

OFFICIAL SELECTION BY PANORAMA BERLINALE 2015

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Berlin
Panorama

PIONERY-GEROI

PIONEER HEROES

A FILM BY NATALYA KUDRYASHOVA

P R E S S B O O K

SYNOPSIS

Olga, Katya and Andrey live in Moscow. Like all the provincials they arrived in the capital looking for happiness. They are school friends. Olga is an actress playing ugly series. Katya works in a big PR-agency. She's in love with a married man. Andrey is a political analyst. He's a hard worker who relaxes playing video games. As of today, they are rather successful people but they had quite another life once in distant 1987. Little Olga, Katya and Andrey had been dreaming of becoming heroes...

It's 1987 and they are preparing to become Young Pioneers. Little Andrey dreams of inventing the pill to prevent death and save the humanity. Olga tracks down mythic spies who hunt the Soviet children. Katya dreams of becoming a Pioneer. She finds out that her grandpa is a bootlegger breaking the law. She has nightmares about Pioneer heroes.

Nowadays Olga, Katya and Andrey are the grown-ups leading the compromising Moscow life. There's no place for big ideas, feelings and high aspirations. The dreams of the heroic deeds swiped for the dreams of stability. They are trying to live "like all the rest" but that gives them neither happiness, nor satisfaction...



ABOUT THE PROJECT

PIONEER HEROES is a story of the last generation of Pioneers of the USSR. Nowadays they are in their 30s. Being taught to stick up to the Soviet ideology with its stories of heroic deeds, they were the last ones to grow up in the Soviet Union. Young Pioneer heroes are the Soviet kids who had committed heroic deeds at the dawn of the Soviet system and during the WW II. Soviet kids believed in spies and were afraid of the war. They were waiting for “the bright future” and dreaming of committing a heroic deed. Nowadays they’re integrated into the modern Russia’s system of values. There are no more heroes. Soviet ideals are gone forever (and have been changed by the new idea of formation and wealth accumulation). But there is still a strong desire of something bigger.

The story develops in 2 dimensions: 1987 and nowadays. The dialogue between two worlds is under way: Soviet childhood with its high ideas is opposed to the brutal modern reality.



"Once we were Pioneers"

Red is the color of blood and danger, of the heroic deed, of the flag, of the Pioneer tie. We were taught to stick up to heroic ideology: it's a hero who gets the victory. We've been taught to love red color since we were born. What could be more captivating for the young hearts than danger! Heroic deed is the only excuse for any risk taken; heroic deed in the name of your comrades, in the name of your Motherland. Pioneers could be considered as a knightly order where tie, drum and bungle replace the armor and swords. Our motto was "Always prepared!"

Admission to the Pioneer ranks marked a certain step to maturity. We had been Octobrists till the third grade. Admission to the Pioneer ranks was accompanied by pompous ambiance. We gave an oath, we swore on our life to love and cherish our Motherland. We'd been divided by a strict hierarchy since we were kids. Komsomol was the next step of our maturity and hierarchy.





CAST

NATALYA KUDRYASHOVA, DARIA MOROZ, ALEXEY MITIN,
VARYA SHABLAKOVA, SIMA VYBORNOVA, NIKITA YAKOVLEV,
YURI KUZNEZOV, ALEXANDER USERDIN,
SVETLANA SMIRNOVA-MARZINKEVITCH

CREW

Written and directed by	NATALYA KUDRYASHOVA
Produced by	SERGEY SELYANOV
DOP	RUSLAN GERASIMENKOV
Production designer	ASYA DAVYDOVA
Costume designer	ELENA LUKIANOVA
Make-up	SVETLANA BLAGODARNOVA
Casting director	YULIA MILOVIDOVA
1st Assistant director	ANNA PROSHUTINSKAYA
Edited by	SEMYON GALPERIN
Line producer	ANDRY RYDABOV, VASILY GRIGOLYUNAS
Associate producer	NATALIA DROZD
Produced by	CTB FILM COMPANY
Co-produced by	MASTERSKAYA SEANCE
Supported by	MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
International sales	ALPHA VIOLET



Natalya Kudryashova

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

Natalya Kudryashova was born in Nizhniy Novgorod in the Soviet Union in 1978. Graduated from the Nizhniy Novgorod Theatre School in 2000 and got a diploma as an actress. Graduated from the Director's Laboratory under the tutelage of Anatoliy Vassiliev at the School of Dramatic Art in Moscow in 2006. She graduated from the High Courses for Scriptwriters and Directors as a feature film director in 2012.

