Second Order Film

Kinoglaz and Pygmalion (Russia)
Mact Productions (France), Thoke+Moebius Film (Germany), Sanzhyra (Kirghizia)

With the support of The Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography
of the RF, Arte France,
Filmstiftung NRW (Germany)

Present

Kirgisische Mitgift
(THE WEDDING CHEST)

Starring Natacha REGNIER and Bolot TENTIMYSHOV

Director Nurbek EGEN

Script Ekaterina TIRDATOVA

Cinematography Dmitry ERMAKOV

Music Alexei AIGUI

Producers Evgenia TIRDATOVA, Dmitry EFREMOV, Sergei KHOVENKO
Pyotr CHERNIAEV, Antoine de CLERMONT-TONNERRE,
Christoph THOKE, Axel MOEBIUS

Running time. 104 min.
Format 1:85
Col., Dolby SR, 2006
Synopsis

Aidar was born in a big family in a mountain village in Kirghizia. His parents are simple country folk. His elder brothers are married and live with their families near their parental home. Aidar went on a trainee course to Paris and stayed there. His parents are proud of him but they are worried that he is not married. In Paris Aidar met Isabelle and fell in love with her and has decided to bring her home and introduce her to his parents. Aidar’s parents are happy to have him back home but he hasn’t enough courage to break the news about Isabelle and himself and says she is simply a fellow journalist. With every passing day it grows more and more difficult for him to tell the truth. Isabelle cannot understand why she and her fiance live in different houses. Back in his own country Aidar changes because he cannot behave as he did in the West. In the mountains he is the son of his parents and has to respect the traditions of his people. According to an ancient family legend, many centuries ago the youngest son of the Khan, who was the forebear of their clan, disobeyed his father and violated his people’s sacred traditions and became a pariah. The image of the unhappy youth constantly arises in Aidar’s mind. To make matters worse, the postman Yusup, a grim custodian of tradition, keeps reminding him of his duty to the clan all the time.

Meanwhile, the parents have picked a future wife for Aidar. Isabelle begins to suspect that something is wrong and finally decides to go away. Aidar is faced with a choice: should he go after his beloved and violate tradition, or forget Isabelle and submit to the will of his elders thereby paying his tribute of respect to his land and his roots? But he is no longer master of the situation which rushes headlong to its culmination.

Short synopsis

There is great excitement in Aidar’s home one fine day when he comes back from Paris to his mountain village with a charming French girl called Isabelle. Aidar has changed but everything at home has remained the same. Lake Issyk-Kul sparkles silver and turquoise, the air is so pure it tinkles and the snow-covered summits of the mountains sparkle in the sun. Isabelle cannot understand how Aidar could leave such beauty behind and why he cannot tell everyone that she is his fiancee. But shades of the past, embodied in the grim figure of the local postman, give Aidar no rest. A threat hangs over the couple’s love.

How the film was made

First, there was the short film “Sanzhyra” which became a great success. It was about a Kirghiz boy on the threshold of adult life, made by film director Nurbek Egen, a graduate of the State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). It appealed to audiences in many countries where it was shown at festivals and on television. It won 12 prizes. The success of the short encouraged the director, scriptwriter Ekaterina Tirdatova and producers Evgenia Tirdatova and Pyotr Cherniaev. After “Sanzhyra” they decided to make a full-length film. Nurbek had a story which was dear to him, it was almost a personal experience. Ekaterina enlarged on the subject and wrote a screenplay. The original title was “The Wedding”, then it was replaced by “Bride and Groom” and “Isabelle” and finally it got the name of “The Wedding Chest”.

However, the idea of independent producers in Russia raising money for a debut film to be made by a Kirghiz film director now residing in Moscow was almost fantastic. Right from the start the film had to overcome great obstacles and the fact that it has been made may be considered a miracle. Or, brushing all modesty aside, we can call it a producer’s feat because sometimes even the authors had fits of despair and were ready to retreat under the pressure of unfavorable circumstances.

For three years Nurbek was shooting commercials for TV and directing several serials. He made the four-part “Willis”, a story about young ballerinas after a screenplay by Yuri Korotkov.

Meantime, Ekaterina was writing scripts for other TV serials and making a successful career in the advertising business. Then she was co-opted for a long time by producer Vladimir Esinov for whom she wrote 24 parts of the TV film “The Secret Sign” all alone. Then the previous partnership was renewed with the production of the second 8-part serial “The Secret Sign-2. The Return of the Master”. It was directed by Nurbek Egen and proved better than the first serial.

And yet, all that time none of the people concerned ever forgot about “The Wedding Chest” which was waiting its auspicious hour. Work on the screenplay continued, enriched by new twists and turns and characters. That is how the grim postman Yusup, the stickler for age-old traditions, came into being and brought elements of suspense and even tragedy into the romantic love story. Comic characters and situations also appeared.

All that while there continued a search for a French actress for the role of Isabelle. The first candidate for the role was Ludivine Sagnier who read the script with great interest and was all ready to accept the part but none of the French producers demonstrated the necessary enthusiasm.

Then finally things started to fall into place. Nurbek Egen met Natacha Regnier at a Paris festival where they showed his film “Sanzhyra”. Natacha read the script and liked it very much, but another eighteen months
had to pass before a second important meeting took place – Evgenia Tirdatova made the acquaintance of producer Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre. It happened in Berlin in December 2003 thanks to the efforts of Nadja Turintsev, one of the organizers of the Forum of European Co-producers. The European Film Academy awards ceremony was in full swing when Nadja was running about the huge banquet-hall looking for Evgenia on the request of the excited Antoine who was afraid that somebody might intercept the screenplay. Later, Antoine called it “a love affair”. He fell in love with the script from the very first word, couldn’t sleep the night, cried and laughed, put aside all other business until he found Evgenia and told her of his firm decision to take part in the film. A day before that the German producer, Christoph Thoke, took her away from the official Forum lunch to a private lunch and later watched jealously all the contacts she was making with regards to the film “The Wedding Chest”. The German side joined the project on the spot.

Then the time came to decide – it was either now or never. The question of state support from the Russian side was dragging on and on. Meanwhile, the apricot trees and famous red poppies of Issyk-Kul had finished blooming and the director warned that the background of the love story would be nothing but faded grass, fields burned by the sun, that it would be too late and all would be lost. Natacha had to put off her work in “The Wedding Chest” while the starting dates of her other films were drawing nearer and nearer.

