

Jorgenson: Y'all Meets Gaul

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The John Jorgenson Quartet turned Vienna's Jammin' Java on Tuesday night into a 1930s-era Left Bank jazz club -- minus the Parisian smoke -- as the former country music notable conducted the equivalent of a master class in gypsy jazz.

Jorgenson's Top 10 hits from his days in the Desert Rose Band were nowhere to be heard, and his famous Telecaster was replaced for the evening by an acoustic guitar on which he re-created the groundbreaking instrumental music of Django Reinhardt's Hot Club of France Quintet.

Jorgenson, who literally wrote the book on gypsy jazz guitar (copies were on sale in the club), was ably accompanied by fiddler Stephan Dudash, playing the role of Reinhardt bandmate Stephane Grappelli. Dudash matched Jorgenson's fiery fretting note for note, creating dynamic interplay that was as thrilling to observe as it was to hear.

The bandleader put each song into context before playing it and briefly explained its history. It was helpful to know which Reinhardt arrangements were influenced by Louis Armstrong and/or Duke Ellington, and it was fun to imagine what "Snowflake Waltz" sounded like when originally played by an Italian on accordion and a bagpiper from Brittany.

Along with vintage numbers such as "Song of the Vipers" (about marijuana, according to Jorgenson) and the standard "September Song" (rendered in a brisk swing setting), Jorgenson played original compositions, including "In Memory of Danny Gatton," a tribute to the local guitar legend who killed himself in 1994. Every other song was instantly and heartily followed by ovations from the 100-plus audience members, but this touching instrumental was met with a collective, whispered gasp before the applause.

-- **Buzz McClain**