

# The Museum of Modern Art

**Alex Ross Presents Dziga Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934/1938)  
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Alex Ross, longtime *New Yorker* music critic and a Pulitzer Prize finalist, introduces Dziga Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934/38), commemorating the publication of his revelatory new book *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2020). Ross reconsiders the German composer Richard Wagner's mythic hold over European and American culture in the late-19th and 20th centuries. Devoting a chapter to the unbridled use of Wagner's music, or Wagnerian music, throughout the history of cinema ("from *Birth of a Nation* to *Apocalypse Now*"), Ross observes that "on the soundtrack of Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin*, we hear the halting drumbeats and upward slithering figures that introduce Siegfried's Funeral Music, which was indeed played at Lenin's memorial.... With the music's transition from tragic minor to heroic major, we see hopeful signs reading 'The revolution lives on' and 'Lenin is our immortality.'"

**Tri pesni o Lenine (Three Songs of Lenin).** 1934/1938. USSR. "One of the greatest and most beautiful films I have ever seen" (H. G. Wells). In 1938, Dziga Vertov was instructed to re-edit his most celebrated film, which he had made in 1934–35 in silent and sound versions, and to remove any references to "enemies of the people" who by then had become the victims of Stalin's purges. This sound version features images of Stalin himself, which had been removed from yet another edit in 1970 during a period of anti-Stalinist revisionism. The film is structured in three parts and glorifies Lenin's life and legacy through folkloric songs, tales, and mythologies. "In this film," Aleksandr Deriabin writes, "Lenin is Vertov's Future Adam, and the spiral montage is his genome, discovered by Vertov before it was by geneticists. Vertov tried to do what the Internationale promised in words, and what Bolsheviks failed to do in practice: build the New World on the debris of the Old.... Those in power made sure Vertov would never get another chance to make a messianic movie like this." Courtesy Austrian Filmmuseum, Vienna. 67 min.

*Organized by Joshua Siegel, Curator of Film. Special thanks to the Austrian Filmmuseum, Vienna.*