



Věra Bílá

Jurkova, Zuzana

Věra Bílá is the most popular contemporary Czech Roma singer. She was born on May 22, 1954, in Rokycany. She comes from a musical family, "the Giňas", who moved to Rokycany from eastern Slovakia in 1945. Her mother was an outstanding singer. Her father, Karol Giňa, led a → cimbalon band which played in the wide area around Rokycany, especially at Roma weddings and parties (in contrast to prewar Slovakia, when Roma bands were hired by non-Roma). Bílá has kept her traditional way of life: according to the Roma proverb, "He who marries someone has to stay with him until death", she has been living with her husband, František, since she was fifteen years old. They have an adopted son. She preserves traditional customs: Belief in God [→ Devel] and even in → mule is a part of her life.

Bílá has been performing in public since the age of eight. First she sang in the traditional milieu of family celebrations, marriages and parties. Since 1994, she has been singing professionally with the group "Kale" ("Black"), in which members of Věra's large family play. Bílá's singing is characteristically exceptionally colourful; her rich voice with its wide range makes her performance distinctively expressive. Věra Bílá plays five musical instruments: guitar, piano, cimbalon, percussion and accordion, but she does not play them in public.

In concerts, Bílá sings traditional songs of Czech and Slovak Roma – → hallgatós and → Csardases – but, above all, she sings → Rom-Pop . She herself writes the texts and composes the melodies of most of the songs, whose subjects and turns of phrase are drawn from her traditional Roma background as well as from contemporary life style.

In 1985, a songbook of her favorite songs of the time, "Kali Zpívá" ("Kali Sings"), was published.

The success of her first two CDs ("Rom pop", 1995, and "Kale kalore", 1998), brought Bílá and her group, "Kale", invitations to prestigious international festivals of ethnic music, e.g. "Les Printemps de Bourges" (France), Falun (Sweden), and Kaustinen (Finland). In 1999, Bila undertook a grand concert tour through Europe, the USA and Japan with her group. They also gave concerts in Canada and the Vatican. Their CD "Rovava" (2001) came out simultaneously in Switzerland, Finland, England, France, Poland, Israel, Holland and Belgium.

Věra Bílá played in two films by the Slovak director Dušan Hanák, "Růžové sny" ("Pink Dreams"), 1976 and "Já milujem, tu miluješ" ("I Love, You Love"), 1980. A semi-documentary film about Věra Bílá, "Černobílá v barvě" ("Black and White in Colour") was filmed by the director Mira Erdevički-Charap in 1999.

References

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