

# The Woodstock for trumpets

## POP

**GUCA FESTIVAL**  
Guca, Serbia  
★★★★★

Each year in August, a tiny hayrick-ringed town in southern Serbia hosts the wildest, noisiest, rawest and probably most popular music festival you have never heard of. Guca attracts nearly half a million people from the Balkans and beyond to the biggest celebration on the planet of trumpet music. But blow those preconceptions from your horn right away. This is a gypsy-derived style that has four settings: mournful, manic, very manic, and terrifyingly frenzied. It sounds like the music of the id, the expression of that dark space in the soul where sex and war and passion are born and bubble and fester.

The 49th Guca Trumpet Players' Gathering, to give its correct title, is built around the prestigious competitions on the main stages about the town, with 130 bands predominantly from Roma background. None is paid – the annual festival is free, and attracts a large number of European

youngsters, predominantly French, dementedly swirling their harem pants and dreadlocks. The majority though, are crew-cut Balkan youths, often in forage caps and with militaristic tattoos, but hugely good-natured. And there are no pink wellies, or Justins and Jemimas, and definitely no Jo Whileys. This is a festival of ragged music, in a rough land not long out of a brutal conflict, and it has the raw energy that left fluffy events such as Glastonbury a long time ago.

Away from the official stages, the real flavour of the place is found in the beer-drenched streets, where 10-piece brass orchestras roam the town searching for those who will pay to become the eye of their musical storm. Closer and closer they press their blaring instruments to their willing victim, who hands over money – hundreds of euros by the small hours – for the privilege of being deafened. Each frenzied cell attracts a leaping, spinning, gyrating crowd. It's impossible to ignore the carnal content of the music. It seems designed for people to graze, and grind, and grope with impunity around complete strangers. I'm sure I'll never again see trumpets played



Blow by blow: the sound of brass bands echoes through the streets of Guca AP

against the parts of the human body in quite the way that I saw here.

Adam Tadic, the large, mournful-eyed festival manager, described the gathering – which began in 1961 as a way of preserving Balkan music in what was an increasingly urbanised Yugoslavia – as “Woodstock for trumpets”. If it is Woodstock, then its Jimi Hendrix is Boban Markovic. After winning numerous prizes, Markovic stopped competing in 2001. He and his

virtuoso son, Marko, now perform at sell out events around the world. He also contributed the soundtrack to the Emir Kusturica movie *Underground*.

Cream-clad Boban and red-and-pink Marko mounted a twin-trumpet lead over the tightest horn section in town, a three-man percussion section thrashing out complex rhythms, and there was never a hint of world-music crossover blandness.

**SIMON HARDEMAN**

## CLASSICAL

**PROM 44: BUDAPEST FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA/FISCHER**  
Royal Albert Hall, London  
★★★★★

The woodwind and brass of the Budapest Festival Orchestra gave advance notice of their prowess in a tiny madrigal-like offering – a sort of musical monogram – before the main event. Did it, I'm wondering, incorporate their national anthem? Or some other nationalistic tune fashioned in the bygone style of the nation's birth? Pride shines through this orchestra's playing and when, before leaving the platform, each player offers a handshake or embrace to their colleague it's somehow much more than an acknowledgement of a job well done.

But that it was. The rare orchestral version of Prokofiev's Overture on Hebrew Themes brought the principal clarinet to the solo spot to rejoice in the catches and rasping glottal stop effects of one in search of his very own klezmer band. The trouble with this version over the original piano quintet is the soloist sounds somewhat out on a limb amid his better-behaved colleagues. It's the rose-tinted take on the Jewish style where slurs and slides in the strings sound more cosmetic than vocal.

Primary colours were again muted in Bartok's Second Violin Concerto that followed. It was as if the soloist, Leonidas Kavakos, and conductor, Ivan Fischer, were at all times mindful that one of Bartok's favourite composers was Strauss. Romantic reverie was the



Romantic reverie: Leonidas Kavakos

key here in a reading that felt forever poised on the edge of dreams. Kavakos took his cue from the strumming harp, lyre-like at the start, lending the rapt opening theme an air of ancient fable. Feverish dances jolted us back to reality with smouldering trills and fiery arpeggios reminding us we were deep in the Hungarian heartlands. But it was Kavakos's miracles of fine shading that left the greatest impression. His stratospheric song blissfully duetting with celeste at the close of the slow movement like a fading memory.

Fischer's reading of Dvorak's 7th Symphony was one of geniality more than muscle. It was the ease and spontaneity of the phrasing, big and flexible and harmonically revealing, that carried you along. The orchestra's glory is its woodwind choir. The alliance of flute and oboe constantly entices the ear and I'm thinking that the oboe solo just prior to the close of the slow movement might be the most beautiful thing I've heard all season. Then again, what about the first trombone thrillingly asserting D major at the close? Wow.

**EDWARD SECKERSON**

## POP

**GRIZZLY BEAR**  
Koko, London  
★★★★★

So, Grizzly Bear are a pretty cool band to name-drop in 2009, and with good reason. Their stunning third album, *Veckatimest*, is already being touted as one of the albums of the year and they have received public gushing endorsements from a number of acts, including Fleet Foxes and Radiohead. And yet they seem more surprised than anyone that their complex brand of experimental folk-pop is such a winner, and that they're now playing venues the size of KOKO.

