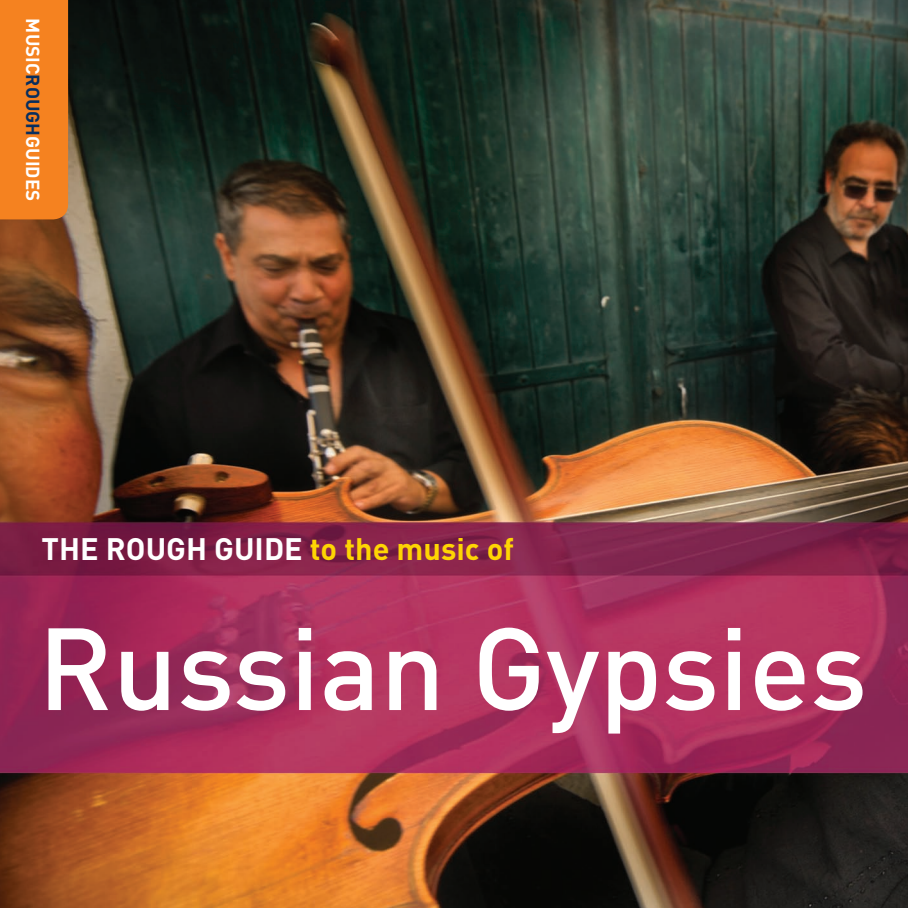


THE ROUGH GUIDE to the music of

Russian Gypsies



The Gypsy road began in India a thousand years ago and, in the centuries since, the Roma have shaped the culture and music in the countless lands throughout their journey – think Spanish flamenco, French Gypsy swing and the Balkan brass bands. The Roma arrived in Russia in the seventeenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth century, they were legally permitted to 'live and trade horses' throughout the Russian Empire. Horse-trading became the first signature profession of the Roma nation. The second was their inspiring, infectious music that transformed Russian folk culture, and continues to influence it into the twenty-first century. Almost immediately after they settled in the Russian empire, the artistic talents of Romani singers and musicians found large audiences. Russian nobility hired the Roma to perform in their private orchestras, choirs and theatres, and every respectable earl or count sponsored his own Roma theatre. These theatres and choirs were fondly described by numerous Russian writers of the nineteenth century, including Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin, Vladimir Sollogub and Afanasij Fet. Usually, choirs performed multi-harmonied vocal songs, accompanied by seven-stringed guitars. Later, violins, cymbals and drums were added, yet the guitar remained the most important instrument. Initially, Russian Roma performed in Romani (their Indo-European-based language), but by the mid-nineteenth century they started to sing almost exclusively in Russian. Talented improvisers, many musicians transformed Russian folk songs, they replaced lyrics, added

refrains, such as 'ta-ra', or 'ne-ne', and added emotion and fire and, in the process, completely reinvigorated old standards. The combination of the Russian and Roma musical traditions resulted in creation of the 'Russian Romance', the musical genre that became the staple of both Russian and Russian Gypsy cultures for two centuries. Gradually, Roma music found listeners outside of theatres, in places like pubs, restaurants and market concerts.

