

Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2012

# Interview : Bojan Vuletic

Director of 'Practical Guide to Belgrade with Singing and Dancing' - Serbia, Germany, France, Hungary, Croatia, 2011 - East of the West Competition

`<p class="spip"><span class="spip_document_2134 spip_documents spip_documents_center" >  
</span></p>`

`<p class="spip">A comedy where the characters cry and a drama that involves joyful singing, Practical Guide to Belgrade portrays a city and its inhabitants on their way towards the European Union, while still holding on to their passionate selves.</p>`

**Is your story more about the characters, or are they just a pretext to tell something about the city and the country ?**

BV : Honestly, in the first stages of writing the idea was the main one, of Serbia transitioning towards the EU, and after that we gave our best to create these characters so that they seem alive, you can somehow feel all the problems they face in Belgrade and Serbia nowadays. We are always going from one extreme to the other, trying to show that we are better than anyone, exaggerating everything. And it s a very local thing, it s very much characteristic for the Balkans. There is this fascination we have now with the European Union and with the people coming here.

**It seemed like not only the couples have love stories, but that in fact there is also a love story between you and the city.**

BV : It s true. It s like when you are married to somebody, you know both their positive qualities and their flaws. I tried to make this ironic opposition show in the cinematography, with my DOP, Jelena Stankovic. We wanted to show nice aspects of Belgrade, but at the same time the things we are picturing are mostly falling apart precisely because of transition. The collision between the old town and the new, the European one, was meant to look like a sort of post-card, but a very ironic one.

**It seems like it s the women that pull the strings in all the couples in the film. Is it like that in real life in Serbia ?**

BV : Absolutely ! It s still an old, patriarchal society, but women are stronger than men. For me, a woman is always the main character in everything that I write, because the main character is somebody who has a problem, somebody who suffers&hellip; I always feel more connected to women. I think that they are more complex, there are a lot of feelings that a female character is capable of.

**Could you talk a bit about how the structure revolves around the songs ?**

BV : My intention was to make a musical, with serious dancing and singing all the time. But we realized we didn t have enough money for that. We tried not to drift completely away from the idea of musical, but at

the same time keep the costs low. So we figured out this device with the choir and I think in the end it is even better than if we would have had singing and dancing all the way. We needed songs that didn't require us to pay for copyright. It was my composer that suggested we could use folk songs about love which also provide a sort of ironic commentary to the four stories.

**What about the fact that characters continued on from one story to the other ?**

BV : I wanted to put across the fact that in Belgrade we are very much connected, despite all the differences. Somehow we are very similar, in these extremes and exaggerations, and the four chapters come together like a puzzle to show the bigger picture, sometime in a very schizophrenic manner.

**By Mirona Nicola**