



HOT CLUB OF DETROIT

NIGHT TOWN – Mack Avenue Records MAC 1014. www.mackavenue.com. *I Want To Be Happy; J'Attendrai; Valse A Rosenthal; Seven Steps To Heaven; Speevy; Coquette; Sweet Substitute; Blues Up and Down; Pour Parler; Melodie Au Crepuscule; Two Weeks; Tzigane; Django's Monkey; Night Town; Swing 05.*

PERSONNEL: Evan Perri, lead guitar; Paul Brady, steel & nylon string rhythm guitar; Julien Labro, accordion, accordina; Shannon Wade, bass; Carl Cafagna, tenor & soprano saxophone.

By Dimitry Ekshtut

The city of Detroit has been called home by a generation of leading jazz musicians, ranging from brothers Elvin, Thad, and Hank of the celebrated Jones musical family to Kenny Burrell, Barry Harris, and Curtis Fuller. It was these men and their contemporaries that by the 1950s had cemented the Motor City firmly within the national jazz conscience. Now a new stock of Detroit musicians is once again making the rest of the country take note. All it took was a little trip to France.

Around the same time the brothers Jones were cutting their teeth in the music halls of Detroit, a charming Belgian gypsy had succeeded in taking the jazz world by storm. Guitarist Django Reinhardt, the first true European jazz star, created a wholly new sound – later termed “Gypsy jazz” or “Jazz manouche” – best embodied in his famous all-string-instrument ensemble, the Quintette du Hot Club de France. Django's synthesis of the French, gypsy, and swing musical traditions of his day laid the groundwork for all future exponents of so-called “gypsy jazz”, including the Hot Club of Detroit, which gets not only its distinctive sound but also its moniker from Django's seminal group.

Rather than simply ape Django's style, the Hot Club of Detroit has taken the substance of the

legendary guitarist's distinctive brand of jazz and infused it with a personal, modern touch. Where Django had one “lead” guitar and two “rhythm” guitars in his group, the Hot Club of Detroit employs one of each – founder Evan Perri on the former and Paul Brady on the latter. Augmenting the guitars are accordionist Julien Labro, tenor and soprano saxophonist Carl Cafagna, and bassist Shannon Wade. With this effective though uncommon combination of frontline instruments – most “gypsy jazz” groups have a violinist, as Django's did – the Hot Club of Detroit manages to just about split the difference between American and Continental, old and new, the vivacity of a pre-war Parisian café and the din of a Prohibition-era speakeasy. I suspect that's just the way they'd like to have it.

Night Town, their second effort on Mack Avenue Records, kicks off with a lively little gem called “I Want To Be Happy”. Upbeat and energetic, this three-minute tune effectively sets the mood for the entire album. The Hot Club of Detroit bound through the remaining fourteen selections, a well-paced assortment of the requisite Django tunes and French chansons complemented by originals and some straight-ahead jazz, with an impressively meticulous eye for detail and precision while reveling in the group's obvious passion for the music.

Among the many pleasant surprises on this album, perhaps the most impressive is the impeccable arrangements the group has put together not only for standard gypsy fare but for jazz compositions as well. Take Miles Davis' “Seven Steps To Heaven” with its inventive and colorful blend in orchestration, primarily encompassed in an engaging introduction to the melody. “Seven Steps” then develops into a vehicle for Cafagna's crisp, warm tenor sound, which takes center stage throughout the tune. “Valse A Rosenthal”, a Reinhardt composition, is notable for an ornate melodic line that weaves back and forth from harmony to counterpoint between guitar and accordion. “Django's Monkey”, with its catchy arrangement anchored by a riff-laden accompaniment, also features a blistering solo from Perri that finds him at the top of his improvisational game. An interesting merger of classical music and gypsy jazz is found on Maurice Ravel's “Tzigane”, while Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt's rollicking “Blues Up and Down” is a typical jam session barn-burner replete with a terrific call-and-response solo section shared by Cafagna and Labro.

Consistently keeping the track length in the three-to-five-minute range, the Hot Club of Detroit present solos that are concise and intelligently constructed to deliver maximum impact given the premium on time. Only “Pour Parler”, tipping the scales at a still-modest 5:58 minutes, prevents *Night Town* from being a hypothetical collection of old 45-rpm recordings reissued on a single compact disc. Yet this is an asset to the Hot Club of Detroit. Its members never go too far afield, consistently keeping the listener interested with luscious new melodies and supple arrangements uncompromised by any egotistical need to “blow” on the part of the soloists. They succeed in that they are smart enough and take themselves seriously enough to know the difference between being purveyors of a specific idiom, which

they are, and merely being a one-trick pony. As such, *Night Town* is a remarkably accessible album capable of being appreciated not only in conventional jazz circles for its musical sophistication but rather far outside of them as well. That elusive combination of musicality and accessibility make the Hot Club of Detroit a force to be reckoned with – not only in Detroit, but everywhere quality music is valued.