

# The New York Times

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NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006



Mark Higashino/Studio Belgrade

Sergej Trifunovic, left, is a hit man and Peter Gevisser a cop in "Love."

## FILM REVIEW

### *Lost and Foreign in Manhattan*

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

Cool, mysterious and defiantly foreign, "Love" plays out on the immigrant fringes of an indifferent New York City, in backstreet clubs and decrepit buildings where past and present uneasily coexist.

Vanya (Sergej Trifunovic) is a hit man from the former Yugoslavia, a disillusioned ex-soldier working off his debt to the crime boss who paid his passage to the United States. Anna (Geno Lechner) is Vanya's ex-wife, a German doctor who abandoned him years earlier and is now halfheartedly dating a gloomy cop (Peter Gevisser). When Anna and Vanya meet unexpectedly during a hotel-room killing in Brooklyn, their rekindled passion propels a cast of cosmopolitan characters — including a French barmaid, a federal government agent and a small-time Italian crook — into a seductive and violent game of cat and mouse.

"Love" is a mournful thriller about the myth of assimilation and the way nurture — or, more precisely, the lack of it — fashions identity and character. Elegantly directed by Vladan Nikolic using multiple view-

## Love

*Opens today in Manhattan.*

Written and directed by Vladan Nikolic; director of photography, Vladimir Subotic; edited by Vladan Nikolic; music by standing in lines and Sxip Shirey; production designer, Sorangel Fersobe; produced by Jim Stark; released by Frontier Films. At the Two Boots Pioneer Theater, 155 East Third Street, at Avenue A, East Village. Running time: 93 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Sergej Trifunovic (Vanya), Geno Lechner (Anna), Peter Gevisser (Dirk), Didier Flamand (Jean), Mario Padula (Manny) and Al Naz (Ali).

points and an elliptical, nonlinear narrative, the movie presents a New World disrupted by old grievances and a neglected community living by its own rules.

In these bleak, isolated neighborhoods, exquisitely shot by the Serbian cinematographer Vladimir Subotic, love and politics are inseparable, and even a genial old drag queen (deliciously played by the legendary French actor Didier Flamand) wields unexpected power. From here, the gleam of Manhattan is a million miles away.

the village

# VOICE

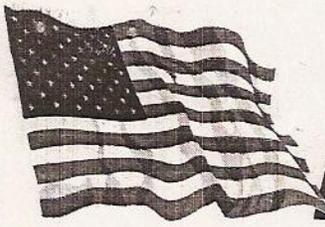
FEBRUARY 15-21, 2006 • VOL. LI NO. 7 • AMERICA'S LARGEST WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

## Love

*Written and directed by Vlada Nikolic*

*February 16 through March 1, Two Boots Pioneer*

A multi-perspectival film vastly superior to *Crash*, Vlada Nikolic's dynamic thriller *Love* reinvigorates a stale cinematic format and imparts a compelling message all without a single head-on collision. This story of a hitman, his ex-lover, and her current boyfriend trapped within a large and increasingly sticky web of intrigue could be told from any number of viewpoints: Nikolic has the guts to try to tell them all and the skill to use the technique as more than a stylistic crutch. Skeptical of rudimentary good/evil dichotomies—though, amusingly, the key American character in the international cast is not—*Love* uses an interlocking structure to illustrate its point. Opinions of characters are open to constant revision as assassins are revealed as soldiers and murderers become caretakers. Through the first two-thirds, the cross-cutting aims to give viewers a truth larger than that available to the characters, but the finale boldly turns the tables: During a riff on John Woo-styled face-offs, Nikolic cycles through his characters' perspectives, withholding key information to prolong the suspense. At moments like those, *Love* gives you hope for the future of independent movies, particularly because Nikolic is also a professor of film at the New School. **MATT SINGER**



# NEW YORK POST

LATE CITY FINAL

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2006 / High winds; rain early, then some sun, 62 / Weather: Page 64 ★★

www.nypost.com

## Love and death, Balkan style

### LOVE ★★★

**T**HE stylish ambiance often found in East European cinema is present in "Love," a New York-set, English-language thriller written and directed by Vladan Nikolic and noirishly photographed by Vladimir Subotic. Both hail from the Balkans, as does the lead actor.

Shot in gritty industrial sectors of the outer boroughs, "Love" involves a hit man from the Balkans (Sergej Trifunovic), who in the course of his dirty work encounters his ex-wife (Geno Lechner) and her fiancé (Peter Gevisser), an NYPD cop.

The story unfolds in nonlinear fashion, with the same events being shown several times, from different perspectives. The concept works especially well with the murder spree that sets up the movie.

The finale — a shootout in a church — seems inspired by Hong Kong filmmakers like John Woo and Ringo Lam. (The latter's 1987 "City on Fire" was a source for Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction.")

Several plot elements in "Love" are shaky — the NYPD seems oblivious to the fact that people are being killed left and right, for instance. But if Nikolic doesn't care, why should we?

*Running time: 93 minutes. Not rated (violence, nudity, sex). At the Two Boots Pioneer Theater, Avenue A and Third Street. Through March 1.*

