Django Reinhardt

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Jean-"Django" Reinhardt (French: [dʒɑ̃ɡœ rɛ̃nʃaʁ]; 23 January 1910 – 16 May 1953) was a Belgian-born, Romani French jazz guitarist and composer, regarded as one of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century. He was the first jazz talent to emerge from Europe and remains the most significant by far.

Reinhardt lost most of two fingers on his left hand in a fire in his youth. He developed a modified technique to overcome this disability and went on to forge an entirely new ‘hot’ jazz guitar style, now known as Gypsy jazz, or jazz manouche, that remains a musical tradition in France and neighbouring countries—especially within Gypsy culture. Reinhardt's innovations on the guitar helped elevated it above its prior position as usually only a rhythm instrument.

With violinist Stéphane Grappelli, Reinhardt formed the Paris-based Quintette du Hot Club de France in 1934. The group was among the first to play jazz that featured the guitar as a lead instrument. Reinhardt recorded in France with many visiting American musicians, including Coleman Hawkins and Benny Carter, and briefly toured the United States with Duke Ellington's orchestra in 1946. He died suddenly of a stroke at the age of 43.

Reinhardt's most popular compositions have become standards within gypsy jazz, including "Minor Swing", "Daphne", "Belleville", "Djangologie", "Swing 42", and "Nuages". Jazz guitarist Frank Vignola claims that nearly every major popular-music guitarist in the world has been influenced by Reinhardt. Over the last few decades, annual Django festivals have been held throughout Europe and the U.S., and a biography has been written about his life.

In February 2017, the Berlin International Film Festival held the world premiere of the French film Django.

Biography

Early life

Reinhardt was born on 23 January 1910 in Libramont, Luxembourg, Belgium, and into a Belgian family of Manouche Romani descent. His father was Jean Eugene Weiss, but domiciled in Paris with his wife, he went by Jean-Baptiste Reinhardt, his wife's surname, to avoid French military conscription. His mother, Laurence Reinhardt, was a dancer. Reinhardt spent most of his youth in Romani encampments close to Paris, where he started playing the violin, banjo, and guitar. He became adept at stealing chickens, which was viewed as a noble skill by the Romani, because part of their means of survival on the road was to steal from the non-Gypsy world around them. His father reportedly played music in a family band comprising himself and seven brothers; a surviving photograph shows this band including his father on piano.

Reinhardt was attracted to music at an early age, first playing the violin. At the age of 12 he received a banjo-guitar as a gift. He quickly learned to play, mimicking the fingerings of musicians he watched, who would have included local virtuoso players of the day such as Jean "Poulette" Castro and Auguste "Gusti" Malha, as well as from his uncle Guillou, who played violin, banjo and guitar. Reinhardt was able to make a living playing music by the time he was 15. He received little formal education and acquired the rudiments of literacy only in adult life.

Marriage and injury

At the age of 17 Reinhardt married Florine "Bella" Mayer, a girl from the same gypsy settlement, according to gypsy custom (although not an official marriage under French law). The following year he recorded for Jack Hylton, who came to France just to hear him play. He offered him a job on the spot, and Reinhardt accepted.

Before he had a chance to start with the band, however, he nearly lost his life when the caravan he and his wife lived in caught fire when he knocked over a candle on his way to bed. His wife made artificial flowers from the ashes.

Reinhardt refused to have the surgery and left the hospital after a short time; he was able to walk within a year with the aid of a cane.

One change during this period was his abandonment of the banjo in favor of the guitar. He was playing all types of music previously but began to appreciate American jazz a little during this period, when an acquaintance, Emile Savitry, played him a number of records from his collection.

In 1929, his wife gave birth to a son, Henri "Lousson" Reinhardt. As a result of the trauma and injuries, he and Bella parted company soon after. His son later took the surname of his mother's new husband, Baumgartner. He later recorded with Django.

His brother, Joseph Reinhardt, also an accomplished guitarist, bought Reinhardt a new guitar. With rehabilitation and practice, he re-learned his craft in a completely new way. He played all his guitar solos with only the index and middle fingers and used the two injured fingers only for chord work.

Discovery of jazz

The years between 1925 and 1933 were formative for Reinhardt, personally and musically. He had parted with his wife and had formed a relationship with one of his distant cousins, Sophie Ziegler, nicknamed "Naguine." They traveled throughout France with Reinhardt getting occasional jobs playing at small clubs. He had no definite goals, living a hand-to-mouth existence. The concept of money and saving was foreign to him, and he spent his earnings as quickly as he made them.

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It was the first time Reinhardt heard leading American jazz musicians, such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. The new sounds gave Reinhardt a vision and goal of becoming a jazz professional.

