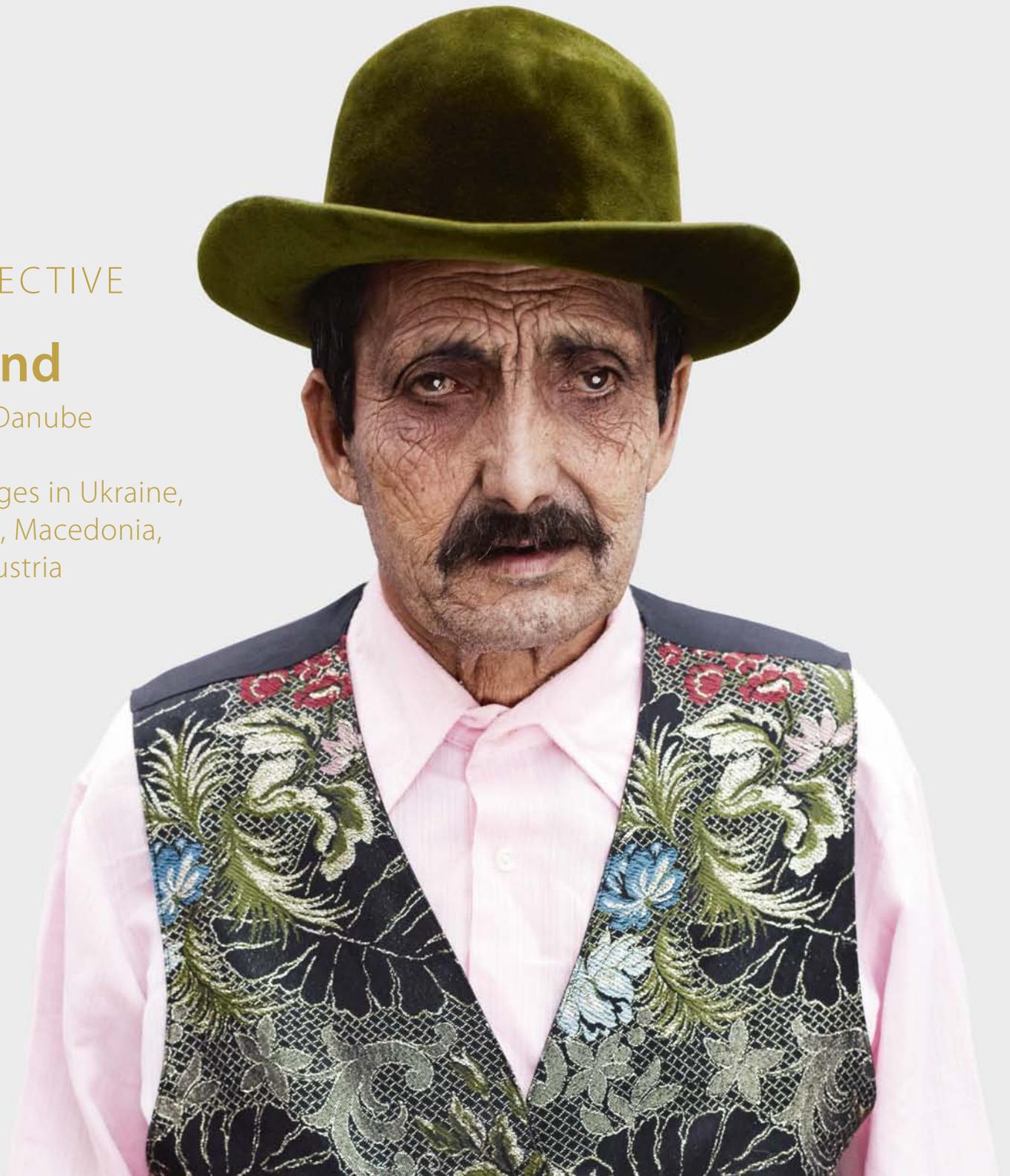


SOUNDWALK COLLECTIVE

Sons Of The Wind

A sound journey along the Danube

Recordings from Gypsy villages in Ukraine,
Moldavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia,
Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria





SOUNDWALK COLLECTIVE is an international art collective based in New York City & Berlin.

