

THE ITALIAN (ITALIANETZ)



A film by Andrei Kravchuk

Official Russian entry for Best Foreign Language Film for 2006 Academy Awards,
WINNER: Grand Prix - Best Feature at the 2005 Berlin International Children's
Film Festival

Official Selection 2006 Telluride Film Festival
Official Selection 2006 Toronto International Film Festival,

99 minutes. Rated PG-13. In Russian with English subtitles.

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SOPHIE GLUCK
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110 S. FAIRFAX AVE, STE 310
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EXHIBITOR CONTACTS:

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS
CARMELO PIRRONE
ANGELA GRESHAM
550 MADISON AVENUE,
NEW YORK NY 10022
PHONE (212) 833-8833
FAX (212) 833-8844

The Italian Cast:

Vanya Solntsev	Kolya Spiridonov
Kolyan	Denis Moiseenko
Sery	Sasha Syrotkin
Timokha	Andrei Elizarov
Bloke	Vladimir Shipov
Nataha	Polina Vorobjeva
Irka	Olga Shuvalova
Anton	Dima Zemlyanko
Madam	Maria Kuznetsova
Grisha	Nikolai Reutov
Headmaster	Yuri Itskov
Mukhin's Mother	Darya Lesnikova
Guard	Rudolf Kuld

ALSO STARRING:

Tatiana Zakharova , Irina Osnovina , Elena Malinovskaya , Andrei Dezhonov,
Vladimir Kosmidailo, Anatoly Agroskin.

INMATES OF LESOGORSKY CHILDREN'S HOME (LENINGRAD):

Vladimir Kuteinikov, Sergey Zhukovich, Dmitry Konokotov, Diana Shishlyaeva,
Olga Lysenkova, Vladimir Ryazantsev, Alexei Koshevoy.

The Italian Crew:

Director	Andrei Kravchuk
Executive Producer	Olga Agrafenina
General Producer	Andrei Zertsalov
Producers	Vladimir Husid Vladimir Bogoyavlensky
Screenplay	Andrei Romanov
Director of photography	Alexander Burov
Editor	Tamara Lipartiya
Production Designer	Vladimir Svetozarov
Music	Alexander Kneiffel
Sound	Aliakper Gassan Zade
Sound Editor	Larisa Moraleva
Costume designer	Marina Nikolaeva
Wardrobe Mistress	Victoria Alexeeva
Make up Artist	Olga Grabenuk
Dialog Editor	Alexander Pozdnyakov
Assistant Directors	Elena Bogorad Tatyana Kanaeva Sergey Polujanov
Camera Team	Victor Palekh Petr Vodolazhsky Mikhail Avsarkisayn
Unit Photographer	Tatyana Kanaeva
Production Manager	Tatyana Nikolaenkova
Music performed by	Andrei Sigle, Sergei Roldugin, Valery Znamensky, Vladislav Pesin, Artem Chirkov

Produced on Kodak

Sound recording, digital editing, rerecording: Lenfilm Studios

A presentation of LENFILM studios in association with TULOS-CINEMA with the support of the Culture and Film Federal Agency Of Russian Federation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The idea for THE ITALIAN started in 2000. There were a lot of children on the streets of Russia trying to earn their living selling newspapers, washing cars and doing all sorts of menial jobs. I started thinking about making a film about the subject and shared this idea with screenwriter Andrei Romanov. He told me that he had read an article about an orphan boy from a children's home who decided to find his own mother. In order to do so, he taught himself to read and write and afterwards ran away from the children's home. This became the basis for our final screenplay.

Working with children was difficult but very interesting. We had to find a special way to communicate with them, as most of them were real orphanage wards. It was important to explain to the children that our work was really serious and to treat them with the respect of adult actors. They responded well to this, giving us their best, performance-wise.

THE ITALIAN is a film about love, self-esteem and dignity. I think that if a person acts in accordance with his heart and human principles he will definitely be a winner in any situation.