In 1917, most 'sponsors' of Gypsy theatres were forced to leave Russia; the Soviet government severely limited private trade, thus depriving the Roma of their traditional sources of income. The Soviet ideologues proclaimed Gypsy music 'decadent' and 'bourgeois'. Many feared the end of Roma culture in Russia, but, ironically, the creation of the Soviet Union signified a new beginning for the Roma. Gypsies were recognized as a 'nation', which needed to be convinced about the benefits of the Soviet regime, and their culture and language were recognized as legitimate in the new Soviet state. Moreover, soon after the Revolution, Moyshe Goldblat, a Jewish communist, was asked to establish a Roma theatre that would perform Gypsy music and, most importantly, be fully sponsored by the state.

The Romen Theatre was launched in 1931, and became a world centre of Roma Russian culture, especially its music, and remains so even today. Most prominent Russian Romani musicians have performed there. Singing legend Lialia Chernaya, guitarists Vava Poliakov and Ivan

Rom Lebedev, and dancer/choreographer Ivan Khrustalev, established the Romen as one of the most respectable Russian theatres. During World War II, when one quarter of all Russian Gypsies were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators, the theatre became a centre for Romani culture and solidarity.

One of the important features of Russian Gypsy music is that musicians continue to use seven-string guitars (traditionally in open G tuning). While popular in the nineteenth century, it is rarely currently played in other cultures, as the six-string guitar took over. Russian Gypsies, who initially borrowed this instrument from Russian culture, kept it as a key component of their music, and developed sophisticated techniques of performance on this instrument. Alexander Bobrov, Fedor Kondenko and Alexander Kolpakov are among the most famous performers on this instrument.

Gypsy music remains popular after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most Roma in Russia today are completely assimilated, and have almost entirely abandoned national costumes and traditions. They sing predominantly in the Russian language (though many speak Romani at home). Others, such as the Kotlyar Gypsies, live in villages, and continue with a more traditional lifestyle. Gypsy music finds its way into many genres of Russian contemporary culture: Gypsy rap bands, Gypsy reggae and traditional Gypsy romances are popular among Roma and non-Roma alike.

Le voyage des Tsiganes a débuté en Inde voici 1000 ans. Au fil des siècles, les Roms ont influencé la culture et la musique d'innombrables pays, comme en témoignent le flamenco espagnol, le swing manouche français ou les groupes de cuivres des Balkans. C'est au 17ème siècle que les Roms parvinrent en Russie. A la fin du 18ème siècle, ils reçurent l'autorisation 'd'élever et de vendre des chevaux' dans l'Empire russe. Le commerce des chevaux devint alors la première profession de la nation rom. Leur seconde signature fut leur musique, inspirante, contagieuse. Celle-ci modifia profondément la culture populaire russe et continue de l'influencer au 21ème siècle. Presqu'aussitôt après leur installation dans l'Empire russe, les chanteurs et musiciens tziganes firent reconnaître leurs talents artistiques auprès de nombreux publics. Les nobles russes les embauchèrent dans leurs orchestres privés, leurs chœurs et leurs théâtres. A cette époque, pour tenir son rang, tout comte russe se devait d'être le mécène d'un théâtre tzigane. De nombreux écrivains russes du 19ème siècle, tels Léon Tolstoï, Alexandre Pouchkine, Vladimir Sollogub et Afanasij Fet ont décrit de manière très détaillée ces théâtres et ces chœurs où les musiciens tziganes avaient l'habitude de faire entendre des œuvres vocales polyphoniques, accompagnées par des guitares à sept cordes. Des violons, des cymbales et des percussions s'ajoutèrent par la suite, mais la guitare garda une place prépondérante. A l'origine, les Tsiganes russes

s'exprimaient en romani (leur langue d'origine indoeuropéenne) mais à partir du milieu du 19ème siècle, ils commencèrent à chanter presque exclusivement en russe. Improvisateurs nés, les musiciens tziganes furent nombreux à transformer les chants du répertoire populaire russe. Ils modifièrent les paroles, ajoutèrent des refrains, comme 'ta-ra' ou 'ne-ne', et conférèrent une touche d'émotion et de passion aux mélodies traditionnelles, contribuant par là à leur renouveau. La combinaison des traditions musicales russe et tzigane contribua à la création de la 'romance russe', genre musical qui constitua la base des cultures russe et tzigane russe durant deux siècles. La musique tzigane conquiert progressivement son public hors des théâtres, par exemple dans les cafés, les restaurants ou sur les marchés.