Since 2000 they have been sonic nomads, embarking on never ending journeys from the desolate land of Bessarabia to the desert of Rub al Khali. By exploring and documenting the world around us through its sounds, the Collective abstracts and re-composes narrative sound pieces through fragments of reality to form distinct audible journeys. Created by Stephan Crasneanski who lives and works in New York, the Collective's recent installations and performances were shown at Centre Georges Pompidou [Paris]; MADRe Museum of Contemporary Art [Napoli]; New Museum [New York City]; National Museum of Singapore; Abu Dhabi: Art; Maison des Arts de Creteil [Paris]; Fes Festival of World Sacred Music; Villa de Noailles – Centre d'Art et de Culture Contemporain [Hyères]; Florence Gould Hall [New York City]; Lille Fantastic; ARMA 17 [Moscow]; Berghain Panoramabar [Berlin]; MUDAM [Luxembourg]; TAP [Poitiers]; MuCEM [Marseille]; CTM [Berlin]; Barbican Centre [London], Volksbühne [Berlin]

SOUNDWALK COLLECTIVE

Sons Of The Wind

A sound journey along the Danube

Recordings from Gypsy villages in Ukraine, Moldavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria

SONS OF THE WIND

Exile and movement are central to the Roma identity. Their history is written in just one language: music. Played and sung, handed down spontaneously from generation after generation, it ignores national borders. The Soundwalk Collective followed the course of the Danube and of the music of the Roma, with its combination of Eastern and Western influences, from the Black Sea Delta to the river's source in Germany. From ghettos to mahale, on the trail of the *Sons of the Wind*, recording heart-rending songs, mournful violins, tinkling cimbaloms, the gutsy tones of brass bands. Sounds accompanied by the words of the Elders, the rustling of long skirts, the wind in the delta plain, and, always in the background, the rumbling of the river. This is the origin of our sound poem.

Danube journal. End of winter

UKRAINE

The journey begins. Direction: the Danube Delta. Gray skies. Muddy moorland. Endless winter. Hour after hour on a pot-holed road. The Danube is out of sight. 4000 square kilo-

meters of land fragmented by water, water fragmented by land. The sound of the river, like a murmur.

In the mahala (ghetto) of Izmail there are cigarette smugglers and musicians. Stepan Martinovich is an accordionist. He cuts a fine figure, broad-chested in his long coat, well polished shoes, and leather trousers with a red fabric belt. Zlata, 12, one of his ten grandchildren, sketches an undulating dance for the approving, gold-toothed Drina. We're recording, carefully manipulating the sound boom and the microphone. The music floods out.

MOLDAVIA

The plain is immense. Long, deserted hours pass. We drive toward Chisinau. Spectral rows of poplar trees define the horizon. Into the heart of the night, the white plain and the solitude of ravens.

Hiñçesti mahala. Garbage, humidity, stray dogs, broken walls, improvised roofs, plastic tarpaulins, skeins of electrical wiring ... Children climb all over us. Microphones. Cries of joy. "Gadjji! Gadjji!" And the dogs.

The Baron's family. His wife, Luminita. Sara, 22, their oldest daughter, has the beauty of an Oriental painting. Tonight, they're celebrating the birth of their newborn child.

Accordions and cimbaloms. Marc, 4, sings the notes. That's how the Roma learn music. By living it. The two instruments unite, lose themselves, pause, seek each other out, intertwine, diverge once more. Moments of grace stolen from boredom. The whole village has gathered in two little rooms. People eat, dance, smoke. They drink too. Shots of raki and endless embraces. The children are the kings and queens of the party. Sara starts to dance, shaking her skirt of silver coins. Her swaying hips rattle the coins together, producing the sound of rain.

