



DIGITAL COLLECTION OF EUROPEAN ROMA THEATER AND DRAMA

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Gypsy, but Decent

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DÁNIEL SAID

Please put your hands together for

Dániel Said!

Hi, thank you!

My name is Dániel Said, and I'm not a gypsy!

I don't usually open with that. Especially not into a microphone.

But this is a special situation.

I'm doing stand-up in an autobiographically inspired show about being Roma, and I didn't want you realizing ten minutes in: "Ooooh... wait, he's not." And then having to rewind everything I'd said so far in your head and de-Gypsy it.

This show is called "Gypsy, but decent," and it's not about me, it's about my friend Rudi. He's the one who bravely and proudly embraced the fact that he's "decent." He'll be on stage very soon. I'm just here to bring a little extra Arab flavor to this flatbread.

Rudi and I know each other from the stand-up scene. He asked me to be part of this evening because the way we think about ourselves is similar in some ways.

We both see ourselves as "half Hungarian." But we both have question marks around the non-Hungarian half. And similar experiences too. Also, we both call ourselves "young up-and-coming stand-ups."

Okay, I'm not that young.

Rudi is 23, I'm 37, but as long as László Kövér is still a "Young Democrat," maybe I can stay young too. But "up-and-coming" is a perfectly appropriate description... in Rudi's case. He's been doing stand-up for a few years now, and he's very skillfully carving out his path and rising.

I, on the other hand, have been doing this for more than ten years without any particularly tangible results. So maybe I'm more "coming-at-it-sideways." Or maybe "considerably late-blooming"?

Anyway, the two of us put this stand-up show together.

Raise your hand if you've ever been to a stand-up show before!

And now, applause for those of you who have never been to stand-up before!

So I'm here at the beginning to give the newcomers a bit of guidance.

This evening will be a bit unusual: there'll be stand-up, there'll be live music...

There will not be an intermission — even though that's a lot of people's favorite part.

But the most important part of all this is that you are here! In this genre, the audience also plays a very important role, so don't be afraid to make some noise! We're very happy about smiles, but if something is funny, feel free to laugh out loud!

Sometimes you can even clap. It'll be much better for Rudi, for me, and believe me, for you too!

Plus if you don't laugh, we'll assume you're racist.

You also need to loosen up a bit because the subject matter isn't always easy. The title is "Gypsy, but Decent" — you'll be asked to laugh at all sorts of ethnicity- and class-related stuff...

out loud...

in front of other people.

Which may not be easy...

Meanwhile I've said "Gypsy" into a microphone for the fifth time in two minutes, even though I basically have nothing to do with Romani identity, so this isn't easy for me either. So please, be supportive!

What also makes this evening special is that it's a "grant-funded stand-up show."

Rudi applied to Trafó and the Independent Theatre's stand-up grant about Roma self-representation, and this show is one of the winners.

Roma people and stand-up have a long history together.

For example Péter Aranyosi...

He was trying to draw attention to the kinship between Roma people and Dakota Indians.

(...)

RUDOLF FORGÁCS

Good evening, everyone!

I'm a Hungarian-speaking guy from Romania, half Roma, half Székely. I have no idea how I ended up this white either.

I guess I count as multiply disadvantaged. As a Romanian, people look down on me in Europe; as a Székely, in Romania; and as a Gypsy, in the whole world.

I recently moved up to Budapest so I wouldn't be such a tiny minority anymore.

Only I didn't know that there are as many Gypsies in Hungary as there are Hungarians in Romania.

I found myself in a minority of exactly the same size.

Supposedly Romania has the highest proportion of Roma people in Europe, and Hungary the second highest. But I think that's a valid statistic.

Because hats off to anyone who can tell a Romanian apart from a Gypsy. Because I can't tell Romanians apart from Gypsies.

Once I even mistook my own father for a Romanian in a shop. I only knew it wasn't him because he saw I was scared and was incredibly nice to me.

The trend seems to show that the more developed a country is, the less successfully Roma people managed to integrate there.

For example, in England they didn't at all. That's where Roma people lived the longest wandering around in wagons as full nomads on the margins.

In Romania it went differently. We probably taught the Romanians how to write.

In Hungary there have been several censuses since the regime change, and all of them gave wildly different answers.

There were all sorts of figures, anywhere between 3 and 10 percent, for the size of the Roma population. And that's because those studies counted as Roma the people whom their non-Roma environment considered Roma. So officially, you might be a Gypsy and I might not be.

It depends on what kind of relationship we have with our neighbors. It pays to stay on good terms with them. Because if they say you're a Gypsy, child services shows up the next day to take your kid away.

I really don't like this self-identification system.

The question is this: Who counts as a Gypsy?

It's not a simple question.

Few people identify as one, because the experiences are bad. Families still vividly remember that if you declare yourself a Gypsy, something bad happens.

I'm not surprised.

That sleepaway camp really did a number on us.

Still, we've been living among you for so long that there are now words and expressions named after us.

Gypsying around, gone down a gypsy road... cartwheel.

But that one is different. Nowhere else in the world is that move called a "Gypsy wheel." Even though the move is the same everywhere. Here too it's the same move as in England. You don't go "dik... dik... dik..." while doing it. For a long time I thought it was called that here because that's how Gypsies moved around everywhere.

That was because some little racist asshole classmate of mine said humans came from monkeys, but Gypsies came from cartwheels.

Then I asked my mother what I had become a Gypsy from, and she said, "From your father's dick, you little idiot!"

By the way, the wheel motif is in the Romani flag too, because we're a wandering people. It symbolizes that we can't find our place in the world. And that we can't settle anywhere because there's a curse on us.

Legend has it that the blacksmiths who made the nails for Jesus were Gypsies. And because they contributed to Christ's death, he cursed them to travel forever in their little wagons and never find peace, to have no country of their own. Compared to that, the Romans... who, by the way... did the crucifying... They're doing just fine with their boot-shaped territory that belongs to them. And they even have a Ferrari, whose emblem is a horse. A little better than a horse-drawn wagon!

So I don't think it was fair that, hanging there on the cross, he went:

"Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do."

But those fucking Gypsies should wander for their entire lives."

Then later I realized it's called a cartwheel because people associated that particular move with that ethnicity, that nationality.

You first saw it among Gypsies.

And while you were staring in awe, they probably robbed you, but that's just part of the romance.

(...)