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The Cradle of Roma Brass Bands

Macedonia and southern Serbia are the cradle of Roma brass bands. These bands have gained a worldwide reputation for their celebrations in Serbia. The music of the brass bands accompanies all the important moments in people's lives: weddings, births, departure for military service... All the major events are traditionally accompanied by the sound of trumpets.

In the small village of Zaguzanje, near the town of Surdulica, 300 km south of Belgrade, live about 70 Roma families. Occasionally employed to work in the fields by the few other Serbian families, the villagers' meagre income is supplemented by the recovery of scrap metal. In Zaguzanje, life is difficult for the Roma, but Zaguzanje is sparkling. Of the 70 families, almost 50 are musicians. Trumpet playing is a centuries-old tradition here, although most of them have no classical musical training. Music is learned in the family from an early age. A gypsy brass band is often a family of ten musicians. With a drum set, a 'bass' (a kind of tuba) and 8 wind instruments and the first trumpet that naturally leads the musical game. So music is often the main income for these Roma families. A good musician is the glory of his village and he can support his whole family.

Every year in August, near the town of Guca * south of Belgrade, the event of the year takes place: the trumpet festival where numerous brass bands from all over Serbia converge. For this event, the youngest musicians of the village Zaguzanjeu have formed several groups. They will also go to this festival, even though they are not on the bill, in order to earn a few euros or dinars.