

# Singing the bones

Ishbel Kargar interviews Caitlin Hicks about her new film

**Caitlin Hicks, playwright and actor, has toured internationally with her play 'Singing the Bones', which she and her husband have successfully transferred to the cinema screen**

*Caitlin, I'd like to congratulate you and Gordon on the success of the film. What are your plans for showing it internationally?*

Thank you, Ishbel. It's great to share with you, as you have been a very supportive force for our work in the UK! We are distributing it theatrically through Fat Salmon Cinema Inc and we're using a model for presentation which concentrates on getting the word out to a more general audience - starting with the birthing community and expanding awareness of birth issues into the general public. For small groups, we have a special rate for private screenings. A VHS video can be hired for \$500 US to be returned to us after the screening. For the larger screenings, we send a specially mastered DVD. We did this because we know that not everyone has the resources to present a five day screening of our motion picture.

*I was moved to tears when I first saw your play. Does such a powerful portrayal indicate personal experience?*

The stories are not my personal experience, but they are inspired by the personal experience of three women with whom I worked - one is Wendy Clemens, a powerful and charismatic midwife whose language of midwifery is heard throughout the play; another is a woman here in my town, who shared her traumatic birth experiences with me. The story of Dr Sara was also inspired by a woman I met who was an adolescent at the time she lived in the Lodz Ghetto in Poland, and who went with her mother and sister on the last train out of the ghetto to Auschwitz. The details of Dr Sara's story are true, although not all of them happened to her personally; I did a great deal of research on that story to make it authentic. I pay homage to Bronia Sonnenschein, my inspiration, whenever I tell that story, but it is the story of many who died, and who lost loved ones.

*How did your interest in childbirth start?*

The birth of my own son, which took place in hospital and was absolutely magnificent, was one of the most profound experiences of my life. My mother gave birth to fourteen children, and I have always been fascinated with birth. At the time, I was writing a play which I was 'stuck' on and my husband suggested I speak to a midwife and just write some birth stories, because he felt that I had an affinity for the topic.

*Where does the title come from?*

There is a story in Clarissa Pinkola Estes' book 'Women Who Run With the Wolves', about La Loba, the woman in the desert who sings over the bones of wolves until a complete skeleton is formed, and then the wolf springs back to life and runs off, laughing. After I wrote the play, I came across this story and felt that Meg, the midwife, was La Loba, because she helped the women to face their skeletons, their past traumas, before the healing work of birth could begin.

*How did you research the work of the midwife?*

By long conversations with Wendy Clemens, who also gave me many books to read. Also talking with women about their experiences.

*What about the work of the obstetrician?*

First by reading. Initially I wrote sketches of the story, which were further developed through daily performing and re-writing; at some point it became clear that we needed to introduce the doctor's concerns and words. Wendy helped me initially, and when I had what I thought was an accurate stab at it, took the entire play to several medical doctors and asked for discussion, verification. At this point I understood a lot of what I was talking about - and I kept on asking questions until it seemed pretty accurate.

*Your many international tours took you away from home. How did your family cope with the separations?*

Gord has been my director and creative partner in this process. He helped initially with dramaturgy and has been with me through every production of the stage play. Jaz also came with us on most international trips. We made it a family thing. It's been very, very rich on so many levels!

*What prompted you to make the film?*

We both felt that the story had a long, long life and that it is an important story. The

heartfelt responses we've experienced every time we performed the play were tremendously spiritual and moving, and we really felt we'd sort of stumbled into this universal story with so much resonance for so many people... yet realistically, we understood that only the live audiences we'd met would be able to experience this story. We wanted it to live on... and I was getting to the end of my rope as a performer - you can only make it rich and fresh so many times. I was ready to move on as a writer - I finally had to push the baby out of the nest.

*As the play was already complete in itself, how did you adapt it for the screen?*

Actually, there is less 'written' in the film than in the play. We had to cut, cut, cut a lot of the spoken language of the play - to make it work visually and as a film. But there is much more of a visual and auditory experience in the motion picture. It's a very emotional film. The music is fantastic, absolutely wonderful. That being said, we made a conscious effort to preserve the language of the play, because we felt the language was part of its power.

*Tell me about the Gala Premiere.*

It was excruciating and fabulous at the same time. I wasn't sure what would happen. They cheered, whistled, applauded. They must have told their friends - the next night it was sold out.

*Will the film be shown in the UK?*

We've had enquiries from Manchester, Leicester, Bournemouth and Edinburgh - so we'll see. One woman who saw the film and who is herself a film producer said 'Singing the Bones' has 'long legs' - this is just the beginning. If anyone wants to get more information about how to host a showing, they can call me at (604) 886-3634 or email me at [cailinhicks@sunshine.net](mailto:cailinhicks@sunshine.net), also visit our web page: [www.fatsalmoncinema.com](http://www.fatsalmoncinema.com) Now that the film is released, when will it be available on video?

It's hard to say at this point; we have agreements with our investors where we have to make back some of the film's expenses before we can spend any more production money. By the way, I love the picture you've used to illustrate the film - do I detect one of our wooden Pinards in the midwife's hands? Yes, of course!