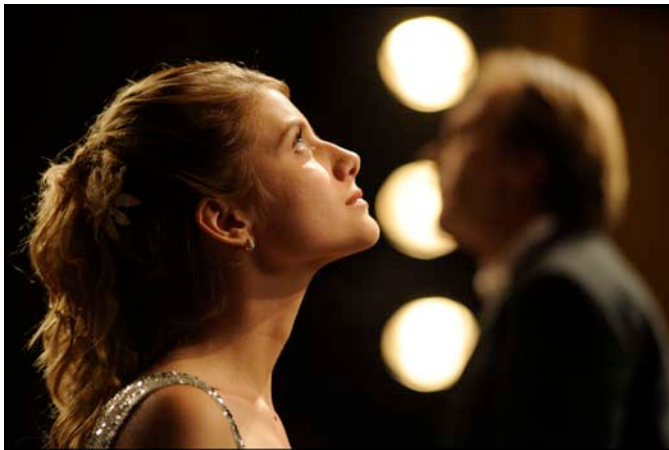


The Concert

An international comedy-drama made by a Romanian with a classical music theme that flits between Moscow and Paris and contains dialogue equal parts Russian and French... This is “The Concert,” not your typical movie fare, surely, but one which certainly intrigued this reviewer going in. My verdict? A mixed bag; I wanted it to be better.

The premise holds promise: a once-great Russian conductor of the Bolshoi Symphony, Andrei Filipov (Aleksei Guskov), was fired by the Party 30 years ago for harboring Jewish and other undesirable ethnic groups in his orchestra and demoted to janitor at the Bolshoi Theater ever since. He accidentally sees a fax invitation for the current Bolshoi to stage a concert in Paris’s Chatelet Theater on short notice. He steals the fax and looks to round up all his dismissed orchestra members to take the gig. He also needs the intervention of an old commie nemesis, Gavrilov (Valeriy Barinov) to manage the deal. Complications ensue when the orchestra is asked to perform with an outstanding young French violinist, Anne-Marie Jacquet, (Mélanie Laurent) who—it turns out—has a long-term personal connection to the conductor (Laurent was the striking Parisian movie house manager in “Inglourious Basterds”).



The overall tone of “The Concert,” directed and co-written by Radu Mihaileanu, is schizophrenic: a goofy, at times lumbering, comedy is contrasted with the serious work of classical music making, in particular a focus on the signature piece of the movie, Tchaikovsky’s noble Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Filipov’s talisman. This shifting duality is, for the most part, entertaining. For me, while the cross-cultural Russians-out-of-

water goofiness is full of stereotypes, it was often funny, even charming. And the premise itself—that of a valued musical entity brilliantly revived after the Cold War—is heartening. To pull at the heart strings, there is a delicate back story of political oppression which ends in triumph.

Representing nicely the above duality in person are the two leads, the sober but sympathetic Guskov who inhabits the part with his sad eyes and soulful countenance, and the bright young Laurent, who is skeptical of the ragamuffin orchestra she sees at first but is finally overwhelmed by their music-making together.

Where the film errs for me is how it *presents* that music making. Your movie reviewer is also a classical music fan, so, while I appreciated the (solid) playing of a movement from a major Tchaikovsky concerto--in a bracing finale--I was grimacing inside about the mess the film made of orchestral practice. The film presents a number

of wildly improbable elements, inter alia: a symphony orchestra performing with no rehearsal, a violin soloist who learns a (most demanding) piece in one day, and a torpid orchestra revived by a single stanza of the piece. Hey, it was a comedy and I wasn't expecting a PBS broadcast, but the genuine comedic elements were undercut by the sheer slovenliness of the musical material--it could have been handled with much more seriousness without marring the spirit of the film.

Perhaps I'm making too many demands of a movie aimed at popular entertainment. After all, the concerto finale, however implausible, is still a rouser and could introduce thousands of regular moviegoers to a staple of the classical repertoire (this happens every so often in movies, like the discovery by many of Rachmaninoff's soaring Third Piano Concerto in the 1996 film "Shine"). A stirring introduction to Tchaikovsky is not the worst thing to offer.

(The film is NR and runs 117 mins.)

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