

# PARNO GRASZT

*They do not use sources of Gypsy music - they are the source itself.*

Simon Broughton, Songlines

During the last 20 years the name of **PARNO GRASZT** (meaning **White Horse** as symbol of purity and freedom in Romani language) became **the equivalent of authentic Hungarian Gypsy music.**

At least that's what critics say.

For the group, *being authentic* was nothing more than *being themselves*. Living in integrity, living a life and

playing a music they *always* have had. As **Simon Broughton** (Songlines) said after spending a weekend with Parno Graszt in their home village Paszab: 'They do not use sources of Gypsy music, they are the source itself.'



Indeed, back in Paszab at times of social ceremonies (let it be *any* kind) music is shared by each one of the community: instruments are passed from hand to hand and practically everyone is a dance master. **There is no**



**band, there is no audience. There is one unified festive gathering.** For Parno Graszt, their backyard is just the same as a festival stage with an audience of 50,000... too bad they cannot go on stage all together!

The band plays traditional Gypsy folk songs collected from North East Hungary and Romania along with their own compositions, thus representing **a specific local dialect of Roma music.**

Their instruments are acoustic guitars, double bass, tamboura, spoons, stereo (!) water can and the 'oral bass' which is a continuous vocal improvisation made by the percussionist. The band consists of 9 musicians including 4 dancers which is sometimes extended with cimbalom, accordion, violins and taragot.



Today a **50-years-old archive video** is projected behind the group on stage, presenting the parents and grandparents of Parno Graszt dancing parallel with them – **a real time journey between past and present!** On special occasions the number of dancers are extended to 18 including three generations aged from 7 to 78.

Their **first album [HIT THE PIANO](#)** was released in 2002 by FONÓ RECORDS and hit **[nr. 7 on WORLD MUSIC CHARTS EUROPE](#)** which was at least surprising since **never any Hungarian band reached the TOP 10 before!**

**World music radios discovered Parno Graszt.** The catching, easy-to-sing-along melodies and superfast rhythms gained many fans around the world, especially after the first live shows abroad where everyone was astonished by the elementary power of the Paszabi Gypsies... **no one could stop dancing...**

Since then Parno Graszt has played all around Europe including **THE NETHERLANDS** (tour 2004), **NORWAY, RUSSIA, GERMANY** (tour 2005), **AUSTRIA, POLAND, SWITZERLAND** (Paleo Festival 2006), **FRANCE** (Tribu Festival 2004, 12-gigs tour 2007), **BELGIUM** (Gaume Jazz Festival 2004, Balkan Trafik Festival 2008) as well as the most prominent venues in **HUNGARY** like Sziget Festival or Palace of Arts.

In 2004, **European Broadcasting Union** and **BBC** produced the series **EUROPEAN ROOTS**, presenting the indigenous music genres of Europe. Part of the series, the episode presenting Parno Graszt **[HOLIDAYS AND EVERYDAYS](#)** was presented all over Europe and acclaimed very good critics.

The much anticipated **second album [IN MY WORLD](#)** was featuring world-famous Hungarian Gypsy cimbalom master **KÁLMÁN BALOGH**. For this record Parno Graszt was selected into the **TOP 10 OF BEST GROUPS in 2005** by the Swiss magazine **VIBRATIONS**.



After a successful French tour in 2007, the group celebrated its 20th anniversary with the **new album [THIS WORLD IS MADE FOR ME](#)**. For this occasion, **DJ Gaetano Fabri** (remixer of Taraf de Haidouks, Kocani Orkestar and Mahala Rai Banda) made his debut remix for Parno Graszt's **[Gelem Gelem](#)** and two major labels, **World Music Network** and **Eastblok Music Berlin** selected one song off the new album for their compilations (see page 4).

