

Romani music and dance



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There are many different styles of Romani music. Romani folk songs and the Balkan-style music from Romanies in the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece incorporate musical instruments such as the bouzouki, a stringed instrument that sounds a bit like the Indian 'Veena', which is played in Hindustani music.

For hundreds of years, people have been enthralled by the dance and music of the Romanies. Kings, Queens, Tzars and Emperors have all enlisted Romani musicians to play for them in their castles and palaces.

The fiery Flamenco dance and music from Spain is Romani in origin. The earliest accounts of Flamenco stem from the beginning of the 19th century where Spanish Romanies (Kale) played and sang at social events or gatherings. The onlookers participated in the performance by clapping their hands to the rhythm of the guitars while loudly cheering on the skilful flamenco dancers.

The dance gets its name from the flamingo bird, whose body, together with its long neck and raised leg, reminds one of the typical body posture of a flamenco dancer.

I really enjoy the impacting sounds of trumpets, trombones, clarinets and drums of the music played by Romani bands such as 'Fanfare Ciocarlia' from Romania. Their raging sounds and fast rhythms depicting sorrow, pain, rage, joy, fierceness and compassion reflect the many different aspects of Romanies.

This style of music, which originated in the Ottoman Empire changed over time to become a style of fast, sometimes dark blues that has become something akin to a release or an outpouring of feelings, as life has often been hard for Romanies... and this shows in Fanfare Ciocarlia's music.

Some say let the spirit move you. Dance scarves, and vividly coloured dresses with many layers that spread out like butterfly wings when swirled around are what Romani women often wear to dance in. Black fire group, [Kali Jag](#), are an example of a Romani group.

Romanies from Hungary, Russia, Serbia, and one I personally know from Macedonia, all play beautiful violin music. It was forbidden to sing in the Romani language because of assimilation laws that were enforced in the past in many European countries. Also, 400 years of slavery of Romanies in Romania suppressed any freedom of choice. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of discrimination happening against Romanies and for some, it's on a daily basis.

These days however, many Romanies sing their songs in their mother language. A famous one is the Romani national anthem, Djelem Djelem, which you can listen to [here](#).

Faster songs, like the wedding song, Usti Usti Baba, (Get up father the drums are playing) are very popular in Europe. There was one particular Balkan Romani dance that I participated in where the people hold hands and dance around in a big circle in quick, step-like movements.

The leader of the dance holds a handkerchief out high in one hand and waves it around like a flag, beckoning for more people to join the circle. As more and more people break in to the circle the musicians pick up the tempo to get everyone really moving. It's a lot of fun.

Of course you've heard of Django Reinhardt, a famous Sinto Romani jazz musician, who was born in Belgium in 1910 and lived till 1953. A relative of his, Lulo Reinhardt, who is a very talented guitarist, came to Bellingen, NSW during his Australian tour in 2010, and played Sinti Jazz at the Global festival.



Authentic Romani dancer in traditional dress.

Picture from the multicultural research library in Australia.

More links:

Fanfare Ciocarlia' from Romania: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= MsWI7eCs_E

Romani music: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R6lEytvMLo&NR=1&feature=endscreen>

Romani songs and lyrics: <http://www.oocities.org/romanivonnie/>