



# acts of imagination

## Stephanie Hayes

### **We asked Stephanie Hayes, who plays 'KATYA', what the film is about:**

I have given many versions as to what this film is about. I've said it's a story about immigration, or about alienation. I've said it's about daring to ask questions that don't have answers. Or: it's a story about two lovers who can't be lovers, who can't even be brother and sister. Or: A story about forgetting. Or: remembering. In either case, feeling your past falling into small fragments that can't hold you together. But most importantly, I think this story is about a journey towards empathy. It's an inevitable but reluctant journey, a sacrificial and heroic journey... Katya becomes a woman who can see her own suffering in other people, which she couldn't do at the beginning of the film. It's a big discovery, and it saves her life.

### **We asked her how she approached her preparation for the film:**

This is my first feature film. I was fortunate to work with people that I have known for several years, people who have witnessed my journey and my work. It is priceless to feel safe in a working situation because you dare to take risks, you dare to challenge and provoke. There was always an on-going discussion between the director, the actors and the writer. We changed the script all the time. Some things are impossible to know until you try them. ... From the beginning, while preparing in Sweden (that's where I am from by the way), I developed an interest in Katya's creation of rituals: small, reoccurring moments that held her life together, that gave her some sense of being. Every morning – coffee on the side of her brother's bed, her conversations with Petrov, her imitations of a mother, her journeys to the river and her preparation of food. I started there. I read the script every day and imagined other things that she would do in the same way... These small moments of infinity were important to me in entering Katya's world. It dictated the way that she moved, walked and held herself. Each movement became its own ritual.

### **We asked her, too, how she managed to achieve such a convincing relationship on screen with her co-lead Billy Marchenski:**

Billy Marchenski and I met at Simon Fraser University. We are very close friends and I love working with him. We previously worked together on one of Michael Springate's plays with Sodium Glow Theatre Company. He is a beautiful, hard-working and generous actor. He constantly opened up space for me to try new angles and approaches. Katya's relationship with her brother is loaded. They both have big journeys in this film. Different, but big. Slavko tries to forget, while Katya can't. But he knows she isn't crazy, he is familiar with her burden.

### **We asked her, too, what it was like during the time of the actual production of the film?**

Because I had already moved back to Sweden when the filming began, I had nowhere to stay in Vancouver except on set. For better or worse, I slept in Katya's bedroom. I woke up in her sheets every morning. Many of us were in a sense homeless. Volodya and Natasha (Petrov and the mother), slept in the room next door. They had flown in from Ukraine.. Julian Samuels, who plays Aashir, had flown in from Montreal. Steven Denault's (the DOP) house had recently burnt down. So we all camped together in Katya and Jaroslaw's apartment. I remember being woken up by the make-up artist and stepping right into a kitchen full of hungry crewmembers eating breakfast. It was like camp, but with camera equipment everywhere.

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Stephanie, a native of Sweden, studied theatre at Atlantic College in Wales before coming to Canada to continue her studies at the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University. Following her graduation in 2004, she immediately won public recognition for her portrayal of Holly in the premiere production of Michael Springate's Freeport, Texas directed by Olivia Delachanal. During late summer and early autumn of 2005 she returned to Vancouver from Sweden to play the central role of Katya in Acts of Imagination, her first major film role.

This summer she spent a month with her father traveling along the Trans-Siberian railway, going as far as Ulan Bator in Mongolia. She hopes to soon return to Vancouver, her adopted home, to be a member of a new performance collective, Tigermilk.