This is also a film about a country in turmoil. If we have little "heroes" like the lead character Vanya, who are capable of performing such outstanding deeds, we can talk of and hope for a better future in Russia. I strongly hope the universal themes in THE ITALIAN will be understood not only by Russian people but also by foreign audiences.

-- Andrei Kravchuk

Synopsis

In his feature directorial debut, director Andrei Kravchuk addresses with intelligence and poignancy the urgent issue of illegal adoption in Russia, which has become a well-documented international crisis. *THE ITALIAN* is based on the true story of a small Russian boy abandoned in an orphanage who goes in search of his birth mother.

A childless, affluent couple from Italy comes to a provincial Russian children's home to find a child for adoption. The orphanage is a harsh place, run by two rival internal factions. Alongside the official, adult administration, run by a corrupt headmaster (played by Yuri Itskov) with the help of greedy adoption broker Madam (Maria Kuznetsova), there is a shadow children's gang operating out of the institution's boiler room.

When the Italian couple singles out six-year-old ragamuffin Vanya Solntsev (Kolya Spiridonov) as their prospective choice, the other orphans give Vanya a new nickname: *The Italian*. They envy Vanya, imagining that he is destined for a life of ease in sunny Italy. But seeing that the older children must resort to stealing or prostitution in order to survive, plucky little Vanya has other plans. He decides to track down his birth mother, teaching himself to read in order to learn her address from his personal file locked in the home's office. After stealing his records, Vanya sneaks out of the orphanage and boards a commuter train headed for the city, with the orphanage staff and police in close pursuit. Fearing that Vanya will make them lose a very lucrative adoption deal, the orphanage headmaster joins forces with Madam to find the runaway child by any means necessary.

Interview with Andrei Kravchuk

—Your original career choice was to become a mathematician. How did you decide to become a filmmaker?

—As American writer O. Henry once said: “It ain’t the roads we take; it’s what’s inside of us that makes us turn out the way we do.” It was not easy to change career directions, especially as I was attending graduate school and my master’s thesis was almost completed. It was then that I met the film directors Aleksei German and Vladimir Vengerov, and the former helped me get a job as a director’s assistant. He was shooting a movie called *My Yedem v Ameriku* (*We Are Going to America*). By the time we wrapped the film my decision was made and I was admitted to the St Petersburg Institute of Cinema and Television.

—Your filmography lists a good number of documentaries and TV series. What are the differences in working in film and these media?

—Making television today in Russia is the most accessible path to professional filmmaking. In television, deadlines are strict, production is always rushed and all you can really do is maintain the storyline. The documentary genre is a favorite of mine as it lets you create an artistic image out of everyday life around you. Making documentaries helps in feature films, too: it teaches you to look at your latest rushes not as something sacred, but as raw material for editing.

—Have you been writing fiction for a long time? Do you write only scripts or do you also write strictly literary works?

—In the past I wrote a lot – mainly short stories and poems. I used to moonlight a bit for newspapers, for instance, even one pretty weird publication about UFOs. I contributed a little fantasy about flying saucers, a kind of stab at science fiction. That got me started writing screenplays. Lately I’ve been concentrating entirely on films.

—Who of the older generation of filmmakers has influenced you?

—I like the films of Dinara Asanova, *Teenagers* and *Woodpeckers Don’t Get Headaches*. She was honest in her attempt to take her cues from children. I will be always thankful to my mentor, filmmaker Semyon Aranovich (Winner of The Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear for his film *The Year Of The Dog*). He cultivated something unique in each one of us, and made every effort to help us realize our artistic potential. Naturally, I love Italian Neorealism, for instance films such as *The Bicycle Thief*, that try to capture an authentic “slice of life,” which I believe is the most difficult thing to do in film. As much as I respect filmmakers of the past, I do not want to emulate anybody. Copying someone else’s style is the most thankless task I can imagine.

—How did you come up with the idea for *The Italian*?

