

Fanfare Ciocărlia: The legends of gypsy brass

Forget "Balkan Beats", forget the hype, here comes the real deal:

Fanfare Ciocarlia are one of the world's greatest live bands, their energy and ingenuity having won them fans from Melbourne to Memphis, Tokyo to Toulouse. Having learnt their craft at the feet of their fathers and grandfathers Fanfare's members proudly approach every concert as a challenge to both entertain audiences and keep the true spirit of Gypsy music alive.

When Fanfare Ciocarlia - the brass orchestra from the "hidden" village of Zece Prajini in north-eastern Romania - take the stage the crowd receive 100% Gypsy music. Zece Prajini's isolation - situated in a misty valley, the valley's dirt roads are occupied by flocks of geese and horse and carts; here live eighty Gypsy farming families who live a traditional rural lifestyle dictated by nature's seasons - meant that under communism the village remained hidden from the outside world. Somehow the ancient Ottoman tradition of brass bands accompanying armies, weddings and funerals continued to exist here when it had long died out in the rest of Romania. And when Henry Ernst, a young German music fan, wandered into the village in 1996 he found a living tradition that he knew the world would embrace.

And so they did: Fanfare Ciocarlia - whose name translates as "lark's song" - conquered Europe in 1997, their furious live blast appealing to punks and headbangers, jazz and funk fans, world music aficionados and those who simply love music that sounds absolutely unique. Even the classical world embraced Fanfare Ciocarlia and they have since performed at many prestigious philharmonic halls. The Romanian's breakneck speed, technical chops, ripping rhythms and sweet and sour horns is quite different from any other brass band on earth. Everyone who heard Fanfare Ciocarlia agreed on one thing - no brass band had ever played as fast as this before. Make that two things: no brass band had ever sounded like this before!

Fanfare Ciocarlia went on to conquer the USA, Japan and Australia. The Gypsies may only have spoken their local Romany dialect but their music spoke an international language and audiences responded to their fierce Balkan funk by turning concerts into parties. What Fanfare Ciocarlia played was something new. The Times of London described it as "a heavy, heavy monster sound" and Fanfare's recordings have taken their eerie Balkan groove into dance clubs across the planet.

Along the way Fanfare Ciocarlia have been celebrated by critics and championed in all kinds of media: they star in several films (Ralf Marschalleck's *Iag Bari* follows the band on tour across Europe while Fatih Akin's *Head On* has them ripping up Berlin's clubs), own the cover of *Princes Amongst Men* (Garth Cartwright's acclaimed book on Romany musical culture), were commissioned by Sacha Baron Cohen to cut biker anthem *Born To Be Wild* for the Borat soundtrack and have been sampled and covered, championed and emulated, by countless DJs, bands and Gypsy orchestras. Their radical reinterpretations of popular Western standards - including the James Bond Theme and Duke Ellington's *Caravan* - show how the Romanian orchestra effortlessly "Gypsify" any music they get their horns on.

Besides making great music Fanfare Ciocarlia have twice developed brilliant musical theatre - *Gypsy Queens & Kings* (which brought together many of Europe's greatest Romany musicians) and *Balkan Brass Battle* (which saw the Romanians face a Serbian orchestra) both toured the world to great acclaim.

Fanfare Ciocarlia have released eight albums, several of which have topped the European World Music charts. Their DVD *Brass On Fire* was acclaimed by *Songlines* magazine as "setting a new standard for music documentaries". They have played over 1200 concerts and like to consider themselves "the hardest working band in the blow biz". Put simply: nobody does it better, harder, faster, funkier than Fanfare Ciocarlia.

<http://www.asphalt-tango.de/fanfare/artist.html>