

Yoshi's in SF... and Hot Jazz Guitars

by Phil Elwood, *San Francisco Examiner*



Monterey's not the only place I've heard remarkable guitar playing in recent weeks, starting with the astonishing John Jorgenson and his Quintet, joined occasionally on Yoshi's stage by mandolinist David Grisman.

Why isn't Jorgenson better known to the jazz crowd -- especially since he is far-and-away the best interpreter of Django Reinhardt's material? It's probably because jazz fans are, generally, a stuffy lot -- reluctant to accept as one of theirs any artist whom they identify with, say, rock, hard rock, country music, studio-pop sounds (with overdubbing, etc.) rhythm-and-blues, and so forth.

Jorgenson, for instance, broke onto the scene in 1986 with his (and Chris Hillman's) lively country-jazz group, *Desert Rose*, with Herb Pedersen on banjo. He then began six years of traveling with the Elton John band, in the midst of which he recorded with everyone from The Byrds, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt and Willie Nelson to Johnny Cash, Barbara Streisand and Luciano Pavorotti -- take that, you jazz snobs.

With a life in music like that, it's not surprising that Jorgenson became enamored of Django Reinhardt's music -- spirited, romantic, and breathtakingly distinctive.

I've heard a number of sets in the last year by Jorgenson and his impeccable Quintet at Yoshi's. They made me both cheer and cry.

He and dozens of other fine guitarists whose music certainly falls within the ever-expanding jazz category are expanding the overall jazz audience. They, along with the continuing attraction of blues performers (old and new), may indeed be creating a new generation of jazz fans.

Let's hope so.