



**LABINA
MITEVSKA**

GOD EXISTS, HER NAME IS
PETRUNYA

A FILM BY **TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA**



GOSPOD POSTOI, NEJZINOTO IME E
PETRUNIJA

Press
 RENDEZ-VOUS

Viviana Andriani : +33 6 80 16 81 39 . viviana@rv-press.com

Aurélié Dard : +33 6 77 04 52 20 . aurelie@rv-press.com
 www.rv-press.com

World sales
 PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL
 32 rue de l'Echiquier, 75010 Paris

Head of International Sales : Agathe Mauruc . +33 6 65 65 22 40 . amauruc@pyramidefilms.com

Sales Executive : Constance Poubelle . +33 6 32 75 49 03 . constance@pyramidefilms.com

Festivals & Markets : Ilaria Gomasasca . ilaria@pyramidefilms.com
 www.pyramidefilms.com

SYNOPSIS

In Stip, a small town in Macedonia, every January the local priest throws a wooden cross into the river and hundreds of men dive after it. Good fortune and prosperity are guaranteed to the man who retrieves it. This time, Petrunya dives into the water on a whim and manages to grab the cross before the others. Her competitors are furious - how dare a woman take part in their ritual? All hell breaks loose, but Petrunya holds her ground. She won her cross and will not give it up.



DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

WHERE DOES THIS STORY COME FROM ?

Every 19th of January for the holiday of Epiphany, the throwing of the cross event takes place in almost all the Orthodox world of Eastern Europe, including in Macedonia. In 2014, a woman caught the cross in the town of Štip, in Eastern part of Macedonia... Her act was deemed as an outrage from the local population as well as the religious authorities. As a matter of fact, women are not allowed to participate in the event. Consequently, they tried to take the cross away from her, but she would not give in. Next day, she gave an interview to the local station encouraging more women to jump for the cross in the future. She was labelled by the population as a "crazy", "disturbed", "troubled" young woman.

To me and my producer, Labina Mitevska, these reactions exposed a natural reflex of social conformism; they also revealed the misogyny that is supported by the deeply incusted patriarchal norms within our society. It was frustrating and maddening. The story of Petrunya rose from this frustration, we had to react.

DO YOU FEEL YOU MADE A FEMINIST MOVIE ?

All patriarchal societies are constructed to support male domination, where the woman status and social space is decided by man, so every time a story is told about, or around the so-called "second sex", it is inevitably a feminist movie. Every film with a female character in main a role or not, which treats the subject matter by not conforming to traditional roles is a feminist film.

It is difficult for me to imagine to be a woman and not be a feminist. Feminism is not a disease, or something to be afraid of. Equality, justice and equity for all is in the forefront of its ideology.

COULD THE FILM BE SEEN AS THE FIGHT OF TRADITION AGAINST MODERNITY ?

Imagine if tradition were a bag of salt (salt being essential for human life) to be carried through a large, deep, strong stream of water, which in this constellation, represents modernity? What would happen ? The salt would melt and the person would drown, and what then ?

If this story was happening in an office and was about breaking the glass ceiling, things would be more evident, but by placing it in a traditional environment, a small Macedonian town, things become more complex. Petrunya, as a symbol of modernity, stands against not one but two establishments, the Church and the State. She is powerless facing both but hopefully education is her saviour.

I don't have the answer of how to balance tradition and modernity, neither of what is the place of tradition in the future. What I am concerned is how can tradition be modulated to, for example, involve the second sex on a more equal level?

PETRUNYA COULD SEEM WEAK AND ARMLESS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM BUT SHE PROVES TO BE STRONGER AND STRONGER AS LONG AS THE FILM MOVES FORWARD AND THE WHOLE VILLAGE TAKES SIDE AGAINST HER. WHERE DOES SHE FIND THIS ENERGY ?

