

BERGAMO FILM MEETING

International Film Festival

42nd edition, March 9 - 17, 2024

Bergamo Film Meeting honours with a complete retrospective film master Otar Iosseliani, a keen observer of human behaviour and long opposed by Soviet censorship, and pays homage to the works of Sacha Guitry.

The 42nd edition of Bergamo Film Meeting, scheduled for March 9 - 17, 2024, celebrates the recently deceased Georgian naturalized French director and screenwriter Otar Iosseliani with a comprehensive retrospective featuring several titles never-before screened in Italy. A keen observer of human behaviour and long opposed by Soviet censorship, Iosseliani was a critically acclaimed international filmmaker who won numerous awards, including Venice, Cannes and Berlin.

Completing the Festival's section devoted to historical retrospectives is a tribute to the prolific and brilliant Sacha Guitry, actor, screenwriter, playwright and director, among the most fascinating and versatile personalities of 20th-century French theatre and cinema.

Otar Davidovič Iosseliani (Tbilisi, 1934 - 2023) was a Georgian naturalized French director, screenwriter and actor. His childhood passion for music (he studied piano at the Conservatory in Tbilisi- at the time part of the Soviet Union- before discovering his passion for film) and science never left him; his work is characterized by the use of symphony or sonata-like structures and a continuous search for formal precision pushed to the extreme but never an end unto itself. The relationships between characters themselves are marked by comparisons between empty and full, silence and sound, as in a musical score.

In the 1950s he moved to Moscow where he enrolled in the Faculty of Mathematics, which he later abandoned to attend the renowned VGIK film school, where he had the opportunity to study under the guidance of great masters such as Aleksandr Dovženko and Mikhail Romm.

After shooting a couple of shorts, in 1961 he graduated and made a medium-length film, *Aprili*, which wasn't cleared for distribution. With the following films - *Falling Leaves* (*Giorgobistve*, 1966), his first feature film, *Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* (*Iko shashvi mgalobeli*, 1971) and *Pastorale* (*Pastorali*, 1976) - the problems with Soviet censorship worsened to the point of forcing him to seek financing in France, where he finally settled in Paris. This sparked a new creative phase, with *Favorites of the Moon* (*Les Favoris de la lune*, 1984) in which, through a slender narrative thread - a collection of 18th-century porcelain and a 19th-century female portrait that pass from hand to hand over the years - Iosseliani weaves together a carousel of characters all addicted to stealing, in a real or metaphorical sense. This feature was immediately followed by *And Then There Was Light* (*Et la lumière fut*, 1989), almost an ethnographic documentary about the destruction of a small African village. Both films won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival. His works in this period explored the human condition, individual freedom and social dynamics, with a subtle irony and a critical outlook towards the world. Iosseliani's films, which he describes as simple, honest and stubborn, "optimistic yet aware that everything will end badly", constitute a strangely poetic body of work, delicately burlesque and ironic, inspired by René Clair, Buster Keaton and Jacques Tati.

In 1992 he shot *Chasing Butterflies* (*La Chasse aux papillons*, 1991), followed by *Brigands, Chapter VII* (*Brigands, chapitre VII*, 1995), which earned him the Special Jury Prize in Venice for the third time. This was followed by *Farewell, Home Sweet Home* (*Adieu, plancher des vaches*, 1998), which tells the story of a

marabout (an African stilt walker) who sneaks into posh parties; *Monday Morning (Lundi matin)* (2001), which earned him the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale; and *Gardens in Autumn (Jardins en automne)* (2005), featuring a dazzling performance by Michel Piccoli as the protagonist's mother. Iosseliani returned to the big screen five years later, with *Chantrapas* (2010), which chronicles the adventures of a Georgian filmmaker who moves to France to escape the censorship of his country, only to be subjected there to another form of censorship: the economic one. In 2015 he shot his last film, *Chant d'hiver* (2014), about the absurdity of revolutions and the paradoxical consequences that each of them brings along. Iosseliani has also been a sophisticated documentary filmmaker over the years; examples include *Tudzhi* (1964), shot with a hidden camera in the Rustavi Metal Works, in Georgia; *Ancient Georgian songs (Dzveli qartuli simgera)* (1968); *Euzkadi été 1982* (1982), about the French Basque Country and its inhabitants; *Un petit monastère en Toscane* (1988), on the daily life of a small community of French Augustinians in the monastery of Castelnuovo dell'Abate; and the monumental, nearly four-hour long *Seule, Géorgie* (1993) which traces 2,000 years of Georgia's turbulent history through archival footage and film excerpts.

