

# OREGON MUSIC NEWS

## Hot Club of Detroit: More hot, less Django

by Mark Niemann-Ross on September 21, 2010

What I'm about to tell you has little to do with the Hot Club of Detroit. But to understand why HCoD is worthwhile, you'll need a bit of background information.



Django Reinhardt, the focal point of Gypsy Jazz, isn't just a musician, he's a religion. His prolific recordings (320 albums), festivals, tribute bands and jam sessions are the envy of any artist. In fact, Django Reinhardt isn't just a religion, he's a complete musical genre – mention "Gypsy Jazz" or "Gypsy Swing" and it is immediately clear you are talking about a musical style that includes arpeggiated guitar solos, a rolling bass line, possibly violin (ala Stephane Grappelli) or accordion, all accompanied by driving rhythm guitars supplying "chugga-chugga-chugga" to keep the swing dancers hopping. Played well, it makes for an infectious concert that seems to summon swing dancers from a twenty-block radius. Played poorly, and you'll long for a recording of Kenny G to break the monotony.

Most of the Gypsy Swing faithful demand complete fidelity to Reinhardt's original recordings. Grab any album produced by "Hot Club of (fill in a city name here)" and you'll hear a faithful tribute to the Reinhardt. Faithful to the point of repetitive. Which makes one wonder, why re-record a tribute to an original? Why not just buy the original recording?

This is where the Hot Club of Detroit diverge from the faithful, and as a result, come closer to the essence of Reinhardt than endless tribute bands. Reinhardt was an innovator – and so is HCoD – thank god.

Their latest album, "It's about that time," takes the first beat of the first track to announce itself as outside the Reinhardt fixation. Julien Labro and Carl Cafagna double a rolling set of notes on accordion and – gasp – a saxophone. The rhythm guitar kicks in, and we're off to the races. But wait – there's more. It's – gasp upon gasp – an ORIGINAL song written by Labro. The sheer audacity makes one stagger. But be careful where one staggers, lest you get crushed by the swing dancers invading the floor. Listen up to "On The Steps..."

All sarcasm aside, these guys are swingin'. The second track, "Nostalgia in Times Square" is a Charles Mingus ditty. Juicy bass run starts things off, and we now have a gypsy version of a big band swing tune. It's not until the third track, "Noto Swing," that we finally get around to playing something from Reinhardt. And so it goes.

I could do track by track – but I won't. Here's a better idea. Come hear them, live and in person, at the Doug Fir on September 27th at 8pm. Ten bucks, bring extra for the album you'll want to buy.