

# MARY CELESTE: SOLVING THE MYSTERY

Review by **John Davis**



## ***Mary Celeste: Solving the Mystery***

Producer/directors Jason Davidson and Peter Roch.  
*Available on My 5.*

ASIDE perhaps from the events purported to have happened later inside the ominously named Bermuda Triangle, the incident surrounding the sailing ship, the *Mary Celeste*, is by far the biggest unsolved mystery in maritime history.

This programme is yet another attempt to find the reason why a 250-tonne sailing ship was suddenly discovered totally abandoned near The Azores islands in the Atlantic Ocean in December 1872.

The discovery of the *Mary Celeste* was made by another cargo vessel, the *Dei Gratia*, drifting aimlessly under sail on a calm sea with no-one on board. The ship appeared undamaged, its equipment in full working order and its cargo, over 1700 barrels of 93% proof industrial alcohol, intact.

When a boarding party went to investigate, they discovered the ship had been left in a hurry with discarded boots, food and clothing lying around. The only noticeable item missing was the vessel's small rowing boat and navigational

equipment. Even the ship's log was there with its last entry made nine days before the sighting.

In terms of personnel, the *Mary Celeste*'s highly experienced captain was Benjamin Briggs, who was also the ship's part-owner. The vessel had recently been altered to include an extra cabin so that Briggs' wife and children could accompany him on voyages. As well as Briggs, his wife and daughter, Sophia, there were also seven crew members unaccounted for. None of them were ever seen again.

The programme includes CGI to re-create external and internal shots of the *Mary Celeste*, and a variety of expert naval 'talking heads' to explore likely scenarios. There is also some scientific experimentation to examine other hypotheses before a possible solution is reached.

Once the ships had reached port at Gibraltar, we learn there was a full inquiry presided over by a judge. Fanciful notions like attacks by aliens or sea monsters, underwater earthquakes and piracy were soon discounted while counsel Frederick Solly-Flood was full of conspiracy theories including mutiny and murder and/or a massive insurance scam. Eventually, a court awarded the *Dei Gratia* salvage rights but significantly only about one-sixth of the ship's insured value.

# MR NOBODY AGAINST PUTIN

Review by **John Davis**



## ***Mr. Nobody Against Putin***

The story of Pavel Talankin

Written and directed by David Borenstein.

*Storyville on BBCI Player*

PAVEL Talankin (usually known as Pasha) was living in the Russian town of Karabash when his country invaded Ukraine in 2022. Karabash, with a population of around 10 000, is in the heartland of copper smelting territory and has been described as the most polluted town in Russia. The average age of life expectancy has been calculated at under forty.

When the invasion occurs, Pasha is working in the town's main school. His official post involves taking photographs, videos and films of the school's major events. These include musical concerts, sporting competitions and the annual graduation day ceremony as well as recording the everyday routines of the school and its pupils.

While Pasha continues with this work over the next couple of years, he becomes increasingly incensed with the invasion and its effect on the people of Karabash that he decides to discreetly film other things that were happening in the school which he felt the outside world should know about.

Soon after the invasion, the school is flooded with copies of the *New Federal Patriotic Education Policy* which dictates what could be taught. There are patriotic songs to sing and poems to write, a daily flag ceremony and militaristic marching drills. Teachers are forced to read through specially scripted lessons laced with words like demilitarisation and denazification which they have

great difficulty pronouncing let alone understanding. Pasha films a visit from Wagner Group mercenaries who instruct the children how to spot buried mines, handle automatic weapons and throw grenades. (Shades of schools in Germany under the Nazi regime and those chestnuts of propaganda enshrined in Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*.) As if this was not bad enough Pasha was forced to film all these events and send them off to the authorities for ratification. Wars would not stop with Ukraine, pupils were told, they should prepare themselves for more conflict in the future.

As serious as the circumstances are, Pasha hits back. Russians use humour to help them cope, he says. He decorates his room with protest flags, removes the Russian flag from the top of the school and one morning the children are greeted with a loud and very brassy rendition of the American National Anthem sung by Lady Gaga.

Tired of being used as a pawn and despite the fact he has once loved his job, Pasha resigns. Soon though he gets himself re-instated when a contact puts him in touch with writer/director David Borenstein and he begins to smuggle out encrypted copies of his films despite the serious personal risk. Finally in 2024 the danger becomes too great and he is forced to go into exile.

After appearances at several film festivals, *Mr Nobody Against Putin* has, in 2026, won an Oscar and a Bafta in the documentary category. From school cameraman to international star, Pavel Talankin has become famous. Heroes come in all shapes and sizes and sometimes, it seems, it is more powerful to point a camera than a gun.