

SPORTING LEGENDS COME FROM NATIONAL TEAMS

An Interview with Aleksandar Djordjevic

by Milos Rastovic

Aleksandar Djordjevic, head coach of the National Basketball Team of Serbia, visited the Serbian NBA players in the USA last fall. Following his meeting with Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets, in Colorado I was able to interview him thanks to the help of SNF member George Grkinich.

Djordjevic, one of the greatest icons of Serbian basketball, is the only person in the history of basketball to participate in the finals of the three biggest world competitions as both a player and coach. He won two silver medals at the Olympic Games: as a player in Atlanta in 1996, and as a coach in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. At the Basketball World Cups, he won the gold medal as a player in Athens in 1998, and silver medal as a coach in Madrid in 2014. He won a silver medal as the coach at the European Basketball Championship in Turkey in 2017 as well as his first gold medal as coach of the team Virtus Bologna in the European Basketball Champions League in 2019.

As we admired his skills and bravura as a player, we equally admire him as head coach of the Serbian National Basketball Team today, a spot he filled in 2013.

MR: As a professional coach, how much does players' experience help?

AD: Personally, it helps me a lot. I think that all the experience and levels on which we played as players are priceless. They are unique. Many things I draw from my player's experiences. However, these experiences are not enough for the coach's work, but they help a lot.

MR: Please compare the quality of players from the time you and your generation played basketball to today's players. Was it more difficult then or now for a coach to choose players based on their quality?



AD: This question is very personal, and I cannot give the right answer. Every generation bears its own rules, requirements, postulates, ways of playing, a choice of selection, and reasons why some players are selected and another is not. We all begin to test players based on general rules. What we need for a certain competition depends on players' injuries, whether players can respond to our invitation and obligations to their professional clubs. Today, the basketball season is different. The basketball game is different and more in-

tensive. The calendar of competition is also different. Everything is different today. I can say neither better nor worse. A person in our position has to adapt to it, and should always select the best: that players are in excellent shape, of good character, and the best players at that moment. That is why I am doing this job.

MR: How difficult is it to stress in young basketball players the importance to play for their own country? How much have times changed since you played basketball?

AD: This is the objective again. First of all, our country has drastically changed in an aggressive and bad way from the country it was when I was born and grew up. It is necessary to pass a certain period of time in order to inculcate a sincere love for their country again. This has been specially related to generations who passed through bombing, suffering, wars, and separations, all of which left a big wound. There were a lot of negative things related to our country. Recently, we finally witnessed a whole arena that sang the Serbian national anthem, which was not the case before. It should be worked on through the education of young people through schools, athletic clubs, and with parents. Positive lectures and messages by positive people should be delivered all the time. They do not necessarily have to be from athletes. They can be people from cultural or public life in general, who are able to deliver messages to young people. That is the process of education of young people. The earlier they begin with this process, it is easier for us. Young players have to realize that only through the national team and its success can they get the title of a sporting legend. Whatever success they have in the basketball clubs on each level, it does not mean that his nation will look at them as a sporting legend, but only if they did something through

continued on page 12

Tesla Nation Screened In New York, LA

At the end of April and into May this year, the 2018 movie *Tesla Nation* by Zeljko Mirkovic was screened in Cinema Village in Manhattan, New York for a week and Laemmle Music Hall Cinema in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles for another week. The screenings were followed by great applause from the people who attended at both cinemas. The North American premiere of the movie took place at the SNF Serbian Movie Festival, University of Pittsburgh in March. Initiated by the Tesla Science Foundation in Philadelphia, the film was produced by Optimistic Film and Radio Television of Serbia and supported by the Serb National Federation.

