

Sitting down with Nastassja Kinski can be a tad disconcerting—especially if your high school fantasies tended to include Ms. Kinski and a large cat or snake. Luckily, it was some time since my imagination strayed in Ms. Kinski's direction, due not only to changing tastes on my part, but the actress herself had spent much of the last decade eschewing movie stardom for motherhood.

At 34, she remains a lovely, youthful presence. In fact, there is a bit of the earth-child about her, a kind of mystic responsiveness and curiosity which belies over 11 years of motherhood.

I met Nastassja in the Don Giovanni Hotel during her final week of shooting Danielle Steele's *The Ring*. She managed to combine warmth, flirtatiousness, and wariness all at once, but beneath the professional veneer she was eager to return to her children, who were preparing to leave for their home in Los Angeles where the family has lived for the last four years.

From Prague it's difficult to keep track of your current films. I know you did *Crackerjack*, and—

[Smiling] That was my first project when I came back to America. I needed to work, and I needed to work right away, so I just did it.

Then there was *Terminal Velocity*, with Charlie Sheen. Did you do anything between these two?

Well, I was trying to work where we were living, but the

projects that I was offered were always far away. Once when I was working in Russia, my daughter had an accident and got burned. From then on I swore I would not work far from home, and I didn't. I worked in Italy because we were all there. When I came to America I wanted to do the same thing, but that wasn't as easy. In the case of *The Ring*, it just happens to be something I really love—I really loved the book. And [the kids] were able to come out and see me for a bit.

Do you see these films as a way of climbing back up the career ladder?

Yeah, but I also feel I owe it to the people that have believed in me since I was 12, and I owe it to myself, to begin again and do some things I'm proud of. This is not something that I ever chose. The work chose me. I was

happy because it allowed my mother and me to live better, but I just wanted to have a normal life. After *Tess*, there was such a big responsibility: "Don't do this, do that. Don't say this, say that." I was just 17, so I went along with it. I loved doing *Tess*, but I couldn't hold up under all the pressure. And then I found myself facing the fact that I didn't have anything else—no education, no diploma. So I started taking night classes to try to catch up, but it was all just a whirlwind until I had what I'd wanted so much, which was my kids.

And that was when you decided to take time off?

Well, when you work you get up before the kids, and when you come home they are already asleep. And I thought, "This is insane. This is not what I want to do with my life and my children." Because doing a movie is really is all-consuming. What I would like to do now are really good projects that last about two weeks and then every once in a while do something that's longer. You have to balance it out. If you don't create the time for your private life, it just won't happen.

Were you getting a lot of offers during this time?

There were a couple of things—two theatrical plays and various film projects. Like *Immortal Beloved*, things like that. But they were always far, far away.

***Immortal Beloved*, of course, was shot in Prague.**

That was shot here. But back then I thought,

"Czechoslovakia? Please! I can't go that far away!" But I had to make a choice, and then people kind of forgot me and wondered whether I wanted to do this anymore or if I was any good in the first place. And then I had to prove myself all over again, which is fair—there are thousands of people out there doing the same thing I do.

Do you feel you've had to re-learn your craft as an actor? Is it something that gets rusty without use? Definitely. Anything does.

Was there anything you missed about the film business?

I'd wanted a family for so long—since I was 15 or 16—that I didn't really miss anything. Also, I thought I could always work when I wanted, but then I realized it's not that easy to just jump back and forth. I suddenly pan-

icked, thinking “What if something happens?” I never wanted to end up like my mother, suddenly finding myself with nothing—no job, no money, and a kid to support. Ever since I was little and supporting myself, I knew I never wanted to be in that situation. So that pushed me back to work.

How do you compare the Nastassja of the early Eighties with Nastassja today?

In the Eighties I didn't have any rhyme or reason. To be on a set for a couple of months creating a story and a world that was interesting, and being wanted, needed, and cared for by a group of people was fulfilling. For two months or whatever there was this kind of warmth with all those people together. There was no reason for me not to do that. But now that I have my own family, everything has changed.

Which of your films would you be most proud to show your children?

Well, the usual. You know—*Tess*, *Paris, Texas*. *Storywise*, *Maria's Lovers*.

As a mother, do you have any reservations about the sensuality in your early films?

Oh, yeah. I mean, I used to just run around doing that—when nudity was needed for a film, I just did what I was asked, like in *Cat People*. There, of course, it was justified by the fact that I was an animal as well as a human being. But now I have a very hard time doing that. You just think differently. Not that you become a super hypocrite or anything, but you change. You do imagine your kids seeing your films at some point. But one also has to have the courage to just explain to them, “I'm an actress, this is a story I'm acting out.” I think the kids will understand.

Which directors would you most like to work with?

Well, I'd rather not say, but . . . There's Scorsese, and a few others. And I would like to work with Jodie Foster. We've known each other for many, many years and I think that would be interesting.

What were your feelings about *One From the Heart*?

It was such a bizarre film.

I loved working on it. First of all, I was just so happy that Coppola actually chose me to work with that group of people. It was an incredible experience. For a director to tell you you have so many months to work in a circus school and work on the highwire and on the trapeze

(which wasn't in the movie, but I did it), and who trusts you, and just loves you and loves his people, and creates this kind of family for many months—you never forget that.

The other day I saw an article about you in a Czech magazine. The headline was, “I Am Always An Animal.” What's that all about?

That is why I would be very happy if I never did another interview again. That is what I and many other actors suffer from, especially when you've done it since you're very young. People write so much crap that has nothing to do with you, and after a while you just have to say, “Whatever, have a good life.”

So there's no context for “I Am Always An Animal?”

No context at all. None. ❖

interview by david speranza



Nastassja Kinski