

Scanorama

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Tribunal

Swedish lawyer Marie Tuma brings war criminals to court in The Hague

Devil in disguise

TOUGH ENOUGH Norwegian/Swedish actress Maria Bonnevie dyed her hair black and pumped iron to get in shape for the title role of *I Am Dina*, the most expensive Scandinavian film ever made. After portraying a woman with a serious grudge, Bonnevie is now back to her more fragile self



A black and white portrait of actress Maria Bonnevie. She has long, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the left of the camera. She is wearing a thick, textured knit sweater. Her hands are raised to her face, with her fingers tucked near her mouth, partially obscuring it. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting, possibly a beach or a coastal area.

Maria gets tough

IN A BRAVE career move she has transformed herself from fragile fairy to hell-raising man-eater. And back. Walter Gibbs meets **Maria Bonnevie**, the Norwegian/Swedish star of *I am Dina*, the most expensive Scandinavian film in history. Pictures by Micke Lundström

She had trouble finding herself in all her clothing. Finally, she took his knife from its sheath and slashed her clothes. The flashing blade gave Thomas a sudden start. But she just sat on him heavily and opened herself for him. Then she rode him. Wildly.

Meet Dina – ravisher and destroyer of men, vessel of myth and one of the most vivid characters in Scandinavian literature.

Fans of Herbjørg Wassmo's 1989 bestseller *Dina's Book*, which was published in 20 languages, remember Dina as a near-giantess of the Norwegian Arctic who both protects and devours those around her. But with the movie *I Am Dina* opening this month – the most expensive Scandinavian film in history – all previous visions of the 19th-century dominatrix will dissolve into the small but luminous body of actress Maria Bonnevie.

"In Norway," says Bonnevie, "people have fixed ideas about what Dina looks like and how she acts. It's a big responsibility

"She's gorgeous, erotic, scary, intelligent and all of the other things that Dina is," Ole Bornedal, the film's Danish director, tells me beside the whirling tides of Nevels Fjord. "It's now Day 57 of shooting, and she brings something new to the part every day."

Today's scene is of Dina – having just head-butted her father into a glass bookcase – hurling furniture out the third-floor window of their gothic-style home.

"The danger," Bornedal says, "is that she could steal every scene."

That would be grand theft indeed. With a budget of \$15m assembled from Scandinavian state film funds and investors throughout northern Europe, *I Am Dina* was designed to smash conceptual and marketing barriers. It's a period costume drama but also a psycho-thriller, a ghost story and a sex romp, all performed in English for maximum box-office reach. The Norwegian producers wanted to prove that a movie set in Norway could have international commercial flair. Historically

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to play her. But I have a little bit of Dina in me, too. I think every woman does."

We're north of the Arctic Circle on a rugged Norwegian peninsula called Kjerringøy, where rain and fog have bollixed the shooting schedule. Gérard Depardieu, the aging French heartthrob who plays Dina's doomed husband, has brought 500 bottles of wine from his own vineyard to boost spirits. But *I Am Dina* is Bonnevie's movie. Radiant and seemingly mud-repellent, it is she who evaporates the gloom, chatting playfully with cast and crew.

"There are many men in this production, so I'm having a very nice time," says Bonnevie, who is half Norwegian and half Swedish. "I am lucky to be surrounded by men and mountains."

Her biggest previous film role was that of a Swedish waif searching for Jesus in Bille August's 1996 historical epic *Jerusalem*. Last year she remained a tender and diminutive ingénue with oceanic blue eyes who blushed when she least wanted to. Loyalists of *Dina's Book* protested that she was too fragile to play their heroine. But she pumped iron and guzzled protein shakes. She dyed her hair black. And now at Kjerringøy something diabolical seems to flare in the blood of the 28-year-old actress whenever the camera rolls. *I Am Dina* insiders insist that Bonnevie's supercharged performance could catapult her to stardom.



Gérard Depardieu getting intimate with Maria Bonnevie in a scene from *I Am Dina*. This is before she catches him cheating and hurls him off a cliff.



there is little to back up their claim. But they do have Bonnevie, whom the director calls “the most beautiful woman in Scandinavia.”

