

Assimilation was attempted in the Austro-Hungarian Empire by outlawing Romani language, music, dress, and nomadism, and banning traditional occupations. Similar assimilationist legislation was enacted in Spain from 1499-1800 and in East European communist countries after World War II. Persecution escalated with the Nazi rise to power: Roma faced an extermination campaign in which more than 600,000—over one fourth of all European Roma-- were murdered. Europeans have treated Roma as the quintessential “outsider” despite the fact that Roma have been Europeans for almost a millennium.

Since the 1990’s, harassment and violence towards the 10-12 million Roma of Europe have increased, as have marginalization and poverty. The largest minority in Europe, they have some of the lowest standards of living in every country. There has been a rise in scapegoating and violence against them, and in response, Romani political participation, human rights activism, and pride in Romani ethnicity are growing. Romani political parties and organizations now have a place in European institutions, and Romani culture festivals take place in many cities. In all of these forums, music plays an important role in celebrating the creative adaptability of Roma despite centuries of discrimination. There is mushrooming interest in Romani music on American soil, where approximately one million Roma reside.

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Esmá Redzepova
and Folk Masters

Beall Concert Hall
Friday, April 29, 2016 | 7:30 p.m.





Esma Redžepova has been performing for more than 50 years to enthusiastic audiences in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia. Hailed by NPR as one of the world's "50 Great Voices" and crowned "The Queen of Romani Music" at the World Romani Congress in India in 1976, Esma is perhaps the most famous Romani singer in the world and has given thousands of concerts, many of them for humanitarian causes. Her ensemble has played in plazas, stadiums, and opera

houses, for villagers as well as world leaders. She has produced more than 500 songs on dozens of records, several of which achieved "gold" status in the Former Yugoslavia; releases include "Songs of A Macedonian Gypsy" (Monitor), "Čhaje Shukarije" (World Connection), and "Gypsy Carpet" (World Network). Esma has also been building a "Home of Humanity and Museum of Romani Music" which will include an archive, recording studio, and an outpatient cafeteria for underserved populations.

Esma was the first Romani musician (male or female) in Macedonia to concertize and record in the Romani language, and she was the first Macedonian woman to perform on television. Born in 1945 in Skopje, Macedonia, Esma was one of six children in a poor Muslim family; her father lost a leg in World War II and subsequently shined shoes. At the age of eleven Esma met Stevo Teodosievski, an ethnic Macedonian accordionist and arranger who recognized her talents and secured permission from her parents to train her as a recording artist (not a cafe singer, which would be shameful). By the age of thirteen, Esma had become a star with her trademark song "Čhaje Sukarije" (beautiful Romani girl). Esma and Ensemble Teodosievski moved from Macedonia to Serbia in 1961 to escape prejudice against Roma in the music industry and to cultivate wider opportunities.

is both the social glue and the context for artistic display in Romani communities. It is also an important commodity in the economic relationship between Roma and non-Roma. Popular exaggerations run the gamut from the claim that Roma are merely musical sponges to the claim that Roma are the most traditional interpreters of village music. The truth is more complicated. While Romani music shares much with that of neighboring peoples, often Roma impart a distinct stylistic stamp.

Linguistic evidence reveals that Roma are a composite population who migrated westward from northwest India in the eleventh century. By 1500, Roma lived throughout Europe, becoming indispensable suppliers of diverse services such as music, entertainment, fortune-telling, metalworking, horse dealing, woodworking, sieve making, basketry, and seasonal agricultural work. The term Gypsy derives from the erroneous belief that Roma originally come from Egypt. The Romani language, derived from Sanskrit, exists in multiple dialects in the Romani diaspora. Roma often adopted the religious beliefs of their neighbors while keeping a layer of older beliefs. Today Roma are found in all professions and an intellectual elite is growing rapidly.

In Europe, initial curiosity about Roma quickly gave way to hatred and discrimination, which continue until today. From the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries in southern Romania, Roma were slaves owned by noblemen, monasteries, and the state; they were sold, bartered, and flogged, and even their marriages were regulated. Slavery was abolished in 1864, but patterns of exclusion continue. Despite their small numbers, often less than one percent of the total population, they inspired fear and face prejudice in every European territory. Many learned to "pass" as other ethnic groups. Bounties were paid for their capture, dead or alive, and repressive measures included confiscation of property and children, forced labor, prison sentences, beatings, and sterilization.

workshops, performances and educational presentations (voiceofroma.com). The Center for Traditional Music and Dance assists immigrant communities to preserve the vitality of their distinctive performing arts traditions. The tour is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

Sani Rifati is Voice of Roma President and founder, production/tour manager, dance researcher instructor, and activist. Of Romani decent, Sani was born in 1962 in Kosovo and emigrated to the United States in 1993; he now lives in Berlin. His career as a dancer and singer began early in childhood in his Romani neighborhood, and he has given numerous workshops in Europe and the US. Sani has produced VOR North American tours with Esma Redžepova in 2004, Ivo Papasov and Yuri Yunakov in 2005 and 2008, and Kal in 2006 and 2008.

Roma: History and Music

For over five hundred years, Roma in Eastern Europe have been professional musicians, playing for varied ethnic groups for remuneration in cafes and at events such as weddings, baptisms, circumcisions, fairs, and village dances. This professional niche, primarily male and instrumental, requires Roma to know expertly the regional repertoire and interact with it in a creative manner. A nomadic way of life, often enforced upon Roma through harassment and prejudice, gave them opportunities to enlarge their repertoires and become multi-musical and multilingual. In addition to nomadic Roma, numerous sedentary Roma professionally perform urban folk, classical, and/or popular music. In Hungary, Russia, and Spain, certain forms of Romani music became national music, veritable emblems of the country.

