

F A U S T

A Leisure Times Features release

Faust

A FILM BY ALEXANDER SOKUROV

Based on the tragedy by Johan Wolfgang Von Goethe

The Final Part of the Tetralogy
Moloch – Taurus - The Sun

**Golden Lion (Best Film), 2011 Venice International Film Festival
Nika, Best Film, 2012 Russian Academy Awards**

Running time: 134 minutes. Not rated.

Press notes and stills can be downloaded at <http://www.leisurefeat.com/>

NY/National Press Contact:

Sophie Gluck and Associates

Sophie Gluck

Aimee Morris

212 595 2432

sophie@gluckpr.com

aimee@gluckpr.com

SYNOPSIS

Winner of the 2011 Venice International Film Festival's Golden Lion, **FAUST** is acclaimed director Alexander Sokurov's latest film, a hallucinatory re-imagining of Goethe's masterpiece set in the early 19th century. Using elaborate camera movements, a dense soundscape, intricate production design and spectacular locations, **FAUST** conjures up a unique and phantasmagoric vision of the Faustian legend. Faust (Johannes Zeiler,) is a man in search of the ideals of the Enlightenment, but becomes obsessed with the lovely Margarete (Isolda Dychauk) and eventually sells his soul to the Devil (Anton Adasinsky) also known as the Moneylender, so that he may possess her. Comic, cosmic, painterly and stunningly beautiful scenes abound as the Devil takes Faust on a strange, unforgettable journey that ends in Hell itself.

The story of FAUST is one of the most popular in western literature – there is the opera, play, movies and countless other adaptations.

FAUST is the final installment of Alexander Sokurov's cinematic tetralogy on the nature of power. The main characters in the first three films are real historical figures: Adolph Hitler (Moloch, 1999), Vladimir Lenin (Taurus, 2000), and Emperor Hirohito (The Sun, 2005). The symbolic image of Faust completes this series of great gamblers who lost the most important wagers of their lives.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENT

Faust is seemingly out of place in this portrait gallery, an almost museum-like literary character framed by a simple plot. What does he have in common with these real figures (from the three previous films about historical figures) who ascended to the pinnacle of power? A love of words that are easy to believe and a pathological unhappiness in everyday life. Evil is reproducible and Goethe formulated its essence: "Unhappy people are dangerous."

Alexander Sokurov

ABOUT DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER ALEXANDER SOKUROV

Considered by many to be Russia's most important living filmmaker, Alexander Sokurov was born in 1951 in Russia. His father was a military officer in World War II. During his childhood, Sokurov's family frequently moved about the Soviet empire. After graduating from high school in 1968, he entered Gorky University to study history. While a student, he began working as a staff member for Gorky television and obtained wide experience in film and TV production. At 19 he made his first shows as a TV producer and over the next 6 years created numerous films and live TV shows for Gorky television.

In 1974 Sokurov received his degree in history from Gorky University. In 1975 he entered the All-Union Cinematography Institute (VGIK) in Moscow and was granted the Eisenstein Scholarship. He graduated in 1979 but his films were deemed unacceptable and he was accused of formalism and anti-Soviet views. At VGIK, the great Russian filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky befriended Sokurov and supported his filmmaking efforts. After VGIK, Tarkovsky helped get Sokurov a job at Lenfilm, the second largest film studio in Russia. At the same time, Sokurov also worked at the Leningrad Studio for Documentary Films where he made documentary films.

Sokurov's first feature, *The Lonely Voice of Man* (1978) was based on a short story by Russian writer Andrey Platonov but was not released until the early 1990s because it was viewed as anti-Soviet. His documentaries and other early features were not officially approved by the Soviet government, and were not released to the public until the late 1980s. Later on, his films were selected in many international film festivals and Sokurov won numerous awards and international recognition. In the mid-1990s, Sokurov became interested in new video technologies and made films in Japan.

Sokurov has taught film directing at the Lenfilm Studio and still teaches film in Moscow.

