



# I SUFFER SO MUCH MORE WHEN I AM WORKING BECAUSE I AM NOT AS TALENTED AS I BELIEVE I AM

EMIR KUSTURICA

Part cultural Alamo, part Plato's Republic, Kustendorf has all that the civilised world contains: art, agriculture, internet, shops, debate. Cats, dogs, geese ... animals figure heavily in Kusturica's cinematic oeuvre, providing sight gags, reinforcing the animalistic nature of humans but also highlighting characteristics such as instinct and empathy, which the filmmaker feels we have lost. Kusturica films such as *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985), *Underground* (1995) and *Time of the Gypsies* (1998) are crammed with cameos by inquisitive pigs, levitating fish, singing dogs and, always, a gaggle of snowy white geese.

"Geeses [sic] are *camarillas* [courtiers] in my movies. They are spiteful and like to bite but they have their dignity. A gander never cheats on his wife."

Other familiar tropes include brass bands, chaotic crowd scenes, boozy wedding and funeral parties and splashes of magic realism; he is particularly fond of sending his main characters floating through the air. With their carnivalesque casts, riotous soundtracks and brutal takes on human nature and war, his films often recall the oeuvre of Federico Fellini, the Italian director whom Kusturica — a former professor of film at Columbia University — ranks alongside Stanley Kubrick and Soviet visionary Andrei Tarkovsky as the three titans of cinema.

"The arts today are without gurus." 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, opening 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 Tolstoy'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 movies 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, despite the bleakness of his subject matter (*Underground* 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 scowls. "When critics in the West want to insult you they always say your film is 'visually interesting'," he complains. "And there is no joy in my movies. They are f.cking heavy. I suffer so much when I am working because I am not as talented as I believe I am." He gazes out at the valley, thinking. "Movies, movies, movies. Not music. Music is good therapy."

The story of the No Smoking Orchestra mirrors 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 determined to get his only child on the straight and narrow. Kusturica graduated in 1978, having supplemented his studies by hopping over to

## Eclectic line-up from here, there and everywhere

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 all manner of genres and from all points of the compass.

Among the main drawcards is Brazilian superstar Bebel Gilberto, who brings her seductive bossa nova groove to the festival on March 11. Spreading the love across three days is the Hot 8 Brass 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 Modja.

The Philip Glass Ensemble brings to life the composer's soundtrack to the 1982 classic

Godfrey Reggio film *Koyaanisqatsi* in an aural and cinematic feast, while Argentina's Orquesta Tipica Fernandez Fierro delivers its vibrant and confronting take on the tango tradition. Ska also gets a guernsey in the form of English veterans the Specials and if psychedelic Turkish rock 'n' roll is your thing, check out BaBa ZuLa.

Australia's contribution this year is stronger and broader than before, ranging from the folkie/roots strains of the Waifs, William Crichton and Aaron Thomas through to the strident hip hop of L-Fresh the Lion and AB Original. From home there's also Montaigne, Archie Roach, 30/70, DD Dumbo, Dope Lemon, Electric Fields, Gawurra, Jesse Davidson, Kelly Menhennett, Mane, Nattali Rize, Tangents and Uncle Jack Charles.

Iain Shedden

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 Sarajevan 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 Karajlic had caused a political and media scandal by likening a broken Marshall amp to dictator Marshal Tito, who had arguably held Yugoslavia together and whose death in 1980 saw simmering tensions resurface. Having Kusturica in the line-up overcame the enforced media 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 Karajlic, an ethnic Serb, and fellow frontman Sejo Sexon, an ethnic Croat, disintegrated. When the Bosnian War began in 1992, Karajlic fled to Belgrade, where he created a popular TV satire show called *Surreal Top List* and re-formed the band on the back of his fame. Sexon fled to Zagreb in Croatia where he also helmed a band called No Smoking; from the mid to late 1990s, two outfits with the same name worked in parallel.

Karajlic's version featured original violinist Dejan Sparavalo, crack players from bars around Belgrade and Kusturica's son Stribor on drums. In 1998 they composed the music for *Black Cat*, *White Cat*, a slapstick, apolitical gypsy-gangster love story and worldwide box office smash. Renamed Emir Kusturica and the No Smoking Orchestra, the band released an album titled *Unza Unza Time* and began touring their effervescent mash-up of punk, jazz and folk.

"Thanks to *Black Cat*, *White Cat* we were welcome all over the world. We would play somewhere once and they would call us and ask 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 grungy, award-winning 2001 tour diary. Featuring images of Kusturica and his family (he also has a daughter, Dunja) and archival footage of the former Yugoslavia in ruins, it details the making of the video for *Unza Unza Time*'s title track and the spectacles 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 because 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.

"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 Dionysian atmosphere, which is as it has been since ancient 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 occasionally more akin to the Banana Splits than ancient Greece. Onstage, out of the main spotlight, he often looks as if he's directing.

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

Interview over, he invites me 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 fairy-tale cum love story between a Serbian milkman (played by Kusturica) and a beautiful Italian-Serb fugitive (Bellucci) during the Bosnian conflict. It is an indulgent, meandering and ultimately stunning epic, stamped with his signatures: gunfire, kooky animals, boozy weddings, blaring musical interludes.

Kusturica's portrayal of war and its 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."

**Emir Kusturica & the No Smoking Orchestra**  
perform at WOMADelaide on Saturday, March 11.

## VIEWING IN MELBOURNE THIS WEEKEND



CHARLES BLACKMAN  
*Women Lovers*, circa 1980  
oil on paper on board  
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