

Elena

Russia 2011

Directed by

Andrey Zvyagintsev

Writing creditsAndrey Zvyagintsev
Oleg Negin**Cinematography**

Mikhail Krichman

Original Music

Philip Glass

Cast*Elena*

Nadezhda Markina

Vladimir

Andrey Smirnov

Katerina

Elena Lyadova

Sergey

Aleksey Rozin

109 min

*Our next screening...***Berberian Sound Studio**

Tue 1 April 2014

Dir: Peter Strickland

Acclaimed psychological
thriller from the director of
Katalin Varga.

As we move into the second half of our debut season at Winchester Science Centre, tonight we bring you a gripping thriller from Russia. Films from Belgium, Australia and the UK (one set in Italy) to follow through April and May!

If Claude Chabrol had made a film that looked like a Russian parable of human vanity, it might look like this gripping and disturbing film from Andrey Zvyagintsev. (I found myself thinking of both *Merci Pour Le Chocolat* and old Count Bezukhov's will in *War And Peace*.) *Elena* is only the third feature-length film from this 48-year-old director, after *The Return* (2003) and *The Banishment* (2007); it is in many ways his most intimate, and the film with the most contemporary and realist character. The subtlety and stealth of this movie is a marvel, and so is the complex and enigmatic performance of Markina. Zvyagintsev has a brilliant slow zoom on to an old photo of Elena, apparently taken around the time of her marriage 10 years before – and presumably taken by the doting Vladimir. It inspires the question: who is Elena? What does she want? Who does she love? It is superbly shot and directed; it does not offer a thriller-type ending – the narrative is resolved in a disquieting minor key. A deeply satisfying film.

Andrey Zvyagintsev's third feature film offers a caustic, numbed examination of evil, selfishness and corruption, perhaps intended as a comment on contemporary Russian society, maybe even intended as a comment on the putrefaction of humanity at large. A little like a glassy neo-noir update of Von Stroheim's seminal silent epic, *Greed*, or Bresson's withering swansong, *L'argent*, the film grapples with the intoxicating allure of money and the way in which its relentless acquisition often comes with a dark human collateral. It's a film which toys with ominous inevitability, presenting apparently banal situations and then positing the suggestion of threat or violence by simply allowing them to slowly play out. Nadezhda Markina's performance in the lead role is a kind of non-performance, where she plays Elena as someone who has relinquished herself of all palpable human emotion over the years. Her spiritual emptiness makes the film all the more believable. A withering admonishment of capitalism and the emotional mindset that comes with.

David Jenkins, *Little White Lies*

The mundanity of the everyday is examined, but do you really want to watch someone slowly making a bed?

Alex Zane, *The Sun*

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*



Voting for *The Gatekeepers*: A-25 B-16 C-3 D-3 E-0 Rating: 83.5% Attendance: 55