

DJANGO REINHARDT AND THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF GYPSY JAZZ

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

After finishing up an intense amount of satisfying work on the *Django* book, it was time for a vacation...

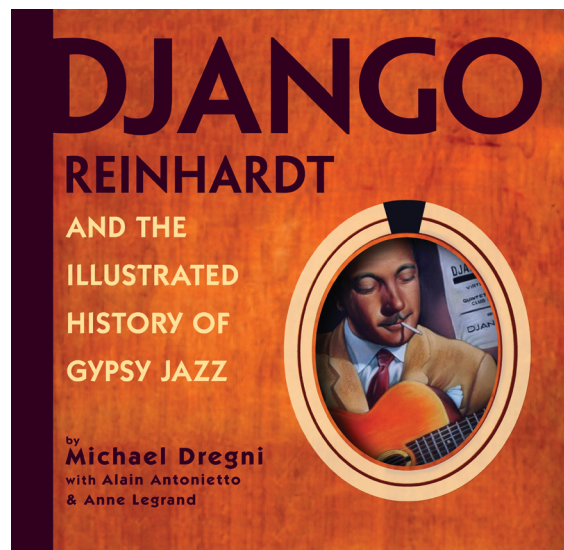
It was in The Netherlands where I stumbled across my moment of thrilling coincidence. After admiring the numerous van Gogh paintings at the famed Kroller-Muller Museum, I walked past a message board where there sat the enigmatic and beautiful Django Reinhardt. A poster touted a Django tribute concert slated for the following week. This overwhelming feeling of elation and validation overcame me. I knew of the worldwide Django devotion, I knew of my own growing obsession of Gypsy jazz, but it wasn't until that moment did I truly internalize Django's monumental and vibrant legacy. (Needless to say, I asked the security guard for the poster, and it now resides on one of Speck Press' office walls.)

—Susan Hill Newton

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This stylish collection of more than 400 exceptional images tenderly tells the story of Django and Gypsy jazz. Beginning with Django's birth and running through the Paris Jazz Age of the 1920s to today's worldwide renaissance of Gypsy jazz bands, the images include rare archival photographs, family portraits, collector-quality posters and programs, as well as modern images, guitars, era memorabilia, and paintings. Running narrative weaves its way in and around the imagery, further playing out the tales of Gypsies and their music.

Gypsy jazz is a music both joyous and sad, timeless and modern. It was born from a marriage of Louis Armstrong's trumpet with the anguished sound of Romany violin and the fire of flamenco guitar. Created amidst the glamour of Jazz Age Paris and reaching a peak during the horrors of World War II, Gypsy jazz gave a voice to a dispossessed people. Today, Gypsy jazz is more popular than ever. It has a legacy as strong as the Cuban sounds of the Buena Vista Social Club, the blues of B. B. King, and the R&B of Ray Charles.



SELECT MOMENTS IN DJANGO'S LIFE

- 1910 January 23, born in Liberchies, Belgium
- 1924, begins music career in Parisian dance halls
- 1928 June, first recording session
- 1928 October, suffered disfiguring injuries to hand in caravan fire
- 1930 April, begins to play guitar again, without use of his ring finger and little finger on left hand
- 1932 Discovers Stephane Grappelli
- 1934 February, first performance organized by the newly founded Hot Club de France
- 1935 March, records with Coleman Hawkins
- 1939 April, meets Duke Ellington at the Hot Club de France's new office
- 1940 Releases "Nuages," an anthem to Paris during the Occupation; despite Nazi bans on jazz, Django was a favorite with German troops
- 1946 Joined Duke Ellington's tour in the U.S.; begins to paint
- 1952 December, exhibits paintings at the Salon des Vedettes
- 1953 May 16, dies from a cerebral hemorrhage

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AUTHOR BIOS

Michael Dregni (left, with David Reinhardt) is the author of *Django: The Life and Music of a Gypsy Legend*, published by Oxford University Press in 2004 and a New York Times Extended Bestseller. He is a writer for *Vintage Guitar* magazine, his work has also appeared in *Guitar Player*, *Acoustic Guitar*, *The Utne Reader*, and others. He is the author of several obscure books on a variety of esoteric subjects. Michael lives in Minneapolis, with his wife and two sons, both budding loud guitarists.



Alain Antonietto (left, with Babik Reinhardt) is the world's pioneering historian of Gypsy jazz. He is the author of numerous articles on Romany music, a long-time contributor to *La Revue Etudes Tsiganes*, and producer of albums collecting rare Gypsy music. Alain is also the co-author of *Django Reinhardt: Un géant sur son nuage* and *Django Reinhardt: Rythmes futurs*. He lives in Belleville, the Paris quartier made famous by Django's jazz melody of the same name.



