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LESLIE Bega.

BOTH SIDES

by Jay Bildstein

Renaissance woman
Leslie Bega

Explaining who Leslie Bega is, in an article, would be like trying to empty a lake with a thimble, it cannot be done. The vivacious, reflective and multi-faceted Ms. Bega defies easy description. What can be provided here is but a glimpse of this most intriguing woman.

In this decade's pop culture terms, Bega is the actress who played Tony Soprano's



ENRIQUECEDORA TRAMA QUE EVOCA A LAS DIVAS MEXICANAS

El sentido del humor que rodea el espectáculo es producto de una seria pero muy gozosa investigación por parte de los actores —Adriana Duch, Darina Robles y Adrián Vázquez—, quienes junto al director inglés escudriñaron películas mexicanas de la llamada Época de Oro para extraer de las grandes divas como María Félix o Dolores del Río actitudes que enriquecen la trama.

¡CALLATE!

who played Tony Soprano's girlfriend, Valentina La Paz, on seasons four and five of *The Sopranos*. During the same period she appeared in *CSI*, as lab technician Leah Banks, a kind of diametric opposite to Valentina.

My first recollection of Leslie was in her portrayal of Anna Lansky, in the 1991 movie *Mobsters*. Five years prior, she had received critical acclaim for her role as Maria Borges in, the television sitcom, *Head of the Class*. However, it was when I watched her as Valentina—in dynamic performances exuding street smarts and sexual ferocity—that I became convinced of her acting genius.

At one point, I viewed a sultry Leslie in a *Maxim* magazine spread. She made their Hot 100 list. Years passed. Then, a bit more than a month ago, I saw a video podcast of her in *Deliciously Raw*, preparing green cuisine. At that moment, I decided to pursue an interview with her. She seemed like a diversely interesting person and she is.

Leslie and I spent almost two hours talking. Here is an overview.

Leslie's paternal grandparents, who were Sephardic Jews, came to New York City from Spain. They spoke no English. The family name was De la Vega and was eventually changed to Bega. Her dad was born in the Big Apple and the family owned a store there. Eventually, they made their way to California.

See: RENAISSANCE... 8/E

Con humor reflejan a la sociedad actual

► Cómica aventura que rinde homenaje a la Época de Oro del Cine Mexicano

► Con dirección de Cal McCrystal estarán en El Agora de la Ciudad

► En agosto se presentará en el Fringe Festival de Edimburgo

por Gina Sotelo*

Un aparente melodrama con elementos clásicos de la idiosincrasia mexicana entre ellos el racismo, el poder, la soledad, el abandono, el sexo y los celos es el montaje de creación colectiva, dirigido por Cal McCrystal *¡Callate!* El drama es interpretado por actores que son capaces de realizar las extravagancias más ilógicas con el único objetivo de divertir al público.

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Robles y Adrián Vázquez— quienes junto al director inglés escudriñaron películas mexicanas de la llamada Época de Oro para extraer de las grandes divas como María Félix o Dolores del Río actitudes que enriquecen la trama.

Así, el proyecto *Operación Clown* planteó la creación y promoción de este espectáculo teatral basado en el lenguaje del Clown que lleva como nombre *¡Callate!* y que se estará presentando en El Agora de la Ciudad del 12 al 17 de junio de martes a jueves a las 21:00 horas y de viernes a domingo a las 19:00 y 21:00 horas.

El proyecto *Operación Clown* está en las manos de la actriz Adriana Duch, quien ya ha trabajado anteriormente con McCrystal en la serie para televisión *Solstrom del Cirque du Soleil*.

Operación Clown, que culminará con el estreno del espectáculo *¡Callate!*, cuenta con el apoyo del Programa de Fomento a Proyectos y Coinversiones Culturales del Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, The Anglo Mexican Foundation, British Airways, Xalapa.com, Tempora Impresos, el Gobierno del Estado y la Universidad Veracruzana.

En julio el espectáculo se presentará en el Encuentro Internacional de Teatro

del Cuerpo, organizado por el grupo Teatro Línea de Sombra en la ciudad de Pachuca, Hidalgo.

