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JUNE 23, 2007

Zach Condon Eat Your Heart Out



Don't get me wrong, I love [Beirut](#), but last Thursday I was lucky enough to be invited by a friend at [Harmonia Mundi](#) to the pre-screening of *[GYPSY CARAVAN...When The Road Bends](#)*. Written and directed by Jasmine Dellal of Little Dust Productions, the film is a documentary about five bands that play different kinds of Gypsy music, who united for a highly successful 6-week tour across North America. Descendants of the [Roma](#), a group that migrated from Northwestern India around 1050, Gypsies are now spread over the Balkan peninsula, the Americas, the former Soviet Union, Western Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

The featured groups in the movie are:

[Maharaja](#), from India

[Antonio El Pipa Flamenco Ensemble](#), from Spain

[Esma Redzepova](#), from Macedonia, "Queen of the Gypsies"

[Fanfare Ciocarlia](#), from the Romanian-Moldavian border

[Taraful de Haidouks](#), from Romania

Most of the musicians singlehandedly support extended families back home through their music, in some cases providing electricity to their entire village. The musicians talk about what it means to them to be Roma, and to have known the persecution and even [genocide](#) historically known by Gypsies. They also try to sneak cigarettes where they aren't allowed, get caught fishing in art museum fountains, break into song and dance on airplanes, and generally make fun of each other. There are quite a few memorable moments: a member of

Maharaja attempts to dance flamenco like Antonio El Pipa and winds up out of breath and holding his side. Harish, the Indian dancer who dresses like a woman (and does the most amazing [Rajasthani knees dance](#)), drapes a scarf over his head and starts mimicking the stately Esma Redzepova, who cracks up laughing. Antonio's aunt Juana eats Indian food ordered by Maharaja and cries out "Even the bread is spicy! Why? Why is the bread spicy??"

The scenes of them at home from touring, going about their daily lives, are excellent; members of Maharaja discuss with village elders how surprised they are at the respect they've received from other cultures, and how similar they've discovered Spanish music to be to [Raga](#). Caliu of Taraf De Haidouks discovers his 19 year old son is about to marry a 13 year old girl (yikes) and he must pay for the wedding. At 78, Nicolai of Taraf complains that he needs a woman! And that he wants a swimming pool "like Johnny Depp" (whose movie [A Man Who Cried](#) featured the band).

In the end, you leave worrying a bit about their families and what it must be like to go back to extreme poverty after seeing the world. But you're also left with an enormous amount of admiration for their general enthusiasm for life. It's an understatement to say these people live for their music. The movie opens on 6/29 at the [Nuart Theater](#) in West L.A. The soundtrack is available through [World Village Music](#).

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