

## Review: 'Gucha – Distant Trumpet'

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The Balkan gypsy movie, a genre popularized by associate producer Emir Kusturica among others, puts the music centerstage in Dusan Milic's toe-tapping, tongue-in-cheek "Distant Trumpet," a wickedly fun, lowbrow spoof on "Romeo and Juliet" satirizing racism while it plays up a storm. Sporting the same anarchic humor as Milic's well-received debut "Jagoda in the Supermarket," this ironically raw take on dysfunctional Serbian ethnicity has the musical numbers to win arthouse berths along with festival kudos.

The concept of an authentic gypsy trumpet band battling it out against a powerful rival of Serbian "rednecks" at the World Brass Championships is a hoot in itself, made juicier when you know the hamlet of Gucha hosts a wildly popular real-life band contest with a 40-year tradition.

Though he only plays second trumpet in his gypsy band, the ambitious young Romeo (Marko Markovic) is inspired to reach new artistic heights when he falls in love with Juliana, the 16-year-old daughter of the most popular trumpeter in Serbia (Mladen Nelevic.) Juliana's father, known simply as Satchmo after his idol

Louis Armstrong, can't stomach Romeo's "black" face and has no intention of letting him near the freckled blonde Juliana (Aleksandra Manasijevic), who endearingly still wears braces.

But hark, Romeo's love is returned. The mismatched lovers' attempted trysts in the flowering fields of the Serbian countryside are haunted by Satchmo's watchful eye. Finally, Satchmo agrees to allow their union, on one condition: that the young man beat him at the Gucha trumpet festival.

Milic's script generously piles crude humor onto a classic underdog plot, as Romeo plays a mean trick on the first trumpeter in his band to force him to withdraw and cede his place at the festival. While the cards are all stacked in favor of the star-crossed lovers, Satchmo — racist redneck that he is — still wins some sympathy points as he vigorously defends his reputation in Gucha during a delirious musical faceoff.

The lively if homely looking protags are beautifully cast. Making his screen debut as Romeo, Markovic has a wistful but unabashed air that takes flight during his dazzling trumpet solos. (He is an actual soloist and arranger in the band of his father Boban Markovic, a five-time winner at Gucha.) Matching his starry-eyed determination, Manasijevic makes a plucky teenage Juliana set on getting her own way whatever it costs. As her nationalistic father, veteran thesp Nelevic strikes the right light note as more jovial than villainous.

You can almost smell the grilled meat and sauerkraut wafting over Aleksandar Denic's deep-country sets, where Petar Popovic's camera playfully roams. Dejan Pejovic's Balkan fusion sounds give the proceedings a musical boost.

## **Gucha – Distant Trumpet**

Germany-Serbia-Austria-Bulgaria

### **Production**

A Pallas Film (Halle/Saale)/Dakar Film/Film Deluxe (Belgrade)/Aichholzer-Film (Vienna)/Art Fest (Sofia) co-production. (International sales: The Match Factory, Cologne.) Produced by Karl Baumgartner, Thanassis Karathanos, Goran Radakovic, Aleksandra Milic, Josef Aichholzer, Stefan Kitanov. Associate producer, Emir Kusturica. Directed, written by Dusan Milic.

### **Crew**

Camera (color), Petar Popovic; editor, Marko Glusac; music, Dejan Pejovic; production designer, Aleksandar Denic; costume designers, Zora Mojsilovic, Marija Dimitrijevic-Urosevic;