



Calgary International Film Festival: Who is Wilbur Sargunraj?

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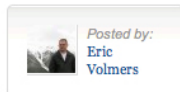
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Wilbur Sargunraj

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It's perhaps fitting that the "champion of the common person" and focus of the movie "Simple Superstar" arrived at the red carpet Thursday night for the opening of the Calgary International Film Festival after most of the press had dispersed for the evening.

Wilbur Sargunraj, who describes himself as "no one of significance," initially seemed disappointed that the cameras had ceased flashing by this point, but talked a good game nonetheless for the few press that had remained.

It seems the performer, who claims he was born in Three Hills, Alberta before moving with his family to India, had spent the day before in a Calgary basement making a music video. His film, Simple Superstar, is a "semi-autobiographical musical" that will have its world premiere Saturday as part of the Calgary film fest.

His rise to online fame has come from videos, which reportedly have won praise from the late Roger Ebert among others and has had him dubbed "India's First YouTube Star" by the Times of India. Among his more oddball offerings on the video-sharing site is an instructional video on how to use a toilet in India.

"We were shooting a music video yesterday with very common people, I met them four years ago when I came to Calgary — college students" says Sargunraj. "That's exactly how we made the movie in India. It's a grassroots, relational kind of movie of using common people to make the common extraordinary. So these people in Calgary were just friends. We got together in their house, shot the movie in their basement. We scripted it, filmed it — everything yesterday."

"Making the common extraordinary" seems to be Sargunraj's mantra as he travels around the world. His videos have apparently garnered 3.1 million hits, making him India's first online sensation.

Simple Superstar, he says, tells the story of his rise.

"It's based on certain true stories," he says. "I'm not a narcissistic person. I don't like to say I am India's first YouTube star, but that is the name given to me by the Times of India when I release a video on YouTube called Love Marriage. The song went viral and Roger Ebert tweeted about it and everything."

Whatever the case, judging from the trailer of his film — modestly described as coming not from "Kollywood, Bollywood, Hollywood" but "Wilburwood" — he is plenty entertaining.

And Simple Superstar is a rare chance to see a "international" world premiere in Calgary, thanks to the enthusiastic endorsement of executive director Stephen Schroeder and programming head Bruce Fletcher.

"We sent it out and Mr. Bruce and Mr. Steve, they really enjoyed the movie and said "We would love to have this movie," Wilbur says. "We applied to so many different festivals. This is something people might be a little bit scared of because in the movie industry you always want to put your best-foot forward, I want to put my least-bad foot forward. We got rejected by many different film festivals. That did not stop us at all and we said 'no, we have to apply and some person who will catch this vision.' I believe it is a divine thing that Mr. Bruce and Mr. Steve saw this movie and said 'This has to be part of the Calgary International Film Festival.'"

Simple Superstar screens Saturday at 2:30 p.m. and Sunday at 6:30 p.m. at the Eau Claire cinemas as part of the [Calgary International Film Festival](#).