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MOVIE REVIEW

Gypsy Caravan (2006)



Members of the band Fanfare Ciocaria, from "Gypsy Caravan."

Four Countries, Five Bands, One Coast-to-Coast Party

By MANOHLA DARGIS
Published: June 15, 2007

As a music document and as a labor of unabashed love, the nonfiction feature "Gypsy Caravan" could hardly be better; as a movie, it could stand some improvement. Shot on film and what looks like consumer-grade video by almost a dozen camera operators, including the veteran documentary filmmaker [Albert Maysles](#), the movie tracks five very different Gypsy bands from four countries — India, Macedonia, Romania and Spain — that toured North America in 2001, delighting audiences from Florida to Oregon with ragalike melodies, furious flamenco and much brassy oompah-oompah amid bottles of booze and clouds of cigarette smoke.

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The 2001 tour was actually the second such event, though it takes an Internet search to discover the years of the first Gypsy Caravan (1999) and this one. The director, writer and producer Jasmine Dellal names the locations in the movie, in both the newer and older worlds, but for some strange reason doesn't complete these colorful pictures with time stamps. That's too bad, because this ambiguity adds some needless and distracting confusion (the movie includes footage from the 1999 tour) and undermines some of Ms. Dellal's fine work, loosening the threads among the multiple bits and pieces — the dozens of characters, the myriad pit stops — that she carefully

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"PROFOUNDLY, METAPHYSICALLY SCARY."
JOHN ANDERSON, FILM COMMENT

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tries to stitch together.

Thankfully, the music is so wonderful and the musicians so winning that the sounds of your feet tapping and seat shaking may temper most of your intellectual qualms. At the very least, the music should distract you from

worrying those loose threads or wondering why Ms. Dellal couldn't find someone besides [Johnny Depp](#) to talk about the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies. Or if Esma Redzepova, the Macedonian diva in the "[I Dream of Jeannie](#)" get-up, actually raised the 47 children she claims she and her husband took in. She may not be entirely for real, but neither is the gloriously raw, otherworldly sound that pours from her mouth and places her on a continuum with the Indian and Spanish Gypsies as firmly as a flag pinned to a map.

In the main, Ms. Dellal takes a more straightforward approach to her material than [Tony Gatlif](#) did in "[Latcho Drom](#)" (1993), his impressionistic account of the Gypsy diaspora. Her narrative arc essentially flows along the same line as the tour, with one American city giving way to the next amid enticing concert footage and backstage encounters that tend to play like filler.

Far richer are those scenes in which Ms. Dellal shifts to this story's points of origin, to the dusty villages and cluttered homes, the dining rooms and kitchens where the various performers, including the astonishing Spanish singer Juana la del Pipa and the Romanian fiddler Nicolae Neacsu, open their hearts about their families, histories and identities.

Spend just a little time with Ms. Pipa, an epic-size woman who could have been conjured by [Pedro Almodóvar](#), and you realize that the problem with "Gypsy Caravan" is that there are too many rich stories crammed into this one feature, along with too much great music. Although Ms. Dellal singles out a few musicians, you could probably make a movie about each of the bands, including Mr. Depp's friends and one-time co-stars (from the film "[The Man Who Cried](#)") Taraf de Haidouks, which supports its entire Romanian village. Here, far from the modern world, where boys still ride ox carts and an old man talks wistfully about putting in a pool ("like Johnny Depp"), men make violins weep — audiences too.

GYPSY CARAVAN

Opens today in Manhattan.

Written (in English, Romany, Spanish, Romanian, Macedonian, Hindi and Marwari, with English subtitles), produced and directed by Jasmine Dellal; directors of photography, Albert Maysles and Alain de Halleux; edited by Mary Myers, Ms. Dellal, Roko Belic and Angelo Corrao; released by Shadow Distribution. Running time: 111 minutes. This film is not rated.

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4½ rating, 5 votes

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1. June 15th, 2007

Rating:



the coolest thing I've seen

Music documentaries are harder to describe than other films, and harder to convince people to see. I think the best thing I can say on behalf of Jasmine Dellal's thoroughly wonderful "Gypsy Caravan" is that I was thrilled and transported by it. It's a two-hour movie, and I'm only sorry it isn't two or three times as long. What begins as a concert-tour

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doc about a varied group of Roma musicians (aka Gypsies, a term rejected by some Roma and embraced by others) as they travel the United States keeps getting broader, richer and deeper until it becomes a cinematic and musical experience that's absolute magic. Salon, Andrew O'Hehir

- *houstonking1*

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