

Angel on the Right (Farishtay Kitfi Rost)

A Film by Djamshed Usmonov

88 minutes, Color, 2002, Tajikistan
In Tajik with English subtitles



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Synopsis

After 10 years in Moscow, broke thug Hamro returns to his native Tadjikistan village to tend to his dying mother Halima. Hamro realizes that he must sell her house and belongings as quickly as possible. His debts are long overdue and the townspeople are as tough as the big city crowd he now frequents.

Hamro immediately starts renovations to his mother's house in order to get a better selling price, but also to grant his mother's wish for a decorative double gate, one that will allow her coffin to exit with dignity and not be lifted over the wall in humiliation.

Hamro soon gets more than he expected from the quiet countryside village. Savri, his mother's pretty nurse, eventually comes around to his boorish advances. A tough family violently forces Hamro to recognize the 10-year-old son he didn't even know existed. And to top it all off, Hamro discovers he's been tricked by his own mother and the crooked mayor.

With mafia-types on his back for money, desperate Hamro will realize that a mother's love is sometimes the only thing a guy can count on. It's about time he started listening more to the angel on the right.

Credits

CAST

Halima	Uktamoi Miyasarova
Hamro	Maruf Pulodzoda
Yatim	Kova Tilavpur
The Mayor	Mardonqul Qulbobo
Savri	Maljgat Maqsumova
The Barman	Furkat Buriev
The Young Man with the	Orzuqul Kholikov
Goat	Hokim Rakhmonov
Dervish	Tolib Temuraliev
The Millionaire	Davras Azimov
The Doormaker	

CREW

Written and directed by	Djamshed Usmonov
Cinematography	Pascal Lagriffoul
Sound	Dana Farzanehour
Editor	Jacques Comets
Sound editor	Waldir Xavier
Sound Mix	Eric Bonnard & Martin Stricker
Costumes	Marina Yakunina
Line Producer	Tatiana Abdullaeva
Executive Producers	Elise Jalladeau
	Marco Müller
Producer	Marco Müller / Fabrica Cinema

A production of Fabrica Cinema (Italy), ventura film (Switzerland), Artcam International (France), Rai Cinéma, TSI Television svizzera.

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A FILM BY DJAMSHED USMONOV

Born in Asht, Tadjikistan in 1965, Djamshed Usmonov graduated from the Theater Department at Dushanbe Fine Arts School in Tadjikistan. He has been working in the film industry since 1986 as a director, producer, screenwriter, and an editor for fiction, animation and documentary films. He worked predominantly at the Tadjikfilm Studio in Dushanbe.

Djamshed has also appeared as an actor in 1990's "Yellow Grass Time" (dir. Mariam Yussupova, Tadjikistan) and 2000's "The Road" (dir. Darezhan Omirbaev, Kazakhstan).

He currently lives between Paris, Moscow and Tadjikistan.

FILMOGRAPHY:

2002 ANGEL ON THE RIGHT

1998 THE FLIGHT OF THE BEE (Torino - Best Film, Audience Award, FIPRESCI Prize; Thessaloniki - Silver Prize)

1991 THE WELL (medium-length film)

Movies

ARTS & IDEAS/CULTURAL DESK

FILM FESTIVAL REVIEW; A Man in Trouble and Without Love, Even for His Child

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

Published: March 29, 2003, Saturday

Jamshed Usmonov's film "Angel on the Right" is set today in a crumbling village in Tajikistan, which is so bleak and impoverished that a corrupt kind of tribal law holds things together. Business transactions are conducted through crude ritualistic bartering that involves muscular arm-dipping handshakes between the haggling parties. Justice is administered by a mayor whose sweeping authority includes the power to decide when someone will die. He keeps a schedule of death dates in a log in his desk. Late in the movie, an old woman is allowed to exchange her designated day of departure with someone else's in return for certain favors.

This surreal twist reflects the Tajik filmmaker's fascination with the story of Attar, a 13th-century poet who, after encountering a dervish who reminded him that material possessions can't be taken into the next world, thereupon lay down and died. The film's title reflects an Islamic legend that imagines each person going through life with two invisible angels, one perched on each shoulder. The one on the right records good deeds and thoughts, while the one on the left records bad ones. On Judgment Day the scales are weighed to determine if a person's destination will be heaven or hell.

The two myths lend a cosmic dimension to a film that has a grim neo-realist look and tone. The story follows its antihero, Hamro (Maruf Pulodzoda), a sullen, mustached career criminal who returns to his hometown from a Russian prison to pay his final respects to his dying mother. While in Russia Hamro had worked for the Russian Mafia, and he is dangerously in debt to his mob boss.

But Hamro's mother, Halima (Uktamoi Miyasarova), who he is told won't live beyond three days, isn't really dying, although she puts on a convincing show when her son arrives. The movie's opening scene finds the gnarled old woman going about her daily chores, but when Hamro appears she seems to be gasping her final breaths. Halima, it develops, is in cahoots with the mayor (Mardonqui Oulbobo) in a scheme to lure her son back home to pay debts he owes all over the village.

A sullen predator with the taut, wiry body of a street fighter, Hamro has always been in trouble. Just before fleeing to Russia, he sired a little boy, Yatim (Kova Tilavpur), now 10, without even knowing it. No sooner has he returned than a group of townspeople present him with the child, whose paternity he refuses to acknowledge.

The more poignant parts of the movie, which is showing today at Alice Tully Hall at 1 p.m. and tomorrow at the Gramercy Theater at 6 as part of the New Directors/New Films series, show Yatim wistfully trailing around after his hard-hearted father, silently begging for attention. But Hamro views him only as an inconvenience.