Durante agosto, como parte del Programa Mexart 2007 (que promueve el Anglo en colaboración con algunas instituciones del gobierno mexicano), el espectáculo viajará a la ciudad de Edimburgo para presentarse en el Fringe Festival de Edimburgo, en los Assembly Rooms, uno de los complejos teatrales con mayor prestigio dentro de dicho festival.

A su regreso a nuestro país el espectáculo realizará una temporada en el Teatro La Capilla en la ciudad de México y más adelante en alguno de los teatros del Centro Cultural del Bosque/INBA, en dicha ciudad.

UN SOLIDO EQUIPO

La dirección está a cargo de Cal McCrystal, teniendo a su cargo a los actores Adriana Duch, Darina Robles y Adrián Vázquez. El equipo de creativos está compuesto por Edyta Rzewuska en el diseño de escenografía y vestuario, mientras que el diseño de iluminación pertenece a Tomás Owen; María Daniela Morales realiza las labores de enlace de producción y Bryant Caballero en la asistencia de dirección.



EL DRAMA es interpretado por actores que son capaces de realizar las extravagancias más ilógicas con el único objetivo de divertir al público.

Por su parte, el espectáculo contará con la colaboración de Mannel Monforte en la adaptación musical, A. Güiris V. en la realización y edición multimedia, Jorge Allen en el entrenamiento de lucha libre y el colectivo Sinetiqueta en las labores de gestión y promoción.

Mayores informes en los correos electrónicos adriana_duch@yahoo.com.mx y caballero_uv@yahoo.com.mx y en la página electrónica www.callate.com.mx. *Colaboradora



EN ¡CALLATE!, Scarlett Oaxaca (Adriana Duch) enviada a temprana edad y, por el poco apego que guardaba a su esposo, no tiene empacho en seducir a un joven revolucionario.



ACOMPaña al titular del diplomado, el maestro Antonio Tornero, director del Instituto Superior de Música del Estado de Veracruz.

Impartirán diplomado en educación musical integral

Del oído al corazón, la forma fácil de hacer música es el punto de partida en la integración musical, por lo que el Instituto Superior de Música del Estado de Veracruz (Ismev) impartirá el módulo 1 y 2; del 19 al 23 de julio, el diplomado en Educación Musical Integral, a cargo del maestro sueco Lenart Winnberg.

El objetivo de este diplomado será otorgar los conocimientos teóricos y prácticos necesarios para que el maestro de

Educación Musical continúe desarrollando su educación y se desempeñe como profesional en su área, frente a sus estudiantes de música, tomando en consideración las características individuales de cada aprendiz, sin importar su edad y nivel de conocimiento en el estudio musical.

Está dirigido a maestros de música, ejecutantes, estudiantes de educación musical, directores de orquesta y coro, busca específicamente que el alumna-

do entienda y recuerde la música con una perspectiva de vida, comprenda que la música es un elemento importante en la formación integral, escuche de una manera más activa, toque con más sensibilidad, con mejor afinación y ritmo y, muestre mayor interés en el proceso de aprendizaje, para que alcance una comprensión más profunda de la teoría, ya que se acercan a ella de una manera más vívida.

Vea: IMPARTIRAN... 2/E

Renaissance woman Leslie Bega

COMES FROM PAGE 1E

In Los Angeles, her father—now deceased—met her mother at the high school they both attended. Leslie's mom, a Russian Jew born in LA, came from an extensive theater background. In youth, her mother bore a resemblance to a young Elizabeth Taylor, having black hair, blue-lavender eyes and white skin.

Both her parents were involved in community theater. Leslie's birth was unplanned. Whether owing to her genes, the ambience she was growing up in, or both, she acted in her first play, *The Patriots*, at six years old. Early on she knew what she wanted to do. She was on a mission.

"I used to love Star Trek. I still love Star Trek ... At six, seven years old I was a huge fan of Spock and I made myself up to look like Spock with shaving cream my dad had. And, it didn't work very well. But I took pictures of myself and I sent it to an agent and I said my name is Leslie Bega; I'm an actress. I need to meet with you right away. And she called; she said anyone with this much moxie I got to meet ..."



LESLIE in the popular TV show CSI.

rant experience as "learning on someone else's dime." She did not have a large stake in the restaurant, but did a lot of the grunt work. This helped her cut her teeth, learning the ins and outs of opening and launching a successful business. To this day, *Raw* continues to thrive.

