

## Discovering Georgian Cinema

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**BAM/PFA**



# DISCOVERING GEORGIAN CINEMA

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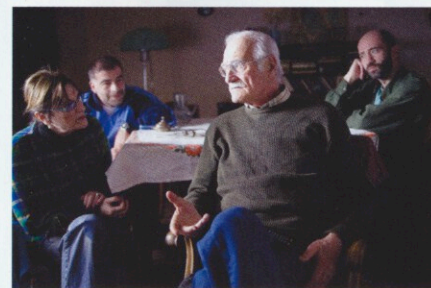
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## Foreword

The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), is tremendously proud to present *Discovering Georgian Cinema*. BAM/PFA holds an exceptionally important collection of Soviet Georgian films and is pleased to have this occasion to share these works with film lovers across North America. BAM/PFA was involved in the last significant touring series of Georgian films in the US, in the early 1980s, and at that time acquired many of the films; however, the present series is much expanded, thanks to loans of key works from archives throughout the world and to the remarkable output of a new generation of Georgian filmmakers. This retrospective offers an opportunity for film critics and historians to give consideration to an area of cinema that is well deserving of greater scholarship in the English language. We are grateful to the series's co-programmers, BAM/PFA's Senior Film Curator Susan Oxtoby and Curator Jytte Jensen from MoMA, for their extraordinary thoughtfulness and skill in assembling these works. We are also very pleased to welcome the many visiting filmmakers and authorities on Georgian cinema who will participate in programs at the host venues on the tour.

Lawrence Rinder  
Director, BAM/PFA



ABOVE

Tengiz Abuladze: *Repentance*

Tinatin Gurchiani: *The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear*

Levan Koguashvili: *Blind Dates*

OPPOSITE

Otar Iosseliani: *Once upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird*

Mikheil Chiaureli: *Khabarda*

Ivan Perestiani: *Little Red Devils*

Siko Dolidze: *The Last Crusaders*



## Discovering Georgian Cinema

SUSAN OXTOBY

*Discovering Georgian Cinema* is truly an opportunity for discovery—a chance to explore the rich cinematic heritage of a place that has produced many wonderful films during the past century. The largest retrospective of Georgian cinema ever mounted in North America, the series features rare 35mm exhibition prints held by film archives around the world, where curators and archivists have championed the importance of this once regional, now national cinematic tradition.

A collaboration between curatorial departments at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) and The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the project has been in the works for many years. BAM/PFA holds a significant collection of Soviet Georgian films, and this fact was the impetus for us to undertake extensive research at other archives with the goal of assembling a selection of the best films for this touring retrospective. My programming colleague, Jytte Jensen at MoMA, has been following Georgian cinema for decades, and this series would not have happened without her encouragement and devotion to this filmmaking tradition.

A curatorial fellowship from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts generously allowed me an opportunity to do the necessary research and make new contacts who would greatly assist with the Georgian project. First, I invited Georgian film archivist Nino Dzandava to Berkeley in 2010 to view the 35mm prints in BAM/PFA's Soviet Georgian collection. This was an enlightening experience, and a great way for me to get a crash course in the history of these specific films' production and critical reception and their lasting importance.

Over the course of the last three years, I have had the opportunity to preview 35mm prints in the archives of Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art (Berlin), La Cinémathèque de Toulouse, Eye Film Institute (Amsterdam), and Gosfilmofond (Moscow), where the vast majority of films from the Soviet period are archived. My research was also greatly informed by visiting Georgia twice; I attended the 2011 Tbilisi International Film Festival and met with members of the film community there, and returned on a personal vacation a few months later to visit many of the country's world heritage sites and see its different regions firsthand.

Georgia is a relatively small country (approximately 26,900 square miles) with an extraordinarily varied terrain. The alpine regions of the Caucasus, bordering with

Russia to the north and Azerbaijan to the north and east, are rich with forested lands and rapidly flowing rivers. To the east and south the lowlands are much more arid, and one even finds examples of savanna grasslands on the borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia. As one travels westward, there is a tropical zone toward the part of Georgia that borders on the Black Sea with Turkey to the south. Georgian filmmakers right from the early days of production have capitalized on the beauty and diversity of the land, shooting on location at monasteries and historical sites, using the rugged landscape as the backdrop for tales of heroism.

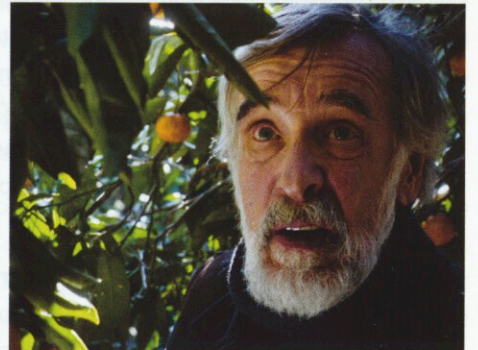
Through the centuries, the Georgian language—technically part of the Kartvelian family of languages that were spoken only in the Caucasus—has remained apart from other language groups, with a unique script that was developed around the time that the Georgian elites began to convert to Christianity in the mid-fourth century. The Georgian language has remained strong despite many periods of invasion or political domination by outside powers, be it incursions by the Persians and later the Ottomans, the dominance of the Russian empire, or the more recent period of Soviet rule. Today, most of its nearly 5 million people are Christians; indeed, Georgia is an important example of a continuous Christian community, with its church established in the early fourth century CE, but one can also find worshippers of the Muslim, Jewish, and Bahá'í faiths as well as an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple in Tbilisi.

In surveying the cinematic tradition that has emerged from this distinctive cultural milieu during the past century, this retrospective concentrates on three main periods of film production: the wonderfully creative films of the silent era; the flowering of narrative filmmaking that began in the mid-fifties with Tengiz Abuladze and Rezo Chkheidze's award-winning *Magdana's Donkey* and is well represented here by a concentration of films from the 1960s to the 1980s; and the new wave of Georgian cinema, which demonstrates the talents of the young filmmaking community today.

During the silent era, which began about a decade after the birth of cinema in Europe and continued in Georgia through 1934, well after the advent of sound, Georgian filmmakers produced a number of important and artful documentaries in addition to strong dramatic films. Here one must note the importance of Vasil Amashukeli's *Journey of Akaki Tsereteli to Racha and Lechkumi* (1912), the Georgian *Kulturfilms* (c. 1930–34; see Nino Dzandzava's related essay in this brochure), and, especially, Noutsia Gogoberidze's *Buba* (1930), an accomplished, poetic documentary that she made with the noted avant-garde painter David Kakabadze. This film was effectively written out of film history during the Soviet regime but has been restored and should be considered alongside films like Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* for its complex relationship between so-called subjective content and authorial voice.

The best Georgian feature films from the silent era demonstrate high production standards (strong camera work, creative editing, and poignant performances) as well as distinctive styles developed by leading directors; key early examples include Ivan Perestiani's spirited, action-packed *Little Red Devils* (1923) and *Three Lives* (1924), with its striking use of location shooting and natural light. Mikheil Chiaureli's *Saba* (1929) and *Khabarda* (1930) and Mikhail Kalatozov's *A Nail in the Boot* (1930/1932) all exhibit wonderfully expressive picture editing. Other silent-era films provide us with fascinating, still-relevant geopolitical themes and evidence of Georgia's links to Western European countries—films like Nikoloz Shengelaia's *Twenty-Six Commissars* (1928), Lev Push's *The Doomed: Russian Soldiers in France* (1930), Leo Esakya's *Amerikanka* (1930), or Kote Mikaberidze's dadaist workplace sendup, *My Grandmother* (1929).

