

Serbia's stringband Kal



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Asphalt Tango CDATR 0906

Full Price (45 mins)



**Serviceable serving from Serbian string-band siblings**



Kal, formed by brothers Dragan and Dusan Ristic, guitarist and violinist respectively, are currently one of the hottest Roma bands on the wildly diverse Serbian scene. Fundamentally a string band with the addition of accordion, they have a somewhat altered line-up on this CD, recorded over a two-year period and remixed by Mike Nielsen. Dusan, for example, seems to be missing, and there are a number of guest musicians. The playing is clean (even when performing highly ornamented melodic lines) and occasionally impassioned – driving forward remorselessly on the faster numbers, dripping with sentiment on the slower. There seems to be more of a central European and Russian Gypsy

spirit on display here than a Balkan one, save for a couple of numbers such as the danceable 'Obrenovac Boogie'. Ristic is not afraid to experiment, however, and loping reggae grooves successfully bear up the patchwork 'Komediija', which also boasts a characteristically morose vocal by counterculture hero Rambo Amadeus. High points are a splendid version of the Romani anthem 'Djelem Djelem', notably enriched by marvellous solo accordion, and the closing mood piece, 'Midnight Walk' where the instrumental honours are equally divided.

There is, perhaps, a sense in which this is a whole of rather disparate parts rather than an album that truly hangs together, and its rather long gestation period may be to blame for this. It's still a splendid offering, however, and yet another example of the musical imagination which is such a feature of contemporary Serbia.

*Kim Burton*