

Moscow's Fall Film Harvest

The best new Russian films opening this autumn

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"Acid"

In Russia, movies are released all year long, but some producers and directors still like to save their best, most interesting films for the fall season. This year is no exception, and several films have already become the talk of the town. If you're in Moscow, catch them in theaters. If you're abroad, keep an eye out for internet screenings.

"The Story of an Appointment"

In theaters now

"The Story of an Appointment" (Istoriya odnogo naznacheniya) is the latest film by acclaimed director and screenwriter Avdotya Smirnova. Based on real events, the plot revolves around a case where Lev Tolstoy got involved as a lawyer to defend a soldier. Tolstoy's friend, lieutenant Grigory Kolokoltsev, is torn between the liberal ideas he espouses and his duty as

an officer. The film led to much debate on social media about the role of liberal intelligentsia both in the time of Tolstoy and in today's Russia. "The Story of an Appointment" won Best Screenplay award at the Kinotavr Open Russian Film Festival in Sochi this summer.

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"Core of the World"

In theaters now

"Core of the World" (Serdtshe mira) is a new film by the creators of last year's hit "Arrhythmia," which won all the major Russian and some foreign awards. "Core of the World" is directed by Natalya Meshchaninova, the screenwriter of "Arrhythmia." She wrote the screenplay with Boris Khlebnikov, the director of "Arrhythmia," and Stepan Devonin, Meshchaninova's husband, who also plays the film's main role. The creative team seems on track for more awards. It already brought back the Grand Prize and Best Actor awards (for Devonin) from Sochi. It's the story of a loner veterinary doctor Yegor, who lives in the woods at a training station for hunting dogs with the station's owner (played by the outstanding Dmitry Podnozov) and his family. When the station gets harassed by a group of young eco-terrorists, Yegor and the owner respond in very different ways.

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"Acid"

In theaters now

"Acid" (Kislota) is a directorial debut of Alexander Gorchilin, an actor from Gogol Center and a student of Kirill Serebrennikov, its embattled art director. The two main characters are also played by actors from Gogol Center: Filipp Avdeyev and Alexander Kuznetsov. All of them starred in Serebrennikov's latest film "Summer" (Leto). In the aftermath of a young man's suicide under the influence of drugs, two of his closest friends explore different paths of dealing with death, sexuality and the meaning of life. Acid here refers not just to the drug, but also a bottle of sulfuric acid, which plays an important role throughout the movie. Gorchilin, Avdeyev and Kuznetsov are all 26 years old, so this is truly a case of a film about young people made by young people.

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"Without Me"

In theaters from Oct. 11

"Without Me" (Bez menya) is a highly anticipated drama by Kirill Pletnyov about a recently deceased man who sends cryptic messages to his two former lovers. The man is played by Rinal Mukhametov, a rising star known for the role of the alien in Fyodor Bondarchuk's recent blockbuster "Attraction." Two women (Lyubov Aksyonova and Polina Maksimova) are

forced to befriend each other and embark on a common quest to solve the mystery behind the messages.

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"The Man Who Surprised Everyone"

In theaters from Oct. 25

"The Man Who Surprised Everyone" (Chelovek, kotory udivil vsekh), directed and written by Natasha Merkulova and Aleksey Chupov, just got an award at the prestigious Venice film festival. Merkulova and Chupov are best known for "Intimate Parts" - an erotic melodrama about middle-class Muscovites. "The Man Who Surprised Everyone" is a story about Yegor — a popular name this premiere season — a forest guard in Siberia, who discovers he has a terminal illness and only two months left to live. Yegor decides to cheat death by following in the footsteps of a local mythical character: he completely changes his identity — he becomes a woman. Yegor is played by Yevgeny Tsyganov, one of the most recognizable faces on Russian TV and cinema. Natalya Kudryashova, who plays Yegor's wife, won the Venice Horizons Award for Best Actress. Whether a bold statement on transgender identity or just a witty parable, this movie is definitely worth checking out.

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"Jumpman"

In theaters from Nov. 22

"Jumpman" (Podbrosy) is the latest movie by critical darling Ivan Tverdovsky. At 29 he's one of the youngest Russian directors of world renown, whose two previous films — "Zoology" and "Corrections Class" — did fairly well at international festivals. "Jumpman" is a story of Denis (played by newcomer Denis Vlasenko), who suffers from congenital insensitivity to pain. His newly found mother (Anna Slu of "Day Watch" and "Night Watch" fame) tries to earn some money by convincing Denis to jump in front of cars. Complications ensue.

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"Spitak"

In theaters from Nov. 29

"Spitak" is a second movie in just two years devoted to the earthquake that devastated Armenia in December 1988. Directed by Alexander Kott, the movie centers around Gor, who flies to the city of Spitak from Moscow to look for his family in the very epicenter of the earthquake.

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