Natalya's career as a theatre and film actress:

"Golden Mask" Theatre Festival nomination as Best Actress for her part in the play "Break" (dir. Adolf Shapiro, Moscow Art Theatre, 2010)

"Sozvezdie" Festival nomination for Best Female Debut

"Window to Europe" Film Festival nomination for her part of Marusya in "One War" (dir. Vera Glagoleva).

2011 KHOLOD (The Freeze), short. Best Feature Short Film award at the ArtKinoFest Film Festival, 2011. Special Award "For the poetic image creation" at the ArtKinoFest Film Festival, 2011.

2012 UTRO LIZY (Liza's Morning), short. Special award at the Open Cinema Festival, 2013. Nominations at ArtKinoFest 2012, and at the Message To Man Film Festival, 2012.

INTERVIEW WITH NATALYA KUDRYASHOVA: THE DIRECTOR OF PIONEER HEROES

What was your major inspiration for shooting PIONEER HEROES? What did the script idea arise from?

The Soviet childhood was abundant with distinct meaning. We were brought up with the stories of heroic feats, with the ideas of self-sacrifice. We were awaiting the arrival of the bright future for all and believed in the coming of communism. We were raised to be altruistic dreamers. During childhood, it seemed to me that we must all grow up to be heroes and realize brave exploits. Due to our age, we didn't get a chance to see all the pitfalls of the great artificial era and when we were 10 - 15 years old, the Soviet Union fell apart and entirely different times have started. The Soviet kids who grew up in 2010s are successful, young, active people fitting into the system of new values in contemporary Russia. The ideas of heroism and the bright future for all were interchanged with the ideas of personal accomplishment and stability. I thought a lot about my generation, which grew up to be very active and infantile at the same time. I have many friends who are very successful according to contemporary standards, who earn a lot, but all of that does not bring them true satisfaction. They have everything and yet, they are missing something very strongly. Having many material advantages, they are spiritually unsatisfied. Having grown up in the time of ideas, albeit artificial and naïve, today they inhabit a space that is deprived of essential, tremendous beliefs. We live in the time of fraud and compromise and I think this concerns not only the Russian space. It's not so important which medium to use to tell a story about the life of the human spirit, which requires more than monthly income and career growth. Ideas are the essential building material for the life of the spirit, of the soul. I could tell the same story using another historic medium and get the same idea across; I was just coming from the personal experience of my soul. To be honest, we all want something bigger; we all would have liked to be heroes; we all want to rise somewhat above our humanity.

PIONEER HEROES is your debut feature film. How long did it take to develop the script and the story? And how was your experience of the conditions for film production in Russia as a new director?

It took me not so long to develop the story and the script. A film is a sensation and if you have it, everything happens quite quickly. I knew exactly what I wanted to say about what and that's probably why I was so strongly inspired by it. And when you have an inspiration, nothing is developed or extracted; everything is just written down as it is and pretty quickly. About the shooting conditions in Russia.... It's quite difficult for the beginner because one doesn't know the work facilities, doesn't have a chance to hire his people and his team. I didn't know anyone and the process of looking for people was long and difficult. When you are just starting, all you can trust is your own feelings. With some people I made a mistake, with some I plan to work again. Film



production in Russia is not simple. I don't want to say bad things, but quite a lot of people in Russian film production are already adapted to compromise. Sometimes it's quite difficult to drag a person to another level, from compromising to the real making. We were quite spoiled by the TV series production, where a habit of mediocre work has already been formed.

How hard was it to find the child actors?

