**VAGABOND — About the Music**

**“Gypsy” music — fiery and sensuous —we all know what it sounds like, but who were, and are, the “Gypsies” (properly known as the Roma)?**

A tribe of musicians from northern India took to the road at some murky point in history and reappeared in Hungary in the 14th century as the Roma, fleeing the advancing Ottoman empire. They cashed in on their musical skills, earning their next meal by twisting the local music around them into tantalizing, mysterious and pulsating new forms, and becoming the go-to players for functions from village dances to the entertainment of princes.

Between dances the musicians improvised with extraordinary expressiveness and skill — they were soon the must-have players throughout central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Spain,and courts vied to have the best band, where the Roma lent their fiddle bows to their version of whatever was in fashion.

Musicologists tell us that Hungarian “Gypsy” music is really mostly indigenous Hungarian folk music, or derived from 18th and 19th century art music, and Romanian and Bulgarian scholars are equally keen to reclaim their folk music from inaccurate branding as “Gypsy.” And it is all very convincing: Roma music for their own purposes was almost entirely vocal — nothing like the showy instrumental (mostly violin) music we expect. “Gypsy” music is thus smoke and mirrors; a virtuoso illusion — we all know what it sounds like, and the music is real enough, but it is not born of an ancient “Gypsy” tradition. “Gypsy” music might not exist, but Gypsy virtuosity certainly does.

And yet that is not the whole story: from medieval Europe onwards, some Jews represented another wandering tribe who kept to themselves and had an equally specialized musical class, the klezmerim, who provided music for weddings and celebrations. They were also remarkable fiddlers with an eastern twist, so it is not surprising to learn that they branched out a bit to take on some of the Roma musicians’ success. We know, for example, that one of the most famous Hungarian “Gypsy” band leaders of the 18th century was a Jewish man. Unpicking the appreciable klezmer influence from what we think of as “Gypsy” music is impossible.

Despite the fact that our beloved “Gypsy” music is not actually indigenously Roma, and neither were many of the famous “Gypsy” bands who created the style, it remains one of the world’s most instantly recognizable musical brands.