En 1917, la plupart des mécènes des théâtres tziganes furent contraints à l'exil. La limitation du commerce privé, imposée par le gouvernement des soviets, contribua à priver les Roms de leurs revenus traditionnels. Les idéologues de cette époque déclarèrent la musique tzigane 'décadente' et 'bourgeoise'. Beaucoup pensèrent que la culture tzigane était morte en Russie. Pourtant, la création de l'Union soviétique entraîna paradoxalement un nouveau départ pour les Roms. En effet, les Tsiganes étaient reconnus comme une 'nation', qui devait être convaincue des avantages du régime soviétique ; leur culture et leur langue étaient reconnues dans le nouvel État soviétique. Peu après la révolution, on demanda

même à Moyshe Goldblat, un communiste juif, de créer un théâtre rom qui ferait entendre de la musique tzigane, et surtout, qui serait entièrement sponsorisé par l'État.

Le Théâtre Romen fut créé en 1931, et devint un centre mondial de la culture russo-tzigane, notamment par sa musique. Il l'est encore aujourd'hui. La plupart des musiciens russes tziganes y ont joué. Les Lialia Chernaya, véritables légendes vivantes, les guitaristes Vava Poliakov et Ivan Rom Lebedev, ou le danseur chorégraphe Ivan Khrustalev, ont fait du Romen l'un des théâtres russes les plus respectés. Pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, alors que les Nazis et leurs collaborateurs faisaient périr un quart de la population tzigane russe, le théâtre Romen devenait un centre majeur de la culture tzigane et de la solidarité envers les Roms.

Une des caractéristiques essentielles de la musique tzigane russe réside dans l'emploi de la guitare à sept cordes. Populaire au 19ème siècle, cet instrument a été supplanté par la guitare à six cordes et est rarement joué aujourd'hui dans d'autres cultures. Les tziganes russes, qui l'ont emprunté à la culture russe, l'ont conservé comme une composante principale de leur musique, et ont développé des techniques de jeu très élaborées. Alexander Bobrov, Fedor Kondenko et Alexander Kolpakov figurent parmi les interprètes les plus célèbres de cet instrument.

La musique tzigane est restée populaire après l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique.

La plupart des Tsiganes de Russie sont aujourd'hui complètement assimilés et ont presque entièrement abandonnés leurs costumes nationaux et leurs traditions. Ils chantent pour la plupart en russe (bien que beaucoup parlent romani chez eux). D'autres, comme les Tsiganes Kotlyar vivent dans des villages et ont conservé un mode de vie plus traditionnel. La musique tzigane a influencé de nombreux genres de la scène culturelle russe contemporaine: les groupes de rap tzigane, le reggae tzigane et les chants traditionnels tziganes remportent un franc succès auprès des Roms comme des non Roms.

El Camino de los Gitanos comenzó en La India 1000 años atrás. La música Roma ha modelado la cultura y la música en incontables sitios a través de su travesía. Piense en el Flamenco Español, El Swing Gitano Francés, Las Bandas de Bronces de los Balkanes. La música Roma llegó a Rusia en el siglo XVII. Para el final del siglo XVIII, los gitanos tenían permiso para vivir y comerciar con caballos a través de la Rusia Zarista. El comercio de caballos se constituyó en la firma que identificaba a la nación Roma. Lo segundo era lo inspirador e infeccioso de su música, que transformó el Folklor Ruso y continua influenciándolo hasta el siglo XXI. Casi inmediatamente después de que estableciera en el Imperio Ruso, el talento artístico de los cantantes y músicos Romaníes encontraron grandes audiencias. La Nobleza Rusia les contrataban para tocar en sus orquestas, coros y teatros privados. Cada Conde respetable

