

ELENA

a film by
Andrey Zvyagintsev



Russia / 2011/ 109 mins / Russian with English subtitles/ Certificate TBC

UK release 26 October 2012

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AWARDS

WINNER
SPECIAL JURY PRIZE
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL Un Certain Regard

WINNER
BEST FEATURE FILM
BEST DIRECTOR
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHER
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS
GOLDEN EAGLE AWARDS
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURES

WINNER
GRAND PRIZE FOR BEST FILM
GHENT FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
BEST DIRECTOR
BEST ACTRESS
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY
DURBAN FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
BEST ACTRESS
FESTIVAL NOUVEAU CINEMA MONTREAL

WINNER
BEST ACTRESS
SEVILLE FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY
BELY KVADRAT (WHITE SQUARE)
CINEMATOGRAPHY AWARDS
MOSCOW

NOMINEE
BEST ACTRESS
EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS

SYNOPSIS

Winner of the Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard Special Jury Prize, *Elena* is a modern twist on the classic noir.

Sixty-ish spouses Vladimir and Elena uneasily share his palatial Moscow apartment—he's a still-virile, wealthy businessman; she's his former nurse who has clearly "married up." Each have children from earlier marriages. Estranged from his own uncaring daughter, Vladimir openly despises his wife's son and family as just spongers. But when a sudden illness and an unexpected reconciliation threaten the dutiful Elena's potential inheritance, she must hatch a desperate plan....



CAST

Elena	Nadezhda Markina
Vladimir	Andrey Smirnov
Katerina	Elena Lyadova
Sergey	Alexey Rozin
Tatyana	Evgenia Konushkina
Sasha	Igor Ogurtsov
Lawyer	Vasiliy Michkiv
Vitek	Alexey Maslodudov

CREW

Directed By	Andrey Zvyagintsev
Written By	Oleg Negin and Andrey Zvyagintsev
Cinematography	Mikhail Krichman
Editing	Anna Mass
Producers	Alexander Rodnyansky, Sergey Melkumov
Line Producer	Ekaterina Marakulina
Script Supervisor	Maria Shulgina
Casting	Elina Ternyeva
Production Design	Vasiliy Gritskov, Valeriy Zhukov
Art Direction	Andrey Ponkratov, Maxim Korsakov
Sets	Andrey Grachev, Sasha Lozovsky, Victoria Kudinova, Inna Saltikova
Make-Up	Galya Ponomareva, Elena Dmitrienko
Costume Design	Anna Bartuli, Nastia Vishnevskaya, Tatyana Chernyakova
Sound	Andrey Dergachev, Stas Krechkov

The film features music from Philip Glass's 1995 Symphony No. 3

Russia – 2011 – 109 mins - 35mm and DCP – Scope 2.35 – Dolby Digital

More details at www.newwavefilms.co.uk

The Cast

Nadezhda Markina – Elena

Born in 1959, Nadezhda Markina is from the Tambov Region in western Russia. She graduated from the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatre Arts in 1983 and honed her craft at the Taganka Theatre and Malaya Bronnaya Theatre between 1992 and 1998. Her diverse roles included Regan in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Elizaveta Epanchina in a trilogy based on Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (both at the Malaya Bronnaya). Her performance as Tamara in Volodin's *Five Evenings* won her the Golden Mask for best actress in 1998. She has also performed at the Moscow Art Theatre and at the Gogol Theatre, where she worked on a production of Vasily Sigarev's *Black Milk*. She has also acted in several TV series. *Elena* is her first major film role. Since, she has played a part in Sergei Loznitsa's *In the Fog*, premiered at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival and to be released in 2013 by New Wave Films.

Andrey Smirnov – Vladimir

Born in Moscow in 1941, Andrey Smirnov graduated from the directing department at VGIK in 1962 (class of Mikhail Romm). He is a director, playwright and actor. As a film director he is best known for the movies *Angel* (1967), *Belarus Station* (1973) and *Autumn* (1974). He has acted in more than 20 films and TV series and has won prizes at several film festivals including IFF in Karlovy Vary (1990, Best Actor). He was a member of the jury at the 38th Berlin International Film Festival in 1988 and at the Venice Film Festival in 1989.

Yelena Lyadova – Katerina

Born in 1980 in Morshansk in the Tambov Region. After graduating from the Shepkin Theatre Higher College in Moscow, she began her career performing with the Young Spectators Moscow Theatre. She made her film debut playing the role of Rima in *Dreaming of Space* (directed by Alexei Uchitel). One of her notable theatre roles was that of Stella in a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Alexey Rozin – Sergey

Born in 1978, Alexey Rozin graduated from the theatre school of MkhAT (Moscow Art Theatre). He began his career in the Moscow Art Theatre. Since 2003 he has worked in the Russian Academic Youth Theatre, and played several roles in films and on TV.

The Crew

Andrey Zvyagintsev: Director/Co-Writer

Andrey Zvyagintsev was born in 1964 in Novosibirsk, Siberia. In 1984 he graduated from the Novosibirsk Theatrical School, and in 1990 from the acting department of the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS), where he studied under the supervision of Eugene Lazarev. He subsequently worked as an actor for independent theatrical projects and performed various guest roles in television series and movies.

In 2000 he made his directorial debut with three episodes for television's *The Black Room*.

