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Yelena Popovits: Why I am doing a film for Saint Nektarios



I was born in Belgrade to Serbian parents. We didn't go to church. When I set out for a better life to a land of milk and honey I asked God to protect me and guide me on my path. Even though I believed in God I didn't know who Jesus Christ was, who Panagia was, basically I didn't know anything about Orthodox Christian faith. I was 17 when I went to America and after the birth of my first son at age of 25 in Los Angeles I discovered our Orthodox Faith and the Church became a big part of my life. As I was new to Church I began reading a lot of books on saints for they gave me strength, courage and faith to live and fight. Even though I enjoyed reading about them I never thought that I would make a film about a saint. I wrote scripts and wanted to make films to share light, to give hope to people, to help those who suffer, but I never had a story of a saint on my mind to make into a movie. In

summer the of 2012 I read about Agios Nektarios. Like any other story about a saint it was a beautiful and powerful story but there was something about his story that resonated within me, there was something that I understood on a very personal level and had to share it, and I thought that his story would make a good film especially in the times we live in. In the summer of 2013 I visited Greece and his Monastery in Aegina with a synopsis of the story and I asked him to bless it. I came back to Aegina in 2014 with a script and did the same. In 2015 I told Abbot Paisios and Elder Ephraim of St. Anthony's Monastery in Arizona that I wanted to make a film about Agios Nektarios. With their blessing I came to Greece in June of 2016 and started to work on the film.

At that time a wonderful actor and a friend Rade Serbedzija was attached to play the role of Agios Nektarios. As I started my journey in Greece actor Manos Gavras introduced me to Costas Lambroupolos and Costas joined the team in 2017.

Originally I tried to get funding from the Greek Film Center with Serbia and Croatia being co producers, but unfortunately GFC denied to fund the film. Finally I got private funding and started pre-production in June of this year. The filming is scheduled for the beginning of 2020 and the theatrical release worldwide is set for November of 2020 which will mark 100 years of the repose of Agios Nektarios.

The film is going to be shot in English for a global audience. Aris Servetalis will play Agios Nektarios and I am extremely pleased that he will portray the saint as I feel that he is the best possible choice for the part. Tonia Sotiropoulou will play the nun Maria and Marthilia Svarna will play the nun Efimia.

We are also casting other roles with international actors.

I was disappointed to see that some Greek tabloids mentioned the names of Mr. Hanks and Mrs Aniston amongst others as they have no connection with this film. We have not confirmed any international actors as of yet but once they are cast I would be happy to share the information. This film in particular is a project that shouldn't be promoted by its cast level as the biggest star of this film is Agios Nektarios himself and his story alone is the power that should and will drive this film forwards.

We are going to shoot the entire movie in Greece. I am very excited to work with our DOP (Director of Photography) Simos Sarketzis.

This story will naturally resonate with Orthodox Christian and other Christian audiences, but what I like the most about it, what prompted me to write and direct this film is that the story of Agios Nektarios will resonate with everyone.