ArtSmarts

2003-2004 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

Gypsy Spirit: *Journey of the Roma*

February 20, 2004 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the school matinee presentation of Gypsy Spirit: *Journey of the Roma*. This guide provides information on the company, a historical and cultural background of the Roma, and a review of audience etiquette.

Mondavi Center gratefully acknowledges the institutional donors supporting the Arts Education Program during the 2003-2004 Season of Performing Arts:

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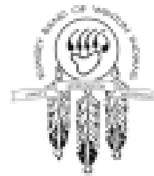

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With additional support provided by Teichert Foundation and UC Davis School/University Partnerships.

GYPSY SPIRIT: *JOURNEY OF THE ROMA*

The dramatic music of the Gypsy (or Roma) people has fascinated people for centuries. Celebrating this legendary music and dance tradition, Gypsy Spirit: *Journey of the Roma* features the acclaimed Budapest Dance Ensemble in an exploration of this vibrant culture's roots. The performers trace the Gypsy tradition from its origins in northern India, vividly showing how Roma culture contributed to Turkish music, Spanish Flamenco, csardases from Hungary and Transylvania, and the folk music of Romania. The Budapest Dance Ensemble is one of the oldest performing folk ensembles in Central Europe. In the 40 years of its existence the professional troupe has performed on almost every continent. The Ensemble presents Hungarian and other Central European folklore that retains the power of authentic traditions, while satisfying the expectations of contemporary audiences.

Zoltán Zsuráfszki, Artistic Director of the Budapest Dance Ensemble, is one of Europe's most accomplished choreographers. Zsuráfszki's extensive field research in remote villages of the Carpathian Basin (Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian, and Gypsy) makes him unique among currently active artistic directors of professional folk ensembles. He is a graduate of the Hungarian State Ballet Institute (1975) and

the Budapest Teacher's College (1985). He first performed with, then served as director and choreographer for, the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble. In 1984, he was founding director, choreographer, and soloist for the famous Kodaly Ensemble, which became one of the most important professional folk ensembles in Central Europe until its dissolution in 1991 due to lack of funding. Under Zsuráfszki, the Ensemble toured North America with significant critical acclaim. In 1991 he was elected artistic director of the Budapest Dance Ensemble and he has succeeded in revitalizing one of the most prestigious professional folk ensembles in Hungary. The members of the Budapest Dance Ensemble are selected from the best young folk dancers throughout Central Europe. Zsuráfszki specially trains them until they are ready to tour with the group. All members of the Ensemble are dedicated to the same ideal of preservation and performance of authentic folkdance at the highest level.

Musical director and master of the cimbalom (a type of hammer dulcimer), Kálmán Balogh traces his descent from a famous dynasty of Hungarian Gypsy musicians. His virtuosity is matched only by his understanding of and respect for his heritage. A graduate of the prestigious Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Balogh spent decades studying the music of the Roma in Europe and Asia. His knowledge and respect for the music of his people is unsurpassed. He has performed and toured extensively with many of the best folk bands and has recorded dozens of albums with them and as a solo artist. He was a featured performer in numerous major European festivals and venues featuring Gypsy music. Balough has also toured many times in North America, most recently with the *CSÁRDÁS: Tango of the East* tour with the Budapest Dance Ensemble. In addition, he has performed with the Ökrös and Méta Bands and with his own Cimbalom Jazz-Band. Balogh has also been a star on the classical concert stage. In North America, for example, he has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, New World Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Austin Symphony and the Bend, Oregon Festival Orchestra. In addition, he also played at many North American festivals, clubs and world music venues.

For more information, visit the official Gypsy Spirit website: http://www.gypsyspirit.org/about.php