Leslie's restaurant experience provided the impetus for her writing a business plan, emphasizing a dessert-centric, raw food product line. Showing an astute sense of market dynamics, she identified a consumer need and set out to fulfill it. She has worked at creating desserts that are tasty, yet nutritious and claims they help facilitate weight loss.

At a point in time when acting roles were sparse, Leslie realized that she needed to find other sources of income. After some contemplation, she focused on finance, something she had always wanted to learn, but had never studied. While she was in finance, she began thinking about real estate.

"Then, while I was in finance, I thought real estate is really interesting to me. My brother is in real estate and why not go for my real estate license, so I did that. So I'm

ves to drive across the boarder with her friends and visit the fruterías. She mentioned the William Hitt Center, in Tijuana, as an interesting place. It is run by Dr. Hitt, a physician specializing in different holistic techniques not available in the United States. This seems to play to Leslie's enlightened view of medical care. She is not anti-mainstream medicine, but with her background in homeopathy and naturopathy seems to be broadminded in her approach to health.

In Mexico, as well as California, Leslie benefits from being a Spanish speaker. Spanish was her Dad's first language. But her linguistic talents do not stop at being bilingual. Having gone to a French preparatory school in Los Angeles, she speaks French fluently. She did say though, that when she was in France a lot of people laughed at her because she spoke so formally. While having an impeccable accent, she did not have command of the common slang. No matter, add trilingual to her resume.

With the end of *The Sopranos*, June 10th, I took the opportunity to quiz her about the show. One thing you have to know about Leslie Bega. She speaks openly, yet when she does not want to answer something she can be hermetic. I attempted to get some indication of how the show might end, even just her speculation. That got me nowhere, except her telling me that, like the entire run of the series, the finale would be fantastic. Leslie was so closed mouthed on this issue that she would not even confirm or deny whether she knew how the series concludes.

She did not hesitate, however, to praise David Chase, the series creator. Her apprecia-



LESLIE in a scene from the Sopranos, with star James Gandolfini.

"I find that the best actors and actresses like Meryl Streep, or Kevin Spacey, or Gene Hackman, you know, they are the greatest of the greats. Judi Dench, Helen Mirren who I worked with a longtime ago—I got the opportunity to work with Helen Mirren on a remake of *Twilight Zone* and we did an episode called *The Dead Woman's Shoes*—You think about these wonderful, exceptionally talented human beings. They are great artists, but they're really great human beings ..."

Leslie concludes her thought:

"Like the greatest artists of our world, the greatest playwrights of our time, Ibsen, or Chekov and Eugene O'Neill, or Strindberg, Tennessee Williams or more current like John Patrick Shanley, or David Mamet ... It's all of these wonderful artists in our world that make you realize, they make all the possibilities possible. Because of what they've gone

And some people are able to swing it and some artists wouldn't dare dishonor our craft by not doing the work".

Then, she drives home the point of how much effort goes into a strong performance:

"Some people go on and do the work and it is a lot of work. If you look at some of the greatest performances that we're ever given, you say the same thing. Where did that come from? This is a craft, and when vast detail is applied it is transforming, and it transforms the audience because they learn through the humanity of the writing and having brought a character to life".

Beyond acting, we spoke about many things including pop-culture and the state of society as a whole. At one point I asked Leslie if she thought that there are not enough people who sit back and think about what they are giving to society; what's the overall picture?

"You know, and again,

lity of your spine is your flexibility of mind".

On whether people tend to think for themselves:

"I think, it's difficult to generalize but, I think the majority of people have lost interest in thinking for themselves ... given up, or have become complacent".

On programs that pick winners:

"... I don't think that there are winners and losers in the world. I think it really is what we have to give and are we giving it and are we passionate enough about what we do to work hard enough at it. Are we doing enough to be able to do something significant for our world before we leave? That's why we're here".

On succeeding:

"The most important thing is to believe in your own potential. And believing in yourself and knowing your own potential and if you know that then I think you can really do anything that really makes

"So I signed with the agent and a very funny event happened years later. Actually a couple of years, about a year ago I went to go see a play at the *Geffen* called *I Am My Own Wife*. Phenomenal play, beyond phenomenal. One of the best one woman, man, flash man shows I've ever seen in my life. Anyway, I went to go see this play at the *Geffen* and I went back to the car to get something that I forgot and there's Leonard Nimoy walking through the parking lot and I went up to Leonard and I said 'I want to tell you how I got started in this industry and it was because of you.' He thought it was a very funny story".

