

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Princes Amongst Men Asphalt Tango CD-ATR 1608

It's taken a while, but here at last is the audio companion to Garth Cartwright's 2005 book of encounters with many of the leading musicians in the Roma cultures of Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Macedonia.

By no means all the artists interviewed or described in the book are here – they wouldn't all fit, of course. One notable exception is the Roma paradox that is Bulgarian kitsch-king/queen Azis, whose chapter in the book is likely to make one want to hear what he sounds like. (A trawl of the Net brings up samples, though, and that could be enough for some). But the CD's 18 Garth-chosen tracks, quite a few of them from Asphalt Tango's strong Roma and Eastern European centred catalogue, the others licensed from other labels, cover the book's ground pretty well. It's a well-sequenced display of gloriously vivid, brilliantly played music, and very likely to inspire and guide the seeking out of more.

From Serbia there's Boban Markovic's brass orchestra, Kal, Ekrem and the late Saban Bajramovic, from Romania Fulgerica, Fanfare Ciocarlia, Taraf De Haidouks, a previously unreleased track from Rom Bengale, phenomenal cimbalist Toni Iordache (who died at the age of just 45 in 1987) and Romica Puceanu (d 1996). The Macedonians are Dzansever, Ferus Mustafov, Sudahan, Kocani Orkestar and of course Esmá Redzepova, and from Bulgaria we get Sofi Marinova, Jony Iliev (recently to be seen in fine form with Ciocarlia's Gypsy Queens & Kings touring show, as indeed was Esmá), and his clarinet and sax-player big brother Boril.

Though it has the same title as the book and is described as its soundtrack, it's a stand-alone CD not tied in with the book's publishers, so one might expect information about the artists, but apart from track sources and a background essay by Cartwright there is none. But if one also buys the book, which is now available online for rather less than its £11.99 cover price, it acts as a 300-page CD booklet, though tracking down the artists would be easier if it were to have included an index. One would hope that deserved success for the CD might create enough demand that the book's publishers Serpent's Tail squeeze out a new edition with an index, and on better paper so the photos get the decent reproduction, and in colour, that they deserve.

www.asphalt-tango.de, distributed by Harmonia Mundi.

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