

Title: Television to Film: The Emergent Comedy in Contemporary Russian Cinema

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This paper argues that a new form of cinematic comedy has emerged in the Russian Federation, but it is one that does not necessarily have roots in the Russo-Soviet tradition of the genre. The presentation focuses on the popular television comedy sketch show *Comedy Club* that plays on channel TNT. The show is based in Moscow, with spin-offs in St. Petersburg, Nizhnii Novgorod, Rostov-on-Don, and in Ukraine and Belarus. Similar to the American stand-up comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, *Comedy Club* is a forum for aspiring comedians. Moreover, just as *Saturday Night Live* skits have led to whole films—such as *Wayne's World* (Penelope Spheeris, 1992) or *A Night at the Roxbury* (John Fortenberry 1998)—*Comedy Club* has espoused a similar mode of production, in which a popular skit or a group of popular comedians is developed into a high-grossing commercial film.

The paper focuses on productions of the Comedy Club studio: *The Very Best Film* trilogy (Kirill Kuzin, 2007; Oleg Fomin, 2009; Kirill Kuzin, 2011) and *Our Russia: The Balls of Fate* (Gleb Orlov, 2010). These films rely on crass “bathroom” humor and jokes with sexist and racist overtones that privilege heteronormativity and Russian ethnicity. The paper notes that one of the defining features of this genre is a constant reference to and parody of recent Russian blockbuster films in the style of *Scary Movie* (Keenan Ivory Wayans 2000) or *Not Another Teen Movie* (Joel Gallen 2001). The paper argues that Comedy Club has co-opted several industry techniques that originated in the United States to craft a new genre of Russian comedy. It is a move that is ultimately self-aggrandizing of the Russian commercial film interest, aimed at a young demographic that is familiar with the references these films make and hungry for a domestic version of obscene humor.