Anne Legrand holds a Ph.D. in the history of music and musicology from the University of Paris Sorbonne. She curates the vast and important Charles Delaunay archives at the audiovisual department of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Anne has published essays on jazz history in reviews such as *Les Cahiers du Jazz*, *Études*, *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Radiodiffusion*, and *Jazzman* magazine.



INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL DREGNI

Q & A WITH AUTHOR MICHAEL DREGNI

Q: Django was a Gypsy, born in Belgium in 1910 and raised in France: How did this affect his music?

A: Django's parents traveled Europe playing music from their horsedrawn caravan at small town markets, country festivals, and big city flea markets. They played all the popular tunes of the time, from dance numbers to opera overtures, classical pieces to Gypsy music. It was this music that Django first learned on violin around his family's campfires. He then took up the more modern banjo and finally guitar, and at age fourteen became a professional musician, playing in the underworld dance halls of Paris. When he first heard American jazz in 1928, his life became focused on playing just jazz. As a Gypsy, he brought two universal elements of Gypsy music to his jazz—deep emotion and incredible virtuosity.

Q: Django is truly a virtuoso: Is it true he played those dazzling jazz songs with just two fingers?

A: In 1928 when Django was eighteen, the caravan he lived in caught fire and he was nearly killed. Doctors swore he'd never walk again or be able to play music. Convalescing over eighteen months, he re-taught himself the guitar. His left, fretting hand was horribly burned in the fire: His two little fingers were just claws and so he had only his middle and pointing fingers to fret with. He created a new technique on the guitar, playing up and down the neck more than vertically across it, as most guitarists do. And he worked to play quicker, using just two fingers to play all those notes that most guitarists can't even play with all their digits.

Q: What was Django like as a person?

A: He was a fascinating character, a true man of legend. He earned fortunes as fast as he picked his guitar, and then spent them just as quickly. He lived most of his life in caravans, and whenever he

felt the call of the wild, simply left to roam France. He never liked living in houses or hotels, and when he had to, he'd leave the water running all night to mimic the sound of a stream and never turn on electric lights, preferring a kerosene lantern. He was handsome, charismatic, completely capricious, and doomed to an early death, dying at just age forty. He never learned to read music, yet he was like an idiot savant who understood music better than most of us could ever dream: As one band-mate said, "Django was music made man."

Q: What was Django's lasting influence on music?

A: Django largely created the guitar as a solo instrument, so his influence was fundamental to today's world of music. Before him, the guitar was largely a band's rhythm instrument, used to accompany parlor-song sing-a-longs, or for wooing maidens on balconies. Django opened the ears of the world to the guitar's possibilities as a solo instrument, playing jazz horn lines and especially Gypsy violin lines on the guitar. And thus, we owe Django thanks for truly creating the guitar, without doubt the musical instrument of the 20th century.

Q: Which other guitarists cite Django as a major influence?

A: Everyone. And if they don't, it's because they haven't studied the history of the guitar well enough. Early on, Chet Atkins was a huge fan of Django's, and he became probably the most influential country guitarist. Les Paul learned Django's solos note for note from records. B. B. King—one of the cornerstones of modern blues—credits Django with inspiring him. Jerry Garcia, Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler all mention Django. But I think the guitarist who is Django's spiritual successor is Jimi Hendrix. Following Django, Hendrix has truly opened our ears to the almost limitless possibilities of the electric guitar.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL DREGNI, CONT.

Q: Was Django the only Gypsy to play jazz in Paris in the 1930s?

A: It's largely forgotten today, but Gypsy guitarists in Paris made the city the world's capital of jazz guitar in the 1930s. Django was the star, and he eclipsed several other great Romany guitar luminaries who deserve more fame: Django's own brother Joseph; the three Ferret brothers, Baro, Sarane, and Matelo; and more. Their recordings are gradually being rediscovered and re-released today, and this book tells their stories. Other Gypsies kept Django's legacy alive through the 1950s and into the 1980s as Django's music amazingly was adopted into Gypsy culture and tradition. Today, many French Gypsies teach their young children to play Django's songs when they're first old enough to hold a guitar. And within the European Gypsy church, hymns have been written to Django's melodies.

Q: Today, Gypsy jazz seems more popular than ever before: Why is this?

A: Gypsy jazz is indeed a hit these days. You hear it in movies—Johnny Depp is a great fan, and played a Django song himself on guitar in *Chocolat*. There are Django Festivals from France to Japan, Norway to Seattle, New York, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and elsewhere. And you can find bands playing this music in most cities in the United States. Django's music has a timeless beauty and romance to it, and it seems to hit a perfect chord today as if we need this joyous music today more than ever.

CONTACT

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