

“The Woods are Dark and Deep”

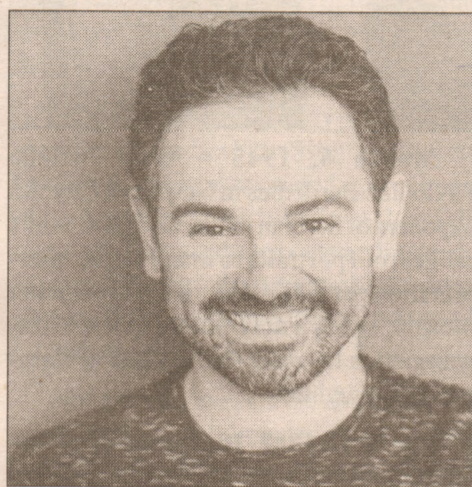
By Mladen Obradovic

They came to Canada to find a better life and ended up sacrificing their freedom.

Moved by the tragic story of our earliest immigrants who arrived in Canada before or during World War I with Austro-Hungarian or Ottoman passports, playwright Mladen Obradović wrote a theatre play about their plight so that their painful story could be told in a creative format based on historical facts. His drama “The Woods are Dark and Deep” was presented at Factory Theatre in Toronto March 21-27, 2019.

Mladen Obradović, Artistic Director of Pulse Theatre in Toronto, wrote this poignant story about a dark and relatively unknown period in Canadian history when the Canadian government sent thousands of immigrants to labour camps in the Canadian hinterlands. Among them were Serbs, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Croats, Turks, Armenians, Austrians, and others. Stigmatized as “enemy aliens” because they had immigrated from empires which were at war with Canada, our country waged a different sort of war against them, depriving them of their families, freedom, properties, language, everything they had achieved since their arrival. Some were interned under harsh conditions while others reported regularly to the police.

The story revolves around three Serbian male immigrants and a Ukrainian family (parents with two children) in one camp and how they cope with the situation, all thrown together by the winds of war. The playwright shows how each handles the injustice and isolation. The kind Ukrainian mother accepts this fate as long as her family is together and tries to maintain a semblance of a normal family life. Nevertheless, moments of passion, desperation, anger and hopelessness prevail, mainly among the three Serbs, because of the uncertainty about the future - almost like waiting for Godot, but with the added notes of helplessness and extreme isolation. The heated debates among them often ended up in fist fights, and yet throughout those heated exchanges, they maintain full



Mladen Obradovic

control of their Eastern European accents adding to the authenticity of the story. On a lighter note, there is the love story subplot with a bit of humour. Woven into the play are lovely Serbian folk songs and the constant appreciation of the deep woods which had enveloped their isolation which show that hope can thrive even in the most burdensome and harrowing circumstances. At the conclusion, the Ukrainian family is liberated and shortly thereafter the “Serbian association” liberates the Serbs - an indirect reference to Božidar Marković and the Serbian National Shield Society who had actually liberated the Serbs from the Kapuskasing camp.

Mladen Obradović brought together an excellent cast and creative team. The costumes and scenery were as modest as the environment of the camps. “The Woods are Dark and Deep” was commissioned by the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund which awarded Obradovic a modest grant to write the play. The outcome was an excellent, moving and realistic drama!

Congratulations to the entire team on this meaningful tribute to the forbearance and fortitude of our early immigrants and the historical lessons it teaches today’s generations.

Draga Dragašević

Tito’s secret

The April 5, 1952 marriage of Josip Broz Tito (60) and Jovanka Budisavljević (28) was conducted in secret. Recently Tito’s personal archive was made accessible and among his many papers was a long held secret.

Throughout his rule, Tito was always recognized as a “Yugoslav”. That identity was promoted among the people for decades. However, that changed when archivists at the Arhiv Jugoslavije were doing research for an exhibit entitled “The Great Illusion”. They discovered their marriage certificate on which Tito declared his ethnicity as “Croatian”, not Yugoslav, while Jovanka declared hers as Serbian.

That discovery throws a light on many of Tito’s policies and decisions, especially those regarding: concealing the genocide against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, the division of Serbia into three parts, the liquidation of thousands upon thousands of Serbs during and after the war, the opening of the border between Kosovo and Metohija and Albania, and the permanent expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija (implemented by the kum at his marriage, Aleksandar Ranković). Tito’s hypocrisy and disdain for the Serbs were reinforced in his policy: “Što slabija Srbija, to jača Jugoslavija” - “The weaker Serbia is, the stronger Yugoslavia is”. Events of the 70s, 80s and 90s proved the exact opposite.

