

10 Questions

Film editor and director **Sergei Eisenstein** talks about his life and experiences, as well as his films and the techniques used to make them

What was your childhood like?

I was born in Riga, Latvia in the Soviet Union on January 22, 1898. My parents were divorced, but I spent most of my time with my father, who was an architect, and inspired me to follow my dream to be in the arts.

How did you develop an interest in film?

It wasn't until I enrolled in the Petrograd Institute of Civil Engineering that I discovered I might have the potential to become a filmmaker. I was already involved in theater, and at the time I wanted to become an actor. However, when the Russian Revolution

came around, a long with the *agitprop* phase, I started to make films to support it, and decided that was what I wanted to do.

Did you know anyone who influenced you on behalf of your editing techniques?

Yes, that was my two teachers, Lev Kuleshov, and Esfir Shub. Kuleshov was the founder of the world's first film school, The Moscow Film School. He taught me all about montage, shot structure, editing, and camera placement. Montage, specifically, was one that caught my eye.

What were some of your earlier films?

My first real production was *The Wiseman*, including my first short film, *Glumov's Diary*, based off of the comedic play, *Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman*. My first feature film was *Strike*, which takes place just before the Bolshevik Revolution,

where some factory workers violently revolt against their bosses.

How would you explain your revolutionary editing techniques?

What I have discovered is a theory of montage, which involves four different parts. Rhythmic montage, tonal montage, collisionary montage, and collusionary montage. Rhythmic montage is having a long or shorter shot length to add suspense or excitement. Tonal montage shows emotional feeling with intercutting, while collisionary montage are images put together in order to create aviolent effect, and collusionary montage shows actions happening at the same time by editing them together.

Can you tell us about your most famous film?

Yes, my most well-known film is by far *Battleship Potemkin*. Like many others I have made, it is a political war film about sailors

that are tired of the Czar's corrupt rule and riot against them, creating lots of violence. There is a scene in the movie known as the Odessa Steps sequence, where the citizens of Odessa are rushing down an outdoor staircase while getting brutally shot down soldiers. It is about ten minutes long and took a week to film, but is an accomplishment I am quite proud of.

We hear you took a tour of Europe, what was it like?

The citizens of other parts of Europe were very different from others back home. Even my close friends thought I had "deserted the ideas of the revolution," and I was criticized a lot by them. But, when I visited other countries, I was flattered when almost all of them treated me as if I were a famous celebrity. We also understand that you worked with Paramount for a period of time, what happened with that? It was very brief, and barely even

lasted a year. They informed me that I was being a bad communist influence even though I had just created a new film there, *An American Tragedy*, which eventually did come out in theaters. After that, I moved on in my tour and directed some more films before I returned home.

Did the people in the Soviet Union still feel the same way after you came back as a world-renowned celebrity?

No, in fact they were even more enraged. My films there were known as "abstract," and involving Social Realism. Because of that, I was sent to court in 1935, and forced to renounce my work, which also limited my artistic freedom, until a little while later.

Can you talk about some of your most recent works?

Yes, my most popular film as of now is *Alexander Nevsky*, a true story about a Russian prince who fought a German invasion with only the help a few

followers. This pleased the public since it fit right it with the anti-Nazi campaign, and used more traditional editorial techniques. My most recent film is *Ivan the Terrible*, that came out two years ago in the Soviet Union, and will be coming out in the U.S. soon. I plan for this to be a trilogy, and I am very excited for what happens with it next.