— V.A. Musetto

## TV GUIDE ON-LINE

**love**

**Written, Directed, edited & Co-produced by Vladan Nikolic, 2005**

**Our rating:**    *What's love got to do with it?*

Yugoslavian-born writer-producer-director-editor Vladan Nikolic weaves together the intersecting stories of lost souls who bring their international miseries to New York in this cool, cynical thriller. At the film's heart is a morose, rootless hit man who carries a pocket rosary and retains just enough faith to make his job a misery. Abandoned as an infant to an orphanage in the former Yugoslavia, Vanya Nevakovich (Sergej Trifunovic) found a surrogate family in the Yugoslavian army and was cut loose again as his country collapsed into a bitter scrum of warring nations. He met Anna Petrovic (Geno Lechner), the daughter of a Serbian mother and a German father, in Bosnia, where she was working for Doctors Without Borders. Anna eventually fell apart under the pressure of the Balkans' endless, soul-eroding misery and left Vanya for the hope of a new life in New York. She's engaged to a police officer named Dirk Malloy (Peter Gevisser), an aspiring writer who's pressing her for a commitment she's unwilling to make. Vanya's passage to America was paid by a small-time crime lord; he's paying off his debt as a reluctant assassin. Sent to intercept a Colombian drug dealer, Vanya finds him dead of a heart attack in his hotel room. And then who should walk in but Anna, who's been paying a house call on a patient a couple of floors down. Dirk, who dropped her off at the hotel, thinks Anna has been kidnapped and sets out to rescue her despite the assurances of federal agents — who appear suddenly on the scene — that she's safe in the hands of a professional who doesn't kill for fun. Ricocheting around this doomed triangle are a jilted French waitress (Liat Glick), a small-time Neapolitan thug (Mario Padula) devoted to his dying wife, a Slovenian drug dealer-performance artist (Didier Flamand), a lovelorn Lebanese refugee (Al Naz) obsessed with a duplicitous Canadian thrill-seeker (Kerry Rossy) scarred by the legacy of incest, and a depressed Fed from Texas (Eric Frandsen). Style reigns supreme in this accomplished low-budget film, which is both an asset and a liability. Nikolic's gimmicky narrative doubles back on itself, each new version of events expanding on the one before without changing the viewer's fundamental perception of what happened. But Serbian cinematographer Vladimir Subotic's photography transforms New York's outlying neighborhoods and anonymous streets into a weather-beaten dreamscape suffused with mystery, danger and the hope of heaven. — *Maitland McDonagh*

**Country of Origin:**

Serbia; U.S.

**Genre:**

Crime; Drama

**Color or b/w:**

Color

**Production Co(s):**

Studio Belgrade; Suria Films; Thoke+Moebius Films; Why Not Productions

**Released By:**

Frontier Films

**MPAA Rating:**

NR

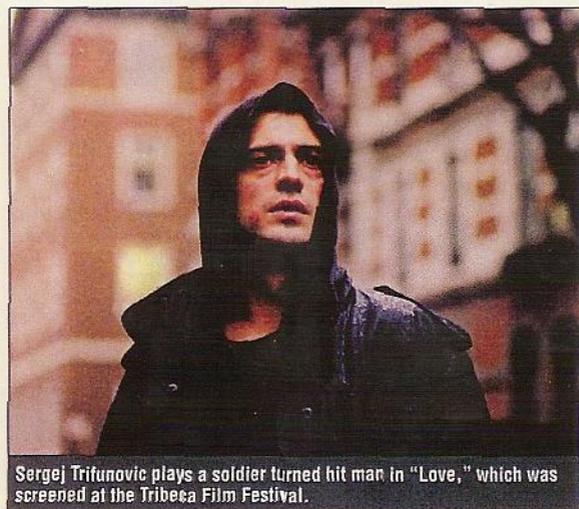
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# NEW YORK

FEBRUARY 27, 2006

## LOVE ★

Vladan Nikolic's flashy neo-noir juggles perspective as it crisscrosses the lives of a soldier-turned-hitman from the former Yugoslavia, his ex-wife, and her new NYPD squeeze in an effectively grim version of New York City. Perhaps not as deep as it pretends to be, it's still an effective little thriller. (1 hr. 33 mins.; NR)



**LOVE**

A Studio Belgrade production in association with Thoko-Moebius Film, Mikado Film, Why Not Prods. and Suria Films. Produced by Jim Stark. Executive producers, Christoph Thoke. Luigi Musini. Co-producer, Vladan Nikolic. Co-executive producer, Axel Moebius.

Directed, written, edited by Vladan Nikolic. Camera (color, DV-to-35mm), Vladimir Subotic; music, Standing in Lines; production designer, Sorangel Fersobe; costume designer, Olivera Gajic; sound, Logan Sunick; associate producers, Maggie Haese, Bettj Garcia; special effects, Damien Leone. Reviewed at Tribeca Film Festival, April 25, 2005. Running time: 93 MIN.

Vanya	.....	Sergej Trifunovic
Anna	.....	Geno Lechner
Dirk	.....	Peter Gevisser
Jean	.....	Diederik Plamand
Hayes	.....	Eric Fransder
Faye	.....	Liat Glick
Helen	.....	Vija Vetr

By JOHN ANDERSON

**M**ore technically accomplished than emotionally engaging, "Love" joins a niche occupied by films as varied as "Marathon Man" and "Dirty Pretty Things" — stories in which foreign conflicts resurface in big, disinterested cities. Director Vladan Nikolic's strategy of having ex-Balkan warriors recreate their national tragedies in microcosm is intriguing, as is the fresh face he puts on Manhattan, but the coldness of his delivery may put off some auds. Still, the action is compelling, the film good looking, the acting first rate and the circumstances — people from neglected nations in an alienating if not hostile urban landscape — is moving. *Film should do well at festivals and in major cities.*

Nikolic's non-linear — or multi-linear — approach to storytelling may evoke comparisons to "Pulp Fiction" or "Rashomon," but he lacks the humor of the former and the subjective realities of the latter. As he rolls out the story of Vanya (Sergej Trifunovic) — an ex-Yugoslav special forces soldier blackmailed into becoming an American hit man — the overlapping action doesn't alter any version of what happens, only the perspective. For example, during a hit in a hotel, the audience gets electrifying, alternating sequences of action, but the killers and the victims are always the same.

Accepting what he believes to be his last contract killing, Vanya is reunited with his ex-wife, Anna (Geno Lechner), a German member

of Doctors Without Borders who he met in Bosnia. Although Vanya still loves Anna, she is involved with Dirk (Peter Gevisser), a New York City cop and would-be writer.

Meanwhile, villainy from the past haunts the present day, and, as the characters' various storylines intersect and interweave, a stark portrait of desperate people in desperate situations emerges.

"Love" has its soap-opera elements, although the romantic subtext never intrudes on, nor trivializes, the political side of the story. What one wants from "Love" are a few more trips to the Kleenex box, but perhaps that is asking too much of a film so structurally ambitious.

**FROM TWO MEN AND A WAR**

(DOCU)

A Drew Associates production. Produced by Anne Drew.

Directed by Robert Drew. Camera: (B&W/color, DV), Gianni Cigna, Marco Venditti, Anne Drew; editors, Mike Woodworth, Jon Nealon, Robert Drew; associate producer, Pamela Liebson. Reviewed on videocassette, New York, April 8, 2005. (In Tribeca Film Festival — competing.) Running time: 62 MIN.

