



**MUSIC
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FILMS**

Presents

HAPPY PEOPLE: A YEAR IN THE TAIGA

A FILM BY DMITRY VASYUKOV AND WERNER HERZOG

In Russian, subtitled in English with English Narration

94 min., Germany, 2010

To download hi-res images and video clips, please visit:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/happy-people--a-year-in-the-taiga-movies-55.php>

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“Herzog's philosophical narration -- enchanted by this outpost free from phones, taxes and all the trappings of modern life -- elevates **Happy People** above most nature docs.”
– *Variety*

Synopsis

With HAPPY PEOPLE, Werner Herzog takes viewers on yet another unforgettable journey into remote and extreme natural landscapes. The acclaimed filmmaker presents this visually stunning documentary about indigenous people living in the heart of the Siberian Taiga.

Deep in the Siberian wilderness, far away from civilization, 300 people inhabit the small village of Bakhta at the river Yenisei. There are only two ways to reach this outpost: by helicopter or boat. There's no telephone, running water or medical aid. The locals, whose daily routines have barely changed over the last centuries, live according to their own values and cultural traditions. With insightful commentary written and narrated by Herzog, HAPPY PEOPLE follows one of the Siberian trappers through all four seasons of the year to tell the story of a culture virtually untouched by modernity.

CO-DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS:

Werner Herzog

from his introduction to HAPPY PEOPLE: A YEAR IN THE TAIGA at DOC NYC Film Festival 2011

It's a very strange coincidence how I came across this footage and came to work on this film. I was driving in Los Angeles down a street a friend of mine lives on, which never has parking. But that day, there was a huge gap and I thought I'd just knock on his door and see if he was home. He happened to be watching something on his plasma screen, and as he grabbed for the remote to turn it off and talk to me, I told him to wait a moment and asked what it was. He said he had 4 films from Russia about hunters in the Siberian Taiga, and I asked him to let me watch a little bit, but I ended up watching all of them, over 4 separate hours! I was so fascinated and wished so badly that I could spend an entire year with these men out in the wilderness. I was so intrigued that I said, off the cuff, someone should make a much shorter version, with a different commentary understandable beyond Russia, with different music, and edited down to, let's say, one and a half hours. He suggested that we find out who made the film. So we ended up speaking to Dmitry Vasyukov, who I had never met; I only know how he looks and what kind of cigarettes he smokes from seeing him on Skype. And I respectfully asked if he would consider this idea of me making something different out of the film. He was immediately very enthusiastic and said go ahead, but I warned that I could not allow him to look over my shoulder or to comment; could he handle that? And he said yes, yes, yes!

Now the next question was how to pay for new editing, music composition, mixing and all these things. Almost instantly, Studio Babelsberg was onboard, and within a few weeks or so, all of a sudden I found myself in business. And I really loved this material. I loved these men out there, loved their dogs. You can never see anything better about dogs. Everything you see about pets in suburban America or big cities, it's all just a shame when you see a dog like they have; they're just phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal! And this kind of life of self-reliance, of complete and utter freedom, complete and utter absence of government, taxes, police, rules. They live by their own rules, but according to the dignity of nature; they really respect it and they despise hunters who are only out for money and overhunt and overfish. I had the feeling I should spend the whole year with them, which unfortunately hasn't happened because I've been involved in other work. However, when the main character in HAPPY PEOPLE got wind that the films would be shown in the 1½ hour version, he reached out to Dmitry Vasyukov. He worried that other countries would now see this film, and he hated the idea that they might be pitied. "Please tell everyone out in the world that we are doing just fine; we are okay," he explained. "You don't need to pity us; we are proud." So, that's my message from the hunters, and I hope you enjoy HAPPY PEOPLE: A YEAR IN THE TAIGA, which has been a great, great joy for me to work on.

Dmitry Vasyukov

The Yenisei River, where it runs in the Taiga, is one of the most beautiful, special and severe places in Siberia. This river is a zoogeographical border between Eastern and Western Siberia, inimitable in its beautiful combinations of flora and fauna. Landscapes here are flat in the East and rocky in the West. These wild and faraway regions are linked to civilization only by means of rear motorboats in summer and post-helicopters in winter. There is no other place where nature is so close to the inhabitants. These people are fishermen and hunters, Russians and Kets. Sophisticated fishermen and hunters in the past, Kets are a small nationality of the Russian North. Their numbers, which were never high even in the past –decrease quickly in our days. Only 600 Kets live now in the Turukhansky region.

