

Why Don't You Just Die

Kirill Sokolov

2018

It may surprise viewers to learn that *Why Don't You Just Die* is Kirill Sokolov's debut film. A physicist, and self-professed film geek, Sokolov's debut feature is layered with references to spaghetti westerns and Quentin Tarantino. His inspirations interestingly though, reach further east as well, toward the rich, evocative film language developed in east Asia. The influence comes specifically in the form of dynamic camera movement and deep attention to colour, characteristics displayed by filmmakers such as Wong Kar-Wai and Park Chan-wook. In fact, colour is one of the most striking elements of *Why Don't You Just Die*. Based on a colour scheme of red and green, this palette is vibrant, striking and communicates the film's subtext. This occurs from the offset, from the vestiges of Soviet design in the red and green tiles of Andrei's bathroom, and continues throughout the film. The film's interiors use this palette inventively, and in a way that never becomes visually boring or prescriptive. Viktor Zudin and costume designer Natalia Belousova are vital in the creation of this mise-en-scene. Peter Debruge for *Variety* rightfully points to Sokolov borrowing from Jean-Pierre Jeunet's classic *Amélie* (2001) for the 'bold, over-art directed look.' Beyond this, the green and red serve a wonderful motif, both referential to Soviet design and to modern filmmakers. Sokolov with deep attention to detail, makes everything that was green become red with violence. As Debruge points out, 'After the power-drill scene, for example, audiences can hardly tell that Andrei's shirt was once a pale lima-bean green. He looks like Tim Roth at the end of "Reservoir Dogs", in desperate need of a dry cleaner. Or a tourniquet.'

It is vital to consider, in a film so rife with violence, a film that is so deliberately cartoonish in its excess, what point is being made? This is perhaps hard to uncover in a film that is so referential to film, but certainly, when one looks beyond the grotesque exterior, it reveals a dialectic on capitalistic excess and greed. The dog-eat-dog nature of a corrupt society is exposed and so is a nihilistic rumination on human nature. Matvei, the first character we see, clad in a Batman hoodie and holding a hammer, is seeking revenge on the behalf of Olya (his girlfriend and Mia Wallace lookalike). Her assertion is that her father sexually abused her as a child, and Matvei's natural reaction is to come armed with a hammer to seek revenge for this alleged crime. Whilst the story casts an aspersion on whether Olya's allegation is true, (Andrei after the brutal drill

scene seems genuinely surprised at Matvei's assumption), Sokolov said that it is a theme based on lived experience. In an interview with Stefan Pape for *Hot Corn* he states the idea, 'came from real life. It's a weird situation, but a lot of my female friends started to tell crazy stories of how they'd been abused in their childhood by their relatives and when you hear this kind of thing from people who are close to you, of course really specific things come into your mind.'

Whilst *Why Don't You Just Die* remains deliberately funny, employing a cartoonish use of blood and gore, there is still a very real and dominant nihilism that underpins it. Whether or not Andrei did abuse Olya is unclear, however, her father's brutality in other ways, is quickly revealed. In a series of flashbacks we learn of his betrayal of a close friend, a betrayal that is two-fold as it also allows a brutal murderer to walk free. Inside this cartoonish spectacle of violence, there lies a plaintive perspective on corruption and human nature. Similarly, Matvei was sent by Olya into the apartment on potentially false charges; and even if these charges weren't false, Olya happily denies knowing him. There is little loyalty in Sokolov's garish world, and when it does exist, it is quickly proven to be misplaced.

Beyond the violence, which understandably is not for everyone, one has to applaud Sokolov for his tight and slick plot lines. As everything erupts into a final blood bath, the tightly woven narrative unfurls perfectly. It is rare to watch a film that is a perfect whole from a narrative perspective, and it is equally rare to see a debut that is so mature stylistically. In an unusual paradox, the cartoonishness actually obscures a smart and witty plot; as opposed to apologising for the lack of one, which is far more common.

There is a brand of Russian contemporary film emerging currently, which is referential to other filmic traditions, whilst being removed from the same structures that fund them. The result is intelligent, bold and unexpected. What *Why Don't You Just Die* is indicative of, is a swiftly emerging tradition which transplants different filmic languages onto a Russian cultural experience. It is one which might be revelatory, and certainly is bloody!