

GIPSY KINGS

Over the years the Gipsy Kings—whose members hail from the gypsy settlements in Arles and Montpellier in the south of France—have included singers and guitarists from the Reyes (Canut, Nicolas, Pablo and Patchai) and Baliardo families (Diego, Paco and Tonino). Lead singer Nicolas Reyes is the son of famed Flamenco singer José Reyes, who, with Manitas de Plata, sold millions of records in the 1960s and 70s. The band’s vigorous guitar work and passionate vocals are the trademarks of an indigenous musical tradition known as “rumba flamenca.”

There are no other examples of a non-English speaking band (the group’s language is the Gypsy dialect of *gitane*) with such a consistent winning streak in the U.S., where the group is the biggest-selling French act ever. Since the 1987 release of the international hit single “Bamboleo,” from their platinum-selling eponymous debut album, the Gipsy Kings have dominated the World Music charts and sold more than fourteen million albums worldwide—more than four million in the United States alone. Their platinum compilation, *The Best of the Gipsy Kings*, was on the charts for more than a year.

Albums such as the gold-certified *Mosaique*, *Allegria*, *Este Mundo*, *Gipsy Kings Live*, *Love & Liberté*, *Tierra Gitana*, *Cantos de Amor*, and *Volare! The Very Best of the Gipsy Kings* have provided a steady stream of hits to Billboard’s world music, Latin, and pop charts. The ensemble’s music has been used in numerous motion pictures, including Peter Weir’s “Fearless” and Joel and Ethan Coen’s “The Big Lebowski.”

Two PBS-TV specials have contributed to the Gipsy Kings’ ongoing success story. A documentary, “Tierra Gitana,” which aired on hundreds of public television stations in 1996, explores the band’s roots in gypsy culture and the members’ rich family heritage in flamenco music. Filmed in concert and in the Gypsy camps of Arles, “Tierra Gitana” provides a glimpse at the vanishing lifestyle of a vibrant traditional people. The hour-long film was released as a home video in December 1996. A second program, filmed in performance at Washington, DC’s Wolf Trap, captures the excitement of the band’s live show in a 60-minute special; it was broadcast on many PBS stations.

For the group’s most recent release, *Roots*, the core members of the Gipsy Kings settled into a stone villa in the small town of St-Andre-de-Bueges in the south of France, where they collaborated with producer Craig Street on the Grammy-nominated acoustic release, *Roots*. For the first time in years, the band recorded without a drum kit, synthesizer, or electric bass, bringing the music closer to its Flamenco origins. *Billboard* called the record a “treasure,” and *People* said, “Way beyond the strictures of language, these 16 songs will resonate with anyone who loves heartfelt, meticulously performed music.”

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