

WHITE NIGHTS



Mikhail Baryshnikov (left) plays a Russian ballet star who defects to the West, while Helen Mirren is a dancing partner he left behind. Isabella Rossellini (below) plays the wife of an American dancer (Gregory Hines) living in the Soviet Union. Baryshnikov says *White Nights'* plot recalls some of his own nightmares after his defection.

The worlds of international politics and international dance collide in Taylor Hackford's *"White Nights"* when dancers become defectors across both sides of the Iron Curtain. *"White Nights"* is an action-adventure film, of high suspense

and personal drama," says Hackford who directed the film.

Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov plays a Russian dancer who defects to the West but is brought back home by a plane crash in the USSR. Gregory Hines is an American entertainer living in Russia ordered by the Soviets to make sure Baryshnikov stays.

"Baryshnikov and Hines (whose sense of morality made him desert from the army during the Vietnam War) form a wary relationship," explained Hackford. "It's a totally hypothetical story, but one that every defector has imagined."

"I've had nightmares," admits Bar-

yshnikov of his real-life defection. Playing in his first film role since *The Turning Point*, Baryshnikov finds himself reliving the most traumatic events of his own life.

The "white nights" of the title—the long Russian summer nights—"are a stylistic point in the film," says Hackford. "The film takes place totally in daylight. There is no place to hide. Baryshnikov's character can't get away from the light."

All this and some of the best dancing in the world as well. But, as director Hackford (whose *Officer and a Gentleman* and *Against All Odds* established his gift for intense romantic drama) asserts, "It is important to say that, although it stars Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gregory Hines and has nine dancers, it is not a dance film."

"Dance is used in an experimental way—to pick up the dramatic action and move it forward. The film explores defection from the point of view of two men: Baryshnikov, the Russian who gave up his politics for his art, and Hines, the American who gave up his art for his politics."

Pre-production rehearsals at the American Ballet Theater (run by Baryshnikov), directed by Hackford and



noted choreographer Twyla Tharp, produced an innovative synthesis of ballet and tap, seen in *White Nights* for the first time.

Also in *White Nights* are Helen Mirren (one of Britain's premier classical actresses and winner of the Best Actress Award at Cannes in 1985 for *Cal*) playing a retired Russian ballerina, Isabella Rossellini (Ingrid Bergman's daughter) and Geraldine Page. *White Nights* opens in selected cities in November and nationwide in December.

"The film has critical things to say about both the US and the USSR," Hackford described. "It's about force and repression, regardless of where they come from. It makes a universal statement about individual freedom." ♦