By the late sixties, Georgian cinema was gaining an international reputation among knowledgeable critics and programmers. The films of Tengiz Abuladze, Otar Iosseliani, Sergei Paradjanov, Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia, Irakli Kvirikadze, Lana Gogoberidze, and Rezo Esadze, among others, contributed to the high regard in which Georgian cinema is held. In the period from 1960 through the 1980s, there are wonderful examples of filmmakers critiquing the Soviet system or the status quo at large (*An Unusual Exhibition*, *Blue Mountains*,



Ivan Perestiani: *Three Lives: Part 2*  
 Tengiz Abuladze and Rezo Chkheidze: *Magdana's Donkey*  
 Eldar Shengelaia: *Blue Mountains*  
 Zaza Urushadze: *Tangerines*



*Repentance*, *The Nylon Christmas Tree*). There is also evidence of filmmakers focusing on literary works and telling stories set in the pre-revolutionary period, thereby concentrating on unmistakably Georgian concerns (*Pirosmani*, *The Swimmer*, *The Day Is Longer Than the Night*, *The Legend of Suram Fortress*). In fact, this tendency can also be found in a number of Georgian films from the silent era.

Throughout the history of Georgian cinema, one of the predominant themes is the centrality of the family. (Family ties run deep in the Georgian film community, as well, as Jytte Jensen shows in her essay for this brochure.) We find poignant examples of this concern in recent Georgian cinema in films by Levan Koguashvili, such as his insightful documentary *Women from Georgia* (2009) and his delightful feature *Blind Dates* (2013); Salomé Alexi's impressive and wonderfully comic *Felicità* (2009); and Nana Ekvitishvili's hilarious, masterful short *Waiting for Mum* (2011).

Another theme that unites much of Georgian cinema is a profound love of the arts—polyphonic music, especially (as explained by Carl Linich in his essay in this brochure), but also traditional dance, literature, theater, painting, and architecture. The arts and textual references to them seem to permeate the mise-en-scène and location shooting of many of the films. Several Georgian filmmakers are noted for their lyrical or poetic technique—here we think of the cinema of Otar Iosseliani, Tengiz Abuladze (*Molba* and *The Wishing Tree*, in particular), and Aleksandr Rekhiashvili's very fine *The Way Home* (1981), a work that has a kinship with those of Andrei Tarkovsky and Aleksandr Sokurov, and that should be better known.

It is exciting for us to be able to showcase an impressive selection of recent films in this retrospective. For a country its size, Georgia in the past decade has produced a remarkable number of art films. The film community appears to be closely knit and acutely aware of the country's film history—despite the fact that it now almost impossible to see Georgian films, particularly the historical classics, presented theatrically in Tbilisi, apart from the annual Tbilisi International Film Festival and occasional screenings at the National Archives



of Georgia. (Alas, the paucity of a theatrical market at home is not uncommon elsewhere in the world.) These challenges aside, there seem to be a healthy number of breakout films that have received critical praise, international awards, and occasionally theatrical distribution in the West.

Noteworthy in this regard are the documentary films by Nino Kirtadze (a Georgian currently based in France), *The Pipeline Next Door* (2005), *Durakovo: Village of Fools* (2008), and *Something About Georgia* (2010), which have received recognition by the European Film Academy as well as at the Sundance Film Festival; and Tinatin Gurchiani's *The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear*, which also picked up an award at Sundance. Recent feature films adding buzz to the notion of a new wave include *In Bloom* (2013), co-directed by Nana Ekvitishvili and Simon Gross and shot by the talented Romanian cinematographer Oleg Mutu, which was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards and has done well in US distribution; the Georgian-Estonian coproduction *Tangerines* (2013), directed by Zaza Urushadze, which deals thoughtfully with the idea of pacifism in the midst of regional conflicts; and George Ovashvili's *Corn Island* (2014), which received the top prize at the prestigious Karlovy Vary film festival.

*Discovering Georgian Cinema* offers an opportunity for audiences in several North American cities to see highlights from a century of film history from the Caucasus. While the rarity of this assembly of 35mm prints and restored digital copies cannot be overstated, our hope is that the project has opened doors between many of the institutions that hold Georgian materials in Moscow and Tbilisi and the archives in Europe and the United States, and that there will be increased opportunities for cultural exchange in the years ahead.



**Gela:** My father has a strong personality, always struggling to make a film. After school we used to go on the set, spending all day there—doing our homework. A film shoot was real life to us. As Teimur's films were censored and he had such a hard time to make them, I did not want to be in films, so I studied law and economics. But perhaps, due to unconscious nostalgia for my upbringing, it caught up with me. . . . I had no money to make [*13 Tzamet*] and so my family members had to work on every position. My brother is the main character, and my sister, mom, and niece are all in the film.

**Sofia:** The smell of the cinema studio is the smell of my childhood and still a very alive memory. I used to play in the empty film décors sometimes in the dark. I loved the set, the tension, the fiction. . . . At home Teimur was writing scripts in the kitchen, nobody could enter—to eat, we had to wait. And it was normal, Papa was writing a film! In the beginning it was not evident [that I would become a filmmaker]; directors are male in our family—my mother, Liana, brother George, and sister Olga are actors. Very early in my childhood my parents allowed us to watch films with them. Films were like open windows on life, the way to communicate with the world, so it was completely normal we all share it.

When one looks at the intricate familial relationships that weave through and connect Georgia's cinematic production, little aesthetic or thematic similarity within the family connections is apparent, but they all worked together on one another's films and developed their own individual voices under the roof of the Gruzia Film Studios. This well-appointed studio—which started out under a different name in the 1920s—had the great advantage of being far from the center of power, and has in its long history been artistic home to the most celebrated and inventive filmmakers of Georgia. In the twenties and thirties Ivan Perestiani (imported from outside of Georgia to provide professional experience), Mikhail Kalatozov, Nikoloz Shengelaia, Mikheil Chiaureli, and Davit Rondeli ruled the studio and shared the amazing gifts of a group of actors that brought to life the Georgian character on screen: Nato Vachnadze, Veriko Andjaparidze, Ramaz Zakariadze, and Sergo Zakariadze. Throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies it was the next generation of directors whose subtle and sophisticated critique of social and political circumstances produced the films that were to help define cinematic opposition to the ruling powers: Tengiz Abuladze, Rezo Chkheidze, Otar Iosseliani, Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia, and the one female in a male-dominated industry, Lana Gogoberidze.

Following are a few examples of the remarkable familial and professional network that emerged from the Gruzia Studios.

Kote Mikaberidze directed and cowrote *My Grandmother* (1929) with Siko Dolidze and appeared as an actor in several films by Perestiani, Lev Push, Chiaureli (with Vachnadze), and Giorgi Shengelaia.

Mikheil Chiaureli acted for Perestiani and Paradjanov. His wife, Veriko Anjaparidze, was one of the great stars of early Georgian cinema, appearing in films by her husband (*Saba*, 1929) as well as in films directed by Nikoloz Shengelaia, Paradjanov, and Abuladze, among others. Chiaureli was the uncle of Giorgi Daneliya (*Don't Grieve*, 1968) and the father of Sofiko Chiaureli, star of films by Giorgi Shengelaia (to whom she was married), Abuladze, Chkheidze, and Paradjanov, to mention but a few.



