

# Elena

Cert 12A Russia 2011 109 mins

## Crew

Director Andrey Zvyagintsev  
 Screenplay Oleg Negin  
 Cinematography Mikhail Krichman  
 Film Editing Anna Mass

## Cast

Luis Tosar Costa  
 Nadezhda Markina Elena  
 Elena Lyadova Katerina  
 Andrey Smirnov Vladimir  
 Alexey Rozin Sergey

## Synopsis

*Elena, middle-aged and working-class, has recently married wealthy businessman Vladimir, who she met in hospital when she was his nurse. Now they live uneasily together in his palatial Moscow apartment. Estranged from his own hedonistic daughter, Vladimir openly despises his wife's freeloading son and family, and refuses to help them financially. Then a sudden illness and an unexpected reunion threaten Elena's potential inheritance, and she hatches a desperate plan....*



- *Elena* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival 2011, where it was awarded the Special Jury Prize. Despite winning a number of other international awards and prizes, it did not get a UK cinema release until October 2012.
- Mikhail Krichman was the cinematographer for both of Andrey Zvyagintsev's previous films - *The Return* (2003) and *The Banishment* (2007).
- The soundtrack is Philip Glass' Third Symphony. Zvyagintsev said when he asked if he could use the music for the film, Philip Glass offered to write an original score instead, but he declined because the Third Symphony was "so perfectly in tune with the image".



## Reviews

...Andrey Zvyagintsev's multi-awarded film, which follows the superb *The Return* and the less impressive but still highly watchable *The Banishment*, paints an eloquent picture of Russian life predicated on getting by without basic honesty.

Even so, the plan Elena decides upon in sheer desperation comes as a surprise. It's much like the plot of a Forties film noir. But the quiet, truthful performance of Nadezhda Markina, a Russian television actress in her first film role, enables us to believe in it.

Her remarkable portrait is a very good reason to see the film, though Zvyagintsev and his brilliant cinematographer Mikhail Krichman paint the Moscow scene with real eloquence. If it is Markina's film, the actress would not have been able to produce so much without film-makers of this calibre behind her.

The veteran director Andrey Smirnov as the old man and Aleksey Rozin as Elena's wastrel son are also good in what is one of the very best Russian films of the past year.

**Derek Malcolm, London Evening Standard, October 2012**

Andrey Zvyagintsev's third feature film offers a caustic, numbed examination of evil, selfishness and corruption, perhaps intended as a comment on contemporary Russian society, maybe even intended as a comment on the putrefaction of humanity at large.

...Nadezhda Markina's performance in the lead role is a kind of non-performance, where she plays Elena as someone who has relinquished herself of all palpable human emotion over the years. Her spiritual emptiness makes the film all the more believable, and neatly accounts for some of her more questionable acts in the latter parts of the story.

If the film has a problem, it's to do with a central twist which stretches credibility for the sake of its thesis. But this is otherwise an exceptional piece of filmmaking, one which brilliantly attaches a dour contemporary resonance to a militantly old-school genre template.

**David Jenkins, Little White Lies, October 2012**

...Shoot this film in black and white and cast Barbara Stanwyck as Elena, and you'd have a 1940s classic.

**Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times, July 2012**