

fRoots 11/2004
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Hard As Brass

Romania's Fanfare Ciocarlia have conquered everywhere but Britain with their wild Balkan brass band sound. Garth Cartwright is on a mission to convert you....

Northern Romania. December. The torrential rains and first snows are only weeks - perhaps days - away and an icy chill bites through jacket, trousers, thermals, boots. Not really the right time to take a holiday here. But as I travel across Romania, driving for hours across flat alluvial plains, heading through villages seemingly emptied of inhabitants, attention focused on the frozen tundra that spreads as far as the eye can see, I consider this journey to be something of a mission. A mission that will take me to a reputedly 'invisible' village where Fanfare Ciocarlia, the world's foremost Gypsy brass band, arose from.

A village the band arose from and return to -yet not that often. Fanfare have released three fine albums but their reputation and earnings largely come from a live performance that verges on astonishing. Thus the ensemble spend a good part of the year touring, which is why I'm braving Romania's winter to meet them, the tour circuit winding down pre-Xmas. Driving the van is Henry Ernst, manager and discoverer of Fanfare. I first encountered Henry when out in Bulgaria in April 2003 to interview Jony Iliev for fRoots. We got on so well I that we agreed to meet up in Romania later in the year for an encounter with the Fanfare. Obviously, Henry didn't mention back then exactly how late in the year it would be Henry grew up in East Germany and first ventured into Romania as a teenager, helping his fanatically religious brother smuggle Bibles into Ceausescu's avowedly atheist state. Although Christianity never got its hooks into Henry, Romania certainly did and he's been returning ever since. Initially a fan of free jazz, he studied sound engineering and worked mixing live sound with all manner of musicians as they passed across the newly reunited Germany. But, he notes, he never did mix sound for Gypsies or brass orchestras. Henry liked to keep moving, regularly returning to Romania, a cheap place to travel, never dull. Anyway, as fate would have it, he managed to stumble into a village full of unemployed Gypsy brass musicians.

"In 1996 a farmer told me of a village of brass musicians. This was new to me, that's why I went there, driving an old Ford, stopping and asking directions, until I crossed a railway line and pulled into the first house of the village to see where I was. It was Ioan Ivancea's house and he, it turned out, was one of the master brass musicians of Zece Prajini. I told him I was curious to hear brass music and in a couple of minutes the complete village was outside. That's 400 people and 80 musicians. It was so amazing I ended up staying not one day but three months and assembling a brass band. Fanfare is a French word that's passed into Romanian and is used to describe a brass band. Ciocarlia, that's the Romanian for a lark's song. I returned to Germany and sold everything I had to make one tour."

"When I went back to the village to gather the musicians and get their visas, the band realised I wasn't joking. It was 1996 and I managed to book 10 concerts in 40 days. As you can tell I was not very professional! It was a huge success but a financial catastrophe - thousands of marks lost! We paid the promoters and the band but nothing was left but debts for me. Still, it was the best 40 days of my life. Two months later a radio station called me up and asked for the band. I told them it was not possible. They insisted they wanted to book the band for their world music festival. I made some calculations for visas, flights, hotels and fees and rang them back with what it would cost. Within two minutes they had agreed. This was the signal to make the band professional and I founded Asphalt Tango with my friend Helmut Neumann that day."

Even by world music standards the success of Fanfare Ciocarlia comes out of leftfield: the members of Fanfare were peasant farmers and factory workers, men who played at weddings and baptisms for extra lei, yet were not lautari (the caste designating professional Gypsy musicians in Romania). Rooted in the soil of their native Moldavia,

none of Fanfare had passports, few having travelled even as far as Bucharest, Romania's capital. And while Taraf de Haidouks-the fabulous lautari string and accordeon band from Clejani, the village west of Bucharest have been fixtures on the world music circuit since 1990, the music Fanfare makes is so much more extreme, so relentless in its tempo and ferocious in delivery, few could have guessed that they would appeal to a broad public. As ever, timing is everything: 1996 found Germany's rave scene reaching its apotheosis while Emir Kusturica's film *Underground* had recently enjoyed massive critical and art house success, so turning many onto the Balkan brass groove. *Underground*'s soundtrack largely featured Boban Markovic Orkestar, but Milosevic's Serbia was in such chaos it halted Boban's ability to capitalise on the film's success. This meant Macedonia's Kocani Orkestar found a welcoming audience in the Benelux nations-they being then managed by the Taraf's Belgian management while Fanfare Ciocarlia had Germany and Austria, nations known for their love of a good oompah brass blowout, to conquer.