THE CIMBALOM

The *cimbalom* is an elaborate stringed instrument of the dulcimer family used in small music ensembles by the Gypsy people. The instrument has a trapezoidal body that stands on four legs. It has a chromatic range of four octaves and, unlike other dulcimers, a pedal mechanism for damping the strings. The cimbalom has about 125 metal strings, with 3 to 5 strings per note. Some of the strings have two or three bridges along their length. The musician, who plays in a seated position, strikes the strings with two small, spoon-shaped wooden hammers, one held in each hand. The hammers are covered with either hard or soft leather, depending on the tone quality desired. Related to the Middle Eastern *santur* and the German *Hackbrett*, the cimbalom was played in Hungary by the 16th century. Portable folk cimbalom of older origins are played in the rural areas of Hungary, with closely related forms found in Romania, Greece, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The portable version of the cimbalom is strapped across the player's shoulders, and the performer stands while playing. The modern cimbalom was invented in Budapest about 1870 by Jozsef Schunda. Some 20 years later it was proclaimed the national instrument of Hungary, and by 1897 courses in cimbalom instruction were offered at the Budapest Academy of Music. Franz Liszt introduced the cimbalom as an orchestral instrument in his *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* (1876), and it was later used by Igor Stravinsky in *Le Renard* (1916) and *Ragtime* (1918) and by Zoltán Kodály in *Háry János* (1926).

"Cimbalom." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=84831.

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The History of the Roma

The Roma people originated in Hindustan, a region of northwest India. Although they lived a nomadic lifestyle within Hindustan, for centuries the Roma never moved beyond that area. Around AD 1000 they ventured westward, traveling in caravans across Persia (now Iran) and Armenia and into the Byzantine Empire.

Toward the end of the 13th century, the Roma began another mass migration to the west. By the 14th century, they were established in much of Central Europe, particularly the Balkans and Hungary. Here some settled into communities, while others continued their nomadic lifestyle, traveling in caravans of colorful horse-drawn wagons. The Roma, both settled and nomadic, were skilled artisans who excelled at a number of trades. Many were tinkers—a type of repairman for household items such as pots and other utensils and tools. Others were expert wood-carvers. Many Roma had exceptional musical gifts and practiced these as traveling musicians, or minstrels. Some of the women practiced fortune-telling; however, this was no more prevalent among the Roma than among non-Roma, many of whom also dabbled in mysticism.

By about 1500, the Roma had reached Western Europe and the British Isles. There they added horse trading, horseshoeing, and the care of sick animals to their trades. Their nomadic lifestyle and tendency not to intermingle with those outside their group fostered suspicion and established an undeserved reputation for trickery, leading to the widespread but erroneous belief that the primary occupation of the Roma was petty thievery. Despite this, their skills at metalworking and animal care were much sought after by outsiders, who were also enchanted by the Roma's beautiful violin music and their mysteriously accurate predictions with the tarot fortune-telling cards. These unusual trades—along with the Roma's reluctance to assimilate into general society—produced more stereotypes and an increasing general distrust by non-Roma. This perpetuated the persecution suffered by the Roma over the centuries.

Slavery

Although the Roma entered Europe as a free people, before long they became associated with the feudal system that dominated European society and economics. Initially, the Roma were employed as independent workers; soon, however, they became so closely associated with various estates that it was not long before a combination of factors—including prejudice as well as perhaps economic and military reasons—led to their enslavement. This practice began during the 14th century and continued until the mid-19th century. As is the case in most instances of slavery, Roma slaves were prevented from practicing their own customs and from speaking their own language.

Scholars attribute the emancipation of Roma slaves to a combination of factors, ranging from the economic to the humane. The increasing mechanization of labor due to the Industrial Revolution made it less expensive to use machines to replace human workers. During this period, the abolitionist movement in the United States, as well as the increasingly enlightened stance toward humankind that was occurring in France, inspired an outcry in Central Europe that denounced slavery as a barbaric and outdated institution. While larger landowners supported the calls for reform—because they could afford to replace human labor with machines—smaller farmers and planters who could not afford the new industrial machinery remained firm in their opposition to emancipation. In 1837, the governor of Romania signed a decree freeing the Roma in his jurisdiction and granting them the freedom to speak their own language and practice their customs. One by one, the governments of other European nations followed suit. In some cases, however, these freedoms were relatively brief, as governments and regimes toppled during the turbulent years of the mid-19th century. In 1864, a decree issued by Prince Ioan Couza—the new ruler of the united Balkan states—granted complete freedom to the Roma living in those countries.

Central Europe was not unique in its practice of enslaving the Roma. In 16th-century England, a royal decree demanded the branding of Roma slaves as a means of identifying them lest they attempt escape. In Spain, the Roma not only were forced into servitude within that country, but many were shipped abroad for service in the Americas. Portugal also shipped Roma slaves to its colonies, as did France and England. Roma also were forced into slavery in Russia, as well as in Scotland. During the course of the 19th century, these countries too granted legal freedom to the Roma.

