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Movies Reviews

Movie Review: When the Road Bends: Tales of a Gypsy Caravan

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By Ron Wilkinson Jun 17, 2007, 15:44 GMT

The Roma or Romani people migrated west from India in the eleventh century. In the next five hundred years they settled from Great Britain to Spain to Romania to Germany to the USA.

Persecuted in most of their adopted regions, there is no culture that has spawned more myth, fantasy and romanticism than the so-call Gypsies. Their persecution can be traced to their lack of commonality in religion and culture with their respective home countries and with their general pride in their distinct, and perhaps eccentric, heritage. They have been persecuted because they traveled to places that were not their own. Most importantly, they have been persecuted for being different. In a modern society that universally heaps rewards on the landed agrarian culture, roaming societies lacking physical wealth become non-persons.

Enter the modern [movie](#) machine, with a predilection for the different.

Writer, director and producer Jasmine Dellal executes a concept that must have been more difficult than it looked: she brought Gypsies to your living room. The first thing the viewer sees about the people in this production is that they don't look like the Gypsies we read about in school. They look East Indian or Pakistani rather than Spanish, which makes sense since they came from India originally and also because many Gypsies still live closer to India than to Spain.

It is also because a major contributor to the film is the group Maharaja, from the Thar desert in Rajasthan, India, a portion of western India that borders on Pakistan. The group claims a combination of Hindu and Muslim religions and produces authentic Romani [music](#) with a solid Eastern tonality.

In America we associate Gypsies with Spanish castanets, Flamenco dancing and swirling red dresses. Well, two out of three ain't bad, as the Spanish Romani were large contributors in the introduction and growth of Flamenco in Spain. Indeed, the word Flamenco comes from the Arabic "fellaḥ mengu," meaning literally, "Peasant without Land". Letting no good deed go unpunished, after the reconquest the establishment persecuted the Romani into deep hiding in what became the region known as Andalusia. This film features the Antonio El Pipa Flamenco Ensemble from Spain doing some outstanding, authentic Romani Flamenco.

Balkan Gypsies go by the name Caldarari ("cauldron makers") and form one of the larger subgroups of

Romani. Traditionally smiths and metal workers they kept this trade alive for generations, morphing into auto body mechanics in Great Britain and elsewhere in the West in the twentieth century.

In Romania the surname "Caldararu" is prominent. Esmă Redzepova from Skopje, Macedonia, is now known as the musical "Queen of the Gypsies." Articulate and passionate, she tells all about what makes her love her art, and more important, what makes her love the art of performing.

Fanfare Ciocarlia is an eleven-man brass band from near the Romanian-Moldavian border who put a solid spa sound into what we know as Gypsy music and Taraf de Haidouks band members from 22 to 80 and played in the [Johnny Depp](#) film "The Man Who Cried" (Depp holds a brief, uncredited interview in the film).

In terms of vibrant people having the time of their lives and showing Americans how to enjoy themselves, when this caravan toured America we are lucky someone was along with a camera. Don't miss it for a fun night on the town.

Documentary

Written, Directed and Produced by: Jasmine Dellal

Featuring the music of the Roma People

Runtime: 112 minutes

USA release June 15, 2007. MPAA: Rated R for language and some violence.



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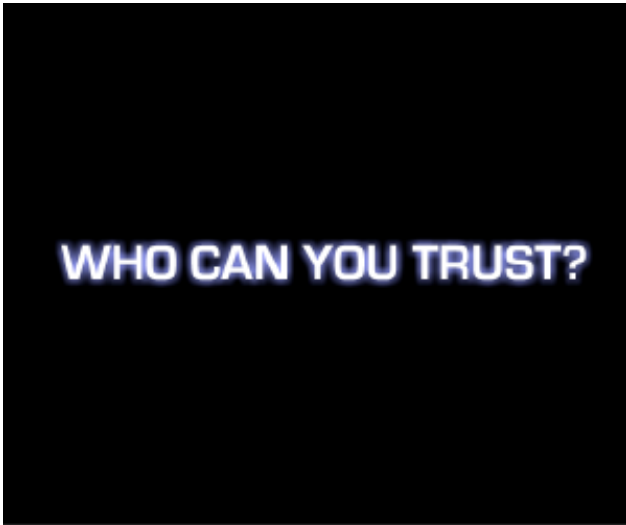
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