

D J Ahmet [PG]

2025 North Macedonia/ Czech Republic/Serbia/Croatia 99 mins

UK released **27 March 2026**

Director **Georgi M Unkovski**

Screenplay **Georgi M Unkovski**

Cinematography **Naum Doksevski**

Music **Alen and Nenad Sinkauz**

Cast **Arif Jakup** (Ahmet); **Agush Agushev** (Naim); **Dora Akan Zlatanova** (Aya); **Aksel Mehmet** (Ahmet's father); **Selpin Kerim** (Aya's father); **Atila Klince** (Muezzin)

“Music is the medicine for everyone,” a man declares in this coming of age charmer, encapsulating one of the essential themes of this story about a teenage boy whose big ambitions are at odds with the reality of life in a rural North Macedonian village. Filmmaker Georgi M Unkovski employs music in various forms in his feature debut, approaching its clash between youthful rebellion and traditional culture with a non-judgmental warmth and an open heart.

Music is a form of escape for 15-year-old Ahmet (Arif Jakup) and his younger brother Naim (Agush Agushev), who radiate joy as they dance together whenever they get the chance. The pair live with their gruff and grieving father (Aksel Mehmet) and, following his mother's death, Ahmet has had to quit school to help his dad with the sheep. Naim has stopped speaking, leading their father to regularly cart him off to the local healer.

Early scenes between the boys smoothly establish their relationship, which comes across as a closeness with no need for conversation. The tousle-headed Jakup brings a winning shyness to Ahmet, who is nevertheless fiercely protective of his brother, although it's Agushev who proves to be a pint-sized scene stealer at almost every turn.

Music is what takes them into the orbit of local girl Aya (Dora Akan Zlatanova), who also uses it as an escape. She has been brought back to the village from Germany for an undesired arranged marriage to the older Hakan

(Metin Ibahim). There's an ulterior motive to her secret meetings with her friends to practice a dance routine for an upcoming festival, aided by Ahmet's newly pimped tractor sound system. These meetings bring the prospect of romance – and trouble – for the pair.

Unkovski nods to the familiarity of his timeless themes with a lightly employed framing device in which a group of older women engage in an act of collective storytelling and dream recollection that references the tale we're being told. Adding this fable-like element helps the audience accept the more outlandish elements of the drama, including the sudden appearance of a bright pink sheep.

The writer/director elicits such engaging performances from his largely young cast that it helps smooth over the episodic plotting. While the support from the older generation, led by Mehmet and Selvin Kerim, as Aya's father, is solid, their characters are mainly there as simple opposition to their children and could use more complexity. Meanwhile, the scoring from composer siblings Alen and Nenad Sinkauz goesos its more traditional elements with energetic brass.

Unkovski shows a talent for comedy, including attempts by the village to employ "technology" around the call to prayer, which are deftly mined for both humour and poignancy. The use of slow motion to emphasise moments or moods works better in some places than in others, but Unkovski and cinematographer Naum Doksevski make creative use of light, from magic hour shots to some unexpected fireworks. Unkovski's film may be singing from a familiar hymn sheet, but he makes that part of its charm.

Amber Wilkinson, *Screen Daily*, 24 January 2025 (abridged)

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