

Vor

("Bop" = "Thief")

Russian Federation / France : 1997 : dir. Pavel Chukhrai :

: 94 min

prod: Igor Tolstunov : scr: Pavel Chukhrai : dir.ph.: Vladimir Klimov

[Misha Filipchuk](#); [Dima Shigarev](#)

Vladimir Mashkov; Ekaterina Rednikova; Amalya Mordvinova; Lidiya Savchenko; Anya Shtukaturov; Olga Peshkova; Anatoliy Koscheev; Lyudmila Selyanskaya; Viktor Bunakov; Natalia Pozdniakova; Yevgeni Popov; Yuliya Artamonova; Yuri Belyayev

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∅ M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: CVMC website



*Misha Filipchuk as the 6-year old Sanja
Source: indeterminate website*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Intimate character study set in post-WW2 Russia: an abandoned single mother and her adorable 6-year old son fall for a swarthy military officer, not knowing he's really a petty thief. A powerful tragedy, simply and beautifully told, with superlative performances from its three leads, particularly Mashkov, who exudes the sexy malevolence of a young Robert Mitchum. *** "

Radio Times review:

"Echoing his father Grigori's socialist realist masterpiece **"BALLAD OF A SOLDIER"** (1960), Pavel Chukrai's Oscar-nominated drama chronicles the crimes of a very different type of trooper. Seen through the eyes of her six-year old son, Misha Filipchuk, Ekaterina Rednikova's abrupt romance with Vladimir Mashkov is both intimidating and bewildering, as the threesome flits between provincial towns exploiting Mashkov's Red Army respectability. Contrasting the conditions of post-war austerity with the post-Communist present, this allegory on Yeltsin's Russia is stylishly composed and superbly acted, particularly the wide-eyed Filipchuk, whose gradual conversion to hero worship eventually has tragic ramifications. Contains swearing and nudity. **** "

"Tolian (Vladimir Mashkov) uses the respectability an army uniform affords him to con his way round Russia."

"Drama. When single mother Katia becomes involved with Tolian, a con man, she fears for her son's safety. Original Russian title: **"VOR"**. In Russian with English subtitles. **** "



*Sanja at 12, (Dima Shigarev) after six years in the tender care of a children's home. His features are quintessentially Russian, and in some shots those piercing blue eyes make him look positively beautiful.
Source: Radio Times*



Vladimir Mashkov as the callous Toljan

Source: Radio Times

Call me obtuse, but I fail to see how this reads as “an allegory on Yeltsin's Russia”. Beginning in 1952, the story is told through the voice of Sanja, then 6, whose father (like millions of other Russian soldiers) failed to return from the war, and who was born on a roadside without any aid for his mother. He has visions of an unknown soldier he takes to be the father he's never known, and so is awestruck when an imposing Red Army captain joins the train compartment where he's travelling with his mother in search of work. If not love, it's certainly a case of lust at first sight for Katia (Sanja's mother) and Toljan, the soldier, and they are copulating in the train corridor even before it reaches the next station. Without further discussion she throws her lot in with his, and the three move into a boarding house, representing themselves as a family, at the next wayside halt.

Sanja's joy at acquiring a new father is short-lived, and he finds himself locked out of the single room they've taken while the grown-ups go about that strange grunting business again (three times in the first 15 minutes). Toljan is very curt with him (threatening at one point to sling him out the window), but when Sanja gets into a brawl with a mob of much older local boys, Toljan presses him to “be a man” and fight back, and then comes to his aid when a neighbour complains, beating the man up in the street. By this combination of threatened violence, cajoling and macho camaraderie, Toljan secures the boy's loyalty. On his chest he has a tattoo of Stalin, and secretly confides in the boy that Stalin is his father. In Russia circa 1952 that was akin to claiming to be the Messiah, and it has the desired effect.

Toljan invites his landlady and all the other boarding house lodgers to a circus to express his gratitude for their hospitality. He steals out midway through the performance and Katia follows him, convinced that he means to cheat on her with another of the lodgers, but she finds him looting the boarding house, and within hours the three of them are bundled onto another train, headed for another small provincial town, where the cycle of deception, robbery and escape repeats itself. Katia is appalled at his behaviour, but finds herself so besotted with his swaggering masculine ways that she cannot bring herself to leave him.

Finally when, in still another town, she realises he has inveigled little Sanja into aiding him in a burglary, her concern for the boy's morality outweighs her feelings for Toljan. They are making their farewells beside a departing train when Sanja runs off, and in the confusion Toljan, who has no identity papers, gets himself arrested. Katia is panic-stricken and attempts to bribe the police to release him, but it is all over. He's packed off to prison for six years for impersonating an officer, even though the authorities do not begin to suspect his

long career of pillage. In the film's most memorable sequence, Katia finds herself and Sanja waiting in the snow amid a crowd of distraught women outside the prison gates, waiting for a glimpse of their loved ones as they're driven away, presumably to some remote gulag. The prisoners, one by one, are marched out through a cordon of guards and snapping Alsations and bundled onto a truck while the womenfolk shout final messages and family news over the heads of the guards. Katia sees Toljan led away in turn, and Sanja finally calls him "father", which until this point he has steadfastly refused to do. From that moment on, the narrator says, he had no further visions of the lost soldier, his true father, whom he had finally betrayed.

Katia dies shortly afterwards, of peritonitis from a botched abortion, and Sanja is put into a gulag for minors, which in the UK is called a "children's home". The film moves forward six years, when the 12-year old Sanja, still at the orphanage, by chance runs into Toljan again, his only remaining link to his past life. The reunion does not live up to his expectations. Toljan scarcely remembers the boy (or his mother) and is very obviously up to his old tricks once again. Sanja decides on a course of action that is to haunt him the rest of his life.

An allegory on Yeltsin's Russia? I fail to see it, unless Yeltsin is perceived to be a charlatan clothing himself in the grandeur of the past to exploit the former Soviet republics. But that is not how he was perceived (oaf that he was) nor how he conducted himself.

A competent, interesting film, certainly not a great one, the performances of the two principals are no more than adequate, and the crucial emotional motivation of the mother is left undelineated. Toljan may be great in the sack, but that doesn't quite seem to justify her acquiescence to his chosen way of life, which she clearly despises. Happily, the strongest emotional scenes are those between Toljan and little Sanja, whose trademark is to wet himself in moments of stress. Toljan is belligerent and manipulative throughout, anything but a figure worthy of admiration, yet in his own way he does take account of the child, tries to bolster his self-esteem, and regales him with tales of "manly" courage and forbearance. Misha Filipchuk is by turns amusing and touching as the wide-eyed Sanja, and Dima Shigarev, the boy who plays him at 12, has a most haunting face, scorched by betrayal.

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