With: Robert Drew.

Readings from Ernie Pyle: Cliff Robertson.

By RONNIE SCHEIB

**A** first-person docu without the usual wry self-consciousness, cinema verite pioneer Robert Drew's World War II memoir seems old-fashioned, almost awkwardly sincere, at first. But as "From Two Men and a War" progresses, the marriage of vintage Signal Corps footage and first-hand testimony coalesces into a sophisticated look at how experiences are communicated. Docu follows then-19-year-old fighter pilot Drew, his bomber-flying father and famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle as their destinies crisscross on the European front. In an era of over-inflated war epics, Drew's modest hour-plus film fulfills its mandate, to show what it was like, with flying colors.

Docu boasts extraordinary army combat footage in pristine condition, the bulk of it from a Signal Corps unit attached to Drew's squadron. When Drew waxes rhapsodic over the new A-26 fighter plane capable of extreme vertical dives that permit pinpoint bombing,

the camera is in the cockpit with him as he dips and soars above the Earth. An old recording of a Puccini aria on the soundtrack imparts an otherworldly feeling as the plane banks and strafes the verdant valley below, dotted with trees, tracer-bullets and burning Panzers.

The camera is with Drew, too, when his squad, in Pompeii for some much-needed R&R, is joined by an exhausted Pyle, described as "hanging on by his fingertips."

In his syndicated newspaper column, Pyle writes about Drew, the young flyer who outranks his father, thus establishing a link to Drew's family and drafting Drew's mother and siblings, as faces and voices from the home front, into the picture.

In an era of instant communication, it is difficult to imagine the huge gap between the experiences of those who waged war and those who waited at home. Even men engaged in fighting were totally isolated from each other's very different daily realities. Thus Drew comprehends the nature of the big bombers flown by his father only when one crash-lands on his airstrip.

When Drew is brought down behind enemy lines, an intricate system of triangulation records the war experience from varying perspectives.

Over archival images of the deployment and firing of the massive Allied artillery buildup against the German stronghold at Cassino, Cliff Robertson reads Pyle's eloquent description of being on the delivery end of the deafening bombardment. Drew conveys his terror via another quotation from Pyle, recounting how he covered in the corner of his room as shells rained all around him.

Meanwhile, Drew's mother has started a correspondence with Pyle in her search for information about her missing son. Through a letter of condolence from Pyle, the viewer learns of the death of Drew's father in a plane crash. And in a letter to Mrs. Drew, Pyle expresses his horror of war and fear of returning to the fray shortly before his own death in the Pacific from a Japanese sniper's bullet.

As Drew tells it, it is from this war that his own vocation as a purveyor of truth is born, first as a Life Magazine photographer, later as director of such groundbreaking "direct cinema" landmarks as "Primary," which revolutionized the documentary genre with its hand-held immediacy.

Drew uses still photographs to fill in "Two Men's" archival gaps, from his father's avocation as jazz musician to photo-montage illustration of Pyle's Pulitzer Prize-winning "4 Miles" which conveyed to the flyers the hardships that the infantry was enduring.

Highly unconvincing video reconstructions of Drew's 3½-month trek to rejoin the Allied forces serve mainly to underscore the magnificent unadulterated truth of the rest of the footage, including an apt excerpt from John Huston's WWII docu "The Battle of San Pietro."

**EXCAVATING TAYLOR MEAD**

(DOCU)

A Traveling Show Films presentation of an Erik Laibe production. Produced by Laibe. Co-producer, Crystal Moselle.

Directed by William A. Kirkley. Written by Kirkley, Erik Laibe. Camera (color, DV), Kirkley, Crystal Moselle; editor, Laibe; music supervisor, Buzzy James. Reviewed on videotape, Los Angeles, April 12, 2005. (In Tribeca Film Festival

— NY, NY Documentary Features.) Running time: 98 MIN.

With: Mary Boone, Jim Jarmusch, Patrick McMullen, Carlo McCormick, Penny Arcade, Steven Watson, Ira Cohen, Amy Wallen, Jack White, the RZA, Bill Rice.

Narrator: Steve Buscemi.

By JOHN ANDERSON

**T**oo scattered to sustain interest beyond academic or anthropological circles, "Excavating Taylor Mead" will fit best at film festivals and perhaps an occasional symposium on the Beat Generation, Andy Warhol or the history of underground film — all of which involved Taylor Mead and none of which would likely have been the same without him.

Clip-rich docu assumes a knowledge of the subject without making a pitch. Yes, there's an captivating opening title, quoting Tennessee Williams ("All art is a scandal. Life tries to be. Taylor Mead succeeds. I come close"). But it's a long time after that before auds are given any reason to think of Mead as something other than a lonely old barfly living in a squalid apartment who feeds cats and nurses inarticulate memories.

Those memories — of 100 movies ("only 10 with Andy"), acting, poetry, performance art and some of the seminal films of the American indie movement ("The Flower Thief," "Lemon Hearts," "Lonesome Cowboys") — are vivid and make Mead, if not a national monument, then certainly a bona fide resource.

It is a bit unkind, however, to train a camera on such a man — who, during the film, faces eviction from his Lower East Side hell-hole apartment, cades free drinks at various Manhattan saloons and seems to subsist on chocolate milk — and not tell auds right off what the point of the story is. Director William A. Kirkley and producer/editor Erik Laibe seem to have scant material to work with — they never mention Mead's work with George Kuchar or Errol Morris, for instance — and a bit of difficulty arranging what they have.

Likewise the narration by Steve Buscemi, who not only resembles the young Mead physically but sounds like him, too. But his voiceovers aren't integrated properly, so what seems to be Mead is often Buscemi. This is not a huge distraction, but trying to get a grip on Mead's contribution to the culture often is.

Born in Detroit to wealthy parents, Mead grew up gay at a time when it was not just scandalous but dangerous (although it happened in Morocco, the yard-long scar Mead bears on his torso, and matter-of-factly displays, is a mute testament to the perils gay men faced everywhere). When performance artist Penny Arcade finally says that Mead and Jack Smith helped originate "what performance is considered today," the viewer gets an overdue sense of who the guy is and what he did.