For the first year, Henry and Helmut worked the band solely as a live unit, selling cassettes of previous concerts at gigs. Realising that numbers kept rising every time Fanfare returned to play a venue, they negotiated a distribution deal with Berlin's Piranha Records. 1997 saw the release of the band's debut, *Radio Pascani*, a full throttle dose of Balkan brass madness that shook speakers and rattled skulls. As Motorhead were to heavy rock, Fanfare Ciocarlia would be to Balkan music: harder, faster, tighter, tougher and, within limitations, constantly inventive. This, combined with regular touring, meant Fanfare found, at least in northern Europe, a fan base stretching way beyond the world music crowd. "Punks, ravers, headbangers, businessmen in suits... we seem to get a real crossover audience," notes Henry, "and I'm not sure why, other than Fanfare are exceptionally good and they play so intensely they offer some form of catharsis. I mean, I notice these very conservatively dressed people coming to the concerts and watch them just go crazy. It's something about Fanfare, their sound, the way they play... it's like an explosion of emotional freedom." Perhaps it's the emotional freedom angle that explains why the UK remains the only Western nation not to embrace Fanfare. I mean, metal and rave both arose from here, so it's not like we can't handle the noise. Fanfare played on the main Womad stage on a wet Saturday afternoon several years back. They've also appeared twice at the Barbican (at the 1000 Year Journey and X-Bloc Reunion festivals) on the free stage. For the former festival they were teamed up with Transglobal Underground's DJs, recreating the frantic rave conditions that have made them such a draw with Continental youth. Yet a 2003 UK tour proved just how difficult it is for even top-tier world music acts who fall outside the Cuban/ West African genre to be a success in Britain. I attended their London concert at Blackheath Concert Halls. My notes follow:

Tour tuba players take the stage and kick off a pumping rhythm. Two trumpet players enter blowing a curling, Ottoman flavoured melody. One clarinet, the bass drummer and a saxophone all join in. Percussionist enters beating a Brazilian batucada rhythm-the lambada craze of 1990 had a huge impact across the Balkans. Fanfare accelerate fast- musical rocket fuel... Most numbers instrumental, but various members take turns to shout/ sing. You can hear several strains of music history melting together here: German oompah choruses, traces of the weeping clarinet so evident in Jewish klezmer, a saxophonist draws out a droning solo, Arabic in flavour. Band leader and clarinettist Ioan Ivancea sings an ominous ballad, his huge farmer's hands tearing the air as he describes lost love, betrayal, skulls crushed like eggshells... The audience, made up almost entirely of the Blackheath elite, shiver in their seats at this frayed folklore..."

"The tune over, Ioan departs and Blackheath, named after the plague burial pits that once existed here, lets out a collective sigh of relief, death's dark presence having departed the room. An audience used to warding off untoward forces with their huge houses, chub locks, investment accounts and upper middle-class security appear a little nervous... The drums reappear and the tempo moves up, Radu continues to lead, two more trumpets take the stage and a saxophonist. It's hard, fast dance tunes (between 130 and 200 beats per minute) and the hall should be pulsing with bodies. But it's not. I can feel Fanfare fighting ennui, unable to kick out the jams without an audience to carry along. Ioan returns blowing clarinet... he pulls up the slack and FC begins to weave incredible passages together, building

choruses and slipping notes around one another. There's a Keystone Kops absurdity to their antics, big fun. Even a venue as icy with English reserve as Blackheath's Concert Hall can't help but thaw after an hour of their good-humoured attack..."

They're still hoping to tour the UK again in the future; Henry's certain Fanfare can win British hearts and minds. "We go to Russia, Japan, Australia, the USA, all over Europe, even Croatia and the Czech Republic, and get great audiences. I simply can't believe British audiences can remain immune to such amazing music from such an incredible band. Obviously, we could completely ignore the UK and concentrate on our stronger markets-and I have considered this-but I like a challenge."

