



BIRÉLI LAGRÈNE GIPSY PROJECT

with :

**Biréli Lagrène (guitar), Franck Wolf (saxophones),
Hono Winterstein (guitar) & Diego Imbert (bass)**

It can't be easy to embark on an international career at around the age of twelve, immediately shouldering the reputation of being the Mozart of Gypsy jazz. To be deemed as the new Django is a weighty responsibility, and others would not have been able to cope. With his prodigious technique, **Biréli Lagrène** could have channeled his entire life around the transmittance of the message of the Gypsy genius; this has already been acceptably ventured by others. Biréli had always had wanderlust: being a traveler, bondless, he succeeded in escaping from a pre-ordained role. Biréli dipped into **Django Reinhardt's** repertoire with indisputable freshness, secured it with ease and moved away with the same facility. As years passed, the young Biréli turned into the big strapping Lagrène, without losing his smile or spontaneity. Rather than staying along on stage, he has always welcomed other contacts and has sought company with other guitar heroes (**John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucia** etc.). But, there once again, he may have fallen in the trap: music isn't a competition and he is well aware of the fact. As a guitarist, he always lends an ear to other instruments.

Lagrène's art overstepped the 21st century quite naturally. He has effectively united the fervent beauty of tradition, that is now symbolized by his two faithful accompanists (guitarist **Hono Winterstein** and bassist **Diego Imbert**) with the rather unexpected and moreover the rare addition of a saxophone (**Franck Wolf**) in such a universe.

The opening bars of the first tune, *Un certain Je ne sais Quoi* announces the flavor: lively with a hint of blues. Then the alloy of sounds becomes mysterious and melancholy (*Mélodie au Crépuscule*). Indeed, this album is presented as a veritable program, where we can enjoy communicative vim (the gambling *Hungaria*) and which more or less penetrates Django's universe through his compositions: the aforementioned *Mélodie au Crépuscule* and *Hungaria*, as well as the tranquil beauty of *Troublant Boléro*, the ineludible *Nuages*, which is here shrouded by the mysterious volutation of the sax, *Danse Norvégienne* transformed as a choreographic piece boasting hypnotic leisureliness and **Joseph Kosma's Clair de Lune** which Django recorded in former times. The album also included two jazz standards, the swinging *Cherokee* and *This Can't be Love*, as well as *Move*, a be-bop classic, delicately in keeping. We can also discover some choice compositions. Two signed by Biréli: *Place du Tertre*, with a distinct West Coast feeling (between **Neal Hefti** and **Zoot Sims**) and *Jadis*, deliciously enigmatic and oneiric. The other compositions appertain to Lagrène's partners. **Diego Imbert's Un certain Je ne sais Quoi**, **Franck Wolf's** Lesterian *Victor* and **Hono Winterstein's** stirring *Mimosa*.

As the journey comes to its end, we have traversed musical landscapes with the impression that we have never heard a superfluous note, there has been no embroidery, that this is none other than a tale told in fourteen episodes which touch our heart-strings. A tale filled with reverie and nostalgia, tenderness and delicacy, free of bluster and wrath. Biréli has never given in to fashion, but forever has surprises in store, such as this startling encounter with **Franck Wolf's** sax. This takes us back to the rare intimist experiences in jazz, where the guitar-saxophone association took on a particularly captivating dimension. **Biréli Lagrène** has successfully retained Django's poetic freshness and also learnt from the master's cosmos regarding risk, adventure and experimentation while never forgetting the love of sound.

François Billard

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