

**February 23, 2006**

## **Balkan Activity at the Wonderland Ballroom**

Just relocated to D.C. this week, I had heard about the [Wonderland Ballroom](#) at the 11th and Kenyon in NW Washington. Supposedly frequented by indie rockers and bohemian music junkies, I expected to find some droning, whiny kid with a guitar on stage - emotionally pulsing through a set of inspired but slightly unlistenable odes to women who'd rejected him.

But what I found in the shotgun "ballroom" was a fascinating performance by [The Balkanics](#), a D.C.-based group offering engaging interpretations of traditional music of Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro. Led by the stunningly petite Tzvety Weiner, the group's set was musically and emotionally engaging, with the drums and tuba delivering thundering beats overlaid by accordion-like instrumental work and Weiner's high-pitched vocals.



**Dressed in slinky**

**black**, Weiner spiraled about the dancefloor, singing in a foreign tongue I couldn't even attempt to identify, and shaking her hips like a size 0 Shakira. Often, a drummer joined

her on the floor, pounding a single drum while a circular dance line rotated around them. The dancers were like a mixed-religion wedding party, where the experienced stepped and kicked fluidly, only to see the circle deformed by uninitiated bar denizens who didn't know the steps.

But the Balkanics don't play music geared only toward people with a cultural heritage in Eastern Europe, their sound is engaging for any true music lover.

But don't get the wrong idea; their sound is not in line with the modern ethnic fusion of bands like [DeVotchKa](#) that mix their roots with modern indie rock. This group definitely leans toward traditional sounds - but the adherence to tradition is one of the band's greatest strengths. While the music progressivist in me wants to see the band challenge their roots and make peace with today's music scene - the part of me that values back-to-the-roots musical expression applauds their adherence to the old country

sound.

**I feel they accomplish an artistic goal** more effectively by staying away from the contemporary world fusion sound. And while I don't expect to see them on the lineup for fusion-happy festivals like [Bonnaroo](#) or [Austin City Limits](#), I know I can expect the group to keep educating audiences in the Baltimore/D.C. area about the strength of Balkan traditional music.

**Photo Courtesy of Balkanics.com**

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