

ORCHESTRA JAZZ COLUMBIA/ MICHELE "MIKE" ORTUSO *Milano 1931/ Berlino 1929* CD

GORNI KRAMER *Volume 1: Milano 1935-1939; Volume 2: Milano 1939-1946; Volume 3: Milano 1939-1947* CDs

QUINTETTO RITMICO DI MILANO, BY LUCIANO ZUCCHERI *Milano 1942-1951* CD
GIAMPIERO BONESCHI E IL SUO COMPLESSO/ TRIO GAMBARELLI-MOJOLI-BONESCHI/ ERALDO VOLONTÉ E LA SUA ORCHESTRA *Milano 1945-1949* CD

The hep Riviera Jazz label, with its Jazz in Italy series, is doing an amazing job of documenting the music's fascinating early days in the land of linguini. What makes this strain of jazz's story particularly intriguing is that much of it was made under Mussolini's culturally oppressive regime. In Germany, *swing musicians* were hunted down and imprisoned, but Italian musicians were pretty much left alone – as long as they didn't record any Anglo-American tunes. How did they get around this? Simple. They just changed the titles and composer credits. Il Duce and his henchmen were apparently too busy to listen in. As a result, these CDs are a trainspotting holiday for jazz history buffs.

The Orchestra Jazz Columbia, however, predates the fascist era. Clearly derivative of Paul Whiteman, the band's jaunty, cartoonish bounce is charming and fun. Banjoist-guitarist Michele Ortuso, the hard-driving nexus of the OJC's sound, is also featured on a pair of stunning solo sides.

Accordionist-leader Gorni Kramer is the true plum of the Riviera roster. On what must be among the earliest recorded examples of the use of the accordion as a solo jazz instrument, Kramer and his various-sized outfits ably put forth the swing on excellent originals as well as standard staples ("China Boy," "Stardust," "Tiger Rag") over three magical volumes. (A fourth and final installment is planned.) What makes Kramer's style so appealing is its unique blending of 1930s Harlem heat with the old-world sounds of neighboring French musette players. Although it's all pretty reet, the highlights are the tracks by his trio, The Three Niggers of Broadway (one assumes Gorni and his label were unaware of the real connotations of the "exotic" n-word), which also features the fine pianist Cosimo di Ceglie. Special mention should also go to *Volume 3's* duets with bassist Ubaldo Beduschi on "La Fisarmonica Moderna (Kramer's Blues)" and "Improvvisazione" (an under-the-radar remake of "I Got Rhythm") and *Volume 1's* "Zum Zum" (the Gershwin's "Slap That Bass" in disguise), by an 11-piece orchestra that includes guitarist Luciano Zuccheri.

Zuccheri, a devoted disciple of Django Reinhardt, also lead the Quintetto di Ritmico di Milano, which included Beduschi and another Kramer cohort, violin ace William Righi. Zuccheri's technique is more reflective of his classical background than the spicy flavor of his gypsy hero, and his rhythm section's delicate drive only hints at the fiery attack of The Quintet of the Hot Club of France. But his refined chops have an undeniably unique appeal; plaintive standouts like "Sussuro di Primavera," "La Crime Innamore," and "Improvviso" serve as this long lost genius's elegant calling cards. (Not that he couldn't burn rubber when he wanted to, as tracks like the reckless "Moto Perpetuo" attest.) A big bonus is that all but two of the songs, a beautiful version of "Old Folks at Home" and the Walter Donaldson/Gus Kahn chestnut "I Wonder Where My Baby Is Tonight," are either Zuccheri originals or are by obscure, homegrown composers. Django junkies and fans of early guitar greats like Eddie Lang or Oscar Alemán should snap this one up. The remaining title covers the years immediately after World War II and features various combinations of pianist Giampiero Boneschi, drummer Claudio Gambarelli, clarinetist Franco Mojoli, and tenor man Eraldo Volonté. The stuff here is, for the most part, trio and quartet dates, quaintly modeled on Benny Goodman's small groups; the take on "Lady Be Good," for example, is okay though nowhere near as swinging as the BG rendition. But Mojoli is an exceptional soloist, and his sweet tone in the low registers often does approach Goodman's. The handful of big band sides, including Volonté-led readings of Gene Krupa's "Leave Us Leap" and Woody Herman's "Apple Honey," are also worth hearing, if only for their variations on the better-known

arrangements. Mainly though, this works well as a period piece, a fine example of the pervasive influence of American music.

(The liners of Riviera's earlier output are all in Italian, but with its most recent releases – QRM, Boneschi/Gambarelli/Mojoli/Volontè, third Kramer CD – the label has begun to include English notes; take a peek at www.rivierajazz.it for more info and a gallery of historic photos.)

[Riviera Jazz Records Via Livigno, 145, 00188, Rome, Italy] *Peter Aaron*