

PRESSKIT

a fighting chance

25-minute documentary (SBS)

Director **MARK ANDERSSON**

Producers **TOM ZUBRYCKI & KATRINA LUCAS**

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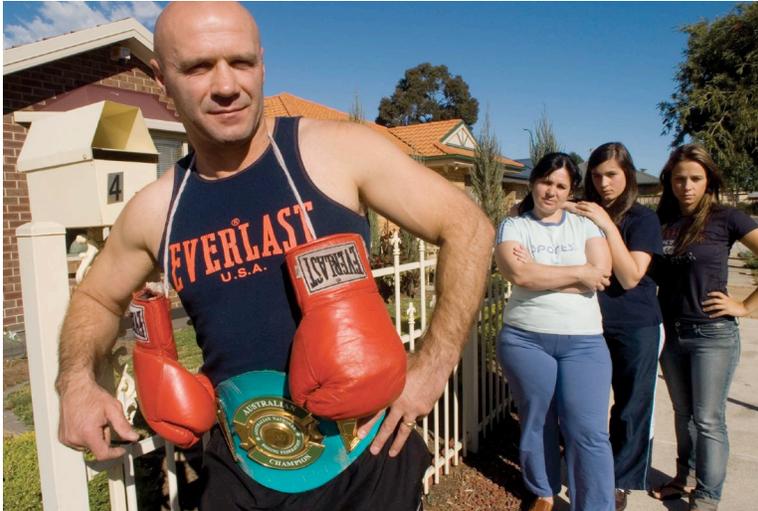
At age 42, former Bosnian boxing champion Nermin Sabanovic is making a comeback and dreaming of fighting for a world title, despite the concerns of his wife and two daughters.

Funded by the South Australian Film Corporation and Australian Film Commission © 2007

Broadcast: 8pm, 23 January, 2007

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Once a celebrity and Olympic boxing champion in his former homeland of Bosnia, 42-yr old Nermin reckons he has what it takes. He might have the support of Bosnian community behind him, but his family is not so sure. Nermin has been out of the ring for ten years and his aging body may not be up to it.



Nermin with wife Indira and daughters Medina and Tea



Winning the OPBF belt



After his Japan fight

ONE-PAGE SYNOPSIS

Nermin Sabanovic is a strong willed man. At 42 years of age, his main goal in life is to win a world boxing title. Now that he holds the OPBF Title and the Australian Title, Bosnian-born Nermin believes he can beat the odds to go on to represent Australia and claim a world championship.

Nermin's wife Indira refuses to watch his fights, and his eldest daughter Tea believes her father's age makes boxing far too risky. Both of them constantly worry about injury or worse. They want Nermin to focus on his work as a project officer with the Aboriginal Sobriety Group (ASG). In nine years patrolling the streets of Adelaide to ensure the safety of Indigenous people, Nermin has come to consider himself as much Aboriginal as he is Bosnian-Australian. For Nermin's family he is already a hero, a survivor, a pillar of strength and a well-respected leader in the Bosnian community in Adelaide. So what does Nermin have to prove?

To truly understand Nermin we must understand his deep passion for his Bosnian people. As a high profile sports figure and a Muslim, Nermin and his family were forced

to flee the war in the former Yugoslavia. After arriving here in 1993 as a refugee, Nermin decided to turn professional. His years of international boxing experience meant he was in a strong position to win the Australian Super Cruiserweight Boxing Title, but a serious road accident a week before the fight forced him into retirement.

Since his extraordinary comeback at age 40 and recent Australian title victory, Nermin has once again become an icon of the fiercely patriotic Bosnian community in Australia and in Bosnia. Nermin's brother-in-law, Helari, is constantly by his side, spurring him on and reminding him he still has what it takes. But Nermin's decision to relive past glory and contest a world title may have some serious consequences. How will Nermin's aging body hold up against a much younger opponent? Will a lack of sparring partners affect his abilities? How will all this affect his family?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - MARK ANDERSSON

This story came to me while undertaking research for another documentary at the Aboriginal Sobriety Group in Adelaide where Nermin works. I was instantly drawn to Nermin's charisma and his determination to follow his dream, as well as his family's struggle to accept his boxing. This, combined with his experiences of fleeing the war in Bosnia and overcoming a serious accident, was something of an extraordinary tale.

