

INTERFILM PRESENTS

A FILM BY VINKO BREŠAN

# WITNESSES

BASED ON THE NOVEL ALABASTER SHEEP BY JURICA PAVIČIĆ

 54<sup>th</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Competition

INTERFILM DE SARAJEVO

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CROATIA - 2003 - 88' - 2:35 - COLOR - DOLBY DIGITAL

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## SYNOPSIS

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A man is murdered when three soldiers unexpectedly find him at home while they are planting a hate bomb. After blowing up his house, the young men discover someone has witnessed everything.

With the witness locked in a basement garage, the youngest of the panicky soldiers runs to his mother for help.

Mourning over her husband's coffin, she promises to protect the three friends. With the support of their shady politician uncle, they'll be safe as long as no one talks.

The Police Investigation takes over the small town in Croatia on the front line of the civil war. Half the town wanted the man dead, especially since his origins lie on the other side.

Everyone has his or her personal interests at heart while the fate of the witness is left hanging: an honest policeman must back off on his investigation to try and save his dying wife. A journalist could become too personally involved in her search for a story.

A soldier - someone's son, someone's boyfriend - will return home from the front with terrible secrets.

Sometimes a story must be relived through various viewpoints before the truth can be revealed.

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## COMMENTS FROM VINKO BREŠAN

### - LOSS OF THE HUMAN SOUL -

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I wanted to make a family drama that would speak about the loss of the human soul in war. I wanted to show how the spiral of hatred in wartime brings crime to the everyday life of ordinary people. Jurica Pavičić's novel "Alabaster Sheep" impressed me by its fearless approach to the themes of war, its fleshed-out characters and its dark description of the atmosphere of the war years in Croatia.

The aim was also to show the silent majority that looks the other way from crime.

"Witnesses" demanded that I be a lot more honest with myself.

My first two films were satiric comedies. It was clear that I could not use the distance of ironic humor to make "Witnesses".

### - AN EXTREME HUMAN SITUATION -

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During the shoot and editing, it was clear to me that in every scene, every frame, every cut, there was also a moral challenge behind the filmmaking challenge.

So I abandoned any thoughts about local politics and trying to balance how good or bad a character should be presented. I focused on depicting the world of war the way I honestly see it, from my own point of view. I turned to myself, to my memories. All the flashbacks are true stories I heard from soldiers...

War is an extreme human situation that can bring out the worst in people.

As a storyteller, I was interested in giving characters, regardless if they are considered good or bad, a chance to demonstrate humanity, compassion and love, if only for a moment. There are wars all around the world.

I don't think nationality is an issue for the human story in "Witnesses".

Whether I'm a Croat or Iraqi or American doesn't really matter.

The important thing is whether I am a person of integrity.





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### - EDITING OF EMOTIONS -

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The novel "Alabaster Sheep" has a classic linear narrative structure. We were aware from the start that we had to work on capturing the emotions of the novel's beauty, its many digressions, its smaller storylines, and its many observations about minor characters. In the screenwriting process, we decided against a strict linear story. We tried a different kind of dramaturgic editing, which I call the "editing of emotions". I tried to group the emotions into different parts of the film to get the maximum of emotions from the story.

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### - DRAMA ON EVERY STREET -

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Croatia is a small country. Strange as it may sound, everybody knows everybody. Everybody is practically related to everybody. Interconnection is the structure of the plot in "Witnesses". Even if the same types of interconnection could happen in a big city, it was more convincing to set the film in a small town where relationships among people are clearer and accentuated, where you can see drama on every street... The film was shot in Karlovac, a city that was on the front line for a long period of time. Many terrible things happened there during the war. The city hasn't been fully rebuilt yet, so there's an atmosphere of emptiness and despair that I think visually says more about the war than anything that could be achieved with artifice.

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### - A SERBIAN ACTRESS PLAYS A CROATIAN MOTHER -

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I have never had a problem with state borders and our local relations. I was making a film and I wanted to get the best crew I could. Mirjana Karanović is an exceptional actress (Emir Kusturica's "Underground" and "When Father was Away on Business" and Goran Paskaljević's "The Powder Keg") and a great person. I never had any hidden agenda in casting a Serbian actress to play a Croatian mother. There were some pretty harsh Croatian reactions against her taking part in "Witnesses". I was not very interested in them then, nor am I interested now... Many things have not been resolved in Croatia. Our society has problems facing basic things, like questioning if our war crimes are crimes at all. This is a terrifying way of thinking.



**VINKO BREŠAN**  
DIRECTOR / SCREENPLAY

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Vinko Brešan's first feature, the political satire "How the War Started on my Island", became one of the biggest hits of the last decade in Croatia. His second feature, "Marshall Tito's Spirit", was presented in the 2000 Berlin Festival's Forum, where it received the Wolfgang Staudte Award. The comedy about an Adriatic island haunted by Tito's ghost also won Brešan the Best Director Prize at Karlovy Vary. Born in Zagreb in 1964, Brešan completed his studies in philosophy, comparative literature and directing.

1996: How the War Started on my Island  
(Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku)  
1999: Marshall Tito's Spirit (Marsal)  
2003: Witnesses (Svjedoci)

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**ŽIVKO ZALAR**  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / SCREENPLAY

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Živko Zalar has served as Director of Photography on all three Vinko Brešan feature films. Over the past 30 years, he has made more than 65 features, TV films and series with various directors including Vojtech Jasny, Goran Markovic, Rajko Grlic, Salvatore Nocita, Branko Baletic, Marco Serafini, Luigi Magni, Andy Bausch, Peter Gersina and Helmut Metzger. Born in Zagreb in 1948, Zalar is a Cinematography Graduate of Prague's Film Academy (FAMU).

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**JURICA PAVIČIĆ**  
SCREENPLAY / AUTHOR OF NOVEL "ALABASTER SHEEP"

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"Witnesses" is Jurica Pavičić's first screenplay and based on his first novel "Alabaster Sheep". Pavičić has written three other novels and is also a film critic for the Croatian newspaper "Jutarnji List". Born in Split in 1965, Pavičić also writes plays, short stories and essays about Croatian society, culture and politics.

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## CAST

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LEON LUČEV ..... (Kreso)  
ALMA PRICA ..... Lidija (Reporter)  
MIRJANA KARANOVIĆ ..... (Mother)  
KREŠIMIR MIKIĆ ..... Josko (Younger son)  
DRAŽEN KÜHN ..... (Inspector Barbir)  
MARINKO PRGA ..... (Oldest of 3 friends)  
PREDRAG VUSOVIĆ ..... (2<sup>nd</sup> friend)

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## CREW

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Directed by ..... **VINKO BREŠAN**

Based on the novel

**OVCE OD GIPSA (ALABASTER SHEEP)** by **JURICA PAVIČIĆ**

Produced by ..... **IVAN MALOČA**

Screenplay by ..... **JURICA PAVIČIĆ, VINKO BREŠAN, ŽIVKO ZALAR**

Director of Photography ..... **ŽIVKO ZALAR**

Edited by ..... **SANDRA BOTICA-BREŠAN**

Music by ..... **MATE MATIŠIĆ**

Art Director ..... **MARIO IVEZIĆ**

Costume Designer ..... **ŽELJKA FRANULOVIĆ**

Make-Up Supervisor ..... **JANUSZ KALEJA**

Sound Design ..... **RANKO PAUKOVIĆ**

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