

Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta

Ústav hudební vědy

Virtuosity and Performance of Masculinity: Music Ethnography of a Non-Roma Gypsy Jazz Group in Prague

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Abstract

In this ethnography I examine the gypsy jazz band Sylvanio Orchestra which is based in Prague, Czech Republic. This research consists largely of my observations at their performances, interviews with the band members as well as my personal experience of being a musician and a woman in this predominantly male collective. Thus, this essay is partly an autoethnography. The research focuses on a group of non-Roma musicians which play gypsy jazz music. I describe how their performances work, which consist mostly of jam sessions (participatory performance), and which mechanisms occur in these environments. Virtuosity is one of the main characteristics of the genre and is coupled with a sense of competitiveness. The group appears exclusive from the outside which might be caused by intellectual musical communication codes which outsiders cannot read and which are connected with the virtuosity typical in gypsy jazz. I suggest that virtuosity, competitiveness along with other characteristics of gypsy jazz performance might be perceived as masculine. Finally, I try to explain the dominance of men in gypsy jazz.

key words: gypsy jazz, virtuosity, performance, masculinity, gender