



A FILM BY IGOR DRLJAČA

# THE STONE SPEAKERS



SYNDICADO FILM SALES PRESENTS

A TIMELAPSE PICTURES PRODUCTION "THE STONE SPEAKERS" PRODUCTION MANAGER AMIRA LEKIĆ

LOCATION MANAGER HARIŠ KAMENČIĆ DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY AMEL ĐJKOVIĆ PRODUCTION SOUND NIRVAN IMAMOVIĆ, PREDRAG DODER SOUND DESIGNER AARON MIRKIN

SOUND MIXER MATTHEW CHAN EDITED BY IGOR DRLJAČA PRODUCED BY IGOR DRLJAČA, ALBERT SHIN WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY IGOR DRLJAČA

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2018 - 92min - Canada, Bosnia & Herzegovina - Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, English - Colour- DCP -5.1

## **PRODUCTION COMPANY**

### **TIMELAPSE PICTURES**

1121 Bay Street

Suite # 704

Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3L9 Phone:

+1-416-918-7970

[www.timelapsepictures.ca](http://www.timelapsepictures.ca)

## **DISTRIBUTION CANADA**

### **GAME THEORY**

Contact: Hilary Hart

Email: [hilary@gametheoryfilms.com](mailto:hilary@gametheoryfilms.com)

[www.gametheoryfilms.com](http://www.gametheoryfilms.com)

## **INTERNATIONAL SALES**

### **SYNDICADO FILM SALES**

Contact: Aleksandar Govedarica

Email: [aleksandar@syndicado.com](mailto:aleksandar@syndicado.com)

[www.syndicado.com](http://www.syndicado.com)

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### **SYNDICADO FILM SALES**

Contact: Jasmina Vignjevic

[admin@syndicado.com](mailto:admin@syndicado.com)

[www.syndicado.com](http://www.syndicado.com)