Persecution and Near-Annihilation

Released from slavery, many Roma chose to immigrate to North America, thus beginning the third mass migration in their history. For those who remained in Europe, the legal freedom they were granted in no way stopped the persecution, some of which was protected by law. In most countries, Roma were allowed to stay after emancipation, but anti-nomadic laws forbade them from resuming their migratory traditions. In the countries of Scandinavia the Roma were completely banned, as they had been since the mid-16th century, though in the 19th century Norway permitted Roma immigration as long as the immigrants lived in settled communities. Thus despite the enlightened rhetoric surrounding their emancipation, Roma in most European countries found that as a group they were still scapegoated, accused of crimes and so-called evil behaviors, and prevented from pursuing their cultural traditions.

The widespread dislike and suspicion of the Roma set the stage for their near-annihilation after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Although the Roma were legally free, most countries of Europe had had anti-Gypsy laws in place for several centuries. Thus it was not difficult for Hitler to implement a series of racist policies against the Roma, policies similar to those instituted against the Jewish population of Europe. Hitler viewed the Roma, like the Jews, as an inferior and subhuman race that needed to be prevented from "polluting" German so-called racial purity. Thus, like the Jews, the Roma were subjected to discriminatory laws depriving them of citizenship and other civil rights. Like some Jews and other groups targeted by the Nazis, some Roma were sterilized as punishment for certain perceived crimes. In 1937, the first Roma were sent to concentration camps in Germany, where they were used as slave labor. Many were tortured and executed by the prison guards.

Of all the groups persecuted by the Nazis during the Holocaust, only the Jews and the Roma were targeted for complete annihilation by the Third Reich. By 1940, the Nazi regime had implemented the use of gas in the concentration camps as the method for mass extermination. By 1942 more camps had been built across Eastern Europe, and deportations of Roma were increased. In the death camps, many Roma were subjected to horrific medical experiments and other forms of torture as well as beatings and hard labor. Many died under these conditions, but the majority who perished were gassed

to death. Pre-World War II Roma population estimates are difficult to determine because of the Roma's nomadic tradition as well as their general exclusion from official censuses. However, some scholars estimate that prior to the rise of the Third Reich, there were more than 900,000 Roma living in Europe. It is believed that between 200,000 and 500,000 of these people perished at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators; however, many experts believe the true number is considerably higher. In Romany, the Holocaust is called *O Porrajmos*—The Devouring.

The Roma Today

By the dawn of the 21st century, there were an estimated 7–10 million Roma living across Europe. Although they remain grossly underrepresented in most governments, there is a distinct, albeit small, Roma presence in some parliaments. Despite this, the Roma also continue to face blatant discrimination in many countries of the world. A disturbing trend toward anti-Roma violence began during the late 20th century, perpetrated by blatantly racist movements, such as skinhead and neo-Nazi groups.

Because they continue to live in tightly knit communities in Europe, most Roma are easily identified as such. While some groups still travel in caravans, the horse-drawn wagons of earlier times have been replaced by cars, small trucks, and trailers. In the United States—where the Roma population is estimated at roughly 1 million—many Roma have disguised their origins and heritage to some extent by settling into communities, in some cases passing for other minority groups in an attempt to hide their own heritage.

Many organizations arose during the second half of the 20th century that worked toward fostering a strong sense of ethnic pride and an end to persecution of the Roma. At the 1971 convention of the World Romani Congress in London, the delegates adopted a flag to represent all Roma people. The top half of the flag is blue and the lower half green; these colors symbolize the sky and grass, respectively. In the center of the flag is a red emblem that resembles a 16-spoked wheel. This is called a *chakra*, which represents the Roma's Indian origins and is similar to the *chakra* found on the Indian national flag.

A number of well-known artists and entertainers have claimed Roma heritage, including actors

Yul Brynner, Bob Hoskins, and Charlie Chaplin; musicians Carlos Montoya and Django Reinhardt; and painter Pablo Picasso. Mother Teresa also was of Roma descent!