The story opens with Dina, aged 6, accidentally scalding her mother to death – an event so traumatizing that it reverberates throughout the two-hour film. Dina grows up wild and neglected, is married at 16 against her will, witnesses a hanging (one of the largest crowd scenes ever filmed in Scandinavia), and becomes a steely, cigar-smoking businesswoman. She also channels through her loins the “rutting instinct” of all of nature and commits a series of capital crimes so integral to her character that they seem more like natural disasters than punishable acts.

Having seen only an extended trailer and raw footage, I can't review the whole movie. But I can report that Børnedal's storytelling zeal flies in the face of the introverted filmmaking style that has freighted Scandinavian cinema. And Bonnevie dominates almost every frame. “She has created her own Dina gestalt, with great authority, pain and sensitivity,” says Wassmo, the book author. “May she be well rewarded!”

THREE MONTHS AFTER VISITING THE BUSY KJERRINGØY SET, I meet Bonnevie for white wine at the Grand Hotel bar in Stockholm. Her year as Dina almost over, she is playing Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Royal Dramatic Theater. I want to know all about her, so she tells me she is the daughter of Norwegian actress Jannik Bonnevie and Swedish actor Per Waldvik. They divorced when she was 3. Cherished by both parents, little Maria commuted by air between Oslo and Stockholm. Alone.

“It's why I still don't like good-byes,” she says, recalling the ID card pinned to her chest by airline personnel. “I always sat in front of the plane, where the mothers held their babies, and I would say to myself, ‘Oh, how I wish I was that little baby over there.’”

At the age of eight her dramatic skills came into flower, as she found out through such performances as smearing a playmate with ketchup and screaming to the nanny for help. But she was shy at school. “I was never one of the cool ones,” she says. “I had glasses, I had braces, and I got these little ‘tomatoes’ on my face all the time.”

She was also math-a-phobic. So when an Icelandic film director came to Oslo casting for *The White Viking*, Bonnevie auditioned in hopes of being excused from school. She became the Viking princess Embla, a role that led directly to the children's film *The Polar Bear King*, an instant classic in Norway that gave its 16-year-old starlet the confidence to drop out of school. She found it electrifying to control her own des-

tiny and took up dramatic studies. She even wrote to director Bille August to ask if he was planning a sequel to *Pelle the Conqueror*. He wasn't. But she was invited to try out for the role of Gertrud in *Jerusalem*.

Critics and moviegoers so loved *Jerusalem*, with its majestic sweep, that Bonnevie's aura quickly reached Hollywood. She was “the new Liv Ullmann,” a young actress whose translucent beauty seemed to rise out of a deep Nordic reser- >>

Facts on *I Am Dina*

- DIRECTOR** | Ole Børnedal (*Nightwatch*)
- STARRING** | Maria Bonnevie, Gérard Depardieu (*Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Jean de Florette*, 1900, 102 *Dalmations*), Pernilla August (*Fanny and Alexander*, *Private Conversations*, *Jerusalem*), Christopher Eccleston (*Elizabeth*, *Gone in 60 Seconds*), Bjørn Floberg (*The Telegraphist*, *Misery Harbour*)
- PRODUCERS** | Per Holst and Axel Helgeland
- BUDGET** | \$15m
- LENGTH** | 2 hours
- SUBJECT** | Traumatized girl becomes fatally attractive woman
- MUSIC** | Cologne Philharmonic Orchestra
- RELEASE** | March 2002 in Scandinavia, later in rest of Europe and North America
- CONTROVERSY I** | Uf-Norwegian story filmed in English
- CONTROVERSY II** | Gérard Depardieu's French accent
- CONTROVERSY III** | Maria Bonnevie “too beautiful”
- EXPLANATION** | *I Am Dina* is Scandinavia's contribution to film globalization
- DIRECTOR ON HIS FILM** | “This will be a cross between *Gone with the Wind* and *Pulp Fiction*”
- DIRECTOR ON BONNEVIE** | “She's the woman that you want and the woman that you fear. This will be a major international breakthrough for Maria. She has a star quality which is very, very rare”

» voir. Bonnevie dismisses such talk as stupid – “They’re always looking for a new Liv Ullmann,” she laughs – but admits she was enraptured when whisked away to America to play opposite the hunky Antonio Banderas in *The 13th Warrior*.

