Ivan Aksenchuk

A Great Relay [Большая эстафета (Bol’shaia ėstafeta)]

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1979)

TAGS: Apollo Ares Athena Helen Olympic Games Paris (Trojan Prince) Trojan War Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	A Great Relay [Большая эстафета (Bol’shaia ėstafeta)]
Studio/Production Company	Soyuzmultfilm
Country of the First Edition	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
Country/countries of popularity	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Original Language	Russian
First Edition Date	1979
First Edition Details	*Большая эстафета* [A Great Relay (Bol’shaia ėstafeta)]. Written and directed by Ivan Aksenchuk. Moscow: Soyuzmultfilm, 1979.
Running time	9 min 6 sec
Genre	Animated films, Hand-drawn animation (traditional animation)*, Humor, Instructional and educational works, Motion picture
Target Audience	Children (6+, crossover)
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Creators



Courtesy of kino-teatr.ru database.

Ivan Aksenchuk , 1918 - 1999
(Director)

Soviet and Russian animation director, WW2 participant, awarded the title of People's Artist of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

Aksenchuk came to animation after WW2, studying and later working in Moscow at the Soyuzmultfilm Studio. Ivan Aksenchuk made movies of various kinds. He was especially famous for his fairy tales (*Ореховый прутик* [Nut Twig] 1955, *Синеглазка* [Blue-Eye] 1984), but also made many satirical and propaganda movies. Among his experiments we may mention a movie based on a poem by Aleksandr Blok *Twelve* or a movie interpreting drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. Aksenchuk was a very educated and intelligent person according to the description of Grigory Borodin in a fascinating article dedicated to an anniversary of the director.*

* Borodin, Georgy, "Иван Аксенчук (к 95-летию режиссера)" [Ivan Aksenchuk. In honour of 95 anniversary of the director], online resource animalife.ru/2013/09/20/ivan-aksenchuk-k-95-letiyu-rezhissera/ (accessed February 02, 2018).

Bio prepared by Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Summary

The film presents the history of the Olympic Games as bringing peace to the nations.

The animation starts with a story of a nice woman being kidnapped by a handsome Greek soldier. Helen (it is apparently she) agrees with kidnapping after a while and takes her belongings with her.

There is a pursuit across the sea, and the couple hides behind a city wall.

A great war starts. We see also the Olympic gods watching the war. Some of them want to participate in it, but Zeus asks Apollo to play music, stops the war with thunder and lightning, and puts a tripod between the armies. He places the Olympic fire on the tripod and the Olympic Games begin.

We see wrestling, races, chariot competitions, jumping with weights, discus throwing, as well as statues honouring the sportsmen.

Then time passes and the modern Olympics are shown. After periods without the games there is a man wearing a modern suit who finds a bowl of Olympic fire and has the idea to renew the Olympics. It is obviously Pierre de Coubertin. The games organised in Athens in 1896 are presented.

We see pictures of different competitions during various Olympics, shown on two small screens. On the top of the main screen the place and year of the Olympics are noted. The style of pictures changes with time. For example, Paris Olympics of 1900 are presented on the background of the Eiffel tower and paintings are made in expressionist style. Later Olympics are presented with fragments of documentaries (found footage).

A sportsman with the Olympic fire runs through time and lands.

The Olympics of 1936 in Germany are not mentioned. We see symbols of war and inscriptions "Year without the Olympics", "1916", "1940", and "1944". The letters and numbers explode under bombardment. But the Sun of the Olympic fire wins and the Games are continued.

After the Montreal Olympics the music changes and we hear

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Подмосковные вечера [Moscow Nights] by Vasily Solov'ëv-Sedoi. Firstly we see birches, than scenes of Moscow with construction cranes. The animation changes into a documentary and we see streets of Moscow (also Kremlin) filmed from a car.

When the animation returns, the athletes run together with white doves forming the symbol of the Olympics and the symbol of peace.

