

**Before the Rain**  
by Brian Tallerico

**STUDIO:** Criterion

**RELEASE DATE:** June 24, 2008

**STARRING:** Rade Serbedzija, Katrin Cartlidge, and Gregoire Colin

**WRITTEN BY:** Milcho Machevski

**DIRECTED BY:** Milcho Machevski

**FEATURES:** New, restored high-definition digital transfer, supervised and approved by director Milcho Machevski

Audio commentary featuring film scholar Annette Insdorf and Machevski

New video interview with actor Rade Serbedzija

Behind The Scenes In Macedonia, a short 1993 documentary about the making of Before The Rain

Soundtrack selections, featuring the music of Macedonian band Anastasia

On-set footage, theatrical trailers, and stills galleries of production photos, storyboards, and letters

A selection from Machevski's photography collection Street

Machevski's award-winning "Tennessee" music video

New and improved English subtitle translation

PLUS: A new essay by film scholar Ian Christie

Movies like **Before the Rain** are why I do what I do. It's a masterpiece that has the rare power to provoke completely disparate feelings in my heart at the same time. At once, I'm so thrilled with the caliber of the filmmaking that just the screenwriting, acting, direction, etc. inspires a feeling akin to joy. But what the filmmaking accomplishes, the themes of the film, are so depressing that they can feel like a punch in the stomach. Writer/director Milcho Machevski uses beautiful imagery to tell a shockingly brutal story of the cyclical and unavoidable nature of war. That's the incredible power of art - the ability to create more than one emotion simultaneously and bring a viewer down with its themes while it lifts the same viewer up with its beauty. The emotions are raw. The nerves are exposed. Children, animals, innocent, guilty - we will all be drenched in the downpour.

**Before the Rain** is about the moments before the "big event". You know how you can smell it in the air when a storm is coming? It's not just weather. War, divorce, pregnancy, violence - most of the major events in the world have a foreshadowing, an energy that changes the air into one that feels like something big is imminent. How do you live in a world where you KNOW that violence is just around the corner, like a coming storm? Machevski divides his film into three parts - "Words", "Faces", and "Pictures". The first tells the story of an Albanian Muslim girl finding asylum in a Christian monastery with a silent monk (Gregoire Colin). The second takes the action to London, where we meet a photographer named Alexander (Rade Serbedzija) and his girlfriend (Katrin Cartlidge), just as she's about to tell her husband she wants a divorce. Finally, the same photographer goes back to his childhood home in Macedonia, only to find it besieged by violence and tragedy. The three stories are related, but not in the way you'd expect. In fact, on a continuity level, they barely fit together at all. Characters who are dead in the second act aren't in the third. At one point Alexander sees graffiti that says "*The circle is not round.*" Machevski is playing with audience expectations and traditional plot to tell a story where the themes are more important than getting smoothly from point A to point B. In war, there is no point B.

When **Before the Rain** came out in 1994 it was heralded as an incredibly urgent and timely film. It was the first shot in the newly independent Republic of Macedonia and it was made during the strife of the war-torn Balkans in the nineties. But it's possible that the 'timeliness' of **Before the Rain** actually led to the film being underrated. Of course, I'm fifteen years older than when I first saw it, which makes a huge difference with a film like this one, and the world has changed significantly, but **Before the Rain** feels much more timeless now. Maybe it always was. As Alexander says on his return home, "*This place is the same as before, but my eyes have changed.*"

Maybe we felt safer in 1994. What was happening in the Balkans was something that happened on TV or, as Machevski uses in his film, through a camera lens. Watching **Before the Rain** in today's political climate gives it a different urgency. For the people that haven't seen the movie, I wouldn't give anything away, but there's a shocking act of violence in the film in a quiet, celebratory place. Machevski is clearly saying that even if we ignore the violence overseas, it can still find us. That theme couldn't be more effective than it is in today's atmosphere of terror alerts and bombings. **Before the Rain** was nominated for an Oscar when it came out and was justly acclaimed, but it has doubled in power in the years since its release and gone from a timely drama to a classic.

Of course, classics thrive at Criterion. **Before the Rain** was masterfully restored by Machevski himself who cleaned up "*thousands of instances of dirt, debris, and scratches.*" It's a gorgeous transfer. The collection of special features is even more remarkable. The liner notes features a brilliant essay by historian Ian Christie about the film. As for the disc itself, a lot of Criterion releases come up a little lacking in the special features department, merely because they're often films that are so old that the major players are deceased. Except for the tragic and far too young death of actress Katrin Cartlidge in 2002, most of the people who made **Before the Rain** are still around to comment on the movie. That means that Machevski could come in for a commentary track (on which he's joined by film scholar Annette Insdorf) and Serbedzija could sit down for a new interview. That material is joined by a short 1993 documentary, soundtrack selections, on-set footage, trailers, still galleries, a selection from Machevski's photography collection, and even a music video for the great "Tennessee" by Arrested Development, which Machevski directed. That last one has to be the most out-of-left-field special feature I've seen so far this year. It's an unexpected extra, which seems appropriate for a film that continues to provide unexpected raw emotions and now looks like it will for decades to come.

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