

Hop aboard 'Gypsy Caravan'

BY COLIN COVERT
STAR TRIBUNE (MINNEAPOLIS)

The music documentary "Gypsy Caravan" is an eye-opener, an ear-opener and, most important, a heart-opener. The film follows five Roma bands from Macedonia, Romania, India and Spain as they tour the United States in a raucous, irresistible whirlwind of drums, brass and fiddles.

Recording them on their six-week excursion, with side trips to their homes, director Jasmine Dellal dispels many stereotypes about the gypsy lifestyle, props up a couple others and creates an honest and affectionate portrait of a much misunderstood people.

The film is in the vein of "The Buena Vista Social Club," with fly-on-the-wall camera work, on-the-run interviews and long, infectious swaths of concert footage. The film leavens the performers' often painful stories with absurd humor. A befuddled policeman arrives when the musicians hook fish out of a municipal art center's courtyard pool, and the ever-worried American stage manager ceaselessly urges the artists to get to the auditorium on time.

Appropriately for an Indo-European people scattered over half the globe, a diverse cross-section of music is included. There's



Fanfare Ciocarlia, the funky 11-man Romanian brass band that plays supersonic gypsy, klezmer and Turkish rave-ups. You may have heard their rendition of "Born to be Wild" at the end of "Borat." Their four CDs have been so successful they have brought electricity to their impoverished village.

"Queen of the Gypsies" Esma Redzepova, a humanitarian who adopted 47 children and was twice nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, sings captivating Macedonian tunes. The raga and dance group Maharaja, resplendent in northwest Indian finery, features Sayari Sopera, a specialty act to end them all. He twirls, dervish-style, in transvestite wedding dress, jewelry and full makeup. Hey, it's a tradition.

Romanian violin wizards Taraf

GO 'Gypsy Caravan'

Review: ★ ★ ★ ½
Rated: Unrated; suitable for all audiences

Length: One hour, 50 minutes

Cast: N. Maharajan, Taraf de Haidouks, Esma Redzepova, Fanfare Ciocarlia, Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble

Playing at: Camelot

de Haidouks (Band of Brigands), who get an affectionate plug from fan Johnny Depp, work miracles with scratchy strings, and Spanish flamenco artist Antonio el Pipa is passion personified. You can see why their tour sold out, fans traveled hundreds of miles for an autograph and concertgoers couldn't resist dancing in the aisles.

Maysles lends his vision

BY DEBORAH NICOL
THE DESERT SUN

There is little difference between The Rolling Stones and gypsies, according to Albert Maysles.

He would know best as the documentary pioneer behind the Stones' "Gimme Shelter" and cinematographer of Jasmine Dellal's exploration into musical culture, "Gypsy Caravan."

"It is one of the best films I've ever seen," Maysles said. "It conveys such an important message in such a profound way. You learn so much of humanity and decency."

Regarding his relationships with rock stars and Roma bands, Maysles claims they are all the same. "I have a special relationship with stars and feel on common ground with them. I empathize with them, which generates that much more trust."

His close relationships have furthered filming opportunities. Sean Lennon recently requested that he film a concert, and in the process he met Rufus Wainwright — who devoted a song to Maysles' cult favorite, "Grey Gardens" — who proposed that Maysles in turn film his concert.

"Some of it falls into my

hands, but others take a long time," Maysles said. He has been working on one project, "In Transit," for many years. Riding on half a dozen trains throughout the world, he encounters intriguing commuters and follows them off of the train to discover the bigger story.

"It is my attempt in one film to bring the whole world together," Maysles says. He looks for the little things in subjects and even stumbled upon a woman heading to meet her mother for the first time. "I had a sense of something going on. She looked nervous, so I started filming right away."

This study of the human condition is not so surprising considering that Maysles' first profession was as a psychologist. He felt he could report more thoroughly with a movie camera.

Maysles' subjects have ranged from rock stars to Muhammad Ali to artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who he documented six times, most lately "The Gates."

"It's the perfect kind of art for making a documentary, as they struggle to get permits and all the thousands of people's reactions to it."

'Steel Toes' falls short of lofty ambitions

BY DEBORAH NICOL
THE DESERT SUN

Lawyers can get stuck defending the dregs of society. At what point does duty for fair representation override personal morals? Where are the boundaries set for a Jewish legal aide lawyer and his skinhead client?

Mark Adam and David Gow direct their first feature film about a young man brainwashed with hate and the lawyer who must dig deep to find compassion.

David Strathairn portrays Danny Dunckelman, a lawyer raised by his father to practice tolerance, especially towards

those who wish him the most harm. Sharp but tough-mouthed Mike (Andrew W. Walker) fits the latter category well, sent to jail for murdering a Middle Eastern man who accidentally poured water on him — a response that even mortified his fellow skinheads.

Upon their first meeting, Mike is calm and collected whereas Danny begins their conversation on guard and confrontational. Once Danny hits the right button, Mike unleashes relentless anger and hate rhetoric, telling Danny that "in an ideal world, they'd have you eliminated."

Convinced a more intelligent kid is bound within a brainwashed shell, Danny battles his own ability for forgiveness by forcing Mike to become introspective of his actions.

As hard as it is for Danny to defend this man, his friends and family feel that Danny is betraying his cultural history. They are unaware of his internal struggle and his constant need to turn to his father's teachings and lessons from his faith as a guide. Strathairn does not allow his character to be wholly convinced that Mike is not a lost cause — the effort is apparent on his face

and in his tough portrayal.

Walker is effective as a conflicted man who in turns tries to understand his own actions while also attempting to maintain the beliefs that were burned into him.

Surrounded by multiculturally diverse Montreal, much of the movie takes place within the walls of the St. Vincent de Paul Penitentiary. As Mike becomes stir crazy in isolation without the influence of his fellow Neo-Nazis, he is forced to consider the final words of his victim and the aide of his lawyer, upon whom he initially made a biased

GO 'Steel Toes'

Review: ★ ★ ½
Rated: Rated R for a brutal attack and for language.

Length: One hour, 30 minutes

Cast: David Strathairn, Andrew W. Walker

Playing at: Cinémas Palme d'Or

judgment.

The film is powerful in its portrayal of such a deep-seated conflict, yet somehow falls short of feeling like an entirely professional production.