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interview



Simply a Good Film

Polona Prešeren / Government PR and Media Office

Branko Đurić - Đuro is the director and star of *Kajmak in marmelada* (Cheese and Jam), the biggest domestic box-office success of independent Slovenia. In addition to authoring the most successful comedy of late, he is also an undisputed theatre star with his legendary Teater 55.



Your film - which is currently in the cinemas - has already broken all records for a Slovenian film. It is also the biggest Slovenian hit in over a decade...

That is certainly what the numbers say. So far, over 120,000 people have seen the film, so we have already broken the Slovenian record. What I am more interested in now though, is making it to the all-time top 15 in Slovenia. We have already overtaken *Gladiator*, and are now catching up with *The Mask*, which is at 15th. I never thought that the film would be so successful, but now that we have already broken so many records, my wish is that more than 132,000 people will see it, which would take us into the top-ten.

What kind of film is *Kajmak in marmelada* actually? I understand it was not your intention to make a comedy.

Labelling the film a comedy in the ads was merely a marketing ploy, because it was really not my intention to make a comedy. I am paying for this now, because people say comedy is the easier film genre. ***Kajmak in marmelada*** is a social drama. The story could take place anywhere in the world, because everyone has their own

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"Southerners". I just wanted to make a film about something that is close to me, something I know about. So I made ***Kajmak in marmelada***.

How do you, as the author, perceive the film's success? Many had predicted that it would not be so triumphant.

I don't know if anyone in Slovenia is in the business of predicting film success, except for distributors who thought that the film would draw an audience of between 42,000 and 50,000. I was not surprised by the success because I am used to making hits. I make things that are easy to understand, I make films for the people, doing my best to make simple things that people can easily identify with. I also deal with topics that I know a lot about, and I try to do them well. I am glad that the film is so successful, just as my theatre and TV shows have been. You have to realise that a Slovenian film is considered successful if 25,000 people see it, this is one Golden Reel (awards given to films seen by 25,000 viewers). I wanted two such reels, but now we're approaching number five.

Slovenians are said to find it hard to accept jokes about themselves, but the film in a way shows the most typical Slovenian stereotypes.

I did not work with stereotypes. I'm interested in extreme situations in film; I don't like mediocrity in art. Mediocrity is not interesting. I don't know who would want to watch a film about the average workday of an average person. My characters are extremes. I wanted to show the worst of what is Slovenian and the worst of what is Bosnian. Seeing how people in both countries react to the film, I think I have succeeded. People in Bosnia resent that I have denigrated Bosnians too much, but now I often hear that I also poked fun at Slovenians a little bit too much.

What are your plans with this film?

I don't know. I wrote the script six years ago, filmed it three years ago, and even while I was doing the editing I was already thinking how I would do a lot of things differently. I am over it a little bit now, and don't have that many ambitions with it. We were at the Sarajevo Film **festival** for the world premiere. Now we're going to Los Angeles to the **Festival** of Balkans Film.

You also starred in *No Man's Land*, which won an Oscar for best foreign language film. Has this opened up the doors of Hollywood for you?

I work a lot in Italy, where I am quite

abroad
Croatia: Chance for a New Beginning

what's going on
what's going on

where to go
where to go



popular. I've so far done three films there. My last performance was the leading role in Renato de Maria's *Amate Mi*, starring Isabella Ferrari. I have offers on the table for a few Hollywood films and an English project, which we are now discussing. Playing the lead in a film that won an Oscar has had a major impact on everything. I've gotten quite a few offers.

You came to Slovenia from the besieged Sarajevo. Now you are one of the greatest comedy stars in Slovenia, having first conquered TV and then theatre stages with your Teater 55. What is the philosophy of your theatre?

Teater 55 is a comedy theatre, where we cultivate comedy. We currently have five shows running, namely *Kaj pa zdaj*, *Ėas za spremembo*, *Butelj za veèerjo*, *La³/₄e¹*, *krade¹*, *¹kampe je¹*, and getting ready for the premiere of *Elizabeta je zagreta*. We are also in the middle of making a new show, *Slovenci v vesolju*, a science-fiction comedy. In December, for example, we had 34 shows, and January has been quite busy too.

And the next step?

One of my scripts won an international competition, and I'm in the middle of talks with foreign producers on making a film based on it. But I have very little time, since there is still a lot of work with Teater 55; I'm writing a new comedy, a new screenplay. I am somehow "lost in space" regarding priorities. Should I promote Kajmak, write a new drama, a script, film... Some say that I should quickly start writing *Kajmak in marmelada 2*, which I think is absurd, just as *Rambo 2* or *Rocky 4* are. I will try to focus and establish how and what to do next. Although I never plan for the future, it seems that I will have to make up my mind about what I will or won't do.

As an artist from abroad, have you ever had any problems in your work?

No, I actually don't feel like a foreigner at all. Naturally, there are some intolerant people everywhere you go, which is perfectly normal. But these are just individuals. I feel at home here. When we are returning from abroad or from a holiday trip, I always say "We're going back home now".

Well, you had been quite well known back in Yugoslavia.

True, but even then I didn't have a particular sense of national affiliation. I feel alright and at home everywhere. No matter where you are, you can find people that you feel close to.

You are probably often asked this question, but what is your recipe for making people smile?

The word "phenomenon" is often used now when people are talking about ***Kajmak in marmelada***. Everyone writes about how and why this is possible. Philosophers, sociologists, journalists are writing about it, explaining what phenomenon lies behind the film's success. I have read all possible explanations, with the exception of the one that I expected: that maybe this is not a bad film. I think it is simply a good film. I don't know how I otherwise would be able to convince 120,000 people to watch something that is not OK.

Kajmak in marmelada, a story about a Slovenian woman and a Bosnian man, could take place anywhere - every country has its own "Southerners". It is a story about a couple from the margins of society, of shady deals that he gets involved in to make money and make her happy. He is a jobless Bosnian spending his time sitting in front of the TV with a beer in his hand. She is a hard working Slovenian with a job; he merely helps her spend the money she makes. She puts up with it because she loves him so much, but they get into an argument where she explodes, venting the anger that had been building up inside of her for so long. She tells him she is leaving, not coming back until she is absolutely certain that he has changed and is willing to chip in to the family budget. He desperately wants her back and starts looking for a job, getting a helping hand from a friend who is involved in suspicious business activities. Her parents - who can't stand foreigners and "Southerners", are thrilled to have her back and immediately fix her up with a "proper" Slovenian guy. But, blind as love is, the two cannot stand to be separated...

Director: Branko Đurić **Screenplay:** Branko Đurić **Starring:** Branko Đurić, Tanja Ribić, Dragan Bjelogrić, Igor Samobor