That was when cameraman Dmitry Ermakov appeared. He was the one who had to make a feast for the eye out of the fading spring nature. The taciturn Dima did not add much optimism but he had resolute intentions and joined the team.

The third important meeting took place at that point. After a number of attempts to awaken enthusiasm among the Russian producers who had expended quite a lot of money in the period when state financing was slack, and who were not fired by romantic love, sunny Kirghizia or a French star, nor the prospect of coming out on the western market, we finally found those who believed in the project and gave it moral and material support. Those were producers Sergei Khovenko and Dmitry Efremov.

Jointly we acted fast and resolute. The departure of the shooting team in early June from “Domodedovo” airport to “Manas” (the airport in Bishkek) was nothing short of a migration of nations. The three-and-a-half tons of shooting equipment that filled up all the space empty of people made the “Altyn Air” (Kirghiz airlines) personnel panic and the not very numerous passengers, who had nothing to do with the film, cursed the filmmakers and that “most important of all arts”.

We couldn’t do otherwise because we had to bring everything from Moscow, down to the last nail, because the Kirghizfilm Studio equipment had practically gone to seed and the only thing we could make use of was the lichtwagen that roared like a bear and became the object of sound engineer Victor Timshin’s hatred, and the mobile crane which swept DoP and his assistant Igor Morin up into the heavens at great risk.

Producers Efremov and Khovenko got all tangled up in the cables but concealed their annoyance. After all, they were starting on a prestigious international project. Producer Tirdatova, who had started it all, gazed at what was going on with a mixed feeling of melancholy, guilt and uncertainty about the future.

At Bishkek “headquarters” the director, cameraman and scriptwriter were bracing themselves for the inevitable: the arrival in “Manas” airport of the Moscow landing party meant the end of their pleasant fantasies, creative thought and the beginning of the stern reality of production.

The young actor, Bolot Tentimyshov, a debutant in cinema, did not speak French (the language in which he had to warble with his beloved), and almost lost his role when he got all mixed up in the text and the feelings during the tests. Luckily, his “supporting group” was firm in their choice of the actor and in the end they proved to be right.

Next day the Moscow group, joined by the Kirghiz actors and technical personnel, moved to the southern shore of Issyk-Kul where the exterior shooting was done in the most picturesque places called Ak-Terek, Zhyrgylchak, Barskoon, Tamga and many others.

By mid-summer the Muscovites were as black as the inhabitants of equatorial Africa and it was difficult to recognize the wellbred, intellectual individuals in the unshaved, bearded and long-haired, or bald, wild-looking men who descended from the mountains a month and a half later. Only the 1st assistant cameraman, Nikolai Podzemelny, did not succumb life in the rough and in his shorts and smart striped shirt looked like a London dandy who had come to hunt lions in the Sahara.

The fourth luckless sheep was bleating in the hands of the merciless Mr. Khovenko. The animal was to become the victim in the traditional game of “flaying-the-sheep”, one of the episodes of the film. Bolot Tentimyshov walked miles and miles in search of trout which was supposed to be so plentiful in the mountain river.

The higher we climbed up the mountains, the less comfortable were the so-called “tourist havens” where we lived and eating only mutton (the very mention of the dishes “beshbarmak”, “lagman” was nauseating towards the end of our Kirghiz sojourn) was a great test of stamina.
Executive producer Andrei Guriev, the first volunteer whom we left overnight in a tent at a height of 3000 meters, was found in the morning completed covered with ice in spite of the sheepskin coat, two quilts and other heating devices with which he was thoughtfully provided.

Director Nurbek Egen mustered all his willpower and looked imperturbable despite the antics of the changeable Issyk-Kul weather that upset all his plans: no sooner did Oleg Kondratyuk and his lighting team place the light as required when suddenly it would start raining or the wind would start blowing or, on the contrary, the sun would start shining when it wasn’t necessary.

Cameraman Dmitry Ermakov grew angry when the herd of wild horses galloped in the wrong direction. The herders merely spread their hands and said it was that particular time of the year when mating was over and many mares were in foal, besides they were accompanied by young foals. So the rest of the group, including producers of both sexes and Ekaterina, the author of the story, bravely formed a live corridor actually forcing the galloping herd to turn towards the camera.

Natacha Regnier who sometimes managed to get in touch with Europe with the help of a mobile phone (sometimes the only means of communicating with the outside world) displayed the highest professionalism and flexibility of character. Thanks to her kind nature and openness she easily joined in the life of the shooting team and adapted herself to the rough camp life just like her heroine Isabelle got adapted to life in a Kirghiz mountain village.

Natacha’s bodyguards never let her out of their sight but actually there was no need for that. News of the filmmakers’ arrival spread along the entire southern shore of lake Issyk-Kul and Natacha immediately became an object of the local folks’ worship while the children gave her little bunches of flowers. The bodyguard Nourgazy, a quiet kind-hearted fellow, had little else to do but become her three-year-old daughter’s nurse.

That summer “Manas” airport witnessed many an interesting happening. First, there was the triumphant arrival of Natacha Regnier and her daughter Lise Tiersen (Lise’s father is Jan Tiersen who wrote the music to “Amelie” and “Good-bye, Lenin!”).

Then there was the merry send-off of the German assistant cameraman who toted the camera back and forth muttering some Russian and Kirghizian words that he had remembered so well.

Another memorable event was the arrival of the French producer Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre who stayed with the group for a whole fortnight and became its good friend. He left with the words: “I have seen a very good shooting team, efficient technical personnel. Possibly, you work a bit slower than we do but the director and the entire group are doing very serious work”.

Then there was the lightning-like appearance of Evgenia Dobrovolskaya who introduced a fresh aspect into the not-so-easy work routine of the tired shooting group.

There was also endless bickering with the customs officials so they would not screen the precious film that we sent in portions to Moscow for development.

“Pygmalion” now boasts a trophy: a green vest with the “Manas” logo which the indefatigable Sergei Khovenko obtained thanks to a complicated rouble-som-dollar exchange with an airport worker.

In September Natacha and Bolot met on top of Montmartre in an apartment with a round balcony that gave out on a beautiful view of Paris. That was where the first and the last scenes were shot. The French side arranged these scenes while the camera and shooting team came from Germany.

