

New Zealand writer Garth Cartwright is a modern-day Don Quixote, his quest a search for the best of Balkan Gypsy music. He chronicles his odyssey in *Princes Amongst Men*, wandering through the wreckage of post-Communist Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria, tilting at windmills and uncovering musical jewels along the way.

In each instance, he meets with the Romani musicians behind the songs—just getting to the interviews down dirt roads and dead ends proving quixotic travails all their own. Cartwright describes the lives of the great Gypsy bands Fanfare Ciocarlia and Taraf de Haidouks, bringing new insight and understanding to their music. And he meets with stars like Esmá Redžepova, Saban Majramović, and Boban Marković, each with near-unbelievable life stories to tell.

Like a conjurer, Cartwright's prose brings the songs to life. He describes the tragic Gypsy ghettos, the engulfing poverty and racism, drugs and petty crimes. It all comes to a thunderous finale in the fiery festival Ederlezi, the Night of the Gypsies, with stoned Romani youths setting fire to old tires, the choking black smoke blending into the swirling music. And yet in the end, [this book is a grand celebration](#) of life and music.

*Princes Amongst Men* is now available in a new paperback edition. And there is a soundtrack to the book offered separately, featuring 18 tracks by the musicians featured. Here are deep blues, torch songs, heartbreaking ballads, and wild brass boogies that will alternately drive a stake into your heart or set your feet dancing. -MD