

# The Main Feature



## Season 34 - Issue 5 (screening 14.11.13)

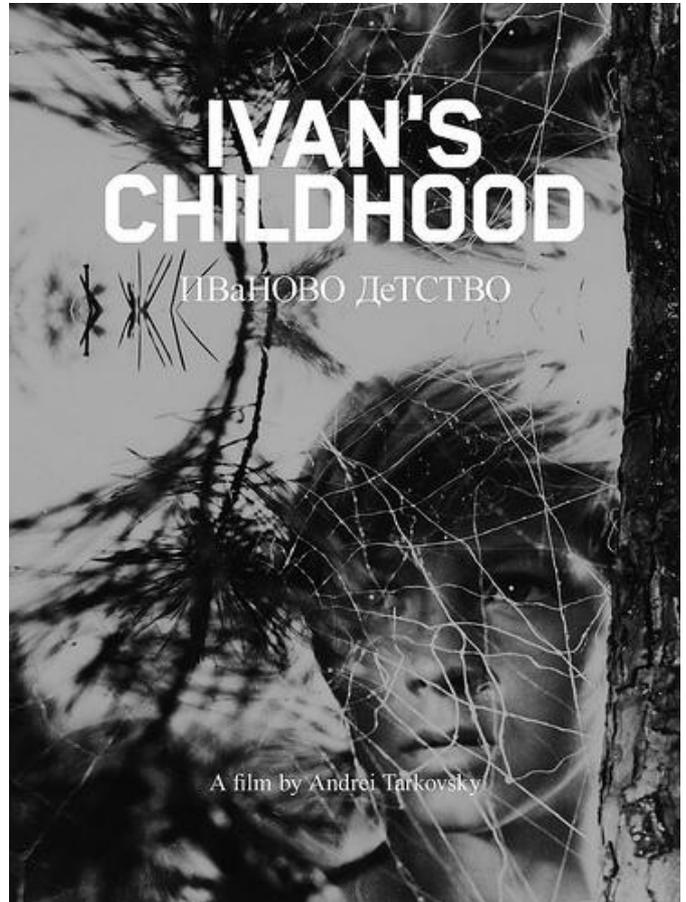
USSR  
1962  
Certificate PG  
Running time 94 minutes

**Directed by** Andrei Tarkovsky  
**Written by** Vladimir Bogomolov and Mikhail Papava  
**Music by** Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov  
**Cinematography** Vadim Yusov

### Starring

Nikolay Burlyayev	Ivan
Valentin Zubkov	Capt. Kholin
Yevgeni Zharikov	Lt. Galtsev
Stepan Krylov	Cpl. Katasonov
Nikolai Grinko	Lt. Col. Gryaznov
Dmitri Milyutenko	Old Man
Valentina Malyavina	Masha
Irma Raush	Ivan's Mother

The reputation of Andrei Tarkovsky, who died of lung cancer in Paris on the night of 28/29 December 1986, rests on a slender catalogue of eight films made over a period of little more than 25 years.



Tonight's film was his first full length film. Its story -- about a 12-year-old Soviet boy heroically acting as a spy against the Nazis in World War II -- feels a good bit like Soviet-approved propaganda, which is not entirely surprising when one learns that the project had started under the direction of E. Abalov, but had been abandoned because of the unsatisfactory quality of the sequences filmed. Later the decision was made to salvage the film after all, and Tarkovsky was placed in charge of its completion. The fact that he was able to create a work of such emotional impact in these circumstances is testimony to his powers as a film-maker and his strength of vision. Despite its mixed parentage, the film is very much his child and bears the unmistakable fingerprints of his style and the way the film effortlessly moves in and out of fantasy is remarkable.

Tarkovsky describes his goal, explaining *"Beyond the diligently described military episode, I wanted to see the grave changes which war makes in the life of a man, in this case a very young one. To see a truthful depiction of its hardening and resistance, and to show its battle with the insanity of militarized death."*



In his book *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky describes *Ivan's Childhood* as his "qualifying examination." When he took over the reins of a project he hadn't originated, Tarkovsky soon realised the occasion would permit him to prove his mettle as a director, if only to himself. Tarkovsky and Director of Photography Vadim Yusov determined to turn a

fairly conventional war film into a poetic reverie drenched in a doom-laden atmosphere conveyed by shadowy high-contrast cinematography, poetically resonant lighting schemes, and intricately choreographed camera movements.

