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## Relish a spirited 'Gypsy Caravan'

June 29, 2007

Kelly Jane Torrance - It's unlikely that a single film could end centuries of persecution and prejudice, but if it were possible, "Gypsy Caravan" would be that film.

The Roma, better known as Gypsies, originated in northern India and began migrating to Europe and North Africa almost 1,000 years ago. They've been fighting for respect ever since, enduring enslavement, sterilization and concentration camps. However, one learns on watching this glorious, life-affirming documentary, their spirit was never broken.

They poured their suffering — as well as the pleasure they found in love and family — into their music, which has influenced non-Roma all over the world. Spanish flamenco, to give just one example, was created in part by the Gypsies.

"Gypsy Caravan" follows five musical groups from four countries as they make a six-week, often sold-out tour of North America: traditional Indian folk troupe Maharaja, Romanian brass band Fanfare Ciocarlia, Romanian string group Taraf de Haidouks, the Antonio El Pipa Flamenco Ensemble and Macedonian diva Esmá Redžepova.

Although they share a common origin, migration means there is no homogenous Gypsy culture. The 35 persons on the road speak nine languages. Part of the pleasure here is watching them learn from each other as they show non-Roma that none of the stereotypes holds.

A member of Fanfare recalls the group's first tour, to the country whose Nazi regime killed thousands of Roma. "We didn't know if they'd welcome us in Germany, if they believed rumors about Gypsies, that we kill and steal," he says. "It made no difference. They clapped and cheered normally."

This engrossing film, which also visits each group in its homeland and was partly shot by documentary legend Albert Maysles ("Gimme Shelter"), is filled with fascinating characters. With the sales from their first album, Taraf brought electricity to their small Romanian village. Violinist Nicolae Neacsu is an old man, but he's a firecracker, joking that he'll build a swimming pool like Johnny Depp's.

The actor once shared a trailer with the band on a film, and he speaks here about how even supposedly tolerant Americans believe the clichés about the Gypsies. "These beautiful men have to carry that on their backs every single day," he says.

One would never wish persecution on anyone. But we should be thankful that the Roma took their bitter experience and turned it into art. As Antonio says, "Flamenco is the Gypsies' way of expressing their cry to the world."

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TITLE: "Gypsy Caravan"

RATING: Not rated (suitable for all audiences)

CREDITS: Directed, produced and written by Jasmine Dellal. Cinematography by Alain de Halleux and Albert Maysles.

RUNNING TIME: 110 minutes

WEB SITE: [www.gypsyncaravanmovie.com](http://www.gypsyncaravanmovie.com)

MAXIMUM RATING: FOUR STARS

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