CD 2, Baro Biao (Worldwide Wedding), was released in 1999 and for the first 12 of its 18 tracks appears to be running on the same high octane spirits as Radio Pascani, manic party music that bleeds pop hits and TV themes into a molten Balkan brass mix. Then track 13, Lume, Lume Si Hora, kicks in and the album takes on a different mood, becomes a more challenging document. The feel of this song is slower yet jaunty, almost like riding waves in its up-and-down rhythms, both celebratory and ominous, an Andalucian-flavoured trumpet tone coming through at one point. And across the next five songs Fanfare digs out some deep Balkan blues, music of subtlety and winningly eccentric character, sometimes fast but also slow, so ending with the title tune Baro Biao, recorded live at a Moldavian wedding, splendid and wilful.

Onwards we drive, into the Romanian twilight, with Henry explaining to me that weddings and baptisms were the way Fanfare traditionally earned a living. Their village of Zece Prajini was recognised by both Roma and Romanian as the best place in Moldavia to find good musicians. It seems that for as long as people can remember, almost every male resident played an instrument. Back then they were not the fixed 12-member ensemble now touring: the father of the bride, when organising the wedding, would approach one of the village's key musicians and announce the sum he had to pay the musicians. They would negotiate on how many musicians that would buy and once a deal was struck the aforementioned musician would collect the required horn men. A poor family might only be able to afford a small ensemble, while a wealthy family may employ more than a dozen musicians.

Fanfare's musical majesty is definitely shaped by weddings - Romanian weddings last a day and night (with continuous music), while Gypsy weddings may go on for up to seven days. Playing weddings means knowing not just traditional numbers and standards but current hits, TV and movie themes... pretty much anything the guests may request. Not knowing a requested tune at a Romanian wedding has resulted in beatings handed out to musicians. Still, the hard work of weddings only partly explains the magic of Fanfare: how did this tiny village come to be a laboratory for future Balkan funk when Romania is generally noted for fiddle, cimbalom and accordeon?

"I'm unsure of how this exactly came about," says Henry, "but the whole north of Romania once had a strong, centuries-old German community-they built many of the medieval cities in Transylvania-and by the 1920s this community were dancing to waltzes and polkas. They started employing brass musicians and the local Roma, who were probably then playing violins and cimbaloms, noted that brass was where the work was at and changed over. Also, for musicians coming from Zece Prajini where everyone farms, brass instruments are easier to play because farming hardens your fingers. Violinists don't want hard fingers, but a tuba player, he doesn't complain!"

Considering much Balkan brass has roots in the Ottoman Army's brass ensembles, I wondered if there was a connection. "The Ottomans did control some of Romania but never as far north as Moldavia. Maybe at some point the musicians in Zece Prajini heard some of the orchestras that came out of the Ottoman ensembles. Also, it's worth remembering that Gypsies have a strong historic connection with Turkey and that region, so it could already be there in the way they play."

Darkness falls as we enter the small city of Roman. Romania's fascist rulers murdered approximately 400,000 Romanian Jews across WW2, Moldavia being a focal point for anti-Semitic energies. The Roma were also massacred, 70,000 being deported to death camps in Transnistria, the chunk of Ukraine Hitler gifted Marshal Antonescu. Yet fascism still bubbles in Moldavia: in October 2001 Ion Rotaru, Mayor of Piatra Neamt, the city immediately west of

Roman, announced he was going to force the city's Roma populace to relocate to a converted chicken farm six kilometres outside town where, "The black plague will be surrounded with barbed wire and watched by guards with dogs". International reaction forced the Romanian government, busy applying for EU membership, to halt Rotaru's construction of what can only be called a concentration camp.

Today in Roman there remains a synagogue. It is maintained by the city's one surviving Jewish citizen, an elderly man who still performs the cleansing and prayer rituals which ensure the synagogue remains a living spiritual temple. The synagogue may live but fascism effectively exterminated one of Europe's richest Jewish cultures. Interested parties, largely from outside Romania, come searching for traces of the klezmer whose music once resonated across the region. And to whom do they turn to find these traces? Gypsy musicians.

Not that we're in this nondescript city to check its Holocaust history; instead Fanfare's Costica "Cimai" Trifan lives here, his Fanfare earnings having allowed him to escape Zece Prajini.

Cimai's spacious apartment is furnished with large leather sofas and paintings of Jesus. The latter contrasts with Cimai's stage persona: goatee, blazing black eyes, incendiary trumpet solos, all suggesting a musical Mephistopheles. If Cimai's a tiger on stage, he's a pussycat at home, pouring drinks, serving salami and reflecting in halting English on Fanfare's leap from village poverty to urban comfort. "When we started touring Germany then Europe we were very, very surprised; surprised at the audience reaction and surprised at the life people live. We are not used to being more than a few kilometres from our village. None of us had passports before Henry arrived. Life was difficult because the factories had closed and people did not have the money to put on weddings. But now we have seen the great cities and our village philosophies have changed."

