



ANAMARIA MARINCA: BEYOND THE IRON CURTAIN

*ROMANIAN ACTRESS CONTEMPLATES
HER BREAKTHROUGH ROLE, IN-
TERNATIONAL ACCLAIM AND YOUTH
SPENT IN THE EASTERN BLOC*

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Despite the conveniences of modern technology, my attempts to reach Anamaria Marinca are proving futile. The Romanian ingénue has holed up in London for the holidays, basking in the accolades for her impressive performance in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*—the international hit capturing the daily lives of Romanians under Communist rule. Although she's kindly agreed to chat over mobile, my repeated dialing of endless international digits results in the same indifferent buzzing. Anxiety mounts, and I'm left to contemplate this formidable talent who boasts a Palm d'Or winner as her theatrical film debut—quite an achievement for a girl from a country mostly known for its springy, pre-pubescent gymnasts and its unenviable position at the Westernmost edge of the old Eastern Bloc. But those were different days, and now stardom comes knocking, even amidst the remnants of the iron curtain. Suddenly, a sweet voice greets me: "Hello, Hello? I thought it was at 4 pm?"

It's fitting that a girl raised in Communist Romania would



break into the international scene with a film depicting a world she knows all too well. “I was twelve or eleven and a half when the Communists collapsed,” she recalls, never hesitating to revisit her country’s hampered past. “But we grew up under this regime. We pretty much understood everything about it. I know we were very young, but it was compulsory for everyone to understand what was going on. Otherwise you couldn’t survive.” But rather than fleeing this troubled past (and following the allure of crossover success), Marinca is holding still. She’s part of a younger, creative generation, whose experience with the Cold War has sparked a renewed interest in national culture: “I understood that [communism] started as a utopia. But we were a dictatorship. We weren’t allowed to speak, but they couldn’t stop us thinking.”

Born in Iasi, Romania, Marinca was raised in pseudo-bohemian splendor, and instilled with ideals at odds with the party lines. “I grew up in a family with an artistic background. My mother is a violinist and my father is an actor.” Her parents nurtured a curiosity for creativity despite the conspicuous limitations laid before them—particularly those sanctions against the dangers of Western culture. “All these tapes circulating, all these films I’ve seen with my parents under the blanket—they were forbidden,” she says bluntly. “We weren’t allowed to see Western films. But we grew up with them, they were everywhere in the black market, people could get them. Growing up amongst artists, gave us a lot of freedom... My mom traveled with the orchestra. My father, as well, worked for the theatre. We had access to information, we did have opportunity growing up, I mean, me and my brother, but it was...” Marinca begins to struggle, pulling at dead air for the precise words, but tenuously settles, “That’s how people grew up.”

In 2004, not long after graduating from university, Marinca, a gifted theatre performer, landed her first role in television. “I went to this audition for *Sex Traffic*, a program for the BBC and CBC. [It was] the first time I was in front of the camera ever.” However, the defining career role as Otilia in Cristian Mungiu’s *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, fell into her lap surprisingly as a last minute casting decision. “I didn’t have much time. I met Cristian two weeks before. I was contacted very late. I only had ten days maybe [to prepare].” But it was a character uncannily close to her, mirroring Marinca’s own journey.

4 Months, 3 Weeks follows the lives of two female college students in a single day. Gabita is seeking an illegal abortion amidst the craze and hysteria before the dissolution of Romania from the Soviet Union, and Marinca’s character, Otilia, is perversely and regretfully placed in the position of organizing this fate-

ful and banned procedure for her incompetent friend. “It came at the moment when I’m becoming the woman [Otilia]—I’m 29... I have the memory from my childhood,” Marinca reflects, taking a moment to truly unearth her place in all of this. “I never questioned back then what was happening to women... I didn’t actually understand what was happening to my mom’s generation.” The film unflinchingly, if graphically, depicts the events surrounding the illegal abortion; it’s clearly a tale made to challenge and provoke, with the stories of countless forgotten or denied. And Marinca is fine with that: “These women are Gabita and Otilia in the movie—and I relate to her. After the revolution, I started finding out about the decree of Nicolae Ceausescu back in ‘67 when he banned abortion... the number of women that died because of complications and lack of medical care... For me, as a woman, [*4 Months, 3 Weeks*] is vital; it’s where I come from. It’s about my land and my people.”

The early acclaim for *4 Months, 3 Weeks* has placed Marinca in an interesting position just starting out. She graciously passes on offers from Hollywood at the moment, other than a brief appearance in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Youth Without Youth*, but accepts the current spotlight on the film as “unexpected... and wonderful.” Marinca gladly ponders: “You can’t possibly predict the state of a film while doing it. What I can tell you is it felt special. When we [the cast and crew] met, when we started, something was there, more than magnetic... It was there in the air, floating.” For a country popularly known and accepted as pumping out nimble gymnastic tumblers and football heroes, it is great to know the film’s success is paraded with equal vigor as its most beloved sports. “In Romania—it’s funny. We have the same public [as sports stars]... we found out after. People stopped the performances to announce to the public that we got the Palm d’Or. People went out on the street as if it was after a football match or something—we won big. They just shouted on the streets. It was amusing.”

A Romanian New Wave may still be a way’s off, but a vital film community is definitely on the rise. In the past few years, Romanian cinema has landed firmly on the international scene with *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2006) and *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006) and now, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. “They are mature artistically now,” she fondly points out, acknowledging her fellow filmmakers. “[Communism] was a very troubled time in our history, a turning point... It’s very good we speak about it.” A BBC miniseries, *The Last Enemy*, is slated next, with another Romanian film, *Boogie*, to follow. But ultimately, things are just taking shape: “I’m not making any plans. My instincts will guide me...”