

T H E S C E N E

THE HOT CLUB QUARTET DELIVERS EARLY JAZZ SWING

There seems to be a growing interest in hot gypsy jazz from the 1930s, with another Los Angeles area group, The Hot Club Quartet, now playing dates and putting out CDs. This animated early jazz is galvanizing new listeners who find it quickens the pulse and excites. You almost can't have a program of gypsy jazz without the music and influence of the legendary Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli, but this group didn't limit their work to total replay of those early greats. However, it was inevitable that many of the stirring Django guitar patterns played with intensity were included by lead guitarist Billy Steele, while Tom Marion's guitar added a different style of old-timey single-string licks that walk the chord changes transitions to the next chord. On a few surprise occasions, Marion also briefly played banjo-mandolin on "Japanese Sandman" and what appeared to be a ¾ size tenor banjo on "Ain't Misbehavin." Marion's accompaniment wasn't the expected hard-driving rhythm guitar, but rather a lighter, melodic second-guitar approach. However, when the guitarists switched lead and accompaniment parts during some tunes, Steele played rhythm guitar as my ear demanded with this style of early jazz, with a strong, propulsive beat a la Django and Grappelli's Hot Club of France.

Benny Brydern was outstanding both as spokesman and violinist, doing both with enthusiastic high-energy. He played particularly eloquent violin in a forthright manner, with spirit and panache! If you haven't heard early jazz on violin, as was played by Stephane Grappelli and others, you are in for a treat when you hear Brydern make his fiddle swing. He plays jazz violin with the soul of a gypsy and the technique of a classical musician. He is a skilled fireball who is a joy to watch and hear.

These four musicians also play in a larger band with Janet Klein's Parlor Boys, featuring music from the early 1900s to the 1930s. This accounts for the old-timey flavor sometimes found in the mix of the Hot Club Quartet's music.

The play list of 25 tunes included many associated with Reinhardt and Grappelli, as "Minor Swing," "Honeysuckle Rose," "Nuages," written by Django and beautifully played as a violin feature and "Avalon," with a duo of Dave Jones bowing his large upright bass with only rhythm guitar accompaniment. Original tunes "Travel On," "Woodinville" and "Ravello" were written respectively by Steele and Brydern to fit this type of program.

The Hot Club Quartet brings a different flavor to the art as they interpret and play gypsy jazz. It's a versatile style that has room for invention and wide latitude for high temperature performances. One thing certain, the audience in the filled room at the Coffee Gallery Backstage in Altadena liked what they heard and responded with such enthusiastic applause that proprietor Bob Stane promised on the spot to have the Hot Club Quartet back often.

--Harvey Barkan