ALEXANDER SOKUROV FILMOGRAPHY

Fiction

1978 *The Lonely Voice of Man*
1980 *The Degraded*
1983-87 *Painful Indifference*
1986 *Empire*
1988 *Days of Eclipse*
1989 *Save and Protect*

F A U S T

1990 The Second Circle
1992 Stone
1993 Whispering Pages
1996 Mother and Son
1999 Moloch
2000 Taurus
2002 Russian Ark
2003 Father and Son
2004 The Sun
2007 Alexandra
2011 Faust

Documentaries

1978 Maria
1979 Sonata for Hitler
1981 Sonata for Viola. Dmitriy Shostakovitch
1982-87 And Nothing More
1984-87 Evening Sacrifice
1985-87 Patience Labor
1986 Elegy
1986-88 Moscow Elegy
1989 Soviet Elegy
1990 Petersburg Elegy
 The Events in Transcaucasia
 A Simple Elegy
 A Retrospective of Leningrad (1957-1990)
1991 An Example of Intonation
1992 Elegy from Russia
1995 Soldier's Dream
 Spiritual Voices
1996 Oriental Elegy
1996 Hubert Robert. A Fortunate Life.
1997 A Humble Life
1997 The St. Petersburg Diary. Inaguration of a Monument to Dostoevsky.
 The St. Petersburg Diary Kosintsev's Flat.
1998 Confession
 The Dialogues with Solzhenitsyn
1999 Dolce
2001 Elegy of a Voyage
2005 The St. Petersburg Diary Mozart. Requiem
2006 Elegy of Life
2009 Reading "Book of Blockade"
 Intonation

PRODUCTION TEAM

Andrey Sigle, Producer and Composer

Award-winning producer and composer Andrey Sigle was born in 1964 and graduated from the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory and the Royal Academy of Music in Gothenburg. He has composed music for more than 40 films. In 2002 he and Dmitry Svetozarov co-founded the production company Film ASDS Studios. In 2004 he went on to found Proline Film through which he produced Sokurov's *The Sun, Alexandra*, and *Faust* as well as Konstantin Lopushansky's *The Ugly Swans* and Joel Farges' *Serko*.

Bruno Delbonnel, Director of Photography

One of France's most acclaimed cinematographers, he was born in 1957 in Nancy, France. Delbonnel started shooting short and animated films at the age of 18 with the support of renowned director of photography Henri Alekan. Delbonnel has received the European Film Award for Best Cinematography for his work on Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amelie* (2001,) a César for Best Cinematography for Jeunet's *A Very Long Engagement* (2004) and has received three Oscar nominations for *Amelie*, *A Very Long Engagement* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Recent credits include Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows*, Julie Taymor's *Across the Universe* and the Coen Brothers upcoming film, *Inside Llewyn Davis*.

Yuri Arabov, Story

Moscow-born Yuri Arabov graduated from the Russian State Cinematography Institute. His film debut was the screenplay for Alexander Sokurov's *The Lonely Voice of Man* (1977). He won the Cannes Film Festival Prize for Best Screenplay for Sokurov's *Moloch*. Arabov also writes poetry and fiction and is one of the founders of the Poetry Club in Moscow. Since 1992 he has headed the Screenwriting Department of the Russian State Cinematography University and is the author of many films and TV series.

Elena Zhukova, Production Designer

Elena Zhukova is one of the leading production designers in Russian cinema. She was born in 1962 in Leningrad and graduated from the Leningrad Mukhina Applied Arts School in interior and industrial design. She began to work at Lenfilm Studios in 1983, and has worked as a production designer since 1989. Zhukova has received two NIKA awards (Russian Oscars) for Best Production Design for Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* and Sergei Bodrov's *Mongo*.

ABOUT THE CAST

Johannes Zeiler, Faust

Austrian-born actor Johannes Zeiler studied history and German literature in Graz, and studied acting at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna. In addition to his film and TV work, Zeller has performed on stage at the Landestheater Coburg, the stages of the state's capital in Kiel, The Theater Phoenix in Linz, the Ensemble Theater (Vienna), and the Vienna Youth Theatre.

Anton Adasinsky, Moneylender

Born in Leningrad, Anton Adasinsky founded the pantomime group the Derevo Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1988. Adasinsky was also the front man for the Soviet rock band AVIVA. The Derevo Theatre, now based in Dresden, has toured throughout Europe, Asia and the United States and has won many international awards.

Isolda Dychauk, Margarete

Isolda Dychauk was born in 1993 in Surgut (West Siberia) and moved to Berlin in 2002. In addition to her native Russian, she learned to speak German accent-free. In 2003, she was admitted to the Berlin-based acting school *Next Generation*. She made her film debut in 2004 with the short film *Gimme Your Shoes* by Anika Wangard. She starred in her first feature film in 2008 in the youth drama *Mein Freund aus Faro*.