The huge chest, handmade especially for the film by Kirghiz craftsmen was brought from Bishkek to Paris via Moscow and Zurich by the director, cameraman, scriptwriter and the general producer. The desperate attempts of the film group to load the elephantine chest on the plane proved highly amusing for the passengers waiting for their planes in “Domodedovo” airport.

All the necessary film equipment was lifted up to the seventh floor of the old building through the window. The joint Russian-Kirghiz-French-German group worked with great speed and coordination.

As for the precious family chest, it remained Paris. The shooting team gave it to Natacha Regnier as a souvenir.

About the makers of the film

NURBEK EGEN
Director

Born in the Osh region of Kirghizia, December 3, 1975. Studied at the Actors Department in the Institute of Arts in Bishkek. Graduated from the Directors Department of the State Institute of Cinematography in 2000 (Vladimir Khotinenko’s workshop). In 1997 he made the short film “A Day Older” which won him a diploma at the “St.Anne” Competition, the Kodak company prize at the 18th festival of the SIC, a prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the “Bronze Frog” at the IFF in Poland, participation in the official programs of the IFFs in Geneva and Cracow. In 1999 he made the short titled “The Closed Space” (special
“My hero is caught in the trap of a white lie. It’s bad if he does not speak out but if he does he will make his dear and near ones sad. But those are only the consequences. The cause is altogether different.

“It is the story of how civilization is counterposed to age-old tradition and of how people today are trying to knit together these two different systems with their lives.

“Like my hero, I was born and grew up in the backwoods, then I moved into the city where I was forced to ignore the traditions and customs of my people and of my parents who brought me up in keeping with these traditions. Sometimes I have to lie in order not to mortify them. After all, for them tradition is objective reality, while for me and my hero it is an obstacle on the way to the life that I have chosen.

“At home, Aidar is one type of person. In a big city, he is quite different. In the picture, this inner discord comes to the surface because the man is placed in circumstances in which he has to make a choice.

“This film is as much an autobiography as it is fiction. It is a genre fantasy and almost a true story. We wanted to make a beautiful, tender and life-asserting film, funny and sad at the same time”.

EKATERINA TIRDATOVA
Scriptwriter
Born in Moscow in 1977. In 1998 graduated from the Scriptwriters Department of the VGIK (A.Gabrilovich and N.Ryazantseva’s workshop). In 2001 finished postgraduate courses at the VGIK, chair of cine-dramaturgy. In 2003 graduated from the Film Directing Department of the Schukin Higher Drama School (A.Vilkin’s workshop). Worked as an actress in the “Obraz” Theater from 1993 to 1995 and from 1995 to 2001 at the Mossoviet Theater. From 2000 has been working as copywriter in the advertising business. At present she is a deputy creative director of ACG advertising groups. She is the author of many commercials and clips and the scripts for the short film “Sanzhyra”, directed by Nurbek Egen, “The Formula of Happiness” serial and the 24-part serial “The Secret Sign”. She’s just finished scripts for TV films “Kamenskaya-5” and “D-r Pirogova” which are now in production.

“What happened in ‘The Wedding Chest’ could have happened to anyone who one fine day decided to break away from his family and his roots, leave the place where he grew up and set out in search of money, fame, career or a lucrative marriage. This happens quite often, always starting the same way but ending differently – sometimes comically, sometimes tragically, sometimes happily and sometimes not very. This story is about what forms the moral foundation of our lives whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or deny it. The story is repeated century in and century out and ends only to be repeated again because it deals with such eternal phenomena as tradition, memory of ancestors and moral choice. The story may be told in different ways. We wanted to narrate it as a tragicomedy, because there is as much of the comical in it as the tragic, and the two are so closely intertwined that sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between them.

“In Kirghizia, where they set great store by tradition, they begin to prepare for a child’s wedding immediately after it is born. Right up to the wedding day, while the child is growing up, the parents collect a dowry for it in a huge chest, so that by the time the wedding day comes round it is full of all kinds of things – ornaments, clothes, money. Symbolically, the young couple start a new life emptying the chest for the needs of their home and their children and then start filling it again for the next generation.

“There are many different worlds on earth. Some are familiar to one and all, others we know only by hearsay, and we do not even suspect the existence of still others. A people who have preserved their traditions are worthy of respect. Thanks to them new generations remember their ancestors and the best of what history has selected. In our film we wish to say that there are no bad or good worlds, righteous or ignoble lives, traditions that are useful or useless. All have the right to existence and we must have the ability to discover the new every day but never forget about the old that others had discovered for us centuries ago”.

DMITRY ERMAKOV
Director of Photography
Born August 15, 1968. Enrolled at VGIK in 1986 and was called up a year later. After he was demobbed he returned to the VGIK (Alexander Galperin’s workshop and later Alexander Knyazhinsky’s workshop). Graduated from the VGIK in 1993 and shot the short film “The Bridegroom” (“St.Anne” prize for
photography). In 1998 he shot the medium-length “Crossroads” (directed by Arko Okk, Estonia). He was one of the cameramen working on the TV serial “My Frontier” together with Leonid Kazakov and Alexander Degtyaryov (director Ivan Solovov, 2003). He made commercials and clips. “The Wedding Chest” is his first full-length feature film. At present he starts working on the next feature “Telemetry” (Russia-Canada).

“Nurbek and I got acquainted when we were students. At the time the Rolan Bykov Center was considering a project which did not happen but we began to phone each other occasionally. We shot two commercials together. And it so happened that we got together in Kirghizia. I have worked with a Yugoslav and Estonian directors and now with a Kirghiz. When I read the script I saw the future film a bit differently. The Issyk-Kul is a great place with its own customs and culture. That’s what we came here for. Natacha Regnier is a superb actress. All in all, we’ve got really good material to work on.”

ALEXEI AIGUI
Composer
Composer and violinist, soloist of the “4’33” group that he organized in 1994. He works on “hybrid projects” that combine music with other arts like cinema and painting. In 2000 Aigui’s group played his music to the silent film “Happiness” made by Alexander Medvedkin in Gewandhaus hall in Leipzig. Moreover, he did the sound track for Boris Barnet’s silent film “The House on Trubahaya”, recorded the music for Fritz Lang’s “Metropolis” and made a number of other recordings for the “Silent Films – Music that Speaks” cycle. He was awarded the Golden Ram, the national prize of film critics and film press for his music to Valery Todorovsky’s “Land of the Deaf” and nominated for the “Nika” award. He also wrote the music to the films “Retro for Three”, “Love”, “My Stepbrother Frankenstein”, “Ragin” and the serial “Kamenskaya”.