—In 1999, huge numbers of destitute and homeless children invaded the streets of Russia’s big cities as a result of the banking and financial collapse. They washed cars, sold newspapers, pumped gas and did whatever they could to survive. When children are neglected and forgotten, they grow up too fast. When irresponsibility becomes the rule in a society, its whole system of morality changes. While among adults, no matter what the circumstances, certain moral restrictions and conventions still hold, among children

there are no such boundaries. Children establish their own laws, their own hierarchy, and their own methods of distributing wealth. On the one hand, these children grow up very fast. On the other hand, they never really mature; they stay in a strange intermediate condition.

—Your film shows us an orphanage functioning as a state within a state. The children have created an autonomous administrative system that is far more efficient than the official adult version. Children play by their own rules, and those who violate them are severely punished. The structure is semi-criminal, but very effective. Have you observed this in real life? What is the source of your knowledge of this very specific social milieu?

—For a long time I wanted to shoot a film about deeply troubled youth. And I searched and searched for a narrative to embody this idea. I toyed with some vague thoughts along the lines of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Once I started collaborating with Andrei Romanov, it turned out that he had collected a great many real stories about orphanages. He has an incredible knack for getting ordinary people to talk to him; complete strangers open up to him and tell him their whole life stories — sometimes true, sometimes not. He told me a story he had read in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* about a boy from an orphanage. The boy taught himself to read for the sole purpose of finding his mother's address in her file. He ran away from the orphanage and managed to find his mother. This story immediately provided us with a good main character. We had a tangible image that could solidify some otherwise abstract sociological observations. I understood that the actions of our character had to seem somewhat absurd, because he was driven not by reason, but by his soul, not by any capacity for compromise, but by an extreme need. He does not want, unlike most of us, simply to secure a safe mode of survival. This boy is a real hero, in an existentialist sense, as in the works of Camus and Sartre.

—What criteria did you use to select an orphanage?

—During my student years I filmed a short about a local Russian orphanage. Emotional images of this rather strange milieu were stuck in my memory. I needed to find the right way to get this story across. We decided to shoot at a real provincial orphanage, which was particularly troubled. It was very important to observe the children, not to force them into *our* storyline, not to make them conform to *our* notions, but to take the children themselves, their authentic experiences and attitudes, as our starting point. In Russian orphanages located in big cities, the children look at every adult visitor as a potential adoptive parent. Children immediately throw themselves at them and cling to them. When all of them are shown out, leaving only one child, the rest realize that this particular child has been selected for adoption.. In addition the wards there have been so completely let down by adults all their lives that they no longer look at new adults as potential adoptive parents. Eventually, we selected the Lesogorsky children's home in the Leningrad district, near Vyborg, not far from the border with Finland. We needed provincial Russia, with all of its modest charm, which will undoubtedly strike some people as shabby. I recall an episode from the life of Marc Chagall when he visited his birthplace, Vitebsk, in Belarus, as a very old man. The locals were eager to show him their new construction projects, but Chagall was obviously bored and became animated only when he came across some badly warped and weather-beaten fences. Chagall said he had never seen anything more beautiful. Ruins and rubble tell the biography and fate of a place.

—How did the local authorities treat you? It must have been obvious you weren't planning to produce a very flattering film?

—They treated us very well. Everyone we met was willing to cooperate. For our part, we weren't there to point fingers or to dwell gratuitously on problem areas. However, after the screening I did detect some tension in relations with the city authorities. They obviously did not like the children's system of "self-government," the director of the orphanage being portrayed as a drunkard, or the lady agent brazenly bribing city officials. But even so our relations with the authorities remained constructive.

—Can you talk more about the adoption broker, whom everybody calls Madam?

—I have met her real-life counterpart, and she gave me a lot of information about all this "go-between" business. This lady was engaged in adopting Russian children into Italian families and began forging signed relinquishments of the biological parents' parental rights. A scandal broke and she left the agency, nursing a tremendous grudge against it, and then she got even by spilling the whole story to me. We used some of the details I learned from her. The actress who plays her, Maria Kuznetsova, resembles this woman in real life. In general, brokering adoptions is very hard work for just one person to do. An adoption must go through the courts, the paperwork is enormous, there is always a lot of red tape, bureaucratic obstacles, and lots of sessions with the relatives. The relatives are often alcoholics and aggressive, therefore she needs a strong man at her side as a security guard, as we show in our film. Madam is by no means evil, although it may seem that she is; she sincerely believes that she is doing good by the children.