Georg Friedrich, Wagner

Born in 1966 in Vienna, Austria. Georg Friedrich is one of Austria's leading actors. He has starred in many films by Michael Haneke (*The Piano Teacher*) and Ulrich Seidl (*Import/Export*).

Hanna Schygulla, the Moneylender's Wife

Actress/singer Hanna Schygulla was born in 1943 in Germany. Long associated with the theatre and film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, for whom Schygulla first worked in 1965, she is generally considered the most prominent actress of the New German Cinema.

Faust and Furious: Alexander Sokurov**SIGHT AND SOUND (UK), Ian Chrisite, December 2011**

A surprise winner of the top prize at the recent Venice Film Festival, Aleksander Sokurov's *Faust* has divided critics, leaving some groping for superlatives. Here Ian Christie places the film in the context of European high culture's previous tellings of the tale – and of the Russian director's other, varied works, now showing in a BFI retrospective

Aleksander Sokurov's *Faust* has opened a real can of worms. The news that it had won the Golden Lion at Venice provoked instant reaction, much of it incredulous, some downright hostile. Hollywood stars and popular commercial films had been snubbed. Worse still, snubbed by a jury headed by the American director Darren Aronofsky. And in favour of what: a high-concept art film? Pretentious stuff, after Cannes [giving the Palme d'Or](#) to Terrence Malick's demanding and no less divisive [The Tree of Life](#).

And yet, wasn't this Venice reasserting its original role as the oldest film festival in the world, added to the city's existing Biennale in 1932 to show 'cinematographic art' within the wider framework of the other arts? In Sokurov's case, we might also recall how, 49 years ago, Venice proclaimed the emergence of another Russian master, Andrei Tarkovsky, with the Golden Lion for his first feature *Ivan's Childhood*.

Sokurov, however, is no debutant – and nor can he still be pigeonholed as 'Tarkovsky's heir'. Indeed he's probably the most prolific of all contemporary filmmakers, with a non-stop output of features, documentaries and highly personal film-poems. For *Variety's* reviewers, he's mannered, tedious and not a barrel of 'laffs'. But the Venice award prompted some stirring responses. Nigel Andrews, writing in the *Financial Times*, declared himself "exalted and astonished" by Sokurov's film, and hailed it as "complete, magical and accessible to all". And writers in the blogosphere have reached heights of rhetoric to convey their mixed emotions: "a grueling, attenuated pre-modernity right down to the marrow of *Faust*, as though narrativity itself were being etched in acid before you" ([Michael Sicinski](#)); "wheezing human-blob in a glass, a steaming geyser piercing through an ashen purgatory" ([Fernando F. Croce](#)); and "like being trapped in an elevator with Terry Gilliam's id" ([Guy Lodge](#)).

That last might seem quite relevant, since the most recent manifestation of Gilliam's baroque imagination was his widely acclaimed production of Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* earlier this year for the English National Opera. But the main thing Gilliam's *Faust* had in common with Sokurov's is a willingness to tackle boldly one of the great European subjects, undaunted by the reverence that has accumulated around its main monument – the vast philosophical drama that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe laboured on for over 40 years, between 1790 and his death in 1832. Part of the problem facing

Sokurov's *Faust* is indeed our relative unfamiliarity with Goethe in Anglophone culture, which is partly down to having our 'own' Faust in the shape of Christopher Marlowe's punchy Elizabethan firecracker *Doctor Faustus*.

It's that version of the tale, drawing on earlier folk versions, that seems to have shaped the most notable modern Faust on film: Jan Svankmajer's ferocious 1994 combination of live action and puppetry. Svankmajer's Faust is given a map in the street in modern-day Prague, which leads him – like Alice (the subject of Svankmajer's previous feature) – into a labyrinth of the bizarre. Like Marlowe's hero, he wants Mephistopheles to amaze and gratify him, and the angels and demons are a palpable presence, with the hallucinatory puppet theatre that originally nourished Svankmajer's imagination recalling the intimate theatre for which Marlowe wrote. And for these everyman Fausts, the salvation that Goethe offered – in the shape of Gretchen – is not an option.

When Goethe as a young man first mapped out what was to become his main creative work, he envisaged an epic treatment that would begin in heaven and ultimately return to somewhere beyond the earthly setting of the central drama. Like Marlowe's hero, his Faust is tempted by the devilish Mephistopheles, and signs away his soul in return for knowledge and power. But apart from the greater density of the social setting for this Faust, the crucial difference is the love interest, represented by Gretchen. In Goethe, Faust manages to seduce the innocent Gretchen and kill her brother, before abandoning her with their child. After Gretchen drowns the baby, she's condemned to death and Faust tries to save her; but even though she rejects his help, there's the promise of heavenly salvation.

