



Kal *Kal* Asphalt Tango (www.asphalt-tango.de)

Gypsy musicians are used to being outsiders in Europe, and whether a Gypsy chooses a nomadic lifestyle or a sedentary one, their far-flung diaspora has meant that their music is often imitated and bathed in a romantic, mystical aura. The band Kal is situated in Serbia, a land that is no stranger to ethnic strife. Founded by Dushan and Dragan Ristic, Kal's music is immediately and unapologetically urban. This collective of Roma musicians from the Belgrade environs are digging deep into Romani culture, creating music that is not only looking to the fields and byways, but to skyscrapers, airliners, and cyberspace.

"Duj Duj" is the explosive lead-off track, driven by an incredibly funky bass-line and manic percussion. It is an unrelenting dance-floor pleaser, and as Kal's CD was produced by Mike Nielsen (who has worked with the globe-trotting Natacha Atlas and the techno of Underworld), it is clear that Kal want to work the seam between the modern and the traditional. "Dvojka" has an acoustic drum 'n' bass flavor that meshes and morphs into a frenetic gypsy violin tune, but the tempo is quickly varied as the band applies the brakes slowly, pausing to listen to Dragan take on some scat singing that sounds like an Indian tal. The influences come at the listener fast and furiously.

Kal do not approach every tune at breakneck speed, as the lovely "Djelem, Djelem" and "Boro Boro" prove. "Boro Boro" features some mournful female vocals, and the music invites mind expansion and heartbreak. Elsewhere, Kal incorporate tango, a bit of Italian influence, and the last tune, "Midnight Walk," made me wonder what might have happened if the Ventures were Roma in an alternate universe.

Dragan's comments in the liner notes indicate that he is interested in making music without compromise, and he hopes that Kal will ideally serve as an example to other young Roma musicians that are modernizing Romani culture. Where culture and politics are often intertwined, the band's music does indeed have the sound of the streets and a global heartbeat.
- Lee Blackstone