



Romashka

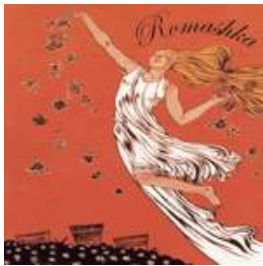
By [Elliott Simon](#)

A Balkan beat, gypsy fire, a Serbian brass band, a sexy vocalist, a dazzling show. There is a big Balkan music scene in New York City, and it is best experienced at local venues that cater to their crowds with plenty of music, space for dancing, and free flowing spirits. Places like Mehanata on Canal Street and even the famed

Knitting Factory pack their venues for Gypsy/Balkan shows. I was fortunate to catch just such a show with one of the best of these young bands at the Knit a few months ago. Romashka didn't disappoint that night, and neither does the group's debut CD.

"Mariana" kicks things off with a nod to the brass band of the great Serbian trumpeter, Boban Markovic. The pumping tuba of Ron Caswell, quick Jeff Perlman sax runs, the frenetic fiddling of Jake Shulman-Ment, and the oh so powerfully sweet horn of one of NYC's best young trumpeters, Ben Holmes, make for a danceable delight. Vocalist Inna Barmash showcases her strongly sensual lyrical skills on the wonderfully catchy "Loli Phabay (The Red Apple)," which has a castanet backbeat and a lovely string-based feel courtesy of guitarist Joey Weisenberg and Shulman-Ment. The brass is back with the carnival atmosphere of Perlman's own fun loving "Shimidiggy," which has the composer and Holmes trading solos over an infectious rhythm. Caswell's tuba is present throughout, and in conjunction with Timothy Quigley's percussion, he sets up the infectiously danceable backbeat to all these tunes.

With no apologies to Hernando's Hideaway, Stevhen Iancu's accordion makes "Tayna (A Secret)" a flowing forum for Barmash to vocally layer a Russian feel on top of this tango with beautiful results. It all comes together in the cooker "La Cîrcuma De La Drum (The Tavern on the Road)," allowing Weisenberg, Shulman-Ment and Iancu to change direction with the intense "Rustemul." "Zaznobila & Baro Foro (She Messed With My Head in the Great City)" again finds Barmash in powerful voice as Perlman's clarinet and Shulman-Ment's violin energize this tune to its conclusion. Closing with the traditional instrumental "Moldovan Batuta," a surprise tango reprise awaits the patient listener. This is hot music for cold nights; Romashka rocks.



Track Listing: Mariana; Loli Phabay (The Red Apple); Shimdiggy; Tayna (Secret); La Cîrcuma De La Drum (The Tavern on the Road); Rustemul Zaznobila & Baro Foro; Moldovan Batuta.

Personnel: Inna Barmash: vocals; Jake Shulman-Ment: violin; Jeff Perlman: clarinet, saxophone; Ben Holmes: trumpet; Stevhen Iancu: accordion; Joey Weisenberg: guitar, Ron Caswell: tuba; Timothy Quigley: trumpet.