# THE NEW ARCHIVE VIDEO

1956, Paszab, 8 mm silent film. Dancers: parents and grandparents of today's Parno Graszt

Projected behind the group on stage >> a real time journey between past and present

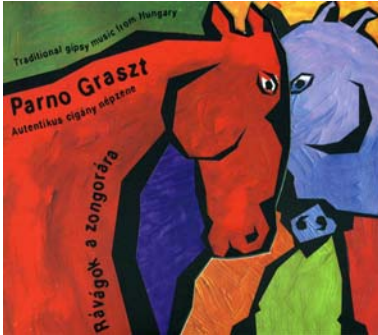




# DISCOGRAPHY

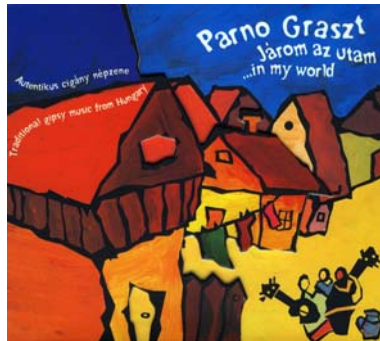
## RÁVÁGOK A ZONGORÁRA

2002 Fonó Records



## JÁROM AZ UTAM

2002 Fonó Records

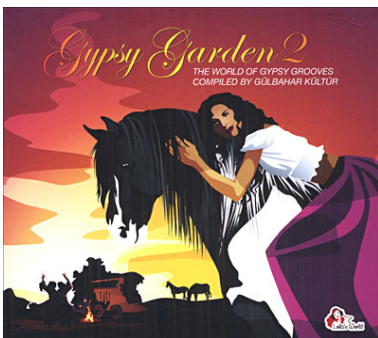


## EZ A VILÁG NEKEM VALÓ

2007 Podium Productions



# COMPILATIONS



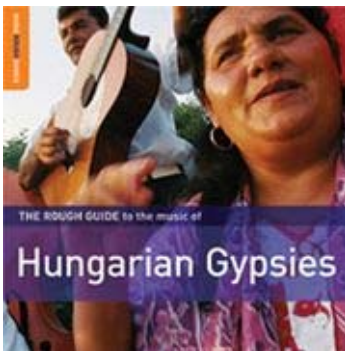
## GÖLBAHAR KÜLTÜR – GYPSY GARDEN VOL. 2.

2006 Lola's World Records  
#16. Parno Graszt – Koro Kino



## EAST EUROPA - MÉTISSAGE BALKANIQUES

2006 Disques Office / Paléo Festival Nyon  
#04. Parno Graszt - Khade sukar / Így szép



## THE ROUGH GUIDE TO HUNGARIAN GYPSIES

2008 World Music Network  
#02. Parno Graszt – Odi Phenel Cino Shavo / Azt mondja a kisfiam



## WE ARE MAGYAR

2008 Mama Records  
#05. Parno Graszt – Annyit ittam bánatomban



## BALKANBEATS 3.

2008 EastBlok Music  
#08. Parno Graszt – Annyit ittam bánatomban / Drunk of Sorrow

## SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

### 2008

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Balkan Trafik Festival, Brussels, Belgium

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Palace of Arts, Budapest – Gala for the Opening of Folk Faculty at Franz Liszt University

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### 2007

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6eme Continent Festival, Lyon, France

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Festival Settembrinu, Talasani, Corse

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Rugby World Cup 2007, Paris, France

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Tour: France (Paris, Guingamp, Chambéry, Barbey)

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### 2006

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Folk Holidays Festival, Namest nad Oslavou, Czech Republic

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Hungarian Year, Kulturbrauerei, Berlin

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Paléo Festival, Nyon, Switzerland

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Pohoda Festival, Trencin, Slovakia

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### 2005

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Concertgebouw , Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Jazz Festival, Gaume, Belgium

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Palace of Arts, Budapest

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Sziget Festival, Budapest

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Tribu Festival Dijon , France

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### 2004

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Iagori Roma Festival, Oslo, Norway

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Moszkva, Oroszország

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Sziget Festival , Budapest

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Tour: The Netherlands (Amsterdam, Utrecht, Groningen, Rotterdam, Breda )