Cimai is unaware of klezmer influences in Fanfare's sound, suggesting, "Local Romanian and Gypsy music are what I know. We steal a lot of musical styles-all Balkan countries, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia -and we are able to transform radio hits." As for the Holocaust, Cimai simply shrugs. He's aware Moldavia's Jews and Roma suffered, but no one directly from his family. And why talk about it? It's no good. Everyday racism? He's unaffected but adds, "There are lots of different Gypsies in Romania so I can't speak for all of them". As for the Piatra Neamt debacle, Cimai is unaware, which is understandable: these musicians glean their information from TV news, a medium unlikely to show foreign criticisms of local lunatics. And, maybe Fanfare, like so many Roma elsewhere, have developed psychic defences, blocking out the loathing that Tziganes draw from Romanians.

Tomorrow morning we will head to Zece Prajini, the invisible village of legend, a place so small and backward it's not found on any map. A local musician, when asked once how to find it, cryptically suggested, "He who searches for it probably sails right past, unless he senses when to jump..." I like this concept, dropping off the radar screen, but can't quite get my head around the jumping. "Henry, what's this about jumping when sensing Zece Prajini?" "Well, Zece Prajini's built along a train line but the train doesn't stop there. And there's no sign marking it, so for those who didn't have a car or motorbike, which is most of the residents, you had to wait until the train slowed to take a curve and then jump off. Or on, if you were intending to catch the train."

Today, a good chunk of Moldavia is incorporated into the Ukraine, while a large amoeba-shaped blob of territory is now The Republic Of Moldova, Europe's poorest nation and one whose misery is compounded by an ethnic divide between Russian speakers (placed there by the Soviets after WW2) and native Romanian speakers who dream of reunion with mama Romania. Noted largely for Orthodox monasteries ablaze with frescoes, Moldavia is isolated even by Romanian standards. And, rising early the next morning, I soon realise the territory we're heading into is the land that time forgot.

Driving out of Roman we leave the highway for a dirt road, passing through a landscape where little has changed across the last thousand years. On the van's CD player we have lag Bari (Piranha), Fanfare's 2001 album and easily their finest yet. On lag Bari they're joined by noted Bucharest Gypsy singer Dan Armeanca and Bulgarian voices Angelite. Fanfare temper their sound here; sure they still like to play fast but there's more mood, more texture, a loose,

almost New Orleans brass flavour to tunes. Iag Bari is a masterpiece of 21st-century European music. As Fanfare's horns brood and swell through the van, the morning mist begins to dissolve and as we descend into the valley I get my first sighting of Zece Prajini. Well, alright, this is a suitably funky town for the funkiest musicians in Romania: squat houses made of mud, brick, concrete and tarpaper, many painted luminous colours, wells out front and a menagerie to the side of the house. I note more cows, goats, chickens and turkeys on the main road than humans. Country living? Deep country. We swing into Ioan Ivancea's house. Ioan is bleary, not long awake. Marie, his wife of almost 50 years, offers a glorious gold tooth smile, while continuing to husk maize. Breakfast follows: cold meat, hot soup, bread, coffee; vodka.

"Where would we be without Henry?" says Marie as we settle in. "Without him this village would be dead." When Henry arrived in 1996 the village's brass bands had largely fallen into disarray: the economic collapse following the end of communism had cancelled extravagant weddings. Back then few of the children showed any interest in learning an instrument. Now the hills around Zece Prajini are alive with the sound of music. I ask Ioan why Zece Prajini has produced such a powerful and individual music. He thinks about it and suggests the Hungarians in the region liked spicy food and thus spicy music. Good theory, but it fails to explain why the Romanian diet is so awful, yet their music so tasty.

