



ØST FOR PARADIS PRÆSENTERER: ET STREJF AF LYKKE

en film af Teona Strugar Mitevska



PREMIERE: 30. marts 2023

PRESSEVISNING: d. 23. marts kl. 9:30 i Empire Bio

FIND MATERIALE:

Pressebilleder:

Trailer og EPK klip:

<http://distribution.paradisbio.dk/film.asp?id=349>

<https://paradis.digitalepk.dk>

Brugernavn: presse - password: film

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SYNOPSIS//

Asja, en 40-årig single kvinde i Sarajevo, søger kærligheden ved et stort anlagt dating-event, hvor hun bliver matchet med Zoran, en 43-årig bankmand. I løbet af arrangementet viser det sig, at Zoran ikke er den han udgiver sig for at være, men allerede kender til Asja og hendes traumatiske fortid under borgerkrigen. Han leder ikke efter kærlighed, men tilgivelse.

Filmen er lavet af den kvindelige instruktør Teona Strugar Mitevska, som også gav os 'Gud eksisterer, hendes navn er Petrunya'.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE//

Hvad definerer os: Vores etnicitet, religion, køn? Hvad splitter os, og hvad forener os? Dette er en historie om livets usikkerhed, muligheden for at bringe gerningsmand og offer sammen, gennemlevningen af den smertefulde fortid; dette er historien om utænkelige forbindelser, om kærlighed og absurditet. Filmen starter som en humordreven ekskursion og udvikler sig til et bjerg af oplevelser. Den naturlige rytme er forhistorisk og er tæt forbundet til de menneskelige undersøgelsesteknikker man bruger til at finde sandheden efter vold. Jeg ser denne film som en symfoni af koreograferede bevægelser, der udfolder lag af følelser, der langsomt indruller publikum til en grad af svimmelhed. Lokationen var essentiel: Et 80'er hotel, et vidne til Eksjugoslaviens arkitektoniske stil: Betonbrutalisme eller modernisme, og så er der den sårede by Sarajevo, et vidnesbyrd om åbne sår og fortidens smerte.

OM INSTRUKTRUKTØR TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA//

Teona Strugar Mitevska er født i Makedonien, startede som barneskuespiller, studerede billedkunst og grafisk design og senere film på NYU-Tisch School of Arts. Hun instruerede sin første kortfilm VETA i 2001 og har lavet film lige siden: HOW I KILLED A SAINT (2004), I AM FROM TITOV VELES (2007), THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS (2012), TERESA AND I (2013), WHEN THE DAY HAD NO NAME (2017) og senest GUD EKSISTERER, HENDES NAVN ER PETRUNYA der havde premiere ved konkurrencen på Berlin Film Festival i 2019, hvor den fik den Økumeniske Pris såvel som German Guild Film Prisen. Indtil videre har filmen modtaget mere end 30 internationale priser, f.eks. LUX-prisen fra Det Europæiske Parlament og blev solgt til biografdistribution i mere end 40 lande. I 2018 gav Frankrigs kulturministerium Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Letters.

ET STREJF AF LYKKE er hendes nyeste film: Hun arbejder på nuværende tidspunkt med pre-produktionen af MOTHER; hendes første engelsksprogede film. Teona Strugar Mitevska bor i Skopje og Brussels med sin søn Kaeliok.



INTERVIEW MED TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA - ENGELSK//

I = Interviewer

TSM: Teona Strugar Mitevska

I: GOD EXISTS, HER NAME IS PETRUNYA, took a tough stance against patriarchy. WHEN THE DAY HAD NO NAME, spoke about the inability of the young generations, especially men, to define themselves differently than what society and, again, the patriarchal structure demands from them. Why making now a film that deals with war and the debris of war?