That was one of the most difficult tasks. We have searched all the agencies, theater studios and workshops in Moscow, but all the kids who came from there, almost all, were... how should I put it mildly... already "damaged" by some sort of acting experience, by acquired intonations, by the so-called "knowledge of acting". This was a nightmare. It was as if someone had twisted their childhood essence out of them with theatrical methodologies; they were taught "how to". The further the casting in Moscow continued, the worse and worse things were starting to look. Actually, I told some of the parents who had those still "natural" kids, to never in the world send them to those studios, workshops, etc. The TV series kids and the film kids were no better. We decided to make a social media call and to refuse professional child actors. Then, interesting characters started coming to us. Also, I asked everyone everywhere about children; everyone knew that I was looking for kids. So this is how we finally found Varya (little Katya), Sima (she came to us through Facebook, little Olga) and Nikita. Sergeyev we searched for for a really long time and finally also found on Facebook. First we talked for a long time in front of the camera. It was very important for me to see how emotional the child is because the kid's scenes in the script are very

complex and dramatic. I did not quite understand how to explain to them all of this Pioneer subject matter and then understood that it's not necessary because we are not talking about the Pioneers, but about faith, extremism, dreams, which all the kids have, regardless of the time period. Then, we tried to do something together.

Are there any interesting episodes in the film related to Russian culture, history and facts?

Episodes that are connected to the Russian history... First of all, this is a story of little Katya and her grandfather, the bootlegger. From 1985 on for a few years prohibition was in effect in the Soviet Union. This was a very harsh time, stores did not offer alcohol, vineyards were being cut down, everything was done in the Soviet way: large scale, but meaningless and paradoxical. People wanted to have a drink, to have alcohol for the holidays and quite many Soviet families produced bootleg, naturally not for sale, but for themselves. Everyone produced it, simple workers as well as academics, but the propaganda was very strong. Bootlegging was considered a crime and was persecuted by law. Kids didn't quite understand anything, but watched the news, of course. The stories of bootlegger confinement were the typical news stories for those times. Bootlegger raids were organized to crack down on the offenders. It was frightening to make bootleg, but everyone did it. Little Katya realizes while watching the news that her grandfather is a criminal. At the time, TV called on citizens to be alert, to denounce crime and to call the police. Two notions of honesty cannot coexist in a little child's head because every Pioneer must be honest to their family and yet cannot conceal an offender who breaks the law. The second episode is connected to the inkpot. I really wanted to zero in on that because in Russia this set up is recognizable by every person aged 30 and older. There was a huge number



of books not only about the exploits of the Pioneer heroes, but also about Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Children's literature encompassed all the stages of his biography. There was a huge number of stories promoting the wonderful human qualities of Lenin that are very funny by today's standards. The most popular of those is the story about how imprisoned Lenin sent secret messages to his compatriots. The point of it was the following: Lenin was in prison, but the revolution had to happen at any moment and he had to send messages to his active friends. It was impossible to do it since day and night he was under the surveillance of the evil wardens and all the written communication was destroyed. Then he came up with this trick. He made an inkpot out of bread, poured milk into it and wrote the secret letters with milk on paper. Then he passed those to his friends out of prison. The stupid wardens looked at them and saw only empty sheets with nothing on them. The trick was this: in the free world, these letters written with milk had to be held over a lamp and then the characters started to come through and Lenin's messages could be read.



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WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY **NATALYA KUDRYASHOVA**

PRODUCED BY **SERGEY SEL'YANOV DOP RUSLAN GERASIMENKOV** PRODUCTION DESIGNER **ASYA DAVYDOVA** COSTUME DESIGNER **ELENA LUKIANOVA** MAKE-UP **SVETLANA BLAGODARNOVA**
CASTING DIRECTOR **YULIA MILOVIDOVA** 1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR **ANNA PROSHUTINSKAYA** EDITED BY **SEMYON GALPERIN** LINE PRODUCER **ANDREY RYDANOV VASILY GRIGOLYUNAS**
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SEANCE