Over the past year I have been following Nermin and have built a close relationship with both Nermin and his family, filming them amongst vibrant Bosnian-Australian festivities, awards ceremonies and reunions. I have also been lucky enough to gain access to Nermin's work at the Aboriginal Sobriety Group and have filmed him training for and travelling to fights in Melbourne, Brisbane, Japan and Newcastle.

Nermin is extremely fit. He trains two hours a day and doesn't smoke or drink. Years of intense training in communist former Yugoslavia have made him mentally and physically extremely disciplined. He has over 350 fights under his belt, and is champion of both Bosnia and Australia. But Nermin is 42 years old. He has no sparring partners in his weight division in South Australia, and often works night shifts at the Aboriginal Sobriety Group in the lead up to his fights.

Nermin's status as a celebrated hero within the Bosnian community is clearly a strong motivation for him. Yet Nermin is also an unsung hero within the Aboriginal community. Years of tirelessly working on the streets with Indigenous people has given Nermin understanding of the issues these people face, and has earned him respect amongst them. It is against this backdrop of his job and interaction with his clients that we see Nermin's soft and caring nature: a characteristic that is usually not associated with a boxer.

Nermin is the perennial underdog - highly driven yet very likeable. For me the film is not just a documentation of Nermin's boxing journey, but of a man struggling to reconcile his past

glory and present role as father, husband and Indigenous support worker. I hope the audience will be as inspired by Nermin's underlying passion and caring nature as I am.

BIOS - KEY CREATIVES

Write/Director/DOP: **Mark Andersson**



After stints as a breakfast cook in Sydney, taxi driver and landscape gardener in Adelaide, Mark graduated from film school in 2000 with over 15 short film credits to his name. Since then Mark has worked in community television, theatre production, and as a freelance director, camera operator and editor. He has self-funded a number of educational and short documentaries on various topics ranging from homelessness to UFO investigators, that have won awards and screened at festivals in Australia and overseas.

Mark wrote, directed, shot and edited the award winning *Stone Country* about an Aboriginal township in the Northern Territory, and in 2006 he formed the production company Budaya Productions with fellow filmmaker and partner Katrina Lucas. Together they have taught documentary production workshops in Indonesia, as well as filming a documentary and educational DVD on women performing artists in Bali.

Producer: **Tom Zubrycki**



Tom Zubrycki is an Australian writer, director and producer of documentaries, who over the last 25 years has evolved a substantial and critically acclaimed body of work. He usually works in an observational style and his films are narrative-based and strongly character-driven. They have won him many local and international awards, including two AFI awards.

His recent credits include *Temple of Dreams* (2007, director/producer), *Molly & Mobarak* (2003, director/producer) *The Diplomat* (2000, director); the 4-part series *Short Stories* (2003, executive producer); *Broken* (2003, producer); *Vietnam Symphony* (2003, director) and *Making Venus* (2002, producer).

In 2001 he was conferred an "ASDA" accreditation for "outstanding work and excellence in the art of screen direction" by the Australian Screen Directors Association. He is currently a board member of ASDA and represents the interests of Sydney-based doco-makers on the SPAA/ASDA Documentary Council.

Writer/Co-Producer: **Katrina Lucas**



Katrina worked as a research assistant, in refugee services and as an Indonesian dancer before trying her hand at filmmaking. She has collaborated with *A Fighting Chance* director Mark Andersson on a variety of educational and short documentaries in Australia and Indonesia, and is currently co-writing and directing a half hour documentary together with Mark for an SBS series on Generation Y.

Editor: **David Banbury**

Since graduating from the Flinders University Drama Centre in 1988, David has worked as an editor on a diverse range of documentaries, television series, short films and commercials during the past two decades. From children's series (*Pig's Breakfast*, *The Fairies*), to science (*Beyond 2000*, *Quantum*), natural history (*The Last Whale*, *Red Crabs/Crazy Ants*), episodes of *Boney* and *Neighbors*, feature documentaries (*Damn Right I'm a Cowboy*, *Sacred Journey*) and the television series *My Restaurant Rules*.

