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NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS REVIEWS; With Serbs And Muslims In the Muddle Of Bosnia

By ELVIS MITCHELL
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The title of the incident-filled but relaxed and oddly courtly comedy-drama "Fuse" isn't exactly misleading. Watching the story unfold is akin to watching a ridiculously extended fuse burn for so long that you almost forget there's a bomb at the end.

The writer and director Pjer Zalica's droll, soulful film, set in a war-ravaged Bosnian village, pits Serbs and Muslims, black marketeers and the government, against one another, with the corrupt cop Mugdim (Izudin Bajrovic) playing both ends against the middle. The laughs and discomforts emerge from the spiking and cresting of paranoia. In this movie, running tonight and tomorrow in the New Directors/New Films series at Lincoln Center, Mr. Zalica's gentle but firm hand stokes the building tensions. It's a masterly cranking of suspicions, both personal and political, and he mixes the moodiness deftly.

And with a flurry of emotional tones, "Fuse" has echoes of the lyrical and peculiar films of Ivan Passer, with the symbolism rendered in more corporeal terms rather than as a ghostly presence. Like East European comedies of the 1960's, this picture is ostensibly built around an event -- here it's the approaching arrival of President Bill Clinton and the attendant storm of activity, official and otherwise. His visit is announced by a disruptive and funny shot of his blocklong limo being choppered in, reminding the villagers of the meddlesome American presence throwing a noisy shadow over the countryside.

The picture's lifeblood courses through the middle-aged Zaim (Bogdan Diklic), who's trying to learn the fate of his soldier son, Adnan (Feda Stukan). "Fuse" begins with the father trying to share a cigarette with the apparition of his son, who graciously declines, adding to his father's respect.

"They think I'm mad," Zaim asks. "What do you think?"

After a thoughtful pause, Adnan shrugs, "You're mad."

With Zaim drunk and anxious, his head vibrates like an A-Rod bobble-head doll. Yet with all the coarse motivation in the movie, he's one of the purest souls around.

Zaim's erratic good-heartedness has been passed on in a more consistent version to his firefighter son, Faruk (Enis Beslagic), who devotes himself to his duty and struggles to maintain his equanimity as a bomb claims several people close to him. He gets drawn into Zaim's investigation if only to keep watch over his father, and the information that Faruk picks up only increases his burden of misery.

Mr. Zalica follows all the mounting turmoil and the undercurrents of lust, greed and grudges with an agile, matter-of-fact assurance. Some of the loopy touches are just dropped into the frame, like the schoolchildren's choir that the mayor has assembled to pay musical tribute to the president; they greet him with a wobbly rendition of "House of the Rising Sun."

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With all the film's comic touches, Mr. Zalica also makes a subtly intelligent point by showing how the most profoundly affected victims of combat are the women. Always visible in "Fuse" is their battle to cope with ruination. (A Brechtian closing credits sequence salutes one of the female stars.)

With his background in documentaries, Mr. Zalica relies on generating a small but steady stream of sparks. Even Zaim's insanity is low-key. His head twitters so much that it takes a minute to catch the mad gleam in his eyes. "Fuse" does sputter toward its explosive climax, but Mr. Zalica does not avert his gaze from the aftermath. What the movie tells us, in the most intelligent of terms, is that the consequence of every act has to be recognized. And after the smoke clears from the destruction, life goes on.

FUSE

Written (in Bosnian, with English subtitles) and directed by Pjer Zalica; director of photography, Mirsad Herovic; edited by Almir Kenovic; music by Sasa Losic; production designer, Kemal Hrustanovic; produced by Ademir Kenovic; released by Global Film Initiative. Running time: 105 minutes. This film is not rated. Shown today at 3 p.m. at Alice Tully Hall and Sunday at 6 p.m. at the Walter Reade Theater, both at Lincoln Center, 165 West 65th Street, Manhattan, as part of the 33rd New Directors/New Films series of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the department of film and media of the Museum of Modern Art.

WITH: Enis Beslagic (Faruk), Bogdan Diklic (Zaim), Sasa Petrovic (Husnija), Izudin Bajrovic (Mugdim), Jasna Zalica (Hitka), Senad Basic (Velija), Admir Glamocak (Hamdo), Emir Hadzihafizbegovic (Stanko) and Feda Stukan (Adnan).

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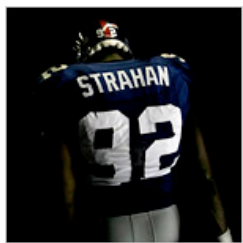
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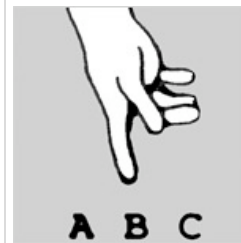
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