

CARMEN BIZET

ENO

PASSION, OBSESSION AND TRAGEDY IN A SPECTACULAR NEW PRODUCTION STARRING ALICE COOTE

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DIRECTED BY SALLY POTTER, CONDUCTED BY EDWARD GARDNER

When the Road Bends Full Circle: Carmen & Gypsy Caravan

Posted by [Sophie Mayer](#) at 14:29 on 21 Sep 2007

Tags: [the man who cried](#), [Christina Ricci](#), [bizet](#), [Gypsy Caravan: Where the Road Bends](#), [Johnny Depp](#), [Taraf de Haïdouks](#), [Nicolae Neacsu](#), [the Viper Room](#), [Kronos Quartet](#), [Gloomy Sunday](#), [Spanish gypsy music](#), [Goran Bregovic](#), [Esma Redzepova](#), [Jasmine Dellal](#)

At the centre of new documentary [Gypsy Caravan: When the Road Bends...](#) is a cameo by [Johnny Depp](#), in which he talks passionately about the music of [Taraf de Haïdouks](#) (below). The band, comprising a score of musicians from the Romanian village of Clejani, are among the Roma performers documented by the film as they tour the US in 2001.

Depp's place in the film traces back to [Sally Potter](#)'s 2000 film [The Man Who Cried](#). Depp plays Cesar, a Roma horseman living in an encampment on the outskirts of Paris during WWII. Cesar and his horse perform as part of an opera company that includes singer Suzie ([Christina Ricci](#)), who follows him home one night to discover a different kind of singing, one that draws her in by reminding her of her childhood in a [shtetl](#) on the Russian steppes.

The musicians that she encounters at the camp are members of Taraf, including lead violinist [Nicolae Neacsu](#), whose wake is part of *Gypsy Caravan*'s moving climax. Depp was as taken with the musicians as Suzie is: he reportedly asked to have his trailer decorated like a gypsy caravan, and flew the band from Clejani to LA to play at [the Viper Room](#)!

In *Gypsy Caravan*, he uses his celebrity to make a more serious point: Roma musicians are powerful ambassadors for their people's rich culture and resistance to the oppressive forces of history. His association with the documentary will hopefully compel viewers not only to see it, but to seek out the music that affected him.

In her liner notes to *The Man Who Cried*'s soundtrack, Potter writes about how Roma music was influential in the development of her film's historical narrative. She adds that she first discovered Taraf when they played in London with eclectic classical group [the Kronos Quartet](#), who also appear on the film's score (composed by [Osvaldo Golijov](#) who had arranged some of the pieces played that night by the Kronos Quartet) and who, by coincidence, opened the concert with an arrangement of "Gloomy Sunday," the very song that she had been listening to while writing.

It seems like a further beautiful coincidence that *Carmen* opens the same week as *Gypsy Caravan* reaches London. *The Man Who Cried* is about an opera company: you can get an onscreen preview of her take on opera, as she parodies traditional productions of the canon, including Bizet's [The Pearl Fishers](#). But more importantly, it brings two musical traditions into conjunction: the "high art" of the opera stage, and the oral, lived tradition of Roma and Yiddish song.

Carmen, whose eponymous heroine is a gypsy, is another place where these traditions meet: Bizet based many of *Carmen*'s themes on his assumptions about Spanish gypsy music, and in recent years, Carmen has been reclaimed as a Roma heroine – for example, in a 2007 film adaptation by [Goran Bregovic](#) (in which he gives the narrative a happy ending).



Like the musicians in *Gypsy Caravan* – who include the magnificent [Esma Redzepova](#) (above), known as the Gypsy Queen – Carmen will not remain quiet about injustice. Her voice is her most powerful weapon, and she uses it to celebrate the freedom, musicality and movement that are at the heart of *Gypsy Caravan*. [Jasmine Dellal](#)'s documentary features a repeated image of a flock of birds taking off, wheeling against the sunset and over the horizon – a haunting echo of Carmen's claim that she is "un oiseau rebelle"...

Gypsy Caravan: When The Road Bends [opens at the ICA](#) on Friday 28 September, screening until 21 October. For full listings, tickets and ICA membership visit ica.org.uk.

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