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WHAT ELSE IS NEW

WORLD

LEGENDARY GYPSY QUEENS AND KINGS

Festival Hall, SE1

★★★★★

SIMON BROUGHTON

IT WAS tough last night for the killjoy ushers at the Royal Festival Hall having to stop people dancing in the aisles.

After several strikes at the girls to my left, the official had either jumped into the Thames in despair or was hopefully just getting up and enjoying the music like everybody else. Sadly there's no room for photos here but you could have had rampant sax seducing belly-dancing hips, and the audience throwing themselves at the stage.

It started gently, with French Catalan group Kalooome and their languorous singer, percussionist and flamenco dancer Sabrina Romero. Then came Romania's Mahala Rai Banda, a 10-piece Balkan brass band plus violin, who hosted the evening.

The brightest stars were Bulgaria's Jonny Iliev, a flamboyant Rachid Taha-persona singing Ya Rayah, one of his songs; the extraordinary Bosnian vocalist Ljiljana Buttler, who sadly had to be taken to hospital after just two songs; and the great Macedonian diva, Esma Redzepova. An icon for the Roma people, Esma is one of the great voices of our time and in just a few of her signature songs she showed us why.

With almost everyone on their feet, it really was a gig to remember.