Those who think American indie film began with Quentin Tarantino will be surprised to know — and to see evidence of — the '60s-era cinema that laid the groundwork for much of what helped create the entire independent movement.

Mead is charming, with a wry outlook and dry delivery ("He was a genius," the straight-faced Mead says of Warhol. "Of course, Hitler

was a genius, too ...").

What one sees, especially in the Taylor Mead-Bill Rice two-hander that Jim Jarmusch included in his 2004 omnibus "Coffee and Cigarettes," is that Mead might have been one of the greatest interpreters ever of the plays of Samuel Beckett, if he hadn't been so busy with so many other things. It's a subtlety that may elude some viewers. It seems to have eluded the filmmakers.

**SLINGSHOT**

A Bold Films presentation in association with Coquette Films of a Mercer Films production. Produced by Matt Fiorello, Jay Alaimo, M. Edward Bass, Jack Birch. Co-producer, Brendan Garst. Executive producers, Michel Litwak, Robert H. Hultzen, Gary Michael Walters.

Directed by Jay Alaimo. Screenplay, Matthew Q. Martin, Matthew Fiorello, Alaimo, from a story by Martin. Camera (color, Super-16mm), Paul Daley; editor, Jim Rubino; music, C.J. Varston; music supervisor, Richard Walters; production designers, Kate Duffy, Beth Mickle; costume designer, Jennifer James; sound (Dolby), Kevin Bowe, Jose Torres; casting, Kelli Lerner. Reviewed at Tribeca Film Festival (NY, NY competition), April 29, 2004. Running time: 90 MIN.

With: David Arquette, Thora Birch, Balthazar Getty, Julianna Margulies, Joely Fisher, Svetlana Metkina.

By RONNIE SCHEIB

**G**rifter pic about two losers joined at the hip cannot quite reconcile its various agendas. At once a moody character piece, class-crossed romance, repressed homoerotic thriller and stalled road movie, "Slingshot" succeeds in marrying its component genres only by shifting them all into a minor key. Boasting a strong sense of place and a standout perf by Thora Birch in her nouveau blond period, helmer/coscripter Jay Alaimo's debut feature has a desultory charm that should assure it at least a cable slot.

A short prologue, which foreshadows later developments, establishes Taylor and Ashley as kids on the streets of New York, who share a foster home. Nice-guy Taylor has attracted a girlfriend who is less than thrilled by his aggressive pal, but friendship trumps romance and the boys vow eternal friendship. Cut to upscale pastoral Fairfield County, where the now grown-up thieves are hatching a new plan to bed hockey moms and surreptitiously relieve them of their jewelry.

Turn to next page



David Arquette, left, and Balthazar Getty pair up in "Slingshot," shown at Tribeca.

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FILM & DIGITAL PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES • SINCE 1920

SPECIAL FOCUS: INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION

SEPTEMBER 2005

# American Cinematographer

AN ORPHAN'S STORY:  
PAWEL EDELMAN, PSC AND  
ROMAN POLANSKI DISCUSS

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PLUS:  
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A CHORD WITH THE BEAT THAT  
MY HEART SKIPPED

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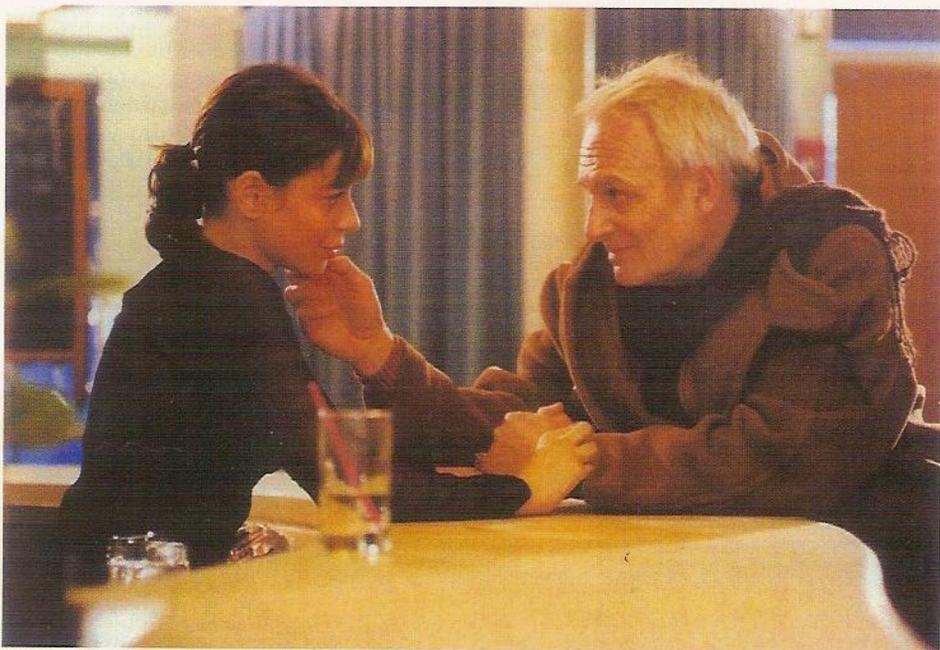


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# Points East

## Love Reveals New York Through Outsiders' Eyes

by Patricia Thomson



In a scene from *Love*, which chronicles a romantic triangle, supporting characters Faye (Liat Glick) and Jean (Didier Flamand) share a warm moment in a Lower East Side bar.

Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca once observed, "New York is a meeting place for every race in the world, but the Chinese, Armenians, Russians and Germans remain foreigners." Today, one might add to that list the Yugoslavs, those exiles who abandoned their country in the 1990s when it dissolved into warring factions.

Serbian cinematographer Vladimir Subotic was one who left home. "I could smell that something was going to happen," he says. He headed to Athens, Greece, at age 19, and then learned cinematography in Cyprus. He arrived in New York several years later. Meanwhile, director Vladan Nikolic, a fellow Belgrade native, headed straight to Manhattan in 1992. Though they were from the same city, Subotic and Nikolic did not become acquainted until a mutual friend suggested they meet. "For Europeans, this whole networking thing

is very strange," says Subotic. "I'm going to call someone and ask if he can meet me? I don't think so! But then I did." The two found common ground not only in their Serbo-Croatian heritage, but also, says Subotic, "in the same cinematic language."

