

The Beat Magazine

Don't uncover your ears just yet, unless you want them to bleed from the loudest clatter since the Big Bang. Fanfare Ciocarlia is a gypsy brass band from East Romania, a mere cymbal crash from the Moldavian border. The music on Radio Pascani (Piranha) is klezmer on steroids with the party atmosphere of a polka bash on the eve of the millennium. Not only does the band play at top volume, it also plays fast, throwing tongued trumpet triplets into convoluted rhythms that jolt the body like a trip off a cliff on a mule cart. The music's intensity and martial figures are the legacy of the military bands of the occupying Ottoman legions of the 19th century. Soloists as familiar with western jazzsters as with traditional currents keep the mixture fresh, though songs rip by so quickly the listener has scant chance to appreciate the contribution of any given member as the ensemble turns its horns and reeds into a massive melodo-percussive piston--leading me to wonder what kind of dance could possibly keep up with these wedding and ceremonial tunes. Just listening is exhausting. And intimidating. As unmistakable as the go-for-broke joy is the current of rage that comes from being a stepped-on people invited to the homes and ceremonies of the non-Rom in a professional capacity only.

Bob Tarte 1998