



Boban & Marko Marković

Garth Cartwright looks back over the careers of the father and son trumpet players who have helped bring Balkan brass music to the world

Boban and Marko Marković hail from a long-settled Roma family in Vladičin Han, southern Serbia. The Marković family, on its male side, has long produced trumpet players. Boban recalls his father being a mediocre musician yet his grandfather had been so good he even got to play for the king of Yugoslavia. Boban's father was tyrannical in forcing his son to practise and, by his mid-teens, Boban was proving himself the most gifted trumpet player in the region.

Trumpet is the lead instrument in Balkan brass bands – these bands have developed

out of the Ottoman marching bands that once accompanied armies into battle. The brass bands are almost always male and Roma musicians have long been hailed as the best. As most Roma end up either unemployed (or working in the worst jobs) musical skill is valued highly: just as Boban's father forced him to practise trumpet all hours, one imagines Marko also spent more time studying scales than cramming homework.

Boban's skill for the trumpet quickly led to him becoming the leader of a youthful brass band, and as word got out about his abilities,

the band became much in demand for weddings. Balkan weddings tend to be epic affairs that go on for days with much drinking, eating and music. And a brass band is expected to be able to play for hour after hour and know every tune a guest requests. This can range from standards and folk songs to TV and movie themes and big pop hits. Boban's ability to learn swiftly and lead a brass band that played with a fierce dynamic made him a local star, and he and his band soon began winning the Golden Trumpet award at the Guča festival, which is held every summer in central Serbia.

It's likely it was here that the film director Emir Kusturica and the rock musician Goran Bregović first came across Boban and his band. Kusturica and Bregović had scored an international art-house hit with *Time of the Gypsies*, and for a follow-up movie, *Underground*, they decided to employ brass bands to provide both the raucous soundtrack and to appear in the film. Bregović hired Boban and his band to play on the soundtrack and the huge success of this album helped popularise Balkan brass – two of the favourite party pieces among Balkan bands, 'Kalasnjikov' and 'Mesečina' (Moonlight), come from *Underground*. And the film's success drew international attention to Boban.

Yet at the time Serbia had sanctions against it so he and his band were unable to tour Western Europe. Bregović, originally from Sarajevo and long based in Paris, instead capitalised on the film's success with his touring band. Boban has always expressed dismay that Bregović claimed the publishing on certain tunes that Boban feels he brought to the project.

Still, the attention around *Underground* won Boban a record contract with Berlin's Piranha Musik. For his debut album they wisely tested the waters with a live album that captures just how raucous Balkan brass can be. By now Boban was beginning to perform across Western Europe; he and his band won over audiences with their huge blast of brass.

Marko was not doing well at school and, aged 13 (in 2003), he joined his father's band

on the road and in the studio: Boban's next album for Piranha would be the excellent *Boban i Marko*, an album that finds both trumpeters and band playing a great range of Balkan brass styles. Follow-up album *The Promise* (produced by Ben Mandelson) is also superbly executed and captures the band at their most intense and powerful. Balkan brass is famously party music but the Markovićs' skill on trumpet means they add long, eerie trumpet lines and ominous rhythms to the mix, their sound being very Eastern in flavour.

By now Boban's annual Guča performance would be, for the hundreds of thousands of festival revellers, the weekend's highlight by the genre's superstar. A teenage Marko was even cast in a Serb feature film called *Gucha: Distant Trumpet* about a Gypsy youth who falls for a Slav girl at the festival. Needless to say he's a better musician than actor!

Marko is now married and a father, and has grown into his role of co-leader of the band. However, the Markovićs' music has, sadly, not developed and their recent Piranha albums have been rather shoddy affairs. That said the Balkan Brass Battle tour and album with Romania's Fanfare Ciocărlia was great fun. Since then things have been quiet on the recording front. Maybe Marko is going to cut the great Balkan trumpet album his potential hints at. Or maybe the Markovićs' will simply focus on lucrative weddings and festivals. Either way, Boban and Marko have helped mark Balkan brass on the world music map. ♦



BEST ALBUMS

Srce Cigansko
(X-Produkcija, 2000)
This was a big hit and featured Hungarian violinist Félix Lajkó as a guest.

Live in Belgrade
(Piranha, 2002)
Boban's debut for Piranha – a wild blast of brass that is so intense you can almost taste the rakija! A Top of World review in #16.

Boban i Marko
(Piranha, 2003)
Marko joins his father's band for a wide-ranging album that features some superb trumpet solos. A Top of World review in #22.

The Promise
(Piranha, 2006)
The Markovićs' most focused and intense album. Reviewed in #35.

Boban & Marko Marković Orchestra vs Fanfare Ciocărlia Balkan Brass Battle
(Asphalt Tango, 2011)
A lively celebration of brass with Romanian band Fanfare Ciocărlia. Reviewed in #78.

BEST COMPILATION

Golden Horns: The Best of Boban i Marko Marković Orkestar
(Piranha, 2012)
This compilation is by no means perfect but a good introduction to their sound. Reviewed in #86.

BEST AVOIDED

Gipsy Manifesto
(Piranha, 2013)
With this recent album, Boban and Marko attempt to make a club album. The result? A colossal failure. Reviewed in #97.

IF YOU LIKE BOBAN & MARKO, THEN TRY...

Kočani Orkestar
L'Orient est Rouge
(Crammed, 1997)
Macedonia's foremost brass band, Kočani Orkestar, play deep Balkan trance music.