Nikoloz Shengelaia: *Eliso*  
Eldar Shengelaia: *An Unusual Exhibition*  
Noutsa Gogoberidze: *Buba*

Nikoloz Shengelaia was co-screenwriter with Perestiani of *In the Quagmire* (1928) and co-directed *Giuli* (1927) with Push (Kalatozov was the cameraman). His wife, Nato Vachnadze, the icon of the 1920s, was adored in films by Perestiani and Rondeli, and played roles in several of her husband's films, as did her sister, Kira Andronikashvili, star of *Eliso* (1928). Nikoloz and Nato's sons, Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia, were the most prominent directors of the sixties and seventies, with Giorgi also acting in films by Chiaureli and Chkheidze.

Tengiz Abuladze made the first internationally successful film from the Gruzia Studios, *Magdana's Donkey* (1955), with Chkheidze. Chkheidze later made one of the most beloved and locally successful films, *Father of a Soldier* (1964), starring the incomparable Zakariadze. Abuladze's daughter-in-law, Nana Janelidze, who cowrote *Repentance* (1984), has subsequently made several well-regarded films and is currently the director of the Georgian National Film Center.

Given all this interconnectedness, it is surprising and refreshing that when I asked Salomé Alexi to interview her mother, Lana Gogoberidze, about their experience of filmmaking in Georgia as a family affair, both women rejected the idea and instead pointed to the freedom of a clean slate and the power of the personal example. Lana's mother, Noutsa Gogoberidze, made several films in the late twenties and early thirties but was arrested when Lana was seven years old. Her films forbidden, she spent the next twelve years in prison and in exile as "family of an enemy of the people." Until recently these early films were all believed lost, until a few years ago Lana found *Buba*, her mother's astounding 1930 documentary, now celebrated for its authentic cinematic language.

**Lana:** I cannot speak about any influence because I simply had no opportunity to see my mother's films. Her movies, as well as her name, did not exist in the history of Soviet cinema. . . .

It happened that in the late fifties I was the first woman cineaste in Georgia and the Soviet Union. Of course my decision to become a filmmaker was somehow influenced by the fact that my mother—in her past—was a cineaste.

**Salomé:** What is filmmaking: a mode of life? A vision of life? To be a filmmaker is to dare to have your vision of life, your point of view. This courage I got from my mother.

I think what I got from her is the freedom, the nonconventional mode of life, the idea that you have to live your life as you feel and not as others would like [you] to.

Maybe she got it from her mother?

Which is very beautiful, the story of Lana and her mother. Noutsa Gogoberidze never told her daughter that in her "first" life before 1937 she was a filmmaker. That she worked in a team with such great people like Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, or Kalatozishvili [Kalatozov], and a painter like David Kakabadze.

As I understand it, Noutsa Gogoberidze adopted a way which consisted in forgetting her past life in order to give her daughter the freedom of lightness, of innocence. Not to oppress her daughter with a



mother's so important, so interesting and heavy past. Lana was really turned to the future, to act, and not to look back.

It is the key of Lana's energy and I think it comes from this very silent, very secret pact that her mother did with her own life.

In this way, of course, we all three have been influenced by each other.

The committed, personal cinema from an undiluted female perspective that Lana Gogoberidze almost singlehandedly brought to the Soviet screen in the sixties and seventies is much influenced by her mother's example as a human being. In one of her most celebrated films, *Several Interviews About Personal Matters* (1978), the relationship between the fictional journalist and her mother is informed by the real-life story of the director and her mother; the film was the first to mention Stalin's camps. Lana's *Waltz on the Pechora River* (1992) is based on short stories her mother wrote while imprisoned in the camps for twelve years. She has said that she likes her mother's stories because they are about everyday life and human relations, especially friendships—as are her own films, and those of her daughter, Salomé.

Of course, in film as in any other walk of life, no family is alike, and every person within the family structure lives out his or her own individuality. However, looking at Georgian cinema from the perspective of its dominance by about a dozen families, we can say that this clannish artistic milieu creates a sense of continuity and organic development within an artistic medium that served as the basis of much national identification and pride for the Georgian public, especially during the Soviet era. This dynamic of continuous renewal is just one of the distinctive and surprising traits that define the particularly rich tradition of Georgian cinema.





*Discovering Georgian Cinema* includes a group of four Georgian short films, previously screened at the Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone, Italy, in 2013, that are united by the concept of the body as machine. Siko Dolidze's *Call of the Land* (1928) and Kote Mikaberidze and Vasili Dolenko's *You Must Reap as You Have Sown* (1930) are dedicated to the urgent problems of a young socialist republic, especially the mechanization of labor on collective farms. Aleqsandre Jaliashvili's *Ten Minutes in the Morning* (1931) and Vakhtang Shvelidze's *Collective Farmers' Hygiene* (1934) represent a state policy of promoting physical culture and exercise as a form of healthcare. This essay places these films in the context of the *Kulturfilm* genre.

#### KULTURFILM: GENRE AND IDEOLOGY

For most of the twentieth century, the small country of Georgia lived under a totalitarian regime. Today nobody disputes the degree to which the Communist government was maintained by both widespread corruption and serious restriction of information, as well as Stalinist terror. The Communist regime employed a variety of methods in its mass social control, consolidation of power, and rewriting of history, including the most powerful and inspiring of all, the visual media—including the visual arts, broadcasting, and, of course, cinema.

In 1922, Vladimir Lenin famously said in a conversation with Anatoly Lunacharsky (the first Soviet Commissar of Culture and Popular Education): “Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important.” This concept of “the most important art” immediately became hugely popular, and guided Soviet culture for decades as the nation developed a successful and internationally circulated film industry. Lenin made sure that new, Communist-inspired films reflected the new reality of the Soviet state. Lunacharsky, however, argued that when Lenin talked about “the cinema” he primarily meant documentary newsreels. From the outset, documentary filmmakers had instructions to make films primarily for propaganda purposes; Soviet-era films were also expected to serve educational aims. By pursuing these dual educational-propagandistic goals, the Soviets were following the example of the Germans.

A new genre of documentary film emerged in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century. No matter where they were shown, these films were known by the German term *Kulturfilm*. Today the rise of the *Kulturfilm* is associated with the rise of the National Socialist regime, but in the beginning *Kulturfilms* helped legitimize cinema as a constructive cultural force, and were deemed by educators as particularly useful in socialization and education. The effectiveness of these films in serving nationalist, militarist, and educational aims was also evident to those in or seeking power, ultimately making the *Kulturfilm* a key genre for the Nazis.

At the end of the 1920s several Soviet filmmakers, including Nikolai Lebedev and Vladimir Erofeev, were allowed to go to Germany, spending several years in Berlin, where they not only studied the cinema industry, but also developed a special interest in ethnographic films, travelogues, and expedition films, as well as *Kulturfilms*. When they returned to the Soviet Union they promoted this kind of filmmaking with great enthusiasm. At first the Soviet Union could not compare with Germany in the production of *Kulturfilms*. But, like the Nazis, Soviet officials soon became well aware of the films' power in strengthening the new Soviet state.