Neither one worldwide nor one pan-European Romani music exist. Roma constitute a rich mosaic of groups who distinguish among themselves musically. For example, contrary to popular conceptions, there is no one “Gypsy scale.” Often, music-making

Teodosievski’s vision and Esma’s abilities created the perfect combination of Romani exoticism and refinement. Stevo and Esma composed songs which they transformed into staged choreographies incorporating dance, costume, and dramatic scenarios showcasing the stunning emotional range and dramatic potential of Esma’s voice. The couple married in 1968 (one of the first “mixed marriages” in Macedonia) and were inseparable musical partners until Stevo’s death in 1997; her career continues with her children. Stevo and Esma turned their home into a school of music which served as a training ground for 49 children (many from poor homes) whom they adopted. Throughout the years the Ensemble embraced an eclectic internationalism: music from various regions of Yugoslavia became part of their repertoire as well as from neighboring Balkan countries and beyond. Singing in over fifteen languages, including all of the Balkan and East European languages, plus Hebrew, German, and Hindi, Esma embodies the versatility and cosmopolitanism of Romani artists.

Esma has been a major contributor to countless advocacy and assistance programs for women and underserved populations, including the disabled and refugees. She is honorary president of the Macedonian Red Cross; in 2000, the Sorority of Roma Women proclaimed Esma “Woman of the Millennium”. In 2002 Esma was nominated as United Nations Ambassador for Refugees in Macedonia, and was nominated a second time for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2010, she was awarded the Macedonian Order of Merit, and in 2013 she was proclaimed a National Artist of Macedonia.

Esma’s songs, sometimes based on true-life incidents, chronicle the joys and sorrows of love (such as in arranged marriages), the poverty of Roma, and the pain of separation (such as resulting from Balkan men going abroad to work). A trademark of the Balkan Romani repertoire is the genre *čoček* in 2/4 (often divided 3-3-2), 7/8 (divided 3-2-2 or 2-2-3), or 9/8 (divided 2-2-2-3). Often utilizing *makam* (Turkish modes), *čoček* is marked by *mane*, an improvised free-rhythm instrumental improvisation played over a metric vamp.

The dance *čoček* is solo and improvised, utilizing demure torso and hand movements.



The instrumentalists in **Folk Masters** appear on the new release “Folk Masters: Her Soul” (2016, Mister Company). They are:

Simeon Atanasov, accordion and arranger, was born in 1976 in Kočani. At the age of seven, he joined Esma and Stevo Teodosievski’s school in Belgrade, and became a member of “Esma Ensemble Teodosievski,” playing *tarabuka* (hand drum). In 1997 after Stevo’s death, he took over the leadership of the Ensemble, and later directed “Esma’s Band.” He participated in the 2001 North American “Gypsy Caravan” tour, and has performed in nearly 2000 concerts on all continents. In 1998 he taught at the Balkan music workshops sponsored by the East European Folklife Center. As a teenager, Atanasov began composing songs in the Romani language. He has created over 500 arrangements and authored 200 compositions, 150 of them sung by Esma, and 30 by other singers, plus 20 instrumentals. In 1993 his song “Čhaje, Čhaje” was the Grand Prize winner in the International Gypsy Festival “Šutka Fest;” in 2003 he was named composer of the year at “Music Stage Kočani;” in 2006 his song “Čekaj Živote” won best song at “Rosa Fest;” and in 2008 his song “Isti San,” performed by Esma and Keba, was chosen as best duet on the TV channel Grand Production in Serbia.

Filip Nunevski, trumpet, born in Skopje in 1993, has been a musician since the age of eight years. He studied in elementary school, high school for music, and continues to study in the Music Academy, where he will graduate this September. He has taken part in over ten international competitions, winning three, and twice earning second place. He is a member of “Nune Brothers” and “Focus” bands, and is also the author of eleven compositions.

Nikola Mitrovikj, bass guitar, was born in Skopje in 1960, and graduated from music high school. His professional career began in 1976 in the Orchestra of Folk Instruments of the Macedonian Radio and Television. He was also a member of the bands “Makedonski Merak,” “Koda,” and “Denica,” played with Ferus Mustafov for 10 years, and toured the US with Violeta Tomovska. He has authored more than 100 folk music compositions, including children’s songs; these have been performed in many large festivals, such as “Valandovo” and “Cvetnici.” His most popular song is “Svadba e Golema” which was chosen as hit of the decade.

Aleksandar Stamenkovski, was born in 1977 in Skopje and started to play music at the age of 14 years, first as an accordion player, and later as guitar player. He has been a member of “Harmonija,” “Premier,” and “Diplomatic” bands. He has performed with Esma for approximately 15 years, and has composed two songs and one instrumental.

Safet Demirov, drum set, was born in 1968 in Skopje, and hails from the large Roma neighborhood of Šuto Orizari (Šutka). He started to play drums as a child, and was longstanding member of one of the most popular Roma wedding bands, “Južni Kovaci” (Southern Blacksmiths), as well as a member of “Južni Ritmi;” both bands perform at Romani weddings, circumcisions, and other celebrations with the most famous contemporary Romani singers.

Tour Producers: Voice of Roma is a California based NGO that promotes the rich cultural heritage of Roma through festivals,