

Radio Interview on Czech National Radio

13th September 2017



David Stahlavsky (DS): It doesn't happen very often, and it may not have happened to me yet, that I would find so little information about my guest on the internet. Now with me in studio, I have a producer, director and actor, and as it seems, he is self-taught. Information about him appears and disappears as well as his Facebook profile so I only know that he's trying to break the well-established practice in the film industry that a movie is a matter of sponsoring only; that he gives main or supporting roles to himself or non-actors; and that after 13 years when he made the movie *Blackout* the story of which he offered to Oliver Stone, his second film, *72 Hours in Bangkok* – or *96*, is coming to screens. I will be asking Lubomir Haltmar. Here is David Stahlavsky, and I am now inviting you to meet a bit of an undercover director with a mysterious movie title.

Lubomir Haltmar in the studio. Hello.

Lubomir Haltmar (LH): Hello.

DS: How is it with your movie? Is it called *72 Hours in Bangkok* or *96 hours*? As such information can be also found on the internet.

LH: The movie is called *72 Hours in Bangkok*.

DS: Was the title shortened?

LH: No, 2.5 years ago, when filming in Bangkok started, there was a vision that we'll try to make a version only with Nicolas, with a minimum number of actors, and minimise the number of shooting days. So, the version 96 hours in Bangkok was to be totally different from 72 hours in Bangkok...

DS: But that's a feature movie.

LH: Yes, sort of. 96 hours in Bangkok was actually an amateur film while 72 hours includes more filmed material, actors' engagement, music professionals who make film music e.g. Andrea Morricone. There was still an issue as the leading actor, Nicolas; he was not speaking too much, being only 2.5 years old during shooting, so there was a challenge of how to portray his emotions. We tried voice over, which did not work, and the music which was composed only covered some scenes but was not able to express feelings, emotions, moods, views of a child who got missing in Bangkok.

DS: The movie is actually not just about Nicolas but in general about children who get missing in Bangkok and many of them are not found. What are the numbers?

(radio timeline ca 3min)

LH: In Thailand there are generally no accurate statistics. That means that the number of missing children is hundreds of thousands per year. These are just the ones on record in Thailand. But it's hard to get statistics on how many are actually found as Thai authorities don't share or publicise this data.

DS: How did you come up with this topic?

LH: A few years ago I spoke with producers abroad about how many people get missing and nobody really cares. So we got the idea to make a film focusing only on missing children. Children should be the priority in legislation, i.e. their protection, rights, so more people should be interested in this issue. Also, we were trying to find out how this works, from the legislation point of view, in terms of cooperation between the police and NGOs, such as **Missing Children Europe**, the biggest NGO in Europe which joins up other organisations and is subsidised by the EU, but I don't think it works well in the area of helping find the children as when filming, we requested photographs that could appear in titles of the film but we got an answer that due to legislation it's impossible.

(radio timeline ca 4.40min)

DS: If I understand it correctly, you used Thailand to highlight a worldwide problem of missing children.

LH: Yes. The film titles include some numbers from around the world, from the Czech Republic and also European countries as well as worldwide ones.

DS: How many missing children are in the Czech Republic?

LH: In the Czech Republic there are 2 million children in total, out of them 5,000 are reported as missing annually, and on average 1,000 aren't found, which is quite high for the Czech Republic, I think. The question is why for example media are not involved.

DS: Media are involved, as you can see.

LH: Yes, radio may have got involved but radio unfortunately does not allow for visual broadcast, so if someone saw the child somewhere, they wouldn't know it's a missing child.

DS: When preparing the film, did you contact UNICEF?

LH: Yes, we did but they weren't able to provide any significant information.

DS: How was shooting in Thailand? Did you have some support of local authorities there?

LH: We got assistance from one of the producers in Thailand who made sure we could shoot in locations where we had to have a permit, such as state grounds. The shooting had a big support as people in Thailand love children and were more helpful than we had expected. There were no big problems there but we had issues to shoot at the airport in the Czech Republic.

DS: That is a different chapter...

LH: The only issue we had in Thailand was with a very different climate so because of Nicolas we had to limit the shooting either in the morning or afternoon when he was not sleeping as he was only 22 months old. But within full 6 weeks there we managed to get some amazing shots, so we amended the original script vision and let the camera roll permanently capturing his moods, emotions, which we would not have been able to achieve during a planned shooting.

DS: How many cameras did you use?

LH: Two cameras. A main one and an additional one, used less frequently.

DS: Have you got a personal relationship with Thailand?

LH: My first wife was from Thailand.

DS: As I mentioned at the start there's a lack of information about you on social media, by the way, why did you close down your Facebook account?

LH: I did not close it down. Yesterday the profile was showing that due to data protection I had to provide my photograph for the profile for some purpose which will be removed later. I emailed it and then the profile has deactivated itself. Why, we shall see in the following days I hope.

