

The Power of You

“Let’s make a film!”: Q’orianka Kilcher talking again to THE SPIRIT in 2012

by Marc Hairapetian



THE SPIRIT and Q’orianka Kilcher

International Film Festival Berlin, February 11th 2006: A world star is born. Q’orianka Kilcher is celebrating her 16th birthday at the press conference of Terrence Malick’s Masterpeace “The New World” where she acts as Powhatan princess Pocahontas. Since Vivien Leigh in “Gone with the Wind” no young actress was so amazing like her. It is also the first meeting of Q’orianka and SPIRIT – EIN LÄCHELN IM STURM editor Marc Hairapetian. Six years later the multi talented girl presents her first own film production at Berlinale Film Market: “The Power of Few” starring Christopher Walken, Christian Slater and Q’orianka Kilcher!

Marc Hairapetian: Q’orianka means "Golden Eagle". Are you proud of this name?

Q’orianka Kilcher: I love, love, love my name! I love the meaning and I love the fact that it is unique, infact, until 2006 I was the only person in the world who had the name since my mom made it up , putting two Quechua words together. Then after the release of “The New World”, a number of Q’oriankas were born, all named after me, which is an honor.... Now there are also a bunch of restaurants, hotels, travelagencies and all sorts of businesses using my name as well, which I don’t find charming, since these businesses really are not endorsed by me. So people are just using the name because now it is popular. The thing I dispise most however are the adults who are legally changing their name to Q’orianka. There are four so far I have found. The reason I am not happy about this is because they pretend that they had my name before me, since they are much older than me but in reality they just changed their names sometime after 2006.



Marc Hairapetian: You were born in Germany and grown up in Hawaii. Now you live in L. A. Your Father is Quechua, your mother half German/half Suisse. Do you remember Schweigmatt? Is this your home or Hawaii? Do you feel more European or more American?

Q’orianka Kilcher: I love Schweigmatt! It’s a little farming village with about 14 houses way up in the black forrest in Germany. And on a clear day you can see the mountains of Swizerland, Italy and Franc on the horizons covered in snow. Its beautiful and one of the most peaceful and beautiful places on earth! I still have a small garden house made out of brick which my grandmom had build. This is the house I spend my first four months in. It’s only a garden shack but with a loft a small fireplace and really cute five corner window. It looks like a little play house! Now when it comes to choosing where I feel more at home, germany or Hawaii, I really can’t say it because I also love Hawaii, and it’s the place I grew up at from age two to nine years old so all my childhood memories are in Hawaii, playing in the waves or hiking up the mountains to see play in the bamboo forrests. Hawaii is super close to my heart. And I actually grew up thinking I was part Hawaiian. Now my Quechua- Huachipaeri indigenous heritage is something I am also very proud of, and I feel this heritage very deep in my heart. It’s like a deep connection which I can’t really explain, since did not grow up there and only later as a teenager started to visit the highlands and amazon of Peru in connection with my involvement in human rights environmental justice and indigenous rights causes which brought me there. I am thinking that one day I definitely want to live there maybe permanently, because I love the amazon and the people.

Marc Hairapetian: How important is your German part for you? Do you want learn German like Quechua?

Q'orianka Kilcher: I speak a little German... not much but enough to have a fun conversation with family and friends. I'm just a bit shy, since I feel like I must sound like a little child with my pronunciation. But I do love learning many languages. The problem is I never have time to sit down and actually learn them. So I feel that unless I would live and maybe work in Germany for a while, my pronunciation and German grammar will always be a little funny!

Marc Hairapetian: I think Hawaii has also a part in your heart because you also act as "Barbarian Princess" ("Princess Ka'iulani"). Do you agree?

