

Eric Nemeyer's
JAZZ INSIDE

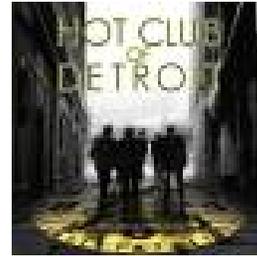
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HOT CLUB OF DETROIT

IT'S ABOUT THAT TIME—Mack Avenue
MAC 1051. www.mackavenue.com.

On the Steps; Nostalgia in Times Square; Noto Swing; "Tristesse" E Major Etude; Equilibrium; Restless Twilights; For Stéphane, Papillon; Duke and Dukie; Heavy Artillerie/It's About That Time; Patio Swing; Sacre Bleu; Sweet Chorus

PERSONNEL: Andrew Kratzat, bass; Carl Cafagna, saxophones; Evan Perri, guitar; Julien Labro, accordion; Paul Brady, guitar



By Herbie Y. Gamura

"Not another Hot Club record! If you've heard a few, you've heard them all," is what I thought when I picked up the CD but within seconds of pressing the play button, I knew I was wrong, and I knew I was in for a very enjoyable listening session. Of all the recent Hot Club records I've heard, this one is perhaps the most pure, even though it will be sure to disappoint the purist. One should define purity as unhindered truth. Of course, being influenced by the past is unavoidable, but to try to recreate the past is to disregard what is true about you, someone living now, with a completely different life, heart, mind and frame of musical reference than Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli. Nevertheless, the sound those Gypsy Jazz trailblazers created is one that is deeper than just a style—it is its own genre of music, like Bebop, or the Blues. The Hot Club of Detroit manages to retain the essence of the Gypsy Jazz medium—the absence of a drummer and the percussive "la pompe" rhythm guitar technique, the presence of an accordionist, and the general attitude of the gypsy jazz player, but they have truly made this music their own. This is not a novelty record like so many Gypsy Jazz records are. This is not a re-enactment. This is something that is part of a timeline, connected to a certain tradition, but the year is very much 2010.

The two guitarists, Evan Perri and Paul Brady, play both an electric and an acoustic Gypsy jazz style guitar. Their playing is marked by inventive rhythmic phrasing that is precise and accurate – but don't let those adjectives deter you! This often means playful and deeply swinging, not at all machine-like, as so many guitarists in other jazz mediums tend to get. The appeal of Gypsy jazz is the supremacy of swing, and this band revels in that priority.

Along with plenty of classic Gypsy style sounds, and song choices/compositions, there are also doses of funk, blues, hard bop and modern jazz. The first track, "On the Steps" pays homage to Pat Martino's "On the Stairs" by making use of his chord changes and general vocabulary with its melody along with a brief reference to John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" which gives perfect sense to the title.

One of the more funky offerings is “Heavy Artillerie/It’s About That Time,” a coming together of a Django Reinhardt and a Joe Zawinul tune. Another ‘outside-the-box’ offering for a Gypsy jazz group is Mingus’s “Nostalgia in Times Square,” a song in 5/4 with an apropos bass intro from Andrew Kratzat.

The ensembles interpretation of Chopin’s “Tristesse – Etude in E Major” is absolutely gorgeous—Julien Labro makes his accordion sound like a string orchestra.

The rest of the album features an eclectic mix of originals that shed light on the groups various influences while retaining that Gypsy jazz essence.

An album like It’s About that Time has the ability to revitalize the Gypsy jazz tradition and to inspire many people who may hear it to seek out and (re)discover the roots of this music, yet it also stands alone as a grand achievement on its own merit.