TSM: I was born and grew up in Yugoslavia. I was 17 when the war in Bosnia started, one year older than Asya, the female protagonist of THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD. This war, and the dissolution of everything we believed in, was, and still is, a significant development in my life, one that has informed me and continues to structure who I became. In the first year of NYU grad film school, I made a short film: «Amer in America,» a documentary about my best friend, Amer, a Bosnian refugee living in Florida. During my second year, I made the short VETA, which was based on Amer's personal story of leaving Stolac, his native town. The film was screened at Berlinale and started my career allowing me to make all my films since. For me, THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD is a sort of poem and a way to celebrate the best of what was once Yugoslavia and Sarajevo, the most beautiful town in the world, with the most beautiful people too.

I: This is a third collaboration with Elma Tataragic, the co-writer of the film?

TSM: It is, in fact, our fourth, as we have just finished writing my next movie, MOTHER. We often say: between the two of us, we have 20 stories to tell, four done, 16 more to go. But yes, once you meet your match, you don't let it go, and Elma is this, to me, an unbeatable collaborative force. GOD EXISTS, HER

NAME IS PETRUNYA was a personal journey for me. THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD is Elma's personal story. The script is based on her life.

I: Can you tell us about the true story your film is based on?

TSM: Elma was injured during the siege of Sarajevo. And then, after the war, when she studied cinema at Sarajevo Academy, she was invited to an acting workshop where she met "the" man. They were asked to talk about the worst things that happened to them. And they share their experiences just as in the film. Their meeting was pure chance. She stayed in contact with this man while having very conflictual feelings about the whole experience. Eight years ago, Elma told me she would like to do something with her story. Three years later, I was at the Sarajevo Film Festival with my sister Labina, the film producer who also plays Marta. We were at the famous Holiday Inn hotel, this big yellow building, a pivotal place during the siege of Sarajevo. We were sitting in the hallway, and I told her Elma's story. Labina said to me: "Imagine if we put this story here, it would be some Meeting Congress". We started talking, and we found the form of how to give a more contemporary view of this strange experience. We called Elma who answered: "Great! When do we start writing?"



I: Being from Macedonia, did you feel rightful to tell a story about Bosnia?

TSM: It is something I continuously questioned myself. I grew up in Skopje and studied in the United States in the early 90s during the siege of Sarajevo. I watched the war unfold from far away. I heard first accounts through my family, even though in Macedonia, the conflict was almost non-existent. But this war affected us as we were all part of one country, Yugoslavia. It influenced our lives regardless. As we were writing the script, Elma and I did a lot of research and interviews on-site with residents from Sarajevo. We integrated some of their stories into the screenplay. Only then did I realize how ignorant I was, how little I knew of what it meant. You don't know war unless you have experienced the devastation of it. No matter how close Elma is to me. But with her being involved, I didn't feel like an impostor.

I: In real life, did Elma forgive this man?

TSM: She wouldn't have been able to write the story if she had not. But without taking responsibility, forgiveness is not possible. The story is, in the end, a fictional account of an actual event.

I: So, there was no process in Bosnia like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

TSM: Elma and I often went back to the post-Apartheid process in South Africa but no, it did not happen in Bosnia. Possibly through culture and regional cooperation, we have come to terms and reconciled to a degree. Our cast and crew genuinely reflect how far we have come. We met and hired Serbians, Croatians, and Bosniak actors that live and work in Bosnia and Hercegovina coming from all religious and non-religious backgrounds. We must remember that Sarajevo, until the 90s was an incredible melting pot of religions and nationalities. So was Yugoslavia, with its socialist ideology and the philosophy of multicultural brotherhood and unity among its citizens. My father is Macedonian, and my mother is Montenegrin. Maybe that is why I feel even closer to the story: I am a child of Yugoslavia.



I: We can feel some of your characters don't know to which community they belong, as if they were forced to choose an identity through their birth or religion, and they seem lost.