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### 2003

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Brno, Prague , Czech Republic

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Tour: Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany (Antwerpen, Leipzig, Esch, Elmau, Radebeu)

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> SEE SONGLINES AND VIBRATIONS REVIEW ON PAGE 6 AND 7



## POSTCARD FROM... HUNGARY

**Simon Broughton** spends time with the Gypsies – and gets into the music and interior decor

It's ten in the morning and we've already drunk brandy in a dozen houses in the village. And I've become a connoisseur of brick-imitation wallpaper. Garish red brick, thin grey brick, or brick with creeping ivy enhanced by hanging plastic leaves and flowers. This latter in the house of our host, József (Jozsi) Oláh, guitarist and leader of the Hungarian Gypsy band Parno Graszt.

It's Easter Sunday and the tradition is to call on family and friends. But of course, it's not just an exchange of greetings, every house has a table groaning with cakes, cutlets, cucumber and bottles of drink – vivid pink

thought it was worth making a film about them, and why I'm here. Parno Graszt means 'white horse' in Romani and white, Jozsi tells me, is a symbol of purity. They play songs and dance music of the rural Hungarian Gypsies. They made their first CD (for Fonó Records) in 2002 – a cracking disc, which got into the EBU World Music charts, and have recently released a second.

Paszab is an unremarkable village in north-east Hungary, an economically depressed area with a large Gypsy

live on the outskirts of the village and the 'Gypsy Street' of 'c-houses' – *cigany hazak* (Gypsy houses), built by the state in the 70s. They're small concrete buildings with no running water, but individually painted and spotlessly clean inside, decorated with brick wallpaper and plastic flowers.

József Oláh is one of the few that doesn't live in the Gypsy quarter, but in the village proper. He has a Hungarian wife, but as his mother said to me, "A Hungarian can make Gypsies, but Gypsies can't make Hungarians". At best there's latent racism from Hungarians. Everyone says relations in Paszab are good, although economic hardship hasn't helped. "There are two sorts of racism," says Aladár Horváth, of the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, "little racism and big racism. Here it's little racism. They just hate you, but don't burn your house down."

In the afternoon we end up at one of Jozsi's relatives on Gypsy Street. It's a warm April afternoon and teenage girls are skimpily, even provocatively dressed in tight trousers or split skirts and revealing tops with bare arms. It's an informal party in the yard outside the house. The bass is tuned, Jozsi starts strumming his guitar and then pulls out a *tanbura*. Within minutes water cans have become *tablas*, guitars are fizzing and those bare arms have become seductive serpents snaking through the air.

Some of the songs are about the hardships of life, but most are escapist – fast, furious and catchy as hell with nonsense words and oral percussion. It's the romantic Gypsy cliché. Life is shit, but let's escape it for as long as we can and forget about tomorrow. "We are born like this," says Jozsi. "All our life is music and when I'm happy or sad I express it with music. That's why I've been playing like this since I was born." |

**Parno Graszt's new CD is reviewed in the Europe section and the European Roots film Parno Graszt – Hungarian Gypsies will be shown on BBC4 in January**



Gypsy Street in Paszab, north-east Hungary



Guitarist József Oláh leads the Easter celebrations

and orange pop, beer and *palinka* (plum brandy). The first visits are in and out with a quick exchange of greetings and a dash of *palinka*. But soon songs and dances creep in and before long it's a mobile musical party.

Parno Graszt is largely a family affair and has been around for 20 years working simply as a village band playing for local celebrations. They're not an urban concert outfit, but a real Gypsy band, which is why I

population. Until a decade ago there were jobs in Budapest and every week Gypsies travelled on the 'Fekete Vonat' (Black Train) to the capital for work, but now their places have been taken by migrants from further east. Jozsi's father worked in Budapest till 1992, but nothing since then. Most live off social security and occasional piece-work.