Their first collaboration, *Love*, is screening this month at the Venice International Film Festival. The film made its U.S. debut last spring at the Tribeca Film Festival in the event's "NY, NY" section — appropriate, given that it reveals the city through immigrant eyes. The characters are an assortment of Yugoslav, Italian and Lebanese petty criminals working on the city's periphery, in Greenpoint, Gowanus, Williamsburg and elsewhere in Brooklyn. "It's not Woody Allen's New York," says Nikolic. "They're in these decrepit landscapes; Manhattan is always in the distance, but they're not in that world. The idea

was to find locations that would illustrate that parallel reality."

The story revolves around a love triangle. Vanya is a former Yugoslav soldier working in New York as an assassin — a form of debt settlement to the crime boss who paid his way out of Yugoslavia. During one job, he encounters his ex-wife, Anna, a German who had worked in Bosnia through Doctors Without Borders. She's now involved with Dirk, a cop, but is merely treading water with him. After this chance encounter, the old lovers must deal with old emotional scars, as well as more threatening remnants from the Yugoslav conflict.

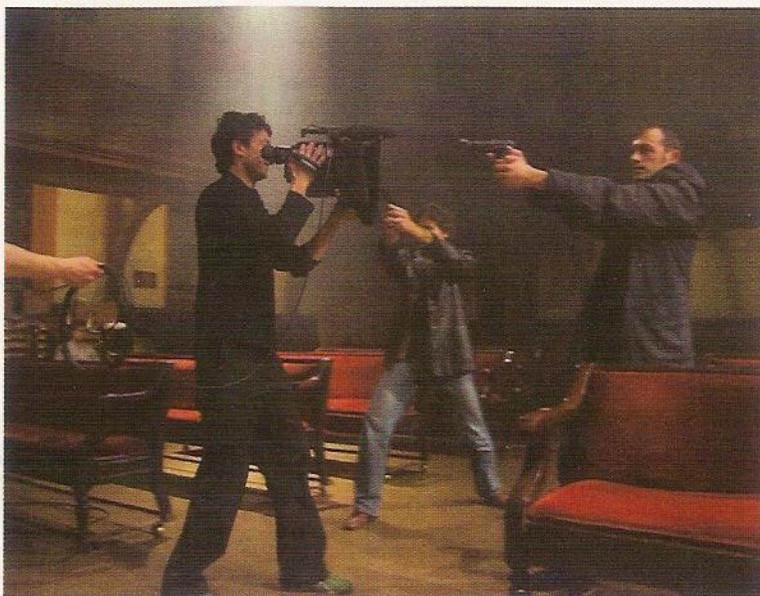
A quintessential indie production, *Love* was shot for less than \$50,000. Naturally, this determined many of Subotic's choices. First among them was the use of digital video (DV). That choice enabled the filmmakers to shoot with two cameras, a decision that grew out of the script. *Love* is a nonlinear narrative, with the story folding back on itself and repeating from the different perspectives of the romantic triangle. In order to differentiate the three points of view, Subotic wanted to use color palettes created through production design and costume, but when the filmmakers determined that this strategy would be too costly, they decided instead to rely on framing and camera movement. "With Vanya, the camera is almost always in motion because *he* is always in motion — hiding, or going from A to B to execute someone," Subotic explains. "The cop is a good soul and a little conventional, so we framed him in the center. Anna doesn't know what she wants; she left Bosnia because it was too much, but she doesn't know why

she's with [Dirk]. So we framed her in eccentric ways."

Thanks to the European financing lined up by producer Jim Stark, the filmmakers were able to plan on a 35mm transfer from the start. For that reason, Subotic and Nikolic chose Panasonic's AG-DVX100, the only DV camcorder that offered progressive-scan capabilities at the time. The dangling question was whether to go with PAL or NTSC. Because the camera was still relatively new in January 2004, when *Love* was in preproduction, there was no 35mm transfer footage available for review in New York, according to Subotic. So the team sent PAL and NTSC test footage to Andromeda Film in Zürich, where Patrick Lindenmaier graded it and had it filmed out to 35mm at nearby Schwarz Film. "There was no comparison," says Subotic. "The PAL picture looked way, way richer. The NTSC didn't have any black; it was all mushy. Plus, PAL gave us 20-percent better resolution."

The director was determined to shoot *Love* in 16:9, but the DVX100's internal 16:9 option cropped the image — not a good solution when a 35mm transfer was planned. Panasonic's next version of the camera, the AG-DVX100A, offered electronically squeezed 16:9, but it became available on the New York market only during the second week of *Love's* production. While waiting for the DVX100A, the filmmakers made do with anamorphic adapters on two DVX100s. However, "with the adapter, the whole focus points of the lens are different," says Subotic. "I couldn't do a close-up — the image just looked out of focus. Even though it *was* in focus, it started losing focus on the edges." Lindenmaier had warned him of this. "When watching it on the monitor, I couldn't see what he was talking about," says the cinematographer, "but when I saw it projected in 35mm, I realized he was right. I just couldn't see the problem on set."

Subotic's additional challenges were typical of micro-budget films. His entire lighting package consisted of



Cinematographer Vladimir Subotic films *Dirk* (Peter Gevisser, left) and Vanya (Sergej Trifunovic, right) as they face down some foes in a New York City church.

eight lights: two 2Ks, three 1Ks, three 650s, and various 60-, 100- and 200-watt bulbs. Cranes and dollies were out of the question. Inspired by the approach Anthony Dod Mantle, DFF, BSC took on the Dogme95 production *Festen* (*The Celebration*) — using a boom stick to replicate crane moves — Subotic improvised. "There were times we'd do the blocking with the actors, and I would say, 'This scene is perfect for a dolly move,' and everyone would start laughing and say, 'Yes, but where's the dolly?' I said we'd figure it out." The solution was to lay down a bit of dance floor and use a furniture dolly with the tripod on top. Elsewhere, monopods on C-stands substituted for elevated crane shots. And monopods duct-taped to the actors' costumes created unusual POV shots during the climatic showdown, looking back down a gun barrel to its owner's face.

