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A Fresh Picture Emerges of Serbia

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Saturday, March 3, 2007; Page C14

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Like a panoramic snapshot of a nation on the cusp -- the cusp of development, after a bloody political and economic upheaval -- a *Serbian documentary film festival* opens Wednesday with a wide view of the relatively new country, just cleared by the U.N. of genocide against Muslims in the 1990s Bosnian war.

The Avalon will play host to the free screenings of eight docs, most of them 12 to 45 minutes long, that aim to tell the story of Serbia in the past decade. The politics gives way to the personal, however, in depictions of everyday Serbians: musicians, children and factory workers. Rastko Petrovic's *"The Cuban"* tells the story of a young boxer; Rajko Petrovic's *"East of Eden"* looks at the former socialist nation's bumpy economic transition through the eyes of Celarevo brewery workers, who grow rich when Big Beer comes knocking; in *"The Day of Youth,"* Jelena Jovic chronicles her familial connection to the country's political turmoil -- made all the more real when she turned up on a poster celebrating the life of Marshal Tito; and *"Pretty Dyana"* is Boris Mitic's cult film about Gypsy refugees outside Belgrade transforming old French cars (the Dyana is one model) into caravans that collect recyclables.

The Orfelin Circle, a local nonprofit that since 2004 has promoted Serbian culture through film screenings, concerts and theater, has organized the Serbian Shorts & Docs festival, now in its second year.

Wednesday's 9 p.m. screening will include "Vanishing," "Looking Away," "The Angel" and "Pretty Dyana." The rest, including "East of Eden" and "The Cuban," will be shown March 11 at 6 p.m. In Serbian with English subtitles.

Avalon Theatre, 5612 Connecticut Ave. NW. 301-816-0613.

-- Lavanya Ramanathan

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"The Cuban," written and directed by Rastko Petrovic, is among the offerings at the Avalon's Serbian Shorts & Docs. (Orfelin Circle)

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