With meek waves, four slightly dorky-looking guys arrive and take their places behind the instruments which are arranged evenly across the front of the stage: in concert, each member of the band is the frontman. They go straight into *Veckatimest*'s opener, “Southern Point”, for which the band's founder, Daniel Rossen, takes lead vocals. It is a soaring track which builds with layers of guitar, tambourine, drums and the added vocal harmonies of the other men. And this is what makes their music so striking: the myriad sounds that comprise each song; how the tracks often have phases and change direction; the slow build up to release.

“Two Weeks” blends Beach Boys-esque keyboard pop with lugubrious, haunting harmonies to lament a doomed relationship. “Foreground” is another exploding choral track that devastates the crowd. For “Knife” (from



Furry good: Grizzly Bear LUCY JOHNSTON

their second album, *Yellow House*), Ed Droste and Chris Taylor take up vocal duties and the result is a spine-tinglingly beautiful ode to Phil Spector's Sixties girl group sound, updated with folk elements. For their encore, the band even play an eerie version of the Crystals' “He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)”.

There are a couple of minor quibbles. On occasion, a track will drag a little bit, and “Lullabye” sounds a bit messy. With too much going on, it loses the precision that their music requires.

The gig is a low key affair. Those who prefer more action in their shows – furious solos, witty banter, the opportunity to really let your hair down – may need to look elsewhere. Indeed, there's the odd restless shout out from a bored crowd member. But Grizzly Bear's is a modest, beautifully executed performance that evokes past summers and old loves. It's one that requires patience from the audience. This October they play with the LSO at the Barbican. If the opportunity arises to make it to this sold out show, grab it with both hands. They're a class act.

**GILLIAN ORR**

## FIVEBEST

{ Concerts }

**POP: SUPER FURRY ANIMALS**  
(CLUMBER PARK, WORKSOP)  
The Welsh won-

ders work the surreal psych-pop magic of 'Dark Days/Light Years', an album of terrifically colourful, krautrock-inspired grooves and moves. (01909 476592) Sat

## CLASSICAL: SAMSON

(ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON)  
Harry Bicket conducts Handel's biblical oratorio, with Mark Padmore as the Hebrew hero. (020-7589 8212) tonight



John Etheridge

## JAZZ: JOHN ETHERIDGE

(PIZZA EXPRESS JAZZ CLUB, LONDON)  
The guitarist plays solo tonight and with his band, Sweet Chorus, tomorrow, launching his new album, 'Small Hotel', dedi-

cated to Stéphane Grappelli. (020-7734 3220) tonight & Fri

**FOLK: CARA DILLON**  
(SNAPE MALTINGS, SNAPE)  
The pure-voiced Derry singer and

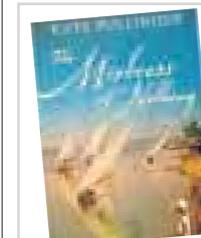
her quartet, including the multi-instrumentalist Sam Lakeman and James O'Grady on pipes, brings this year's 'Hill of Thieves' album to Aldeburgh. (01728 687110) Fri

## POP: GREEN MAN FESTIVAL

(GLANUSK PARK, CRICKHOWELL)  
State of the alt-all-sorts at the friendly rustic fest, with headline slots from Wilco, Animal Collective and Jarvis Cocker,

## The ThursdayBook

# Seductive Victorian secrets



**THE MISTRESS OF NOTHING**  
By Kate Pullinger  
**SERPENT'S TAIL**  
**£10.99**  
Order for £9.89 (free p&p) from the Independent Bookshop: 08430 600 030

In 1862, almost certain to die of consumption if she remained in England, Lucie Duff-Gordon, one of a far from rare breed of enterprising Victorian women traveller, set off for the salving heat of the country that would yield her best-selling

*Letters from Egypt* (1865), accompanied by her maid, Sally Naldrett. Her family, including a toddler, were left behind, but she was advised to acquire that indispensable tool of a Middle Eastern traveller, a dragoman: Omar Abu Halaweh. Duff Gordon's biographer mentions an affair in the steamy night of Luxor between Omar and Sally that resulted in a pregnancy, but nothing is known about Naldrett.

Enter Kate Pullinger, who has invented a character and a story for the lady's maid. The novel is written in Sally's voice but Pullinger wisely avoids a cod-Victorian idiom. Sally is intensely loyal, performing intimate ministrations such as “cupping”, but her dedication is not rewarded when her mistress discovers the pregnancy and refuses to speak to the maid-companion with whom she had learnt fluent Arabic. Sally, though Omar married her and took the baby to live with his family, was banished to England, because her husband was forbidden by his mistress to permit his new wife to live in his home. Against all odds, Sally challenges this destiny.

Pullinger's narrative flows as smoothly as the Nile whose density and odour she seductively evokes. This is an absorbing and gripping tale, however puzzling Duff Gordon's motives. Outrage at a menial's misbehaviour? Sexual jealousy? Perhaps the maid has the one thing her mistress does not have: life.

Egypt gave her mistress seven extra years, Sally reflects: “But at what cost? It was as though she died when she first crossed the Mediterranean”. Duff Gordon defended the fellahin, victims of the oppressive Osmanli Khedive, but her savage reaction to the plight of someone with whom she had shared a life, when even her husband appears to have deserted her, is ultimately inexplicable except as the triumph of caste over common humanity.

**NICHOLAS MURRAY**



Cara Dillon

**Monday**  
Five Best Film

and peerless supports from Dirty Three, Bon Iver, Noah and the Whale, Camera Obscura and more. (0870-066 7799) Fri to Sun