



**CHELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM (MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA)** is a January, 2016 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

**20 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Soviet Union 1928 black-and-white silent 61 minutes live action experimental feature VUFKU**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**Points:**

- Direction: Dziga Vertov, nee Denis Kaufman**
- 2 Editing: Denis Kaufman\* and Yelizaveta Svilova\* (Mrs. Dziga Vertov)**
- 2 Cinematography: Mikhail Kaufman\***
- 2 Locations: Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Kharkiv**
- 2 Music (special recent score): Michael Nyman\***
- 2 Production Design: Denis Kaufman\***
- 2 Lighting**
- 2 Creativity\***
- 2 Humor**
- 2 Introduction**
- 2 Conclusion**

**20 total points**

**Cast: Mikhail Kaufman**

**Denis Kaufman certainly lived up to his pseudonym of Dziga Vertov (Spinning Top) with creation of CHELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM (MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA). Born in the Russian sector of Poland in 1896, he originally studied literature and music, abandoning both ultimately in favor of cinema. Montage theory and proletarian propaganda beckoned both to Denis and younger brother Mikhail. Denis preferred writing and editing tasks. Mikhail's**

primary interest was photography. So when they teamed to produce a feature experimental film it seemed logical for the elder to concentrate on writing a preface and cutting. Mikhail could handle cinematography.

Filmed largely in four cities, *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* is an exuberant exposition of twentieth century Russian and Crimean urban life. Employing superimpositions, split screens, freeze frames, slow motion, animation, double exposures, backward splices, accelerated motion, and Dutch angles rendering shots in oblique perspectives, filmmakers created a compendium of motion picture techniques, all without computer assistance. Life-threatening camerawork by Mikhail Kaufman intrudes persistently, reminding viewers they are watching a film of selected compositions, not reality.

Structurally, an opening declaration of intention by the director is followed by eight joined sections, each with its own tempo and theme. These are *Awakening*, *Locomotion*, *Assemblage*, *Life Goes On*, *Manual Labor*, *Recreation*, *Relaxation* and *Cinematic I*.

*Awakening* deals with dawn, city streets in early morning, sleepers rousing from slumber. It proceeds at a sluggish adagio pace, beginning with a theater gradually filling with people. Thirteen minutes into the film, tempo accelerates to allegro. This second portion deals with transportation: shots of trains, streetcars, horse-carts, planes and automobiles fill the screen with action. Next come manufacturing passages emphasizing weaving, typing and film editing.

Then movement slows. The camera documents wedding and divorce registrations, a funeral procession and cemetery scene, several birthing shots, an ambulance emergency treatment and a fire company rushing to a conflagration.

Segment Five moves to factories and a cutting room, emphasizing handiwork and routine.

The picture's sixth part focusses on recreational pastimes at a beach and on a carousel. It alternates kinetic shots with stills of the same scenes.

After that an excursion into the world of exercise and sports highlights volleyball, soccer, discus throwing, pole vaults, hurdles, and various types of equine and wheeled racing. Incredibly, this portion is labelled "*Relaxation*," possibly due to insertions of laundry, manicuring, shampooing and tonsorial clips.

Vertov's grand finale, at a dizzying presto tempo, takes viewers back into the theater. Audience reaction to what is shown onscreen mixes with showy camera hijinks as dusk approaches.

Eliminating narrative, professional actors, continuity, dialogue, and plot, Denis Kaufman succeeded in replacing them with pure visual poetry. Condemning traditional blocking as outdated theatricality and dramatic dishonesty, he nonetheless employed numerous staged events, such as a woman getting dressed in an apartment bedroom, an Oriental magician operating a shell game and an excursion party in an open-top automobile reacting to a cameraman's recording of them. How honest and open were such setups?

Enhanced by a dynamic minimalist music score composed by Michael Nyman, Kino International's dvd release of *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* runs sixty-one minutes and is strictly for adult viewers due to occasional nudity. Special features include brief biographies of Denis Kaufman, Mikhail Kaufman, emigrant younger brother Boris Kaufman, and composer Michael Nyman.

In its 2012 Greatest Films Poll, *Sight and Sound* magazine's responding critics ranked *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* eighth. Participating directors ranked it forty-eighth. Either way, Vertov's classic is absolutely a landmark of world cinema. Contemporary film buffs are highly encouraged to screen this knockout. Once past an initial manifesto, it offers sheer visual rapture, proceeding unhindered by intertitles. Like Germany's *BERLIN: SYMPHONY OF A GREAT CITY*, this Soviet trial balloon is virtually ageless, still a compelling, vital kaleidoscope of stunning imagery.