TSM: Let me give you another example: Elma, the screenwriter, has a Croatian Catholic mother, while her father is a Bosnian Muslim. Her family also has Jewish and Orthodox Christian heritage. What is she? That is the tragedy of war: questioning something along the lines of ethnicity and religion. Since the war, Sarajevo's socio-cultural atmosphere has vastly improved. Yet, it is incredible how the subject of war sneaks through little cracks of common everyday experiences in one way or another, as when Asim talks about the pumpkin pies. This war happened thirty years ago, we almost forgot about it, but it is still can be detected in our present. And now, we have Ukraine, an another war on European soil. When will we learn to stop this destructive behavior?

I: Is Sarajevo still a melting pot? Are there some victims meeting some ex-snipers in the city streets?

TSM: We can imagine the likelihood of people from different sides of the war meeting on Sarajevo buses, trams, city squares, daily. Sarajevo is also a divided city, a fractured aggregate, but nevertheless a city that seems more vital than politics. Of course, there are opposite currents against that, which is disappointing. We say that history is about facts, but today we live in a time when historical facts seem to have lost their importance. And unfortunately, in today's BosniaHerzegovina, the facts are different for different communities. Even today some politicians, are in denial of the siege of Sarajevo, as if it never happened. Younger generations grow up with this ignorance of how the war affected everything and everyone. If we ignore what happened if we don't educate and initiate continual dialogues, how can we create any common future?

I: How did you build Asja's character?

TSM: We wanted Asja to be an ordinary civilian, you could meet randomly in Sarajevo, Brussels, or Berlin. We needed to have that familiarity of likeness that borderlines invisibility. In this context of fake normality, the «everydayness» of Asja became even more critical. It was a way for the audience, who are not from the Balkan region, to identify with her. She has a regular job. She has an everyday life. Her only problem is her inability to meet somebody who can accept her, somebody she can love. Like everybody else in the world, she is looking for love, acceptance, for happiness. The idea was to keep her in this normality until the audience identified with her. And then we produce her rage, which is typical; when she begins Zoran's trial, it's something very uncommon, but you are with her at that moment. And you understand the origin of her emotions.

I: Asja says she is afraid of every loud noise. Does it mean many people in Sarajevo potentially have PTSD, which has never been fully acknowledged nor discussed publically ?

TSM: Absolutely. It is the most common trigger for trauma. And we know that trauma is passed from one generation to the next. Even the young people Asja meets on the dancefloor, carry the trauma in a way they might not be aware of. Not in the same way as Asja, but they probably do.

I: What will happen with Asja after this day? Will she be relieved, changed?

TSM: Well, there is a smile on her face. Let me tell you something very personal. Elma, the screenwriter, is 46. She tried for many years to be pregnant. She did all the checkups, and there was no reason she could not have a child. So, at one moment, she gave up. And as soon as we finished writing the script, she became pregnant. I still have goosebumps talking about it as if the release of this heavy thing she carried inside allowed her to have a future.

I: What should we think about Zoran? He is also a victim of his surroundings.

TSM: He is a sad man. I showed the film to some people from Sarajevo, and it was a very challenging experience for them because the film pushed them to understand the other side: Zoran is the nemesis, and yet, you can feel sorry for him. I am amazed by Elma's ability to understand this man. Her forgiving shows the incredible generosity of a human being. Zoran grew up as a victim of history, a victim of the men's egos because, for me, the war in Yugoslavia was a matter of egos, a war of needless male absurdity.

I: Are there any testimonies from exsnipers that guided you?

TSM: You can find some YouTube videos of certain war criminals talking about their experiences, but that feels very abstract, very opaque. About Zoran himself, his situation is one of many soldiers enlisted against their will even though they still made a choice. His everyday existence is his purgatory.

I: You directed this film as a choreography between two people meeting and fleeing from each other and then meeting again. Sometimes in front of a choir of other people.

