

Songlines

Fanfare Ciocarlia – The Story of the Band A cracking concert and a baffling flick

The centrepiece here is a live concert filmed in Berlin in April 2004, with an enthusiastic audience and the band providing an object lesson in how to milk that audience for everything they can. Those familiar with this Romanian brass band will know what to expect: a series of frenetic dances zipped through at lightning speed, the band standing stock still, or at the most gently bouncing on the spot, interspersed with a couple of ballads. It's wonderful to see a band of this size playing live with such fantastic precision and concentration

The other major piece of work is a frankly confusing film, 'Iag Bari – Brass on Fire'. It mixes a fable of a small boy – who finds a baritone horn in a frozen lake, and pops up now and again trying to get it repaired by an ill-tempered but kindly tinsmith, ending up running after a train with the band returning from an evidently successful tour – with the story of a German enthusiast arriving in the village, meeting old friends from the band, watching rehearsals, recording them and then rather suddenly driving the players into Frankfurt in a bus to start the aforementioned tour. Best bit: a collection of greying Japanese beatniks playing along with the band in Tokyo and clearly having the time of their lives.

Among the extras are two little gems: some utterly charming home movies by band members, and an all-too-brief shot of bandleader Ioan Ivancea talking about his village and his family, with some extraordinary old photos including one of a band from maybe the 30s, dressed up nice with bowties and looking like a convention of village schoolteachers. Strange and moving.

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