—In your film, an Italian couple comes to the orphanage and selects Vanya Solntsev for adoption, but Vanya runs away looking for his real mother, and another boy ends up going to Italy instead. Is this main storyline strictly fictional, or is it based on fact?

—Similar incidents have occurred. Under their contracts, adoptive parents pay a lot of money to the Russian brokers, often tens of thousands of dollars. If a child runs away or refuses to go, the brokering agency is financially liable. They must either reimburse the money or find another child who meets the adoptive parents' approval.

—How did you select young actor Kolya Spiridonov to play Vanya Solntsev?

—Casting the film took a long time. We advertised on radio and television and my assistants went cruising around schools and orphanages. We auditioned hundreds of kids. Kolya was a standout at a very early stage. Our production designer noticed him in a short film and said to me: "That's what we need." The charm of this boy was hard not to notice; yet he was awfully tense, spoke in a low voice, was afraid of taking a step and couldn't memorize his lines. We went on looking at other candidates, but always returned to Kolya. There were interesting kids, but every time I realized they lacked something that I could see in Kolya. Finally I decided to take a risk and began shooting with him. When I saw the first rushes, I knew I'd made the right choice.

—Did amateur actors play all the other children and when you were shooting the orphanage did you need to arrange any changes in the place's normal routine?

—Almost all the characters were played by amateur actors and except for two girls; all of them are from children’s homes. Many are from the Lesogorsky orphanage, where we shot part of the film, while some older kids were taken from Vyborg, and others from different orphanages of St. Petersburg. In regards to disrupting the everyday running of the orphanage, everything there remained intact: discipline, classes, recess, and wake-up time.

—There is a strong tradition of films about children in the Soviet cinema. How important to you is this tradition, and do you consider yourself a part of it?

—I made a conscious decision *not* to watch Russian films centering around children again. I wanted to tell a contemporary story in an almost documentary manner.

—In the script Vanya ultimately reunites with his mother, but you do not show that in the film. Did you not want a happy ending?

— There *is* a happy ending. When we finished the film, the producers, the screenwriter and I debated the ending for a long time. We concluded that it would be unfair to the main character not to reward him somehow at the end. That’s how we came up with the final exchange of letters between Vanya and the boy who goes to Italy instead of him.

—What was the impact of the film on your young actors?

—Getting involved with a creative project and people working in the arts has been very important and positive for them. The fact that we treated them with respect made a big impression. Some of these children were so inspired that they decided to turn over a whole new leaf. Unfortunately, it’s hard to make a lasting change with just a one-time effort, especially once their personalities have been fully formed.

—From time to time we hear scandalous stories of the abuse of Russian children by foreign adoptive parents, especially in the United States. They stir strong emotions in Russia. Some legislators in the Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament, are calling for severe restrictions on foreign adoptions. It looks as if your film supports this trend, whether you intended it to or not. Why do you have Vanya Solntsev giving up his chance to eat oranges under the Italian sun and staying in Russia instead, surrounded by warped fences?

—These debates have only a tangential relationship to our film. Vanya does not choose between a life in Russia and a life in Italy. He chooses to find his birth mother. THE ITALIAN is the odyssey of a boy, a basic, archetypal myth of return to one’s mother, the return of a prodigal son. In the newspaper article that provided us with the seed of our film, the mother asked her son after he’d finally found her: “What do I need *you* for, anyway?” And the son replied: “From now on you’ve got a man in your house.” A boy like that is going to have no trouble straightening a fence or two.