Q'orianka Kilcher: No, Hawaii was in my heart way before Princess Ka'iulani. In fact as a little girl I was already a big admirer of the Princess. And I wanted to be like her. Ka'iulani's courage, compassion, diplomacy, grace and internal strength and dignity make her an amazing young role model, especially for young women. Then when I heard that there will be a film made about one of my great heroes, I was very excited because her story is such an inspiring and important one to be told. To me Ka'iulani's life and plea for her people carries a message of absolute contemporary relevance in the context of the United Nations declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples and issues still faced by many of the 360 million indigenous peoples around the world who are struggling until this day for dignity, self-determination and cultural survival. And, being a young Indigenous Woman, and having spoken at the UN declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights in Washington DC myself at the age of 16, her story is very close to my heart. In her short years, Ka'iulani was a principled international diplomat, ahead of her time, who spoke out on behalf of her peoples and nation. Highly educated, and using the media to highlight her message, the young Ka'iulani traveled to Washington DC at the age of only 17 to address and speak to the United States President, in her effort to stop the annexation of Hawaii. But I actually never thought I would be hired to play her in the film because there are so many talented Hawaiian young women who would love to play this character. I was very surprised when I got an audition. So even though I felt very honored to play one of my great role models, I was a little nervous, since I am not Hawaiian. And so, taking on this role, I felt a big sense of responsibility to do Ka'iulani's memory justice.



Q'ORIANKA KILCHER

Marc Hairapetian: Is it true that you earned from your 6th living year a lot of money as a street singer? And then your equipment was stolen? I think this tragic moment made you famous...! Los Angeles Time was writing about you and you got a job in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas".

Q'orianka Kilcher: Hahaha, yes, I was earning a lot of money on the streets... How else do you think I would have been able to train with some of Hollywood's best acting coaches and voice teachers? Getting good training can be very costly, and I would hope that more and more fantastic teachers in this business would open up their doors to children who might not be able to pay for the training they truly could benefit from. So I always encourage people to mentor others because I know how hard it can be. As for my equipment being stolen, yes, usually bad things happen and then it's up to us to use the bad as fertilizer to grow some amazing flowers. So, yes, your right, my equipment being stolen showed me that I had fans and people who loved me and who were willing to step up and lend me a hand. This is a valuable lesson I try to carry forward and so I'm always trying to help others, who might be in a similar position. This is also true in respect to me producing my first film "The Power Of Few" in which I was able to do exactly this... pay it forward and mentor others.

Marc Hairapetian: Your first appearance in a film was also "grinchy" in "The Grinch" with Jim Carey. Was it your dream to be a film star or did you want in that time to be a famous singer?

Q'orianka Kilcher: Actually I always wanted to be only a singer. I did not really like "Hollywood" and originally I just got into acting because it's important for stage presence and maybe to land a commercial or some other gig so one day I could afford my own recording studio or my dream guitar.

Marc Hairapetian: How did Terrence Malick choose you for the part of Pocahontas in "The New World"? Did you win a casting or he called you "first choice"?

Q'orianka Kilcher: Actually I was never submitted for the part of Pocahontas. I was way too young and was only 13 at the time they started casting but Joanna Brooks, a casting assistant in the same casting office, saw my picture which had been submitted for another project and then pushed the casting agent to bring me in for "The New World". Once this happened it was a long audition process, since they originally really did not want to hire me, because I was way too young and it was going to get complicated due to child labor laws and insurance etc etc... But every audition I came into, I guess I won them over again to see me one more time and I really feel thankful to producer Sara Green and director Terrence Malick who kept pushing for me and I was offered the part. I think I had over twelve call back auditions and beat out over 3000 girls they had looked at world wide.



Marc Hairapetian: Was it good or hard for you to work in early years with super stars like Colin Farrell or Christian Bale?

Q'orianka Kilcher: The experience to work with Christian Bale and Colin Farrell was THE BEST! I am so thankful for having had the opportunity to work with such an accomplished cast. And no acting class can ever teach anyone what a little mentorship from an accomplished actor can teach you.

Marc Hairapetian: Was it difficult to act for you in that masterpiece? How much supported you Malick and the other actors?