This movie shows the great importance of building and nurturing the relation-



Delmonico's in Manhattan today

ship between the United States and Serbia as well as Serbian-Americans and their contributions to build the United States and the world. "If I am fortun-



Milos Rastovic, Tesla Nation screenwriter, at Delmonico's

nate enough to fulfill at least some of my ideas, that will do good for all of mankind," said Nikola Tesla, the Serbian-American Scientist and Inventor

(1856-1943). Spanning more than 200 years, the film recounts the stories of many Serbian-Americans throughout this time period from George Fisher, the first famous Serb, to Mihajlo I. Pupin and Nikola Tesla, two Serbian-American Scientists and Inventors and World War I and II immigrants, and up to the present time. It stresses overall Serbian-American contributions to progress.

At Cinema Village in New York were Director Zeljko Mirkovic, Screenwriter Milos Rastovic, who also served as emcee, and participants in the movie including Dr. Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic, Professor at the Columbia University, Filip Bajovic, President & CEO at Label

continued on page 10

Tesla Nation Screened In New York, LA

continued from page 1

Kings, and Vladan Ivkovic, journalist in the New Jersey City. Mirjana Zivkovic, Consul General of the Consulate General of the Republic of Serbia in New York, was also present at the event.

Dr. Vunjak-Novakovic stressed the main points in her life and prolific scientific career as well as her participation in this movie: "I congratulate Zeljko Mirkovic how he portrays the stories about Serbian-Americans. It was my great honor to be part of this project inspired by Nikola Tesla, the brightest star of our science. As Fiorello La Guardia, the mayor of New York City from 1937 to 1945 in his eulogy to Tesla on January 10th, 1943 said... 'If we remove Tesla's inventions, our civilization fall in the dark again.'"

Bajovic presented an interesting story of his way to succeed in business in New York. And, Ivkovic summed up his journalist's experience, the obstacles which he faced throughout life, and his impressions about the movie: "*Tesla Nation* offers a glance into the amazing contribution of Serbian immigrants to the American society, but it also lays out a spectrum of resources available to new generations. Any path a young Serb takes in America, it's been cleared and widened by a fellow compatriot. I believe *Tesla Nation* is just the start of a great project."

Rastovic expressed gratitude to all guests and participants in the movie. He stressed the lives of Serbian immigrants and everything that they brought to their new country: talent, a readiness to sacrifice their lives for ideals, and their souls: "Today, our soul is the magnet that connects Serbs in different countries and continents. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, who was also an immigrant in the United States, described Serbian-American history with the following words: 'It is all an amazing epopee begun by those Serbian farmers who escaped from tyranny and came to this country of freedom not to enjoy, but to become more capable to carry worries of Saint Sava and helping their families in the homeland to carry out the same worries and thus for more than 100 years until today.' If we follow the path of our great people such as Nikola Tesla and Mihajlo I. Pupin, we can be sure that we will not be lost neither for faith, the homeland nor for ourselves."

Mirkovic revealed his motives to make this movie and how much the stories of Serbian immigrants influenced him. He pointed out that the main aim of the movie is to show Serbian-American contributions in building America and the world, which spans more than 200 years, and the relationship between two nations: "*Tesla Nation* is a symbol that connects people by achieving positive

goals. *Tesla Nation* does not need any geographical explanation. Nikola Tesla is a symbol of renewed communications. Tesla is the name that everybody recognizes."

Along with Zeljko Mirkovic, others present in Los Angeles included Ognjen Milovic, director of photography, movie director and screenwriter Peter Bogdanovich, Emmy-nominated producer and songwriter Anna Tea Bogdanovich, Sr. V. President of Happiest Baby, Inc. Nina Montée Karp and Opolo winemaker Rick Quinn of Paso Robles, CA.

Anna Thea Bogdanovich shared her excitement saying, "As a songwriter for peace, I was honored to participate in *Tesla Nation*. We discovered common ground among the many Serbian immigrants and their descendants living across the United States today. The visionary inventor Nikola Tesla and filmmaker Zeljko Mirkovic are brother Serbs who have demonstrated through their life's work how we are all interconnected as one human family."

Milovic described his impressions beautifully: "Simply incredible and a true masterpiece of essential filmmaking. *Tesla Nation* is a masterfully done documentary in the spirit of old school films. The sense of pace, rhythm, substance, subject, editing perfected in its purpose to the very frame accompanied by the supporting soundtrack felt and looked like a classical composition conducted by a master orchestra conductor. A true breadth of fresh air in film today. Moving, highly impacting work of the 7th art that we call film."

