Eisenstein, Sergey Mikhaylovich (1898-1948)

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-Soviet motion-picture director and theorist who experimented with the intellectual and expressive possibilities of editing to create a revolutionary new form of cinema.

-Eisenstein was born in Riga, Latvia, into a middle-class Jewish family.

-Intending to enter the professions of his father, a prominent architect and civil engineer, he enrolled in the Institute of Civil Engineering in Saint Petersburg in 1915.

-During the Russian Revolution of 1917, Eisenstein joined the revolutionary forces, putting his engineering talents to use building bridges.

-While in military service, he became attracted to the theater.

-He also helped decorate propaganda trains leaving for the front and produced impromptu skits for his comrades in the revolution.

-Demobilized in 1920, Eisenstein enrolled in Moscow's Proletkult (short for "proletarian culture") Central Workers' Theatre, one of many experimental arts institutions supported by the Communist government to educate and indoctrinate the Russian people in the events and causes of the revolution.

-After an apprenticeship as a set designer at the Proletkult, Eisenstein enrolled in the School for Stage Direction under Vsevolod Meyerhold.

-This innovative producer advocated radical methods of acting and staging in which stylized movement and speech, rather than naturalistic acting, would convey emotion.

-Under Meyerhold's tutelage, Eisenstein developed what he called a "montage of attractions," a bold theory of staging that addressed the possibility of linking a series of images to evoke predetermined emotional responses from the spectator.

-Eisenstein's first films, Stachka (Strike, 1925) and Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin, 1925), established his reputation as a filmmaker of international stature.

-His films departed from commercial movie practices in several ways: First, his films are didactic; they teach a lesson, rather than just entertain. For example, Strike and Potemkin deal with historical situations that
dramatize the oppression of workers by the ruling class under the tsars. **Second**, his characters are types: **representatives of different social classes**, instead of well-rounded individuals who are psychologically motivated. The "**hero**" of Eisenstein's first two films is the **collective masses**. **Third**, he **uses editing to juxtapose apparently unrelated images, to create rapid and dynamic shifts in rhythm, and to compress and expand physical action rather than function simply as a storytelling device.**

The best example of these startling effects is contained in the famous "**Odessa steps**" montage sequence of Potemkin, a segment of film that greatly influenced the language of cinema. Using a long flight of steps as his setting, he intercut close-ups of guns and faces with scenes of fleeing civilians and attacking soldiers to depict the slaughter of the populace by the tsar's troops and the Cossacks during the revolution of 1905.

- Eisenstein made two more silent films: **Oktyabr (October, 1928; also known as Ten Days that Shook the World)** and **Staroe i novoe (Old and New, 1929; also known as The General Line)**.
- The latter was a **propaganda piece** advocating collective farming—an agricultural policy in which government-owned farms were managed and operated cooperatively.
- The introduction of sound in the late 1920s by American and European film industries motivated Eisenstein to tour foreign studios.
- After delivering a series of lectures in Europe, he visited Hollywood to explore possible film projects.
- Finding no studio interest, he turned to independent production and secured financing from American novelist Upton Sinclair to produce an epic of the Mexican people entitled Que Viva Mexico!.
  A dissatisfied Sinclair canceled the project midway into production, however.
- After returning to Moscow, Eisenstein was discredited for having deviated from socialist realism, the new cultural policies of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.
- The official new policies rejected the montage style of filmmaking and embraced a more accessible style that depicted the lives of common people in sympathetic ways.
- Finding no alternative but to submit to governmental demands, Eisenstein was restored to favor and assigned to direct his first sound film, **Alexander Nevsky (1938)**, an epic about a medieval Russian prince who defeated Teutons (Germanic tribes) invading from Europe.
Designed to boost morale in Russia, which anticipated an attack by the German army, Alexander Nevsky contained a brilliant integrated music score by composer **Sergey Prokofiev**.

- Prokofiev also wrote the music for Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible, Part I, 1944 and Part II, 1946), a massive wartime effort that was envisioned as a three-part epic about the tsar who unified Russia in the 16th century.
- Deteriorating health prevented Eisenstein from completing Part III.
- He died at age 50, recognized as one of the greatest innovators of film history. English-language collections of his writings include The Film Sense (1942), Film Form (1949), Notes of a Film Director (1959), and Film Essays with a Lecture (1968).