One can find less and less people who truly know the arts of ancient domestic crafts, fishery, and hunting, who remember the traditions of creating the articles and ammunition for Taiga's mode of life. Two of them live in the village of Bakhta: A Ket, Nikolay Nikiforovitch Siniaev, and a Russian hunter, Gennady Soloviev, who began hunting at the age of 14 years. Gennady is a real Taiga patriot, who managed to preserve his saintly attitude to his profession. He grieves for his life's work and considers himself a keeper of the *muzhik* way of life.

The post-Soviet epoch brought striking changes to Russia in all spheres of our life. We have acquired something, but some things we have lost forever, and something else is on the verge of disappearance. One of these vanishing human values is the lifestyle of professional Taiga dwellers: hunters and fishermen. Hunting and fishing have always been the basis of life for the majority of the population in Siberia, in the Far East and in other faraway north regions. The mode and way of life of these people was created over centuries; the tenor of their everyday activities was built in accordance with the cycles and laws of nature so as not to disrupt the fragile harmony of the environment. The so-called common integral culture of this region has been formulated historically. It absorbed elements of the cultures of the indigenous North population and the Russian people who lived there as well. The process of mutual cultural enrichment that took place here created the very special psychology of the inhabitants in these severe spaces. A hunter treats Taiga kindly, as something private and vital. He knows that it will feed him for many years (and maybe later, his children). Therefore he is interested in Taiga, which is rich with animals, birds and berries. He can't be a scrounger, for whom the only important thing is to grab and run away. He always thinks about the future. These people are proud of their profession and lucky to be working not only to earn some money, but for something else, something lofty and inexplicable. And a man

once touched this “something,” purifying his soul and becoming forever “sick” by hunting, Taiga and the North.

HAPPY PEOPLE: A YEAR IN THE TAIGA reflects the harmony of life against the background of natural cycles and the technology of the creation of articles and ammunition for the Taiga mode of life, not just to embody the ancient traditions, but to serve as a guidebook for those who want to assimilate and regenerate those skills. Even today, the preservation of the forests is becoming a global ecological problem for mankind. The careful use of natural resources- without destroying the integrity and viability of forest ecosystems- will be the most important task for future generations. I am sure that the time will come and all those things, which are organically interlaced in the life of Siberian hunters: the centuries-old experience of the harmonic coexistence of Man and Nature, and their careful use of its resources, will be claimed by the new generations.

It's a pity that skilled hunters like Anatoly Blume and Gennady Soloviev will finish their days and nobody will know anything about their difficult and beautiful lives. Their destiny would probably help another people, who will never be in Siberia to look at themselves from another point of view, to find their own sense of a proper life.

For me, it is quite important to preserve this passing of the old generation of Ket and Russian hunters. Their life is at once so beautiful, severe and unselfish, that it would be my grave mistake not to show it to other people.

Happy People: A Year in the Taiga

Germany - 2010 - Documentary - 94 min - English, Russian

Writer, Narrator, Director, Executive Producer: Werner Herzog

Director: Dmitry Vasyukov

Writer: Rudolph Herzog

Producers: Charlie Woebcken, Christoph Fisser,
Vladimir Perepelkin, Nick N. Raslan

Co-Producer: Thomas Nickel

Executive Producers: Yanko Damboulev, Timur Bekmambetov, Klaus Badelt

Composer: Klaus Badelt

Camera: Alexey Matveev, Gleb Stepanov, Arthur Sibirski, Michael Tarkovsky

Editor: Joe Bini

Production Company: Studio Babelsberg

About Music Box Films

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films has quickly established itself as one of the leading theatrical and home entertainment distributors of foreign language, American independent and documentary films in the US. Past releases include the film adaptations of Stieg Larsson's trilogy of international mega selling novels; the first in the series, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, with over \$10 million in US box office, was one the most popular international releases of the decade. 2012 titles include Terence Davies' THE DEEP BLUE SEA, starring Rachel Weisz; Philippe Falardeau's Academy Award nominated MONSIEUR LAZHAR, one of the top grossing foreign language films of the year; Ira Sachs' KEEP THE LIGHTS ON, winner of the 2012 Outfest Grand Jury Prize and the Berlin International Film Festival Teddy Award; and Travis Fine's festival audience favorite ANY DAY NOW, starring Alan Cumming. Upcoming releases include Cate Shortland's LORE, Australia's official selection for the Academy Awards, and Baran bo Odar's THE SILENCE, starring Ulrich Thomsen. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.

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