TSM: For me, each film is a conjunction of the story, the environment, the experience proposed, camera movement, characters movement, framing, color, sound, and the «mise en scène.» The film takes place in one space, a brutalist architectural style hotel. I was put against a significant challenge: how to shoot this troupe of forty actors; only seventeen of them were professional, in one room and not bore the spectator to death. I knew I had to prepare the actors for the process. I knew I must prepare as well, be confident in exercising my craft as a director and do what I most enjoy: direct actors. For eight months, I casted everyone on the territory of Bosnia and Republika Srpska. I knew it was an ensemble film and had to treat it as a puzzle or a cathedral where every piece takes critical importance: one character could not function without the rest and vice versa. Just as a theater director would need six weeks of rehearsing, we did something similar: 6 weeks plus one week of rehearsals on the set and almost four weeks of shooting. I rehearsed a lot, and I shot pretty fast. Rehearsing allows you to organize the chaos and create space for improvisation, unearths certain truths you cannot find otherwise. The entire cast was always present on the set, always ready, following religiously the moto: "Don't look for the camera, the camera will find you!" The process was one of the best and most humbling experiences I have ever lived. There was an incredible cohesion and a sense of togetherness. It was a very democratic experience, we were acting like one united organism, the ultimate musketeers: One for all, all for one! All of them have had an experience with the war. To some, our rehearsals felt like a prolongation, an extension, a reminiscence of the past, and even a therapy. And I, I was just the facilitator.

I: You say throughout the film that it is impossible to end a war without curing the pain, loss, and trauma.

TSM: Bosnia is still profoundly injured and highly divided. The Dayton Agreement made the country impossible to govern. Thirty years later Bosnians are still living the war. This is the ultimate human tragedy, belonging to us all. My film asks the question: when does this war end, when will the reminiscence of it disappear, and can traumas ever be erased ? I hope Europe has learned from this experience, and we will not make the same mistake with Ukraine.

I: How do you think the film will be received in ex-Yugoslavia? Is it possible to show it in Serbia?

TSM: Of course, there will be people who will have a problem with it. But I think even Serbians are more and more open about discussing what happened and what role they took in the war. It will create controversy, and the discussion will be exciting and hopefully constructive.

CREDITS//

CAST//

CREW//

Asja : JELENA KORDIĆ KURET
Zoran : ADNAN OMEROVIĆ
Marta : LABINA MITEVSKA
Mersiha : ANA KOSTOVSKA
Azemina : KSENIJA MARINKOVIĆ
Asim : IZUDIN BAJROVIĆ
Ema : IRMA ALIMANOVIĆ
Aida : VEDRANA BOŽINOVIĆ
Sabina : MONA MURATOVIĆ
Elvira : NIKOLINA KUJAČA
Kerim : SINIŠA VIDOVIĆ
Neven : KEMAL RIZVANOVIĆ

CREW//

Instruktør: TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA
Manus: ELMA TATARAGIĆ og TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA
Producer: LABINA MITEVSKA
Producere: SÉBASTIEN DELLOYE, DANIJEL HOČEVAR, VANJA SREMAC,
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Foto: VIRGINIE SAINT MARTIN
Klipper: PER K. KIRKEGAARD
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Kostume: MONIKA LORBER
Make-up: MOJCA GOROGRANC PETRUSHEVSKA
Supervising Sound Editor: INGRID SIMON
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Sound Operator: VIKTOR GRABAR
Produktion: SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI (North Macedonia), ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP
(Belgium), VERTIGO (Slovenia) , FRAU FILM (Denmark), TERMINAL 3 (Croatia), SCCA/pro.ba
(Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Originaltitel: NAJSREKJNIOT CHOVEK NA SVETOT

Spilletid: 100 MIN.

Sprog: BOSNISK

Produktionsår: 2022

Dansk Distribution: Øst for Paradis Filmimport ApS

Lanceres med støtte fra:

Det Dansk Filminstitut og Creative Europe Programme - MEDIA of the European Union



Medfinansieret af Den
Europæiske Unions program
Et Kreativt Europa