ROMANIA

Night. The journey lasts twelve hours. The sleeping car is from another era – the kitschest rugs and wall-hangings, synthetic drape around the window, a bouquet of artificial flowers on the pull-out tabletop ... 6 a.m. The whiteness of morning. Empty, mist-laden avenues. Asphalt and concrete. Bucharest is a ghost town. The Baron's "brothers" have come to greet us – the Roma have no frontiers ... A convoy of weatherbeaten vehicles. Music pours out of the car radios.

Clejani is a holy place. It's the mahala of the Lautari, the musician clan. Everyone here remembers Nicolae Neacșu and his heart-rending violin. With the musicians of the

ghetto, he founded Band of Brigands – Taraf de Haidouks – the best known Gypsy band in Eastern Europe.

In the shack belonging to Marin Sandu, Nicolae's son. The whole family is there. The accordions ruffle the humid air. Marinel plays the theme on his little cimbalom. Marin asks to listen to the recordings. He's moved.

That evening, Marin is suffering from pains in his left knee, the one on which he rests his accordion. He's also having trouble with his hands. It's because of the humidity, which eats away at everything. Standing by the stove, he massages his knotted fingers over the flames.

BULGARIA

Rain squeezed from the sky, like blood dripping from a heart. The mahala of Iztok, east of Kyustendil. All we can hear is the hammering of the rain against the sheet metal roofs of the shacks and the clip-clopping of horses hooves on the paving stones. At the end of Strelcka Street, the Café – four tables and a makeshift stove. The Iliev brothers are waiting for us. Bijodar, their nephew, gets proceedings underway, carving into the smoke-filled air with a machine gun-style volley of sixteenth notes. Emmanuel Peshev's accordion, followed by Sergei Ivanov's

guitar, add melody. Chiki on drums. Yan providing the vocals. Motif after motif. An effusion of sound and song. Jony Illiev, their father, a living legend. His warm voice mixed with guitar riffs like galloping horses.

MACEDONIA

After the circle of mountains, at the bottom of the valley is Skopje, capital of the Republic of Macedonia. A city within the city: the mahala of Shutka (the biggest in the world, with over 22,000 inhabitants).

Tonight, we are recording Mendo. His nickname is "Kaval" – lively and rapid. He plays trumpet in a brass band on the outskirts of the mahala. A marriage. With the advent of Spring, work begins again. The band plays all night, spontaneous and enthusiastic.

We couldn't leave without meeting the stars of Skopje. Daughter of the mahala and of a shoe shiner, adulated in Tito's Yugoslavia, Esmā Redzepova is the great diva of the Balkans. She's a warm lady, pearled, perfumed and elegant – her fingers weighed down by sparkling rings, her eyelids and lips painted purple. Even when surrounded by cosy rugs and leather furniture with ostentatious gilding, Esmā's voice channels the pain of her nationless people. We record throughout the afternoon. Rehearsals, singing practice with her students, her adopted children.

Skopje's other rare bird is Ferus Mustafov. There he is, saxophone in hand. Ferus blows into the mouthpiece. Blows again without stopping. He holds the note forever. He trembles. He sweats. His veins bulge. His heart's going to give out. It has to ... But no. He keeps going. There's foam around his lips. Beads of sweat on his temples. His eyes closed. He's on a journey. His sound has distant roots. So distant that its origins are shrouded in mystery.

SERBIA

Outside, the wind from the Carpathians saves us. A few dinars change hands and the ticket collector cheers up. For a few dinars more, he brings us beers and wet sheets. Cigarette smoke. Doors opening and shutting. Fragmentary sounds of voices. Four customs officials in the carriage. Outside, a police patrol, shines torchlight across the rails and under the train. A long wait on the Serbian border.