Interview by Oleg Sulkin

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

DIRECTOR: ANDREI KRAVCHUK

Andrei Kravchuk was born in 1962 in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). His mother was a doctor, his father a navy engineer. In 1984 he graduated cum laude from the Leningrad State University with a degree in mathematics and mechanics. In 1996 he graduated from the St. Petersburg Institute of Cinema and Television, where he studied feature and documentary filmmaking. Shortly thereafter he began his career as a documentary filmmaker and a director of television series, collaborating regularly with screenwriter and director Yuri Feting. *Italianetz (The Italian)* is his feature-film directorial debut. He is now working as a director on a feature film about admiral Alexandr Kolchak (1873-1920), one of the leaders of The White Russians during the Civil War with the Bolsheviks.

FILMOGRAPHY– ANDREI KRAVCHUK (as director, unless otherwise noted)

- 2005 *Mify Moego Detstva (Myths of My Childhood)* – screenplay, together with Yuri Feting
- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*
- 2004 *Gospoda Ofitseriy (Officers)* – TV miniseries
- 2003 *Ilya Averbakh. Obratnaya Tochka (Ilya Averbakh. Reverse Point)* – documentary, in the “Filmmaker: Profession and Fate” series
- 2002 *Chernyi Voron (Black Raven)*
- 2002 *Semyon Aranovich. Poslednii Kadr (Semyon Aranovich. The Final Shot)* - documentary, in the “Filmmaker: Profession and Fate” series
- 2001 *Sutenyor (The Pimp)* – episode, *Agent Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti (Agent of National Security)*, TV miniseries
- 2000 *Rozhdestvenskaya Misteriya (Christmas Mystery)* – together with Yuri Feting
- 1999 *Delo chesti (A Matter of Honor)* – episode of *Ulitsa razbitykh fonarei (Streets of Broken Streetlights)* TV series –together with Yuri Feting (screenwriting and directing)
- 1999 *Marlen Shpindler (Marlen Spindler)* – documentary (screenwriting and directing)
- 1997 *Tamozhnya (Customs)* – documentary (screenwriting and directing)
- 1996 *Vecher i Utro (Evening and Morning)* – screenwriting and directing
- 1994 *Deti v Strane Reform (Children in the Country of Reforms)* - documentary (screenwriting and directing)
- 1993 *Otbleski i Teni (Reflections and Shadows)* – screenwriting and directing
- 1992 *Indonesiia – ljubov’ moya (Indonesia, My Love)* – screenwriting and directing

ANDREI ZERTSALOV (GENERAL PRODUCER)

Born in 1951 in Leningrad, Zertsalov has been a part of the now privatized Lenfilm Studios since 1973. Since the late 1990s he has represented the Studios as a producer in projects combining private and state investments. He is also an assistant professor at the St. Petersburg State Cinema and Television University.

FILMOGRAPHY – Andrei Zertsalov (as producer):

- 2005 *Italianets(The Italian)*
- 2004 *Demon (Demon)*
- 2003 *Bednyi, Bednyi Pavel (Poor, Poor Pavel)*

- 2003 *Babusya (Granny)*
- 2003 *Peterburg (Petersburg)*
- 2002 *Kinorezhisser: Professiya i Sud'ba (Film Director: Profession and Fate)*
- 2001 *Telets (Taurus)*
- 1999 *Molokh (Moloch)*

OLGA AGRAFENINA (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)

Born in 1964 in Leningrad, Agrafenina graduated from LGU (Leningrad State University) in 1986, where she studied journalism. Since then she has been working at Lenfilm Studios where she is now their head of public relations department.

FILMOGRAPHY – Olga Agrafenina (as producer):

- 2006 *Agitbrigada 'Bei Vraga!' (The Agitbrigada 'Hit the Enemy!')* – In production
- 2006 *Yar (Yar)* – in production
- 2006 *Probuzhdenie (Awakening)*
- 2006 *Deti Blokady (Children of the Blockade)*
- 2004 *Vitalyi Mel'nikov, Rezhisser (Vitalyi Melnikov, Director)*
- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2005 *Sapiens (Sapiens)*
- 2002 *Kinorezhisser: Professiya i Sudba (Film Director: Profession and Fate)*
- 2000 *Rozhdestvenskaya Misteriya (Christmas Mystery)*
- 1998 *Boldinskaya Osen' (Boldino Autumn)*

ANDREI ROMANOV (SCREENWRITER)

Born in 1962 in Leningrad, Romanov studied journalism at Leningrad State University. After various odd jobs, including janitor, debt collector, fireman, roofer and subway worker, he enrolled at VGIK (the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography) in Moscow, graduating with a specialization in screenwriting in 1992.

