

Serbian black comedy "Monument to Michael Jackson" a fable about a dreamer in a town without dreams: Cleveland International Film Festival 2015



monumenttomichaeljackson.jpg

Serbian black comedy "Monument to Michael Jackson" is a singular, special story of a dreamer in a land that has lost the ability to dream. (CIFF)



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on March 26, 2015 at 6:01 AM, updated March 26, 2015 at 10:16 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio - In the last 20 years, the Balkans have produced countless films set amid wartime, understandably so. They've explored crumbling societies, relationships in turmoil, personal despair - and, ultimately, the unbearable weight of cataclysmic events.

Darko Lungulov's stellar black comedy goes back to a time before the war - all the way back to the 1960s, when Eastern Europe churned out enchanting little stories about people trapped in a world they never made.

The world in question here is set in 2009, in a hard-scramble town in central Serbia - where a go-nowhere, beaten-down feeling is represented by the fact that there is no monument on the pedestal in the town square. There is none because there are no heroes left to look up to.

That is, until the town barber - and perhaps the last dreamer standing - hatches an idea: Erect a monument to the King of Pop, Michael Jackson. Crazy, perhaps. But it is a **true story** [\[http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jan/20/entertainment/et-booth20\]](http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jan/20/entertainment/et-booth20) that Jackson used to wear the medal of the Serbian Order of the White Eagle. (He liked the design of it.)

Lungulov focuses on the dreamer as he pursues this outlandish idea, but also surveys a landscape without dreams. As someone who's been to towns such as the one in "Monument to Michael Jackson," I've found such a dreamer rare and lovable - yet often so misunderstood that it makes for a sad story.

This film operates that way, also - thanks in no small part to some deft cinematography by Mathias Schoeningh and a soundtrack that is a bit reminiscent of Ennio Morricone's in the Sergio Leone's western, "Duck, You Sucker."

"Monument to Michael Jackson" is its own story, however, and not to be confused with other genres, films, anything else. That's what makes it such a singular, special story of a dreamer in a town that has lost the ability to dream.