#### KULTURFILMS IN GEORGIA

Following a resolution of the Soviet Central Executive Committee and the Council of Peoples' Commissars of Georgia, the right to shoot both feature films and newsreels was granted exclusively to the Georgian State Film Studio, known as Sakhkinmretsvi. All other state and private organizations, as well as independent film producers, might only make films with the consent of Sakhkinmretsvi, and violations were punishable by serious administrative penalties. The year before the adoption of this resolution, the right to distribute films had been granted exclusively to the People's Commissariat for Education, and all other organizations engaged in renting films were closed down. In this monopolistic environment, the state was able to impose total control over cinema production and exhibition, and define the ideology of films. Independent feature

and documentary filmmakers, along with private film companies, were completely excluded. The only viewpoints presented on Soviet screens were state sponsored.

The Communist Party conference of March 15–21, 1928, was a significant event for Soviet film production. Local industries were to develop their own Five-Year Plans according to Party directives, and the Communist Party clearly outlined a course for the development of Soviet cinema. Among its major aims was to bring the cinema closer to the masses, a move that many believed would logically lead to the medium becoming a more effective force for cultural revolution. Many in the Party believed that cinema was a unique tool for rising political awareness, and saw the medium as the ideal way to attain officially approved Party objectives.

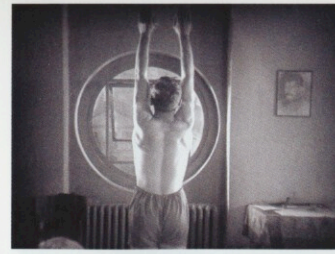
Local film industries undertook the task of “revitalizing the repertoire,” completely rethinking the kinds of films they were making, feature films and documentaries alike. *Kulturfilms* soon become a significant tool to realize Party objectives, especially in the local studios. In terms of the number of films produced before 1928, Georgia’s Sakhkinmretsvi studio occupied fourth place in the entire Soviet cinema industry, accounting for almost 12 percent of total Soviet film production.

Soviet officials soon instructed all local, republic-based film studios, including Sakhkinmretsvi, to create and develop documentary-newsreel sections (*Kronikis Sektory*). This resulted in a *Kulturfilm* boom across the Soviet Union; very quickly almost everything that was not a feature film was called a *Kulturfilm*. Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, young cinephile directors at the Sakhkinmretsvi film studio made a number of *Kulturfilms*, which today can be considered exemplars of the genre.

#### BODY/MACHINE

The Soviet state’s official position on mechanization was that its purpose was to “ease labor,” “raise the material and cultural levels of the working class,” and “improve labor conditions and accelerate development.” Soviet ideologists claimed that unlike capitalist mechanization, the Soviet approach did not imply the domination of capital over labor, but was about improving the well-being of the working class and ending their exploitation. The 1920s saw a huge amount of propaganda about the use of new mechanical procedures on recently collectivized farms. Siko Dolidze’s *Call of the Land* and Kote Mikaberize and Vasili Dolenko’s *You Must Reap as You Have Sown* describe the need for new tractors, combines, and other modern equipment, and visualize the introduction of new techniques involving them, celebrating the saving of time and energy.

The fetishization of new technology was a familiar theme in Western European avant-garde cinema of this period, as it was in much modernist art and literature. The key difference is that Soviet filmmakers’ excitement about machinery and automation had strongly political and explicitly ideological qualities. The most famous example of this pro-mechanization motif in Soviet cinema is of course the much-imitated milk



separator sequence in Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Old and the New/The General Line* (1929). Siko Dolidze also used the image of a milk separator in his 1934 film *The Last Crusaders*.

The new Soviet system also needed a citizenry made up of well-functioning and well-organized bodies/machines. The founding fathers of modern capitalist manufacturing, Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, believed that the human body was a machine. Russians, however, went even further. For Aleksei Gastev, the leading Soviet theoretician of the scientific organization of labor and the founder of the Central Institute for Labor, the human body was not just a machine—it was a living machine, and it needed to be carefully tended, cleaned, and exercised if it were to genuinely improve production.

In line with this philosophy, Soviet *Kulturfilms* of this period promoted healthy, clean, and well-kept bodies. “Fighting dirt” and exponentially increasing the availability of healthcare became part of the officially sponsored vision of cultural revolution. Exercise was promoted as part of the lifestyle of the ideal Soviet citizen, with the hope that this love of physical culture would universally reinforce a sense of collective responsibility and local patriotism. These efforts to create a “New Man,” who was defined in equal parts by patriotism and physical strength, were analogous to the social transformation promoted in Nazi Germany. These concerns are vividly illustrated in the other two shorts in our program, *Ten Minutes in the Morning* by Aleqsandre Jaliashvili and *Collective Farmers’ Hygiene* by Vakhtang Shvelidze.

The original materials and prints of the four films featured in this program are held by the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents at the National Archives of Georgia. All four films have been digitally safeguarded by the joint efforts of the National Archives of Georgia, Georgian National Film Center, and CinePostproduction (Munich, Germany).

## Giorgi Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* in National and Cinematic Context

PETER ROLLBERG

At the time of its release, Giorgi Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* (1969) was not immediately recognized as the masterpiece that it is known to be today. The film was different from the adventurous and humorous movies that audiences expected from Georgia. Its narrative was nonlinear, its rhythm pensive, and its title character highly opaque. But even then, an unbiased, attentive viewer could not help but be captivated by the film's intense atmosphere and harrowing imagery. The art of Nikoloz Pirosmani, Georgia's most famous painter, emerged from Shengelaia's film as the materialization of a unique personality who never compromised his artistic principles. Indeed, by evoking Pirosmani's traumas, Shengelaia proposed a concept of what true artistry means.

*Pirosmani* was not alone in its lack of positive feedback. The mid-1960s had seen a shift in the cinematic treatment of the lives of great artists, a movement away from the chronological biographical narratives that had been characteristic of the so-called "biopic" since the inception of the genre in the 1910s. After blossoming in the 1930s and 1950s in many countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, the biopic—with its assumption of the decisive role played by larger-than-life personalities—seemed to have become an anachronism. Reliant on grandiose depictions of artists' personal tragedies and dramatic struggles against opponents and snobbish audiences, and on naïve explanations of specific artistic achievements, the genre had exhausted itself.

Interestingly, it was Russian cinema that showed how the life of an artist could be treated in a radically different manner: Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966/1969) demonstrated for the first time that film was a medium capable of ignoring the usual "life-and-works" pattern and giving the artistic biography an unexpected historical and philosophical depth. Paradoxically, the choice of a fifteenth-century icon painter as the subject for Tarkovsky's film was beneficial precisely because hardly any facts about Rublev's life are documented—a challenge that turned out to be a blessing. *Andrei Rublev's* episodes, although arranged chronologically, are not exclusively focused on the title character; rather, they often depict fictitious events reflecting the zeitgeist. The same is true of another anti-traditional biographical film, Sergei Paradjanov's *The Color of Pomegranates* (1968/1972). Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* is similar to *Andrei Rublev* and *The Color of Pomegranates* in that biographical facts about its subject are scarce, and a systematic cinematic re-creation of the artist's life was out



of the question. But the reconstruction and illustration of facts is precisely what all of these films aimed to transcend.