MUSA ABDIEV
Art Director
Born February 23, 1934. Graduated from Frunze Art School. Honoured Art Worker of the Kirghiz SSR. Has been working at Kirghizfilm Studio since 1959 as costume designer, assistant to set decorator and production designer. Worked on A.Konchalovsky’s film “The First Teacher”; Tolomuch Okeyev’s “Offspring of the Snow Leopard” (awarded the Silver Bear at the West Berlin IFF, and a medal of the Exhibition of Economic Achievements for his sketches for the film) and several pictures by Gennady Bazarov. He was the production designer for “Genghiz Khan” (USA-Italy), “Jambyl” (Kazakhstan) and others.

“The director, designer and DoP determine what the film is to be like beforehand when they get the written screenplay. Then they have a more or less definite idea of how they want to make the film. We had long discussions with Nurbek Egen and Dima Ermakov about what the film should be like. After that I sat down to my sketches. Everything was quite clear from the screenplay while the minor nuances are the business of the director and the cameraman. I believed that a classical interpretation would be most appropriate in our case. As an artist I am a realist - that is how I see things. But we were a team and I was only part of it. We work together”.

NATACHA REGNIER
Isabelle
Natacha, a Belgian by birth, lives and works in Paris. She was born April 11, 1972 in Berlin. Her father is in show business and her mother is a psychologist. She grew up in Brussels where she finished school and graduated from the “Uccle” Academy of Dramatic Art and the “l’Equilibre” Theater Studio. After that she moved to Paris where she worked on television. She made her film debut in the short film “Girl on a Motorcycle” (1993). She got her first big role in Pascal Bonitzer’s “Encore”. Her performance as Maria in Erick Zonka’s “La vie rêvée des anges” (1998) won her a prize at the Cannes festival, the top national Caesar prize and the European Film Academy Awards. In 1999 Natacha played in Francois Ozone’s “Criminal Lovers”. Among her other films are: “Tout va bien, on s’en va” by Claude Mourieras, “La fille de son pere” by Jacques Deschamps, “How I Killed My Father” by Anne Fontaine, “Vert paradis” by Emmanuel Bourdieu, “Ne fais pas ca!” by Luc Bondi, “Demain on demenage” by Chantal Akerman, “The Bridge of Arts” by Eugene Green. Natacha’s daughter, Lise, is four years old.

“In Cannes I told journalists from all over the world that if I liked a director and wanted to act in his film, I would follow him to the end of the world and it didn’t matter what part of the world the film was going to be shot. For me the director is of major importance. When I met Nurbek in Paris and read Katya’s screenplay I fell in love with both of them immediately. For me meeting Nurbek was a very important event. I felt that he was
a very serious and talented director and that he possessed excellent material. As for going to Issyk-Kul, it was a real adventure and I was not mistaken.

“I feel a kindred spirit in Isabelle. I myself seem self-contained and sometimes I have to be alone. But my friends and relatives know the other side of my nature, that I am cheerful, optimistic and sociable like Isabelle. I was quite different in “The Imaginative Life of Angels” and “Criminal Lovers”. Nurbek gives me the opportunity to express the optimistic side of my character and I am grateful to him for that.

“The cast is wonderful and it is very pleasant and interesting for me to work with all of them, especially with Bolot. He is a theater actor, perhaps he lacks experience of working before a camera, but he is very talented and catches on very fast. Nurbek has faith in the people working on the set. Everybody is equal and can make his suggestions. His method of communicating with the group may be described as “a steel fist in a kid glove”. He is in full control of the situation on the set and understands professional and purely human relations. Something unforeseen always happens during shooting and his reaction is quick and always right.

“As for the conflict in the film, the situation in my opinion is quite realistic and understandable to one and all. Many sons and daughters leave their homes when they grow up either to get an education or a job. They get immersed in another culture and come back home as strangers. Grown-up children don’t want to quarrel with their parents or shirk traditions, however they want to remain true to themselves”.

BOLOT TENTIMYSHOV

Aidar

Born June 22, 1971 in the Kant region of Kirghizia. In 1988 entered the Leningrad State Institute of Theater and Cinema (LSITC), (Yuri Mushkatín’s and Dmitry Astrakhan’s workshop). Served in the Soviet army from 1990 to 1992. Worked at the theater in Tomsk-7 and in the People’s Theater in Krassnkamensk where he played in “Pygmalion” after the play by B.Shaw and “The Mechanical Nightingale” after “The Nightingale” by H.C.Andersen. After service in the army he started to work in the Drama Theater in Bishkek. Among the plays he participated in were “The Red Apple” by C.Aitmatov (Rain); “The Crane’s Feathers” after Junju Kinoshita (Yohio); “Kut Kagan” after Shakespeare’s “King Lear” (the Duke of Albany); “The Temptation of St.Anthony” after P.Merimee (Anthony). Since 1997 he has been working in the Tunguch Theater in Bishkek. Among his roles are: the Man in “The White Ship” after Aitmatov; the Mankurt in “Taiaman” after Aitmatov’s “Stormy Station”; the Shadow in “The Lament of the Alai Queen” by Sultan Rayev. Played in a short titled “Mousie” directed by Marat Sarulu. The role of Aidar in “The Wedding Chest” is his feature debut.

“We’re not spoiled by too many offers of film roles, so when the rumour spread of a new film project, an international one besides, the actors’ community was all agog. I came for the screen test and met the director. When they told me that I was the candidate for the main role I was a bit worried because I was not in my best form. The director asked me to get rid of excess weight and look sharp. He gave me the script to read. The subject was interesting, the plot involved, I myself am not a strong adherent of traditions and put more emphasis on inner discord, on human relations.

“Aidar found a woman with whom he wants to spend the rest of his life. That is the most important thing. His father is simply a stubborn old man who doesn’t want to lose his son. He wants Aidar to be near him, not somewhere in France but at home because he has pinned all his hopes on him. The conflict in the film is sooner a family affair rather than a conflict between the past and the present.

