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'Gypsy Caravan' puts faces on a sound

Film followed 5 bands touring United States

August 31, 2007

BY TERRY LAWSON
FREE PRESS MOVIE CRITIC

At a dinner party a few years ago, a guest told me he had no idea how much he loved Cuban music before seeing "Buena Vista Social Club." How much Cuban music had he heard before he saw the movie? "None that I knew of," he answered.

Some who see "Gypsy Caravan," an often exhilarating documentary that followed five bands of gypsy musicians across the United States in 2001, may have the same reaction, because the music of European and Asian gypsies has exerted so much influence on everything from Hot Club jazz in France to Klezmer music in Eastern Europe and Spanish flamenco.

PHOTOS

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(www.shadowdistribution.com)

Fanfare Ciocarlia hits the road in "Gypsy Caravan."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

'Gypsy Caravan'

THREE STARS

out of four stars

Not rated; nothing objectionable

1 hour, 51 minutes

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The most familiar performers in "Gypsy Caravan," at least to world music fans, might be Taraf de Haidouks, the Romanian string ensemble whose recordings have been distributed in the United States.

But "Caravan" will almost certainly win new followers for Macedonian vocalist Esma Redzepova, one of many performers to claim the title Queen of Gypsies, with a personality as irrepresible as her singing is powerful; India's classically styled Maharaja, joined by Harish Kumar, who performs the amazing chakari dance on his knees; Romanian brass band Fanfare Ciocarlia, and Spain's Antonio El Pipa, performing here with his own Flamenco Ensemble.

British director Jasmine Dellal mostly lets

the musicians tell how the traditional music of the Roma spread from northern India throughout the world. They supply the cultural history and dispel the usual gypsy myths. (They have not come to steal your children, but are happy to leave behind their ancient sense of craftsmanship and community.) The emphasis remains on the personal stories of the players themselves who, for all their backstage squabbling, identify more with each other than any of the countries in which they've settled.

Dellal is lucky enough to have the legendary Albert Maysles manning the camera for much of the journey from New York to San Francisco. (Maysles and his brother David will be the subjects of an upcoming tribute and retrospective at the Detroit Film Theatre.)

In between, the members of Taraf de Haidouks catch up with an old friend who happens to be a major movie star, and at a stop in Ann Arbor, they precede a performance at Hill Auditorium by doing a little fishing in most unlikely waters. Being gypsies, they take a little something and leave something behind wherever they roam.

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