At 64, Ioan is Fanfare's patriarch, leader and sage. He broods on questions, aware Zece Prajini's oral history rests in him and his band. "We are of the Ursari tribe, the bear tamers tribe," says Ioan, "but it is a very long time since anyone here tamed bears. Zece Prajini's name? Our ancestors were serfs for the local Boyar (landowner) from Dagita (a neighbouring village) and were living on the steep slopes of the surrounding mountains. This was such a harsh existence, people struggled to carry water and firewood to the camp, so one day the tribe elder approached the Boyar and asked for a space in the valley. The Boyar was a good man and gifted them ten fields in the valley to live. Zece Prajini's name translates as Ten Fields. Since then, all the families have farmed and played music. And always will." Ioan then adds, "Unless the young generation of Gypsies turn to shit. I grew up with the music of Romica [Puceanua], Gaby [Lunca], Dona [Dimitru Siminica]. This music is the real music of the Gypsies here in Romania. We only had it on records and tapes as we could never invite them to our weddings. The new music, it's bullshit."

The new music Ioan is talking about is manele - a Romani expression for "good thing" - a cheaply produced form of electropop hugely popular amongst both Gypsies and Romanians. Its two biggest stars are Nicolae Guta - who keen-eared listeners may recall issued a modestly titled album, *The Greatest Living Gypsy Voice*, on French label Auvidis in 1997 - and Adrian 'Copilu' Minune, a small man with a big voice. Keen-eyed viewers may recall Minune having a brief cameo in Tony Gatlif's excellent 1996 film about a Romanian Gypsy community, *Gadjo Dilo*. Manele's popularity has largely rendered redundant Romania's traditional Gypsy music - Western audiences being what keep the likes of Fanfare and Taraf de Haidouks going.

And Transylvania's self-proclaimed 'Gypsy King' Florin Cioaba, what are your thoughts on him? Cioaba courts publicity, although generally of the more positive kind than what followed when he arranged the marriage of his 12-year-old daughter in October 2003. "He's a politician leading his party. We've never worked with him, we're different clans. As for the marriage of his daughter, our parliament was talking to him saying, 'You call yourself king, but you don't put your daughter in school to get an education. What kind of king are you?' It's a stupid tradition to marry a girl so young. Who can respect you if you do things like this?" The wedding attracted international attention and EU condemnation, so allowing Romanians to beat on the Roma even harder. Thing is, only a minority of Roma still practise child brides, the ancient tradition arising from an age when people married young because they also expected to die young. Those who continue to practise the marrying of pubescent girls see it as both ancient tradition linking them to India and, maybe, a two-fingered gesture towards Romanians and West Europeans. As Cioaba noted, the EU complain loudly about child brides, yet are content to let the majority of Roma live a marginal, impoverished existence. A recent BBC 2 documentary on Romania's Gypsy child brides did no one any favours: the Gypsies appeared primitive, the Romanians fascistic, the British (including the BBC)

imperious and too ready to occupy the high moral ground (How many Gypsies invaded Iraq or decimated Australia's Aboriginals or...?). Put simply: until Romania develops a civil society, one that engages the Gypsies as equals, some will hold to such customs as an act of defiance.

Henry suggests we visit Sulo, the tenor horn player. Sulo's house was Zece Prajini's first to have a bathroom and indoor toilet, something which had the whole village gawping and raised loan's ire: Who needs a sit-down indoor toilet when you've squatted outside all your life? Drawing up at Sulo's, Henry does a double take: currently under construction is a two-storey house with balcony. Sulo saunters out, a Gypsy Jean-Paul Belmondo. "What's this?" asks Henry. "The old house is too small for two growing kids," says Sulo nonchalantly. We retire inside for more coffee and vodka. The TV is on but silent. Panjabi MC blasts out of the stereo. Marinela, Sulo's wife, attempts to serve us more food while her husband reflects on his good fortune. "No other job in Romania provides this kind of money so it's absolutely possible to build as I do."

Ralf Marschalleck's feature-length 2001 documentary *Iag Bari (The Great Longing)* filmed Fanfare at home and on tour. It's a witty, engaging film with the Moldavian landscape creating a backdrop for many magical events. It also captures Sulo, while touring Japan (and, yes, there are Japanese Balkan brass bands), taking a call from his wife announcing she's given birth to a son. "Is he white or black?" he asks. "Weil of course I ask that," he says laughing when I mention it. "I was so happy to have a son and I want to know how much colour he has." For the record, his toddler is dark eyed and pale skinned.

