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## **"Gypsy Airs": Building bridges beyond all clichés**

*By Ralf Siepmann*

Beethoven Festival - the International Beethoven Festival in Bonn experienced a touching premiere: the first appearance of the Sinti and Roma Philharmonic Orchestra. The musicians want to create awareness of the importance of "Gypsy music" for the European culture - not only Haydn, Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven used their style elements. But the vision is to overcome the exclusion of the Sinti and Roma - with the help of music.

For Riccardo M Sahiti, born 1961 in Kosovska Mitrovica in the former Yugoslavia as the seventh of eight children of a Roma family, it was like in a dream. "I'm overjoyed," smiled the conductor of the Sinti and Roma Philharmonic Orchestra. "It was a great honour for us, to play a concert in the city of Beethoven." For a decade the Frankfurt-based musician worked on the realization of his vision, to create a public stage for the compositions that are linked to the musical culture of the Roma with an orchestra of symphonic setting. Then, they performed in Bonn.

Romani Rose, patron of the "Liszt night" at the international Beethoven Festival Bonn and Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, said visibly moved: "what we were able to experience in the Beethovenhall is something like an accolade for the musicians. "Exaggerated? Not at all. The first appearance of the, from origin Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonic Orchestra, which recruits professional Orchestra musicians in Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Germany and Austria should be the beginning of a journey that could lead to a re and new discovery of the elementary roots of European cultural history. And arouse interest in a chapter beyond all clichés, that is commonly linked with the concept of "Gypsy music".

The cradle of this cultural heritage is located in the today's Hungary. Long before the modern era, an archaic folk music evolved there. Five or seven-tone series, abruptly changing *Zeitmaße* and more idiosyncratic style elements are characteristic for them. On the basis of this own tonal language arise, for example, moody passionate songs and dances, as the *csárdás*. Gypsies adapted this style, using their own scale in their way to make music and made this known during the Baroque period in the West.

Haydn, Mozart, Brahms - they resorted to "Gypsy airs". Composers picked up the "Gypsy airs", from the Gypsy Orchestras who played in the cafés of Vienna and Budapest. They adapted elements of Hungarian folk music in their works and made it to a new genre. Compositions "alla zingarese" are already detectable in Telemann. They are later found in Haydn, Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven, de Falla and Sarasate. Liszt created during his composing of the "Hungarian Rhapsodies" an image of "Hungarian national music" on the basis of materials, that he had written during his travels through Hungary and Romania. Bartók and Kodály explored the folk music of their Hungarian homeland, just like native Hungarian archaeologists systematically do. Kodály was fascinated by the "Verbunkos" style from the Gypsy Orchestras ("dances from Galanta") and now also the Bonn public. It is an recruiting dance with slow introduction and a furious final. Many Opera Composers by Bizet and Verdi were inspired "alla hungarese". "More than 80 operas", points out Sahiti, "are influenced by the Gypsy music."

The Hungarian conductor Ivan Fischer argued during a discussion in the Beethoven Festival, the music of the Gypsies have enriched not only the Hungarian culture. "It represents a big achievement for today's Europe, that is indispensable from our common cultural Canon." But are we sufficiently aware of this? "Gipsymusic" is widely associated with virtuoso of the violin, so-called "Devil's

violinists". Or with Balkan brass, whose power and originality at the Bonn concert were demonstrated by the fanfare Ciocărlia from Romania. Or perhaps still with beginnings and developments in jazz, for which is Django Reinhardt well respected.

Talking about the prospects of the Roma and Sinti Philharmonic, Sahiti says that there is "much to do". Which is something like a charming understatement. Because his project stands for nothing less than for the hope to achieve a Europe-wide awareness that the new "Gypsy music" in all its facets will grow beyond the clichés and that it contributes an unmistakable part of the cultural heritage of our continent. For that, Sahiti says, there is need for more awareness, more concerts and above all, support that goes beyond that of the Central Council of Sinti and Roma. His wish: the recognition and promotion of the project as a permanent institution by the German State, by the EU.

### **Exclusion of the Roma should be stopped**

This should not be a utopia. In Brussels as in some European Member States, the insight has grown that the commitment to a sustainable improvement of the living conditions of the Roma in Europe must be intensified. The centuries-long exclusion of the Roma, which led to the concentration camps of Hitler Germany, should be overcome through serious processes of integration.

This perspective, the targeted action against degradation and discrimination, is arranged in Sahiti's project. "Sinti and Roma gave much to mankind ", he says, "but they've received very little in return." To Sahiti, a strong signal of public attention promises from the world premiere of a Requiem which is composed by the Sinto Roger Moreno Rathgeb and is a remembrance to "all the victims from Auschwitz". It will be performed by the Roma and Sinti Philharmonic Orchestra and has its world premiere the coming year in Amsterdam and afterwards also in Frankfurt.