

Princes Amongst Men: Journeys with Gypsy Musicians

Asphalt Tango CDATR 1608

Full Price (66 mins)



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This is the soundtrack to Garth Cartwright's racy, plum-brandy-fuelled journey across the Balkans

in search of Gypsy musicians, first published in 2005. The writing in the book was raw but vividly evocative of the music and musicians he encountered. Many of those are featured here, with compelling tracks from larger-than-life characters such as Esmá Redžepova, Šaban Bajramović, Boban Marković and celebrated bands like Fanfare Ciocărlia and Taraf de Haïdouks. These are, of course, the usual suspects of Balkan Gypsy compilations, but there are other lesser-known treasures here like Serbia's Kal, Romania's Fulgerica and Bulgaria's Jony Iliev, plus some older Romanian *lautari* tracks by singer Romica Puceanu and *cimbalom* maestro Toni Iordache (pulled from Asphalt Tango's excellent *Sounds from a Bygone Age* series). The 18 tracks have clearly been chosen with hands-on experience of the territory and, although there are several musicians who don't feature in the book, it's a great compilation of Balkan Gypsy music.

One of the most extraordinary chapters in *Princes Amongst Men* is about the Bulgarian cross-dressing artist Azis. Cartwright describes attending his concert in Sofia's Palace of Culture: *'Taking the stage on a Harley accompanied by leather boys, his performance included simulating sex with men and women, marrying a body-builder then discarding said Muscle Mary so to gaze into a mirror and marry himself.* So what I was most looking forward to on this album was a track from Azis – but it's sadly absent because of licensing problems. Still, I hope the disc leads people towards the book and vice versa – both are celebrations of some of Europe's greatest music. *'Bal' and 'kan' are Turkish for 'blood' and 'honey'*, Cartwright wrote. (Actually it's the other way round, but you get what he means.) *'Appropriate for such sweet and sour territory.'*

Simon Broughton ●