FILMOGRAPHY – Andrei Romanov (as screenwriter)

- 2005 *Mentovskie Voiny (Cop Wars)* – TV miniseries
- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2004 *Poteryavshie Solntse (Those Who Lost the Sun)* – TV miniseries
- 2003 *Chuzhoye Dezhurstvo (Other's Duty)* – TV miniseries
- 2003 *Chelyabumbiya (Chelyabumbiya)*
- 2002 *Vremya Lubit' (Time to Love)* – TV miniseries
- 1992 *Strannyye Muzhchiny Semenovoi Ekateriny (The Strange Men of Semyonova Ekaterina)*
- 1991 *Mechenye (Marked)*

ALEXANDER BUROV (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY)

Born in 1958 in Leningrad, Burov studied at VGIK (the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography) in Moscow, graduating in 1981 with a specialization in cinematography. Between 1985 and 1989 he has worked at the Leningrad Documentary Film Studio (LSDF); since 1989 he has worked as a cinematographer at Lenfilm Studios, where he has lensed many films by Alexander Sokurov.

FILMOGRAPHY – Alexander Burov (as director of photography):

- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2003 *Otets i Syn (Father and Son)*
- 2000 *Svad'ba (The Wedding)*
- 1998 *Serebryanye Golovy (Silver Heads)*
- 1995 *Vechnyi Ogon' (Eternal Flame)*
- 1993 *Tikhiye Stranitsy (Whispering Pages)*
- 1992 *Kamen' (Stone)*
- 1991 *Papa, Umer Ded Moroz (Papa, Father Frost Is Dead)*
- 1990 *Prostaya Elegiya (Simple Elegy)*
- 1990 *Krug Vtoroi (The Second Circle)*
- 1989 *Peterburgskaya Elegiya (Petersburg Elegy)*
- 1986 *Moskovskaya Elegiya (Moscow Elegy)*

VLADIMIR SVETOZAROV (PRODUCTION DESIGNER)

Born in 1948 in Tbilisi, Georgia, Svetozarov studied in a public school in Leningrad and served in the Soviet Army (1966-69). In 1974 he graduated from the Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music and Film (LGITMiK) as a theater production designer and was hired by Lenfilm Studios. As an art director he has worked on over forty films with such top directors as Dinara Asanova, Ilya Averbakh, Aleksei German, Sergei Rogozhkin, Vladimir Bortko. He is a member of the Filmmakers Union of Russia, and has received the top Russian national film and TV awards.

FILMOGRAPHY – Vladimir Svetozarov (as production designer):

- 2006 *Master i Margarita (The Master and Margarita)* – TV miniseries
- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2005 *Turetskiy Gambit (Turkish Gambit)*
- 2003 *Idiot (The Idiot)* – TV miniseries
- 2003 *Dnevnik Kamikadze (Diary of a Kamikaze)*
- 2002 *Kukushka (The Cuckoo)*
- 2000 *Banditskiy Peterburg (Bandits' Petersburg)* – TV miniseries
- 1999 *Vostok – Zapad (Est – Ouest)*
- 1998 *Khrustalyov, Mashinu! (Khrustalyov, My Car!)*
- 1988 *Sobachye Serdtse (Heart of a Dog)*
- 1983 *Blondinka za Uglom (Blonde Around the Corner)*
- 1983 *Patsany (Teenagers, aka Tough Kids)*
- 1975 *Chuzhiye Pis'ma (Other People's Letters)*

TAMARA LIPARTIYA (EDITOR)

Born in 1941 in Leningrad, Lipartiya studied at the St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance (FINEC). In 1960 she was hired by Lenfilm Studios. Since 1976 she has edited close to sixty films, collaborating with such distinguished directors as Aleksei Balabanov, Dinara Asanova and Dmitry Meskhiev. She holds the title “Honored Filmmaker of Russia.”

