

Hot Club of Detroit



More than seven decades after the innovations of the Quintette du Hot Club de France, featuring guitar virtuoso Django Reinhardt, combos called Hot Clubs carry on the gypsy jazz sound around the globe—in Tokyo, San Francisco, Seattle, Sweden, Norway, Austria, and many other locales. None, however, offers a fresher take on the tradition than does the Hot Club of Detroit, led by fast-fingered Reinhardt disciple Evan Perri.

Unlike the instrumentation of original Paris-based quintet, comprising Reinhardt, violinist Stephane Grappelli, two rhythm guitarists, and a bassist, the current Hot Club of Detroit is made of guitarist Perri, accordionist Julien Labro, soprano and tenor saxophonist Carl Cafagna, rhythm guitarist Paul Brady and bassist Shannon Wade. The fibrous accordion tones of Labro, a native of Marseilles, France, links the Detroit quintet to the French musette style from which gypsy jazz partially sprung, while Cafagna's robust saxophone work introduces bop and post-bop elements to gypsy jazz.

"Night Town," the follow-up to the group's widely acclaimed 2006 debut CD, Hot Club of Detroit, finds Perri and company giving a New Orleans boogaloo twist to "Django's Monkey," a number inspired by the Reinhardt composition "Django's Tiger," which utilized "Tiger Rag" chord changes. "Blues Up and Down," the hit 1950 tenor saxophone battle by Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt, is transformed into a tenor/accordion battle between Cafagna and Labro. And "Seven Steps to Heaven," the classic 1963 Victor Feldman/Miles Davis composition, enters the gypsy jazz realm through the Hot Club of Detroit's swinging rendition.

The disc also includes the Detroit combo's distinctive takes on the Reinhardt tunes "Speezy" and "Melodie au Crepuscule;" the venerable French songs "J'Attendrai" and "Valse a Rosenthal;" Maurice Ravel's "Tzigane;" contemporary French guitarist Romane's "Pour Parler;" Vincent Youmans' "I Want to Be Happy;" John Green and Carmen Lombardo's "Coquette" and Jelly Roll Morton's "Sweet Substitute;" plus the Evan Perri compositions "Night Town," "Swing 05" and "Two Weeks" (co-written with Julien Labro).

"While the Motor City is synonymous with the music of Django Reinhardt, the members of the HCOD are living proof that the virtues of gypsy jazz can survive the transatlantic voyage."

London Times

"The Hot Club of Detroit's "Night Town" is a tour de force full of hard-swinging, toe-tapping arrangements of gypsy jazz standards and original compositions penned by members of the ensemble. Having won four Detroit Music Awards, HCOD are setting their sites on the national and international scene, and Night Town is the perfect vehicle for the HCOD to broaden and expand its audience.

All About Jazz

Evan Perri's arrangements bring out the tantalizing contrasts in Django's music: light and dark, fast and slow, burning and lyrical. His lead acoustic guitar is virtuosic, blending vintage flavor and with bebop flair.

**Dave R. Adler
JazzTimes**

**2006 Detroit Music Award
for Outstanding
Traditional Jazz Group**

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The son of a professional jazz guitarist, Perri was born in Detroit on June 12, 1979, and raised in nearby Grosse Pointe, Michigan. He began studying piano at age four and was giving classical recitals by the time he was five, but he says he gave up piano "around the time I started discovering skateboarding and girls." He next took up bass in the school orchestra and, as a teenager, played electric bass in local punk bands. When he was 17, his dad gave him a guitar.

"My father always told me never to become a guitar player 'cause you'll make more money playing bass," Perri recalls, "but one morning I woke up and he had bought me a Fender Strat. It kinda changed my world."

Perri had been exposed to his father's straight-ahead jazz guitar playing, as well as to records by Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass, and Jim Hall, while growing up and, after taking up guitar himself, developed a fondness for Pat Martino, yet he had never heard Django Reinhardt until he enrolled at the McNally Smith College of Music in St. Paul, Minnesota, to study with Mike Elliott, a former student of jazz guitar great Johnny Smith.



"He totally turned me around and changed my world, the way I approach music, how to function as a musician," Perri says of the now-deceased Elliott. "We studied all styles of guitar playing. We had been studying rhythm guitar, especially Eddie Lang and Charlie Christian, and how to play swing rhythm guitar. It was only a matter of time before Django's name came up. He asked, 'Have you ever heard of this three-fingered gypsy, who was one of the best players of all time?' I had never heard the name before. Several months later, I bought a Hot Club of France CD. I got in my car and put it on. I think the first track was 'Honeysuckle Rose.' I couldn't believe what I was hearing, this whole new approach to jazz that was so old, no drums, violin, and just swinging-ass rhythm playing."

Perri, who now plays a small oval-hole Del Arte acoustic guitar, formed the Hot Club of Detroit in 2003 while attending Wayne State University in Detroit. The group took first place in the 2004 Detroit International Jazz Festival competition and won the 2006 Detroit Music Awards as Outstanding Traditional Jazz Group. In 2007, the band swept the Detroit Music Awards, winning in the Outstanding Traditional Jazz Artist, Best Independent Label Recording, Outstanding National Small Independent Label Recording, and Outstanding Video on a Limited Budget categories; Perri himself was named Best Jazz Instrumentalist. And, for the past five years, the quintet has hosted the annual Djangofest Detroit at various venues, including the Masonic Temple, where Reinhardt himself had appeared with Duke Ellington in 1946.

Saxophonist Carl Cafagna joined the Hot Club of Detroit in 2007, replacing clarinetist Dave Bennett and giving the band, in Perri's words, "a little more of a modern jazz sound." Night Town is Cafagna's first recording with the group.

"On this album," Perri says, "I'm taking a whole different approach than we did on our first. Our first was more of a straight-ahead gypsy jazz record. With this one I really wanted to show the maturity of the group and how we've grown, and I wanted to feature everyone in writing the arrangements so that it's not just one guy in the group but it's an actual band. It's a band sound instead of just a soloist backed by all his buddies."

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