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Gypsy Caravan

The North American Tour

'You cannot walk straight when the road bends.'
Romani proverb

Roads always bend for gypsies, those peripatetic tradesmen and artists who left India about 1,000 years ago and settled in far-flung corners of the world.

The gypsy life has inspired suspicion and fear in a way that anything "other" does, to the extent that Hitler put them on his extermination list.

Wherever they have settled, gypsies have been known for raucous, gut-wrenching and life affirming music and dance. Flamenco dancer Antonio el Pipa probably speaks for all when he says, "What defines me most as an artist is being a gypsy."

In 2005, the World Music Institute set up a gypsy caravan tour. Five bands from four countries speaking nine languages -- 35 people in all -- toured North America giving concerts. "Gypsy Caravan" is director Jasmine Dellal's cinematic record of that trip, interspersed with footage of and interviews with the artists at home.

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The groups highlighted are: Macedonian diva and "Queen of the Gypsies" Esma Redzepova; traditional Indian folk troupe Maharaja; Romanian brass band Fanfare Ciocarlia; Romanian superstars of the violin Taraf de Haïdouks; and Spain's Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble from Andalucia.

It's a chaotic piece of filmmaking, jumping back and forth from performance to at-home interviews to sometimes comical footage of these disparate groups meeting and making friends with each other. The organizer even wonders how they can do a finale. Purists may say "Gypsy Caravan" lacks focus and organization; I see it as reflective of the history and perhaps the psyche of a people disdained and feared by many.

"Gypsy Caravan" is a captivating look at a fascinating people. Even Johnny Depp, a friend of the Taraf group, shows up.

Plays July 20-26, 2007 at the Ken Cinema. In English, Spanish, Romany, Romanian, Macedonian and Hindi. Not rated.

For screening times and other info: www.landmarktheatres.com

— *Jean Lowerison*

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