

# Russian Films Going for Gold in Hollywood

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Alexander Rodnyansky, left, will try an encore this year. Here he is with director Andrei Zvyagintsev when they accepted the Globe for "Leviathan." **Sony Pictures**

Russian filmmakers are going for gold in Hollywood — the much-coveted Golden Globe statuette.

Of the more than 90 movies entered from around the world, a record number of four Russian motion pictures have been accepted to compete in the best foreign film category.

Departing from the blockbuster genre with casts of thousands, this year's Russian entries are focused on subject matters more aligned to the preferences of today's movie-going public.

The four films from Russia include directors Andrei Konchalovsky's "Paradise," Alexei Mizgirev's "The Duelist," Kostas Marsan's "My Murderer," and Kirill Serebrennikov's "The Student."

Only one of these films, "Paradise," will be able to compete in the Oscar race, since the

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences allows only one entry from each country. But they are all competing for the Golden Globe awards, where there is no restriction on the number of films submitted from a country.

### **Paradise on Earth**

“Paradise” tells the story of three individuals whose paths cross during the terrible time of war, the last days of World War II. The plot revolves around Olga (Julia Vysotskaya), a beautiful aristocratic Russian emigre and member of the French resistance; Jules (Phillippe Duquesne), a corrupt French police collaborator; and Helmut (Christian Clauss), a naive but high-ranking German SS officer.

Although “Paradise” (Rai) is the official Russian pick for the Academy Award, it is a co-production between Germany and Russia and the dialogue is in German, Russian and French. The film was unveiled at this year’s Venice Film Festival where Konchalovsky won the Silver Lion honor for best director.

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### **The Duelist**

“The Duelist” already had a successful opening in Russia and will make its presence known not only in the awards landscape but also when it reaches local screens in the United States. As has been the case with producer Alexander Rodnyansky’s other films, “The Duelist” will get a major boost with its release orchestrated by a major distributor, Sony Pictures.

The third Russian film in the IMAX format, “The Duelist” tells the story of a retired officer, Yakovlev (Pyotr Fyodorov), who fights as a duelist representative. For the film’s foreign viewers, Rodnyansky, who co-produced the film with Sergei Melkumov, points out that the Russian code allowed for this dueling practice.

The film revolves around many aspects of dueling as Yakovlev fights for money but at the same time sees his honor as the most important thing in life. Following a painful and disgraceful past, he returns to St. Petersburg after a long exile to seek out honor and revenge against those responsible for his misfortunes.

An adventure film with thriller and drama elements, “The Duelist” was well received at this summer’s Toronto International Film Festival.

“This film is entirely audience-oriented, and we made it with American and other foreign markets in mind,” Rodnyansky told The Moscow Times in an interview at the Toronto film fest.

Before this, Rodnyansky’s company, Non-Stop Productions, released several films on the American market, including “Stalingrad” in 2013 and “Leviathan” by director Andrei Zvyagintsev in 2014. That film won the Golden Globe and garnered an Oscar nomination for the best foreign-language film.

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### **Murderers and Students**

“My Murderer,” a thriller from Russia’s republic of Sakha, made its splash recently at the Asian World Film Festival in Los Angeles. Now it is going for gold, too.

It tells the story of a young detective who is working on a seemingly simple murder case. The investigation turns into a dangerous journey into the world of illegal mining and gold trafficking. The leading roles are played by Vyacheslav Lavernov and Galina Tikhonova.

“The Student” takes place in contemporary Russia, where a high school student becomes convinced that the world has been lost to evil and begins to challenge the morals and beliefs of the adults around him. The cast of players is led by Victoria Isakova, Yulia Aug and Pyotr Skvortsov.

This film’s original title was "(M)uchenik," a play on the Russian words for “martyr” and “student,” but it was changed to “The Student” when it was entered into the 2016 Cannes Film Festival by its director Serebrennikov.

To date, only “The Duelist” has a definite U.S. release date. It will have a limited release starting Dec. 2. “Paradise” has been sold to multiple territories, including the U.S., China, Germany, Canada and Britain.

*Golden Globe nominations will be announced on Dec. 12.*

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