

## **Milcho Manchevski: Co-operation Is a Must**

*By Valentin Nesovski for Southeast European Times - 29/03/04*

Macedonian filmmaker Milcho Manchevski lives in New York City and teaches directing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Graduate Film and TV. In this exclusive interview with Southeast European Times correspondent Valentin Nesovski, he comments on the condition of the Balkans and the people who live there.

**Southeast European Times:** Your movie *Before the Rain*, filmed in 1994, addressed a dangerous and tense atmosphere in ethnic relations in Macedonia before the Kosovo war and the Macedonian conflict. The metaphor of thunderbolts and rain obviously represented the imminence of conflict, but was it also used as a symbol of hope? If so, where does Southeast Europe stand now in relation to hope, ten years after those scenes were filmed?

**Milcho Manchevski:** Yes, absolutely, the rain was meant to be seen as a metaphor suggesting both scary and promising things. Rain is also cleansing. *Before the Rain* is not a documentary about the wars in what once was Yugoslavia. Nor is it a documentary about the state of affairs in Macedonia ten years ago or today. It is not a documentary, period. If one wanted to talk about those years in the Balkans, one would have to address the warmongering politicians, the opportunistic locals, and the international community as factors in those events. This film is a story about people; it talks of regular folks trapped in dramatic events which could potentially become historical. These people could be anywhere. I often present the film to audiences, and people come to me and say, "I am from Kashmir or Israel or the ex-Soviet Union or even the United States and the story of this film is something that could have happened in my country." Where are the Balkans in terms of hope? I don't know. At least people are not shooting at each other any more.

**SE Times:** The use of cyclic events in your film is also strongly symbolic. Some analysts characterise the conflict among Balkan nations as a fatalistic cycle of violence that occurs with periodical regularity. Is this stance irrational?

**Manchevski:** You could say that world wars start when Western European nations fatalistically go after each other's throats. I think there are deeper reasons for going to war than simply fatalism and periodical regularity. This type of analysis smacks of ethnocentricity and even racism. Violence was not invented by the Balkan peoples. We have often excelled in that department, but neither the Holocaust nor the atom bomb were devised by people from the Balkans. Neither Rwanda nor Cambodia happened in the Balkans. Unfortunately, humans seem to exercise a tendency towards violence much more often than I would like to see. I am not sure it is a matter of cyclical regularity, or whether it occurs with the sunspots.



**SE Times:** New technology, music and fashion are connecting people -- especially young people -- around the globe, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. What are the prospects of the Balkans getting attached to the rising international global culture?

**Manchevski:** It's inevitable. On one hand, it will hopefully mean that Western-style institutions and mechanisms supporting the rule of law and productivity will become stronger. This will make the Balkans more like, for example, South America. On the other hand, many unique and local aspects of collective living -- tradition,

culture, aspects of the economy, aspects of social life -- will be wiped out by these trends of globalisation, which put an emphasis on profit, speed and hierarchical thinking.

**SE Times:** We now have a generation in the Balkans that was raised in an environment of conflict -- one filled with tragic events and grandiose expectations, myths instead of rationality. Will they have the capacity to shift the society toward progress?

**Manchevski:** They will have no choice. Globalisation, their surroundings and corporate culture will take them there.

**SE Times:** How can culture and cultural events help? Is renewed co-operation within the region part of the formula?

**Manchevski:** Co-operation is a must, unless you want to live in a medieval city-state and personally manufacture everything, you will eventually need for survival. Culture is the soul of one's existence and it is crucial to one's spiritual survival. Collaborating on projects and seeing each other's work makes human beings spiritually richer. Knowledge thwarts prejudice.

**SE Times:** Vast majorities of people in this region hold the opinion that fast integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations will effectively move things in the direction of progress. How much can the international community help, especially in this juvenile phase of the post-conflict period?

**Manchevski:** The Euro-Atlantic organisations and nations that already have crucial influence can certainly provide a desperately-needed investment boost. Even more importantly, this can provide an institutional framework for these countries, which are already moving from one social system into another. Most importantly, however, it will

tell the people in the region that they are not being treated as lepers.