



# MACEDONIAN PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION

of the United States and Canada

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## 2004 MPO Convention Keynote Address

### Macedonian-Canadian Sandra Danilovic Urges Macedonians to Unite

*Below is the Keynote Address given at the 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual MPO Convention by Sandra Danilovic, award-winning Macedonian-Canadian filmmaker. The 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual MPO Convention was held on Labor Day Weekend in September 2004 at the Sheraton City Centre in Toronto.*



Sandra Danilovic

I would like to thank the MPO for selecting me as your speaker tonight. I am honored and humbled by you even though I feel that I am undeserving – perhaps due to my lack of experience and wisdom that comes with age.

But, youth makes up for what it doesn't have with its fresh idealism, energy, and innovative thinking – sometimes labeled as nonconformity.

I like to think that I still possess that idealism and energy, even though sometimes it's so hard to feel that way living in today's harsh world where sometimes both art and being Macedonian is misunderstood, undervalued, ignored, sabotaged, and persecuted.

Being an artist is who I am. Being Macedonian is also who I am – my background, my place of birth, my history.

Art, whether it's music, dance theater, painting or film is an expression and reflection of an individual. It expresses and reflects what their dreams or fears are, their biases and beliefs, this vision so to speak, and their interpretation of the world. It is who they are.

Being Macedonian will always influence my work and my art. My life experience and my history are the well from where I draw my material of inspiration.

I made *Just Arrived*, my documentary about the contemporary Macedonian immigrant experience because I felt the Macedonian cause needs to be disseminated, documented, and presented to the world, to Canada, and to our community.

In Macedonia, the film has had a very reserved reception and has been largely ignored, because it makes a political and social statement about serious issues affecting the lives of Macedonians today that the government would like to deny. I am proud of my work because as a filmmaker with strong convictions, I think I owe it to my audience.

As a documentary film is not an objective art form, as many people falsely believe, it can reflect the filmmaker's own biases and beliefs, but if a film is honest, truthful, respectful and ethical in its portrayal of its subjects and issues, it can be a very powerful social, philosophical, moral and political statement. And that's what the art is all about.

Film is a powerful medium; it can be incendiary at times, breaking taboos and people's misconceptions – that which gets labeled as controversial. As an artist, of course, you speak your mind, saying what others are afraid to say. That kind of courage is at the heart of creativity and art, and it is what I aspire to.



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My film, *Just Arrived*, and my other documentary, *Portrait of a Street: The Soul and Spirit of College*, are both immigrant stories. The immigrant story has always fascinated me because I once played a part in it. My parents came to this country when I was ten years old. The experience was a rude awakening to everything my parents had to sacrifice in order to make a future for us, so that we, their children, could realize our fullest potential.

Today, Macedonian immigrants are flooding Canada for the same reason. Their plight from Macedonia and their first years of life in Canada is sometimes mired in hardship and slow adaptation. Their experiences are further exacerbated by our community's conflicted state, our antagonism against ourselves, and our chronic identity crisis.

The question of our origins as Macedonians is that identity crisis – a constant battleground and contested issue amongst us. It is contributing to the erosion of our community and diaspora at large. Transcending that quagmire will be measured by our willingness to agree to disagree on some issues while concurrently striving for a common goal and uniting the community to help one another without instantly resorting to judgment and resentment.

I do think that our generation could achieve that because we are not haunted by past political loyalties. We have grown up in Canada or the US, devoid of socio-economic hardship and deep bi-partisanship (as in the Republic of Macedonia, where belonging to a political party is crucial to survival).

We have been influenced by living in a multi-cultural society where we realize the beauty and value of difference and dissimilarity, of multiple viewpoints and approaches, which only enrich our understanding of ourselves. We realize that compromise and reciprocity, communication and compassion go a long way towards building respectful, caring and tolerant relationships.

Last month, I had the opportunity to go to Macedonia for five weeks. I go every year to visit the country my parents left behind, to see my relatives and family, and learn something new about a very fascinating and complex area of the world. I was confronted, as I am every time I visit, with the dire socio-economic and political situation the country has been trapped in for more than ten years.

One of the strongest impressions that I come back with is the lack of respect and scruples that I find permeating every facet of society there. The lack of respect extended from politicians to their people, from neighbors to neighbors, and from one ethnic group to another. It is very easy to see why so many people are scrambling to leave the country. It also makes me realize all of the things that we take for granted living here in Canada and the U.S.

Many people predict that the Republic of Macedonia will not exist one day in the future, that it is threatened by dissolution caused by in-fighting, ethnic tension, heavy corruption, socio-economic chaos, and anarchy.

Of course, what is the role of the diaspora in this picture? It is for the community to decide how to approach this predicament that we're all in, regardless of where we live, what country we belong to.

It is our responsibility as artists, lawyers, doctors, and other educated individuals and enlightened beings that we hope we are, to work towards small steps and solutions in uniting our cause.