“French, the language that Aidar uses when he speaks to Isabelle is not my native one. I understand that the cinema is most ingenious and there are lots of ways of coping with difficulties, you can paste things together, you can edit and re-edit, but since I’m a theater actor I have to do everything myself and when the text holds me tongue-tied it’s very difficult to act. On the other hand, it was really very difficult only the first few days, gradually it grew easier and easier.

“Natacha Regnier is a professional. She is a wonderful person and a wonderful actress. Natacha has more experience than I and working with her was a serious school. We did not get adapted immediately. Things were rather strained at the beginning and we had to overcome that, but towards the middle of the shooting we had the feeling we had known each other for two years.

“There is more spontaneity in the cinema than in the theater where you study a role to automatism and “switch on” your physical memory, but in front of the camera things happen simultaneously with your acting. And it is this feeling of expectation of what’s going to happen that intrigues me. I know the text, I know the script but I have no idea how it will all turn out, what implications and what psychological interpretation the text will take on. Sometimes it scares me and I sit down and close my eyes and stop my ears. I go on the set as though I’m made of plastilene that can be moulded so that the viewer will get the feeling that what’s going on is really happening now.

TYNARA ABDRAZAeva
The Mother

Born in the countryside in the family of a shepherd. After finishing school she enrolled at the drama studio under the Academic National Theater of Bishkek and after that at the Ostrovsky Drama and Art Institute in Tashkent. After graduating from the institute she has been working at the Bishkek Academic Theater. At 29 she became Honoured Actress of the Republic. Her first role in the theater was in “Masyrbek Gets Married” (1979) written by Toktogul Oktogulov. Among her other theater roles was that of Aichurek in “The Generous Manas”, Dunyasha in “The Cherry Orchard” and others. She played in the films “A Shot in the Steppe” directed by Kadyrchan Kadraliyev (1990), in Amir Karakulov’s “The Legend of the Mankurt” (after “The Stormy Station”), Marat Sarulu’s “The Great Silk Way” and others.

“I was born in a village, often went with my father and mother to different towns and from childhood I have seen many plays in Kirghiz, Uzbek and Kazakh theaters. My father had an excellent knowledge of the history of the Kirghiz people and Mother too. She could also sing very well and when we sat in a tent in the mountains during the rain they would tell me different episodes from the narrative poem “Manas”. That is where my love of art stems from.

“The third time I’m playing a mother in films, though each time they are different. The first role was that of a mother with many children, the wife of a shepherd in “A Shot in the Steppe”. It was about the drought when sheep died for want of water, she cries but she has to put up a brave front. The woman is always responsible for the family, the children. In “The Wedding Chest” the son brings a stranger into their home and the mother finds herself in a difficult situation. How was she to act? I have many scenes with Natacha Regnier. For me it was not the first time I have worked in an international production. When the Americans were making “Genghiz Khan” the cast and shooting team were also international. For us, actors, that is useful experience. When I met Natacha I had the feeling that we had been working together for a long time. She is simple and kind.

“Nurbek is a very educated person and tactful besides. During rehearsals he knows how to discuss the most delicate aspects of an actor’s role and after that he gives him freedom of action. But you have to understand him, guess what he has in mind because not everything can be expressed in words. I believe in the success of our film. The Muscovites, from producers to workers, and ourselves have put so much into it. Actors included, of course”.

ASAN AMANOV

The postman Yusup

Born in 1955 in the village of Kayra of the Kulmen region. Graduated from the Schepkin Drama School (Yuri Solomin’s workshop) in 1979. Worked at the National Regional Drama Theater in Osh from 1979 to 2001. His first role on the stage was Famusov in “Woe from Wit”. Since then he has played scores of classical and modern roles. After he left the theater he took up farming. Yusup in “The Wedding Chest” is his first role in films.

“Yusup is a complex character. He is a loner. He doesn’t trust anyone. He is not malicious and is very educated. Envy is not the reason for his dislike of Aidar. The reason is his protest against his violation of the traditions of their ancestors which Yusup holds sacred. He cannot stand the situation and believes he is right. He warns Aidar to think well, but in the end his hard feelings overwhelm him and he attempts to shoot Aidar.

“I feel quite sure of myself with Nurbek, he explains many things and does so calmly without hysterics. It’s nice to work with him”.

MARAT ZHANTELIEV

Osonbai

Born in a doctor’s family in 1961 in Narym, the highest mountain region in Kirghizia. In 1978 he enrolled at the VGIK (Alexei Batalov’s workshop). Soon after his graduation in 1982 he played in Tolomush Okeyev’s film “Offspring of the Snow Leopard”. Then he appeared in the film “The First”, Irina Poplavsky’s “The Enchanted Wanderer” and others. He is now working at the Bishkek Youth Theater. He played in the stage productions of “The Mankurt” after Aitmatov, “Dear Yelena Sergeyevna” and others. He performs solo concerts on the variety stage. He is married and has three children. His wife is a philologist.

“After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and our film studio I joined the variety show business. I just couldn’t sit idle at home, I had to work. Today the public knows me more as a singer than anything else. Well, it can’t be helped, one has to make a living. Of the fifteen students who studied together with me at the VGIK I am the only one engaged in artistic activity, the rest have either gone into business or live as dependents on husbands or wives.
“I was preparing for a concert when I was invited for screen tests for ‘The Wedding Chest’. I was told that the director was a young Kirghiz and a graduate of VGIK, and for me VGIK is sacred. As a result I didn’t go through the screen tests, they just took me on. It turned out that Nurbek knew about me. In the beginning, he offered me the part of the driver, but then decided I would be Osonbai. I thought that playing a drunkard would be no problem, but the role turned out to be more meaningful than I imagined. Natacha Regnier and I had to play a big scene. She spoke French while I spoke Kirghiz. We didn’t understand each other, what’s more there was an axe between us. I won’t deny I had a little drink. Just a little one does no harm and it helped me to take off the strain. I had the feeling that I was talking French too.

“I play both comic and tragic roles, but comic roles come easier, though it seems it’s easier to make people cry than laugh. It’s very difficult to make a person laugh. I must say I keep getting unusual parts all the time starting from “The Offspring of the Snow Leopard” directed by Tolomush Okeyev where I played the role of a loony “.