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY – Tamara Lipartiya:

- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2005 *Pervyj Posle Boga (First After God)*
- 2003 *Osobennosti Natsionalnoi Politiki (Peculiarities of the National Politics)*

- 2002 *Dnevnik Kamikadze (Diary of a Kamikaze)*
- 2001 *Mekhanicheskaya Suita (Mechanical Suite)*
- 1997 *Brat (Brother)*
- 1997 *Upyr' (Vampire)*
- 1994 *Zamok (The Castle)*
- 1985 *Prostaya Smert' (A Simple Death)*
- 1984 *Milyi, Dorogoi, Lyubimyi, Edinstvennyi (My Sweet, My Dear, My Beloved, My Only One)*
- 1983 *Patsany (Teenagers, aka Tough Kids)*
- 1979 *Zhena Ushla (The Wife Has Left)*

ALEXANDER KNEIFFEL (MUSIC)

One of the most prolific avant-garde composers of contemporary Russia, Knaifel was born in 1943 in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to a family of musicians. In 1961 he graduated from a special music school at the Leningrad Conservatory where he studied cello. He continued his studies at the Moscow Conservatory under Mstislav Rostropovich and composition at the Leningrad Conservatory under Boris Arapov. Kneiffel's compositions have premiered at top music festivals in Europe and the U.S and he has scored over 40 feature and documentary films.

FILMOGRAPHY – Alexander Knaifel (as composer)

- 2005 *Italianets (The Italian)*
- 2003 *Zhenskaya Logika (Women's Logic) – TV miniseries*
- 1998 *Igra v Brasletakh (The Bracelet Game)*
- 1991 *Bolshoi Kontsert Narodov (People's Gala Concert)*
- 1989 *Lichnoe Delo Anny Akhmatovoi (The Personal File of Anna Akhmatova)*
- 1989 *Eto Bylo u Morya (It Happened Near the Sea)*
- 1988 *Che-Pe Rayonnogo Mashtaba (Emergency on a Regional Scale)*
- 1987 *Petrogradskie Gavrosy (Petrograd Gavroches)*
- 1983 *Torpedonostsy (Torpedo Bombers)*
- 1980 *Ya – Aktrisa (I am an Actress)*
- 1980 *Rafferty (Rafferty) – TV*
- 1978 *Sled Rosomakhi (Wolverine's Trail)*

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

KOLYA SPIRIDONOV (VANYA SOLNTSEV)

Kolya was born in 1995 in St. Petersburg; his father works as a security guard while his mother is a make up artist. Kolya attends a public school in St. Petersburg and has been appearing in movies since 2003. He enjoys dancing and drawing.

FILMOGRAPHY – Kolya Spiridonov:

- 2006 *Likvidatsiia (Liquidation)*
- 2005 *Margantsovka (Manganese Solution)*
- 2005 *Samye Schastlivye (The Happiest)*
- 2005 *Chas Pik (Rush Hour)*
- 2005 *Polumgla (Twilight)*
- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*
- 2003 *Put' (The Way) - short*

MARIA KUZNETSOVA (MADAM)

Born in 1950 in Leningrad, Kuznetsova graduated from the Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music and Film (LGITMiK) in 1975. She debuted the same year at the Aleksandrinsky Theater (the Pushkin State Academic Drama Theater). Kuznetsova holds the title “Honored Artist of Russia.”