DS: I was looking for Nicolas on social media and Facebook as from the movie it was not apparent who he is. But we have Nicolas here with us. Hi, Nicolas.

Nicolas Haltmar (N): Hi

DS: How old are you?

N: This number.

LH: How old are you?

N: This number.

LH: How many is it?

DS: Three. So Nicolas does not have his Facebook profile.

LH: How old are you?

N: I will be five soon.

DS: Can we say that Nicolas is the main hero of the movie, Mr Haltmar?

LH: Yes, that's right.

DS: We've seen in the available trailer online that he gets missing in Bangkok and you, as the second main hero and his father, are looking for him. After a few mishaps, do you find Nicolas or shall we let viewers find out for themselves?

LH: Let's leave it open, I think at end of the movie viewers will make their own opinion, but as we want the movie to strongly support the topic of missing children, it is not a happy end.

DS: You said that your first wife was from Thailand, is Nicolas her son?

LH: No, he is a son of my second wife.

DS: But he is not a pure European.

LH: No, my wife is from the Dominican Republic.

DS: Did you want to emphasise an international character of the movie?

LH: Well, the idea was to have a small child and the choice of Nicolas was spontaneous. It was very close to home. I was looking around me, in my environment.

DS: You do have another son, a younger one.

LH: Yes, I have another son, Alex; he is younger, 3.5 years old.

DS: So the third movie will be with Alexander.

LH: Possibly. The next possible sequel of 72 Hours in Bangkok could be with Alex as both look a bit similar and people often mix one with the other.

DS: You don't use actors on purpose. Is this the only approach you take or do you sometimes use some actors?

LH: Some of the people in Thailand who took part in shooting had some acting experience.

DS: But they aren't known in the Czech Republic.

LH: Although they aren't known in Czech Republic, their performance was very good, which is not only said by me but also by postproduction in Italy where they have experience of over 40 years.

DS: The movie has an international flavour. You've mentioned the author of music, **Andrea Morricone**, the son of the famous **Ennio Morricone**. And also **Peter Hollywood**.

LH: Yes, he provided consultancy during editing. He got awarded for editing **The Adventures of Baron Munchausen**; he is English and liked the movie as it also shows the perspective of a child's world.

DS: It's a nice coincidence that he is called Hollywood. Does it help?

LH: I don't know.

DS: Is the movie in distribution?

LH: Distribution is managed by Italian postproduction and Andrea Morricone, so the movie will most probably go into distribution from Italy. Negotiations with distributors are taking place now. Who will distribute the movie we shall see in the next few weeks.

DS: The first version you planned 96 hours in Bangkok was supposed to be silent, so a silent documentary, but in the 72 version that 's not the case. What's the language in the movie? Czech?

LH: English and Thai.

DS: No Czech then.

LH: There is only one short dialogue is in Czech.

DS: Is this another step to an international success?

LH: Yes, more or less.

DS: Are you an actor as well?

LH: Let's leave it at the director and producer only. I think I got engaged in the acting world only to get the shots we wanted because as his father I am close to Nicolas. But I don't want to have a career of an actor.

DS: Are you a producer and director by occupation or are you self-taught?

LH: I am self-taught but I attended a course at the VH-Schule in Vienna – focused on making and directing movies. 20 years ago.

DS: And 13 years ago, around this time, you made Blackout which was your debut.

LH: It was and was not. It was made but then there was an issue with the co-producer and the movie never went into distribution, so in fact my debut is 72 Hours in Bangkok.

DS: You see? There is not much information about you on social media and on the internet. You offered your script to a range of international producers. And based on the information published in the paper on 21 October 2004, **Oliver Stone** was also partially interested.

(radio timeline ca 15min)

LH: That is true. I communicated with Oliver Stone personally. He liked the idea but due to his busy schedule and small team he did not have time for it. So it's true.

DS: At that time when you believed the movie would be distributed you said: We will prove that in the Czech Republic just like in the US a movie must be an investment not sponsoring. Will 72 Hours in Bangkok achieve that?

LH: I hope so. The movie is funded privately so there are no companies involved.

DS: Is it important that there are no companies involved?

LH: I think so. If companies are involved, they want to be visible, they want to change the script based on what they want, so they interfere, and they demand it as they fund the project.

DS: Isn't it that the companies know what the viewer wants and how they wish to position the movie so that it becomes successful?

LH: No. Companies have marketing specialists and they want the movie to correspond to their marketing strategy.

DS: That's what I am talking about.

LH: But they disrupt freedom of the director, scrip writers and others in the artistic world.

DS: And do you think that a movie, in this way artistically pure with regards to the director's and script writer's intention, has the potential to be commercially successful?

LH: Definitely.

DS: Can you name some examples?

LH: In this country, for example some of the old Forman movies.