Q'orianka Kilcher: Terrence Malick was and still is my greatest mentor. He sometimes calls me just to check in and see how I'm doing, and this means a lot to me. I also stayed close to many other actors I met in "The New World".

Marc Hairapetian: How much Pocahontas is in yourself?

Q'orianka Kilcher: In "The New World", Pocahontas essentially is a young woman who is trying to be a bridge between two cultures. So I can relate to this since I am of Quechua and Huachipaeri indigenous and Swiss-European descent and know how hard it can sometimes be to balance certain aspects of two different worlds.

Marc Hairapetian: When you look back what do you think about your "The New World" experience today?

Q'orianka Kilcher: Playing Pocahontas in "The New World" has really been a blessing to me, not only as an actress but also as a human being who was given the privilege of celebrity and a tool to carry onward and into the future the important message this film was trying to instill into people's hearts. Shortly after the end of filming the new world I was able to use my voice as a tool to speak out for indigenous people's rights and leverage my public voice to try to create a bridge of understanding and respect through my work as human rights and environmental justice activist, especially in Peru, where I have a lot of connections to my indigenous brothers and sisters who are struggling to have their rights respected and their voices heard.

Marc Hairapetian: Are you still in contact with Terrence Malick?

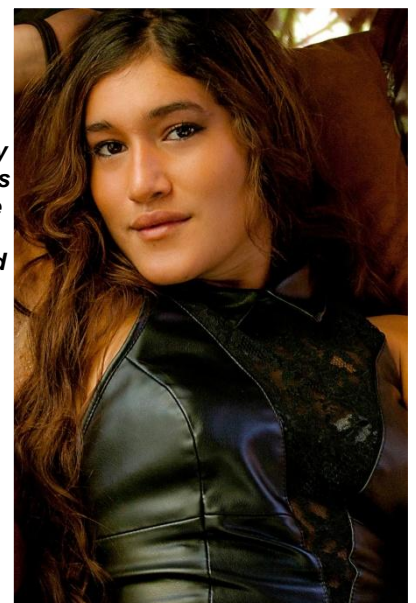
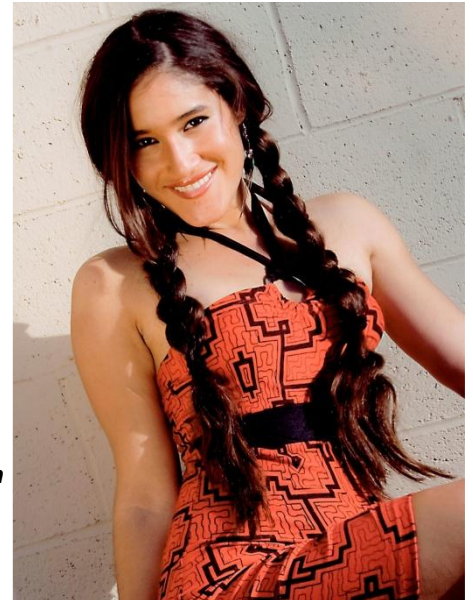
Q'orianka Kilcher: Yes, he calls once in a while to check in, and he always sends his well wishes to me and my whole family.

Marc Hairapetian: In our first meeting at Berlin International Film Festival in 2006 - it was your 16th birthday - I asked you for what man in "The New World" you would make a decision in the real world - Colin Farrell or Christian Bale. You told me maybe Christian Bale but you did not know exactly because at that time you had no own love experience. So what about now? What kind of man would be good for you?

Q'orianka Kilcher: I am still wondering about that... And I am still learning about myself. So I still don't have an answer for you. :)

Marc Hairapetian: Now you are 21 and you have your own film production company Q films. You are also one of the producers of your new film "The Power of Few".