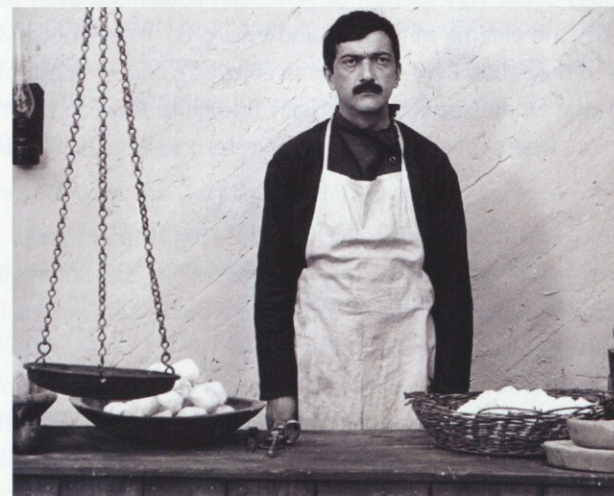
Shengelaia's picture assigns a prominent role to the national origins of Pirosmani's art and places the artist in various class milieus. But, watching Shengelaia's film against the backdrop of the Soviet canon of biographical films, it is striking that the political conditions in which Pirosmani lived are immaterial to the film's concept of artistry: individuals who intuitively understand the caliber of Pirosmani's art can be found in all social strata, among the rich and the poor; likewise, those who mock his art out of arrogance or snobbery are also found in the upper and lower classes of society. Furthermore, the culture and people who nourish Pirosmani's art at times empathize with it, but at other times demonstrate complete indifference.

Thus, the film resists socialist-realist determinism, but also refuses a romantic or patriotic interpretation; it overcomes the Soviet genre pattern, on the one hand, by complicating and diversifying the image of the Georgian people, and on the other,

by endowing Pirosmiani with an unexplained creative drive that gives his life a clear direction, often risking alienation from the people around him. The artist Pirosmiani, as created in Shengelaia's film, lives *among* the people, but is not entirely a part of their society. Still, the artist is visibly placed within a national framework in which notions such as mentality, spirituality, and cultural tradition are omnipresent: the nation is presented as an entity in need of the artist—whether it fully recognizes him during his lifetime or not.

Similarly to Tarkovsky's and Paradjanov's films, in *Pirosmani* the artist exclusively follows an inner calling that is connected to a mission of national relevance (although the artist himself would not be able to formulate that mission, and nobody in the film articulates it). Whenever someone tries to lure him away from his higher artistic calling onto a path of normalcy (his aunts, his family, other painters), Pirosmiani fails and soon returns to his painful independence—the only kind of life he can endure. In Shengelaia's interpretation, artistic talent supplies vital creative energy and motivation, yet on a social level it often acts as a burden. However, this burden must not be rejected under any circumstances—it signifies *chosenness*. It separates the artist from all other people to such an extent that at the end he feels as if he could no longer bear the burden and must die.

Conspicuously, it is the brotherly gesture of a rank-and-file person that brings Pirosmiani back into the world. The choice of a policeman for this role is surprising insofar as representatives of officialdom usually are assigned negative functions in many biographical stories, representing and enforcing a normative order that is directed against the nonnormative artistic personality. But the choice of such an ordinary, albeit authoritative person (who likely has never heard of Pirosmiani and his art) for the ultimate act of rescue and salvation is particularly significant for the film's concept of artistry: while the uncompromising pursuit of his artistic mission leads Pirosmiani into isolation and poverty, he ultimately can and must relate to any member of his nation, whether that person is an intellectual, an art connoisseur, or an authority. This spiritual inclusiveness, together with the film's formal exceptionality on every level—imagery, plot, music, acting—makes *Pirosmani* one of the most genuinely Georgian films.



## From Tbilisi to Tehran and Back Again

JERRY WHITE



Georgian cinema may today seem very foreign to American audiences, even those who don't confuse it with "the cinema of Atlanta and environs." It was not always this way. From the 1960s to the 1980s Georgian cinema enjoyed a fair bit of attention in the West, and in ways that cinephiles should actually find quite familiar. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgian cinema was for Western viewers what Iranian cinema is today.

The most obvious similarity is the degree to which both Georgian and Iranian cinema were wondrous flowerings of critical creativity emerging from authoritarianism. In February 1977 the British film magazine *Films and Filming* published Derek Elley's survey of the tradition under the title "Light in the Caucasus." Elley saw Georgian cinema as being radically different from Western models but always in a low-level conflict with Soviet authorities, a combination that should sound familiar to those who have followed Iranian cinema's gradual rise. Georgian cinema during the Soviet period had a

dissident quality, but—like Iranian filmmakers after them—Georgian filmmakers were critical in a roundabout and often lyrical way.

The best example of this kind of dissident is Otar Iosseliani, whose work in Georgia was startlingly precise about the absurdity of daily life under socialism. His short film *April* (1962)—a sweet although bleak film shot like a silent movie and punctuated with bursts of music and rhythmic sounds, in addition to the occasional blast of dialogue—is critical in the manner of a film like Abbas Kiarostami's *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987). Iosseliani's world has moments of truly tender lyricism and is defined by a playful spirit throughout, but what we also have throughout is a sense of how rigidly these people's lives are limited by convention and expectations. Iosseliani eventually wound up leaving the Soviet Union for Paris not because he was making explicitly antigovernment films, but because his vision was too eccentric to fit into approvable models.

A film like Irakli Kvirikadze's *The Swimmer* (1981) is critical in a similar way. Kvirikadze's film about making a film (the ostensible topic is a family of Georgian swimmers) collapses in on itself by way of illustrating how twisty and artificial our sense of history really is, especially when we are trying to tell the tale of a whole family, or a whole culture. Kvirikadze's film uses different kinds of images (black-and-white stock, handheld footage, re-enactments) to weave in and out of the ways that Georgian culture has connected with and pulled away from Russian and Soviet culture; the speed with which the film starts to feel dense and a little confusing is a fairly good summary of its sense of the way that national histories tend to get written. One particularly vivid sequence features the voice of Paul Robeson singing "Ma Curly-Headed Baby" over an image of a small boat drifting away; that's a very dense sound-image combination, combining familial love, the international dimension of Soviet propaganda, and the elemental, eternal force of the sea. National histories are, we come to see, a lot like family histories: unreliable, playful, epic, melodramatic, vivid, baffling. That's hardly consistent with the way that the Soviets had hoped to use film to tell historical tales, although it's very close indeed to how an Iranian filmmaker like Mohsen Makhmalbaf evoked the connections between film and history in works like *Once upon a Time, Cinema* (1987) or *A Moment of Innocence* (1996).

Elley's "Light in the Caucasus" essay notes how Georgian cinema is "totally devoid of the frequent sluggishness which afflicts the common-or-garden Mosfilm or Lenfilm productions, and frequently at odds to them politically." That's as true of a film like *April* as it is of *The Swimmer*; these are very different films, but like the work of Kiarostami or Makhmalbaf they are explicitly artificial rather than sluggishly realistic, and they use that artifice to offer difficult, complex insights into the culture that produced them. These filmmakers found themselves at odds with the powers that be in those cultures both because of what they said and because of the loopy, roundabout ways in which they said them.