*Love's* overall tone is melancholy, a feeling that was enhanced during the color-correction phase at Andromeda. Nikolic and Subotic disagreed about how much color saturation was needed, so Lindenmaier did another test, comparing scenes rendered with full video color to scenes featuring a desaturated palette and strong contrast. The latter approach won the day. "If the color had stayed the way it was, the film would be two scales happier," says Subotic.

The cinematographer was thrilled with the transfer and pleased overall with his first digital feature. During production, he notes, there was wholehearted involvement of cast and crew, a multinational group that spoke a total of 23 languages. He lined up a high-caliber camera team, including camera operators Matt Wachsmann and Carlos Rios, first AC Brian Murphy and gaffer Nicola Guarneri. "They are amazing individuals and great professionals," says Subotic. "And there were no 'hiccups' during the shoot — the Mayor's Office [of Film, Theater and Broadcasting] was just great, and so were the cops when we had to close the streets, even though we were a tiny, tiny picture." It seems New York couldn't have offered a warmer welcome. ■

# Time Out

## New York

FEBRUARY 16-22, 2006 ISSUE 542 \$2.99 WWW.TIMEOUT.COM



**BOY N THE HOODIE**  
Trifunovic can't escape his criminal past.

### Love

Dir. **Vladan Nikolic**. 2005. N/R.  
93mins. **Sergej Trifunovic**, **Geno Lechner**, **Peter Gevisser**.

Despite its minimalist title, Yugoslav expat Vladan Nikolic's second feature boasts a complex and, at times, convoluted nonlinear narrative, set in the seedy underworld of outer-borough New York City. Vanya (Trifunovic), a guilt-ridden, Bosnian-born hit man, runs into his German ex-wife, Anna (Lechner), while on his very last job and takes her hostage. Her American fiancé, Dirk (Gevisser), happens to be a cop, and he methodically tracks the couple down. All the while a metropolis full of aliens (legal and illegal), criminals and civilians surges in the murky background.

The plot hinges on a series of conve-

nient coincidences, but writer-director Nikolic isn't concerned with realism. He's working in a hyperstylized form, complete with multiple-point-of-view retellings of scenes, a noirish narration revealing each character's back story, washed-out colors and skewed camera angles, and a tense, John Woo-inspired standoff in a church. Comparisons to *Pulp Fiction* are inevitable, yet *Love* wisely eschews wanna-be trendy trappings (except for one extraneous drag queen); it's also much bleaker than Tarantino's film. Although the turbulent world these immigrants inhabit is tamer than their violent, war-torn pasts, America disappoints as a land of dreams. But it's all they've got—so they make the best of what their adopted nation has to offer in terms of life, love and even death. (Opens Thu, Pioneer.)—*Raven Snook*

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March 16, 2006

## Love

By Frank Scheck

NEW YORK -- Virtuosity, both of the storytelling and technical kind, trumps emotional involvement in "Love," directed (and written, co-produced and edited) by Vladan Nikolic. The fractured tale of a Bosnian hit man plying his trade in New York, the film is an atmospheric and complex thriller that, while not quite living up to its thematic ambitions, more than sustains interest along the way.

Bottom line: "Love" proves to be a vivid exploration of cultural dislocation.

The story centers on Vanya (Sergej Trifunovic), who learned his deadly ways during the Balkan wars. Now working as an assassin to pay off his debt to the crime boss who brought him to America, Vanya is on his last job when he happens to run into his former girlfriend Anna (Geno Lechner), who is now involved with a cop (Peter Gevisser). The encounter results in a series of complications involving a variety of eccentric characters of various ethnicities, including a German doctor, an Italian crook and a French drag queen.

The complicated tale is rendered even more confusing by the storytelling style, which involves depicting the same events from numerous perspectives. Ultimately, the film's noirish atmosphere is more compelling than its fractured plot machinations, with the pungent dialogue and vivid characterizations compensating for the lack of coherence.

Evocatively photographed in a well-chosen variety of outer borough locations that well convey the city's grittier aspects, the ironically titled "Love" proves to be a vivid exploration of cultural dislocation.

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**'Love' and war, across the ocean intact**

By Steven Snyder

Any movie that involves the tired cliché of a hit man going on that “one last” mission and dares, in a post-“Pulp Fiction” and “Memento” world, to jump back and forth through time and across narratives, better know damn well what it’s doing, since this is not the road less traveled.

Thankfully, until the overheating mechanics of its dense and layered plot overwhelms a more subdued story of souls at a crossroads, Vladan Nikolic’s “Love” proves it has what it takes to stand proud among the other titles of its genre.

Early on, we identify with each character more for their profession and their heritage than with their particular function as a plot device. There’s a shooter, Vanya (Sergei Trifunovic) and a doctor, Anna (Geno Lechner), who we sense early on is working with Vanya but later reappears in a relationship with a policeman, Dirk (Peter Gevisser). Vanya’s last mission leads him to a drug dealer and a most unexpected reunion with Anna, whom we now realize he used to love, and sends both on the run as Dirk chases them, fearful that Vanya has abducted his girlfriend.

But to describe only the story and to detail it only in linear fashion is to miss the larger effect of Nikolic’s frequently poetic script and moody, evocative direction. In the film’s earlier segments Nikolic skillfully plays with time, introducing us to a scene first and then the actors second, often starting at the end of a sequence and then cutting back to the beginning from another perspective before arriving at the same final image.

As this world rewinds and restarts, Nikolic uses a narrator in a curious way — not to set the place or the time, nor to give us unlikely insights into emotions or feelings, but to give us historical grounding. Each character represents a different nationality and plays a part in a larger story that recreates the stresses and the conflicts of the Balkans. They are not just a vessel for the story, but rounded personalities with individual histories and chronologies.

It’s like the structure of “Amelie,” but with a more developed political backbone, and a few more fists to throw.

Each subplot, in one form or another, intersects with the notion of love as the story moves through an ambiguous slice of New York City. Some are turned into criminals out of desperation to help their loved ones. Others are punished for helping those they love. Love for some begets loneliness for others. At the story’s center, Vanya and Anna’s love is what saves them — Vanya from a life of suicidal self-disgust and Anna from a loveless relationship.