Paszab has about 1,300 inhabitants, around 30% of them Gypsy. Most of these





## PARNO GRASZT

**STYLE** Ce groupe tzigane de Hongrie, tous violons en avant, ressemble à un combo de rock'n'roll

**LABEL** Fono travaille à la pérennité du patrimoine musical hongrois, entre démarche d'archivage et de prospection.

**ATOUTS** La preuve par le live : une tournée des festivals européens a indéniablement confirmé la révélation.

La frontière ukrainienne n'est plus très loin, et dans cette plaine hongroise figée par le gel, le relief se limite aux bras hésitants de la rivière Tisza et à d'innombrables bosquets qui donnent leurs noms aux villages du comté de Szabolc-Szatmar. Il faut ainsi passer le Bosquet du gitan, puis le Bosquet de Varga, pour trouver Paszab, le village de Jozsef Olah et de son groupe Parno Graszt. « Notre nom signifie "cheval blanc", explique le chanteur et guitariste qui éclate aussitôt de rire. Pas très originaux, ces roms, avec leurs groupes nommés systématiquement "cheval", "yeux" ou "feu", d'une couleur ou d'une autre. » Mais un hennissement dans la petite écurie attenante révèle cependant un « parno graszt » tout ce qu'il y a de plus blanc, fierté de cette petite ferme clouée sur quatre hectares d'herbe et de maïs.

En deux disques composés, joués et enregistrés au galop, les dix musiciens de Parno Graszt se sont révélés l'un des meilleurs groupes tziganes d'Europe Centrale, prenant d'assaut les scènes des plus grands festivals européens avec un aplomb et un culot proches d'un combo de rock'n'roll. « Nous ne sommes pas issus d'une tradition musicale. Encouragés par nos parents, nous avons cependant appris à nous débrouiller avec des instruments dès l'enfance. » Dans le salon de la maison, le frère de Jozsef, Janos, saisit aussitôt la porte des WC pour une démonstration musicale que ne renierait

pas Pierre Henry. « Faute d'instrument, j'ai d'abord imité la contrebasse en grattant le bois. »

A des kilomètres de Budapest, ces tziganes francs du collier seraient-ils plus authentiques que les violonistes ombrageux interprétant du Django dans les restaurants de la capitale ? Rien n'est simple dans un pays où la culture tzigane se mélange intimement avec l'histoire hongroise au point de perdre ses racines. « J'essaie une mélodie sur mon synthé dans trois styles différents : si ça passe, c'est que le morceau est digne de figurer au répertoire. Ensuite, j'écris les paroles en hongrois et ma belle-sœur les traduit en rom. » En voilà, du grain à moudre pour les ethnomusicologues : Parno Graszt se déclare attaché à la langue de ses origines, mais presque personne dans le groupe n'est capable de la parler. « Dans les festivals tziganes, on nous accueille toujours avec des "baxtale romale", et nous savons à peine dire merci. »

Dans cette région reculée, la musique tzigane est longtemps restée confinée aux bals de village et aux mariages. Si les violons faisaient gambiller les paysans, seuls la voix et le battement des mains sur une cruche servaient aux fêtes familiales des tziganes Olah. C'est le groupe Kalyi Jag qui a utilisé le premier des guitares acoustiques dans les années 80. Depuis, la plupart des groupes tziganes hongrois utilisent cet instrument au ton plus pop et urbain que le crincrin des anciens. « L'autre jour, des filles sont venues nous demander le troisième morceau de notre dernier CD, raconte Jozsef Olah. Quel embarras ! Non seulement je n'ai aucune idée de l'ordre de nos morceaux, mais je n'en connais même pas les titres. Je ne reconnais nos chansons qu'à leur première phrase, et souvent, je change le sens du refrain sur scène. Je ne suis pas du genre à chanter systématiquement la même histoire d'un type ivre et malheureux qui s'est coincé le pied dans une porte. Une chanson, ça doit bouger et faire bouger les gens, non ? »

**Thierry Sartoretti**

Parno Graszt, Járom az utam... In My World (Fono/www.fono.hu)