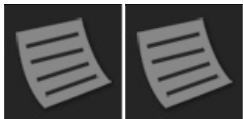


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Review: GYPSY CARAVAN (International, 111 Minutes)

Posted 5/18/2007

Directed by Jasmine Dellal
Screening at the 33rd Annual Seattle International Film Festival

In her landmark work of creative non-fiction, *Bury Me Standing*, Isabel Fonseca created a compelling assessment of the Romani people at the end of the 20th century.

Fonseca's book -- published in 1993 -- was one of the first mainstream narrative works (in English) to document the difficulties of being a "gypsy" in contemporary European society. In *Bury Me Standing*, Fonseca chronicled the centuries of oppression and suffering that the Romani endured at the hands of governments and religious institutions.

Now, Jasmine Dellal's film, GYPSY CARAVAN, takes one significant aspect of the Romani culture -- music -- and explores its presence in today's Europe. GYPSY CARAVAN clearly belongs in the tradition of *Bury Me Standing* and Tony Gatlif's 1994 film, *Latcho Drom: A Musical History of the Gypsies from India to Spain*.

GYPSY CARAVAN is essentially a music documentary -- the story of a five-band tour (Maharaja, Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble, Esmá Redzepova, Fanfare Ciocarlia, and Taraf de Haidouks). As the story of a tour, the film is unquestionably a success; its musician-interviews are candid and its on-stage performances are remarkable. The music itself is infectious and captivating.

Despite the hardships catalogued by the film -- the musicians astound the viewer with their perseverance, talent, and overall good-humor.

And yet the film also stretches the genre, following the bands as they return to their homes around the world: To Macedonia, to India, to Romania, to Spain. Gradually, GYPSY CARAVAN evolves into a work of sociological documentation -- and much of its power comes from this evolution.

And there is -- interestingly -- a cameo from Johnny Depp, who is a fan of *Taraf di Haidouks*. "It would be great," Depp says, "if by experiencing the Romani and their music, people can learn more about them and understand that what you've believed about these people has been a lie your entire life..." Depp's appearance is memorable and his tone matches the tone -- the earnest tenor -- of the film.

--Pauls Toutonghi

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