

salacious news reports about extortion, blackmail, multiple plane crashes, school girlfriends slipping into comas, infanticide, and the like—and the girl’s sedentary position on the sagging couch as she quietly reads a book. The contrast between onscreen and offscreen, the shabbiness of the décor and the crazed tenor of the news report, is completely non-metaphorical: Kostrov is operating in an altogether purer, more beguiling realm. After watching *Orpheus*, I couldn’t help but think of Dave Kehr’s great line about Chaplin’s *Limelight* (1952): “Overlong, visually flat, episodically constructed, and a masterpiece—it isn’t ‘cinema’ on any terms but Chaplin’s own, but those are high terms indeed.”

In September, the news broke that Doclisboa would show a further four films by Kostrov: one, *Zima* (*Winter*), from the same seasonal cycle as *Leto*, and the aforementioned trilogy of concert films about the formation and dissolution of the Narodnaya collective. *Zima* is, as one would expect, the formal inverse of *Leto*: the warm DV images of the latter replaced by flat, icy digital, the long, free-flowing zooms that tracked both the languorous motion of early-evening walks and the characters’ tender, murmured discussions traded for severe wide shots of landscapes blanketed in snow along with cramped, austere interior scenes. For the opening ten minutes, the teenage protagonist is hunched at his PC playing *Counter-Strike* for what feels like an eternity; the image, shot Hammershøi-like from the opposite side of the room, captures not only his screen, bustling with violent movement, but also the fresco of windows that look out onto the dead of winter. For 90 minutes, we follow the unnamed protagonist as he trudges silently through the snow, watching him pause to work with spray-can or paintbrush to create highly intricate but nonsensical graffiti on the crumbling walls of the city’s industrial zones. As programmer Boris Nelepo astutely noted in his introduction to the film in Lisbon, these sequences are a perfect synecdoche for Kostrov’s own practice: just as with the boy’s industrious creation of art with no seeming logic or purpose, Kostrov’s films are purely about the beauty of the gesture.

Kostrov’s eleventh feature and third entry in the seasons cycle, *Osen* (*Autumn*), was shot in September of this year, and the edit locked in his hotel room at Doclisboa a month later. Kostrov’s flight from Russia, along with his wife and the rest of the festival’s Russian contingent, gave ample time for the completion of the screenplay for *Vesna* (*Spring*), which surely will be either underway or even completed by the time this issue hits the stands. This is a truly never-ending tour, a song that never fades out: Kostrov will continue to make movies forever, moving outward in ever-widening concentric circles like air particles shuddering after the strings of a guitar are strummed, or rings expanding outwards after a stone is tossed into still water, “the parents becoming weaker and dying off from within as the progeny conquers the land about them,” as W.G. Sebald once wrote. Kostrov is guided by something on this wavelength, one that isn’t easy to tune into on first pass. We see so many people doing just that in Kostrov movies: strumming, noodling on a piano, bobbing along as another person plays music, *creating* a space through an erratic, overpowering style of performance. This is what Kostrov too is driven by: a mad quest in search of a melody that exists beyond the limits of individual works. His is the kind of odyssey that takes a lifetime. ♦

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

One of the most radical and prolific filmmakers to emerge this decade, Vadim Kostrov arrived in 2021 as if fully formed, with six features, all shot in the director's hometown of Nizhny Tagil, that traveled the festival circuit like a closely held secret. Part documentary, part autofiction, these richly textured and evocative films fuse elements of slow cinema and observational nonfiction into quietly enrapturing meditations on time, light, and landscapes both internal and external. In 2022, Kostrov left Russia for Paris in protest of the war in Ukraine, but his workrate has remained steady as he continues to push his political, experimental, and diaristic impulses to new extremes. Tonight's program includes *Summer* (2021) and *Fall* (2022), two standout features from Kostrov's seasons tetralogy.

TRT: 208 min

In person: Vadim Kostrov

In a Year of Six Kostrovs by Christopher Small

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published in Cinema Scope, Winter 2021

In 2021, the world was introduced to Vadim Kostrov, a young Russian filmmaker with an entire body of work waiting in deep freeze. One film after another appeared in a matter of months, at such a pace that a proper collective accounting could be made. Though these six works vary greatly in texture and tone, style and content, what unites them is Kostrov's detached, universal perspective on the passing of time. Today he is 23 years old, though he began to make films in 2017 after moving from Nizhny Tagil, a prominent industrial town in the Urals, to Moscow, where he lived in a hostel and worked intermittently as a food delivery courier after dropping out of VGIK, the film school at which so many great Soviet, Russian, and Third World filmmakers found the means and institutional support to make their movies. This wasn't the case for Kostrov, whose belief that the work of cinema is to "manifest" certain sensations from the world (and from his life) made him a poor match for the master system by which VGIK has long functioned, in which students are paired with veteran filmmakers.

