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Avantazh
 (The Advantage)
 (BULGARIAN-COLOR)

Sofia, Feb. 3.

A Film Bulgaria Production, Sofia. Features entire cast. Directed by Georgi Dyulgerov. Screenplay. Roussi Chaney, Dyulgerov; camera (color), Radoslav Spassov; sets, Roussi Doundakov, Georgi Todorov; music, Bozhidar Petrov. Reviewed at Bulgaro Films, Sofia Feb. 2, '78. Running time: 12 MINS.

Cast: Roussi Chaney (Lazar Kassabov), Maria Statulov (his wife), Plamena Getova (Zhela), Radosvetz Vassileva (Tanya), Plamen Donchev (Gerchev), Dimiter Ganey (Lyubo), Velyo Goranov, Stepan Popov.

Considered by some to be Bulgaria's most promising young helmer, Georgi Dyulgerov's "Advantage" places him within the circle of East Europe's talent to watch by virtue of the theme alone: a remarkable historical review of the 1950s when the country was going through its birth-pains as a Socialist state.

"Advantage" is underworld jargon for "work that pays off" — namely, the ability to pick a pocket cleanly without risk of getting caught. A legendary "king of the pickpockets," nicknamed Cock or Rooster, plied his trade on trains, at fairgrounds, and places where people gathered in crowds. Little is known about the real man, Lazar Kassabov, except for the hazy memories of friends and acquaintances, along with police records of the time.

Dyulgerov went to police officials and petty thieves for enough material to put together three lengthy episodes in the Cock's life through the eyes of women who knew him. This allowed for some freedom to fantasize about the man himself, to touch upon the petty criminal's dream-world and capture the feelings of an outsider trying, against fate, to fit into society and live with the woman he loves.

The story is both comic and tragic, but the fascinating element is the accurate portrait of the times. The pickpocket moves easily from place to place, changing disguises and girlfriends as necessity demands or whim takes him. One of his romances is with an adept lady thief, another with an idealistic girl at a summer camp, and a third (a more lasting relationship) with a young mother of an illegitimate child who, unfortunately for his profession, wins his heart. He betrays his friends and tries to go straight, but fails.

Pic opens with a prison scene, in which a real criminal tells a story about the past and the exploits of the Cock. Dyulgerov, mixing truth with illusion, introduces Kassabov in the prison group, and we are back in the 1950s with a police official reviewing the Cock's life and adventures in flashbacks. The young director chose unknown actors for the lead roles: his scriptwriter, Roussi Chaney, plays the pickpocket, and debut-thesps the women in his life, and there are real criminals in actual prison locations.

The end result is a compelling psychological portrait of a petty criminal, bearing comparison with Robert Bresson's classic "Pick-pocket." The shift between good and evil in the man's character, the honesty and cruelty of the profession, and the human aspects of an outsider in a society demanding social integration — these conflicts alone make for comedy and drama. Dyulgerov's ability to improvise on the spot adds an extra richness and excuses the over-length of the film.

A "Citizen Kane" reporter-interview framework interprets past history and the mystery of a man who

became a legend in his own time. The same unique mixture of memory and fact occupied the attention of Andrei Tarkovsky in "The Mirror" (Soviet Union) and Andrzej Wajda in "Man of Marble" (Poland). This is the third in that series, a film not to be missed by observers attentive to historic events in East Europe in the immediate postwar period.

Lensing and acting are big pluses — pic could do well on fest circuit or find a place in art houses and campuses programming.

Film is Bulgaria's entry at the Berlin Film Festival. —Holl.