Tengiz Abuladze is the Georgian filmmaker whose career seems particularly close to the evolution of Iranian cinema. Like the “first wave” of 1960s Iranian filmmakers, he was strongly influenced by Italian neorealism, and that is certainly visible in Abuladze’s first big success, 1955’s *Magdana’s Donkey* (which he co-directed with Rezo Chkheidze, a filmmaker also influenced by neorealism, especially in his masterpiece *Our Courtyard*, from 1956). *Magdana’s Donkey* won the prize for best short film at Cannes in no small part because of the way that it seemed so in tune with what was going on in international realist filmmaking; it came out the same year as Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali* (an influence on Kiarostami as well), and Abuladze evinced a similarly delicate sense of life in small villages. But it’s Abuladze’s celebrated trilogy of *Molba* (*The Plea*, 1968), *The Wishing Tree* (1977), and *Repentance* (1984) that makes Georgian cinema seem so much an anticipation of the situation of Iranian cinema.

*Molba* is a meditation on Georgian history, specifically the conflict between its Christian and Muslim elements, although the film’s most important aspects are the sound of the Georgian poetry on its soundtrack and the play of light, landscape, and archaic architecture that defines its visuals. “Meditative” is a word that tends to be overused in film criticism, usually designating nothing more spiritual than “slow.” *Molba* is actually meditative inasmuch as its primary aesthetic example is clearly the prayer of Orthodox Christianity: it is repetitive, allusive, concerned with connecting the earthly to the transcendent, and both highly aware of the limits of what it is able to speak about and yet utterly precise about the details of expression. That’s true of its visual sensibility as well, which is rich and complex and wondrous, but also defined by a certain two-dimensional flatness that is the result of the unmistakable influence of Orthodox icon painting. Kiarostami’s best films, especially his “Koker trilogy,” are meditative in this way, having a comparable connection to Sufi Islam.

If *Molba* seems to suggest a comparison with Kiarostami, then *The Wishing Tree* suggests a comparison with Makhmalbaf. Here the key point of connection is Makhmalbaf’s *Gabbeh* (1994), which uses the patterns of the traditional Persian carpet as a jumping-off point to explore landscape, color, and traditional nomadic cultures. For Abuladze the key image is the wishing tree, sometimes called a tree of desire: a custom in which small, colorful scraps of cloth, each representing a desire or a request of God, are attached to the branches of a tree. These trees dot the Georgian countryside and are emblematic of a certain kind of village life: remote, insular, but also fecund and full of possibility. Abuladze’s composition here is just as evocative and his use of light just as precise as it was in *Molba*, and to that he has added color, whose expressive possibilities he takes just as seriously.<sup>1</sup>

The final of Abuladze’s films and the conclusion to this trilogy, *Repentance* (1984), adds allegory to the toolbox. This is the trilogy’s most narrative film, telling the story of a corrupt Soviet official who hails from Georgia. Although there are clearly elements of



Tengiz Abuladze and Rezo Chkheidze: *Magdana’s Donkey*  
Tengiz Abuladze: *Molba*, *The Wishing Tree*, *Repentance*

the most famous Georgian of them all, Joseph Stalin, *Repentance's* dictator is more likely based on Lavrentiy Beria, a Georgian who was head of Stalin's secret police during World War II. When the film was first shown in North America (it was shelved in the USSR for three years and its release was often said to be one of the signs that glasnost was well and truly underway), Tom Luddy wrote in the program notes to the Telluride Film Festival's 1987 tribute to Abuladze that "*Repentance* is faithful to its director's signature brand of Georgian surrealism, so close in many ways to the epic magic realism of Latin American literature."<sup>2</sup> It's hard to argue with that, especially given the way that Latin American novels have done so much to challenge oppressive regimes. So perhaps *Repentance* shows us Abuladze as the long-lost Georgian cousin of Gabriel García Márquez. But in Iranian terms, *Repentance* shows us Abuladze as a state-challenging dissident; it shows us Abuladze as the grandfather of Mohammad Rasoulof, he of the banned-in-Iran *Manuscripts Don't Burn* (2013), and like Abuladze, the filmmaker who led his cinema into the realm of explicitly oppositional filmmaking.

In a March 1993 essay in *Film Comment* called "Where Iranian Cinema Is," Godfrey Cheshire argued that Iran was a place "where cinema is not only a link among other arts but a bridge between despair and hope, devastation and survival, poverty and plenty, subject and object—and most importantly, between people." That is as precise a way as I can imagine of describing Georgian cinema from the 1960s to the 1980s. In those years cinema was the place where the Georgian nation struggled to speak its language, express its diversity, and wrestle with its history, and it did that by joining with traditions of historical thinking, painting, storytelling, political hell-raising, and prayer.

#### Notes

1. Abuladze's short film *Open-Air Museum (Dagestan)* (1972) is something of a sketch, or perhaps a preliminary watercolor, for this film. It's a lyrical portrait of the small mountain village of Gunib in the Northern Caucasus republic, and even though the colors on the print held by BAM/PFA have faded, it's clear that this remains a singular film in Abuladze's oeuvre in terms of his visual acuity and his desire to find beauty at the junction of landscape and culture.

2. Luddy has been the leading North American advocate for Georgian cinema, building the Georgian collection at BAM/PFA when he was PFA's director in the 1970s and organizing many programs of Georgian cinema there, at the Telluride Film Festival, and elsewhere.

For Abuladze the key image is the custom in which small, colorful icons of God, are attached to the back of the head and are emblematic of a life and full of possibility. Abuladze's light just as precise as it was his possibilities; he takes just as much. The final of Abuladze's films is a elegy to the wolf. This is a corrupt Soviet official who has

## How Georgian Films Came to Cold War West Berlin

ERIKA GREGOR



As cofounder (with her husband Ulrich Gregor) of *Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek (Friends of the German Cinematheque)* in West Berlin, and as a curator of its cinema, *Arsenal*, from its beginning in 1970 to 2001, Erika Gregor has been instrumental in introducing Georgian films to audiences in the West. Erika and Ulrich Gregor developed important relationships with filmmakers in Tbilisi and amassed an important collection of Georgian films at *Arsenal*. In recent years, they have been supportive of the formation and development of the *Tbilisi International Film Festival*, which began in 2000.

It all started in 1971 during the Moscow Film Festival. One Sunday morning, when other festivalgoers were out on a boat trip, Ulrich and I got a telephone call at our hotel room asking us whether we would like to see a new Soviet film. Of course we wanted to! So about seven people assembled that afternoon and drove off to the outskirts of Moscow. There, in a small screening room in a cellar, we met Otar Iosseliani. He said that his film had not been selected for the festival and that he would like us to see it. We saw it without translation, but Iosseliani said that there was no need for that; films should be seen, not heard. So that was how we saw *Once upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird*.

We were immediately enchanted, and from that moment on we followed Iosseliani's work with love and respect and tried to see, and to show, Georgian films.

At Arsenal, we regularly showed films from the Soviet Union and East European countries. (The film critic Boleslaw Michalek once remarked dryly, "There are more Polish films shown in West Berlin than in Warsaw.") We thought it was our duty to go against the anticommunist mainstream and, through films, to inform our public about these countries that had suffered so much under the German occupation.