MELIS SHARSHENBAEV
The Father

Born in 1944 in a village near Bishkek. Graduated from a financial technical college and worked as economist at a collective farm. In 1969 he graduated from the Moscow Institute of Culture and took a two-year trainee course in the LSITC in Ivan Agamerzyan’s workshop. From 1969 to 1993 he worked at the Ministry of Culture, and was the first deputy Minister of Culture from 1988 to 1991. From 1991 to 1993 he was chief of the department of health, education, tourism and sport in the Kirghiz government and deputy chief of the President’s office. In 1985 he started teaching film direction at the Institute of Art in Bishkek and later – acting. Since 1993 he is a professor at the Kirghiz-Turkish University in Bishkek. He is the producer of mass performances as well. The role of the father in “The Wedding Chest” is his acting debut.

“Though I graduated from the Moscow Institute of Culture in 1969 I never had the opportunity of engaging in creativity. My road to creativity was constantly blocked by office and administrative work. It’s true I always received good jobs that provided a personal chauffeur and a private office and that wasn’t easy to resist. Today I wouldn’t have accepted such offers but at that time they were very tempting. However, those jobs were also interesting in their way. Whenever I had the opportunity of accomplishing something worthwhile I had a feeling of satisfaction. Since 1993 I’m engaged solely in teaching. There was a time when I consulted Nurbek. It’s not easy to discern talent in present day youth, but I felt there was something in him even then. I thought he had forgotten me when suddenly I discovered that he remembered and invited me to take part in the film. It was very nice. Today when I see how well he works I recall the words of Aristotle (if I remember right) who said that we need pupils in order to learn from them later on. The fellow is very bright and I like him. As for me, I feel I’m not doing the role justice. The absence of acting experience and work before the camera is obvious. After all, it’s my first acting experience.

“I have produced and continue to produce the most prestigious mass performances in our republic. I produced the Manas millennium celebrations, the decade, the eleven and twelve years of independence celebrations. It’s more of a problem of organization rather than creative work. So I switched over to acting and I find it very interesting. It’s been a long time since I’ve been in a truly creative atmosphere. I have a feeling that we’re on the threshold of a big success.

“When I read the screenplay I did not accept everything, but there was room for creative fantasy and I see now that I was not mistaken. It seems to me that Aidar’s father, whose role I am playing, is really on his son’s side in his heart, but in his mind he is against him. If he does not see all the changes going on around him, he is a narrow-minded man. One has to be more tolerant. The father feels his guilt. It seems to me that this guilt should show in his eyes all the time. However, his stubbornness stands in his way, he cannot overcome himself. He loves his wife and cherishes her. He decides he had better keep silence because Mother would not be able to endure it”.

ABSAMAT UULU NURSEIT
Timur

Born in 1995 and is now a 3-grade student in a Bishkek school. He is the youngest in the family. His elder brother is 26 and his elder sister is 23. His father is a driver and his mother is a housewife. It’s his first time in films.

“Some people came to our school and picked me. I like Natacha, I mean Isabelle. I cried when she went away, in the film and in real life. If they offer me a film role again, I’ll accept. It’s wonderful. Isabelle is as
pretty as the girl in the first grade whom I love. Her name is Janetta. My favorite pictures are “The Lion King” and “Just You Wait!”. When I grow up I’ll be a flyer or an actor”.

ZHENISHBEK SMANOV

Azamat

Born May 9, 1982 in the village of Shunkul, Narym region, Kushkur district, Kirghizia. Father – businessman, mother – housewife. He is the second of four children. In 1998 he enrolled at the Drama Institute in Bishkek and graduated in 2002. Since 2002 he has been working in the National Academic Drama Theater in Bishkek. He played in the stage production of “Jubilee” after Gogol (Shipuchin), played in the film “Ailyuk Matul” and in the serial “Oh, What a Life!”. Married to actress Zinaida Sheraliyeva.

“The role of Azamat in “The Wedding Chest” directed by Nurbek Egen is the first international project that I’m participating in. An assistant responsible for picking the actors came to our theater and invited me for the casting. I was tried for the role of Azamat and got it. The role is compatible with my own character – easygoing, open and unconstrained.”

NAZIRA OZORALIEVA

Zuura

Born in 1986 in Barskaun in the south of Kirghizia. Her mother is a teacher and her father is a builder. She has four sisters and one brother and is a secondary school graduate.

“I was about to graduate when they came from the studio and said I would play in a film. I didn’t understand, it was so sudden. Father wasn’t home, he had gone to Bishkek. Mother said alright I could go ahead. Well, I went – and stayed. I enjoy acting. Only father and mother are strict and don’t want me to devote myself to the movies.

“Zuura, the girl I am playing, is very much like me. It seems to me that if a French girl really came to visit us, I would behave exactly the same way. I would imitate her and put on all kinds of baubles. It was very easy with Natacha. I liked her at first sight. We understand each other even though we don’t speak one language. It’s pleasant to be with her. She even promised she would write something for remembrance in my notebook.

“My girlfriends are envious that I’m acting in a film. ‘Well’, they say, ‘we thought right away that they would take you’. I always take part in all kinds of competitions, in the Merry Wits Club, for instance, and have traveled about a bit. Once when I was taking part in the Merry Wits Club performance they showed it on TV. That was the first time I saw myself on the screen.

“I would like to become a costume designer. I love to draw, make all kinds of hair-does, design clothes, I make my own costumes. I like all that. On the set I watch how the costume designers, make-up artists and decorators work.”

MARAT KOZUKEYEV

Ermek

Born September 8, 1970 in Bishkek in an actors’ family. Studied at the LSITC (Yuri Mushkatin’s and Dmitry Astrakhank’s workshop). After graduation returned to Bishkek and worked at the Youth Theater (1991-1992). Since 1994 he has been acting in the National Drama Theater in Bishkek (“Zoika’s Apartment” after Mikhail Bulgakov, “Kut Kagan” after “King Lear”) and others. From 2002 he has been working as stage director (“Khodja Nasreddin”). As for work in films, he played in “The Mother’s Field” after Chinghiz Aitmatov and “Genghiz Khan” (USA).

“The appearance of Ermek, Aidar’s vivacious elder brother, had to be slightly extravagant and theatrical. We decided that when he suddenly appears on the hill in front of his parent’s home he should be singing “O Sole Mio” in Kirghiz. I think the scene is quite amusing. Working in the film was very interesting. I liked the script the minute I read it. I think it should be a good picture.”

