

Vintage Guitar[®] m a g a z i n e

April 2003

Luciano Zuccheri and the Quintetto Ritmico di Milano

Jazz in Italy in the 40s

Riviera Jazz Records

The unfortunate effect of the brilliance of jazz guitar stars such as Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt is that they eclipsed other players of their day. One such guitarist was the Italian pioneer Luciano Zuccheri.

As with guitarists such as Oscar Alemán, Baro Ferret, and others, stories of Zuccheri's fine sides have long circulated but actually finding copies of his recordings has been next to impossible. Happily, that has now been remedied with this collection of his early 78s put onto CD. The folks at Italy's Riviera Jazz Records are due a big thanks.

Zuccheri was a classically trained guitarist who fell under the influence of Django's Quintette du Hot Club de France and never looked back. He had played in several jazz dance bands since 1933 before founding the Quintetto Ritmico di Milano in 1941 based on Django's famous ensemble. And as with Django and his trademark Selmer modèle Jazz guitar, Zuccheri played a custom-made steel-string jazz guitar crafted by Italian luthier Luigi Galimberti.

Yet Zuccheri did not build a career covering

American jazz standards nor Django's compositions as others did. Instead, he played Italian popular songs translated into jazz, as well as composing his own instrumentals. These latter reflect the influence of Django in their virtuoso

themes but lack Django's natural sense of swing and near-perfect melodies.

On the best of the 26 cuts here, Zuccheri dazzles. His guitar playing is sure and strong with stunning arpeggiated runs using up all the strings and the whole fretboard. And his Quintetto knows how to swing with a fluidity comparable to the hot American combos of the day – although some of his

accompanying violinists had a difficult time keeping in tune in the high registers.

Still, Zuccheri sounds more practiced and planned in his improvisations, never letting himself go the way Django did. And as good as his solos are, they retain an almost mechanical quality – the product of his classical training no doubt – and never quite sing the way Django did.

Comparisons with the master are not truly fair, however, and Zuccheri certainly had his own vision and voice. This collection is a worthy showcase of his talents and an exciting session of pioneering jazz guitar by a near-forgotten master. – *Michael Dregni*

