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This Wasn't It: 'Moscow Case 1993: When the King of Pop Met the Soviets'

 By [Brendan William Boyle](#) 2 April 2013

The credits of Egor Trubnikoff's brief documentary *Moscow Case 1993: When the King of Pop Met the Soviets* bear something of a self-evident dedication: "With deepest admiration to Michael Jackson, King of Pop". Like much of the film itself, the treatment of Jackson's ubiquitous epithet as if it were simply part of his name seems typically quaint and out of step with reality.

Having no footage of the 1993 Moscow concert, part of the *Dangerous* tour, to speak of, Trubnikoff can hardly concern himself with conveying quite what it was like to attend the show. From the early, reverential talking heads assert Jackson's status as an international superstar whose visit was a great event for the people of Moscow living in the city after Communism—and the insight stops there.

At 52 minutes, the *Moscow Case* seems to check off its list of points rather matter-of-factly, never seeming rushed but always stopping short of a deeper investigation of the circumstances surrounding the concert. In reaching back almost 20 years (the documentary was produced in 2011), Trubnikoff makes an admirable effort to deliver first-hand accounts of the chaos and levels of unpreparedness involved.

Ruslan Miroshnick, the concert's producer, speaks at length about the difficulties of staging the *Dangerous* tour, a performance of unprecedented scale for the Russian city. Trubnikoff can't help that he hasn't the access, or presumably the budget, to make the documentary more relevant to the concert itself, but it's continually disappointing that so much talk about the particulars of staging and promoting a show as elaborate as Jackson's precedes only a few courtroom-style colored renderings of Jackson and the interviewees at the show, accompanied by some embarrassing accordion music.

Regrettably, the documentary manages even to tamper with one of its biggest assets in the charming and engaging interviewees, only too happy to discuss the night they saw the King of Pop onstage in their home country. None of them seem capable of speaking English, so a rather dull dubbing job drains the enthusiasm from their accounts of the concert and its surrounding events, preventing them from really developing personalities over the course of the short running time and blurring them all together into a blithe Jackson superfan collective, some of whom even refer to the singer as a "saint".

Moscow Case could only have been produced after Jackson's death, and primarily for the footage shot by cinematographer Yuri Burak which shows him playing with small children in a Russian orphanage. In the canonizing afterglow of his death and worldwide mourning period, one might

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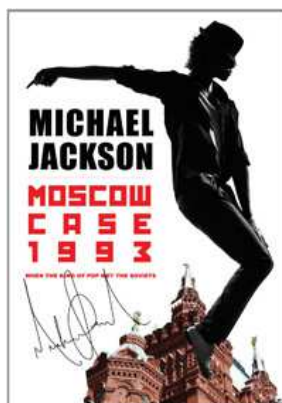
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Michael Jackson: Moscow Case 1993

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think that the footage could stand on its own, a previously unseen depiction of Jackson's skill with children; instead, Trubnikoff includes some superfluous and ill-advised commentary on the sexual abuse scandal Jackson faced while in Moscow. Music critic Art Troitsky dismisses the scandals, which many have with good reason, considering the hyper-sensationalism and outright character assassination to which tabloids subjected Jackson during the '90s and the resurgence of the scandals in the early '00s.

Further comments that make a half-hearted effort to diagnose his psychological state, however, really toe the line of good taste: "He was a child at heart, so he wanted to play with children." The seriousness of the subject of child molestation should hardly be dismissed in favor of half-baked psychiatric evaluations by fans, who are not ideally positioned to make objective judgements in the first place.

If nothing else, *Moscow Case 1993* works as an artifact of Jackson's thriving fandom. Overblown copy like the DVD description which describes the concert as "ill-fated" and promises details about "who wanted to see the concert fail and why" suggest grander drama than the documentary ultimately delivers. As a compendium of trivia and an interesting diversion into a landmark of Jackson's career, the documentary certainly provides a good way to spend an hour. Consider it the fan's alternative to the fireworks exploitation of *This Is It*, an effort by genuine admirers to delve into the behind-the-scenes process of the "King of Pop"'s unflagging commitment to putting on a show.

In its (admittedly facile) treatment of the show's production, the ticket sales, and the experience of simply being in the same city as Jackson for a few days, what Trubnikoff's documentary conveys best of all is the idea that constructing a superstar like Jackson must always be a communal process, and though this perspective merits a more in-depth treatment, there's no denying that

boasts a certain degree of low-budget charm.

Extras: Nada.

Rating: 



Brendan Boyle is a fourth-year Film Studies and Mass Media Arts student graduating this spring from the University of Georgia. He programs for the University's student-run Tate Theater, for local independent theater Ciné, has served as a student judge for the Peabody Awards, and moonlights as an opera enthusiast and DJ at WUOG 90.5 FM. He plans to pursue a doctorate in media studies.

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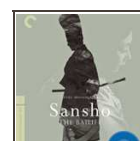
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