

# Review: John Jorgenson

Posted by arts\_reviews

Posted: September 12, 2008 - 1:39 pm

Gypsy Jazz Star now turns to Southeast

By LELAND SMITH

The John Jorgenson Quintet delivered a fantastic Alaska debut performance at the Sydney Laurence Theatre Friday Night.

Lead guitarist Jorgenson, in creating a tribute to jazz legends Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli, has created sparkling original compositions that capture the heart and soul of melodic Gypsy Jazz.

From the outset, the excited audience of around two hundred, found themselves literally transported back in time to the 1930s. Opening fire by improvising with an exotic Hungarian melody, Jorgenson and violinist Jason Anick, exchanged rapid-fire solos and then flowered into the haunting romantic ballad Smoldering Ashes, from the 2004 release Franco-American. Almost every song featured a solo guitar intro and during "Swingapore," from the latest release "Ultraspontane," one could hear a pin drop.

The New Orleans style piece "Dr. Jazz" was a showstopper as Jorgenson sang a Louis Armstrong era vocal and busted out on clarinet. With a deep rich tone, and bends beyond an octave that would make Benny Goodman and Woody Allen blush, Jorgenson was flawlessly blazing. I could have listened to that clarinet all night. Each piece, throughout the evening, created a rich visual impression, often morphing from a quiet sunrise at the beach to the chug of a cross-country train ride sliding into the rhythm of a busy Paris sidewalk café.

Following with "Dark Romance," a piece that would make an excellent film soundtrack, each performer Kevin Nolan-Rhythm Guitar; Charlie Chadwick-Upright Bass; Rick Reed-Percussion kept a firm grip on the formidable duties of rhythm and dynamics, while Jorgenson and Violinist Anick exchanged cutting-edge solos.

After giving the audience heartfelt thanks, the quintet closed with the title track from "Ultraspontane." The piece delivers several movements and the blistering solos are a test of real endurance. The Quintet received standing ovations during their encores of the Django penned Sweet Chorus and Nuages. Before Django Reinhardt became the first single-note guitar soloist, guitar was strictly a rhythm instrument.

Django was truly the first guitar rock star. By taking American jazz and applying the Gypsy factor that was in his blood, Django created an enduring art form and became the most popular European jazz figure to this day. Jorgenson's tribute is authentic and enormous in every way. John Jorgenson has come full circle in his career. His work with Elton John, The Desert Rose Band and The Hellecasters has been innovative, adventurous and versatile. You owe it to yourself to check out this fine artist's work.

The all-acoustic show was a little hard to hear initially, but gradually improved by the second set. Hats off to Whistling Swan and Trish Galfano for bringing this monster talent to Alaska. The John Jorgenson Quintet plays at Douglas High School in Juneau Saturday night and at the Kayhi Auditorium in Ketchikan Sunday night.