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# THE PIED PIPER OF HUTZOVINA

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**65 minutes, 2006, UK**

**Director:** Pavla Fleisher

**Cast:** Eugene Hutz, Boban Markovic, Zita

## **Synopsis**

In the summer of 2004, on a car journey in Eastern Europe, Pavla Fleischer met and fell in love with Eugene Hutz, lead singer of New York's Gypsy Punk band Gogol Bordello. Captivated by his energy and his musical verve, and desperate to get to know him better, she decided to make a film about him. *The Pied Piper of Hutzovina* follows Eugene and Pavla on their subsequent road trip through Eugene's home country, Ukraine. It is the story of two people travelling together on two very different courses. Her aim is to rediscover a forgotten romance; his is to rediscover his roots. She hopes to find love on the road; he hopes to find musical inspiration from the gypsy culture he is determined to preserve. This is an intimate portrait of a filmmaker with a passion for her subject, and a punk musician with a longing to revisit his past. Theirs is a journey which tests their relationship and challenges their perceptions of the music they both love.

## **Review, Nora Lee Mandel, Film-Forward.com**

Before the entertaining and charismatic Eugene Hütz danced with Madonna to a worldwide audience for Live Earth, and his exuberant Gypsy punk band Gogol Bordello played festivals from Glastonbury to Madison Square Garden, he flirted with London-based filmmaker Pavla Fleischer, caught on video when she was visiting her home town of Prague as he serenaded her with his beloved songs of the Roma people. So she thinks by enticing him to trace his musical roots through Eastern Europe, she can continue what they've started. But he didn't flee from Chernobyl to eventually land in the downtown New York City rock scene without shrewd determination to get what he wants. He agrees to the project, but stipulating that she not include footage of his new girlfriend, who has joined him on the tour. Instead of a relationship, Fleischer settles for a musical portrait of some of the cultural influences that have shaped his homeland of the mind she calls Hützovina.

Fleischer provides little background for newcomers to Hütz's rocking world music fusion, and she only mutters in passing about his captivating role in Liev Schreiber's *Everything Is Illuminated*, where a character takes a comparable journey of return. But when she finally stops venting about her personal resentments of him and his filming restrictions (and she complains even more in the "making of" feature on the DVD), he explains his Alan Lomax-like ethno-musicological interest in different types of Gypsy music. They travel by car, train, and plane from Budapest to destitute Gypsy camps in the Carpathian Mountains and then to his Ukrainian home town he left as a teenager. His personal connections provide entrée to different types of Romany music and dance

traditions than those in the tour filmed in Jasmine Dellal's *Gypsy Caravan: When the Road Bends* which didn't include performers from these areas of the former USSR.

Though his propulsive guitar, violin, and accordion-based dance music delights Westerners for its Gypsy spirit, he is constantly challenged on this odyssey to prove his bona fides. He admits he doesn't speak Romany, but was inspired by his Roma grandmother, who changed his life when she brought him to a family wedding in a Gypsy camp like the two he visits here. These camps provide the emotional heart of the film, and more of his musical interactions there are among the 10 spontaneous performances on the DVD's bonus features that are essential to the film as a whole.

Isolated in desperate poverty, the celebratory music springs like flowers in the rocks. One man protests he is too poor to own a guitar and can't really play Hütz's with its broken nylon string, but, in a few minutes on the instrument, he casually demonstrates a mastery of flamenco flourishes. Fleischer spends too much screen time on the faces and reactions of the children, but the point does come across that music is key to the Romany's survival as a people. Even the ever ebullient Hütz is chastened by their poverty.

As Hütz moves on from the bleak camps to his family's apartment outside Kiev, the Ukrainians he meets prefer he sing Ukrainian folk songs. They are also confused that an émigré would return, and during the journey, men approach Fleischer asking to accompany her back home to the West. Even his family is surprised that he relates more to his grandmother's Gypsy heritage, and his grandmother isn't the only one to complain that Hütz is putting too fast a spin on traditional songs. Igor Krikunov, the head of the Kiev Gypsy Theater, vociferously objects to Hütz's "Gypsy rap": "This is what destroys us." On the other hand, Hütz's idol, Sasha Kolpakov of the National Romany Theater Group in Siberia, immediately understands that Hütz's modern approach can attract young people to seek out the traditional music he elegantly preserves.