*Ivan's Childhood* was one of Tarkovsky's most commercially successful films, selling 16.7 million tickets in the Soviet Union. Tarkovsky himself was displeased with some aspects of the film; in his book he writes at length about subtle changes to certain scenes that he regrets not implementing. However, the film received numerous awards and international acclaim on its release, winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1962.

Tarkovsky benefited from circumstance; a thawing of the political situation allowed for the film's more critical depiction of the war, and an earlier version of the story had been abandoned, leaving the door open for him.

It attracted the attention of many intellectuals, including Ingmar Bergman who said, "My discovery of Tarkovsky's first film was like a miracle. Suddenly, I found myself standing at the door of a room the keys of which had, until then, never been given to me. It was a room I had always wanted to enter and where he was moving freely and fully at ease." Tarkovsky, a brilliant director who made a splash on the international art circuit in the next two decades with such films as "Solaris," "The Mirror," "Nostalgia," and "Sacrifice."

Jean-Paul Sartre wrote an article on the film, defending it against a highly critical article in the Italian newspaper *L'Unita* and saying that it is one of the most beautiful films he had ever seen. Filmmaker Sergei Parajanov and Krzysztof Kieślowski praised the film and cited it as an influence on their work.



Filmed in impeccably rendered black and white photography by Vadim Yusov, the film utilizes an array of shadows and near-theatrical lighting schemes to underscore the morally shadowed world that the characters find themselves traversing through in order to survive the war experience. On top of that, there are plenty of tracking shots, crane shots, and other camera moves to spare. While not showing off in an obvious manner, Tarkovsky certainly favours more complex visual movement in *Ivan's Childhood* rather than a simpler, less busy style to convey his story

However, with all the stylistic flash the film is still anchored by Burlyaev's performance. As Ivan, he is able to play both the pure essence of childhood innocence while simultaneously conveying the spiritual trampling that war creates

In a way it was a false dawn for Tarkovsky, whose relationship with the Soviet authorities would become increasingly problematic, leading him to make his last film, *The Sacrifice*, in Sweden. *Ivan's Childhood* remains a stunning debut, a moving and immersive film that both denounces war and evokes its dreamlike beauty.

Iain McGlashan

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# New film for members to look out for?

## From BBC website 27.10.13: "Last Passenger film released after 'shoestring' trailer attracts funding

A film whose £500 trailer attracted the support of cinematic giants has been released in cinemas.

Omid Nooshin penned Last Passenger, about a hijacked train, in coffee shops in his home town of Guildford, Surrey.

The trailer was filmed in part at Guildford Railway Station and featured former acting students from the town. The 90-second advert was enough to prompt a £1.7m investment in the film, which was released last Friday.

Mr Nooshin, who also directed the film, said the trailer was mostly filmed on a slam door train belonging to the Bluebell Railway in East Grinstead, Sussex. Among the cast were former Guildford School of Acting students. The finished film stars former EastEnders actress Kara Tointon and Dougray Scott.

Weeks after the trailer was released online in 2011, Mr Nooshin was approached by Pathe and attracted the support of Pinewood Studios and the British Film Institute.

Shooting commenced at Shepperton Studios in September 2011.

The thriller is about single father Lewis Shaler, played by Scott, who is on the last train home from London when he strikes up a relationship with a flirtatious stranger, played by Tointon. But, it transpires, a sociopath has taken control of the train and intends to crash it, killing those on board.

Mr Nooshin, a former Farnham Art College student, said: "When you're trying to do an ambitious movie as a first film, the onus is really on you to prove that you can pull it off.

"Last Passenger was a small movie, it's a \$2.5m (£1.5m) movie, and the last movie set on a train was Unstoppable which was \$100m (£61m).

"So you have to really prove that you can not only pull it off, but pull it off on a shoestring."

Mr Nooshin said the trailer had to be made "very cheaply" but look "great" to entice financiers.

"We shot in one evening, cut it all together, our effects guy added some fairly rudimentary special effects and visual effects," he said. "We put it out there and after spending nearly a couple of years trying to raise the finance, we were fully financed within about three months."

He said the film had also been sold to France, Germany, Scandinavia, Japan, India, Russia, and Brazil.

John Myall recalls:

I met Omid a couple of times when he won top awards at the Surrey Film Festival while I was Competition Officer. We always knew he would go far.

He has previously produced 35mm features based on Guildford eg the old car park behind Trinity Church featured in one thriller - 'Rooftop' - we showed this at a Surrey Film-Video festival in the 1990's as an example of what good amateur filmmaking can lead to.