David recently edited the documentary *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men* for SBS Storyline Australia, and is currently working on a documentary with another emerging South Australian filmmaker about Vietnamese Hmong girls titled *Please Buy From Me*.

Music: **Unkle Ho**



Unkle Ho (Kaho Cheung) is a composer, producer, recorder and performer of music. He is a founding member of the record label Elephant Traks and is also a fulltime member of the hip-hop group The Herd. He has toured Australia countless times with festival shows at The Big Day Out and Splendor in the Grass.

In 2000 Unkle Ho lived in the Czech Republic where he got Gypsy fever and became determined to get Gypsy/Romania music the attention it deserves. He subsequently released two solo albums, *Roads to Roma* (2005) and *Circus Maximus* (2007), which incorporate Eastern European sounds. He is currently busy working on the next Herd album and doing the odd show around the traps (www.unkleho.com).

CREDITS

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Writer/Director/DOP | Mark Andersson |
| Writer/Co-Producer | Katrina Lucas |
| Producer | Tom Zubrycki |
| Editor | David Banbury |
| Music Composition | Unkle Ho |
| Additional Music | Jayme Capurso |
| Additional Camera | Katrina Lucas, Bentley Dean, Dimitrius Poliotis |
| Sound Edit/Mix | Russell Alexander |
| Sound Post Production | Rusty Prod Sound Works |
| Online Facility | The Cutting Room |
| Online Edit & Grade | David Banbury |
| Online Edit Assistant | Erfan Khadem |
| Interpreting/Translation | Sandra Dzafic |
| Legals | Frankel Lawyers |
| Stills Photographer | Sam Oster |
| Transcription | Hannah Tunstill, Justin Parker, Erfan Khadem |
| Narration | Michael Kumnick |
| Archive Sources | NBN Television, TVNS Bosnia |
| AFC Project Officer | Karin Altman |
| Subtitles produced by | SBS Television Australia |
| Music | 'Bar Chutzpah' by Unkle Ho From 'Circus Maximus' (Elefant Traks 2007) |
| | 'Spaghetti Eastern' by Unkle Ho From 'Circus Maximus' (Elefant Traks 2007) |
| | 'Prayer' by Unkle Ho From 'Roads to Roma' (Elefant Traks 2005) |
| | 'Thriller Run' by Unkle Ho From 'Roads to Roma' (Elefant Traks 2005) |



Commissioned by Jennifer Crone

Produced in association with



Related Links

For more information about the filmmakers and latest news on the documentary:

<http://www.budaya.com.au>

For information about Nermin's work in The Mobile Assistance Patrol:

<http://www.aboriginalsobrietygroup.org.au/content/6>

To see Nermin fight for the Australian Cruiserweight belt against James Ellis in 2006:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls8hViv-GBs>

To read an article about Nermin:

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/sport/reflections-of-a-ring-life/2005/11/05/1130823438185.html>

PRODUCTION STORIES



Nermin fighting Australian champion Daniel Ammann

Filming the Boxing Matches

Over the 12-month filming period, Director/DOP Mark Andersson was able to travel to all of Nermin's fights in Brisbane, Adelaide, Japan, Newcastle and Melbourne. Being part of Nermin's boxing entourage meant Mark was allowed free access to all the events backstage as well as in the ring in between rounds.

However, being the official 'camera man' also meant Mark found himself in the edit suite after every fight having to go through hours of footage to make masses of boxing DVDs for Nermin, his trainer Terry Fox, and all of Nermin's patriotic Bosnian friends. The DVDs would incorporate slow motion montages set to dramatic Bosnian folk music, and is one thing Nermin says he will really miss now that he is retired.



Nermin with a MAP client

Nermin's Work - The Mobile Assistance Patrol (MAP)

In between travelling to Nermin's boxing matches and family events, Director/DOP Mark Andersson would tag along with Nermin on his job as a Mobile Assistance Patrol Officer, transporting Indigenous people on the streets of Adelaide to their homes or places of care.