Source: “Titova najveća tajna: Evo kako izgleda venčani list Tita i Jovanke Broz”, Telegraf, 28 February 2019

VCS TIDBITS

STITCHES WINS AT BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL

The Serbian film, "Stitches" (Savovi) had its premiere at the Berlin Film Festival where it garnered several positive reviews.



Snezana Bogdanovic

According to IMDb: "Stitches combines elements of thriller and melodrama, and deals with the story of newborn babies abducted from hospitals (and sold illegally for adoption), which has been a hot social issue in Serbia recently. The script, penned by Elma Tatarsagic, tells the story of a woman who firmly believes that her newborn baby was stolen from her more than 20 years ago while she was told that her baby died."

Directed by Miroslav Terzic, the film stars Snezana Bogdanovic, Rade Markovic and Dragana Varagic.

"Miroslav Terzic's 'Stitches', which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival," writes VARIETY, "features an engrossing performance by Snezana Bogdanovic, one of the most celebrated actresses of former Yugoslavia."

"The film is a portrait of a woman who's determined to find the truth," Terzic told Variety, "even when everyone around her insists she's wrong or even mad. She's doubted, bullied. It's a remarkable portrait of courage in a society where women's voices aren't always heard."

"Towards the end of the movie," writes Variety, "a woman asks Ana what she's looking for, and she says, 'The truth'. Do you think her search and this story of a chapter in Serbian history that's been buried, speaks of a larger question of truth and justice in your country and how it deals with the past?"

Terzic answers: "That's a story that's connected to the last 50 years. For me, it's really interesting how we do not have any solved cases right now. No one has solved them publicly. There is a wish, but behind the words nothing happens. I don't know why. Sometimes, I'm really furious, because we're really helpless. This film is a vote for people who are really helpless ... I think the lack of empathy is something that will kill us, because we start to live just our life and don't care what's happening to the people around us."

At the conclusion of the Berlin Film Festival, "Stitches" won the Europa Cinemas Label prize. "The film is a fine example of the power of the art of cinema," the Europa Cinemas Label's jury said. "The story is heartbreaking. Once you have seen this film it does not let you go. What would you do if this happened to you? The courage of the mother in this film is truly extraordinary."

As Europa Cinemas Label winner, "Stitches" will get promotional support from the art house cinemas association for its theatrical release on the continent.

VESNA GOLDSWORTHY ON CBC



On CBC's Writers & Company, host Eleanor Wachtel "explores in-depth the lives, thoughts and works of distinguished writers from around the world." A recent guest on the program was Belgrade-born Vesna Goldsworthy whose novels are inspired literary classics "seen through the lens of Eastern European and Russian characters."

Her latest novel, "Monsieur Ka", focuses on the life of Anna Karenina's son, while her previous novel, "Gorsky", re-imagines "The Great Gatsby" as a 21st century Russian oligarch in London.

During her hour-long interview with Watchel, conducted by phone from London, Goldsworthy touched on the theme of exile. "As an immigrant myself, I followed the destiny of the children of the first generation immigrants," says Goldsworthy. "Very often they respond by wanting to become, in this case, as English as it is possible to be. Through almost every character (the novel) is a study of different modes of being in exile. Do you make yourself blend in and disappear or do you emphasize your identity? Do you leave your identity? I know with the Serbian community in London that some people have become almost more Serbian in exile than they would have been back in the old country. With the y. I sort of examined that. They have this ambivalent attitude towards Russia because of the way communism has changed it."

Vesna Goldsworthy was born in Belgrade in 1961. She moved to England in 1986.

SULTANA MARA COMES TO NETFLIX

Netflix has given a six-episode series order to Ottoman Rising, a docu-drama miniseries from STXtv and Karga Seven Pictures. The series tells the story of Mehmet the Conqueror from a 13-year-old teenage Sultan to his conquest of Constantinople.

Mehmet's step-mother, Sultana Mara, was the daughter of Djuradj Brankovic and the great grand-daughter of Knez Lazar Hrebeljanovic.

In the mini-series, the role of Sultana Mara will be played by Tuba Buyukustun, regarded as one of the most beautiful Turkish actors, recipient of several awards and a UNICEF National Goodwill Ambassador. Cem Yigit Uzumoglu, now starring in the Netflix series "The Protector", will be Mehmet. Executive producers are Sarah Weatherbee, Kelly McPherson and Emre Sabin.

Ottoman Rising is on Netflix's 2020 schedule.