I have always believed in the idea of universal truth, the ideal as something all humans consciously or unconsciously strive for. The circumstances of place and environment, social or cultural we were born and raised in, inform us but do not define us. I firmly believe that women are inherently more sensitive to injustice, solemnly because we were born in unfair and unequal world. From early age, we were forced to justify ourselves, our existence, purpose and role. Women are in a constant

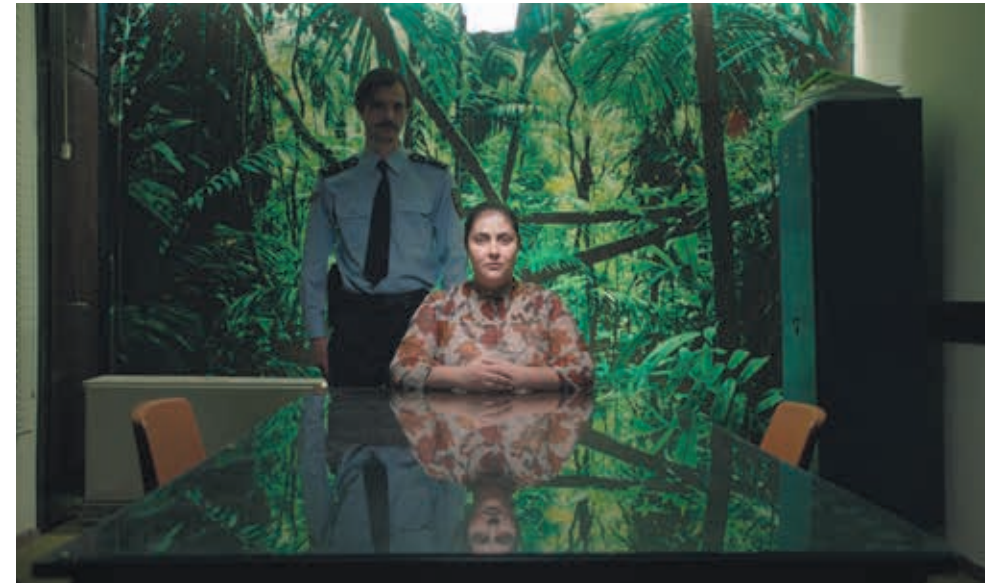


mode of modification, and modification leads to indefinite transcendence, the need to become better and do better. I am not the first or the last to say this, Simone de Beauvoir already did.

I am not saying that Petrunya is aware of all of this but as a member of the longest and most prosecuted majority in human history, she certainly unconsciously is. So she transcends through the story, through the obstacles that are put in her way, in her search for justice. Yes, she is weak in the beginning, or quiet as I would rather define her, and that was a big discussion with Elma Tataragić (my cowriter): should Petrunya be a strong character as Slavica, the journalist, is or should she transform throughout the story? We chose the second because change is positive. What is certain is that it is her situation that disposes her to seek the truth, and it is this need to seek justice that ultimately gives her the force to become from her humble beginnings what she truly is- a woman in her own right and a force for change.

SLAVICA, THE JOURNALIST, IS ANOTHER STRONG CHARACTER IN YOUR FILM... HOW DO YOU RELATE HER TO PETRUNYA ?

I was a journalist in a previous life, and I have a suspicion that Labina (my producer who also plays the part of Slavica) took me as an inspiration when she worked on her character. Needless to say, I have been called a witch, a pushy and arrogant bitch most of my life. Even today it is very difficult to function as a strong woman in the Balkan environment. If you are, you are immediately perceived as aggressive. By creating Slavica, my primary idea was solidarity, sisterhood between the two women, Petrunya and her. There are as many ways to tackle the subject of change as there are variety of characters, but there is only one way to obtain that change and that is by standing united. And here comes the good old dilemma between individualistic and social feminism. I know many people have a problem with the #MeToo movement, mostly with the lack of ideology behind it, but what we have definitely learned from it is that when idea becomes part of a united front, change is possible, and SOLIDARITY becomes the key.



TELL US ABOUT THE VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MOTHER AND THE DAUGHTER...

The way modernity relates to tradition perfectly correlates to how Petrunya relates to her mother, Vaska. The two women are on the opposite spectrum of the matter; the clash of the two is inevitable and necessary for progress to happen.

The legend says : "whoever catches the cross will be happy for the year to come". Petrunya's pursuit of happiness relies on her participation to the traditional race and therefore being happy for a year. The mother cannot understand this, unable to define happiness outside of the traditional codes. The violence between both is rooted in something much deeper and sinister : injustice dressed as a tradition. If the mother would accept Petrunya's behaviour, she would deny everything she is and everything she ever was, becoming nothing in the eyes of her society.

WHERE DID YOU FIND THE ACTRESS WHO PLAYS THE MAIN PART ?