Q'orianka Kilcher: I really love to connect, collaborate and create. So as a producer I have more chances to decide the direction and creative aspects of a film and encourage a more inclusive and collaborative film making process, which I really enjoy because I believe that in this new Age of technology, we have some powerful new tools to spread our stories and let our messages be heard. Film and Television and even the Internet give us the power to reach millions and millions of people. I personally believe that with this kind of power we have a huge responsibility to put out positive films and messages! I believe that we as film makers, directors, writers and actors continuously have to push the borders with the subject matters and stories we help bring to light. For me, as a young artist in this new age of film and multi media technology I feel a great responsibility to use my public voice and the privilege of celebrity as a tool and great chance to do my part and do my best to bring about positive change within my community and globally. I believe that it is up to the young generation to make a positive difference and highlight some of the important issues our world faces while telling stories which need to be told. Film is an amazing tool to do just that because seeing is believing. Images can touch all of us in a deep way and on a deeper human level.



Marc Hairapetian: The budget of “The Power of Few” is 7,5 million Dollars. Was it difficult to finance it?

Q’orianka Kilcher: *Yes! And I am amazed that somehow, several grey hair later, we pulled it together... It was especially difficult to find investors who could see opportunity where most would see risk because not often do we find a team of visionary people, especially a filmmaker who shares a vision of the opportunity and possibility for collaboration and innovation. So I am tremendously thankful to our writer-director-producer Leone Marucci, our whole production team, and especially our investors for believing in us and supporting our vision to create a truly unique experience.*

Marc Hairapetian: How did you meet Leon Marucci?

Q’orianka Kilcher: *Back in 2006, when Leon and I first started brainstorming about the possibilities of making of “The Power of Few”, we both discovered that we shared a deep mutual vision and desire to break down some of the barriers of conventional film making and allow for an interactive and collaborative approach by inviting our fans and audiences world wide to not only get directly involved in the artistic process of our film but to be part of something bigger something powerful and groundbreaking. We decided that this film and its subject matter would be a great platform to not only harness the power and desire of today’s youth for interactive collaboration and a creative voice, but to create a means to mentor and inspire all the dreamers, visionaries and bright talented minds out there, who have a gift to share, want their voices heard, explore new possibilities and share their vision.*

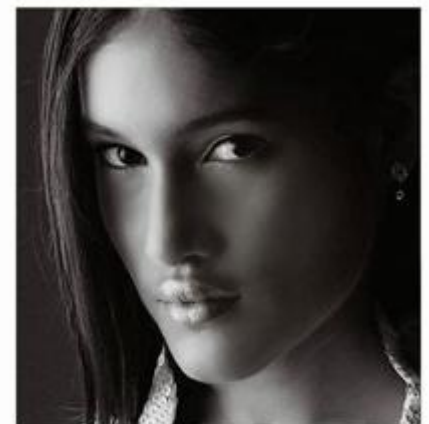


Marc Hairapetian: It was not easy to find a lot of information about a film I will see first in a few days at Berlinale. One magazine wrote about the story: “Spies, cops, holy fools and well-armed children cross paths on a day of danger, mystery and possible transformation. THE POWER OF FEW unfolds over twenty minutes on one New Orleans afternoon, experienced through the lives of five unusual characters who unknowingly are connected to an extraordinary smuggling operation as religious conspiracy collides with urban crime.” Another: “A desperate teenager assaults a store clerk in an effort to get medicine for his ailing baby brother. Two undercover agents come into conflict with the rules of torture while taking down a terrorist ring. To feed himself, a delusional homeless man steals a gun from a cop and sells it to the wrong guy. While delivering a package, a courier becomes the target of a ruthless gang when she rescues a man on the run.” What is “The Power of Few” about in your own words?

Q’orianka Kilcher: *To me “The Power of Few” is the story of the human connections we share, the pressures that shape us and the ripple effect of change that finds us in the most unlikely places. It is also a story of hopefulness wrapped into an urban crime story seen from many different perspectives. I think some people might think that it might be a bit violent, but I think it is important to not “Preach to the Chaire” and use the films slightly action and crime feel to reach audiences we could otherways not reach with this important message.*

Marc Hairapetian: What is so fascinating for you to produce it?

