

Carpe
Noctem
Creatives



Presents:



www.arussianfairytale.com



"A Russian Fairytale" is an observational documentary following the lives of young adults living on the streets of Russia. The film centres on the generation destroyed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. 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 combination of their unique and often tragic stories and the backdrop of a formidable Siberian winter makes compelling viewing and provides insight into a misunderstood and isolated part of Russian society.

The film will give a close-up glimpse into their daily lives, battling the extreme weather conditions, harassment from the police and a largely unsympathetic public and will observe how they have to literally beg, borrow and steal in order to survive. These issues however will remain a backdrop to their immensely likable characters, amazing willpower and determination to make something better of their lives.

Q & A with director Jake Mobbs:

How did you get involved in the project?

I first got involved in this project after volunteering for the charity, *Love's Bridge*, which helps underprivileged children and street children to rebuild their lives through special education programs. I had heard about the problem of homeless children in Russia before and decided to go out and see for myself, documenting some of the stories of the children along the way.

What was the purpose of doing this and what kind of things did you see?

In the beginning, my main purpose for going out was to help the charity raise awareness of itself which relies on donations to keep itself running. Russia is a very different country from the UK when it comes to charity. Many Perm residents believe that youngsters living on the streets have only themselves to blame for their situation and as a result they are often victimized and ostracized in society.

Why did you want to do this, what inspired you and who did you do it with, was it just Jake and his camera?

Reading about the success stories and also the tragic stories of some of the young children living on the streets at -30°C during the winter made me want to go out and help bring more awareness to the problem. I made a trip out there with a University friend, Nicolas Doldinger who is now working as a Director of photography and we both decided to co-produce a documentary.

Was there anything that stood out about your trip out there, what kind of things did you see?

The most shocking thing I saw was when I followed a group of teenagers down into the basement of a block of flats where they lived. We had to climb through a small hole in the outside of the block, down into a dark, dirty space. The basement was crawling with rats, had rubbish and needles everywhere. They had been living here a while used a small room with a hot water pipe to sleep. After gaining their trust I was able to interview them

and discover how their lives turned so horribly wrong. The most common story is that their parents turned to alcohol and many were abused and beaten and so they found refuge on the streets. As children, a lot of them were picked up by police and sent to orphanages where they were locked up. The one's who are now living on the streets had run away from these shelters and were constantly trying to avoid the police.

How do their lives relate to your own?

Their lives are a million miles from mine. They live their lives for each day, battling their demons, looking for food, begging or stealing. For me, spending just an hour or 2 in the basements was difficult, but to think that they live down there together in the dark through the harsh Siberian winters is almost unimaginable.

The Location:

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. The fall of the Soviet Union meant for most families a huge social decline. Much of the countries wealth was sold for pennies to a small group of wealthy oligarchs leaving the rest of the population in an unfamiliar battle with capitalism at an unprecedented rate.

The Characters:

Ksusha has been living on and off the streets since she was seven. Her mother was murdered when she was a small child and her father re-married several years later. Due to poor relations with both her abusive father and her stepmother, she ran away from home where she found other youngsters living on the streets.

Kolya has also been living on the streets with Ksusha since he was seven. He comes from a broken family and first discovered the freedom of living on the streets when he met some homeless children whilst helping his grandmother sell seeds at the market. Now nineteen, Kolya has not lived at home or been to school since that fateful day. He describes life on the streets as 'romantic' and takes the role as the group leader. He often makes a living by stealing. In a word, he describes his love of street-life as "romantic".

Irina was born into an alcoholic and abusive family. Her mother left when Irina was small and her father neglected and abused her from a young age. When she was in her early teens, Irina was taken into institutional care and struggled to come to terms with her new life in an orphanage and regularly ran away. As a result she placed in a psychiatric hospital for 'treatment' (forced medication and confinement), which only agitated her frail mental condition. She was in prison when her 'graduation' date at the orphanage passed and as a result will receive no help future from the government. She is adamant that she will spend the rest of her life homeless.

Content:

The film will include interviews with these main characters to learn how they got to where they are, their feelings about their situations, their fears, dreams and ideas. It will involve family members where possible, which will help build a picture of why those who have the option choose life on the streets over a more conventional life at home. Those fortunate enough to have a caring family member they can turn to, do occasionally take time off the streets, especially in times of greatest need. In almost all cases they get drawn back to their lives on the streets after a few days.

The Filmmakers:

Jake Mobbs – Director - Producer

Ever since his first visit to Russia in 2001, Jake has been fascinated by the extremes of wealth and poverty that overshadow Russian society. He developed a keen interest in the lives of those who have been affected by the unstable period in Russian history which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2006 he returned to Russia and visited the city of Perm, spending some time with the charitable organization Love's Bridge which tries to help the city's poorest and most underprivileged young people become productive members of society. Building strong relationships with a lot of young teenagers who had spent most of their lives on the streets, Jake decided that he would return to document their stories.

Nicolas Doldinger – Director of Photography – Producer

Always being fascinated with the legacy of Russian culture, and approached by Jake about the subject, Nicolas flew with Jake in 2007 to the City of Perm to learn about the situation of the children and they decided to produce this film together. Working as a Steadicam Operator on docs all over the globe from South Africa to Toronto, from Dubai to London, gave him the opportunity to learn the skill of being in the moment while not intruding the action of real life.

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