

Alina Şerban



Photo: Cornel Brad

Alina Şerban is an award-winning actress, playwright and director.

Born in 1987, Şerban grew up in Bucharest, Romania. When she was eight, her parents lost their home and were forced to move into a hut in a communal yard shared with traditional Roma relatives. To escape another eviction when she was 17, Şerban applied for foster care so she could pursue her studies. Overcoming tremendous obstacles, including poverty and discrimination, she became the first member of her family to graduate from high school and university.

After acquiring a drama degree from the Academy of Theatrical Arts and Cinematography in Bucharest, Şerban attended the Tisch School of the Arts in New York and obtained a master's from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. In 2012, she was awarded the prize for the best Romanian student in the United Kingdom.

As a professional actress, Şerban's credits include numerous Shakespeare plays under the artistic direction of Philip Parr from the British theatre company Parrabolla as well as productions presented at European theatre festivals ('Turfed', 'The House Project', 'The Sun That Casts No Shadows'). She also co-wrote and acted in 'Romo Sapiens', which premiered in Berlin.

After acting opposite Benedict Cumberbatch in the BBC television series 'The Last Enemy', Şerban first appeared on the silver screen with a supporting part in 'Written/Unwritten', a short film that won more than 20 awards at international film festivals and was nominated for the European Film Awards.

For her first leading role in cinema, Şerban stars in Marta Bergman's 'Alone at My Wedding', a moving tale of emancipation that premiered in the ACID section at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2018. For her powerful performance, she won Best Actress at the Sale International Women's Film Festival, an Angela Award at Subtitle European Film Festival, and a special mention at the Rome Independent Film Festival. She also stars as a boxer in Huseyin Tabak's 'Gypsy Queen', set to make its world debut in 2019.

As a playwright, Şerban pioneered Roma feminist political theatre, with three plays to her name by the age of 29. She led the way in 2009 with a street performance titled 'Givisarde Paramica', in which she denounced everyday discrimination against Roma in Romania. Her first play 'Slumdog Roma' is a poignant and often funny one-woman-show in which she recounts her life journey as a young Roma woman. (Two subsequent versions were called 'Two Weeks, Maximum one Month, Maybe Six Years', and 'I Declare at My Own Risk'.)

In 2013, she transformed a furious monologue addressed to the Queen of England into a play exploring the notion of 'Home', for which she won the Stories of London playwriting competition. Directed by Şerban, the play was produced by London-based outfit Rich Mix.

Three years later, she researched, penned, directed, and starred in Romania's first play about Roma slavery, a taboo topic still not included in the country's school books. In 'The Great Shame', Şerban plays a Roma graduate student exploring her people's history of forced labour and abuse for 500 years until the mid-nineteenth century, and its devastating legacy of racism and discrimination in Romanian society today.

In 2018, the play earned her national recognition, as she became the first Roma woman director to have a play included in the permanent repertoire of a Romanian state theatre. She brought Roma professional actors with her to the

stage, and drew crowds from her community to the national theatre for the first time.

In cinema, Şerban has worked as a script consultant on several short and feature film projects, and is developing the script for her first feature film which she hopes to direct herself.

She lives between Bucharest, London, and wherever filming takes her. Her work is driven by a strong sense of social justice, a desire to question prejudice and privilege, and the need to plant some good in the world -- however small the seed.

Bio by Alice Hackman, journalist