Mark spent earlier shifts making himself familiar to Nermin's clients before he actually started filming. That entailed countless hours, both day and night, sitting in the back of the

patrol van with clients at various stages of intoxication. After some months hanging around Mark became known as simply “Nermin’s camera guy”.



Nermin with wife Indira

Editing

70 hours worth of footage later, experienced South Australian editor David Banbury was called on to the job. The challenge lay in choosing the boxing matches that best illustrated Nermin’s journey, without it turning into a boxing film.

Finding a balance between the material of Nermin’s family, his work and the boxing was the most difficult part. While there was plenty of footage of Bosnian festivities and boxing events, there was not a lot of footage of Nermin together with his wife, Indira, who worked long hours in a laundering service while Nermin was either working night shifts or training.

CONTENT QUESTIONNAIRE w/ Director Mark Andersson

Q: What was the inspiration behind this documentary? And/or how did it come about?

I first met Nermin at the Aboriginal Sobriety Group in Adelaide where he works. I was actually there doing research for another documentary idea, but when I read an article in *The Age* newspaper about Nermin soon after meeting him, I knew this was the film I wanted to make.

The many diverse layers to Nermin’s story are what really drew me in. First there was the historical background of being a champion boxer in Bosnia, before fleeing the war and coming to Australia. Then there was the personal aspect of Nermin’s Rocky-style comeback in 2003 at age 40 against the wishes of his wife and daughters. But it was his work helping Indigenous people on the streets as part of the Mobile Assistance Patrol that really clinched it for me. Luckily for me, Nermin was very approachable and more than willing to participate in this film, as were his extended family and friends.

Q: What do you like/find challenging about making documentaries? Did you encounter any particular challenges in making this documentary and, if so, how did you overcome them? Any lucky breaks, and if so, how did they come about and how did you embrace them?

I am most interested in documentaries that are about real people and their lives. For me, observational documentary provides an opportunity to explore the layers of someone's story, and to journey with them in their life, if only for a brief time. People who are making waves and impacting on the world around them inspire me.

As a director/DOP, being allowed into the personal lives of others is fascinating but also challenging. One of the challenges was filming Nermin's family, particularly his wife Indira, who was very emotional about the situation of Nermin continuing to box. She was often too upset to talk about it, and combined with the language barrier it made for a difficult situation at times.

Filming the boxing matches was another challenge. Having never done so before I didn't know what to expect, or how much access I would be allowed at certain events. But the promoters were very accommodating and I was always given complete access, which made it very exciting for me to be able to shoot in the ring between rounds, as well as backstage before and after the events.

Q: How does the documentary relate to your past work, if at all? Was this film a natural next step or a radical departure from your previous work in film, TV etc?

I have made a number of documentaries before but this was my first commissioned film that will be seen by a much broader audience. I did feel the pressure but was determined to make the best film I could. Having constructive feedback from my producer, acclaimed filmmaker Tom Zubrycki, not to mention the other experienced people around me like AFC project officer Karin Altman, editor David Banbury and co-writer/producer Katrina Lucas, was invaluable.

Q: Any other production anecdotes/stories?

I remember at Nermin's fight in Tokyo I was unexpectedly not allowed inside the ring or in Nermin's corner. Although I had permission to film from the fight promoter, their security had other ideas, and when I tried to follow Nermin into the ring the Japanese security guard pulled me away. I suddenly had this awful feeling I would go back to Australia with absolutely no good fight footage to show. As the fight was starting I had no time to argue so I ignored the guard and pushed back up ringside to continue filming. They must have seen the despair/desperation on my face because I was thankfully left alone.

Q: *Apart from "it's a masterpiece" what would your ideal viewer response to the doco be!?*

I would love for people to be inspired and feel proud to have a man such as Nermin living in our community. As a new Australian assisting our own Indigenous people in such an open and caring way, as well as fighting for his own dreams against all the odds, Nermin is really a great role model for us all.

Q: *What is your next project or what are you working on now?*

I am currently co-writing and directing (with fellow filmmaker Katrina Lucas) another half hour documentary on a group of young ethnic comedians, as part of a series on Generation Y for SBS, SAFC and ScreenWest.

How to Purchase Program

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