Sunday, 5 a.m. A pallid Belgrade sky, broad, deserted avenues, bombed out buildings, vestiges of the Kosovan war waged in the 1990s. The road to Novi Sad follows the river. It's the only solid thing in a region of moving frontiers. In Novi Sad, Boban Markovich is rehearsing under a marquee. Frayed leather jacket, longish hair, a cigarette hanging from his lips. He carries his legendary trumpet over his shoulder. He has smiling eyes. His trumpet is muted, powerful. Introduced in the early 19th century by the military, and later taken up by folk musicians, the trumpet was popularized by brass bands and Roma musicians. Boban took it to another level.

Later on in the evening, we meet Olah Vince. When he plays for his people he creates a kind of magic. A diffident attitude toward us, the "Gadjis." A brief conversation. He is curt. "In the past, it was forbidden to speak Romani, so instead, we sung. That enabled us to save our language." "Democracy ... What does that mean? Everyone creates their own freedom." "The Roma live from day to day, without asking why. That's all." With that, he leaves us.

The next day, it's Aslan, one of his musicians, who takes us to meet the Gypsies of Kosovo in Bangladesh, the mahala of Novi Sad. A ditch by the side of the main road. You smell it before you see it. An odor of putrefaction. Mud and peat, humid and vile. Here, people live on and by garbage. Pigs, dogs, a horse, old children. Kasa Café, the meeting place of all the local Gypsies. Goran and Graku have set up their synthesizers on a trestle table.

Aslan, his glass eye and his guitar. An amplifier. Electric sounds. And Adem's raw vocals.

HUNGARY

The road to the border. Budapest. Mirrored in the water, the fragile reflections of imposing façades imbibed with memories of the sovereigns of Anjou, of the Holy Roman Empire and of Ottoman art.

The Gundel Hotel is a huge cathedral with woodwork and gold stucco. Every evening, in front of the guests and the vast mirrors in the spectacular ballroom, the violins of the Horváth dynasty can be heard. The illustrious family of musicians belongs to the Romungre cast.

Budapest-Keleti Station. The "Black Train" travels north-west. It gets its name from the daily convoys of Roma brought in to boost the ranks of the capital's workers. The train crosses the empty plains of the Hungarian Pusztas. In what is described as "country of apples," we find the ghetto of Nyírbátor. The home of Gyula Balogh. A single room, a naked electric bulb hanging from the ceiling. Gyula starts to sing a loki djili, a kind of melancholy ballad that some say originated in India. The whole village has gathered in the shack. They use their bodies as instruments: clapping with their hands and feet. Archaic rhythms beaten out on aluminum milk cans and wooden spoons. Not much space in the small room. We grasp on to our microphones as best we can. There is something ardent and sad about it. Heat rises to the face and the soul. The "Cigany" have black skin and hearts of fire.

SLOVAKIA

Day train. The Danube is an immense body lying on its stomach. Its marshy borders drown the trees marking the river's course. Onward to Bratislava. Ghetto. Yan Rigo, a well known singer, lives in the only paved road in the Zlaté Klasy mahala. His young son, Yan Junior, is 8.

They sometimes sing together. When they do, Zlaté plays the supporting role. His daughter, Alena, 18, is beautiful. Stone wash jeans and an Adidas shirt, dyed hair, hazelnut eyes. As is her voice, which can also be hoarser, hence more desirable. She sings a love song which, judging from the melody's lilting crescendos, is probably a sad one.

AUSTRIA

A proper meal in a restaurant in Vienna. We take an evening stroll, feeling orphaned somehow. Hotel, dry white sheets ...

The road is smooth. We walk through the idyllic backdrop of Burgenland, with its bucolic valleys. Oberwart, a quiet little town, with a small Baroque church, it's clock tower bulb-shaped.

Before the War, 3,000 Roma lived in the area. Only 300 came back from the camps. Ludwig's grandfather, the last in a long line of musicians, never returned from Buchenwald. Ludwig sometimes improvises a few song lyrics. He doesn't bother to write them down.