Ultimately, it is the meditative mood and tone that sets “Love” apart, this indescribable sensation of fate pushing these people together despite their will. Nikolic deserves much of the credit, as he skillfully connects these stories comprehensively, as does Vladimir Subotic, for his cinematography that illustrates these characters’ isolation and separation. Similarly, all three leads give their characters a much appreciated sense of imperfection to go hand-in-hand with their flawed quests for love. Gevisser’s a tough cop, but terrified of losing his girl. Trifunovic pretends to control people’s lives, but isn’t even sure he deserves to go on living. Lechner, as Anna, demands Vanya pull over the car to let her out, but isn’t completely sure she wants to run away.

Clarity comes quickly when lives are on the line. That’s why movies like this, bordered by life and death, are made and remade. And while most are needles iterations, “Love” has a few new things to say.

## Upcoming screenings of *love*

Sept 6-7, 2006 - Buffalo, New York – w/ Emerging Pictures  
Sept 6-7, 2006 - Ft. Lauderdale, FL – w/ Emerging Pictures  
Sept 7, 2006 - Lake Worth, FL – w/ Emerging Pictures  
Sept 8-9, 2006 - Wilmington, DE – w/ Emerging Pictures  
Sept 20, 2006 - Portland, OR – Bagdad Theater  
Oct 5 & 7, 2006 - Cleveland, OH – Cleveland Museum of Art Cinematheque

FOR DETAILS - <http://www.argotpictures.com/love.html>

## Recent Screenings

July 2006 Reel Savannah Film Group, Savannah, GA  
June 2006 Portage Theater, Chicago, IL  
Feb-March 2006 Pioneer Theater, New York, NY

## FILM FESTIVALS

Tribeca Film Festival 2005  
Venice Film Festival 2005  
Oldenburg Film Festival 2005  
Cinema Tout Ecran 2005  
Belgrade FF - March 2006  
Tiburón Int'l FF (March 2006) - Best Director Award  
Diba- Digital Barcelona Film Festival - Best Film, Young Jury Prize June 2006  
Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival - April 2006  
SouthSide Film Festival, Bethlehem, PA - June 2006  
Moscow International Film Festival July 2006  
Mostra de Valencia Film Festival, Valencia, Spain October 2006

## *love*

written & directed by Vladan Nikolic  
2005, 93 min. 35mm  
U.S.A./Serbia

“In this stylish, atmospheric thriller, a hit man who learned his deadly craft in the Balkan wars, his beautiful former lover, and her police officer boyfriend all cross paths in lower Manhattan. The looping, nonlinear narrative structure and crisscrossing fates of its colorful characters may remind many of *Pulp Fiction*, but instead of recycling the hipster argot and rap rhythm of that influential L.A. story of more than a decade ago, *Love* gives us a wintry, present-day New York City that is very much a cosmopolitan metropolis, a city of immigrant hustlers and their Old World accents - the Yugoslavian hit man, the German doctor, the French coquette, and the Neapolitan crook...”

**2005 Tribeca Film Festival.**

# love

**Written & Directed by  
Vladan Nikolic**

## **PRESS NOTES**

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# CAST

VANYA ..... Sergej Trifunovic  
ANNA ..... Geno Lechner  
DIRK ..... Peter Gevisser  
JEAN ..... Didier Flamand  
MANNY ..... Mario Padula  
ALI ..... Al Naz  
HAYES ..... Eric Frandsen  
FAYE ..... Liat Glick  
MINA ..... Kerry Rossi  
HELEN ..... Vija Vetra  
GOMEZ ..... Mariano Mederos  
BODYGUARD ..... Mark Perez  
MIDDLE AGED MAN ..... Howell Seth Mayer  
YOUNG WOMAN ..... Renata Darlen  
RECEPTIONIST ..... Eugenio Arias  
SXIP SHIREY ..... Sxip Shirey  
OFF DUTY COP ..... Adam Epstein  
JASON ..... Al Burgo  
ELEVATOR REPAIRMAN ..... Jim Browne  
WOMAN SHOT IN HOTEL ..... Wendy Maples  
MALINA ..... Maralina Hailes  
BARTENDER ..... John Rodriguez  
POLICEMAN #1 ..... Rick Sirianni  
DOCTOR ..... Bob Stack  
OFF DUTY COP ..... Adam Epstein  
DRAG QUEEN ..... Piotr Chomiak  
MAN IN DRAG #1 ..... Michelle Xavier  
MAN IN DRAG #2 ..... Fabian Cuevas  
MAN IN DRAG # 3 ..... R. Balaguer  
GIRL IN THE PARK ..... May Elbi  
DINER WAITRESS ..... Ariel Sheldon  
BELLY DANCER ..... Laura Prokopenko  
BELLY DANCER ..... Mindy Haywood  
BELLY DANCER ..... Bianca Hanna  
BELLY DANCER ..... Deepa Jain

**love**

2005 • USA/Serbia

Running Time • 93 minutes

Color • 35mm

# CREW

## **WRITER / DIRECTOR**

Vlad Nikolic

## **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

Christoph Thoke, Luigi Musini, Axel Mobius(Co-Executive)

## **PRODUCER**

Jim Stark

## **CO-PRODUCER**

Vladan Nikolic

## **ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**

Maggie Haese, Betty M. Garcia

## **CASTING**

Betty M. Garcia

## **CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Vladimir Subotic

## **EDITING**

Vladan Nikolic

## **ORIGINAL MUSIC**

standing in lines, Sxip Shirey

## **PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

Sorangel Fersobe

## **PRODUCTION MANAGER**

Fulko Kuindersma

## **PUBLICITY**

Jim Browne

## **FIRST CAMERA ASSISTANT**

Brian Murphy

## **SECOND CAMERA OPERATORS**

Matthew D. Wachsman, Carlos Rios, Ralph Umhoefer

## **STEADICAM OPERATOR**

Amos Elroy

**LINE PRODUCERS**

Ayse Ayangolu, Aleksadar-Sasha Kostic, Lisa Sardinas

**1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

Joshua Levine

**2nd ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/PROD. COORDINATOR**

Atsuko Sato

**GAFFER**

Nicola Guarneri

**GRIPS**

Aleksandar-Sasha Kostic, Artur Dziweczynski, Ben Cripps, Kevin Stanton, Brian Lange, Abraham Altbuch

