

I got to talking with a friend recently about Russian films I've seen. The conversation caused me to browse my collection trying to recall the ones I like most. A summary follows. Most of these are available on Netflix. Try a few. You might enjoy them as much as I do.

[12](#) Directed by Nikita Mikhalkov In Moscow, 12 jurors weigh the fate of a teenager (Apti Magamaev) accused of murdering his stepfather. They represent a cross-section of modern Russia's fractured society: an indecisive television producer, a flashy musician, a bigoted cabbie, a Holocaust survivor. Inside the jury room, as in the streets, the battle for peace and tolerance plays out. Nikita Mikhalkov directs this Oscar-nominated twist on 12 Angry Men.

[The Last Station](#), about the last period of Tolstoy's life, is now at the top of my Netflix queue.

A Russian film of [The Idiot](#) with Yevgeny Mironov as Prince Muishkin, and directed by Vladimir Bortko. Released on a set of DVDs, It is rich, excellent, and true to Dostoevsky's novel.

I still don't find **Kin Dza Dza** on Netflix. No matter for me. I bought my copy from a Russian film website, and found the English subtitles for it on another website, then burned a DVD from the files. This is a very funny, surrealistic political satire.

[The Irony of Fate, or "Enjoy Your Bath"](#) (1975) is a great romantic comedy, and a joyful send-up of soulless conformity and mass production in the Soviet state. The songs in this movie, written by Mikael Tariverdiyev with others, and performed by Sergei Nikitin, Alla Pugacheva and others, are beautiful. The director, Eldar Ryazanov, has had a prolific career, but I don't find many of his other films on Netflix.

However, I did find Ryazanov's [Railway Station for Two](#) (1982) on Netflix: a touching romance that drew tears.

Vladimir Motyl's [The Captivating Star of Happiness](#) (1975) is rich, tragic, historical drama

I liked Nikita Mikhalkov's drama [The Barber of Siberia](#) (1998). I don't think Netflix offers it. Bought my copy from a Russian film website.

[The Dawns Here Are Quiet](#) (1972) is a solid drama about five female soldiers of the Soviet army in World War II.

Leonid Gaidai's [The Diamond Arm](#) (1968) is a funny musical-comedy heist movie.

At the opposite end of the emotional spectrum is [Ostrov \(The Island\)](#) (2007), a drama centered on a tortured miracle worker straight out of Russia's Orthodox mystical traditions. This is not a movie about religion, but about the soul.

[Seventeen Moments of Spring](#) Made in 1973, this is one of the first TV miniseries to be produced in Russia. Great political intrigue. From IMDB: During the last year of World War II, Isaev, a Soviet mole in the German SS intelligence department, discovers that several top Nazi officers are negotiating with some Allied generals. After his radio operator is killed in a bombing, Isaev seeks ways to pass the information on to Moscow, while at the same time playing a game of wits and nerves against his German 'colleagues' who start to suspect something.

If one gets into Russian cinema at all, one must find a relationship, good or bad, with Tarkovsky. Mine is love-hate. The man has created both exalted filmic poetry, and maddening boredom, and often in the same movie. So, if you want to see just one, try either, [Andrei Rublev](#) or the earlier [Ivan's Childhood](#).

[The Repentance](#) a dark one.

[Tchaikovsky](#) by Director Igor Talankin. OK, maybe not a great, but a good period piece.

Have you seen any of the grade B sci-fi movies made in America during the Cold War '60s: the type very easy to comment upon by Mystery Science Theater 2000? Then you must see [Planeta Bur](#) (1962). It is just that kind of movie, made at the same time, but from the other side of the Iron Curtain. Not on Netflix, so far as I can tell.

[Ilya Muromets](#) (1956) is a fantasy about a legendary Russian hero throwing off marauders. Slow. I'd call this aficionado -ware.

[Sadko](#), also, is for die-hard aficionados only.

[Old Khottabych](#) does not have much to recommend it, but if you are curious to know what happens when a Young Pioneer gets his own 2,000-year-old genie who teaches him the world is flat, this is the movie for you.

We have dancer Mikhail Barishnikov to thank for introducing the West to the collection of beautiful animated films from Soyuzmultfilm Studios, [Stories From My Childhood](#), a four-disc set. Think of the best illustrations you have seen of Russian folktales, animated, not of Disney.

While you are at it, enjoy the collection [Masters of Russian Animation](#).

The "Tom" collection of cartoons is cute, but more what you expect to see on TV.

There is another series I remember that is a good, sad, drama, I think perhaps made for Russian TV, but I can't remember the name of it. When I do, I'll post it here.

Enjoy!