FILMOGRAPHY – Maria Kuznetsova:

- 2005 *Kosmos Kak Predchuvstvie (Dreaming of Space)*
- 2005 *Favorit (The Favorite)*
- 2005 *Kazus Kukotskogo (The Kukotsky Case) – TV miniseries*
- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*
- 2003 *Imeniny (Name Day)*
- 2002 *Kavalery Morskoi Zvezdy (Cavaliers of the Sea Star) – TV miniseries*
- 2002 *Oligarkh (Tycoon: A New Russian)*
- 2002 *Lubov' Imperatora (The Love of the Emperor)*
- 2001 *Taina Zaborskogo Omuta (The Secret of the Zaborsk Depths)*
- 2001 *Russkii Kovcheg (Russian Ark)*
- 2001 *Telets (Taurus)*

DARYA LESNIKOVA (MUKHIN'S MOTHER)

Born in 1968 in the old Siberian town of Tomsk, Lesnikova spent her childhood in Ukraine and followed in her parents' footsteps as a stage and film actor. Since graduating from the Leningrad State Institute of Theater, Music and Film (LGITMiK) in 1989, she has been one of the leading actresses of the Molodezhny (Youth) Theater on the Fontanka, starring onstage in Nina Sadur's *Moon Wolves*, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Mistakes of a Night*, Yukio Mishima's *Madame de Sade*, Euripides's *Medea*, Jean Anouilh's *The Lark*, and other productions. Lesnikova holds the title “Honored Artist of Russia.”

FILMOGRAPHY – Darya Lesnikova (since 2003 sometimes credited as Darya Yurgens):

- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*

- 2005 *Morskie D'iavoly 1 & 2 (Sea Devils 1 & 2)* - TV miniseries
- 2005 *Banditskij Peterburg (Bandits' Petersburg)* – TV miniseries
- 2002 *Krot (Mole)* – TV miniseries
- 2002 *Peizazh s Ubiistvom (Landscape with Murder)* – TV miniseries
- 2002 *Ulitsy Razbitykh Fonarei (Streets of Broken Streetlights)* – TV miniseries
- 2001 *Dom Nadezhdy (House of Hope)* – TV miniseries
- 2001 *Agentstvo NLS (The NLS Agency)* – TV miniseries
- 2000 *Brat 2 (Brother 2)*
- 1998 *Pro Urodov i Liudei (Of Freaks and Men)*

YURI ITSKOV (THE HEADMASTER)

Born in 1950 in Moscow, Itskov graduated from the Far Eastern Arts Institute in Vladivostok. From 1971 through 1979 he performed at the Okhlopkov Drama Theater in Irkutsk. He then moved to another Siberian city, Omsk, where he played major roles at the Academy Drama Theater. Since moving to St. Petersburg in 2001, he has performed at the Satire Theater on Vassilyevsky Island, starring in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Gogol's *Christmas Eve*, Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro*, and other productions. Itskov holds the title "People's Artist of Russia."

FILMOGRAPHY – Yuri Itskov:

- 2005 *Vremya Sobirat' Kamni (A Time to Gather Stones)*
- 2005 *Favorit (The Favorite)*
- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*
- 2005 *Printsessa i Nischiy (The Princess and the Pauper)*
- 2006 *Peregon (Transit)*

NIKOLAI REUTOV (GRISHA)

Born in 1963, Reutov attended the Leningrad Higher Trade-Union School of Culture, graduating as a ballet master in 1990. As one of the leading ballet personalities of St. Petersburg's musical scene, Nikolai currently works at many Russian venues and also in other republics of the former Soviet Union. His credits include the choreography for *Woyzeck* and *Bed-Bug* at the Lensovet Theater, *Macbeth* and *Richard III* at the Satiricon Theater, *Twelfth Night* at the Molodezhny (Youth) Theater on the Fontanka, *Dark Alleys* at the Briantsev Youth Theater (all in St. Petersburg), *Bolero* at the Tabakov Theater in Moscow, *Salomea* at the Academy Drama Theater in Omsk, *Boris Godunov* at the Russian Drama Theater in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and other productions. He also teaches dance and stage movement at the St. Petersburg Academy of Theater Arts.

FILMOGRAPHY – Nikolai Reutov (as an actor)

- 2004 *Gospoda Ofitsery (Officers)* – TV miniseries
- 2005 *Italianetz (The Italian)*