patrocinaba su propio teatro Roma. Estos teatros y coros fueron calurosamente descritos por numerosos escritores rusos del siglo XIX incluyendo a Leo Tolstoy Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin, Vladimir Sollogub y Afanasij Fet. Usualmente los coros entonaban canciones con múltiples armonías vocales acompañadas por guitarras de 7 cuerdas. Posteriormente violines, platillos y percusiones fueron agregados aunque la guitarra permaneció como el instrumento más importante. Inicialmente los Roma Rusos cantaban en Romani (Su lenguaje Indo Europeo) pero para la mitad del siglo XIX, comenzaron a cantar casi exclusivamente en Ruso. Improvisadores talentosos y muchos músicos talentosos que transformaron muchas canciones del folklor Ruso agregándoles frases tales como 'ta-ra', o 'ne-ne' y agregándole emoción y fuego revigorizando los antiguos estándares durante el proceso. La combinación de las tradiciones Rusa y Roma, resulta en la creación del Romance Ruso, un género musical que se convirtió en la unión musical de las culturas Rusa y Gitana durante los dos últimos siglos. Gradualmente la Música Roma encontró oyentes fuera de los teatros en lugares tales como pubs, restaurantes y conciertos en mercados.

En 1917, la mayoría de los patrocinadores de los teatros gitanos fueron forzados a dejar Rusia. El gobierno soviético limitó severamente el comercio privado deprimiendo la fuente de recursos tradicionales del pueblo Roma. La ideología Soviética declaró la música gitana como decadente y Burguesa. Muchos temieron

por el fin de la Cultura Roma en Rusia. Pero irónicamente la creación de la Unión Soviética significó un nuevo comienzo para ellos. Los Gitanos fueron reconocidos como una Nación la cual necesitaba convencerse de los beneficios del régimen Soviético y su cultura y lenguaje fueron reconocidos como legítimos en el Nuevo Estado Soviético. Más aún después de la revolución Moyshe Goldblat, un Judío Comunista fue comisionado para establecer un teatro Roma donde se debería tocar música Gitana y aún más importante, totalmente patrocinado por el Estado.

El teatro Roma fue inaugurado en 1931 y se convirtió en el centro del mundo de la Cultura Roma-Rusa, especialmente su música y permanece hasta el día de hoy. La mayoría de los músicos Ruso-Romaníes han tocado allí. Leyendas del canto tales como Lialia Chernaya, guitarristas como Vava Poliakov e Ivan Rom Lebedev, y el bailarín y coreógrafo Ivan Khrustalev, establecieron al Romen como uno de los más respetables teatros en Rusia. Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, cuando un cuarto de todos los Gitanos Rusos fueron asesinados por los Nazis y sus colaboradores, el teatro se convirtió en centro de la Cultura Romaní y de solidaridad.

Una de las características importantes de la Música Gitana Rusa es que los músicos continúan utilizando la guitarra de siete cuerdas. Popular en el siglo XIX, es ahora raramente tocada en otras culturas donde la guitarra de

seis cuerdas tomó su lugar. Los Gitanos Rusos quienes inicialmente tomaron prestado este instrumento de la cultura rusa, la mantuvieron como un componente clave dentro de su música desarrollando una sofisticada técnica para interpretarla. Alexander Bobrov, Fedor Kondenko y Alexander Kolpakov se encuentran dentro de la lista de más famosos intérpretes.

La música Gitana se mantiene popular después del colapso de la Unión Soviética. La mayoría del Pueblo Roma se ha asimilado totalmente a Rusia y ha abandonado enteramente las costumbres y tradiciones nacionales. Ellos cantan predominantemente en Ruso (aunque muchos hablen Romaní en casa) Otros tales como los Gitanos Kotlyar viven en villas y con un estilo de vida más tradicional. La música gitana encontró su camino dentro de los muchos géneros en la escena cultural contemporánea en Rusia: Las bandas gitanas de rap, reggae, y tradicionales romances gitanos son populares dentro y fuera de la Cultura Roma.

LOYKO – Named after the famed nineteenth-century Gypsy fiddler, Loyko is led by violinist Sergey Erdenko (b. 1958, the younger brother of violinist Nikolai Erdenko) who was actually classically trained in Moscow, but two decades ago decided to dedicate his work to performing Gypsy folk music. Many of their songs are from the traditional Gypsy repertoire, but given a Loyko magical makeover, fusing timeless folk songs with classical virtuosity. Erdenko can do

virtually anything with his violin, from dazzling pizzicatos to slower-tempo passionate Gypsy laments. Then, with a wink and a nod, he transforms these old folk songs by throwing in bird calls, train noises, horse trots, whining, weeping and laughing – literally a talking fiddle. At times, Loyko even manages to create noises that sound as if they have been passed through some sort of electronic effects box, odd eerie tunes produced by acoustic fiddles.