He later met Stéphane Grappelli, a young violinist with similar musical interests. In the absence of paid work in their radical new music, the two would jam together, along with a loose circle of other musicians.

Finally, Reinhardt acquired his first Selmer guitar in the mid-1930s. He used the volume and expressiveness of the instrument as integral elements of his style.

Formation of the quintet

Biography

Marriage and injury

Discovery of jazz

Formation of the quintet

Music database Musician Django Reinhardt

MUSICIAN Django Reinhardt

born on 23/1/1910 in Libereiches, Französisches Sprachgebiet, Belgium

died on 16/5/1953 in Samois-sur-Seine, Île-de-France, France

Links

www.biography.com (English)

www.about-django.com (French)
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Legacy

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For about a decade after Reinhardt's death, interest in his musical style was minimal. In the fifties, bebop superseded swing in jazz, rock and roll took off, and electric instruments became dominant in popular music. Since the mid-sixties, there has been a revival of interest in Reinhardt's music, a revival that has extended into the 21st century, with annual festivals and periodic tribute concerts. His devotees include classical guitarist Julian Bream and country guitarist Chet Atkins, who considered him one of the ten greatest guitarists of the twentieth century.

The Allman Brothers Band song "Jessica" was written by Dickey Betts in tribute to Reinhardt. Woody Allen's 1999 film Sweet and Lowdown, the story of a Django Reinhardt-like character, mentions Reinhardt and includes actual recordings in the film. "Django" was the definitive guitar on the guitar, and the depth of his gift was so spectacular," says Allen.

As far as I'm concerned, no one since has come anywhere close to Django Reinhardt as an improviser or technician. There was a "prejudice against anything that's different in jazz, and playing jazz on stringed instruments is just too different." Reinhardt's five-piece band initially played only strings, with three guitarists, a violinist and bass. In August 1934, he made other recordings with more than one guitar (Joseph Reinhardt, Roger Chaput, and Reinhardt), including the first recording by the Quintette. In both years the great majority of these recordings featured a wide variety of horns, often in multiples, and other instruments, but the all-string arrangement is the most one often adopted by emulators of the Hot Club sound.

Deca Records in the United States released three records of Quintette songs with Reinhardt on guitar, and one other, credited to "Stephane Grappelli & His Hot 4 with Django Reinhardt," in 1938.

Reinhardt also played and recorded with many American jazz musicians, such as Adelaide Hall, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, and Rex Stewart (who later stayed in Paris). He participated in a jam session and radio performance with Louis Armstrong. Later in his career, Reinhardt played with Dizzy Gillespie in France. Also in the neighborhood was the artistic salon R-26, at which Reinhardt and Grappelli performed regularly as they developed their unique musical style.

In 1938 Reinhardt's quintet played to thousands at an all-star show held in London's Kilburn State auditorium. While playing, he noticed American film actor Eddie Cantor in the front row. When their set ended, Cantor rose to his feet, then went up on stage and kissed Reinhardt's hand, saying, "I am not concerned with constant danger, flight and the atrocities committed against my family," he continued composing and performing. Reinhardt's music was re-recorded for the film by the Dutch jazz band.
The documentary, *Djangomania*, was released in 2005. The hour-long film was directed and written by Jamie Kastner, who traveled throughout the world to show the influence of Django's music in various countries. In 1984 the Kool Jazz Festival, held in Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall, was dedicated entirely to Reinhardt. Performers included Grappelli, Benny Carter, and Mike Peters with his group of seven musicians. The festival was organized by George Wein.

In 2010, to celebrate Reinhardt's 100th birthday, guitarist Frank Vignola and his Hot Club paid tribute with a concert in Rock Hall, Maryland.

In 2011 French jazz guitarist and violinist Dorado Schmitt and an all-star ensemble held concerts named “The Spirit of Django,” at Segerstrom Center for the Arts near Los Angeles.

In 2015, the Country music icons Willie Nelson and Herle Haggard released a musical album named Django & Jimmie as a tribute to Django Reinhardt and Jimmie Rodgers.

**Influence**

Many guitar players and other musicians have expressed admiration for Reinhardt or have cited him as a major influence. Jeff Beck described Reinhardt as “by far the most astonishing guitarist ever” and “quite superhuman.” Beck recalls that he once came across a rare black-and-white film of Django playing:

> It’s the most glorious, but tantalizing short footage, but he is playing like crazy. I’ve been studying it in slow motion, and all you can see are these two grubby fingers going like lightning up and down the fretboard.

Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia and Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi, both of whom lost fingers in accidents, were inspired by Reinhardt's example of becoming an accomplished guitar player despite his injuries. Garcia was quoted in *June 1985 in Freis Magazine:*

> His technique is awesome! Even today, nobody has really come to the state that he was playing at. As good as players are, they haven’t gotten to where he is. There’s a lot of guys that play fast and a lot of guys that play clean, and the guitar has come a long way as far as speed and clarity go, but nobody plays with the whole fullness of expression that Django has. I mean, the combination of incredible speed – all the speed you could possibly want – but also the thing of every note have a specific personality. You don’t hear it. I really haven’t heard it anywhere but with Django.

- **Denny Laine** and **Jimmy McCulloch**, members of Paul McCartney's band Wings, have mentioned him as an inspiration.
- **Django**, an instrumental guitar piece by the blue's-rock guitarist Joe Bonamassa, is in his honour.
- **The Allman Brothers Band** song “Jessica” was written by Dickey Betts in tribute to Reinhardt.
- **Andrew Latimer**, of the band Camel, has stated that he was influenced by Reinhardt.
- The composer Jon Larsen has composed several crossovers featuring Reinhardt-inspired music together with symphonic arrangements, the most famous being “White Night Stories” (2002) and “Vertavo” (1996).
- The Cuban composer and guitarist Leo Brouwer wrote Variations on a Theme of Django Reinhardt for solo guitar (1984), based on Reinhardt's “Nuages”.
- In 2005, Reinhardt was ranked 66th in the list of “The Greatest Belgian” Cio Groote Beig in Flanders and 76th in Le plus grand Beige, the Walloon version of the same competition.
- Reinhardt is celebrated annually in the village of Liberchies, his birthplace.
- Willie Nelson and Herle Haggard released the album *Django and Jimmie* in 2015 (the title refers to Reinhardt and the country singer Jimmie Rodgers).
- The Lost Fingers, a French Canadian gypsy jazz band, owe their name to Reinhardt.

**Reinhardt in popular culture**

- Reinhardt's style of playing is discussed by characters in the novel From Here to Eternity.
- Reinhardt is referred to in the opening sequence of the 2003 animated film *Django Reinhardt*.
- His legacy is referred to in Woody Allen's 1999 *Sweet and Lowdown*. This spoof biopic features a fictional American guitarist, Emmet Ray, who is obsessed with Reinhardt, with a soundtrack featuring Howard Alden.
- Reinhardt is portrayed by the guitarist John Jorgenson in the movie *Head in the Clouds*.
- In the movie Swing Kids, the character Arvid has his hand damaged by a member of the Hitler Jugend but is inspired by Reinhardt's example to keep playing.
- Noody Holder of the glam rock band Slade and his wife, Suzan Price, named their son Django in honour of Reinhardt.
- Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi recounted that he suffered an industrial accident at 17 and lost the tips of two fingers. His boss played a Reinhardt record to inspire him to pursue his dream of being a guitarist.
- Reinhardt's music has been used in the soundtrack of many films, including *The Matrix, Rhythm Futur, Dalby Callau, Metroland, Chocolat, The Aviator, Alex and the Gypsy, Kate and Leopold and Gattaca*; the score for Louis Malle's 1974 movie *Lacombe Lucien*; the background for the Steve Martin movie *L.A. Story*; and the background for a number of Woody Allen movies, including *Stardust Memories*.
- Reinhardt's music has been featured in the soundtracks of several video games, such as the 2002 *game: HEX: The City of Lost Heaven, Mafia* (video game) and in the 2007, 2010, and 2013 games *BioShock*, *BioShock 2* and *BioShock Infinite*.
- Reinhardt's music is used in the 1978 film *King of the Gypsies* (film) his long-time friend Stéphane Grappelli appeared in the film in a cameo, performing as a violinist in a gypsy band.
- In the Martin Scorsese film *Hugo* (2011), a character named Reinhardt—played by Emil Lauer—plays guitar in a combo in the station café.
- *Django* (1954) is a gypsy-flavoured piece written by the jazz pianist John Lewis, of the Modern Jazz Quartet, in honour of Reinhardt. Numerous versions of the song have been recorded, including one on the 1973 album *Sacred Christmas* by Mick Abrahams, and in the 2007, 2010, and 2013 games *BioShock*, *BioShock 2*, and *BioShock Infinite*.
- *Le plus grand Belge* (2015) is a tribute.
- Reinhardt inspired Harlan Ellison's short story *Django*, published in the collections *Shatterday and Dreams with Sharp Teeth*.
- The Belgian government issued a commemorative coin in 92.5% sterling silver in 2010 coinciding with the 100th anniversary of his birth. It is a silver 10-Euro coin with a color image of Reinhardt on the reverse.
- The Django web framework is named after Reinhardt, as is version 3.1 of the blog software WordPress.
- Django’s Guitar, a track on *Django and Jimmie* was written by John Jorgenson.
- *Variations on a Theme of Django Reinhardt* is an instrumental guitar piece by the blues-rock guitarist Joe Bonamassa, is in his honour.
- Django Reinhardt et Ses Rythmes is quoted in June 1985 in Freis Magazine: "His technique is awesome! Even today, nobody has really come to the state that he was playing at. As good as players are, they haven’t gotten to where he is. There’s a lot of guys that play fast and a lot of guys that play clean, and the guitar has come a long way as far as speed and clarity go, but nobody plays with the whole fullness of expression that Django has. I mean, the combination of incredible speed – all the speed you could possibly want – but also the thing of every note have a specific personality. You don’t hear it. I really haven’t heard it anywhere but with Django."
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- Reinhardt is mentioned in the opening line of The Statler Brothers' song “Chet Atkins’ Hand”. The opening line is “Thank you Les Paul, thank you Django, thank you Merle”.
- Wagner in 2015 (the title refers to Reinhardt and the country singer Jimmie Rodgers).
- The Lost Fingers, a French Canadian gypsy jazz band, owe their name to Reinhardt.

