

Words, Faces AND PICTURES

Studio blockbusters are not for Katrin Cartlidge, star of this month's *Before the Rain*, as she tells Anwar Brett.

AS HARD as it may be to believe, not every actor or actress yearns for a movie career in Hollywood. Some hardy and adventurous souls are content to plough a lonely furrow in British and European films where the audiences may be smaller, the pay cheques might be more modest but the work is infinitely more varied and satisfying.

British actress Katrin Cartlidge may have got her first significant break on a soap opera, starring in *Brookside* 14 years ago, but her career ever since has been anything but conventional. Opting for the challenges of experimental theatre at the National, she came late to films but won rave notices for her role in Mike Leigh's *Naked* and has not stopped working since.

Her latest film, the Oscar nominated *Before the Rain*, was shot straight after *Naked* and is the first in a succession of three features in which she will be starring. So who says Hollywood is the only place for a young actor to make a career?

"European films were the films that I most adored when I was growing up," Cartlidge enthuses. "They were the ones that I felt the most affinity with as well. That's not to say there weren't American films like that, but a lot of the American films that moved me were very European influenced. I actually used to sit and watch some of these French and German films and wonder, as a British person who doesn't speak any other kind of language, how I

would be able to perform in that kind of work.

"It consistently baffled me, but I always had the dream at the back of my mind that I would be able to work with those kinds of directors, with that kind of aesthetic and those kinds of concerns. So it's amazing really that I have been able to work in my own language but with so many different foreign directors."

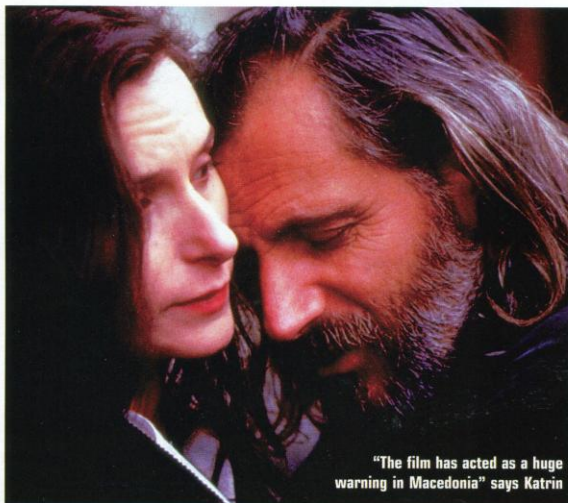
"I'm one of those people who actually gets depressed by feelgood movies."

Although her acting career was more than a decade old when Mike Leigh cast her in *Naked*, Cartlidge is honest enough to recognize the impact that film has had.

"It really announced my presence to the European and American film world," she explains. "Before *Naked* I hadn't done anything that was internationally accepted. It completely changed my life in the sense that ever since it was released I've been able to work abroad and meet the kind of artists I've always wanted to work with."

Before the Rain certainly fulfilled that criterion and has garnered acclaim wherever it has been shown. But when screened in the country in which much of the story is set, the film had an even more amazing effect. Describing an imaginary conflict in the state of Macedonia, writer-director Milcho Manchevski divides his story into three distinct parts; *Words, Faces* and *Pictures*. In each segment the characters' lives are shaped by their experience within that war-torn Balkan nation.

Cartlidge plays a London based picture editor on a glossy magazine, routinely viewing gruesome war photographs one minute and the latest Madonna snaps the next. All the while she is being romanced by an award winning Macedonian photographer who eventually finds he cannot resist the umbilical tug of his homeland any longer, a decision which has profound consequences for each of the characters and which brings the story full circle. Almost.



"The film has acted as a huge warning in Macedonia" says Katrin

"Thankfully the area we filmed in isn't volatile like it is supposed to be in the film," Cartlidge smiles. "It's a fictional situation but obviously it's drawing on what is happening in Eastern Europe at the moment. But because of where Macedonia is geographically it's surrounded on all sides by discontent which makes you feel that it very much could happen there."

"The film has acted as a huge warning in Macedonia. For people there it's a deeply serious piece of work and not just a piece of entertainment. It's actually a profound warning to them of what could happen in their territory if they're not careful. *This* is why it's so important to do these kinds of films."

"It seems to me that politics continually works to separate people while artists, if they're worth their salt, are there to unite people. I really do see it in those black and white terms, the importance of doing work with people from other cultures, trying to understand other points of view, I can't see anything more worthwhile."

It makes a refreshing change to hear an actress talk with passion about the work she does, in sharp contrast to the jaded tones of actors on a never-ending treadmill of formula driven work. But it would be a mistake to assume Katrin Cartlidge was simply defined by the more worthy and serious subject matter that has dominated her recent career. Next up, **Three Steps to Heaven** offers a change of pace, giving the actress a chance to flex her comedy muscles while telling a story with the germ of a serious point.

"It's a black comedy," she adds, "so there is a great deal of pain in there as well, but I see comedy and pain as being very closely connected. I feel there is a certain catharsis to that. But then I'm one of those people who actually gets depressed by feelgood movies. The gap between what I'm watching and what I feel is actually happening is so big that it depresses me. When I go and see a film where what is happening in the world is being expressed then I experience a kind of relief. I thank God that somebody is saying something of importance."

Having carved herself a very productive niche and earned great acclaim while doing so, Cartlidge's earliest ambitions to act have now well and truly been fulfilled. One can assume that her other childhood ambitions have been left behind her.

"I wanted to be a waitress when I was a child. I was absolutely desperate to do that. And even though actors often combine both careers I haven't done it yet. I expect it will come," she laughs with endearing self-deprecation. "I just hope I feel as excited about it as I did when I was a child."

Katrin Cartlidge in *Before the Rain* — a film she applauds for its message