Leslie attended USC—University of Southern California—majoring in cinema and minoring in drama. With a continuing sense of destiny, she remained focused on acting, as well as learning things behind the camera. She always thought those were important skills for an actor to know.

"But throughout the years, one thing has become very clear to me and that is, you can only be as good as an actor as you are a person and you can only be as creative as you have experiences in your life".

And oh boy did she go on to have experiences.

She took a lot of time off to travel while she was with her ex-husband—drummer Jon Farris of INXS. Leslie ended up living in Australia, Hong Kong, Thailand and Italy. She traveled around the world three times. She even lived on a farm. While living in Hong Kong and Australia, Leslie studied naturopathic and homeopathic medicine and ended up getting licensed in those disciplines.

Later, she studied the culinary arts. When Leslie came back to the States she helped to open *Raw* restaurant in Santa Monica, California. What drew her to it was that it had to do with health and nutrition, allowing her to incorporate her homeopathic knowledge with her culinary skills. Eventually, she realized that the food industry was not as profitable as she would have liked.

Bega classifies her restaura-

now also partnered with my brother at *Sotheby's International Realty* in Brentwood. Land, development, investments, as well as residential estates is our primary business".

But, with all that, acting continues to course through Leslie's veins. The day before we spoke, she had received her new headshots.

So I am having this nice chat with a globetrotting Hispanic-Russian, Jewish-American actress-homeopath/naturopath-chef-real estate agent and I am wondering if I should use *orale* or *oy gevalt* as an exclamatory remark. Moreover, do I question about the world's best beaches, reducing workout induced muscle soreness, healthy cuisine, savvy land investments, or acting? Thankfully, Leslie's primary focus brings everything together.

"I'm still acting; it's still something that I really love to do. My creative and artistic integrity, when it comes to this craft, this art form, means so much to me. I am also producing. I have a project that's in the works. It's an American-Latin project and I think that it has great potential! It is a politically timely issue that we are facing in the United States. This project will really reach out to people."

Leslie explains that her American-Latin project, planned as a television show, is a true story that needs to be told. Shooting would take place in Mexico and on a sound stage. In addition to producing the project, she would act in it. With all she is currently doing, this project is her top priority. For a person who studied cinema in college, finance later on and has a wealth of real world experience, producing seems a good fit. Leslie would tell me no more about the project, not even offering a working title, nor the specific locations in Mexico where it would be shot. She did however, promise me the first interview in Mexico when it gets off the ground.

Bega is quite familiar with Mexico. She has traveled to Mexico City, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun, to name but a few places. She lo-

series creator. Her appreciation for James Gandolfini, who started as Tony Soprano with whom she shared torrid love scenes in her role as Valentina, is likewise strong.

"James is a very smart man and he's very streetwise as well".

When I mentioned that Gandolfini describes himself as a 260 lbs. Woody Allen and asked if he really has that kind of quirkiness, Bega offered more:

"Yes he is! There is something very quirky about Jimmy. I think that he's never forgotten where he's come from and he does have a silly nature about him. I remember working, we worked together on *Get Shorty* and you can see it. He had it then; he's very generous and a really good guy".

When Leslie brought up *Get Shorty*—the 1995 film with Gandolfini, John Travolta and Gene Hackman, among other talented actors—which she was in though her scenes were cut, I took the opportunity to ask her what it was like to work with greats like Gene Hackman, whether it made her nervous, or not. She explained that she considered it exceptionally inspiring and exciting, continuing on passionately:

Because of what they've gone through and experienced in their lives to become the artists they needed to become in order to give their gifts to the world selflessly... I think it's the artists of the world that are going to save the world".

