Part cultural Alamo, part Plato’s Republic, Kusturica has always been about the civilised world; con- taining social and political commentary, debate. Cats, dogs, geese … animals figure heavily in Kusturica’s cinematic oeuvre, providing sight gags, reinforcing the animalistic nature of hu-
man and but also highlighting characteristics such as martial law, repression. Which the filmmaker feels we have lost. Kusturica films such as When Father Was Away on Business (1985). Under-
ground (1994) and Time of the Gypsies (1988) are crammed with cameos by iniquitous gaps, levi-
tating fish, singing dogs and, always, a gaggle of snow white geese.

“Geeses [sic] are camarillas [courtiers] in my movies. They are snide and like to bite but they have dignity. A gander never cheats on his wife.”

Other familiar tropes include brass bands, chaotic crowd scenes, booby wedding and fu-
neral parties and splashes of magic realism; he is particularly fond of sending his main characters floating through the air. With their carniv-
ous looks, riots, soundtrucks and brutality takes on human nature and war, his films often recall the voice of Federico Fellini. The Italian director whom Kusturica — a former professor of film at Columbia University — ranks along-
side Stanley Kubrick and Soviet visionary An-
drei Tarkovsky as the three titans of cinema.

“The arts today are without guitars.” He sighs, sips his rose. “There are only producers doing projects that fool around with nothing. I strongly believe that we all want to see fundamental questions being answered. Which is why, open-
ing the festival, we have a movie [The Woman Who Left] by a Filipino director [Venice Golden Lion winner Lav Diaz] who is using a conflict from one of Trotsky’s short stories.

“As a young filmmaker I learned from Fellini’s way of thinking,” he continues. “I still follow the iconography of Tarkovsky. Kubrick’s mov-
ies made me believe that great art is possible; he was originally a photographer so visually he was always coming with the ideas.”

Kusturica’s films are similarly praised for their vivid imagery, along with the fact that, de-
spite the bleakness of his subject matter (Under-
ground is about a group of people who are unaware the war is over and continue to live underground, influenced by propaganda), his identifying stamp is one of raucous joy.

He scribes: “When critics in the West want to invoke the films they think they are ‘visually interesting’,” he complains. “And there is no joy in my movies. They are long heavy. I suffer so much when I am working because I am not as talented as I believe I am.” He goes out at the value, Burundi, Sarajevo, Montenegro, movies. Not music. Music is good therapy.”

The story of the No Smoking Orchestra mir-
rors the story of the Bosnian War, as well as the tale of a football-obsessed bad boy who was packed off to film school in Prague by his father, a journalist and staunch communist deter-
mined to get his only child on the straight and narrow. Kusturica graduated in 1978, having supplemented his studies by hiking over to

Godfrey Reggie film Koyouniotis in an aural and cinematic feast, while Argentine’s Orquesta Tipica Fernandez Ferro delivers its vibrant and confronting take on the tango tradition. Skol also gets a guernsey in the form of English veterans the Spencers and if psyche
delic Turkish rock ‘n’ roll is your thing, check out Balta Dula.

Australia’s contribution this year is stronger and broader than before, ranging from the folk/roots strains of the Waifs, William Crighton and Aaron Thomas through to the student hip hop of L-Fresh the Lion and All Original. From home there’s also Montaigne, Archie Roach, 30/70, DD Dumbo, Dope Lemon, Electric Fields, Gawurra, Jesse Davidson, Kelly Meerevett, Mars, Natali Rize, Tangents and Uncle Jack Charles.

“I am convinced that music and cinema have the same structure.”

Interview over, I invited him to that evening’s friends-only screening of On the Milky Road, which is being held in the small underground Stanley Kubrick Theatre adjoining his house. After several false starts, we launch into a fair-
tale cum love story between a Serbian milkman (played by Kusturica) and a beautiful Italian-

Berlin, buying albums by jazz-fusion group Weather Report and selling them on the black market in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia (“I couldn’t live on the money my parents gave me”).

He was already a famous director when he started playing bass guitar in Zabranjeno Pusenje (No Smoking), a Sarajevo outfit in the vanguard of the irreverent, black-humoured new primitivism movement. They had fallen from grace and needed his celebrity.

