

"Our Town - Our Paper"

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Arts & Entertainment

Sound spectrum

Django Fest - Musicians Tribute to Django Reinhardt



Last weekend I was invited to experience the Django Fest at the Festival of Arts grounds at the Forum Theatre during which both local and international musicians payed tribute to the music and spirit of Django Reinhardt.

On Saturday night I heard the Tommy Davvy Quartet, Pere Soto from Spain - accompanied by Gonzalo Bergara and Stephane Wrembel from France, and the John Jorgenson Quartet. Each masterful musician captured the spirit of music and presented the audience with an exceptional evening.

Allow me to tell you a *bit* about Django. Jean Baptiste Django Reinhardt was born in 1910 in Belgium to his family of Gypsies. He grew up as we would

expect a Gypsy would - moving from one place to another, living in caravans, playing music.

Django's parents settled just outside ol' Paris where he would play the clubs. He played music as a youth and continued to play until his life on earth ended in 1953. He left in his path a story and a style of playing that contemporary musicians dedicate their learning to.

His own story, on the other hand, goes, in short, something like this: After an evening of playing, Django returned home to his Caravan where he and his wife lived. She had made flowers to sell at the marketplace from a highly flammable material. With a lit candle in hand, the flowers caught fire and their caravan went up in a blaze.

They both survived. However, Django's hand was burned and three of his fingers were partially paralyzed. Without ever ~~regaining the ability to extend them again, Django played with two.~~

The night of the Django Fest, Pere Soto told us of a time when he played and someone in the audience shouted that he was good, real good, but could he play with two fingers? He did, and he did for us that night. With an unshakable clarity, I experienced the captivation of music.

Django's style of playing is called Gypsy jazz, Gypsy swing, and Jazz manouche. Each one describes music heard in a Gypsy jazz repertoire.

In France, they have a Django festival at Samois-Sur-Seine, and there are festivals in other places of the world where his music is also celebrated.

Laguna celebrated their fourth annual Django Fest last week with both local and international players. The Tommy Davvy Quartet opened the night with a bit of wit and a lot of great music - both from Django's repertoire and their own. I was told prior to experiencing their music that I'd remember them. Indeed, they are an outstanding group. Currently two discs are being finished right now, and a pre-release is available on special order at the Sound Spectrum.

Another well known player on Saturday night's bill was the John Jorgenson Quintet. It's been written that Jorgenson is responsible for leading the American Gypsy jazz movement. He was asked to recreate Django's music for the feature films "Gattica" and "Head in the Clouds." Unsurpassed, he is a tribute to Gypsy jazz.

I am not certain, but from what I've read, listened to and experienced, these musicians who dedicate their learning and playing to the music of Django Reinhardt are truly artists. Their performances capture the spirit of music. To put it into words - the beauty of the Tommy Davvy Quartet, Pere Soto, the John Jorgenson Quintet, Stephen Wremble and Gonzalo Bergara has opened my musical world to a whole new genre that I had only experienced before through Django's CDs.

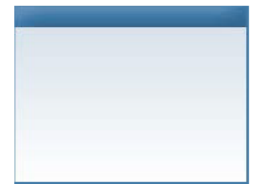
To listen to them live is to feel the music. Each one of these players is celebrated in their own right and has their own website.

The Django Fest here in Laguna brought the art of this town back into full swing on Saturday night. Next April 25 and 26, 2009, it will be brought to life again. I can't tell you how incredibly special this evening was. The talent was unsurpassed, the intimate setting of the Forum Theatre is surely not going to last, and the experience wasn't just sitting back and listening, it was a true experience whereby the imperative importance found in the art of music was given.

Allow yourself to experience music and share in the spirit of Django Reinhardt. Visit www.DjangoFest.com to get started.

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