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The Daily News Weekend Entertainment Guide



# Bumpy road behind Gypsy

By Paul Freeman
Daily News Entertainment Writer

"We're pretty hands-on artists," says Cilette Swann, vocalist and lyricist for the inspiring duo Gypsy Soul. Her declaration is an understatement. Swann and her musical partner, husband Roman Morykit (composer/multi-instrumental-ist/producer), put a massive amount of blood, sweat and tears into building a loyal audience.

Once people hear Gypsy Soul's mesmerizing music — an exquisite blend of Celtic, Americana and other flavors they want to hear more. It's gaining the initial exposure that's challenging.

The twosome comes by its nomadic spirit naturally. Swann's parents, of South African/Irish descent, settled in Canada. Morykit's folks, Hungarian and Italian, moved to England. Now Swann and Morykit are first-generation immigrants to the U.S., living in southern Oregon.

They met in Scotland when Swann was singing jazz in Europe. Their common love of Peter Gabriel, Daniel Lanois, U2, Celtic music, folk and blues, drew them together.

They went to Canada, married and pursued musical dreams. A stint in Los Angeles proved difficult, as promised opportunities faded.

"All of our friends were artists, photographers, actresses or musicians and everyone was heartbroken," Swann said. "Everyone we knew — a pretty damned talented bunch of people — had a lot of rejection and disappointment."

Morykit added, "Los Angeles is not a nurturing environment. That's the kindest way to put it. You either crumble under it or it makes you stronger and it gives you more impetus to keep going.

An indie record deal in '97 led to adult contemporary airplay, quite a feat for unknown artists. But the label's money ran out and that ride ended. Morykit had been through similar disillusionments in England.

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"With a label, so much needs to align," he said. "Everybody needs to be backing the band at the right time and pushing in the same direction. It's amazing, frankly, that anybody ever does make it. We thought, 'Do we want to go up against those odds or do we want to try to find a way to do this ourselves?"

Swann said, "We realized no one is ever going to have our best interests at heart as much as we are.

#### Soul's path

The pair didn't aspire to fame and fortune. They simply wanted to be career musicians. "The two — musicians and stars — aren't always mutually exclusive," Morykit said. "But for us, it was always more important to be musicians, being true to what it is that we have to say and who we are, rather than being stars."

Morykit and Swann started their own label and arranged for distribution. The couple lived in Marin for a time and, to get their music heard, turned to wine and art festivals. But after finding an hour on the main stages didn't garner enough attention, they began renting booths. Spending 10 grueling hours alternating live mini-sets with CD play, their efforts resulted in tons of sales.

Technology provided new opportunities as well. "You're able to get out there and do things on (Web sites) like

Then there's iTunes and Rhapsody for downloads. It involves a lot of work," Morykit said, but added that it's possible to find new opportunities. "You have-to just keep plugging away."

#### Getting intimate with fans

Their rapidly growing fan base wanted to enjoy the full Gypsy Soul experience, so Morykit and Swann rented small theaters for performances. A bountiful email list helped pack each engagement. The couple also found interest from morning TV shows and newspapers, Everyone roots for talented underdogs.

Gypsy Soul has played the Little Fox Theatre half a dozen times. "They've got incredible sound. They just do everything right there," Morykit said.

"It's a very professional venue, and they respect the artist," Swann said.

At sold-out shows spanning the western states, fans have displayed their love for Gypsy Soul. The pair's plans now include national and international touring.

Having songs played in films and on such TV shows as "Felicity," "Roswell" and "The Young and the Restless" has caused downloads to surge.

Listeners respond enthusiastically to tunes from the latest album, "Beneath the Covers: A Rediscovery." Featured are imaginative interpretations of such songs as "Wicked Game" and "Superstition."

A new album, showcasing brilliant originals, is half finished. Through advance sales and fan contributions, Gypsy Soul has already raised \$24,000 to fund the record and promotion campaign.

The duo receives e-mails and letters describing how much the music means to



### **GYPSY SOUL**

From page 22

listeners. "They're connecting in a profound way and that's the reason that we're doing this," Morykit said.

Swann said, "We hear things like, 'Watching you guys and knowing that it's not been an easy road has inspired me to leave corporate America and start my flower shop with my husband.' It's amazing that people let you into their lives enough that you might even spark changes."

Shared tribulations have only fortified the bond between Morykit and Swann. "We experience the exact same rejections all the time," Swann said. "But we also live the same incredible, wonderful events. It makes for a really rich relationship."

Despite the success they've forged, rejection remains a constant challenge. "We comfort each other and we've learned, as we're getting older, to be philosophical," Swann said. "The right stuff is going to come when it's sup-

posed to come.

"My dad, who was an actor and a writer, had a lot of rejection. He used to say, 'You've got to enjoy the journey.'
That constantly rings true to me."

## At a glance

What: Gypsy Soul When: Sunday, 7 p.m.

Where: Little Fox Theatre, 2209 Broadway St., Redwood City Tickets: \$16 advance /\$18 door