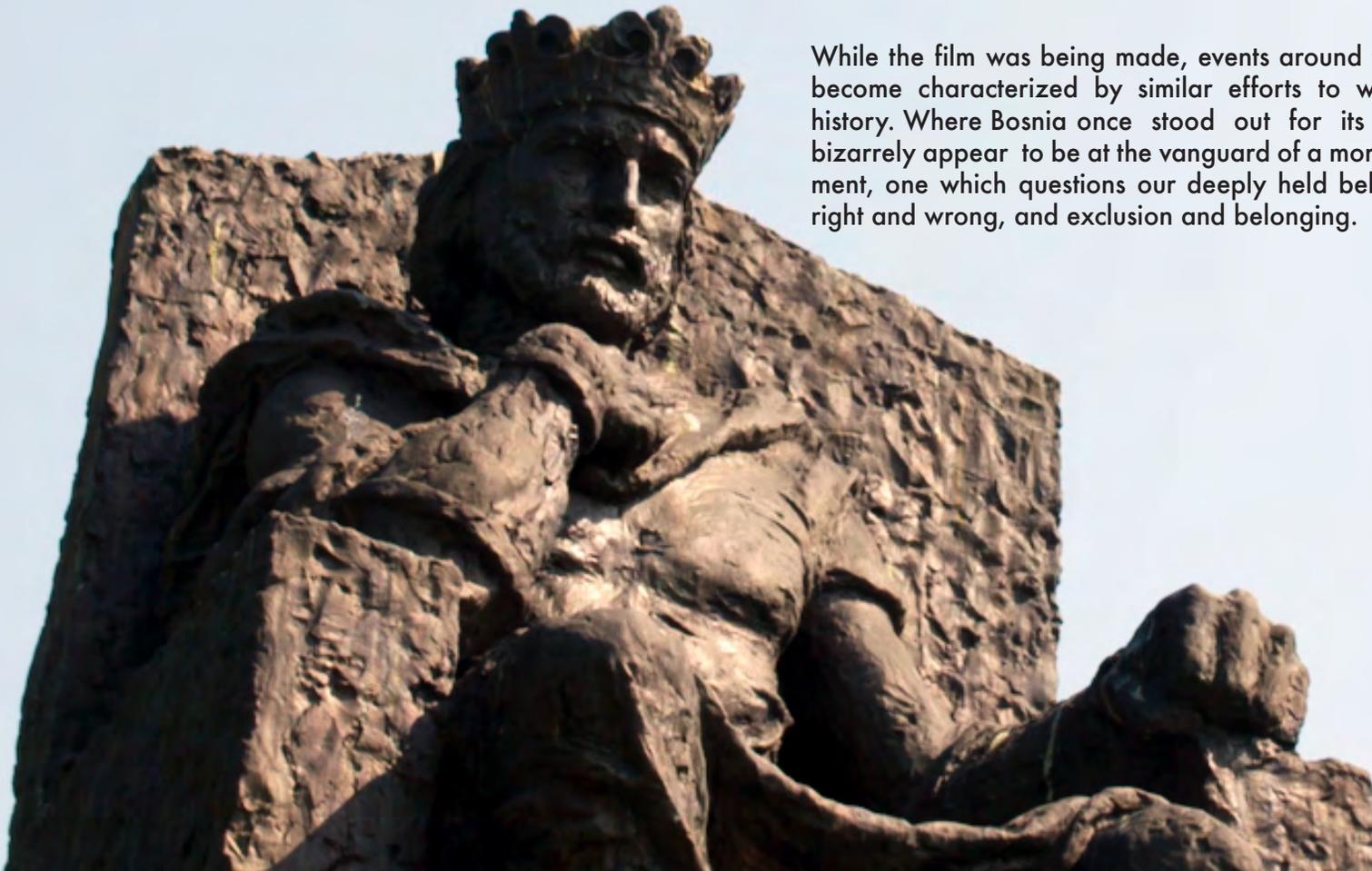
## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In *The Stone Speakers*, I wanted to explore the relationship between recent tourist sites and attempts to create competing national narratives in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. These divergent narratives and the relationship between Bosnia's ethnic groups continue to be a source of misunderstanding and tension. The tourist sites may appear to be innocuous enough, but all have underlying narratives which suggest an alter-native Bosnian or regional history.

Today's Bosnia-Herzegovina was created through the Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the civil war in the 1990s. The Accords enshrined the division of Bosnia's population into three primary ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. The process of ethnic cleansing during the war has also ensured that these groups largely live apart, with only some areas of the country retaining its pre-war multiethnic character. Little progress has been made since the war to address these divisions, and the country remains economically and socially unstable. Bosnia's problems are worsening: it has the most severe unemployment rate in Europe (44%), and its population is constantly declining.

The one bright spot is the country's rapidly growing tourism industry. Bosnia's unspoiled natural sites, and its rich history, have begun to attract tourists from all parts of the world. But the cultivation of the country's tourist industry has not been immune to persisting divisions. Some of these tourist sites perpetuate competing narratives in curious ways, many of which can appear eccentric to outsiders. These eccentricities help to mask the ultimately perilous nature of the narratives perpetuated, as they continue to erode Bosnia's fragile peace.

While the film was being made, events around the globe have increasingly become characterized by similar efforts to write and rewrite facts and history. Where Bosnia once stood out for its eccentricities, it can now bizarrely appear to be at the vanguard of a more global destabilizing movement, one which questions our deeply held beliefs about truth and fiction, right and wrong, and exclusion and belonging.



## SYNOPSIS

Present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina is a country still reeling from the civil war in the early 90s. The Bosnian economy never recovered, and the country remains divided. In order to cope, many towns have transformed themselves into unique tourist destinations that bring together history, religion, politics and folklore. The tourist sites promoted are not only a reflection of people's attempts to make a livelihood but are also a means to promote and establish competing narratives about the country's past, present and future. The Stone Speakers explores four towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina through their tourism, slowly unravelling these competing narratives.

## BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA TODAY

Since the end of its civil war in 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina has remained a divided country. During the conflict, previously multi-ethnic towns and cities were largely cleansed, meaning that the country's three main ethnic groups, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, rarely live in close proximity. This has strengthened ethnic divisions, which have also dominated the country's political scene. At the same time, the Bosnian economy has languished, and the country's inhabitants continue to emigrate. Many recent efforts to promote economic growth have centred on exploiting Bosnia-Herzegovina's tourist potential, albeit in somewhat unexpected ways.



## **MEDJUGORJE**

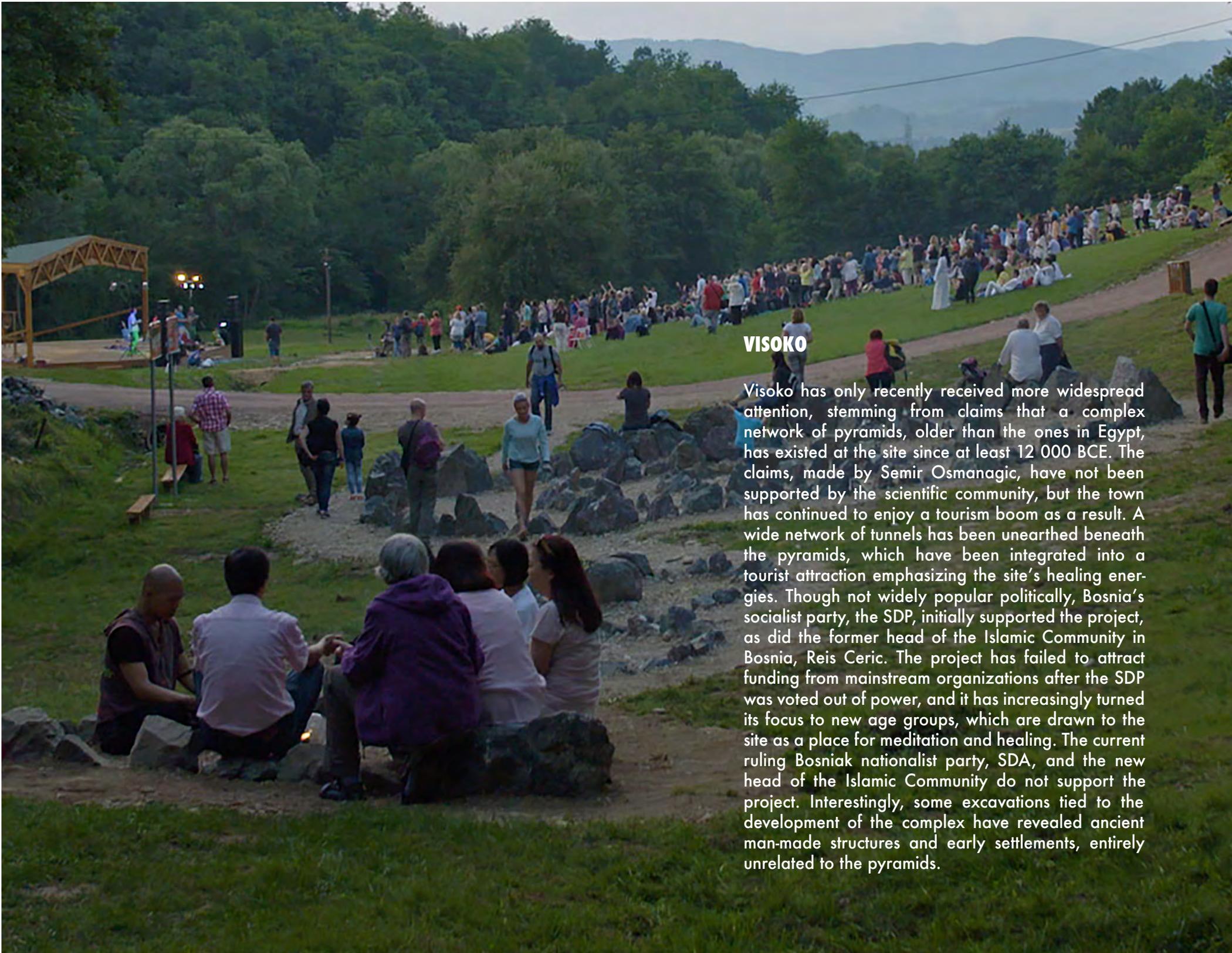
The town of Medjugorje in Eastern Herzegovina became a site of considerable interest in 1981 after six children, who are referred to as visionaries, began to see apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Before the visions began, life in Yugoslav-era Medjugorje had been very difficult for its ethnically Bosnian-Croat inhabitants. The communist government saw the region as sympathetic to the Ustashe fascist movement that ruled Bosnia and Croatia as a Nazi puppet state during WWII. One of the objectives of the movement was to cleanse Croatia of all unwanted elements, including Serbs, Jews, and the Roma. By the end of WWII, the Ustashe were defeated by communist partisans, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, who went on to establish a socialist Yugoslav state. Following the war, communist authorities, while not banning religious expression, sought to control all organized religious activity. When the Marian apparitions began, the government was apprehensive, and imprisoned or interrogated some of the friars seeking to publicize them. This suspicion was eventually replaced with mild enthusiasm as some communist authorities recognized the tourist potential of the site, which first attracted hundreds, then thousands of Catholic pilgrims. The site has continued to grow since the early eighties. While it has not been officially sanctioned by the Vatican as canonical, interest in Medjugorje continues to grow. The town now attracts upwards of one million pilgrims per year. Despite the foreign crowds, not unlike the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the local population in the region continues to decline.





