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## **London Gypsy Orchestra – Corn Exchange, Bedford**

**Musical Director: Gundula Gruen****Wardrobe: The ensemble****Reviewer: Maggie Constable****The Public Reviews Rating: ★★★★★**

Tonight at Bedford Corn Exchange we were treated to the new ensemble which has come out of the renowned London Gypsy Orchestra, which began in 2005. Led by virtuoso violinist, composer and singer, Gundula Gruen, this group of 15plus dynamic and talented musicians performed with both passion and dedication the folk and Gypsy music that is heard across the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Gundula was also the MC for the evening and a charming and amusing one at that.

The backdrop to the stage was an array of glittering stars as we huddled in from the cold and snow. We were soon warmed by the melodies, the energy, the rhythms and the sheer joy emanating from the musicians. The costumes were a blaze of colour and we were told by Evrah, principal singer, all about the traditional skirts made by company members from 4 large circles with 30 metres of material for the frills! Such is the dedication of these artists.

Every member of the orchestra is both singer and musician, playing a range of instruments from accordion to guitar to double bass to violin to wind instruments and special box drums. There are also dancers. We were taken on a wonderful musical journey across years and across European borders. We started in Serbia and went through Macedonia into Georgia back through Turkey and then onto Greece. Evrah sung to most of the melodies and was joined quite often in beautiful harmonies by Gundula. Dancers, who had been taught by a Polish Gypsy based in London, demonstrated traditional gypsy dancing, whirling their skirts and shimmying, and there was some sharp tap dancing by Antonio and his friend. Indeed, in the second half, as the young girls gave out flowers, we were encouraged to get up and dance with the performers, which I did. A fabulous time was had by all of us.

In the second part of the show Evrah recited one of her own poems to a traditional folk tune which Gundula had adapted for the orchestra. Very powerful. We were even treated to a melody composed by Gundula herself. At the end of the show some of the audience were up on their feet and stomping for an encore so the entire orchestra, with instruments, sashayed around the auditorium whilst playing one of the most famous and iconic Gypsy tunes, the Romanian Medley.

A thoroughly different and entertaining evening. A shame that more Bedfordian's could not have found their way to the theatre. It was not to be missed.

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