According to the animation, a girl lights the fire in the main torch.*

The movie finishes with an image of the Olympic bear, symbol of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, that greets everybody with medals. "You Are Welcome!"

* During the real opening it was a male athlete.

Analysis

Including the Trojan War topic into the history of the Olympics is not the most obvious link, however it was the most famous war, and the most famous war with Greek participation indeed. So the choice is understandable. It is interesting that the Trojan War episode lasts 3 minutes, and takes more than 1/3 of the movie. So the accent is strongly put on the Games as a remedy for war.

This entire episode is made in red, brown, yellow and dark blue colours unlike the other parts of the film. It resembles red figure pottery. The figures are also symbolical; they move in unnatural ways, so they do look like ascending from the vases.

The battle scene resembles to some extent a toy soldier fight. Thus the war itself is presented as an unnatural enterprise staged by some external powers.

The Olympic gods are sitting in chairs depicted on different levels on the screen – so it forms a triangular composition having Zeus as the top. To some extent this shape is similar to a temple pediment. The figures of gods are white (or rather beige with brown contours), and have the sun behind their backs. So the gods are similar to white statues traditionally associated with Greek sculpture. This makes them also akin to the above-mentioned toy-soldier-humans or puppets

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incapable of moving on their own.

During the war the gods behave according to their characters: Apollo is shooting arrows, Ares pulls out a sword, Athena knocks with her spear. We see also a goddess who covers her face with hands, being afraid to look at the battle – maybe it is Aphrodite? However her depiction differs from that of Homer. She is rather a weak woman who corresponds to a stereotypical image created in a patriarchal society.

The gods are presented on a black background, having clouds underneath. So they are seating in the skies, but in its cosmic interpretation. This underlines connections of Greek mythology with astronomy and naming of constellations. On the other hand, it includes the movie in the context of space science-fiction popular in the cold war narrative (e.g. *Тайна третьей планеты* [The Mystery of the Third Planet (Taĭna tret'ieĭ planety)] dir. Roman Kachanov, 1981; *Из дневников Ийона Тихого* [Excerpts from the Star Diaries of Ijon Tichy (Iz dnevnikov Iĭona Tihogo)] dir. Gennady Tishchenko, 1985; or *Les Maîtres du temps* [Time Masters] , dir. René Laloux, 1982).

When Zeus stops the war, he changes color into blue, becoming a lightning himself.

The animation is drawn in poster style, which emphasizes its propaganda character. It has an effect similar to chiaroscuro, but the colors are conventional. The episode about the Trojan War differs from the other parts of the movie, however Homer is also used for advertising the Olympics held in the USSR. Thus propaganda of peace guarded by the USSR is based on the most canonical text of European culture. Homer is used to ennoble the Soviet Union and its achievements.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Ares Athena Helen Olympic Games Paris (Trojan Prince) Trojan War Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures,	History Past Propaganda Sport War

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and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Borodin, Georgy, "Олимпиада как мультфильм" ["Olympics as an Animation" ("Olimpiada kak multfilm")], *Сеанс* [Seans (Seans)] 55–57 (2014), online resource (accessed: February 01, 2018).

Borodin, Georgy, "Иван Аксенчук (к 95-летию режиссера)" [Ivan Aksenchuk. In Honour of 95 Anniversary of the Director (Ivan Aksenchuk. K 95-letiiu rezhissiora)], online resource (accessed: February 02, 2018).

Addenda

The Remaining Production Credits

Art director – Ninel Lipnitskaia,

Animators – Oleg Safronov, Lev Riabinin, Vladimir Shevchenko, Liudmila Lobanova,

Sound director – Vladimir Kutuzov,

Cameraman – Kabul Rasulov,

Composer – Yuri Saulsky,

Production designers – Elizaveta Zharova, Vladimir Morozov.

Information about the film in movie databases:

kinopoisk.ru (accessed: February 4, 2019).

kino-teatr.ru (accessed: February 4, 2019).

animator.ru (accessed: February 4, 2019).

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