At this time, the sector of Berlin that had been assigned to the Soviets after World War II was the capital of the German Democratic Republic, while the three sectors making up West Berlin were still controlled by the Allied forces of France, Britain, and the United States. (The division of powers could lead to grotesque incidents: when *Paths of Glory* was released in West Germany, the French commander in West Berlin objected and the film could not be shown in the French sector.) For the West, especially the Americans, West Berlin was the "showcase of the free world"—an island in the sea of Communism. For the Soviet Union, it was a thorn in the flesh of the German Democratic Republic. So Russian diplomacy tried to create a Soviet presence in West Berlin cultural life. Even a small organization like the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, with its cinema, Arsenal—named after Dovzhenko's epos of revolution—was important for them. And we didn't need much persuading to show Soviet films!

Back to Georgia. In our Soviet Film Week in December 1971 we were able to include two Georgian films: Eldar Shengelaia's *An Unusual Exhibition* and Giorgi Shengelaia's *Pirosmani*. We couldn't get any text about *Pirosmani* for our program booklet, so we had to reprint a text from the catalog of an exhibition of Pirosmani's paintings that had appeared in East Berlin in 1970. Sergio Gambaroff, the official representative for Soviet films, remarked that the screenings of *Pirosmani* at Arsenal were probably the "premiere" of the film, because here people actually paid money to see it.

We kept asking the Soviets for a Georgian film week, but the answer was always no. The rule was: two films from Mosfilm, two from Lenfilm, and one or two films from different republics. But in 1974 I saw my chance. The men from the Soviet embassy came to Arsenal and asked if we would show films about Lenin. We had nothing against films about Lenin; there are very interesting ones, for example by Michael Romm and Sergei Yutkevich. But I said, "You know, Lenin in West Berlin, that is difficult, I have to think it over and ask permission." (They didn't realize that we had nobody to ask, that we could do what we thought was right—as long we paid the rent!) And then I said: "If you would give me a Georgian film week, I would also do Lenin."

They argued a bit, but they came back the next week with the answer from Moscow: "You have your Georgian film week!" So it happened, in February 1975. We featured Sofiko Chiaureli on the cover of the brochure and Otar Iosseliani's *Once upon a Time*



*There Was a Singing Blackbird* on the back, and inside were films by Lana Gogoberidze, Merab Kokochashvili, Tengiz Abuladze, and Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia (our beloved *Pirosmani* once again!). And we also looked back to the past, to the fathers of Georgian cinematography, Nikoloz Shengelaia and Mikhail Kalatozov. We had to get Kalatozov's *Salt for Svanetia* from Western sources because, according to the Soviets, "the Georgians don't want that film." There were other diplomatic and logistical challenges, too. But at last we had done it: we had the first Georgian film week in West Berlin.

When our program was published I got a phone call from Ken Wlaschin, who at that time was programming the National Film Theatre in London. He said, "Erika, you have a Georgian film week, how did you do it? I have been asking the Soviet embassy for two years and the answer is always no!" I said, "Ken, the password is *Lenin!*"



## Georgian Folk Singing

CARL LINICH

*BAM/PFA has commissioned Carl Linich to prepare a new score for Nikoloz Shengelaia's Eliso (1928), based on traditional Georgian folk songs and performed by Trio Kavkasia.*

Georgian folk singing is an inseparable part of Georgian culture. All Georgians recognize this unique musical heritage, which is truly unlike any other in the world. Folk singing still survives in its original contexts only in some parts of Georgia; elsewhere, it has been adapted and popularized as something for performance or personal entertainment. However, throughout the country, folk song is a source of national pride, and there are few Georgians who can't sing at least a bit of some folk song or other.

The traditional polyphonic singing of Georgia has been studied and researched by scholars and musicians around the world. One indicator of its significance is that a Georgian song was included on the Golden Disc launched into space on the Voyager spacecraft in 1977, representing the finest musical achievements of Earth culture. Fans of Georgian polyphony have included Igor Stravinsky, Alan Lomax, Werner Herzog, Billy Joel, and Kate Bush. Even filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen have used Georgian folk music in their film *The Big Lebowski*.

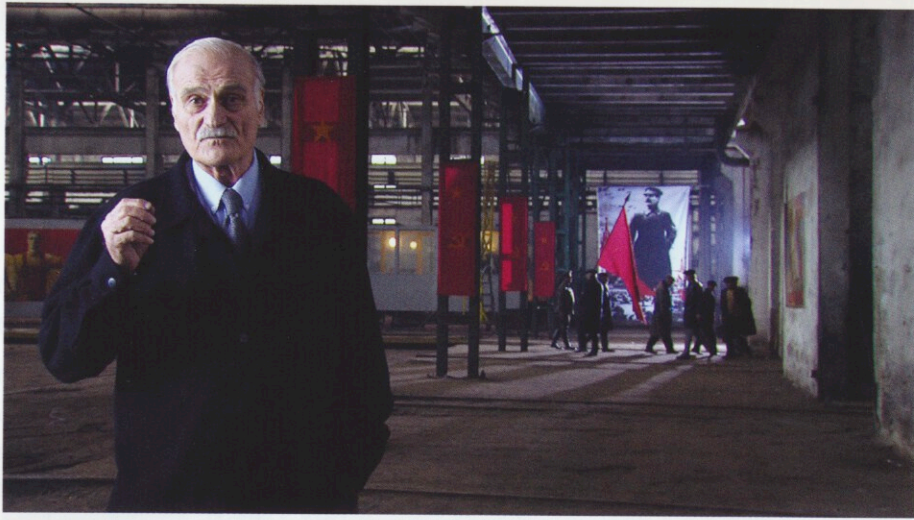
The earliest evidence of vocal polyphony survives in the form of medieval neumatic manuscripts from the tenth century illustrating multiple independent voice parts. However, it's reasonable to believe that Georgian polyphony did not simply appear in its fully developed state in the tenth century. Rather, it probably existed for many years—perhaps even centuries—before these neumes were written. Georgia was Christianized by St. Nino in the fourth century, and the newly developing church consciously decided to make the Georgian Orthodox liturgy as accessible to the common people as possible. One way they achieved this was by translating the Bible into Georgian, and creating a liturgy in the common language. It follows that they would try to create hymns that would be musically similar to their folk music, and therefore “friendly” to the newly Christianized Georgian populace. In other words, it's quite possible that Georgians were singing polyphonic songs even in the fourth century.

Aside from the question of how old Georgian polyphony may be, let's consider the connection of singing to the ritual banquet, or *supra*. The Georgian *supra* is a celebration of life, and the aim is to honor all good things in life with toasts. Georgia is widely believed to be the birthplace of winemaking, and many people still make their own wine in the



traditional manner, by pouring the foot-stomped grape juice into enormous clay vessels buried to their rims in the ground, where it ferments naturally. A Georgian *supra* may last an hour or seven. Sometimes they even go overnight till morning. Toasts are traditionally made with reasonable frequency, all under the direction of the *tamada*, or toastmaster. The *tamada* decides what toasts will be made and in which order, and all guests at the table are encouraged to join in honoring the toasts by adding their own sentiments before drinking. Georgian song is an important element of the *supra*, as well, and songs are often sung that correspond to or reflect the themes of each toast.

What is it that makes Georgian folk singing unique? To begin with, it is generally non-melodic: there is not a “melody” part that is then harmonized. Instead, all three voice parts move independently. In some Georgian songs, the individual voice parts sung separately are not recognizable as the same song, yet when they are sung together, they combine to create something magical. Georgian music is also unusual in that it's not octave-based, and the parts are never doubled in octaves. Fifths are the most common interval in Georgian songs, and many songs even favor “stacked” fifths (root-fifth-ninth rather than root-fifth-octave). These chords sound dissonant to Western listeners, yet they are in fact consonant, as they are following natural harmonic progressions. It is our Western ears that are simply unaccustomed to hearing such sounds.



