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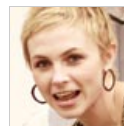
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The Spoils of War

Blood and sorrow in the films of Southeast Europe

BY KIMBERLEY JONES, FRI., APRIL 6, 2012

Seven-year-old Lali (Timotei Duma) is a hellion with a smile that could stop your heart. Most days, he scampers about with his best pals, who are equally up to no good, but charming enough to weasel their way out of any repercussions. Their troublemaking is mostly garden-variety, restless youth stuff – make-believe games; playing Peeping Toms to Lali's older sister, a gorgeous toughie named Eva (Doroteea Petre); tormenting reptiles; and ... hatching plans to assassinate the tyrant-in-chief?



The Way I Spent the End of the World

You could plausibly file Catalin Mitulescu's *The Way I Spent the End of the World* under "picaresque," but that's entirely too plucky a word for this lyrical coming-of-age story set during Romania's Communist rule. Lali and Eva are fighters, but the game's rigged against them, and they know it; when they play chase, the baddie goes by the name Ceausescu, in a small act of defiance by the mostly powerless. Another act – an accidental one – sets the plot in motion as Eva knocks a mold of the dictator's head over, shattering the bust along with her future hopes. Sold down the river by her boyfriend, the spineless son of a bloc-backing policeman, then expelled from school and shunted to a technical institute, Eva is inducted early – and roughly – into adult life. Petre's depiction of that evolution, from flirty girl to determined woman, is a showstopper. (She earned the Prize Un Certain Regard at Cannes in 2006 for the performance.) One can imagine an American picture tackling the same material with reams of self-conscious voiceover and that damnable pluckiness jammed down our throats. Petre's Eva doesn't need pluck: She has *spine*.

Set in 1989 – not for nothing – *The Way I Spent the End of the World* eventually gives way to violence, a recurring theme in the latest Austin Film Society Essential Cinema series. Guest-curated by Vera Mijojlic, director of Los Angeles' South East European Film Festival, or SEEFest, the program winds from war-ravaged Bosnia (in the bleak comic-drama *Fuse*) to postwar, economically depressed Serbia (a Faustian *The Trap*), from battle-scarred Croatia (*Witnesses*, wherein a horrific act is reviewed, *Rashomon*-style) to an ancient blood feud in an Albanian village (*Alive!*). The series ends, however, in a sunnier spot: the Fifties-era comic university romancer *Vesna*, one of the first triumphs of the Slovenian film industry, so beloved the nation named its highest film honor after it.

AFS Essential Cinema

SEEFest Austin: Films of Southeast Europe

The latest Essential Cinema series runs Tuesday nights, 7pm, April 10-May 22, at the Alamo South Lamar. Tickets are \$5 for AFS members (free with AFS Film Pass or Sustainer membership), \$8 general admission. See www.austinfilm.org for more details.

April 10: *Fuse (Gori vatra)* D: Pjer Zalica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003

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KEYWORDS FOR THIS STORY

[SEEFest Austin](#), [AFS Essential Cinema](#), [SEEFest Austin: Films of Southeast Europe](#), [Fuse](#), [The Trap](#), [The Way I Spent the End of the World](#), [Timotei Duma](#), [Doroteea Petre](#), [Catalin Mitulescu](#), [Witnesses](#), [Alive!](#), [Vesna](#), [Vera Mijojlic](#)

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FRI., APRIL 6, 2012

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LET'S DO THIS!

April 17: *The Trap (Klopka)* D: Srdan Golubovic, Serbia, 2007

April 24: *The Way I Spent the End of the World (Cum mi-am petrecut sfarsitul lumii)* D: Catalin Mitulescu, Romania, 2006

May 1: *Witnesses (Svjedoci)* D: Vinko Bresan, Croatia, 2003

May 8: *Alive! (Gjallë)* D: Artan Minarolli, Albania, 2009

May 15: **SEEFest 2012 selection** (TBA)

May 22: *Vesna (Spring)* D: Frantisek Cap, Slovenia, 1953

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TOLERATING ATROCITIES MAKES AMERICANS COMPLICIT I took off from work to attend the second presentation at the University of Texas by Seymour Hersh (Glickman Lecture). ...

HATE TO SEE AUSTIN GO THE WAY OF OTHER CITIES Thanks for the much-needed article in last week's