DS: Which ones do you mean? During the Czechoslovak period?

LH: Yes, during that time.

DS: But these were different circumstances – social, material, financial, etc.

LH: Yes. In the current Czech Republic I don't know of any.

DS: And abroad?

LH: It works in Italy, a movie can be an investment, so they get about 80% ROI.

DS: These are movie within the Italian market.

LH: Yes, but also those that represent Italy abroad and are distributed abroad.

DS: Are they successful?

LH: It depends on a country but they are successful. I can say that there is a different relationship to art – it's not just a monetary one. That is also demonstrated by the music composed by Morricone junior for this movie but we also communicated with Ennio Morricone as we had a big issue with one part of the movie: the child gets missing at the airport, and things are happening in parallel. The father is looking for the child and the child is looking for his father, so the music needed to address the feelings and opposite directions, something similar that Ennio Morricone did in old movies, such as Once upon a Time in the West and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly where he was telling the story through music most of the time. About 90% of the music in our movie tells the story. It took half a year to compose the music and it was very difficult to keep the pace from the start to the end so we had to make some changes. Andrea was not sure about one part so his father helped, either by consultation or otherwise to ensure that the theme was represented successfully.

DS: What does success of a movie look like to you? Is it an Oscar?

LH: No, it is not an Oscar, success is when people like it...

(radio timeline ca 19:03min)

DS: Is it Cannes?

LH: No, no awards. The movie needs to capture people's attention. It's not even a full cinema auditorium. People just have to like it.

DS: But such movie cannot be shown in multiscreen cinemas...

LH: It depends on the distributor but that can be achieved. Right now we are negotiating with a distributor in Italy that distributes to cinemas and TV stations as well as on DVDs. This is a vision of the producer of **Seagullpost** studio, **Massimo Quaglia**, the editor of the movie who got many awards, a close friend of the Morricone family. He liked the movie, he extended it from 71 to 84 minutes and he wants the film to be introduced into cinema networks, and subsequently into TVs, and elsewhere.

DS: A documentary seems to be quite popular these days. Do you think that a pure documentary rather than a feature movie would be more impactful regarding the fact that a lot of children go missing?

LH: We can make such documentary as well. We have the camera shots, data, information, so we would need to edit all that further only but we have everything we need to create a documentary. We have some stunning shots and the end of the movie is very emotional from the visual and musical point of view, so I think that it would be interesting to produce either a short or longer documentary. The fact that now we have a feature film of 84 minutes does not limit us to make a short documentary or a short movie – all that can be arranged after an agreement with interested parties. If one of the TV stations that will we approach wishes to have a shorter movie, we can do that in the studio. And a documentary would require minimum interference as we already had this vision.

DS: You said that except for one scene, there is no Czech language in the movie, only English and Thai. Your son also has Dominican roots so there is this international scope about it including postproduction in Italy. Does it mean you've resigned to create a solely Czech movie?

LH: No, I haven't, but when I spoke about it with people in the Czech Republic, the visions about the movie and how to depict the theme were different from mine. And also, the complete postproduction went to Italy, as Andrea Morricone was seriously interested, so I spent a week with him and his close family friends in Italy, and then it became a totally different ballgame and other things started happening – dubbing, additional sound was recorded as well as other effects that had not been made; the work lasted about half a year. So the music was composed within half a year and then half a year was spent on postproduction. I was travelling between the Czech Republic and Italy either on my own or with Nicolas.

DS: I did not see the movie unfortunately, however, based on trailers I saw Nicolas' acting was very spontaneous as you said being **22 months old**.

LH: A child doesn't act.

DS: Yes. But some director's guidance was there.

LH: Yes, navigation as the script was...

DS: For example, the phone receiver he picked up in the phone booth – was it spontaneous?

LH: Yes, that was spontaneous.

DS: And because Nicolas was spontaneous, I was captivated by the camera. Who was behind the camera?

LH: 95% of the time it was me, so I had Nicolas in front of me all the time.

DS: Are you also a cameraman? You didn't share that!

LH: Yes. If I couldn't be behind the camera, then my assistant stepped in or the camera was set up at a certain angle and someone else who could was filming when I was in the shot. Or one of the assistants was trying to move with the camera as I had instructed them – sometimes it worked well, sometimes not so much but we did not have any other shots.

DS: So, the movie 72 hours in Bangkok is ready and you've revealed there might be a third movie in which we could see your second son. Let's wish this movie will get wherever you want it to get through Italian distribution as the movie is powerful and has an impactful story to tell. Thank you for coming here.

LH: Thank you very much.

DS: This was producer, director and as he confessed in the last moment, cameraman **Lubomir Haltmar** as a guest of the today's Conversations with **David Stahlavsky**. And I must not forget **Nicolas**, thank you, Nicolas, for being here with us and for behaving so well throughout the show.

N: Bye.



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