We walk to Bar Soare, the musicians' local, which has Zece Prajini's only telephone. Beneath the chilly sun, cigarettes are smoked, vodka drunk, and gossip swapped as members drop by to catch up with Henry. "Every year there are discussions as to who's in the band," says Henry. "They all have a family member they want to bring in. A trip like this involves me sorting things out, smoothing things over." Matters rise to a head soon after our visit: later Henry informs me he had to fire two disruptive brothers and hire a Bucharest-based Gypsy trumpeter. Outside a small Orthodox church, Sulo proudly announces it's the first "Gypsy church in Romania". Fanfare pooled their funds to build it. Does Sulo, I wonder, worry that the local Romanians might hate him for his wealth? "No, as musicians we are treated with respect. But others, they are considered [he spits] Tzigane."

By 3 pm the Carpathian Mountains, just to our east, are making their fierce presence known with a chill that cuts through scarf, fleece, thermals, boots. We retire to the house of Monel, Fanfare's bass tuba player. He's a big man given to great displays of affection towards his children and guests. Monel serves coffee, fizzy wine, cold meats, bread and a fermented cheese that's a local delicacy but, to the soft bellies of Henry and I, inedible. "Sastipa!" he says, teaching me the Romani expression for 'cheers'. In Zece Prajini Romani is the first language, but at school all lessons are in Romanian. Henry tried to convince Fanfare to build a bilingual school instead of a church. No chance; he may be their manager but God calls the big shots.

Ethnomusicologist Charles Keil studied the Roma musicians of Iraklia, Greek Macedonia, noting in his fine book *Bright Balkan Morning* (see fR251) that their attitude to music was that of craftsmen, not self-conscious artists. I mention this to Monel. He thinks then answers, "I consider I'm an artist. When I worked in the factory I was a worker. Now, firstly, I like what I do-you can't say that in a factory- and it's a job that inspires us."

Monel is both inspired and seemingly indifferent to the cold, regularly leaving the door open as he pops out for wood and wine. Henry and I swap expressions for 'Do you live in a barn or what?' Finally a large ceramic stove is fired as mist descends across the valley. Zece Prajini's electricity fails and the village is thrust into darkness. We head to the house of Gisniac, the drummer, for dinner, passing on the way a tiny mud house of eccentric beauty. "The village's only violinist lives there," says Henry. "As you can see, he doesn't get much work. Instead, he makes and sells brooms."

Electricity returns after two hours and we hear a jam session kicking off in Bar Soare. Entering we find Fanfare's Daniel on saxophone, a keyboardist playing bass patterns and a drum kit so minimalist it's simply bass, snare, cymbal. They're cooking up an oriental jazz gumbo and the local youth -the unmarried -form circles and start to dance the hora.

Henry enquires after two teenagers he remembers were always playing their instruments along the railway line. Arrested for stealing three chickens from a neighbouring village, they were sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Such is justice and the Gypsies. Temperatures rise when the drummer gets on the mic and starts singing Adrian Minune's hits. He is loose and fluid, his Oriental pop verve sparking through the bar. The youth cheer and dance in couples. Water is thrown on the floor to soak up the dust.

We stagger back to Gisniac's house where his wife, praise be, has the ceramic stove blazing. Henry pops open his laptop and begins playing me remixes he's currently working on of Fanfare tunes. He notes that he's distrustful of most remix albums- Electric Gypsyland being an example of a less than satisfying attempt to turn Taraf de Haidouks and Kocani Orkestar into cafe muzak- but as he once worked alongside Adrian Sherwood and knows the Fanfare sound so well, Henry believes he can create something special. Fanfare dub is an interesting concept and these demos suggest Henry may be cooking up a Balkan monster mash. I promise to pass him some King Tubby CDs next time he's in London.

Henry enquires of fiddling and starts talking about a project scheduled to be released on Asphalt Tango in November 2004. This is a DVD package, Fanfare Ciocarlia: Gypsy Brass Legends. The DVD will include a live Berlin performance from the band, the lag Bari film, Ioan reciting Zece Prajini's history, footage from the US Gypsy Caravan tour and more, much more. Having viewed a rough cut I'll simply note that it sets a new standard for world music DVDs. Essential? Absolutely. In the distance a hound howls and the electricity flickers and dies again. Deep in the valley in Zece Prajini life feels very calm, very slow, as if time has stood still. The warmth of the room is almost womb-like. Silence reigns. That such a brilliantly noisy band could arise from such a quiet village... the mystery of the Gypsies and their musical secrets! Asphalt Tango is now distributed in the UK by Harmonia Mundi.