

From Sarajevo with love

Bosnian writer is a tireless promoter of Canadian cinema

BY JAY STONE

Bojan Bosiljcic, author of the best book on Canadian cinema ever written in Serbo-Croatian, just loves Canadian movies.

Everyone in the former Yugoslavia does, he says. David Cronenberg is a

familiar name. Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* is a cult hit. *The Decline of the American Empire* is huge.

Bosiljcic, who has lived in Ottawa since 1995, was back in his native Yugoslavia last year and on Belgrade TV, in prime time on Sunday night, without commercial interruption, he saw *When Night Is Falling* by Patricia Rozema and *I Love A Man In Uniform* by David Wellington. In Canada, he says, you'd be lucky to see either on Cinema Canada after midnight.

"Maybe it sounds unbelievable, but people in the former Yugoslavia are

very familiar with the Canadian film industry," he says with a wide-eyed intensity. "Much more, I realize, than Canadians.

"It's some kind of shame that Canadian movies are still searching for a place in the hearts of domestic viewers."

Bosiljcic, 40, is the author of *Severno Od Holivuda* (North of Hollywood), which is doing well in the former Yugoslavia and which he is trying to get translated into English. It contains interviews with Rozema and Cronenberg and many others. Bosiljcic is a

tireless promoter of Canadian movies.

"Last year, when I was in Belgrade, everybody was talking about (the David Cronenberg movie) *Crash*. And here, I go to this movie in one theatre in Ottawa, and it was around 50 people in the cinema, and during the projection around 15 people just left.

"It's a very controversial movie, very provocative, it's very difficult to understand, but I think what is the purpose of movies? Not just to entertain, but to give you some new prospects."

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Fan: A bridge between the two cinemas

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To Bosiljcic, *Crash* is "a very exciting exploration of sexuality at the end of the 20th Century."

The Canadian movie industry is similar to Europe's, he says, where the audience is used to seeing more artistic films. It's also similar to the cinema of his old homeland.

"Yugoslavian film-makers are making small movies, they are dealing with serious problems, with the political bedrock, but the whole story is always told in a funny way so the audience could easily accept the movie. The directors are using pure film language, using mostly pictures and metaphors to say what they want to say.

Bosiljcic, who sees himself as a cinematic bridge between the former Yugoslavia and Canada, also tirelessly promotes Balkan cinema in this country. He organized the Balkan film series for the Canadian Film Institute in Ottawa and Montreal, and he has written several freelance articles on the subject for Ottawa newspapers.

Bosiljcic is pleased that *Underground*, the Emir Kusturica movie that takes a brilliant surrealistic look at Yugoslavia from 1941 to the civil war, opens today for a one-week run at the ByTowne Cinema. (Review on E3.)

Bosiljcic was public relations manager for two Kusturica movies. He says the acceptance of his films throughout the world — although not much in North America — were heady times for the Yugoslavian movie industry. *Underground* won the Palme d'Or, the top prize at the Cannes film festival, in 1995, and received glowing reviews, but it never got wide distribution in North America. Nor did the director's earlier movies, including *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?* (Golden Lion, Venice Film Festival, 1981), and *When Father Was Away on Business* (Palme d'Or, 1985) find homes in North American cinemas. Even Kusturica's Hollywood movie, *Arizona Dream*, which starred

