

Mongrel Media

Presents

TULPAN

A film by Sergey Dvortsevoy



(100 mins, Germany/Kazakhstan/Poland/Russia/Switzerland, 2008)

Distribution



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High res stills may be downloaded from <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/press.html>

SYNOPSIS

After completing his naval service, young Asa travels back to the Kazakh steppe where his sister and her shepherd husband live a nomadic life. To start his new life, eager Asa must get married first before he can become a shepherd himself. Asa's only hope for marriage on the deserted steppe is Tulpan, the daughter of another shepherd family. Poor Asa is disappointed to learn that Tulpan doesn't like him because she thinks that his ears are too big. But Asa doesn't give up and he continues to dream of a life that may not be possible on the steppe...



AN INTERVIEW WITH SERGEY DVORTSEVOY

Where exactly did you shoot?

TULPAN was shot in southern Kazakhstan, in an area called Betpak Dala (Hunger Steppe). This is a huge part of the steppe, with very flat terrain. Nobody lives there but shepherds. It's in the middle of nowhere, with the occasional small village. The closest city is Chimkent, 500 kilometers away.

What kind of difficulties are involved when you shoot on the steppe?

First of all it's very difficult for the crew to be put in such a remote place for such a long time. Nature is also tough. Not only the weather, but the animals. There are all sorts of insects, poisonous snakes and spiders especially around May, in the springtime when they wake up. We found spiders in our shoes every day. But the most difficult was the way we shot the film as it took much time and patience from the crew.

Did you and the crew have to live like nomads to shoot this film?

Although we built our own camp one kilometer away from the set where we had water and electricity from generators the crew lived a life very close to nomads on the steppe. We also spent a lot of time living with local shepherds and with the actors because they already moved into a jurte (traditional tent house) one month before shooting and really lived there together as a nomad family. Samal Eslyamova (Samal) did all the work of a shepherd's wife and Ondasyn Besikbasov (Ondas) actually worked as a shepherd. A lot of the things he does in the film he experienced during this period himself. All this was necessary to give authenticity to the film. Ondasyn and Samal had never lived in a jurte before. Samal is from the north of Kazakhstan, where life is much more European. So the shoot was especially hard for her.

Approximately how many shepherds and their families are still living this nomadic existence in the steppe? Are they dying out as more and more young people like Asa move to the city?

Actually there are still a lot of families living like nomads in Kazakhstan. But it's different compared to the times of the Soviet Union. Very close to the life that Samal and Ondas live in the film, which is considered a modern life. Then there are different kinds of nomads. Very few have their own livestock. Most are hired by big sheep owners to tend to their sheep and get paid for this in money or in livestock. But they all still live in jurtes in the steppe and travel around hundreds of kilometers a year. Some of them are very poor. What is shown in the film is a realistic portrayal of the current situation. Almost all young people want to go to the city. Because they think they can make good money there. But then you see them in the big city Chimkent for example sitting there waiting for a job they cannot find. So they end up as construction or temporary workers if they don't have a special profession. People like Asa and Boni would not find what they are looking for.

Please tell us about working with sheep and especially how you accomplished the lamb birth scene.

The method of shooting was very unusual. We started shooting the two key scenes of the script first, which were the two lamb birth scenes. We had to shoot them immediately and under time pressure. A sheep giving birth won't wait for preparation. I knew from experience that it would be very difficult to catch a sheep that's giving birth and that she would allow us to shoot this. Usually they run away. So I told the camera department to be ready for hard work. First they had to follow sheep without the camera to understand how they move, then with a small video camera and only after these tests could they actually use the film camera. I told them it would take hours and even days. My DOP Jola Dylewska is great and she understands very well what I want. The crew spent two weeks just following sheep. In the third week, we tried several times on video to understand what camera movements should be used when the sheep is giving birth. Once the camera crew was technically ready, we waited for one of the thousands of sheep to give birth. The shepherd had a radio station and would call us as soon as one was ready.

When the scenes were shot, I understood that they are so unique and powerful that I had to adjust the rest of the film to those scenes rather than adjusting them to the script. From that on we opened the film to the experiences we made in everyday life and let them influence the story-building. In the end the film grew like a tree and many things were unpredictable.

How did you prepare the leading actor for the lamb birth scene?

I didn't rehearse with the actor before the actual birth scene. I told him what to do according to how the scene developed. He didn't know he would actually have to help the lamb to exit the womb. Only when I saw the lamb could die, I decided he had to help. He ended up very shocked, as he's not from the countryside. It was the first time he did something like this. But this is why the scene is so organic. We were very lucky to catch this scene.

In the end the most difficult thing for the actors was to be as strong as the animals. Because all the animals in the film are fantastic and the actors should not be worse. Everything had to be just as authentic. This was very hard for everybody, actors, sound, camera and directing to achieve this same level of truth throughout the whole film. Sometimes we had to shoot a scene 25 times.



SERGEY DVORTSEVOY BIOGRAPHY

TULPAN is Sergey Dvortsevov's first feature film. Sergey has directed several short and medium-length documentary films which have won numerous top prizes at festivals like Festival dei Popoli (Florence, Italy), Sunny Side of the Doc (Marseille, France), Cinema du Reel (Paris, France), as well as the prestigious documentary festivals in Leipzig, Germany, and Nyon, France. However, Sergey prefers to describe his award-winning films IN THE DARK, HIGHWAY, BREAD DAY and PARADISE as "life cinema." His goal has always been to show the simplicity and warmth of the world in a mixture of naturalism and poetry.

Born in 1962 in Chimkent, Kazakhstan, Sergey graduated from Aviation college in the Ukraine and the Radiotechnical-Institut in Novosibirsk. As an Aeroflot radio engineer, he traveled all over the country, until he saw an announcement for higher education in directing and screenwriting in Moscow.

2008 TULPAN (100 min)

2004 IN THE DARK / V TEMNOTE (41 min)

1999 HIGHWAY (52 min)

1998 BREAD DAY / CHLEBNYY DEN (54 min)

1997 PARADISE / SCHASTYE (23 min)



CAST

ASA Askhat Kuchinchirekov
SAMAL (Asa's sister) Samal Yeslyamova
ONDAS (Samal's husband) Ondasyn Besikbasov
BONI Tulepbergen Baisakalov
BEKE Bereke Turganbayev
NUKA Nurzhigit Zhapabayev
MAHA Mahabbat Turganbayeva
TULPAN'S FATHER Amangeldi Nurzhanbayev
TULPAN'S MOTHER Tazhyban Khalykulova
BOSS Zhappas Zhailaubaev
VETERINARIAN Esentai Tulendiev

CREW

DIRECTOR Sergey Dvortsevov
SCREENPLAY Sergey Dvortsevov, Gennady Ostrovskiy
PRODUCED BY Pandora Film (Germany), Karl Baumgartner
PRODUCERS Cobra Film (Switzerland), Valerie Fischer
Eurasia Film (Kazakhstan), Gulnara Sarsenova,
Bulat Galimgerayev, Film Company Slovo
(Russia), Sergey Melkumov, Elena Yatsoura
CTB Filmproduction (Russia), Sergey Selyanov
Filmcontract Ltd. (Poland), Henryk Romanowski
Pallas Film (Germany), Thanassis Karathanos
Pandora Film (Germany), Raimond Goebel
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Jola Dylewska PSC
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Roger Martin
EDITOR Isabel Meier, Petar Markovic
WORLD SALES The Match Factory
TECHNICAL DATA Format 35 mm / 1:1.85 / 100 min / Color / Dolby
Digital / Kazakh and Russian with English and
French subtitles