GERMANY

Trains and freeways under a sun glorifying the immensity of the landscape. The source of the Danube springs from a small basin located in the park of the former residence of the aristocratic Fürstenberg family in Donaueschingen. A sound of croaking frogs from the low stone wall. The fountain is decorated with sculptures by Adolf Heer representing the "Mother Baar" accompanied by the young Danube. Tourists throw coins in the fountain ... What should we wish for? There's not much sign of Roma and mahale here. Just a few houses and makeshift allotments, left in the industrial wake of the city.

Toward the West. Toward progress. Toward silence. Here, the heart beats slowly.

Virginie Luc

Izmail, UKRAYINA

Stepan Martinovich
Feodor Ivanovich
Martin Prokopovich

Hîncești, MOLDOVA

Valeri Matfei "The Baron"
Luminița
Vadim Barancea

Clejani, ROMÂNIA

Marin "Țagoi" Sandu
Marinel Sandu
Florentina Sandu
Elena Sandu

Kyustendil, BŪLGARIYA

Jony Iliev
Bojidar Iliev
Yan Iliev
Chiki Iliev
Martin Stollov
Emmanuel Peshev
Sergei Ivanov
Sultana

Šutka Mahala, MAKEDONIJA

Dzefrina Idriz
Šutka Roma Rap

Skopje, MAKEDONIJA

Esma Redžepova
Sadan Sakib
Eleonora Mustafovska
Orhan Aljush
Alexander Stamenkovski
Simeon Atanasov
Ferus Mustafov "King Ferus"
Imlmi Mustafov
Valentino Misevski
Goce Trajkoski
Goran Stomkov

Bangladesh Mahala, SRBIJA

Goran Ajvazović
Aslan Ajvazović
Graku Dudula
Gyla Müller
Adem

Vladičin Han, SRBIJA

Boban Marković

Veliki Rit, SRBIJA

Olah Vince
Balaz Laslo
Nikola Radu

Nyírbátor, MAGYARORSZÁG

Gyula Balogh
Jag Virag
Amare Save

Budapest, MAGYARORSZÁG

Gyula Horváth & Gundel Orchestra

Zlaté Klasy, SLOVENSKO

Monica Rigo
Yan Rigo

Oberwart, ÖSTERREICH

Ludwig Horvath

Recorded in 2013 by Soundwalk Collective
Additional Recordings of Nicolae Neacșu in 2002 by Cia Rinne
Text by Virginie Luc
English translation by Mike Lavin
Photography by Stephan Crasneanski
Assistant Dasha Redkina
Additional Graphic Design by Gergana Petrova
Artwork by Claudia Bachmann
Written, composed and produced by Soundwalk Collective
Mixed and mastered by Stefan Betke at Scape Studio Berlin, 2014

Executive production: Helmut Neumann & Henry Ernst
Made in Germany & © 2014

Asphalt Tango Records GmbH Berlin, Germany
E-mail: records@asphalt-tango.de
www.asphalt-tango.de

Special thanks to:

Helmut Neumann, Asphalt Tango, Moritz Pankok, Cia Rinne, Virginie Luc, Dasha Redkina, Anna Olekhnovych, FIAF Alliance Francaise Odessa, FIAF Alliance Francaise Chisinau, Adrian Cibotaru, Stepan Martinovich, Vadim Barancea, Luminita Matfei, Ion Duminica, Elena Sandu, Marinel Sandu, Daniela Mihailova, Alexander Dimov, Sultana, Vesna Gjorgjievaska, Mendo Selman, Bojan Djordjevic, Peter Barbaric, Olah Vince, Maria Varga, Frederic Miskiewicz, Yan Rigo, Ludwig Horvath

More outstanding music on www.asphalt-tango.de



© & © Asphalt Tango Records GmbH 2014
www.asphalt-tango.de

LP-ATR 5014 (LC) 12494