Goethe's *Faust* didn't just become the cornerstone of German literature in the Romantic period, it also inspired the 19th century's single most popular opera, composed by Charles Gounod in 1859. And naturally for Gounod and his librettists, it was the melodramatic aspects of Goethe that offered scope for building a successful Romantic vehicle. Without Faust's courtship gift of jewels to Marguerite (as Gretchen becomes in this version) and the final rendezvous in her cell, there wouldn't have been the opportunity for generations of singers to strut their stuff.

Cormac Newark writes in a recent programme note that George Bernard Shaw, who was a music critic before becoming a playwright, complained that critics had to spend ten years of their lives watching Faust – and would have caught “the inflammatory disease Faustitis” if Gounod's music hadn't been so “seraphically soothing”. The statistics are indeed staggering: Faust clocked up 2000 performances in less than a century in Paris, was staged at Covent Garden every season for 50 years, and figures in countless works of fiction from *The Phantom of the Opera* to *The Age of Innocence* and even *Tintin* as *the* opera. (And for those who want to check for themselves, the New York Metropolitan Opera production will be shown on cinema screens around the world on 10 December).

If this arch-Romantic operatic *Faust* became a cliché, it's important to remember how far removed it was from Goethe's drama of the human soul, described by the aged poet as "tormented by all that afflicts mankind, repelled by all that it finds repellent, and made happy by all that it desires". And what Sokurov has done is to plunge us into a teeming middle-European milieu that seems extraordinarily close to the one Goethe imagined. This Faust is neither an aged lecher nor a would-be Lothario. In Johannes Zeiler's selfless performance, he's an earnest seeker after knowledge, part alchemist and part scientist, a worrier who feels that life is passing him by. The moneylender he visits turns out to be his Mephistopheles, an extraordinary prancing, epicene creation by the Russian performance artist Anton Adasinsky. Together they move through the extraordinary landscape that's had critics flexing their vocabulary to evoke its sensory extravagance.

Sokurov has always been a filmmaker of immense and intense visual invention – as will become apparent to anyone following BFI Southbank's retrospective through November and December. From the antique-shop jumble of his George Bernard Shaw fantasy *Mournful Indifference* (aka *Heartbreak House/Anaesthesia Psychica Dolorosa*, 1987) and the bleached apocalyptic landscape of *Days of the Eclipse* (*Dni zatmeniya*, 1989), through the contrasting painterly settings of *Mother and Son* (*Mat i syn*, 1997) and *Moloch* (1999), he has created highly distinctive visual worlds. In many ways, his best-known film *Russian Ark* (*Russkiy kovcheg*, 2002) is also his least typical, as it mostly features the decor of St Petersburg's Hermitage Palace (although with some deft digital enhancement). And while he's capable of working with the simplest tools and settings, especially in some of the highly personal 'elegies' that provide a counterpoint to his feature-film career, he is not afraid to embrace the opportunity for comprehensive 'world building' that digital cinema now offers.

Hence, no doubt, the choice as cinematographer for *Faust* of Bruno Delbonnel, best known for his work on such stylised films as *Amélie* and Julie Taymor's *Across the Universe*, as well as *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Sokurov has clearly been encouraged to broaden his palette by his producer Andrei Sigle who, unusually, is also a composer, and has here created a soundscape that weaves together medieval German music, Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Sokurov's beloved Mahler. When Sigle claims for the film that "the lighting, colour, space, pauses and breathing in some sequences create an absolutely unusual spectacle", this is more than production hype. *Faust* does indeed create a world as magical and mysterious as any recent mass-market fantasy film; and in doing so it evokes the tremendous range of references and detail that Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau brought to his great silent *Faust* of 1926 – the film, incidentally, that led to him being given carte blanche in Hollywood.

