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Stepout

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ON ADOPTION,
HOLLYWOOD,
RELIGION,
HEARTBREAK,
MADONNA,
MADDIE (HER DOG)

...AND

WHY SHE'S SO

**DAMN
SEXY**

Photo courtesy of Humanitarians Not Heroes.



The Remarkable Life of Film Director Sabina Vajraca

By Laurie Kaplan

It's not every day you get to meet someone who has a story so touching and ambitions so high that you just know that they are going to be very well known one day. Well, after sitting down for lunch in Soho at Café Noir with director Sabina Vajraca last Friday, I realized I just had one of those days.

Over hummus and a veggie burger, I learned the fascinating story of Vajraca's youth in Bosnia, to her transition as a refugee to Croatia, and to her move to the USA at the age of 17, all of which aided her versatile talents and passion to write, direct and produce films that will no doubt place her name among the greatest in the industry one day in the near future.

Her name might be recognizable already through her creation of the award-winning documentary "Back to Bosnia." This film was just the first in a string of one's to come, however, and before her film debut in the States, she had already established a name for herself in a different, yet equally as competitive industry.

As a teen, Sabina spent two years as a refugee in Croatia after having been forced out of her home country of Bosnia when war broke out in the early 1990s. While in Croatia, she reached for the stars and started a theatre magazine, the first of its kind in the country, with a group of friends.

"I went to see my first theater show and I fell in love with it. ...The lead guy was hot too, but beyond that... I didn't know how to get into it. I knew I didn't want to be an actress, so I got together four friends and created a theatre magazine because there wasn't one at the time. We had these really grandiose ideas of what it's going to be, and we're going to interview all these famous actors. In Croatia, theatre actors are sort of like movie stars here. The film industry isn't really that big, but the theatre industry's huge," she says.

Low and behold, the girls managed to achieve what they had set out to do and published what became a very successful theatre magazine through the help of a family friend in the publishing industry and what Sabina says may have been “beginner’s luck.”

In 1994, after a couple of years as a darling of the Zagreb theatre scene, Sabina’s family made the move to the USA so their daughter, who was 17 at the time, could get a college education.

Once through with college, Sabina turned her ambitions in a new direction—literally—when she directed the documentary “Back to Bosnia,” which caught the real emotions of her family as they returned to their home town of Banja Luka for the first time since they were forced to flee during the war.

Once the war ended, those who were forced out of Bosnia were allowed to come back and reclaim their homes and property from those who took it. According to Sabina, many people went through quite a shock and period

Her current project is a feature narrative film entitled “Emina,” which tells the tale of a young Bosnian woman who ends up in a concentration camp during the war. She is brutally and repeatedly raped by her childhood friend, but survives and moves to New York City. Years later, still emotionally tangled from the experience, she runs into him in the city and the story unravels itself. Sabina has written the script and is in the works to start filming the teaser.

One ironic thing about Sabina is that, despite her trend of depressing films, she is actually quite an upbeat, bubbly lady who loves to laugh and has a contagious smile. She even laughs about that and justifies it by blaming her astrological sign—Gemini.

Through her battles, from life as a refugee to busting through the doors of the film industry, she’s managed to, in a sense, avoid the rules advertised as the “right way” to make a film and has taken on her own set of rules, which have so far helped with her success.

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of depression when they returned to what was once their home, as it had basically taken on a completely different identity with other people living in it.

“I was very nervous about the trip back home and had to process so many emotions all at once, while still directing a film and making sure my American members of the crew were taken care of. Not to mention working with my parents, who had their own emotional traumas to process through the filming. It was exhausting, thrilling, life-changing and, at the end of the day, cheaper than therapy,” she says.

“Back to Bosnia” was screened in over 30 film festivals in 2005, earned deserved acclamation and opened the doors for Sabina in the film industry.

Her second project was entitled “Apparition,” which is a short, horror film based on ghosts in New York City real estate. This film is currently in its final editing stages and is being sent to film festivals all over with the hopes of having it premiere sometime during the year 2009.

After “Apparition,” Sabina worked as the assistant to the director on “Adam,” a feature film written and directed by Max Mayer set to be released by Fox Searchlight in July of this year.

A word from the wise for film makers of the future, Sabina says a very important thing she’s learned thus far is to not take “no” too personal.

“One thing I’ve learned through all of this is don’t take “no” personally. I took it personally for such a long time that I thought it meant that the film was no good or that I had to do this, or I had to do this. It took me a long time, a couple of years, before I realized that “no” means nothing.”

So, I take away from my lunch meeting two important lessons learned from Sabina Vajraca: 1, persistence is key and 2, march to the beat of your own drum. If you have a dream, run with it and don’t let yourself get discouraged by the rights and wrongs posed by those who claim to be experts.

Look out for Sabina’s future film releases and keep your eyes peeled for her around NYC.

Steppin’ Out