Georgian folk music has also played an important role in Georgian film. Many great Georgian films have included Georgian folk songs, and some have even featured original folk-style compositions, written expressly for the purpose of adding traditional Georgian flavor to the films. Examples of some films featuring folk singing are Davit Rondeli's *Paradise Lost* (1938), Otar Iosseliani's *Falling Leaves* (1967) and *Once upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird* (1971), Giorgi Daneliya's *Don't Grieve* (1968), Giorgi Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* (1969), the rare and wonderful short documentary *Georgian Songs* (1972), Sergei Paradjanov's *The Legend of Suram Fortress* (1985) and *Ashik Kerib* (1988), and more recently Nana Janelidze's *Will There Be a Theater Up There?!* (2011). Georgian folk songs have even been used in Georgian animated cartoons.

We are fortunate today that Georgian folk singing seems to be experiencing a renaissance. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, most Georgians consider Georgian polyphony to be one of their nation's defining cultural treasures, and many new choirs have emerged, often delving into the archives of recorded and transcribed music to revive long-forgotten songs. There has also been great interest among foreign singers, and foreign groups devoted to Georgian song can be found in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Norway, Australia, Japan, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere. We can all look forward to many more years of Georgian singing, both in Georgia and abroad.

## Georgian Films Can Wait [?]

NINO DZANDZAVA

During the Soviet period, the Georgian film industry was an integral part of the country's national identity. Georgian films, together with sports, cuisine, and wine, were something to be proud of and were used as evidence in claiming cultural difference from Russia. Despite the Georgian film industry's decline in the last years, people still remember that there was a time when Georgian films flourished and even carried an air of artistic freedom and hinted at political injustice.

Old moving images are extremely valuable primary source documents when studying the anti-Soviet or pro-Soviet sentiments of yesteryear. Today, older Georgian films are historical artifacts that still need to be re-examined, pondered over, and discussed. Documentary films, housed in the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents at the National Archives of Georgia, are waiting patiently for researchers to rediscover them. Despite being highly important assets of Georgia's cultural heritage, many film documents at the archives are in poor condition and are in desperate need of restoration.

In 1941, a committee of the People's Commissariat issued a resolution calling for the creation of an audiovisual archive in the Soviet Republic of Georgia. At that time, audiovisual materials belonging to the Archival Documents' Management Office were scattered across different institutions such as museums, libraries, and film studios. The People's Commissariat recognized that audiovisual materials in Georgia needed to be organized in a more efficient way. The aims of the 1941 resolution were not fulfilled immediately, mostly because of the unavailability of a building capable of housing the vast collection of materials. By 1944, the archive had been nominally formed, but the Second World War delayed its operations until 1946. In that year, the photography and film departments were opened, and in 1962 a sound recording department was added. Today, the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents comprises three types of collections: photographic, sound, and moving image materials.

The archive also houses one of the country's leading visual collections related to the Soviet period. This includes original film materials, such as original negatives, master copies, and intermediate film sources, as well as projection prints. There is also a small collection of narrative films, among them Sergei Paradjanov's last work *Arabesques on the Theme of Pirosmani* (1985), Mikheil Kobakhidze's critically recognized shorts such as *The Wedding* (1964), and other materials of interest. The archive also keeps



a collection of *Kulturfilms* that are excellent examples of the genre. Some of these restored silent shorts—*Collective Farmers' Hygiene* (1934), *Call of the Land* (1928), *Ten Minutes in the Morning* (1931), and *You Must Reap as You Have Sown* (1930)—were shown to the public at the 2013 Giornate del Cinema Muto festival in Pordenone, Italy, and are represented in this retrospective (see also the related essay in this brochure). These restored shorts are part of the first preservation project conducted by the archive in the last twenty years.

Since Georgia declared independence in 1991, the archive has gone through several crises and the facilities are far from being completely modernized. The nitrate and acetate film storage vaults, as well as the vaults for photography and sound recordings, are not climate controlled. The archive is currently undergoing a gradual recovery process. The whole film collection is slowly being recanned, and, thanks to a grant from the US Embassy in Georgia, most of the work on the nitrate collection will have been completed by the end of 2014. The nitrate storage building has already been partly renovated, but much more needs to be done to ensure proper conservation of the collection as well as full access to documents with regular public screenings. There are still components that are in need of renovation or replacement, for example, old viewing tables with no variable speed, and winding benches that—without real care being taken—could physically damage the films. Moreover, some films are so brittle and shrunken that they are in constant danger of being torn by the sprockets of the machines on which they are run. To avoid contact between the film and the existing equipment as much as possible, the employees have constructed a homemade “scanner”—a camera hooked up to the projector lens. It is not archival, it is not gentle on the film, and it requires a close watch during the transfer process, but it is currently the only way to make access copies for researchers. The archive's *raison d'être* is, after all, not only to preserve films, but also to ensure that they are easily accessible.

Using the materials for educational purposes is one of the current primary objectives of the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents. For this reason, the archive organizes film screenings for schoolchildren and students. As part of UNESCO's Participation Programme, the archive has launched a mediatheque, which gathers together resources such as books, periodicals, educational posters, and film DVDs from across the cultural heritage. This program is meant to raise awareness of film heritage issues. The study center and its screening room will give the public access to digital copies of audiovisual materials and will be a public access point for the collections. We believe the mediatheque activities will make film heritage preservation topics a more popular subject for the Georgian public and the government. The study center will raise awareness of the importance of film, photographic, and sound recording. As there is currently no educational institute in Georgia dedicated to archiving and preservation, the mediatheque could function as a platform for teaching these disciplines.

One of the strongest impediments to film preservation in Georgia is the lack of awareness among the public that films are a cultural asset. When it comes to history, to cultural experience and the social life of twentieth-century Georgia, people remember that the archive exists, but not everyone is aware that collective memory is also a physical body, vulnerable to human neglect. Film is not perceived as having the same importance as other types of material culture, such as medieval art.

Through the struggle for better conservation of materials, providing information about film preservation, offering publications on early film history, and ensuring public screenings, the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents is trying to raise awareness of media archiving in Georgia. Once the public understands that film is an integral part of Georgia's cultural heritage, conceivably the situation will change and film will be treated properly. Let us hope that films have the patience to wait.





#### CONTRIBUTORS

Nino Dzandzava is deputy director of the Central Archive of Audiovisual Documents, National Archives of Georgia, Tbilisi.

Jytte Jensen is curator in the Department of Film at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and co-organizer of *Discovering Georgian Cinema*.

Erika Gregor is based in Berlin, where she has been involved with Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek since the early 1960s.

Carl Linich, student, performer, and teacher of Georgian folk song since 1990, received the Georgian President's Order of Merit award in 2010 for his efforts to preserve Georgian culture.

Susan Oxtoby is senior film curator at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, and co-organizer of *Discovering Georgian Cinema*. She is responsible for touring the series to Washington, DC, and Toronto.

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COVER Tengiz Abuladze: *The Wishing Tree*  
ABOVE Soso Chkhaidze: *Georgian Songs*  
OPPOSITE Rezo Chkheidze: *Our Courtyard*

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