**Discography**

**Releases in his lifetime**

Reinhardt recorded over 900 sides in his recording career, from 1928 to 1953, the majority as sides of the then-prevalent 78-RPM records, with the remainder as acetates, transcription discs, private and off-air recordings (of radio broadcast), and part of a film soundtrack. Only one session (eight track material was recorded between March 1953 was ever recorded specifically for album release by Norman Granz in the then-new LP format, but failed to sell.)

In 1984 he recorded *The Last Fingers*, a French Canadian gypsy jazz band, owe their name to Reinhardt.

**Posthumous compilations (LP, cassette and CD)**

- 1953 *Django Reinhardt et Ses Rythmes*
- 1954 *The Great Artistry of Django Reinhardt*
- 1954 *Le Jazz Hot*.
- 1955 *Django’s Guitar*.

The following list of reissues is only a selection; as at December 2015, www.discogs.com listed more than 560 such albums; a full listing is available from the source cited here.
Unrecorded compositions

A small number of waltzes composed by Reinhardt in his youth were never recorded by the composer, but were retained in the repertoire of his associates and several are still played today. They came to light via

Notes

References

1. Professor of music and guitarist, Mark White, of Berklee College, writes: "Django Reinhardt with his Hot Club of France group was a hotbed of great guitar playing. Eventually, Django would play electric guitar, and become one of the greatest guitar stylists of all time."[36]

2. "Jimmy Page said "Django Reinhardt was fantastic. he must have been playing all the time to be that good."[46]

3. Here is Lauren Oliver's transcript of the interview from the radio broadcast: Introduction: VO: In the Chapel of the National Institute for Blind Children, Django Reinhardt will, for the first time, hear his mass played on the organ, which he has written especially for the gypsies. (Organ begins to play) Interview: Announcer: Could you tell me Mr Reinhardt, what has compelled you to write this mass? DR: All the gypsies in the entire world have made use of foreign masses for many centuries. I have written this mass to be interpreted by choir and organ. A: And in what surroundings do you isolate yourself in order to write - it's not a

See also

- Oscar Alemán
- Django à Libercières festival
- DjangoDor (Golden Django)
- Festival Django Reinhardt
- Festivals de jazz Django Reinhardt, a French list of worldwide festivals dedicated to the guitarist
- Gypsy jazz
- List of Belgian bands and artists
- List of Belgian musicians and singers
- List of compositions by Django Reinhardt
- List of Romani people
- R-26 Isoloni
- Jean Salbon

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Biréli Lagrène (born 4 September 1966) is a French jazz guitarist. He came to prominence in the 1980s for his Django Reinhardt-influenced style. He often performs in swing, jazz fusion and post-bop styles. Biréli has one son called Sacha Liezer with his first wife Camelia ... music, mischief and magic. Django Reinhardt was a Gypsy jazz genius who kept on living in his caravan long after he found fame. Guitarist and devotee Martin Taylor explains why he has written a Prom in his honour. Published: 19 Aug 2012.

Guitarist and devotee Martin Taylor explains why he has written a Prom in his honour. Published: 19 Aug 2012.


The jazz guitar of Django Reinhardt remains a signature soundtrack of Paris. In the centenary of his birth, Gemma Ware goes in search of the cafes that still swing to his tunes. Published: 6 Jun 2010.

Gypsy Jazz Festival. Virtuoso musicians, including his grandson, celebrate the centenary of the birth of Belgian guitarist Django Reinhardt, writes Dave Gelly. Published: 30 Jan 2010.