

Beauty QUEEN

Stephanie Sigman: From Runway to Red Carpet

WORDS BY RACHAEL SCOTT



Stephanie Sigman is used to the glare of the camera, but the former model turned actress never dreamt her first acting role, in Gerardo Naranjo's *Miss Bala*, would achieve such critical acclaim. Sigman plays Laura, an aspiring beauty queen, who on the eve of a contest is caught in the middle of a war between corrupt police and a violent drugs gang. *Miss Bala* — or *Miss Bullet*, as it translates from Spanish — is a frenetically paced firecracker of a film, and Sigman gives a virtuoso fearless performance.

How did you make the transition from modeling to the lead role in *Miss Bala*?

I think I'm still making the transition, because it's really hard for people to see you in another kind of work when you're a model. They judge. A lot of people didn't know that I studied acting, so it was good because it was a surprise. It's really fun to be a model, I couldn't say anything bad about it, but I was never passionate about it. When they asked me to lose weight, I'd say no. I'm doing what I like. If I can, I will act all my life.

It must have been a very emotionally demanding role.

It was, as well as physically. When the two combine, you're

just so tired. But it wasn't just about me; it was the whole crew, the support of the people that you're working with. Gerardo and I did this together and I trusted him right from the beginning. If you don't trust, you can't go deep into the dark place that we went to.

How did you get into the mindset of being constantly terrified?

Gerardo told me in the beginning that he didn't want melodramatic acting; he just wanted everything contained. I did a lot of research and, unfortunately, it's very easy to do research in Mexico.

I asked myself what I would do in that situation, and came to the conclusion that I simply didn't know...

I think when you're in shock, you don't know how you'll react. You can say, "I would grab the gun and shoot everyone," but you don't know. I had a personal experience a couple of months ago — somebody robbed me with a gun, and he put it in my stomach and I thought I was going to react differently, but I said, "Oh, are you kidding me?" After he went away, I realized what was happening and that was not a good reaction. But you don't know how you're going to react.

Gerardo gets a strong message across, without being openly political. What do you think he hopes to achieve with the film?

He doesn't point fingers. It's very easy to point the finger; it's very easy to blame. I think we need to start looking at this problem as a society, and we don't do that now. I don't know how, but everything has just broken, everybody is looking after themselves. We need to start thinking about a union. What I think he wanted to show, was a feeling of how we are in paranoia — afraid that something is going to happen at any time on the street. And he's right, because we don't trust anyone. We don't know whether the police are going to help us or not, or who's the bad or who's the good guy.

How has *Miss Bala* been received by Mexican audiences?

Controversial. There are people who hate it and people who love it; people who think that it's brave that we're trying to face the problem, and people who think that we're traitors because we are talking about it. I think it's a perfect reaction — the way it needs to be — because it's discussion.

How have you coped suddenly being thrown



My personal opinion is that it's very easy to POINT the finger; it's very easy to blame. We don't TRUST anyone.

into the spotlight?

I'm having a great time. I love the red carpet, I love the photos. I didn't expect anything that's happening to me now, and that's the beauty about it, because everything is new to me and I'm really enjoying everything.

Which actors and directors have influenced you the most?

I love the Hollywood romantic comedies. I love to watch the movie and forget about me and my problems and my life for a moment. But I also enjoy very much the art films with the great acting. I know it's a cliché, but like Meryl Streep.

What's your strangest fan experience?

Well, you know Twitter? It's weird. I'm sure famous people are used to this, but when it's new to you, it's weird that somebody thinks he is close to you. In the beginning I was like, "Oh My God." They tell you really tough things, but it's also good because it's a challenge as to how you process it. The liberty of expression, I guess.

How do you see yourself evolving as an actor in the next decade?

I hope I can do so many different characters and so many different movies. I think I can surprise myself. I don't know exactly what, but I know I want to keep doing movies if I can. **S**

Miss Bala is out on Blu-Ray and DVD February 20th.