TALISMAN – Guitarist Vadim Kulitskii (b. 1965 in Siberia) was trained as a classical guitarist at the famous Moscow Academy of Music. Kulitskii is a remarkable musician, who combines conservatory training with Gypsy passion. He has collaborated with Ravi Shankar, Gidon Kremer and Yehudi Menuhin., and for eight years was a member of the renowned ensemble Loyko, before founding this trio Talisman. Talisman also features Oleg Nehls on *bayan* (button accordion) and Oleksandr Klimas, an extraordinary violinist whom critics have described as the new Paganini of Russia.

ALEXEI DULKEVICH – Alexei Dulkevich (b. 1957 in Leningrad/St Petersburg) has performed professionally in Gypsy bands since 1969. A violinist, dancer and singer, Dulkevich is known for his fiery performances. In 1976 he became the lead singer of the Gypsy band Fortes, and in the past two decades has toured internationally, accompanying mainstream Russian performers such as Alexander Rosenbaum and Mikhail Krug. Dulkevich advocates Gypsy music as a

living tradition, and believes that it will survive through integration into contemporary music.

KOLPAKOV TRIO – Alexander (Sasha) Kolpakov, founder of the Kolpakov Trio, began playing the seven-stringed guitar as a child in the 1950s. This instrument (with an extra string, which allows for melodic bass lines) has been a primary instrument of the Russian Roma since the eighteenth century. In 1999, the band was part of the groundbreaking Gypsy Caravan tour (along with Taraf De Haidouks, Kalyi Jag, Musafir, Yuri Yunakov and the Antonio Pipa Flamenco Ensemble). More recently, they have made international headlines again, touring with Madonna. Vadim Kolpakov, Sasha's nephew, is one of the most prominent and renowned Russian Roma seven-string guitarists in the world. He was a lead musician of the Moscow's Romen Theatre, where he performed as a guitarist, composer, vocalist, dancer and dramatic actor.

OLEG PONOMAREV – Violinist Oleg Ponomarev (b. 1964) hails from one of Russia's most renowned musical families. His grandparents (both graduates from the Moscow Conservatory of music) taught Oleg the violin and piano. Later, he attended Moscow's Central Music School and the Gnesinka Music College. In the 1990s, Oleg toured and recorded extensively with his cousin, Sergey Erdenko, in the group Loyko. This recording, 'Deda', is from Ponomarev's magnificent CD *Master Of The Russian Gypsy Violin*. *Deda* means 'grandfather' in Russian, and

the track is dedicated to Ponomarev's *deda*, a man who was born in a Gypsy caravan in central Russia and eventually became the Dean of the Khabarovsk Musical College.

VYACHESLAV VASIL'EV – Vyacheslav Vasil'ev is one of the few contemporary Roma singers who composes his own music and lyrics. Instead of modernizing Russian romances of the nineteenth century, he writes his own pieces, in both Russian and Romani.

L.P. MIKHAY – 'Opai, Dad' is a traditional Roma dancing song, which dates back to the eighteenth century. It was brought to Russia by Romanian *kelderar* (caravans), and rural Gypsies used to perform it without musical accompaniment. Contemporary Russian Gypsy choirs often perform it with instruments (such as violins and guitars), or in this traditional manner - a cappella - by L.P. Mikhay.

MIKHAIL BUZILEV – Mikhail Buzilev (b. 1976), is part of the Buzilev artistic dynasty. His parents, grandparents and siblings are all accomplished performers of Gypsy music. Buzilev's career skyrocketed when he starred in the popular movie *Muzhiki* (Lads) in 1981. Buzilev is an actor in Moscow's Romeni Theatre, and an accomplished singer, but is also well known for promoting and producing other Roma performers.