EVGENIA TIRDATOVA

Producer

Producer and film critic. Member of the Board of the Filmmakers’ Union of Russia, the Film Critics Guild board, the VGIK State Examination Board, the European Film Academy and the “Nika” National Academy and is vice president of the “Kinoglaz” Com. Born in Moscow. Graduated from the History-Theory-
Composer’s department of the Gnessins Institute of Music and the Cinema History Department of the VGIK in 1985. Worked at State Television and Radio, in the magazine “Soviet Screen”, was the chief co-editor of the “Kino-Glaz” magazine and editor-in-chief of the “Audio Video Business” magazine. Was the program director of the “St.Anne” competition and other festivals. Since 1995 she is a selector at the Moscow International Film Festival. She is the author of numerous articles and books on Russian and foreign cinema. Participated in the work of juries and the FIPRESSI juries at many international film festivals including Cannes, Berlin and Venice. She was the co-author of the script to the documentary film “Your Leaving Object Leonid Obolensky” (Grand Prix of the IFF in Nyon, Switzerland, 1991) and the author of the script of the documentary film “Farewell, Cannes” (2003). She is the holder of the Vera Kholodnaya award, the “Golden Hat” prize of the Russian Film Producers Association and the “Young Artists Award” (USA). As producer she released the short film “Sanzhya” (directed by Nurbek Egen, 2001), and is the co-producer of “The Kite” (directed by Alexei Muradow) which was awarded more than ten prizes at international film festivals, and “Shantytown Blues” (directed by Svetlana Slasenko). “The Wedding Chest” is her first international co-production. At present she is working on the project ‘Telemetry’ (Russia-Canada).

“By profession I’m a film critic, I love what I’m doing and I have no intention of giving it up. But I’m indefatigable by nature and I want something new to do all the time. At the beginning of perestroika Pyotr Cherniaev, my colleague, and I organised the “Soviet Screen” youth editorial board which became the jumping off ground for many leading present day film critics. After that we started to issue the first Russian magazine dealing with film business titled “Kino-Glaz (Cine-Eye)”. There were many more projects after that. “I’m probably the wrong kind of producer. I don’t think enough about doing business and work only on projects that really interest me. What I really enjoy doing is discovering new names and working with young directors and script writers.

“I took up producing because I like lively work, I wanted to get the feel of the cinema with my own hands. I like to organize, to get people together and do something interesting together. I would say I am energetic, have great capacity for work, my enthusiasm is easily aroused and it seems to me I am capable of arousing enthusiasm in others and convincing them. Once I’ve started something I go through with it no matter what it may cost me.

“I think that our producers are making a mistake when they look only to the West and ignore the East. I understand that in the West they hope to raise money for their projects. It is also obvious that in order to work with film studios in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) they themselves must stand firmly on their feet and act as financial support. But in our case it was precisely the East that helped us arouse interest in the West. On the other hand, the film directors of the CIS turn for financing to the French, Germans and Japanese but not to Russians. Then the picture made by a Georgian or a Kazakh director with little home financing goes West.

“Our variant was profitable both for the Kirghiz and the Russians. “The Wedding Chest” based on Kirghiz material was shot in Kirghizia in French and Kirghiz with a Kirghiz director and mostly local actors. The Russian companies “Kinoglaz” and “Pygmalion” are the chief producers and owners of exclusive rights in Russia and the CIS and a lion’s share of world rights. The film will not “go West”, but the West will provide its release on the world market.

“I won’t conceal the fact that I was calculating enough though I was really fascinated with the idea, the material and the script and wanted to work with the director with whom I was working. But I understood perfectly well that in order to find foreign producers I had to consider the demands of the international market which I know well enough thanks to my many years of festival activity and connections with producers and distributors in the West. Interest in the East is as strong as ever in the West and interest in pictures from the Asian republics of the CIS is high”.

SERGEI KHOVENKO
Producer
Graduated from the film directing department of the VGIK specializing in documentary films and television. He is a member of the Filmmakers Union of the Russian Federation and is the author and director of more than ten documentary projects. Since 1992 he is the General Director and producer of the “Pygmalion” film company. As director and producer he has shot more than thirty commercials, many corporate films and social programs. He participated in making widely known feature films such as “The Ark”, “The Mixer”, “Carmen” and “Boomer”.

DMITRY EFREMOV
Producer
Graduated from the mechanics and mathematics department of Moscow State University and the Academy of Finance under the government of the RF. He has been working as financial director of the “Pygmalion” film company since 2000. He took part in the production of the feature films “The Ark”, “The Mixer”, “Carmen” and “Boomer” in the capacity of financial director. Since 2003 he is the general director of “L&P Production Factory” and the producer of the film “The Seventh Day”.

ANTOINE DE CLERMONT-TONNERRE
Producer
Born June 18, 1941 in Lyon, France. Studied at the Higher School for Government Personnel and was in government service for fifteen years. He worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was chief of the government TV channel. He worked with producer Alexander Mnushkin in “Aryan” where the two of them released Giuseppe Tornatore’s “Cinema Paradiso”, Federico Fellini’s “Ginger and Fred” and Ettore Scola’s “Family”. At the end of 1991 he set up his own company “MACT Productions” together with his wife Martin. Starting from 1992 he produced about forty pictures as producer and in co-production with Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, Serbia and Bulgaria. Among the best-known are Walter Salles’s “Central Station”, Goran Paskalevic’s “A Powder Keg”, “Somewhere Else in America” and “How Harry Became a Tree”. Also Jakub Kolski’s “Pornography”. The films received many awards at the most important world festivals. The latest picture was “Bridge of Arts” with Natacha Regnier. He is co-producer of Alexander Sokurov’s “The Sun”.

“I liked the script immediately. I found the story touching. When I received the script, some incomprehensible intuition made me put everything aside, including breakfast, and read it immediately. I cried and laughed.

“It reads easily and is full of charm, just the kind of story that I like. It reminded me of “Central Station” which also contains a lot of emotions, is funny and touching and that’s what I consider most important. It also has children, like “Central Station”. The main attraction for me is not that a French actress is playing the leading lady. Certainly I’m happy that that is so, but the most important thing is the story itself and, moreover, the pleasure of shooting in Kirghizia. We made a film in China ten years ago – that was a wonderful experience.

