



LOG-LINE: A story about compassion, loyalty and friendship from a group of teenagers trying to break free from their addiction to life on the streets.

PREMIS: A Russian Fairytale is a story told through the eyes of young adults and children who have spent much of their lives living an almost fairytale existence on the streets of Russia. They escaped the trouble and stress that was affecting the majority of adults in the early 90s and found they could lead a life by their own rules, sleeping where they found shelter and not having to worry about school or work. Now on the brink of adulthood, they are faced with the difficult task of leaving life on the streets and returning to the society which has forgotten them.

The film will focus on two incredibly charismatic characters who are now 20 years old. They are trying to fulfill the promise they've made themselves to leave the streets behind and make something of their lives. However, this is not as easy as it sounds. Marred by years of substance abuse, a history of freedom, lack of education and official identity, the odds are against them.

SYNOPSIS: A Russian Fairytale is an observational documentary, following the lives of a group of teenagers who have grown up on the streets. Their stories began in the mid 1990s when as young as six and seven, they first started running away from home.

It will show their daily struggles under the extreme weather conditions, interaction with the police and a largely unsympathetic public, and will observe how they literally beg, borrow and steal in order to survive. These issues however will remain a backdrop to their amazing strength of character and determination to make something better of their lives.

It will begin by exploring how they have created their 'family environment' with those whom they are living with on the streets. They often demonstrate strong trust and loyalty towards each other and this will become apparent naturally throughout the film. Evidence of this is the way they share all of their food and money.

Those who are fortunate to have a family member living close by (normally someone living in impoverished conditions), sometimes venture home to see their relative, but they quickly get drawn back to their preferred lifestyle - in basements, sewers and dilapidated wooded houses. It is soon clear from spending time with the teenagers that they are addicted to this lifestyle.

The film will go on to explore more serious subjects like death within the group. Recently a death shook them up and some of them discovered that they are living with HIV. Kolya, the main male character, understands that he will die from the disease and that it is in his own interest to start leading a more healthy lifestyle. He promises to stop living on the streets now that he is twenty. Despite all the odds that are against him, he describes his life on the streets as 'romantic'.

The film will explore all of these avenues of love, fear, family, friendship and death and show the great determination and human spirit in those who are literally trying to pull themselves out of the gutter.

THEMES OF THE FILM: An important theme in this project is the collapse of the Soviet Union. It will be further evidence of the long lasting impact it had on families and especially children. This theme is particularly relevant today as we draw closer to the 20th Anniversary of the breakdown of socialism in Russia.

The HIV/AIDS crisis will be an important global theme. Russia has had a huge problem with AIDS as it not only has two-thirds of all HIV cases in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but eighty percent of those infected are under the age of 30. The combination of young people being infected and an aging population is resulting in a decreasing workforce and population that is seriously threatening the future of Russia.

The theme of the extremely rich living next to the extremely poor. It is a relevant topic here in the UK and the US as more and more wealthy Russians leave Russia and make their homes in the UK/US.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT ON SETTING / LOCATIONS: At the edge of the Ural Mountains lies the city of Perm, which used to be a secret weapons production city during the time of the cold war. For most families the fall of the Soviet Empire meant social decline. Overnight a handful of people became millionaires whilst the majority lost everything they had and all security of a financially secure future.

For many years I have been fascinated by the extremes of wealth and poverty that overshadow post-soviet Russia. For many years after the fall of communism Perm was forgotten about, but now with the growing demand for oil it has become one of the richest and fastest growing areas in Russia today. It still however leaves many scars from it's times of trouble, including the issue of broken families and run away children.

Perm is a huge city with over a million inhabitants. Much of the city is still made up of Soviet style flats and poverty-ridden neighborhoods, many with old houses made of wood. Some of these beautiful houses still exist in the centre of the city refusing to make way for the unstoppable growth of high-rise buildings and trading centers. The houses that are abandoned and await demolition serve a different purpose. They become the homes of homeless people or runaway children and teenagers looking for somewhere to live together. After many years of neglect they often become warped and crooked and it's this reason why some of the children call these dwellings 'Skazka', which literally translates to fairytale.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT ON STYLE / VISUALS: The style of the film will be based around its observational narrative. The overall feel I wish to achieve from this film is beauty. I am consciously trying to steer away from the traditional gritty look of ob-docs. Russia is a beautiful country, and this is evident in both its richness and its poverty. The characters and locations will all be shown with a close-up cinematic touch. It is for this reason that the director of photography and I have decided to use a combination of HD cameras with 35mm lenses and a steadicam where possible.

An important part of the style will be the feel that the viewer is in with the group. The filming methods will be unobtrusive, helped largely by using a very small crew. 3 people will share the roles of camera operator, sound operator, director, translator and lighting operator – where needed. Lighting will however remain mostly natural, helped by the Sony EX3s ability to shoot in very limited lighting and produce an almost grainless image.

The introduction may include some voice-over or titled explanation of the film, the situation and the location to put it into perspective. There is a possibility that there will be a part with animation to help portray the stories and feelings of some of the young children who will not be legally able to appear in the film. This will be decided in post. There will not be any need for graphics throughout the film, except for the introduction and closing credits. The look and tone of the visual style will reflect strongly on the mood of the film. There will be room for colour correction and grading as it will help deliver the true atmosphere of the cold, dark and often lonely lifestyle the characters lead.



Clockwise from top left: The city of Perm at dusk, Ksusha visiting her grandmother, Kolya outside the remains of Skazka and a young boy signals his age as he awaits his alcoholic father in one of the disused buildings around Skazka.



DIRECTORS STATEMENT ON KEY CONTRIBUTORS:

Ksusha has been living on the streets since she was seven. She has an amazingly vibrant personality, a strong point of view and nothing holding her back from speaking her mind. She speaks in an almost lyrical manner throwing many proverbs and wit into her arguments, in true Russian style. She will therefore bring a lot of energy to the film.

An interesting and sad side of Ksusha's life is the relationship between her and her father, whom she blames for her homelessness. After her mother was murdered when she was a small child, her father re-married and would often beat Ksusha and kick her out of the house for days at a time. She would spend these days wandering the streets and it was during this time that she discovered many other youngsters living on the streets who offered her friendship and understanding.

Despite her traumatized background, Ksusha demonstrates an amazingly positive outlook on life, a great sense of humour and desire to change not only her situation but also all of those around her.

Kolya has also been living on the streets as part of the same group as Ksusha since he was seven. Kolya recalls that he even had a good start at school but fell into a bad crowd at a young age and has been drawn away from home ever since. He can even vividly recall the day that his life on the streets began as he was helping his grandmother sell produce at the central market, met other kids sniffing glue and stealing:

"If we hadn't gone there that day then things would be really different. I don't even know what it would be like! I wouldn't have ever met them. I would have lived normally, studied well, maybe I'd even be working now. I'd definitely be working now".

Now nineteen, Kolya has not lived at home or been to school since that fateful day. He is a powerful and emotionally engaging character. The substance abuse, drug use and crime in his life on the streets show in his behavior, as he creates a whirlwind of energy where ever he goes. Despite this he is an extremely likable character with a lot of understanding and ambition and a unique outlook on life. He is always smiling, and his lack of teeth, scruffy clothes and childlike demeanor help him gain sympathy.

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