## TUZLA

Tuzla is located in what was once the industrial heartland of North-eastern Bosnia. Sitting on massive salt deposits, it has been historically well-known for its production of salt, which has continued nearly uninterrupted for over a thousand years. The city's manufacturing sector, much like other industrial infrastructure throughout the country, was criminally privatized and closed in the post-war period. This has contributed to an unemployment rate of over fifty percent, and a mass exodus of young educated people. Recent efforts to boost the local economy have centred on promoting the city's tourist potential. The city authorities have taken advantage of sink holes caused by the over-extraction of salt to create salt lakes that have proven popular with both local and foreign tourists. The residents of Tuzla have also long been known for their promotion of harmony among the various ethnic groups of Bosnia. They continue to closely observe Bosnia's (and Yugoslavia's) worker struggles and the fight against fascism, while also promoting the values dominant during the Yugoslav socialist period. This includes the notion that it is possible to have a civic identity rather than simply an ethnic one. However, Tuzla's leaders tend to gloss over the fact that Yugoslavia was led by an authoritarian single-party regime, making their particular method of promoting a civic Bosnian identity unpalatable to many. In Bosnia's current political setup, a civic identity is not a legally established option. Ethnic identities are entrenched and protected within the country's Constitution, and the ideas promoted by the local leaders of Tuzla have little impact outside of the city.



## VISOKO

Visoko has only recently received more widespread attention, stemming from claims that a complex network of pyramids, older than the ones in Egypt, has existed at the site since at least 12 000 BCE. The claims, made by Semir Osmanagic, have not been supported by the scientific community, but the town has continued to enjoy a tourism boom as a result. A wide network of tunnels has been unearthed beneath the pyramids, which have been integrated into a tourist attraction emphasizing the site's healing energies. Though not widely popular politically, Bosnia's socialist party, the SDP, initially supported the project, as did the former head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia, Reis Ceric. The project has failed to attract funding from mainstream organizations after the SDP was voted out of power, and it has increasingly turned its focus to new age groups, which are drawn to the site as a place for meditation and healing. The current ruling Bosniak nationalist party, SDA, and the new head of the Islamic Community do not support the project. Interestingly, some excavations tied to the development of the complex have revealed ancient man-made structures and early settlements, entirely unrelated to the pyramids.