It is her first role in a long feature film. Zorica is mostly casted as a comic actress; she is

employed in the Comic Theater of Skopje. What is wonderful with comic actors is their impeccable understanding of rhythm and timing. It usually takes me a lot of time to cast actors and rehearse with them. It is a process of many months. Rehearsals become part of the casting process, and this is extremely helpful and rewarding. I was looking for someone who projects a quiet and persistent strength, and it is what I found in Zorica, I immediately knew she would be my Petrunya.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES FOR PETRUNYA TO FIND HER OWN PLACE IN THE SOCIETY SHE LIVES IN AFTER THIS EVENT ?

I have heard that the real girl who caught the cross now lives in London... To be frank, her life would have been very difficult if she had stayed in Stip. I am happy she has had the opportunity to leave. This year a woman caught the cross in Zemun, Serbia. She was celebrated. The world is fast changing, hopefully!

CAST

ZORICA NUSHEVA	Petrunya
LABINA MITEVSKA	journalist Slavica
SIMEON MONI DAMEVSKI	chief inspector Milan
SUAD BEGOVSKI	priest
STEFAN VUJISIĆ	young officer
VIOLETA SHAPKOVSKA	mother Vaska
XHEVDET JASHARI	cameraman



CREW

Directed by	TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA
Written by	ELMA TATARAGIĆ and TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA
Producer	LABINA MITEVSKA (SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI)
Co-producers	SEBASTIEN DELLOYE (ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP) DANIJEL HOČEVAR (VERTIGO) ZDENKA GOLD (SPIRITUS MOVENS) MARIE DUBAS (DEUXIÈME LIGNE FILMS) ELIE MEIROVITZ (EZ FILMS)
Director of photography	VIRGINIE SAINT MARTIN
Editor	MARIE-HÉLÈNE DOZO
Sound recordist	HRVOJE PETEK
Set designer	VUK MITEVSKI
Costumes	MONIKA LORBER
Hair & Make-up	MARIJA GOROGRANC PETRUSHEVSKA
Sound design	INGRID SIMON
Mix	THOMAS GAUDER
Music	OLIVIER SAMOUILLAN
First assistant director	JANE KORTOSHEV
Casting director	KIRIJANA A. NIKOLOSKA
Script supervisor	PETRA TRAMPUŽ BOCEVSKA
Focus puller	SAMUEL ESSELINCKX
Gaffer	EMILIE GUERET
Key grip	JOSIP MATAUŠIĆ
Production manager	ELENA STANISHEVA
Post - production manager	FABIAN HANNAERT
International sales	PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL

35MM + Alexa MINI - Frame rate: 24 fps - In colour - Duration: 100 min - Format 1:2.39 (Cinemascope) - Sound: 5.1
R. Macedonia, Belgium, Slovenia, France, Croatia - In Macedonian





Teona Strugar Mitevska was born in 1974 in an artistic family in Skopje, Macedonia. She started as a child actor, trained as a painter and a graphic designer and later studied at MFA program in film at the Tisch School of Arts, New York University.

She made her debut as short film director in 2001 with *VETA* (Special Jury Prize, Berlin International Film Festival 2002). Film *HOW I KILLED A SAINT* (Tiger Awards Competition of the 2004 Rotterdam International Film Festival) is Teona's first feature made under the auspices of SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI, a company she established together with her brother Vuk and sister Labina.

Her next feature film, *I AM FROM TITOV VELES*, received Special Jury Prize at the 2007 Sarajevo Film Festival and was selected for the 2007 Toronto International Film festival (Discovery section), 2008 Berlin International Film Festival (Panorama) and Cannes Film Festival (*ACID*).

Feature film *THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS* premiered at 2012 Berlin International Film Festival (Panorama Special) and in 2013 Teona directed and edited film *TERESA AND I*, a feature documentary about Mother Teresa, her life and work through the perspective of a woman of today.

Feature film *WHEN THE DAY HAD NO NAME* premiered in the Panorama Special of the 2017 Berlin International Film Festival, while her latest feature film *GOD EXISTS, HER NAME IS PETRUNYA* will be premiered in the Competition of the 2019 Berlin International Film Festival.

Since its founding, SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI have also co-produced several feature films: *THE WILD PEAR TREE* by Nuri Bilge Ceylan; *NIGHTLIFE* by Damjan Kozole and *SIERRANEVADA* by Christi Puiu.

Teona Strugar Mitevska lives in Brussels, Belgium with her son Kaeliok.