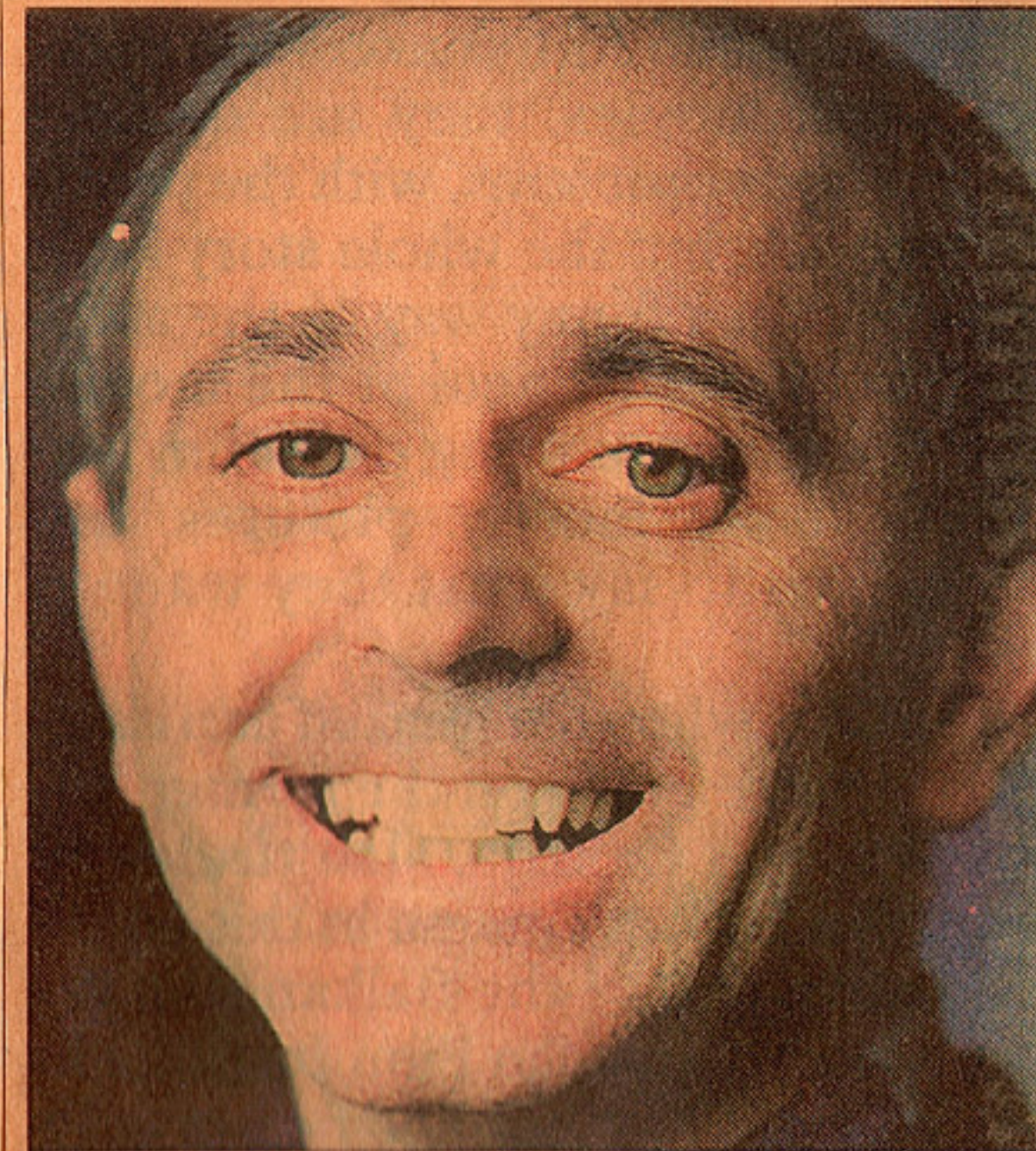
Johnny Depp and Faye Dunaway, a movie that won the Silver Bear at the 1993 Berlin Film Festival, never got theatrical release.

Before the war, he was a film critic and writer on movies in Sarajevo, filing stories to seven newspapers and a broadcast outlet and publishing a book of essays on Hollywood called *Oscar is to Blame for Everything*.

Bosiljcic, whose mother and teenage sister still live in Sarajevo, arrived in Ottawa knowing no one. He looked up

Film in the telephone directory and got the number of the Canadian Film Institute. The executive director, Tom McSorley, helped him arrange the Balkan film program and Bosiljcic began writing his book in Canadian movies. He's now working on a new one, about Hollywood.

He and McSorley are now involved in a new project, a retrospective of Kusturica's movies next fall at CFI. Featured will be a showing of his new movie, *Cat Black, Cat White*.



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Bosiljcic says Canadians don't appreciate their own movies.