## VIŠEGRAD

Višegrad has always been at the crossroads of empires, and until recently, it was a predominantly a Bosniak town. Prior to the civil war in the 1990s, Bosniaks accounted for over 60% of the town's population, but most were ethnically cleansed during the fighting. The city has never been able to fully recover since the war, and its demographic decline continues, driven in part by the poor socio-economic conditions of the region. The town is visually dominated by the Mehmed Paša Sokolović bridge, a UNESCO World Heritage site built in 1577 by the Ottomans, who occupied Bosnia for 500 years. The bridge, and the town of Višegrad, were memorialized in Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić's novel, *The Bridge on the River Drina*, which in part deals with the myth of Mehmed Paša Sokolović, an Ottoman statesman of Serb descent born close to Višegrad. The novel also explores battles over empire, emphasizing Višegrad's location as a gateway between the East and the West, and with the search for identity that has dominated much of the town's and the region's history. In the last decade, filmmaker-turned icon builder Emir Kusturica, with the support of the town's Serb authorities, has constructed a stone city, *Andrićgrad*, as a tourist site within Višegrad. The stone city honours Andrić, who passed away in 1975 before Yugoslavia collapsed, and has therefore had no input into its creation. Kusturica's project at first glance appears innocuous, but a more careful examination reveals the promotion of a revisionist narrative that envisages a Bosnia never touched by Ottoman influence. *Andrićgrad* uses the idea of a Renaissance to imagine an alternative regional history, further testing the already fragile relationship between the three primary ethnic groups in the country.





## **DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

*Igor Drljaca*

Born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Igor Drljača completed his Master's in Film Production at York University's graduate program in 2011. He is the recipient of the Ontario Art Council's K.M. Hunter artist award for media arts in 2014. His award winning shorts include *Woman in Purple* (2010), and *The Fuse: or How I Burned Simon Bolivar* (2011), which have screened at hundreds of festivals, including: South by Southwest, Toronto, Telluride, Tampere, Palm Springs Shortfest, Vancouver and Melbourne. In 2013, *The Fuse* was nominated as best short documentary at the Canadian Screen Awards. His critically acclaimed debut feature *Krivina* (2012) premiered at TIFF and had its international premiere at Rotterdam. He co-produced Albert Shin's *In Her Place* (2014), which received 7 CSA nominations, including best picture.

His sophomore feature *The Waiting Room* (2015) premiered at Locarno International Film Festival, and had its North American premiere at TIFF. It was nominated for 2 CSA's in 2016. His first feature documentary, *The Stone Speakers* will be released this fall, while his third fiction feature, *Tabija* which received Rotterdam's Cinemart Eurimages Prize and was part of the Cannes L'Atelier program, is currently in pre-production.

## CREW

Writer & Director: IGOR DRLJAČA  
Producer: IGOR DRLJAČA, ALBERT SHIN  
Director of Photography: AMEL DJIKOLI  
Editor: IGOR DRLJAČA  
Line Producer: AMIRA LEKIĆ  
Production Sound Mixers: NIRVAN IMAMOVIC, PREDRAG DODER  
Dialogue Editor: MATTHEW CHAN  
Sound Designer: AARON MIRKIN  
Re-Recording Mixer: MATTHEW CHAN

## TIMELAPSE PICTURES

TimeLapse Pictures is an award-winning production company based out of Toronto, Canada, committed to producing original and artist-driven cinema. Founded in 2008 by filmmakers Igor Drljaca and Albert Shin, the company has produced narrative and documentary films that have played in major festivals all over the world including TIFF, Telluride, Locarno, San Sebastian and Rotterdam. Collectively, their films have garnered multiple awards and nominations from the Canadian Screen Awards, The Korean Wildflower Film Awards, Abu Dhabi Film Festival, Festival Du Nouveau Cinema, Taipei International Film Festival, among many more.

The company's most recent production, *The Stone Speakers*, a feature doc exploring the intersection of tourism and ideology in post-war Bosnia will be having its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2018. *Tabija*, a Canadian-Bosnian co-pro, written and directed by Igor Drljaca, is currently in pre-production and slated to begin filming in early 2019.

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