After Kostrov left VGIK, Moscow itself became a source of inspiration, allowing him access to a world of galleries, lengthy walks around the city, cinephilic and literary discussions, and regular screenings. After making *Cherdak Underground* (2019), a VHS-shot film that has not yet screened outside of Russia, Kostrov returned to Tagil with fresh eyes, now capable of imagining a private production model free of the constraints imposed by the school. Once the epitome of entrapment and provincialism, Tagil now seemed to teem with possibility. This has become a hallmark of practically all of Kostrov's work thus far: the filmmaker's hometown as a near-mythic terrain, an environment that, in its range of possibilities, visual and otherwise, provides him the raw material with which to sculpt time. [...]

When the initial batch of Russian programmers who saw the films were not impressed, Kostrov screened them for friends and small groups of spectators at impromptu private screenings, often recording moments from these events for use in other films. This, naturally, only increases the interconnectedness of the works: in *Narodnaya* (2019), we hear Kostrov mention from behind the camera that he is shooting *Orpheus* (2021); later, in *Orpheus*, we

recognize Lazy Comet's Gosha Gordienko as one of the viewers at a screening of one of Kostrov's earlier works. In another film, eagle-eyed Kostrovians will spot Gordienko and Mira Talanova (an onscreen and apparently offscreen couple) in the background of a party; they also both reappear in a major way in the final party sequence in *Orpheus* and in *Leto* (*Summer*) (2021). For those steeped in the vagaries of Kostrov's cinematic realm, a casual appearance like this explodes the possibilities even further; this is a world where fiction begets reality, and vice versa.

In *Leto*, Kostrov reconstructs the landscapes and textures of his childhood in what can paradoxically be called vast fragments: fragments in the sense that they exist in scattered form, vast in that they somehow encompass entire lifetimes. A fictionalized avatar of Kostrov himself, *Leto's* main character, Vadik (Vova Karetin), is experiencing the kind of summer in Nizhny Tagil that he will remember fondly for the rest of his life, despite the fact that, like all great summers before the onset of adolescence, not much happens. Gordienko and Talanova reappear here as the kind of young adults that dominate the free time of a child in a small town over the holidays; though they are fully formed presences, vividly real in their lived detail, they nonetheless exist before us as if remembered in hindsight. Shooting on MiniDV, Kostrov imbues this floating world with a quality entirely in keeping with the gauziness of our memories of childhood summers. Conversations, too—a grandmother, sunlight gently illuminating her grey hair as she reads from a Bible—feel more like impressions than properly unfolding experiences. Even in the moment, it is as if we are watching and listening to everything before us in retrospect.

A month after *Leto's* Sheffield debut, Kostrov premiered *Orpheus*—which stands as perhaps the locus classicus of Kostrovology—at FIDMarseille. Shot the summer before *Leto* and parallel to *Narodnaya*, the film features Kostrov himself as Vadim, a young filmmaker returning to Tagil in search of closure with a former girlfriend, Anya (Anna Naumova, playing herself). The first half of the film is relatively staid, following Anya around familiar spaces in Tagil; at other points, she plays the guitar and sings, or Vadim plays the piano in a living room that will become one of the defining spaces of the film. At the halfway point, Vadim and Anya have a conversation on the hill above the city, with a watchtower illuminated by spotlights in the background. Lighting and holding several candles, cupping each of them in their hands to keep the flame alive, they speak about the stifling conformity of the people in Tagil, who move "as if on rails" from home to work. "Every one of your thoughts can change your life," Vadim says. "There is always a choice to follow these thoughts, even if you have nothing...Thoughts themselves create a future." Subsequently, the film follows Anya to a nightclub, in what becomes a scene of long, drawn-out tedium and numbness. This, we sense, is Eurydice's uncertain voyage into a banal underworld.

As always in Kostrov's movies, the intensity of the music, whether played live or over speakers in a club, can divert the entire trajectory of the film. From the nightclub sequence forward, *Orpheus* seems to spin out in all directions, growing ever more dispersed in its ideas and formal makeup. We see Kostrov's own grandfather, who, after a hurried second marriage, mirrors Vadim's quotidian version of the Orphic quest through his routine of guiltily recollecting and paying ritualistic tribute to his deceased former wife; we witness more parties, whose shifting energies Kostrov catalogues in what feels like their entirety; we meet Anya's girlfriend, who is watching TV on the sofa when she returns from the club.

This latter scene is an instructive one for the way in which it gets at some of the mystery of Kostrov's art. There is a subtle interplay between the blaring TV—from which we hear