Will to power

But the most intriguing question that's now up for discussion is how *Faust* – which completes Sokurov's 'tetralogy of power' – relates to the director's previous three films about infamous political leaders of the early 20th century. The linking theme had

seemed to be an exploration of how ‘unhappy people’ can create unhappiness on a vast scale, as in the case of Hitler (*Moloch*, 1999) and Lenin (*Taurus*, 2001), both of whom are seen in their private lives as diminished, almost pathetic characters. With *The Sun* (*Solntse*, 2005), Sokurov’s equally intimate portrait of the last days of Hirohito’s rule as god-emperor, he seemed to be dealing with the confrontation between the mythic and the mundane – in a way not dissimilar to Scorsese’s treatment of the Dalai Lama in his underappreciated *Kundun*. There had been speculation about another biographical film to complete the tetralogy, but few can have expected this leap into a fully realised period myth.

Sokurov has spoken of *Faust* as continuing to “delve into everything that is dark in man”, and exploring “a pathological unhappiness in everyday life”. But the most striking difference, as he observes, is that the other rulers are shown confronting their own mortality, while Faust – true to Goethe’s vision – is forgiven his blasphemous pact and offered power. In Sokurov’s words – and even more in the film’s final, transcendent images – “he walks off in order to become a tyrant, a political leader, an oligarch”. Are we then to see *Faust* as probing the roots of the superman or übermensch that Nietzsche celebrated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which would later be distorted by 20th-century tyrants?

Goethe was not only a poet but a polymath and politician who tried to balance Enlightenment rationalism with a rising tide of Romanticism. When he began exploring the Faust legend, he claimed to have no idea where it would lead; by the time he reached Faust’s final experiences beyond space and time, the play had become a mystical celebration of redemption and renewal where “Earth’s insufficiency... finds fulfilment.” Granted that Sokurov’s *Faust* doesn’t claim to be faithful to Goethe, there’s no mistaking how closely it locates this struggling scientist, seen carrying out gory dissection on a corpse and peering through a telescope at the moon, in the liminal world that the Enlightenment sought to rationalise.

Goethe’s Faust craves knowledge and fulfilment to become a superior being, which leads to the famous Faustian bargain with the devil, for which he is punished but also partially forgiven. But for Nietzsche, God is dead and so too is the Devil. What remains is the drive towards ever greater power – as he says mockingly in *Zarathustra*, “I suspect you would call my Superman a Devil.” By returning to this most often invoked myth that speaks to our post-Enlightenment world, Sokurov is trying to address the ‘will to power’ that he sees still at work in the post-communist world. The theme is universal, but a veteran Russian critic, Valery Kichin, has been quick to characterise this Faust in Russian terms: “Faust in Sokurov’s interpretation is absolutely devoid of any romantic features. He is a cynic and a hard-core utilitarian of the post-Soviet time when people were ready to step over corpses in order to achieve their goal with a cynic conviction that they knew how to change the world.”

F A U S T

Does this talk of politics and philosophy make him sound like an earnest bore? Well, it shouldn't, since *Faust* shows Sokurov at the height of his ambition as a filmmaker. Impelled by the same restless curiosity as Rossellini – in his great series of films about philosophers – or the sadly missed [Raúl Ruiz](#) – boldly creating new filmic forms to explore art, politics and ideas – Sokurov is surely one of the brightest hopes for believing that cinema can still achieve its full potential as a form of 'total art'. He himself has often spoken in the past about film as a minor art, subsidiary to the older traditions of literature and painting. But with *Faust* he has shown cinema capable of – and this may seem blasphemous, or just pretentious – standing alongside Goethe. As Darren Aronofsky said in Venice: "There are films that change you forever and this is one of them."

F A U S T

CREDITS

Cast:

Johannes Zeiler	Faust
Anton Adasinsky	Money Lender
Isolda Dychauk	Margarete
Georg Friedrich	Wagner
Hanna Schgulla	The Money Lender's Wife
Antje Lewald	Margarete's Mother
Florian Bruckner	Valentin
Sigurdur Skulasson	Faust's Father
Maxim Mehmet	Valentin's Friend

Crew:

Director	Alexander Sokurov
Story	Yuri Arabov
Screenplay	Alexander Sokurov, Marina Koreneva
Director of Photography	Bruno Delbonnel
Production Design	Elena Zhukova
Costume Design	Lidia Krukova
Film Editor	Jorg Hauschild
Make-up	Tamara Frid
Original Music	Andrey Sigle
Producer	Andrey Sigle

A Proline Film Production

with support from

The Mass Media Development and Support Foundation, The Russian Cinema Fund

2011, Dolby Digital, color, 1:1:33, 134 minutes, German w/English subtitles

A Leisure Time Features release

40 Worth St., #833, New York, NY 10013

212 267 4501

Bpleisure@aol.com

www.leisurefeat.com