

September 5, 2013

## The gypsy trail



The Hindu

Norig performing at the Museum Theatre. Photo: R. Ravindran

### **Norig's songs raced through history and geographical borders echoing the music of all the places that the gypsies travelled through**

With her little black dress, flashy orange stilettos and husky voice that sang of love, longing and larger-than-life journeys, Norig stole the show at the opening act of the Music Alliance Festival 2013.

The event, held at Museum Theatre, was presented by the Alliance Française of Madras, the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Tamil Nadu and the French Embassy in India. Along with ace musicians Mathias Levy (violin), Olivier Lorang (double bass) and Joris Viquesnel (guitar), Norig who sang in Romany and French brought home the soul of the gypsies of Eastern Europe.

A young singer of Spanish origin from Grenoble, France, she took lessons in music from Martina Catella, a famous ethnomusicologist. Norig is the kind of singer who can emote the pain of a loveless marriage in one song and then draw everybody into a foot-stomping flamenco in the next. Her songs explored the themes of old such as a dance in the village green and life in caravans to modern ones such as a lonely girl in a bar and the promise of urban courtship. All along the musicians shared the tunes, Levy playing brilliantly ably supported by Lorang and Viquesnel (whose intense riffs led to the guitar strings cutting twice!) They strung melody after melody with finesse, each one bolder than the last, and ornamented their repartees with dynamic contrasts. Their music was rich in textures and the telling.

Norig's songs in Romany were not simple...they raced, then meandered with trills and repetitive notes, dipped into rhythms and were influenced by dance tunes from the Balkans to Andalusia to India. The music came from memory the original having been lost to the vagaries of time travel.

The concert never lacked momentum and ran the gamut from pastoral sonorities to lyrical episodes that spoke of a whirlwind gypsy romance.

The outstretched arms and delicate wrist gestures appeared in dances. And there was much reference to a sense of belonging here even though the language was foreign.

Which was why when the group performed its final song wearing garlands of jasmine and rose, it was as if gypsy music had finally come home to the land of its birth.