

Russian Movie Night: History on Screen

7 films that take you way out of the here and now.

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“Russian Ark” **Intercinema-art**

From the Vikings through the first year of Soviet power, these seven films or series will keep you entertained as you are immersed in the pre-Russian, Russian and Soviet past. Start with Alexander Sokurov's "Russian Ark" that takes you through several centuries of Russian history inside the ark of the Hermitage Museum. You can watch one or two series about Catherine the Great (one more or less realistic, one definitely not) before settling down to relive the end of the Romanov dynasty and start of the Soviet regime.

“Russian Ark” (2002)

It's hard to slot Russian Ark into a single genre; the film follows an anonymous narrator through the Winter Palace in one 96-minute shot, a singular accomplishment for director Alexander Sokurov. As the narrator guides “The European” (based on the Marquis de Custine) through the gilded marbled halls of the palace, they encounter episodes from Soviet and

Russian history and the titans of Russian history, including Alexander I, Catherine the Great, and Peter the Great, and Nicholas and Alexandra. For students of the craft of film making and Russian history alike, Russian Ark is a must-see. Available on Amazon [here](#).

“Vikings” (2020)

Michael Hirst’s blockbuster series is drawing to its close with the final installment of the swashbuckling drama set to drop on December 30, 2020. The saga that began with the legendary Ragnar Lothbrok in the small Scandinavian settlement of Kattegat now takes Ragnar’s descendants as far as Kievan Rus, where the ruling monarch, Prince Oleg, has designs on the lands of his Viking ancestors. Enjoy the complete series that traces the rise of the Vikings from raiders and traders to the dominant power in Europe from the Fall of Rome to the First Crusade. There is plenty of R Rated material — sex and violence — but if you can stomach that, you’ll enjoy this meticulously researched, masterfully filmed, and well-acted epic series. Available on Amazon [here](#).

“Ekaterina” (2017)

Catherine the Great’s Cinderella story has proven popular of late with several foreign production companies, but if its accuracy and authenticity you are after, sink into the opulent Russia 1 multi-season series of “Ekaterina,” which traces the rise of an obscure German princess to Russia’s most capable ruler to date. All of Russia’s filmmaking talents are on display in this lavish costume drama, directed by Aleksander Baranov and Ramil Sabitov, with many scenes filmed in actual historic locations in the environs of St. Petersburg. Marina Alexandrova delivers a nuanced and impressive performance as Catherine, alongside some of Russia’s most talented actors, including Alexandr Yatsenko as Peter III, and Yuliya Aug, who steals every scene she’s in as Elizabeth I. This series can move slowly at times, but there is not a more thorough treatment of the life of Catherine II on screen today. Available on Amazon [here](#).

“The Great” (2020)

“The Great” has garnered many accolades as a very modern take on the fascinating story of Catherine the Great’s early years in Russia. If you are looking for historical accuracy, this isn’t it, but there is still much to enjoy in the rich sets and (again highly inauthentic) costumes, well-timed bawdy comedy, and strong performances by Elle Fanning as Catherine, Nicholas Hoult as Peter III, and marvelous cameo roles by Adam Godley, Phoebe Fox, Sacha Dhawan, and Belinda Bromilow. For those who follow recent American political history, “The Great” may strike a few chords. Available on Amazon [here](#).

“Nicholas and Alexandra” (1971)

This adaptation of Robert Massie’s bestselling account of the lives of the last Imperial Family has yet to be bested for scope, accuracy, and acting prowess. Beginning with the birth of the hemophiliac Tsarevich Alexei in 1904, this epic chronicles the imperial family’s increasing isolation and involvement with the controversial monk, Rasputin (played brilliantly by Tom Baker) as the political situation in the empire disintegrates into war and revolution. Michael Jayston’s performance as Nicholas II shows a good man out of his depth, and Janet Suzman

shows us the frustration and passion of Alexandra. The film is made all the richer by superb cameo performances by Laurence Olivier as Sergei Witte, Irene Worth as Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, Eric Porter as Stolypin, and an impossibly young Brian Cox (of "Succession" fame) as Trotsky. Available on Amazon [here](#).

"Demon of the Revolution" (2017)

The centennial of the Russian Revolution provided the inspiration for this three-part mini-series examining the behind-the-scenes role of Marxist Alexander Parvus in engineering the revolutions of 1917 from his exile in Germany. For viewers interested in the causes and events of the Russian Revolution, this is a must-watch series, offering a fly-on-the-wall perspective in several of the pivotal events of the years 1915-1917. Fyodor Bondarchuk delivers a suitably intense performance as Parvus, in tandem with Yevgeniy Mironov as Lenin. This is a well-researched historical drama with excellent acting and superb sets and costumes. Available on Amazon [here](#).

"The Fall of Eagles" (1974)

The root causes of the collapse of the mighty empires of Germany, Austria, and Russia are the subject of this hybrid documentary-drama, adapted from C.L. Sulzberger's 1981 book of the same title. The episodes focusing on Russia feature some of Britain's best actors: Patrick Stewart in a breakout role as Vladimir Lenin, Charles Kay as Nicholas II, Gayle Hunnicutt as Alexandra, "Game of Throne" actor Peter Vaughan as Foreign Minister Izvolsky, and a very young Michael Kitchen as Trotsky. For those encountering this period of history for the first time, this series offers an engaging way to parse the complicated events and family ties of the three dynasties. Available on YouTube [here](#).

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