Two years previously their lead singer Nele Karagic had caused a political and media scandal by likening a broken Marshall amp to dictator Marshall Tito, who had arguably held Yugoslavia together and whose death in 1980 saw simmering tensions resurface. Having Kusturica in the line-up overcame the en-
forced music and concert bans and revived their popularity. Job done; he left in 1988 and only became fully involved a decade later.

The original Zabranjeno Pusenje broke up in 1990, after relations between Karagic, an ethnic Serb, and fellow frontman Saio Sexon, an ethnic Croat, disintegrated. When the Bos-

The band’s high jinks were captured in Super 8 Stories, the filmmaker’s grumpy, award-win-
ing 2003 tour diary. Featuring images of Kustu-
rica and his family (he also has a daughter, Dunja) and archival footage of the former Yugosl-
avia in ruins, it details the making of the video for Unza Unza Time’s title track and the specta-
cles that are their concerts. Along with lit-up spinning guitars, a violin being played on a bow inside a shoe and group headbanging to passages from Deep Purple’s anthem Smoke on the Water, the NSO is joined by British punk legends the Clash for a messy rendition of Police on My Back. “I liked [late Clash frontman] Joe Strummer be- 
cause he was against mainstream politicians and hypocrisy. He called our music ‘crazy Greek Jewish wedding music of the past and future’, which is still true,” says Kusturica.

“Young people leave our concerts feeling incredibly enthusiastic about life, at least for an hour. This happened in Australia when we played a big opera hall [the Sydney Opera House in 2008]. Friends we hadn’t seen for a long time were very proud. Australians who had seen Black Cat, White Cat were very enthusiastic.”

“Our music has patterns that create a Dionys-
ian atmosphere, which is as it has been since an-
cient times. Last night you saw a civilised version but usually the barrier is broken and we reach catharsis together,” he says of a band that is oc-
casionally more akin to the Banana Splits than ancient Greece. Outrage out of the main spot-
light, he often looks as if he’s directing.”

“Our performance actually consists of many small movies,” he says. “I am convinced that music and cinema have the same structure.”

EUCR KUSTURICA

perform at WOAMAdele on Saturday, March 11.

VIEWING IN MELBOURNE THIS WEEKEND

The Lowenstein Collection of Modern & Contemporary Australian Art
Viewing: Sat–4–Mon 6 March, 11am–5pm
WOMAdelaide, March 11. Thursday 7 March, 11am–5pm

Auction: Melbourne, Tuesday 7 March, 6pm
Mossgreen, 926–390 High Street
Enquiries: 03 9409 3943
jon.dwyer@mossgreen.com.au
View at www.mossgreen.com.au

Emir Kusturica & the No Smoking Orchestra

WOMAdelaide serves up one of the most eclectic line-ups on the Australian music calendar and this year’s roster is no different. There is a wealth of riches over the four days across a manner of genres and from all points of the compass.

Among the main drawcards is Brazilian super-musician Bebel Gilberto, who brings her seductive bossa nova groove to the festival on March 11. Spreading the love across three days is the All Blacks Band, a New Orleans institution that melds the traditions of the city’s marching bands with elements of funk, hip hop and R&B. Powerful voices, not least on the issue of women’s rights, can be heard in the delightful African voices of Mali’s Oumou Sangare and Inna Moda.

The Philip Glass Ensemble brings to life the composer’s soundtrack to the 1982 classic Black Cat, White Cat which we were wel-

ecome all over the world. We would play some-
where once and they would call us to play again and again. The movie made the public for this music,” says Kusturica.

The band’s high jinks were captured in Super 8 Stories, the filmmaker’s grumpy, award-win-
ing 2003 tour diary. Featuring images of Kustu-
rica and his family (he also has a daughter, Dunja) and archival footage of the former Yugosl-
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Surreal Top List

Emir Kusturica

IOak Shedden

Skepticism, machines and war victims is even more visceral (and metaphorical) than usual: there are burned and shredded bodies, a minefield’s worth of exploding sheep carcasses, white geese thrown one by one into a bathtub brimming with pig’s blood.

“Do you see what I was saying about war?” he says later. “Nobody benefits.”

I am not as talented as I believe I am

I BELIEVE I AM WORKING BECAUSE