I was curious as to where Leslie got the inspiration for the Valentina La Paz character. She explained that she has spent her life in acting classes and credits Larry Moss, who she has worked with for ten years and calls the greatest acting teacher/mentor of all time, along with other teachers she has worked with, for helping and teaching her how to perfect her craft. But when she offered up the following, you could have knocked me over with a feather:

"... I had a very short amount of time to do, to write her life, write the character's life as we say. That could be anywhere from one to 300 to 500 pages of creating a character's life... you've got to go through all the questions that would create the person's life... That's why some of the best actors that give you some great work, you never know where it comes from. There's just so much work that goes into it, like any profession,

"You know, and again, that's another question that is hard to generalize. I just know how frustrating it is when I see someone like Paris Hilton who was in an immaculate position to be able to reach the masses with something of significant value if she had chosen to...".

She continued:

"You can really reach out to people and help people and do something with more charity work and foundation work and things that will really help bring really important issues into the light and share that with people, like what Leonard DiCaprio is doing. You see him on the cover of *Vanity Fair* standing on a melting iceberg with a polar bear, because that is a very significant subject that's happening with global warming right now".

And finished with this:

"And the reason why we're going through these weather changes and the reason that we're going through the problems that we are going through is because of additive greed. We are destroying the rain forests and the last rain forest in Brazil was sanctioned last year to be cut down. Trees produce oxygen, oxygen affects our atmosphere and our atmosphere is everything that our world needs to have balance, in order to spin on its axis... and if things are going awry, if one thing is off, if one thing is off kilter, it's going to knock everything off kilter. There's so much to explore, there's so much going on".

Bega walks her talk. Her feelings about the environment and social responsibility are heartfelt, not platitudes. Her commitment is real. For example, she helped launch *Green Zones*, an eco-friendly organization—which utilizes *livingtv* as its Internet platform—and it is there that she demonstrates some of her healthful, delicious and environmentally friendly cuisine on *Deliciously Raw*.

During our interview we covered all sorts of topics, yielding some particularly compelling quotes.

On being a lateral thinker and envisioning different life possibilities:

"As the Yogis say, flexibi-

anything that really makes your heart sing, cause it has to be in your heart. When it comes from the heart, there's confidence because it's so real".

On her fame, or what she perceives to be a lack thereof:

"I have this joke! I think I'm one of the most unknown known names, or most known unknown. I really just love what I do, the rest is nice but it's not why I do it".

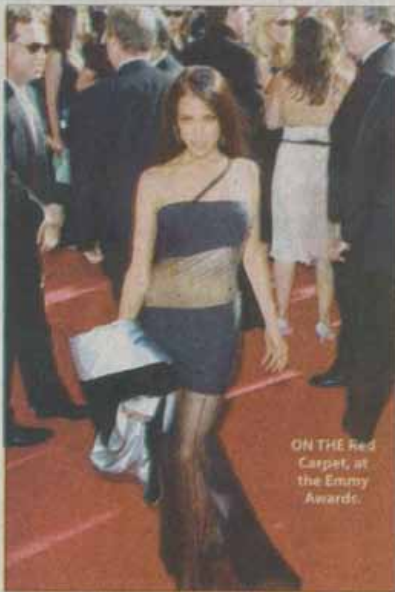
Leslie Bega is to be experienced, not explained. The more you know her, the more there is to know. Some things are certain though. She is personable, unpretentious and fun. Leslie's easy laugh gives you a feeling that you are speaking to an old friend. She possesses a girlish charm, yet is obviously a deep thinker.

Leslie's acting resume indicates that in the play *Grease*, she preformed in the roles of both Sandra Dee and Rizzo. That is about right. It is that Valentina La Paz - Leah Banks thing going on. Reminds me of the scene in Stanley Kubrick's 1987 classic, *Full Metal Jacket*, where a colonel in Vietnam asks Private Joker—played by Mathew Modine—why he is wearing a peace symbol on his body armor, while he has the words born to kill on his helmet. Joker responds "I think I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man, sir. The duality of man, the Jungian thing, sir." Then again, you cannot limit Leslie Bega to simple dualities; she is not two sides of one coin, rather she is as complex as a double helix. But, aren't we all?

Leslie Bega might just be one good role away from an Emmy, or an Academy Award. She is an extraordinary human being.

She has just been booked for an episode of, the television series, *Nip/Tuck*. *Maxim*'s come out with *The Hottest Sopranos Mistresses*. Leslie ranked number one. No surprise there. For more information you can visit her official website at www.LeslieBega.us.

As always, you can reach us with your questions and comments at bothsidesdx@hotmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you.



ON THE Red Carpet, at the Emmy Awards.