**LOCATION SOUND**

Logan Susnick

**SCRIPT SUPERVISOR**

Lisa Sardinas

**HAIR & MAKE-UP/WARDROBE**

Olivera Gajic

**SPECIAL EFFECTS & SPECIAL EFFECTS MAKE UP**

Damien Leone

**STILL PHOTOGRAPHY**

Mark Higashino

**PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS**

Josh Kleefeld, Steven Abrams, Richard Earl Harris, Lennie Matakiev, Irina Khokhlova

## SYNOPSIS

In this stylish, atmospheric thriller, a hit man who learned his deadly craft in the Balkan wars, his beautiful former lover, and her police officer boyfriend all cross paths in lower Manhattan. The looping, nonlinear narrative structure and crisscrossing fates of its colorful characters may remind many of *Pulp Fiction*, but instead of recycling the hipster argot and rap rhythm of that influential L.A. story of more than a decade ago, **love** gives us a wintry, present-day New York City that is very much a cosmopolitan metropolis, a city of immigrant hustlers and their Old World accents-the Yugoslavian hit man, the German doctor, the French coquette, and the Neapolitan crook, and many others. **love** is all the more stimulating because of the elegant simplicity with which it was made; aside from its thriller plot, the spare visual composition and beautifully lit scenes are alone more than reason enough to see this picture. From its memorable scenes, which include a killing in a park to the Mexican stand-off inside a church to the dimly lighted nightclub, where an emcee in drag promises the jaded patrons 'music you've never heard before,' this stylish crime tale makes the New York scene glow with color-drenched beauty, menace, and mystery.

**-2005, Tribeca Film Festival**

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

**Vladan Nikolic** is an award winning filmmaker from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, who has lived in New York City for the past 13 years. Before coming to New York, he worked as a director for the first independent TV network in Yugoslavia. Mr. Nikolic has worked as writer, director and editor on feature films, documentaries, commercials and music videos. His awards include the TV Sarajevo Award and Zeta Film Award for Best Screenplay, the Eastman Kodak Award for his short film "Serendipity," the Telluride Indiefest Best film Award for his feature "Burn," among others. Mr. Nikolic teaches Film Directing, Production and Digital Filmmaking at The New School, Film Video Arts, and at NYU.

## NOTES ON THE PRODUCTION

- "love" was shot on mini-dv PAL in twenty days at sixty locations around NYC during the spring of 2004 for a budget of \$45,000.
- The international cast & crew of "love" spoke a total of twenty three languages.
- "love" was blown up to 35mm with the expert help of Patrick Lindemaier of the famed Swiss Effects film lab & additional support from Mikado Film of Italy, Why Not Productions of France and Thoke+Moebius of Germany.

# ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

## PRODUCER

### Jim Stark

Jim Stark is an independent producer based in New York. He has more than 20 years experience with more than a dozen features to his credit. Some of his credits include, *Down by Law* (1986), *Night on Earth* (1991), *Mystery Train* (1989), *In the Soup* (1992), *Cold Fever* (1994), *I'll Take You There* (1999) & the soon to be released *Factotum* (2005) starring Matt Dillon as Charles Bukowski.

## DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

### Vladimir Subotic

Vladimir Subotic is from Belgrade. His professional career began in 1995 in Cyprus with TV commercials and music videos. He received the Kodak Visions of Light, Best Cinematography Award at the 2004 Los Angeles International Short Film Festival. **Love** is his 2<sup>nd</sup> feature film. He shot the feature, *Going Under*, which was co-produced and edited by Vlad Nikolic and also stars Geno Lechner.

## PRODUCTION DESIGNER

### Sorangel Fersobe

A New York based, Dominican born Production Designer/Art Director, Sorangel has designed many commercials, music videos and shorts films. She was the Art Director for, *Cuba Libre*, which was produced by Harvey Keitel and recently was the on-set dresser for Andy Garcia's directorial debut.

## MUSIC

### Standing in Lines

The New York based duo standing in lines creates film scores, documentary soundtracks and other forms of interesting sound experiments. They combine standard music techniques with cutting edge electronics and often incorporate non-musical sonic elements into the mix. The score for *love* is a classic film form combining strings, pianos and Rhodes, with additional music cues in styles as varied as new age and ethno.

## ARGOT PICTURES

Argot Pictures is a new distribution/production company that works with independent filmmakers to set up low budget theatrical releases. [www.argotpictures.com](http://www.argotpictures.com)

# ABOUT THE CAST

## **SERGEJ TRIFUNOVIC**

### **Vanya**

Sergej Trifunovic is one of the most popular actors in the former Yugoslavia. He has starred in many Yugoslavian films, including Cabaret Balkan, which won the 1998 Best Film Award at the Venice Film Festival. His first film in the U.S. was, Someone Else's America, with Tom Conti. He also appeared in the Dogme #5 movie, *Lovers* as well as Savior, produced by Oliver Stone and Starring Dennis Quaid.

## **GENO LECHNER**

### **Anna**

Geno Lechner started her career in the theater and has performed extensively on stage in Germany, England and France. Since 1990, Ms. Lechner has acted in such memorable films as Steven Spielberg's, Schindler's List, Immortal Beloved, with Gary Oldman, Hal Hattley's Flirt, Raoul Peck's, Not About Love, Wonsuk Chin's Too Hard to Die among others. In 1996, Ms. Lechner received the Best Actress Award at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in Argentina for her lead role in Gesche's Gift. She has also collaborated with Jon Jost, Arto Lindsay, Joan Jonas, David Byrne, Fouad El Khoury and Nan Goldin.

## **PETER GEVISSER**

### **Dirk**

Peter Gevisser has appeared in The Life and Death of Peter Sellers, with Geoffrey Rush, The Beach, with Leonardo DiCaprio, the HBO series, Rome and many other TV and stage productions in England. He is originally from South Africa.

## **DIDIER FLAMAND**

### **Jean**

Didier Flamand is a legendary French actor who has appeared in over 80 French films and television shows, including Code Unknown and Wings of Desire.

## **LIAT GLICK**

### **Faye**

Nominated for the Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for the film Girafot, Liat has also starred in Kippur and Ben Gurion.