



BORUT GROŠIČAR

A Slovenian Physicist in Hollywood

NOAH CHARNEY, Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Branden Garrett may not sound like a particularly Slovenian name, but it belongs to one of Slovenia's most promising actors. Borut Grošičar is new to acting, but has made impressive strides, and a big impression, in just a few film roles – enough to be signed by a Hollywood agency, which now regularly sends him to auditions for international films. Trained as a physicist, he still teaches physics and math, but is following his passion following a striking, mid-life career move.

We met Borut, stage name Branden, at an intriguing moment in his fledgling career. He has an agent. He has a small but memorable part in a new Slovenian gangster film, *Suplje price* (Tall Tales), in which he gets to deliver a perfectly-timed joke: he is obliged to entertain a two-year-old boy and is at a loss, so he offers to show him a gift from his mother, which turns out to be an enormous gun. What happens next is both gruesome and funny, and that scene, however brief, is a standout in the film. Having signed with an American agency, he is currently buried in the mountain of paperwork required for a non-American artist/performer to gain a permit to work in the US. He is on the cusp, and therefore has great insight into life as an actor in Slovenia, and just how a foreigner might break into Hollywood. He certainly looks the part: with long blond hair and a laid-back, southern California vibe, he is someone to keep an eye on.

When did you realise you wanted to become an actor?

The trigger for everything was my good friend from Germany, who told me "I think you should become an actor." I didn't take that seriously, still working as a physicist at the Jozef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana.

"This idea of performing was always inside of me, but I was not courageous enough. After going through some changes in my personal life, I became more extroverted, and also started to do things I really love. I felt like I needed to use the other half of my brain."

Tell me about your first major role.

My first major role was in my short film, *Hills Like White Elephants*. I was the producer and an actor at the same time. It is a film based on a short story written by Ernest Hemingway. It centres on a couple's verbal duel over whether the girl will abort her partner's child. Hemingway's feat in this story is that he accomplished full, fleshed-

out characterisations of the couple, and a clear and complete exposition of their dilemma, using almost nothing but dialogue. As a method actor, I was trying to be authentic, credible, and real in this film. The filming took place at the main railway station in Ljubljana. It brings to my mind the film, *Suplje price* (Tall Tales), which recently came out at the cinema. In that film, I play the role of a professional burglar.

What is the lifestyle of an actor in Slovenia like? How does one become a full-time actor, when it seems that there is a very limited number of roles available?

It depends how you look at it. We can be considered very lucky, having two great teachers of method acting, namely Janez and Andrej Vajevac. They both come from Lee Strasberg's school of acting, a method that was established in the previous century in the US and has lately spread worldwide. But, on the other hand, it is not exactly a nice situation, from a financial point of view, since we live in a very small country, which means that we have a very limited market, consequently there are not enough "customers" for films. Most film projects are subsidised by the government. So unless you come from certain circles, the chance of being cast for a role is insignificantly small, even though you may be a trained actor. You can be an extra, and that's it. Yet, one can always be creative and do one's own stuff, one's own indie projects.

At what point did you decide to pursue an acting career in the US?

After a few years of working as an actor in Slovenia, and having a role in some films and commercials, I had a strong desire to try overseas. There is a much bigger market, many more opportunities.

How did you get an agent? I understand that this is practically impossible and a major accomplishment.

It was a combination of the right circumstances, and that I was prepared to accept such a position. I went to an agency with my friend. When they saw me and my work, my acting resume, they offered to represent me.

Tell me about the audition process and your visit to Hollywood.

There was a nice incident while preparing myself at the famous Stella Adler Academy on Hollywood Boulevard, with the very well-known acting coach, Laura Levya. The last few words in my monologue were "jebat cu ti majku" which means "I will f..k your mother," which is not very nice, but was certainly in character, as I was playing the role of a Serbian mafia boss. I remember, she told me "that was really substantial, although I didn't understand a word."

What is the process of getting all the paperwork sorted out like, in order to be allowed to work in the US, as a Slovenian actor?

It is a troublesome process. You have to prove to the State Department people that you have achieved extraordinary things in the arts. So basically, you need a lot of press articles and recommendation letters that prove your excellence.

How did you choose your American stage name, and how has taking a stage name helped you?

It took me some time. I checked the book of the names, with the intention to have the same initials as in my original name. When I stumbled upon "Branden Garrett" I liked it immediately. After sleeping on it, I decided to keep it. The fact that many actors and artists use a stage name speaks for itself. I think this is an important aspect that can help you break in. Of course, this is not enough. You certainly have to make a good first impression when meeting key people, and I think this is very important for one's public persona, as an actor. Anyway, my surname is very difficult to pronounce.

What other Slovenian actors have achieved success abroad?

Definitely the most successful actor is Željko Ivanek. He has a very impressive Hollywood acting resume. He has had roles in films like *Argo*, *The Bourne Legacy*, *Live Free or Die Hard*, *Hannibal*, etc. After him comes Katarina Čas, with films like *The Guard*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and *Danny Collins*.

Why do you think it is that Slovenians particularly long to succeed abroad – as if success in Slovenia were not enough?

I think it is because, in our psyche as well as in fact, people become better recognised in Slovenia after gaining recognition abroad. It happens in the fields of science, art, and design. Let me mention a few examples, such as the designer Robert Lešnik, or the businessman and owner of Pipistrel, Ivo Boscarol, and the aforementioned Katarina Čas.

What is actor training like in Slovenia, I mean the way acting is taught?

Shelley Winters, a widely respected actress who won two Oscars, once said that, in Europe, we are too burdened by ideas, philosophy, and theoretical knowledge. Consequently, it is difficult to create an organic experience that is credible and authentic. Actors here seem to imitate their objective too much through facial expressions. The first thing that they taught me in Hollywood is to not pretend, but to live.

Noah Charney found his new home in Slovenia. He teaches writing workshops at the Filozofska Fakulteta in Ljubljana, in English. This year he will also teach a workshop on writing and directing for stage and screen, co-taught by the famous actor and director, Branko Djuric-Djuro. For more information, visit www.noahcharney.com.

