



THE CONCERT (LE CONCERT)

Autumn
Season
2010

Review by Rich Kline, *Shadows on the Wall*:

This riotous French farce stirs in both Russian mob action and some strong emotion in a way that kind of defies both description and expectation. But it's brilliantly held together by the music at the centre of the story.

Andrei (Guskov) was a great conductor until he clashed with Brezhnev in 1981. He's now a cleaner at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, and when he intercepts a fax he decides to reclaim his reputation by gathering his old orchestra buddies and illicitly taking a high-profile gig in Paris with the help of his pal Sacha (Nazarov) and their pushy old manager Ivan (Barinov). Meanwhile, Andrei will also need to face up to his past, most notably to Tchaikovsky's violin concerto, as well as rising-star French violinist Anne-Marie (Laurent) and the high-spirited orchestra members.

The film has a lively, funny tone from the start, packing the screen with big personalities and raucous dialog. Writer-director Mihaileanu cleverly maintains a completely out-of-control vibe without ever losing a single plot strand or character. He also helps us vividly engage with the characters; we feel their desperation to reclaim their reputations and right the wrongs of the past, and as the film progresses we also start to understand their raw passion for the music. So when the final scenes come along, the film wallops us with a huge wave of never-sentimentalised emotion.

In other words, this is gorgeously orchestrated filmmaking, keeping us riotously entertained with believable, hilarious characters while underscoring everything with strongly resonant themes. Most effective is the notion that music is good for the soul (this film proves that). There are also several scruffy, rude gags along the way to keep things realistically grounded. And even if the script is packed with French, Russian, Jewish and Gypsy stereotypes, it continually subverts them to make a point.

Meanwhile, the cast is terrific. Guskov is a superb central character, letting us glimpse just enough of his inner life to know that there's a much bigger story here than we are seeing. Laurent is simply wonderful in a role that could have been pretty simplistic, but isn't. And after the farcical build-up, the concert scene at the end is a clever combination of music, acting, cinematography and editing that catches us wonderfully by surprise.



Review By Natasha Senjanovic, *The Hollywood Reporter*:

Radu Mihaileanu returns to form in *The Concert*, which echoes the fable-like brilliance of his *Train of Life*. and once again pokes critical yet always loving fun at what lies behind power, ambition and even failure. With terrific performances by its Russian-Franco-Romanian cast, *The Concert* will travel far in Europe while in the U.S., the Weinstein Co. will ensure art house visibility to this witty, moving story.

Andrei Filipov (Alexei Guskov) is a former conductor of the Bolshoi Orchestra, who was stripped of his position in 1980 for refusing to fire his Jewish musicians, as part of Brezhnev's anti-Semitic decrees. A recovered alcoholic, he works a denigrating janitorial job at the Bolshoi while his wife runs a business procuring extras for the grotesquely lavish weddings and funerals of Russian tycoons.

When Andrei intercepts a fax from the Theatre du Chatelet inviting the Bolshoi Orchestra to Paris, he comes up with a plan to redeem his dream. He'll bring together his old musicians (now working rag-tag jobs) and they'll pretend to be the famed orchestra to play Tchaikovsky's "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra." His only demand is that celebrated French violinist Anne-Marie Jacquet (Melanie Laurent) accompany them, for mysteriously personal reasons.

The greatest humor lies in the first part of *The Concert*, most of all in the clash between Andrei, his best friend and first cellist Sacha (Dmitry Nazarov) and Ivan Gavrilov (Valeri Barinov), the Party official responsible for their demise. The latter immediately accepts to the job of being the fake orchestra's fake manager, secretly dying to see Paris despite his endless spouting of Party rhetoric.

Mihaileanu opts for different filmmaking styles in depicting East and West. A fixed camera shows the French as elegant but staid, whereas the Russians are shot mostly with a hand-held camera, and are lively in their outdated clothes and decrepit surroundings. While these stereotypes work in the beginning, they are over-indulged once the orchestra arrives in Paris.

The Russians, gypsies and Jews are simply too money-obsessed, unruly and uncouth in the story's meandering subplots. *The Concert* loses some vitality and humor in the middle, and even what the director usually does best -- making fairy tales plausible and joyous with great wit and humanity.

However, a pivotal scene between Andrei and Anne-Marie re-establishes the story's footing, and achingly captures the difference between the decades-long suffering and lost dreams of the Russians in particular and the Eastern bloc in general, and the freer, less tormented West.

Mihaileanu then deftly builds up to the film's emotional ending, a beautiful final sequence that evokes tears and laughter as it wraps up the story's various threads.

