Film Close-Up: Mia Farrow

by Joey Berlin

The cast of the live-action and computer-animation hybrid "Arthur and the Invisibles" features a stellar cast of stars; however, Mia Farrow did not get to work with many of them. Madonna, Robert De Niro, David Bowie and Snoop Dogg only provided their voices for the film's tiny, computer-generated characters, which was fine with Farrow. She accepted her role without even seeing the script, just for the chance to work with French film stylist Luc Besson.

MIA FARROW - Freddie Highmore and Mia Farrow star in 'Arthur and The Invisibles.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ehunne Geoise.The director's vision for "Arthur and the Invisibles" is an uncharacteristically kid-friendly adventure film. Young Arthur, played by Freddie Highmore, visits the New England farmhouse of his grandma, who is played by Farrow. A fortune in gems is buried in the yard; however, it is in the hands of a tiny race of elves.

Farrow, who is 61, fits right in with the film's constellation of pop culture superstars. Her private life is the stuff of show business legend, including her 14 children (10 of them adopted) and her marriages to Frank Sinatra, Andre Previn and Woody Allen. More importantly, Farrow's tireless commitment to humanitarian issues, such as her recent visits to Darfur, have expanded the way that famous figures make the most of their celebrity spotlights.

Q: "Arthur and the Invisibles" took nearly five years to create and during that time the celebrity voice actors all worked on different schedules, right?

A: I didn't even meet the other actors. It was just Freddie and me. Some of it was done before my part began to shoot. I'm excited to meet some of the people in this film now. Snoop Dogg!

Q: It turned out that you mostly just worked with Freddie Highmore, who was 13 at the time.

A: He's remarkable on every level. He's a joy to work with because he's so gifted. He's 100 percent there, and he's both spontaneous and full of ideas. He's doing what he wants to do and he's not being manipulated by anyone. And that said, his parents are wonderful. They couldn't be more centered; he's in a very loving family. And he's excellent company. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner together. On weekends we'd travel, take little excursions around Normandy. I think the world of this child.

Q: Are you OK with playing a grandmother already?

A: Of course. I am a grandmother. I've got children the same age as my grandchildren. It was just another part. I've played stranger parts than this woman, who's got a lot of spunk, courage and a good heart.

Q: Have you seen the completed film yet?

A: No. I have not seen most of my films. This may be one of them. It's no fun for me. I don't get much out of it. I only feel disappointment, not with the films but with me and my own work.

Q: Aren't you over that feeling? After all, you have been working in film and television since you were 18.

A: I am over it. But one is also a human being. Your public perception of me has nothing to do with my interior life. I've lived my life with my own goals and consequences.

But I am so lucky to have been in films and to have gotten to do it in the first place, let alone still be doing it. I love what I do.

Q: On a serious note you have visited Darfur, practically alone, to see the genocide firsthand. Wasn't that frightening?

A: Yes. I took photographs and was nearly killed.

Q: What other regions have you seen in Africa?

A: Eastern Chad is surely an inferno that Dante himself would shudder at. It's extremely difficult to get there. There's nowhere to stay.

Q: You are wearing a T-shirt today which says "Genocide Olympics?" in bold letters. Obviously it is designed to start a conversation. So, what does it mean?

A: China is complicit in the genocide in Darfur. Two U.S. oil companies have signed a pact with China that's

pouring billions into the government of Khartoum, Sudan. Most of that money goes to munitions factories, bomb ships, attack helicopters and training and arms for the Janjaweed to attack the civilian population of Darfur.

I feel that the Olympics is China's calling card for the international community to accept them. But we want to make them aware that we know their human rights record isn't so great, that they support genocide and that they should force Khartoum to admit the UN peacekeepers.

Q: Why does it take celebrities like yourself to bang the drum and draw attention to an ongoing atrocity?

A: You're the press, you tell me. The press didn't do their job when we invaded Iraq, either. I saw Ted Koppel in Iraq, standing in front of a tank. I thought, "Ted, you should be doing your homework."

They didn't tell us if there were really weapons of mass destruction. Did they prove it to us or to themselves? They were all heading to Baghdad with no knowledge. And now here we are in a big mess. The press didn't do their job, and they dropped the ball on Darfur.

Q: Back to this film, do you think it offers a social message?

A: The message is very clear: There is right and there is wrong. There are things worth going on a quest for. A kid knows what's right and wrong. A kid will feel outraged.

My own generation has grown complacent for many self-serving reasons. We're in the fourth year of this Darfur genocide with 4 million lives at risk because of no food or medical supplies. A half-million people were slaughtered.

Where are our priorities? Are we going to be among the few that care or among the many that turn away?

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