Although they have been known by many names, including Gypsies, most Roma generally refer to themselves as Rom or Roma, from the word *rom*, which means “man” or “people” in the Romany language. In Germany, the Roma are called Sinti, while in other countries, Roma may be termed Romanichal, Gitanos, Kalé, or Manush. This sometimes relates to the particular clan to which the community belongs. The word Gypsy arose from an early misconception regarding the Roma's origins. During their migration into Europe, it was thought that they had emigrated from Egypt because they were arriving from the East and had dark skin. Thus they were referred to as Egyptians, which gradually was modified to 'Gyptians, and then Gypsies. Over the centuries, the word gypsy, whether capitalized or not, has gained a derogatory connotation, based on gross misconceptions over Roma traditions and culture, and alludes to people who are itinerant and indulge in criminal activity. While some Roma still use the term Gypsy in a colloquial sense, the use of Rom, Roma, Romany (also spelled Romani), or Rroma are preferred, especially in official communications. In 1995, the Council of Europe approved the use of Roma in official documents.

Romany Language

There are many dialects of Romany, but all are based on Punjabi, an Indo-European language of northern India. Wherever they have lived, the Roma have absorbed many of the local words into Romany. The English language has borrowed from Romany as well—the word pal, used in English to denote a friend, comes from the Romany *phal*, meaning brother or comrade. Roma call all outsiders, or non-Roma, by the name *gadje*, which, loosely translated, means bumpkin.

Laws and Religion

Like other ethnic and cultural groups, the Roma tend to form communities and extended groups. These may take different forms and comprise different groupings of individuals and families. The most fundamental unit is the *familiya*, or extended family. These families and their extended relations form the next largest unit, the *vitsa*, or clan. Other types of alliances are formed based on shared geographic boundaries. At the highest level is the *natsia*, or nation. This is an amalgam of many clans, all of whom share some common ancestor. Roma laws are explicit, often strict, and serve as a code of conduct and justice for the entire Roma people. There is a leader at each level of organization—the father or patriarch of the *familiya*, a chief or other elder heading the *vitsa*, and yet another heading the *natsia*. Minor disputes and problems are settled, depending on the offense, by the head of the *familiya* or the chief of the *vitsa*. For serious crimes, a court called a *kris* is convened.

Although the Roma do not have a formal religion of their own, many have adopted the dominant religions of the countries in which they have settled. Thus today, one finds Roma who follow Roman Catholicism, Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. They participate in some religious festivals. Among the best known of these is the annual pilgrimage each May to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a small fishing village on the Mediterranean coast in the south of France. Many Roma also practice certain folk and religious rituals in their homes.

Family Structure and Roma Traditions

Roma society is traditionally patrilineal, which means that ancestry is traced through the father; thus children of mixed marriages—that is, marriage between a Roma man and a non-Roma woman—are considered Roma because their father is a Rom. Although marriage between Roma men and non-Roma women is not encouraged, the reverse situation—marriage between a Roma woman and a non-Roma man—is considered an extreme violation of the Roma code of conduct, though it is not expressly forbidden.

Traditionally, marriages were arranged by the elders of the family band, as a way of strengthening bonds of kinship. By the late 20th century, however, this practice had declined significantly, though young people were still expected to marry within their clan. Another tradition was

the payment of the *darro*, or bride-price—a sort of reverse dowry—to the parents of the bride by the parents of the groom. This was intended as compensation to the bride's family for the “loss” of a daughter. Some modern Roma bands still continue this practice today. After the fathers of the prospective bride and groom agree on the *darro*, a glass of wine is drunk as a symbolic gesture of agreement. Several days later, the parents will host a *pliashka* (also spelled *plotchka*), a feast to celebrate the young couple's engagement.

The typical Roma family consists of a married couple, their unmarried children, and at least one married son, his wife, and their children. After the wedding, a newly married couple will generally live with the husband's parents and family for a period of time, during which the young wife becomes adapted to the ways of her husband's family. By the time the married son is ready to move away with his family, a younger son will have married and joined the household with his new wife.

"Rom." Britannica Student Encyclopedia. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. http://search.eb.com/ebi/article?eu=296622.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

1) How would you describe the Gypsy Spirit: *Journey of the Roma* performance to a Friend?

2) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

3) What emotions did you have while you watched the performance?

4) Did you learn anything new about the Roma people at the matinee?

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ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately *(note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.