

Famous Gypsy/Travellers

It perhaps comes as no surprise that many of the world's most creative and inspiring people – both past and present – descend from, and indeed class themselves as, Gypsy/Travellers. The Gypsy/Traveller way of life is, by nature, an extremely free and liberated one, one where creative talents and traditional practices are of utmost importance. Growing up in a culture steeped in generations of music, story-telling, folklore, ancient crafts and trades, and folk-art, it is no wonder that many Gypsy/Travellers have gone on to become cultural, artistic and influential public figures.

The following people have all made contributions – with varying degrees of importance – to the realms of music, film, sport, humanitarianism, literature and exploration. This list (sourced through various internet searches) is by no means conclusive and was created merely out of interest. Please feel free to inform us of any other famous Gypsy/Traveller names that have made an impact on our world as we know it. Let's take a look at just some of those famous names which find their roots in a nomadic past...

Some of the most important and influential names from the past descend from Gypsy/Travellers: legendary rocker Elvis Presley; humanitarian extraordinaire Mother Theresa; Former President Bill Clinton; actor Charlie Chaplin; actress Rita Hayworth; author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan; Victorian explorer Richard Burton and pioneering jazz musician John 'Django' Reinhardt are all said to come from Gypsy/Traveller blood. More recently: Gogol Bordello; Cher; Michael Caine; Bob Hoskins; David Essex; Eric Cantona; Sandi Thom; Wayne Rooney; Martyn Bennett; Shayne Ward; Adam Ant and Mika are all thought to have Gypsy/Travellers in their own family tree. Interestingly, a recent winner of the reality show 'Big Brother', aired in Italy, is a Gypsy/Traveller. This win comes at a time where other Gypsy/Travellers are under huge pressure from Italian authorities who, in various parts of Italy, have demolished their settlements – prompting talk of a Roma emergency.

The following are perhaps people of lesser know celebrity status, but it is important to note the range of talents and contributions given to us by Gypsy/Travellers: Czech international footballer Milan Baros; Hollywood actor Yul Brynner; conductor Sergiu Celibidache; Spanish flamenco dancer and Roma Ambassador in the European Union, Joaquin Cortes; playwright, critic and broadcaster Louise Doughty; footballer Freddy Eastwood; film maker, scriptwriter, actor and producer Tony Gatlif; Romany activist, writer, professor and United Nations delegate Ronald Lee; fashion designer Juana Martin; World Cup winning footballer Andrea Pirlo; painter and sculptor Katarzyna Polok; boxers Billy Joe Saunders and Henry Wharton and Sir Henry Wood, the founder of the Proms concerts.

It is hoped that this list has highlighted the wonderful array of talents which can be found when we delve into the world of Gypsy/Travellers. The ancient traditions of the Gypsy/Traveller way of life have created a colourful and creative society, a society which should be embraced and respected, not looked down upon, feared and disrespected.

The following website hosts a list of prominent Gypsy/Travellers throughout the ages on a global scale: <http://www.imninalu.net/famousGypsies.htm>

Beth Cadger

Policy and Research

YGTL – Article 12 in Scotland