

EINE KLEINE CHIN MUSIC

WELL, HERE ARE THE DOGS, AND YOU HAVE REACHED THEM, AND YOU CAN STAND IT.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2004

Jazz

I just posted this on a Django Reinhardt discussion site and figured I might as well put it here. Enjoy.

Just thought I'd mention a few new CDs I picked up.

First is Profitez-en! by Samarabalouf. They're a French band comprised of François Petit on guitar and bouzouki, Pierrot Margerin on guitar, and Luc Ambry on bass. They're joined on this album (recorded live, by the way) by Arnaud "Nono" Van Lacker, accordionist from the band Swing Gadge. Petit wrote 15 of the 16 tunes on the album (with Van Lacker contributing one). And what do they sound like? Well, I've had a hard time putting my finger on it. The players all use acoustic instruments. Petit plays some type of Selmoroid. They keep to the usual "head-solos-head" structure, adding a few interesting touches like percussion breakdowns here and there. The tunes run the gamut from waltzes to Eastern European folk. So it's gypsy jazz, right? Well, I'm not sure. First, not too much of it swings. It's not that they try to swing and just can't do it; they just don't seem too interested in that aspect of the music. Most of the tunes seem to have been taken from the folk idiom into the jazz idiom. Even their waltzes are a little weird in the way they differ from the musette tradition. Second, while the rhythm is quite solid, it's not very jazzy. Margerin seems more intent on providing rhythmic drive than interesting chord voicings. That's not a criticism, just an observation; the music they're playing doesn't seem to aspire to beauty as much as power. So would I recommend it? Absolutely. I find Petit's writing interesting and his solos, while not virtuosic, are driving and melodically interesting enough to keep my attention. I happened to pick my copy up at Amoeba Records in L.A.; folks elsewhere in the world might want to try fnac.com.

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I also picked up two albums on Riviera Jazz Records out of Rome, Italy. They've been compiling CDs of Italian jazz from the 1930's and '40's, and it's very interesting stuff. First up: a comp of recordings by guitarist Luciano Zuccheri and his Quintetto Ritmico di Milano. Zuccheri was an admitted Djangoaholic and put together his own group modeled after the QHCF. I love hearing this type of band (like Freddy Valier's String Swing from Norway, Svenska Hotkvintetten from Sweden, Rytmin Swing-Yhtye from Finland, and Quntette du Club Rythmique de Belgique from Belgium); they're interesting footnotes to Django's story. But, like Oscar Aleman, Zuccheri might deserve a closer look. His playing, while definitely reminiscent of Django's, has its own personality: ultra fast and clean sweeps; long, clean melodic lines; and tremolo picking right out of the mandolinist's bag of tricks. This CD is also notable for its choice of tunes: only two standards, "The Old Folks at Home" and "I Wonder Where My Baby Is Tonight." The liner notes contain an interesting essay written by Fabio Lossani comparing Zuccheri and Django, and on the subject of tune choice, says, "Zuccheri's main interest is clearly more unique romantic Italian compositions, often written by Zuccheri and his musicians, rather than American jazz standards." Don't be scared; there's not a shred of "O Sole Mio" in sight. Zuccheri's take on jazz is Italian in the same way that Django's is French.

My other Riviera Jazz purchase was a collection of recordings by Gorni Kramer, an Italian accordionist. I first heard Kramer with his group Tre Italiani in America on Saga Jazz's Jazz a la Gitane comp. Fans of Gus Viseur and Tony Murena's swing recordings will probably enjoy his work. Kramer and his band are tight, powerful, and they swing like crazy. He digs into the American songbook, playing tunes like "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You," "Sweet Sue," and "Nobody's Sweetheart." He also plays many of his own compositions. They're much more indebted to American jazz than those of Zuccheri, but Kramer's excellent musicianship keeps them interesting. (That's not to say that American jazz is uninteresting; it's just that second-rate bands playing imitations of Count Basie and Duke Ellington often sound a little silly.) The playing is hot and Kramer also seems to deserve a closer look by fans of old jazz.

By the way, the folks at Riviera Jazz were very nice and quite prompt with my order. It took about a week for the CDs to get from Rome to L.A., which is a damn sight quicker than Amazon or Fnac. There website is here: <http://www.rivierajazz.it>

POSTED BY RODERICK CUMMING AT 1:57 PM

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