Titles featured in the retrospective

Akvarel (USSR, 1958, 10')
Sapovnela (USSR, 1959, 20')
Sapovnela (USSR, 1961, 50')
Ghisa/Tudzhi (USSR, 1964, 20')
Falling Leaves /Giorgobistve (USSR, 1966, 100')
Ancient Georgian Songs/Dzveli qartuli simgera (USSR, 1968, 20')
Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird/Iko shashvi mgalobeli (USSR, 1971, 85')
Pastorale/Pastorali (USSR, 1976, 95')
Euzkadi été 1982 (France, 1982, 55')
Sept pièces pour cinéma noir et blanc (France, 1982, 25')
Favorites of the Moon/Les Favoris de la lune (France, 1984, 101')
Un petit monastère en Toscane (France, 1988, 54')
And Then There Was Light/Et la lumière fut (France, Germany, Italy, 1989, 103')
Chasing Butterflies/La Chasse aux papillons (France, Italy, Germany, 1991, 115')
Brigands, Chapter VII/Brigands, chapitre VII (France, Switzerland, Russia, Italy, 1995, 129')
Farewell, Home Sweet Home/Adieu, plancher des vaches (France, Switzerland, Italy, 1998, 117')
Monday Morning/Lundi matin (France, Italy, 2001, 122')
Gardens in Autumn/Jardins en automne (France, 2005, 117')
Chantrapas (France, Georgia, Ukraine, 2009, 122')
Chant d'hiver (France, 2014, 117')

Sacha Guitry (St. Petersburg 1885 - Paris 1957), born Alexandre-Pierre Georges Guitry, was a French actor, screenwriter and director. The son of famous actor Lucien Guitry, from a very young age he was involved with the theatrical milieu of the time. After several years in St. Petersburg, his family moved to Paris in 1891. Here, Sacha entered boarding school but showed little inclination for studies. Instead, he devoted himself to theatre, writing plays and performing comedies at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, directed by his father. Due to strong personal disagreements, however, the two fell apart. The separation would last several years. At only seventeen, he wrote and performed *La Page*, and three years later he became known to the general public with *Nono*, achieving great success. His contemptuous and sarcastic aristocratic ways and brilliant elocution made him a leading figure of Parisian life in the early twentieth century. A master of the vaudeville genre, he churned out plays on repeat, bringing the echoes of his private life to the stage: he went from one marriage to the next, fuelling both the gossip news and his own theatre's box office.

In 1915, he tackled cinema for the first time by directing *Ceux de chez nous*, a collection of portraits of great French artists of the time, with the intention of demonstrating - at the height of World War I - the artistic superiority of France over its enemies. After this initial experience, he quit filmmaking until 1934, by which time sound had established itself in film production. After a couple of tries, he shot *Bonne chance!* (1935), a light, sparkling comedy about a man and woman's journey after a lottery win, with the understanding that there would only be a platonic relationship between them. Although constructed as a theatrical play, the film is already fully representative of Guitry's cinematic style, characterized by the presence of a ham with

inexhaustible verve, witty dialogue and rapid-fire jokes, but also by a sense of light cynicism and a bittersweet undertone.

Until the outbreak of World War II, Guitry filmed several comedies starring opposite his wife Jacqueline Delubac, becoming a master of entertainment cinema and an innovator of cinematic language, as evidenced by the inventive opening credits, extremely free prologues and narrative acrobatics. In *Confessions of a Cheat* (*Le roman d'un tricheur*, 1936), a film based on his only novel written and published in 1934, the narrative unravels through the predominant use of images, accompanied by the author's voiceover as commentary. In the midst of World War II, while the Germans occupied France, Guitry reached the peak of fame, continuing to act, direct films, travel the world, hosting multiple charity galas, and living in comfort: a lifestyle that stirred some discontent and that he wouldn't be forgiven. After Liberation, he was among the first on the purge lists. Suspected of collaboration, he spent sixty days in prison and was then rehabilitated thanks to his efforts in helping people escape persecution. He went back to filmmaking in 1947: among his last works – permeated by a fierce irony and a devastating bitterness – particularly worthy of mention is *La poison* (1951), starring a spectacular Michel Simon as a husband who contrives to kill his wife to guarantee himself immunity.

Sacha Guitry died on July 24, 1957. He lies in the family tomb in the Montmartre cemetery, where François Truffaut, his great admirer, was also laid to rest.

Titles featured in the retrospective

Ceux de chez nous (France, 1915, 22')

Bonne chance! (France, 1935, 78')

Faisons un rêve... (France, 1936, 86')

Le Mot de Cambronne (France, 1936, 44')

Confessions of a Cheat/Le roman of a tricheur (France, 1936, 81')

My Father Was Right/Mon pear avait raison (France, 1936, 94')

Nine Bachelors/Ils étaient neuf célibataires (France, 1939, 132')

Donne-moi tes yeux (France, 1943, 101')

Le diable boiteux (France, 1948, 130')

Le comédien (France, 1948, 96')

Deburau (France, 1950, 93')

La poison (France, 1951, 85')

The Virtuous Scoundrel/La vie d'un honnête homme (France, 1952, 85')

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