

Human Rights Watch International Film Festival
June 10-23, 2005
Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center
165 W. 65th Street, Plaza Level
<http://www.filmlinc.com/wrt/wrt.htm>, 212.875.5600
www.hrw.org/iff

Since its inception in 1978, Human Rights Watch has become a leading voice in defense of internationally recognized human rights. We are widely known for our in-depth investigations, informed policy recommendations, and ability to generate intense pressure to confront human rights abusers and defend basic freedoms. Through vigilant monitoring and advocacy in every region of the world, we are dedicated to advancing the protection and promotion of human rights for all.

Recognizing the extraordinary power of film to inspire and educate, the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, now in its seventeenth year, promotes dialogue and activism through the screening of distinguished documentary and feature films. The festival showcases the heroic stories of activists and survivors through the eyes of courageous filmmakers, putting a human face on threats to individual freedom and giving voice to those who might otherwise be silenced. Human Rights Watch brings these films to an international audience and seeks to empower viewers with the knowledge that personal commitment can make a very real difference. This year, we spotlight 26 films from 20 countries, featuring stories that remind us of how powerful both the image and the individual can be.

Midwinter Night's Dream

Goran Paskaljevic, Serbia and Montenegro, 2004, 95m, 35mm, drama
Goran Paskaljevic's *The Powder Keg* (aka *Cabaret Balkan*), which played to sold out audiences at the 2000 HRWIFF, is a seminal film on the tragedy and social self-implosion of Serbian society in the 1990's. In 2004 Paskaljevic crafted what may be the defining film on postwar Serbia and the quiet tragedy that is unfolding in this psychologically devastated country. Set in the winter of 2004, Lazar, a Serbian Army deserter sent to prison for many years, returns to his home in hopes of reconnecting to his former, normal life. There he finds squatters—Jasna, a single mother who is raising her autistic 12-year-old daughter Jovana (stunningly played by Jovana Mitic who is severely autistic). Refugees from Bosnia, they have been squatting in Lazar's apartment for some time now. Like Lazar, Jasna, whose husband never accepted their daughter's autism and abandoned them, also wishes to turn the page on a difficult past. Lazar doesn't have the heart to make them leave. Little by little, among these three beings marginalized by society, a special kinship develops.

Fri June 10: 4; Sun June 12: 9:30

Videoletters

Katarina Rejger and Eric van den Broek, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Slovenia/Macedonia/Croatia/Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo), 2004/2005, 75m, video, doc
With strong vision and intense dedication, filmmakers Rejger and van den Broek (*The Making of a Revolution*) present *Videoletters*, a truly groundbreaking and emotionally uplifting series of twenty short documentary films—a selection of which will be featured in this year's festival in two independent programs ('group 1' and 'group 2'). *Videoletters* is remarkable for many reasons, not least because it exemplifies the power of change inherent in the documentary form; the very making of the films fostered reconciliation between estranged individuals of the war-scarred former Yugoslavia. After the war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and drove millions from hearths and homes, the country crumbled into five separate republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

In *Videoletters*, which was shot over the past five years frequently in tough and often dangerous conditions, the filmmakers act as initiators, mailmen, and recorders of a dispersed population who

hardly have contact beyond the borders. In each episode, two people of different nationalities send each other a video letter, explaining how this could have happened. In each case, they were friends, neighbors, or colleagues before the war drove them apart.

"We are still friends, none of you are guilty, we don't blame all Serbs," a Croatian man says on the screen; on the couch a Serb family is in tears as they watch the video letter of their friend whom they have not seen since the 1990s, when war drove the two families apart. People express their anger and sadness. They try to put rumors and false information behind them. They admit guilt. This stunning series of films literally reaches across the emotional and physical divide to open up a new path for the future. After exchanging the video letters, the participants usually arrange a meeting, the first since the war erupted.

And, in a true testament to the power of the series and commitment of the filmmakers, they have managed the remarkable feat of convincing every public television station in the former Yugoslavia to broadcast at least ten of the video letters. This is the first time the stations have agreed to work together on joint programming since before the war. The series began these broadcasts on April 7, 2005, ten years after the Dayton peace agreements that ended the 1992-95 war in Bosnia were signed. *Winner of the 2005 HRWIFF Nestor Almendros Prize.

*Please note: group 1 and group 2 are distinct programs which can be seen independently of one another.

Group 1: Sun June 19, 1; Mon June 20: 3:30; Tues June 21: 6:15; Thurs June 23: 2

Group 2: Sun June 19: 3:30; Tues June 21: 4; Wed June 22: 9; Thurs June 23: 4:15

-OR-

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