His first feature, *The Return*, won the Golden Lion and the Lion of the Future for Best Directorial Debut at the 2003 Venice Film Festival and was nominated for a Golden Globe. The film was sold to 75 countries. His second feature, *The Banishment*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007 and earned Konstantin Lavronenko the prize for Best Actor, the first ever for a Russian actor.

In total, he has won over 40 prestigious international awards for his films. *Elena*, his latest film, won the Special Jury Prize in the Un Certain Regard section of the 2011 Cannes Film Festival, among many other awards.

FILMOGRAPHY

2003 *The Return*

2007 *The Banishment*

2011 *Elena*

Short Films

2000 *Bushidō, Obscure, Choice* (three episodes of the TV series *The Black Room*)

2009 *Apocrypha* (an unused segment for the feature film *New York, I Love You*)

2011 *Mystery* (part of Experiment 5IVE)



Mikhail Krichman: Director of Photography

Mikhail Krichman was born in Moscow in 1967. He has worked with Andrey Zvyagintsev on all his films, starting with the television series *The Black Room*. Krichman has won numerous awards for excellence in cinematography, including the Best Cinematography Award at Belgrade IFF (Serbia); the Russian Film Critics "Golden Aires"; the Russian Film Academy "Golden Eagle" and the Russian Film Academy "Nika" for Best Cinematography for *The Return*. He was nominated for the European Film Award for Best Cinematography for *The Banishment* and won the "Ozella" prize for Best Cinematography for *Silent Souls* at the 2010 Venice Film Festival.

Oleg Negin: Co-Writer

Born in Moscow in 1970, Oleg Negin co-wrote (together with Andrey Zvyagintsev) the scripts for *The Banishment* and *Elena*. He has also published several novels distinguished by their combination of profound symbolism, cruel realism and elements of post-modernism.

Interview with the director Andrei Zvyagintsev

When did you decide to make films?

I fell in love with films because I was an actor originally. I was dreaming about movies on one side of the camera, imagining myself as an actor. I can't really pinpoint the moment when I found myself on the other side of the camera. It wasn't a conscious decision.

You started with commercials, right?

I don't really call that filmmaking at all. It's just a job that brought some sort of creative satisfaction, but mostly it was a way of earning money. It equipped me with some technical skills, no more than that. I started making films in 2000. Before that, for seven years, I couldn't figure out who I was. I was in a constant search. Am I an actor? Am I a writer? Am I somebody else?

What experience did you take from your work as an actor to help you as a director?

The whole experience of studying to be an actor - I went through acting school twice - that in general helped. I know exactly what the actor is going through. I know what strings the actor pulls to get in touch with the role.

Was acting not fulfilling for you?

When I was a second year student, I saw Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, and it changed my perception. I started to search for a director who would see the actor with the same perceptions, and not put them under such expectations. It was a turning point for me. I realized I wouldn't be able to find a director like that, so I decided to become the director.

I love Nadezhda Markina's performance. American audiences won't recognize her. Can you tell us a little about her?

She's a theatre performer. I saw her in the '90s and she made quite an impression on me back then with her sincerity. The way she acted, you don't see an actress anymore. She's organic. I remembered and invited her to be in the film, and meanwhile, for the last 10-15 years, she was doing lots of TV. She hasn't had the breakthrough role that would bring her out.

This film should do that.

You know what else I like about her? When you look straight in her face, you see a simple, down-to-earth, working, typically Russian woman. But if you see her sideways -- and I do, in the movie, show her in profile a lot -- she looks like royalty. She looks aristocratic. And this duality intrigued me.

Mikhail Krichman just won Russia's top cinematography award for *Elena*".

He is brilliant. We've known each other for a while. I did my first movie with him, a short for a TV series called *Black Room*. Ever since then, we've been working together on everything, all of my work, including the segment in *New York, I Love You*. When you've found someone, there is no need to look for anything else. In Krichman, I found my cameraman. I found my eyes, my co-author.

What was the festival experience like with *Elena*? *The Return* was a massive success at festivals all over the world. Was it a different kind of satisfaction your first time out?

My first experience in Venice was when I was 39, and it was the big moment in my life. I realized that what I was doing was needed, and there were people who wanted to see it. It was like rebirth. You've finally found yourself. First you're born like everybody else, and then you become the person you were meant to be. The impression cannot be compared to anything else.

How did Philip Glass become involved with the film? He doesn't do too many film scores these days.

The music was written a long time ago. Throughout the film, you hear the third part of his "Third Symphony", and in the last part, you hear the whole symphony. We could've just bought rights to use the music, but instead we did decide to write to Philip Glass for his personal permission. I consider him the greatest composer of our time. Without a doubt.

We felt very humbled, and he responded "Why do you need your old stuff? I can write something new for you". Of course, we were shocked! But the music was so perfectly in tune with the image, and to ask for something else wouldn't be right. So we asked that he would write for our next movie. So, now we're looking for a story that will match his talent! [laughs] But that's a joke.

So what are you working on next?

The other day we finally made a deal with a producer. It's a contemporary story, very up-to-date, just as modern as the story in *Elena*. It's a Russian story, set in a provincial city. But I'm confident that it will be universal. Towards the end of the movie, it evolves into the existential themes of being a human in the world. Another way to put it is that it's a story on the scale of Philip Glass!

By Austin Dale, *IndieWire* (27 May 2012)