NIKOLAI ERDENKO – Nikolai Erdenko (b. 1945) was born into a prominent Roma Moscow family, and began playing violin at the age of 4. A classically trained virtuoso violinist, he initially did not connect his career with Gypsy music, but in 1969 he was invited to become the musical producer-in-chief of the Moscow Gypsy Theatre Romeni, and remains in this position today. In 1980, he created his own family band, Dzhang, with his wife Rozaliya, sister Galina and daughters Leonsia and Rada. Dzhang performed Gypsy music around the world, and the band was awarded the Golden Note prize at the first world festival of Gypsy Music in Belgrade. Nikolai Erdenko's style combines the intimacy of the Russian romance and the passion of Gypsy folk songs, all professionally arranged, which has made him one of the most important performers of Gypsy music in Russia.

IGOR KRYKUNOV – Igor Krykunov is a singer and actor who started his career in Moscow's Romeni Theatre. Over the past three decades, he has starred in numerous films, including *Gypsy Woman Aza*. Krykunov currently resides in Kiev, where he has established his own Roma Theatre, Romani, as well as an international Roma cultural festival. His primary goal is to bring Gypsy music from out of the restaurants and into concert halls and proper festivals.

NIKOLAY VASILYEV (ILO) – Nikolay Vasilyev is a producer and singer of both Russian romance and Gypsy folk music, and belongs to another important dynasty of Gypsy performers. His

great-grandfather is the alleged author of 'Tsyganochka', perhaps the most popular Gypsy song in post-Soviet Russia. Nikolay became a star after he sang the duet 'Mokhnaty Shmel' ('The Bee') with Nikita Mikhalkov, in the award-winning film *Zhestokiy Romani* (*A Cruel Romance*) in 1984. Vasilyev's group Ilo performs regularly in Moscow, and combines the traditions of Russia's urban and nomadic Gypsies.

GELEM – This legendary ensemble has been performing together for more than six decades. Its members hail from the extended families of the famous Erdenko and Ponomarev clans in the eastern Siberian city of Khabarovsk.

RUSSKA ROMA – Russka Roma was established in 1990 by Igor Fedorichev (aka Sakizchi). The ensemble initially began performing in Moscow restaurants, and in 1993, with the help of the wealthy Moscow national wrestling association, the band recorded its first CD, *Brichka* (Horse Wagon). In 2000, the band recorded the song 'Bird Catcher' together with Dmitrii Malikov, a major Russian pop star. The piece remained in the Russian Top 20 for an entire year, and the success of that album led to many others.

TRIO RITA – This St Petersburg-based band performs both Russian and Gypsy tunes. Their style combines the tradition of the Russian romance with fiery Gypsy rhythms. 'Kalina' is a traditional Russian song, performed here in a unique manner.

LEONISIA ERDENKO – Leonsia Erdenko, daughter of Nikolai Erdenko, began performing in 1987 in her father's band, Dzhang. She studied both classical and Gypsy styles of music and dance, and in 1997, in collaboration with Georgii Barykin, she recorded rearranged versions of famous Gypsy tunes. In 2000, she co-founded the Trio Erdenko band with her sister Rada and Alexei Bezlepin, and toured with Loyko. Erdenko's goal is to modernize Gypsy music. She recorded numerous soundtracks for Russia, Italian and French films, and continues to perform internationally. 'Lumba' is a Russian version of the Macedonian Gypsy anthem 'Rumelaj'.

ARBAT – This group is named after the famous Bohemian district in Moscow, a legendary street closed to automobile traffic that draws the city's top musicians, writers and poets. The band began forming together in 1989 in Paris, as guitarist Pascal De Loutchek (the son of Russian immigrants) teamed up with two veterans of Moscow's legendary Gypsy Theatre, Lilia Dalskaia and Petr Iourtchenko. Together, they fuse Russian Gypsy romances with elements ranging from Django Reinhardt's swing to Turkish dances.

Dan Ivanovich Rosenberg

Dan Rosenberg would like to thank Vadim Kolpakov, Oleg Ponomarev, Leonsia Erdenko, Sergey Erdenko, Anna Shternshis and Madonna for all of their help, support and inspiration for this project.

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Loyko



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Igor Krykunov and Sergey Erdenko



Gelem



Russka Roma



Leonsia Erdenko



Compiler Dan Rosenberg is a Toronto-based journalist. He has travelled to more than 40 countries in the past decade producing reports for The Times (UK), Islands, Folk Roots, The Rough Guides, Outpost, plus Afropop Worldwide, PRI's The World and CBC's Global Village radio programmes. For more information, visit www.danrosenberg.net

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