



Gypsy Crossings

featuring Biréli Lagrène and Taraf de Haïdouks

Sunday, May 8, 2005, 7 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Biréli Lagrène and musicians

Biréli Lagrène, *guitar*
Martin Weiss, *violin*
Hono Winterstein, *guitar*
Diego Imbert, *double bass*

Taraf de Haïdouks

Manole Ionel, *accordion*
Marin Manole, *accordion*
Ion Tanase, *small cymbalum*
Anghel Gheorghe, *violin*
Constantin Lautaru, *vocals, violin*
Viorel Vlad, *double bass*
Ilie Iorga, *vocals*
Paul Giuclea, *vocals, violin*
Marin P. Manole, *vocals, accordion*
Gheorghe Falcaru, *flute*
Filip Simeonov, *clarinet*

The program will be announced from the stage.

This performance has been made possible in part by the Friends of Cal Performances.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Biréli Lagrène was born on September 4, 1966, in Saverne, Alsace, France. The son of Fiso Lagrène, a popular guitarist in pre-war France, he displayed a prodigious talent as a very young child. Born into a gypsy community, his origins and his fleet, inventive playing style inevitably generated comparisons with Django Reinhardt.

In his teen years Lagrène toured extensively playing concerts and festivals across Europe, often with distinguished jazz artists such as Benny Carter, Benny Goodman, Stéphane Grappelli, and Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen. He also made his first record *Routes To Django*.

An outstanding technician, Lagrène has revealed influences other than Reinhardt, happily incorporating bebop phraseology, rock rhythms, and Brazilian music into his work. By the late '80s he had moved substantially from his early Reinhardt-style to fully embrace jazz-rock and other electronically aided fusions.

Lagrène returned to his roots with such brilliant offerings as 1994's *My Favorite Django* and 1998's *Blue Eyes*, as well as violinist Didier Lockwood's 2000 recording *Tribute To Stéphane Grappelli* and his highly acclaimed *Gipsy* [sic] *Project*, which eminent jazz critic Gary Giddins hailed as "electrifying ... represents his best work in years." This album was followed by the popular *Gipsy Project & Friends* in 2002 and *The Complete Gipsy Project* in 2003.

Taraf De Haïdouks, from Romania, has catapulted to fame since its 1992 debut in the French/Gypsy director Tony Gatlif's acclaimed film *Latcho Drom*. The group's first Cramworld CD *Musique Des Tsiganes De Roumanie* was hailed by the media, topped European World Music charts, and inaugurated a touring schedule that has continued for eight years. Taraf became the first real village band to tour widely and take Western Europe by storm.

Taraf de Haïdouks (Band of Honourable Brigands) hails from the village of Clejani, near Bucharest, and represents three generations of musicians. They have energized audiences at the biggest World Music festivals through their rhythmically complex songs, grace, easy camaraderie, and sense of mischief. *The New York Times* says about them, "Their wild energy is the essence of gypsy music ... their set seemed like the bubbling source of 20th-century rhythm ... they spun out cadences that recalled bebop, salsa, and

the polyrhythms of Zimbabwe and Nigeria."

The members are *lăutari* (traditional musicians), who play at village events such as weddings and baptisms. In southern Romania, practically all *lăutari* are male Roma (a term preferred to Gypsy) – in Clejani alone, there are numerous *lăutari*, all Roma.

The oldest typical southern Romanian Rom *taraf* (band) consists of a melody instrument, accompanying instrument (which varied by region), and a double bass, with singing done by the instrumentalists. Today there are more instruments, of which violin, *tambal*, (hammered dulcimer), accordion (which replaced the *cobză*, a plucked short-necked lute), and double bass are considered essential.

Lăutari highly value improvisation, especially interpretations which fit specific occasions. They have large repertoires because the celebrations for which they are hired are attended by varied groups of people: rural and urban, old and young, male and female, Rom and Romanian. Dance music, constructed of repeated melodic motifs, is an important part of the repertoire. Musicians string together melodies of contrasting mode and tonality to produce dances of varying lengths.

Although epic songs are declining in practice, they are the most venerated part of the vocal repertoire. Epics are traditional stories told in song; they are relatively long and describe the struggles of heroes (such as *haïdouks*) against foreign rulers, nobles, and more recently, greedy politicians. Epic singing entails a mastery of formulaic composition as well as a capacity for originality, combining tradition and creativity. The melody and text of an epic are variable—they are never performed the same way twice.

In the 1970s, Ceausescu's policy of homogenization became more oppressive and Rom culture was targeted. Some Roma were removed from large government ensembles, in which they represented up to 90 percent of the professional musicians. The Rom ethnicity of musicians was frequently covered up, and Roma were not allowed to perform in-group music, such as songs in *Romani*. Since the 1989 revolution, life has considerably worsened for Romania's approximately 2.5 million Roma. While they can now organize their own cultural and political organizations, they suffer numerous attacks on their homes, possessions, and persons. Groups like Taraf de Haïdouks salute the resilience of Rom music under trying conditions.