“Since the day I became an independent producer I always present at the shooting of a film. Some problems can be ironed out only in the presence of the producer. More than that, it is a great pleasure to see your film in the making, especially when the shooting is done in such a picturesque spot like Kirghizia.

“I am usually very much involved in the editing process. I never force my opinion on the director, after all, we are not in Hollywood but in Europe where the director is the main figure as before. Yet if he is happy to see me I am always there at the editing. I think that for the producer editing is the most important and most interesting part in the creation of a film. Shooting is the director’s job. I simply help him do everything possible as well as possible. But in any case the film is his interpretation, he makes the decisions. During editing there arise a lot of variants which need to be discussed. Editing is always a quest.

“ ‘The Family Chest’ team is working beautifully. Possibly, in France things are more regimented, money decides everything out there. We are forced to work very fast in order to meet time limits. Today, they have learned to count money in Russia too, nevertheless the director has time to think. It’s true that sometimes in France they work slowly. That depends on the director, the second director, the presence of the producer and many other things. On the whole, it seems to me that the work is well coordinated and everybody is working seriously and with a high degree of professionalism”.

CHRISTOPH THOKE
AXEL MOEBIUS
Producers
Owners of the independent German production company “Thoke+Moebius Film” which they founded three years ago. The producers are very active and successful on the co-productions market and take a particular interest in exotic countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, South Africa and the former Yugoslavia. Among the best-known films they have produced are “29 Palms” by Bruno Dumont which was in the Venice competition and “The Tropical Malady” which received the Special Prize of the jury in Cannes-2004.

PYOTR CHERNIAEV
Producer
Producer and film critic. Member of the Filmmakers Union of Russia and board member of the Film Historians and Film Critics Guild. President of the “Kinoglaz” company and deputy editor-in-chief of the newspaper “FU News”. Graduated from the cinema history department of the VGIK in 1978. Worked in the magazine “Soviet Screen” and was the publisher and chief co-editor of “Cine-Eye” and director of the “Audio
Video Business” magazine. From 1988 to 1994 he was the author and host of the popular TV program “Sunday Movie Hall” on Channel One. Worked as editor and consultant on a number of feature films and is the author of numerous articles in major publications. Author of the script (together with E. Tirdatova) of “Your Leaving Object Leonid Obolensky” (Grand Prix in Nyon, 1991), organizer of international festivals and seminars. Awarded the “Golden Hat” for his contribution to Russian film business. Producer of the short film “Sanzhyra” (directed by Nurbek Egen) and co-producer of the 24-part serial “The Secret Sign”.

Production companies

KINOGLAZ

The independent company “Kinoglaz” (Moscow, Russia) was set up in 1992. President Pyotr Cherniaev, vice president Evgenia Tirdatova. From 1992 to 1996 the company published “Kinoglaz”, first Russian magazine dealing with film business in Russian and English. Since 1997 the company has been releasing festival catalogues, information, engaging in consultations, arrangement of festivals, symposia and promoting Russian films on the Russian and international markets. Since 2002 the company has taken up film production. It has produced the short film “Sanzhyra” (directed by Nurbek Egen) which participated in more than 40 international film festivals (Berlin, Montreal and others) and received twelve prizes; the full-length “The Kite” (directed by Alexei Muradov) in co-production with the “M2F” company which also took part in about 40 IFF’s starting with Venice, Toronto, Rotterdam, Sundance, London, Thessaloniki and others and won more than ten national and international prizes and also a nomination for the European Film Academy Award. “Kinoglaz” is the co-producer of the 24-part TV serial “The Secret Sign”. “The Wedding Chest” is the first international co-production of “Kinoglaz”. At present the company is involved in the production of the Russian-Canadian co-production “Telemetry”.

PYGMALION (incorporated in L&P PRODUCTION FACTORY)

“Pygmalion” (Moscow, Russia) was founded in 1992 and became widely known in the Russian and international film market. In 2003 it merged with the “Lean TV” television company forming a new company named “L&P Production Factory”. The company is a factory producing audio-video goods by using its own production capacities: the pavilion, four editing rooms, TV and film cameras, lighting equipment. Among the films it has produced are: “Boomer”, “The Arch”, “Odyssey 1989”, “The Mixer”, “Carmen”, the serials “Soldiers”, “Detective With a Bad Character”, “Pure Springs”, “Captain Truth”, “Mysteries of Swan Lake”, and the documentary films and serials: “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is Authorized to State…”, “An Illustrated History of the Russian State” and many others.

MACT PRODUCTIONS

An independent production company (Paris, France), set up by producer Antoine de Clermont-Tonnere in late 1991. Since then it has produced independently and in co-production with Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, Serbia and Bulgaria, more than forty films of which the best-known are “Central Station” by the Brazilian Walter Sallis (Grand Prix of the Berlin IFF, Oscar), “A Powder Keg” (FIPRESCI prize, Venice), “Somewhere Else in America” and “How Harry Became a Tree” directed by the Serbian Goran Paskalevic, “Pornography” by Jacob Kolski (Cannes festival competition). Its latest film was “Bridge of Arts” with Natasha Regnier directed by Eugene Green and premiered in Montreal. In the opinion of the French press which spoke highly of the picture, it was Natasha Renier’s “second birth”. MACT is the co-producer of Alexander Sokurov’s “The Sun”.

THOKE + MOEBIUS FILM

An independent production company founded by Christoph Thoke and Axel Moebius. Among the pictures produced by the company in co-production with different countries are “La Danse du vent” directed by Taieb Louhichi (Cairo IFF competition, official program in Rotterdam), “Twenty nine Palms” directed by Bruno Dumont, winner of the Cannes IFF award (competition in Venice, Toronto, Thessaloniki), “The Red Colored Grey Truck” by the Serbian director Srdjan Koljevic, children’s comics “The Black Diamont” by Belgian director Rudi van den Bossche, “The Buffalo Boy” directed by Minh Nguyen-Vo of Vietnam, “Tropical Malady” by Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Special Prize of the jury at the Cannes IFF-2004).

SANZHYRA

An independent production company based in Bishkek, Kirghizia, set up by Nurbek Egen in 2003 especially for the production of the film “The Wedding Chest”.

Production companies