To add to the documentary *Tesla Nation*, all participants also talked about the importance of Serbian heritage in their career and success. The movie was archived in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Harvard University Library, Columbia University Library, Yale University Library, Hilandar Research Library at Ohio State University, Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Library, and others.

By watching *Tesla Nation* I was inspired to learn more about where and how Tesla lived in New York, and had the opportunity to visit the famous Delmonico's restaurant where Tesla could frequently be found. The restaurant changed locations and owners since Tesla's tie. Today, it's located in the financial district near Wall Street in Manhattan, and is one of the oldest fine dining restaurants still in operation since 1837. It is adorned with old pictures on the walls and equipped with high-class furniture. You can still sense the spirit in the air of the restaurant. Many guests wanted to come to this restaurant to talk with Tesla. He always had the same table booked that other guests could not use without invitation. One of the most frequent guests at Tesla's table was the outstanding scholar and Tesla's close friend Paja Radosavljevic, Professor of Pedagogy at New York University. In 1914, Radosavljevic became President of the Serb Orthodox Federation Srbobran and Tesla became its honorary president.

Seeing the movie is highly recommended to learn more about Serbian-Americans and their contributions to the United States of America and the world.

—Milos Rastovic



From left are Filip Bajovic, President & CEO at Label Kings; Vladan Ivkovic, journalist in Jersey City; Dr. Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic, Professor at Columbia University; Zeljko Mirkovic, movie director, and Milos Rastovic, screenwriter and Master of Ceremonies



Zeljko Mirkovic, left, with Anna Thea Bogdanovich, Emmy-nominated producer and songwriter, and Peter Bogdanovich, movie director

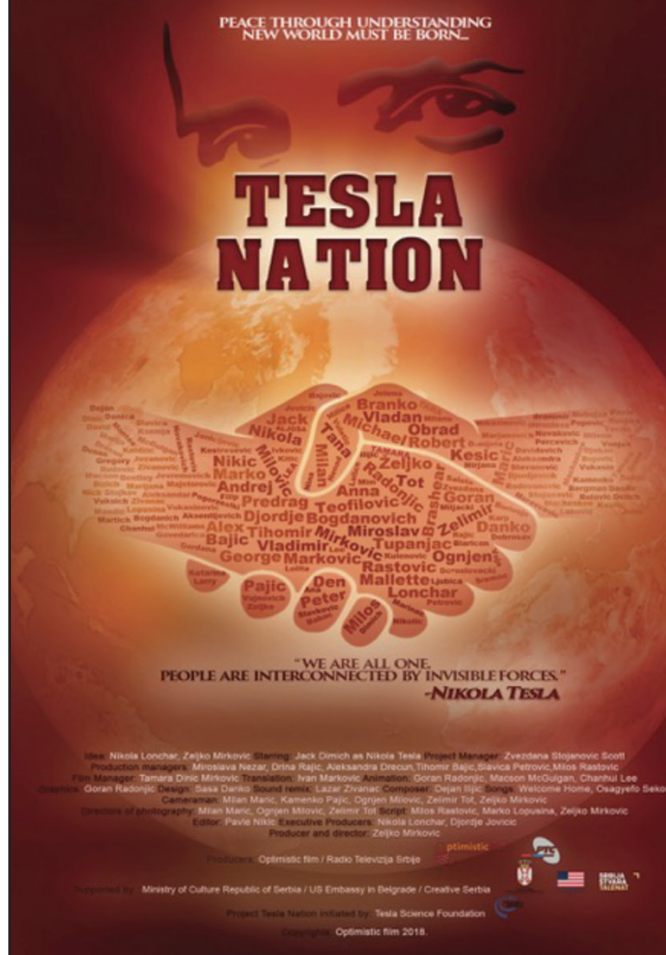


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Cinema Village in Manhattan

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