Q’orianka Kilcher: *My hope as producer was to not to only create a strong narrative screenplay with a relevant message, encouraging audiences to look at things from different perspectives and envision how the power of few and our different choices and actions can effect the outcome of things but to take the message of the film and let this message transcend and be part of our production process and how this film would actually be made, putting into action the positive effects the power of a few people can have in another persons life: “The Power of YOU” . So with this being said, for me “The Power of Few” will always be more than a film: it is a mentoring event and a major step in creating a new connection between a young passionate global audience and Hollywood. It is an important model and platform for harnessing the desire of today’s youth to creatively express themselves and have their voices heard while we explore the new frontiers of today’s social technology.*



Q’ORIANKA KILCHER

Marc Hairapetian: Was it easy to get Christopher Walken and Christian Slater? Are you still excited to work with stars like them?

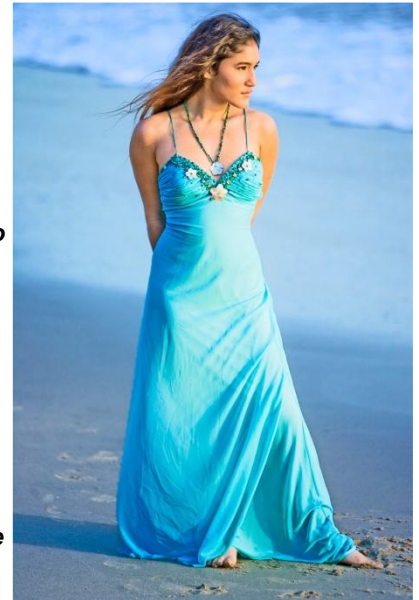
Q’orianka Kilcher: *No it was not easy, but Walken really liked the material so there was that passion. But nothing is easy about producing a film. And yes, I was very, very excited and felt very honored that all our star actors had faith in our production and our film and ultimately signed on!*

Marc Hairapetian: You are very active girl. How do you relax?

Q'orianka Kilcher: I love to go camping, play my guitar or piano by candle light or writing a poem or reading a good script. I also enjoy going out dancing especially latin dancing, or I also like going for a midnight hike up a mountain to see some stars with some friends. But there are lots of ways I like to relax...

Marc Hairapetian: Laurence Olivier was talking acting is realizing illusions. Oskar Werner as actor wanted to give the audience a dream as a gift. What is right? What do you want to give the audience? What is your acting philosophy?

Q'orianka Kilcher: I want to give audiences a peek outside their usual horizons and also give the audience the inspiration to dream big and the courage to pursue this dream! Also, I believe that the power of film should be used as a tool to inspire and create positive transformation. There is an amazing power in film. And as young artists we have a great opportunity to be media warriors and use our youth full rebellion for the positive though our work and the power of film we can give voice to the voiceless and shed light on many of the relevant issues facing our world today and help bring some of these important issues to the attention of the international community. As artists I think it is our responsibility to ensure that we always keep the flame of inspiration and dreams alive, so our art may ignite it in those who have lost it. If we don't take risks and explore new boundaries, we are like stale water. I believe that we as film makers, directors, writers and actors continuously have to push the borders with the subject matters and stories we help bring to light.



Marc Hairapetian: If you would be no actor what would be your dream profession?

Q'orianka Kilcher: Oh, I can see myself doing so Many, many, many things reaching all the way from being a super famous singer or a fierce life risking activist all the way to being a mother, living on a little farm and raising my kids in nature or maybe a poet or painter or even just working in a coffee shop where there are all sorts of interesting people to meet. I can really see myself doing a lot of things. And this is why acting is so fascinating to me, because it lets me experience many different life's and professions!

Marc Hairapetian: What are your next plans? Hopefully our film lol

Q'orianka Kilcher: Well, I would love to continue doing what I love to do and yes... let's Do IT! Let's make a FILM!

Marc Hairapetian talked for SPIRIT – EIN LÄCHELN IM STURM www.spirit-fanzine.de to Q'orianka Kilcher on February 8th, 2012.

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