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Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

Music Review: KAL - *Radio Romanista*



Written by [Richard Marcus](#)
Published December 18, 2008

It used to be you could safely walk into a record store and pick up a long playing record of Irish, zydeco, klezmar, or gypsy music and know what you'd be getting. You could tell just by looking at the covers that those were simpler times. Everybody was wearing their colorful ethnic clothing and had big happy smiles plastered across their faces. You knew who was who and what was what; gypsies were gypsies, Jews were Jews, and you would never confuse the music they played with anything somebody from New Orleans or County Warwick released. Now, not only do you have to buy your music on those CD things, where you can barely see what the people on the cover look like let alone what they're wearing, you can't even be sure if you pick up a recording of gypsy music it will sound like its supposed to sound, like the way you want it to sound.

It's all the fault of that damned, so-called Irish band, The Pogues. They were the ones who first started messing around and changing people's attitudes towards ethnic music. Making them believe that it didn't have to be played the same way over and over again. That it was all right to sing about contemporary issues instead of the great events from hundreds of years ago that were truly meaningful. Well, it was bad enough when it was only Irish music, but now its spread everywhere. Punk zydeco bands who play klezmar music, klezmar bands that use hip hop techniques and gypsy violins, and now, worst of all, punk Gypsy music.

All you have to do is listen to the upcoming CD from the Serbian gypsy band [KAL](#), *Radio Romanista*, being released on [Asphalt Tango Records](#) January 2009, to hear an example of how deeply the influence of those miscreant Pogues has spread. First off, just look at the way the members of KAL dress. Instead of wearing the colorful costumes of their people, they dress in black. What kind of statement does that make? Haven't they ever seen pictures of how they're supposed to dress, don't they have any respect for what we expect gypsies to look like?



Then there's the music they play. While they might play all the right instruments; violin, accordion, guitar, percussion, and drums, it sure doesn't sound like what its supposed to sound like. I don't care what the lead singer says about "stereotypes" and "cliches". Where does he get off saying things like, "If you expect from me music because I am a Gypsy then I'll do it but don't think that I'll not use it to say very important things about my people - Don't just look at us as entertainers - we're no longer going to stay silent and entertain you." That's all very

well and good, but what kind of gypsy music sounds like a runaway train, or is accompanied by that hip-hop, beat box, rhythm that you usually hear in dance halls. They have the gall to take so much pride in the fact that they've even given it a name: Rock 'n' Roma!



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Even the name of the band, KAL, is depressing as it means black in the gypsy language, and then there's the songs themselves and what they talk about. It's a darn good thing they don't sing very many songs in English, I tell you. Who wants to hear songs like "Radio Romanista" which imagines a gypsy country that has a national radio station. Gypsies don't have a country - they wander, how could they be gypsies if they had their own country - don't these guys know anything? Or what about "I'm A Gypsy", the title sounds promising enough, but then the lyrics: "I'm a gypsy, I'm looking for my place under the sun, I have no home, my country is the entire road" Well, duh? Everybody knows that - but he doesn't sound happy about it, it sounds like he wants a place to call home. What kind of real gypsy complains about not having a home or a grave?

They don't even call themselves gypsies these guys in KAL, they call themselves Roma, which is really confusing as it makes them sound like they either come from Italy or from Romania. Why can't they be happy being called gypsy like we've been calling them for years? Don't they understand anything about tradition? Have they no respect for what we expect from them? What ever gave them the idea that we wanted to know about their reality? That they fall in love, get their hearts broken, or that their lives are anything at all like ours? Why can't they be happy being what we want them to be?

No, they insist upon joining the twenty-first century and changing their music to suit their needs so it expresses how they're feeling. Who wants to know that they live in segregated neighbourhoods, that their houses get burnt out from under them, and that they are still harassed and tormented wherever they go? Why can't they sing songs about caravans, dancing around the fire, and other traditional stuff like they show in the movies? Haven't they ever seen *King Of The Gypsies* or listened to Cher? Aren't they modern enough for them?

It's a sad commentary on the state of the world when you can no longer count on ethnic groups to behave the way you want them to. *Radio Romanista* by KAL only confirms this disturbing trend of people taking charge of their own lives and justifying it with words like pride and self awareness. Not only do they expect us to call them by the name they use for themselves, Roma, they expect us to accept the fact that their music can change to reflect the world around them just like everybody else.

I don't know about anybody else but I blame it on the Pogues. Blame it on the Pogues, blame it on the Pogues, you'll feel so much better, just blame it on the Pogues. (*With apologies to Kris Kristofferson*)

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Richard Marcus is a long-haired Canadian iconoclast who writes reviews and opines on the world as he sees it at [Leap In The Dark](#) and [Epic India Magazine](#).