ANGEL ON THE RIGHT

Written (in Tajik, with English subtitles) and directed by Jamshed Usmonov; director of photography, Pascal Lagriffoul; edited by Jacques Comets; produced by Marco Müller. Running time: 89 minutes. This film is not rated. Shown with an eightminute short, Jay Duplass's "This Is John" today at 1 p.m. at the Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, 165 West 65th Street, Manhattan, and on Sunday at 6 p.m. at MoMA Film at the Gramercy Theater, 127 East 23rd Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues, as part of the 32nd New Directors/New Films series of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the department of film and media of the Museum of Modern Art.

WITH: Uktamoi Miyasarova (Halima), Maruf Pulodzoda (Hamro), Kova Tilavpur (Yatim), Mardonqul Qulbobo (Mayor), Maljqat Maqsumova (Savri), Furkat Buriev (Barman), Orzuqul Kholikov (Young Man With Goat), Hokim Rakhmonov (Dervish), Tolib Temuraliev (the Millionaire) and Davras Azimov (the Doormaker).

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film

World Beat

Argentinean Cowboys, Tajik Thugs, Italian Gay Dwarf Taxidermists

by **Voice Writers**

March 26 - April 1, 2003

The 2002 "New Directors" (which introduced two of the year's best movies in *Late Marriage* and *The Fast Runner*) is a tough act to follow. Opening with the charming Loisaida romance *Raising Victor Vargas*, the 2003 edition seems more modest but no less far-flung. Familiar instances of Hong Kong power-pop, Iranian self-reflection, and Japanese crazy comedy are complemented by movies from Bangladesh, Cameroon, Slovenia, Tajikistan, and Camp Ovation. —J. Hoberman

Angel on the Right A tough Tajik gangster returns home from Moscow to see his dying mother. Jamshed Usmonov's deadpan dark comedy is Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* in reverse—the town has lured the hoodlum back, hoping to get its hands on his money. March 29 and 30 (JH)

Film Comment

May-June, 2003

Hidden menu

by Chris Chang

The 2003 New Directors/New Films lineup possessed no unifying theme, hidden agenda, or ideological trend. As such, it was a welcome antidote to everything else plaguing reality. (If only CNN could be so ameliorative.) The following festival highlights proceed accordingly, i.e., with no discernible organizational principle. No excuses are necessary--nor possible. . .

The first film in ND/NF history from Tajikistan, *Angel on the Right* derives its title from an Islamic fable in which all deeds are subject to the scrutiny of dual spiritual beings. One, on the right, bears witness to benevolent acts; the other deals with the rest. When Judgment Day rolls around a final tally is taken, and subsequent assignments to Heaven and Hell are doled out. A quick look at the film's gnarly, shifty-eyed protagonist, Hamro (Maruf Pulodzoda), portends his probable lowerdepths destiny. He's returned from Russian exile to profit from the sale of his dying mother's house but soon discovers his hometown has made other, more retributionary plans for him. (Riddled with debt, he appears to owe something to everyone.) Along with ancient lore, director Djamshed Usmonov appropriates material closer to hand: the village where he was born, his nonprofessional actor family and friends (Maruf is his brother), and the immediate sense of reality made possible by intimate familiarity. The world portrayed is harsh and unsparing (and sometimes transcendently comic), and the cruel, selfish Hamro, in a remarkable feat of dual-aspect dissonance, comes across as the most sympathetic bad guy in recent memory.

Chris Chang is FILM COMMENT's Senior Editor



Angel on the Right

In this accomplished second feature, Tajik director Djamshed Usmonov returns to his native village to film a parable about good and evil. Like his much-prized maiden effort "Flight of the Bee," "Angel on the Right" circles around big themes with a light touch, painting the village of Asht as a magical place where miracles can happen.

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home**movies**

New DVD Releases

TOP 10 NEW TITLES

1. **Godard x 2:** *Weekend 67 & For Ever Mozart* 96; New Yorker \$29.95 each
2. **Platform** Jia Zhangke, China, 00; New Yorker \$29.95
3. **A Moment of Innocence** Makhmalbaf, Iran, 97; New Yorker \$29.95
4. **Point Blank** Boorman, 67; Warners \$19.97
5. **Night Moves** Penn, 75; Warners \$19.97
6. **The Story of Marie and Julien** Rivette, Fr., 03; Koch Lorber \$29.98
7. **Herzog x 2:** *Signs of Life* 68 & *Land of Silence and Darkness* 71; New Yorker \$29.95
8. **Angel on the Right** Djamshed Usmonov, Tajikistan, 02; First Run \$24.95
9. **Million Dollar Baby** Eastwood, 04; Warners \$29.95
10. **Béla Tarr x 3:** *Family Nest* 77, *The Outsider* 81 & *The Prefab People* 82; FACETS \$29.95 each



DVD New Releases

By Sean Axmaker

ANGEL ON THE RIGHT

Two more in the "Global Lens Collection" of films from around the world. "Jamshed Usmonov's feature, set in the village where he grew up in Tajikistan, is a sinewy comedy which is part of the same honourable world-cinema tradition of cine-autobiography as *Cinema Paradiso*, *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Abouna* - tales of remote places with impressionable children that happen to feature ramshackle movie shows," writes *The Guardian* critic Peter Bradshaw of *Angel on the Right* (Russia). "There is much to enjoy in this charming film, shot in a deep, crisp focus - especially the local bargaining technique: a macho handshake ritual, which I've seen nothing like since Bernie Mac's brutal grip in *Ocean's Eleven*."