Again she was to play a Viking princess, but this time under the direction of John McTiernan (*Die Hard*, *The Hunt for Red October*) in a \$100m production. It’s hardly Bonnevie’s fault that *The 13th Warrior* was a fiasco. Her part was reduced to rubbing an ointment of cow urine onto the star’s battle wounds and cooing, “Tomorrow the pus will run and you will have a fever!”

Allotted three hotel rooms to entertain guests from Norway, she spent a month partying on the producers’ tab and only two or three days acting. “It was like a crazy summer camp,” she recalls. “The producers were going around with cowboy hats and cigars, and John McTiernan was riding this big motorcycle.”

We talk for a while about fame and riches, neither of which she seeks. But I, for one, am disappointed that no one at the Grand Hotel seems to notice I’m deep in conversation with a budding diva. I ask if she and her boyfriend – the Swedish actor Mikael Persbrandt – are bothered by autograph seekers or paparazzi.

“Ha, ha, ha, ha! You are still living in America!” she blurts out. “No, no, no, absolutely not. We don’t have that star thing here. Maybe in Norway, when there is a premiere, some people know it’s me coming. But in Sweden there is nothing. Ha, ha, ha!”

BETWEEN FILMS SHE HONES HER ACTING SKILLS ON CHEKHOV, Strindberg and Shakespeare. In 1999 the legendary Ingmar Bergman, a fixture at the Royal Dramatic Theater, said, “We expect a lot out of Maria.” And he got it. To the glee of tabloid editors across Scandinavia, her 80-minute solo performance of Arthur Schnitzler’s *Miss Else* culminated with her stripping naked and springing around the footlights.

“No more virgin image for Maria Bonnevie,” trumpeted the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang*.

Since then she has appeared in flagrante in a couple of small films, but nothing to compare with the role of Dina – a woman of supernatural sexual appetite who is described in *Dina’s Book* as receiving her lovers like a mare in heat. Bonnevie says performing nude “costs something” personally but is worth it if it adds dimension to her character, as in the case of Dina, whose wardrobe of 25 costumes doesn’t quite cover the necessary range of expression.

The real challenge in portraying Dina must be internal: to merge hurt child with fertility goddess and Valkyrie. Yet Bonnevie says there is nothing too mysterious about it. She even insists that launching a certain 53-year-old French adulterer over an icy cliff – as Dina does – is something an ordinary woman could do. Bonnevie herself, for example.

“I think if I had been really hurt in my life, and followed my feelings, then I could be so angry that I could push a man over like that, yes,” she says.

And on that note Maria Bonnevie bounds, light as a feath-



NAME | Maria Bonnevie

BORN | 1973 in Västerås, Sweden. Grew up in Oslo and Stockholm

PARENTS | Norwegian actress Jannik Bonnevie and Swedish actor Per Waldvik

HOME | Stockholm

RELATIONSHIP | Lives with Swedish actor Mikael Persbrandt, best known from the Beck series of detective movies

FILM CAREER | *The White Viking*, *The Polar Bear King*, *Jerusalem*, *Insomnia*, *13th Warrior*, *Øyeblikket*, *Syndere i Sommersolen*, *I Am Dina*

STAGE CAREER | *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Wild Duck*, *Miss Else*, *The Cherry Orchard*

MOST REWARDING PERFORMANCE | Astrid Lindgren’s *Alba Käraste Syster*, performed in Russian at a St. Petersburg orphanage

FAVORITE MOVIES | *The Bridges of Madison County* (USA), *Chaos* (Italy), *The Tin Drum* (Germany)

MASTERED FOR DINA ROLE | Cello, rifle, whip, horse

ON BECOMING A STAR | “It makes me a little scared”

ON DINA | “Others can say she is diabolical, but I am playing her and I have to love her”

ON WOMEN | “I really love women, and if I was a man, I would be really happy because I see beautiful women all the time”

ON MEN | “Men are more concrete”

er, out of the Grand Hotel bar, wishing me a cheerful good luck. She’s off to play with fairies and elves in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with that diabolical something from Kjerringøy still in her blood. ●

WALTER GIBBS

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