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LIFE STYLE

Gypsy Caravan-A spectacular aural visual experience

Tuesday, 06.26.2007, 10:48pm (GMT-7)

India Post News Service

LOS ANGELES: Gypsy Caravan, produced and directed by Jasmine Dellal, cinematographer Albert Maysles, will make its USA theatrical debut showcasing the musical world of Roma, a rich feature documentary weaving home life and personal stories of virtuosic international Gypsy performers including the celebrated Maharaja, singers and musicians from Rajasthan. The film opens on June 29 at the NuArt Theatre.

A Romani proverb tells us that You cannot walk straight when the road bends... And so the documentary sets out on an epic road trip initiated by World Music Institute, New York bringing together an amalgam of cultures, exploring connections not divisions. Thirty musicians from diverse Gipsy landscapes get together and celebrate historic traditions, rhythms, lyrics, crossing boundaries and intersecting layers of music as they perform to rapturous audiences, across America and then travel to their home towns to share their personal histories.

The members of the group communicated in ten languages, including Romani as they traveled over six weeks. The artists are filmed making music, jamming backstage, touring and in motels. The documentary and CD are dedicated to the Decade of Roma inclusion-2005-2015 an international initiative focusing on eradicating discrimination against the Roma and alleviating poverty.

Indian music was important to the tour as India is the origin of the Roma people (now called Gypsies) who probably came from northern India and traveled across the seas. "Due to a mistaken belief" says Jasmine Dellal in the notes accompanying the CD, "it was believed they were from Egypt, hence they were known as "gyptians' or Gipsies and Gitanos in Spanish.

But they all share a common language which comes from Sanskrit ..." The documentary which runs for 111 minutes is a memorable triumph as a tribute to the Romani artists and their heritage. Emotionally vivid, we enter their homes, their community, share the joys of a wedding, lament at a funeral, laugh at an earthy joke, and become a part of their struggles, loves, hearts and minds.

As Esma says, "Most of the musicians on tour grew up with music form childhood, like water, like lair or bread. The kids started playing as early as they can remember and the adults play for a living...to keep on living." The Vancouver Film Fest called the film a "gorgeous sound celebration of misery and oppression turned into music." There is no angst, no consternation, no conflict, no controversy, only an expression of personal vision organically integrated.

When I listened to the music I felt I was always listening to something that was familiar. I was not listening to foreign sounds. An abundance of musical blessings with a host of outstanding artists going deep into history and moving seamlessly through songs of different countries, original and boldly emotive.

The ensemble features traditional folk troupe, Maharaja from Rajasthan, India, the Macedonian diva, Queen of the Gypsies, Esma Redzepova, known for her anthemic songs and blistering vocals, the feisty eleven-man Romanian brass and wood wind band, Fanfare Ciocarlia, the dazzling Romanian violinist Taraf de Haidouks and Spain's Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble.

Maharaja's vibrant blend of music and dance brings together North Indian folk and

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classical traditions, Arabic sounds, Sufi trance music and crossover styles. They have performed at hundreds of concerts and mesmerized world audiences. The group including a brilliantly talented crossdresser, gathered together poets and shamas who in Rajasthan would not play together but here create an energized, haunting and exciting fusion to create an eclectic aesthetic. In the film, we meet a group of men debating the merits of modern education.

They are the Langa musicians in a tiny village of 30 huts. The whole village descends from centuries of story tellers and musicians. The members of the Maharaja perform together defying traditional religion and caste constraints. They are Hindus and Muslims from the Manganyar, Langa and Sapera castes. The CD is foot stomping, frenzied, rapturous with constant variations, layers of rhythms coalescing in the air, tempos changing with precision, shimmering in high harmony, now furiously vibrant, now underlying the depths of passion, grippingly played and brilliantly realized.

The score is impossible to resist. What stays in mind? Maro Jailo, a remix by Maharaja, the Roomal , the constant variations of Desert Night Journey the clacking of spoons and spirited Roman Hero dance, the pipes interjecting with the staccato foot stomping Carolina, the fierce guitars in Kimero and Mehndi where the melody comes out of a scorching Thar desert in India. The The Maharaja group from Rajasthan has discovered the passion of flamenco and has begun a side project Maharaja Flamenca which performs on the tour with Antonio El Pipa.

PREM KISHORE

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