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LIMELIGHT

# Gypsybilly Rockin' The Barkley

The Vignatis fuse Romani rhythm, jazz phrasing and country-rock power-chords.



by Victoria Thomas · March 27, 2025 · 3 mins read



Tracy and Fab burnin' down the house. Photo: Peter Figen

**T**he best things in life are surprising, maybe shocking, sometimes even strange.

Genre-busting hybrids combine contrasting unlikely elements, even opposites, in ways that seem nothing short of alchemy. The adorably weird platypus, for instance. Or rocking sweet lady-lace with the nastiest biker leathers. Or “Hawaiian” (actually *haole*)-style pizza topped with pineapple. They said it couldn’t be done, but it was, and it is.

In the same breath, welcome [The Vignatis](#) (rhymes with Pilates), one of LA’s most unique musical duos, set to play South Pasadena’s The Barkley the evening of Friday, April 11 at 7:00 PM.

This adventurous married couple dares to write their own music and cut their own fearless path through a musical universe crammed with mediocrity and conformity. They occasionally do covers, like Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and Stevie Wonder’s “[Sir Duke](#),” pouring so much love into the composition while making every note entirely their own.



While they may not truly be opposites, The Vignatis hit the scene with exhilarating differences. Tracy is a tall, graceful American Air Force brat with a classically trained soprano, supported by her array

The Vignatis during a performance in Japan. Photo: Aina of colorful plastic clarinets.

Fabrice, “Fab” for short, was born in the French Alps in the resort-spa town of *Aix-les-Bains* where natural thermal springs have drawn discerning tourists since Roman times. She’s smooth and cool, he’s fiercely hot, together creating what can only be called *un frisson* onstage.

Some of the sorcery is purely physical and visual. Their playing style is gleefully breakneck, with Fab ripping into dazzling jackhammer guitar passages sure to huff and puff and blow the house down. Tracy’s vocal and instrumental counterpoint is more fluid, but equally facile. But the X factor that makes a Vignati show a true experience is what they call [Gypsybilly](#).

Yes, not to go Karen on you, but the band is aware that “Gypsy” is not a universally accepted term for the persecuted ethnic culture who may prefer to be called Rom, Roma, or Romany.

Fab fell under the spell of a musical genius who didn’t flinch at the term “Gypsy,” and that genius was of course Django Reinhardt. The Belgian-French *Manouche* or *Sinti* maestro developed his unique two-finger picking style after surviving a fire at the age of 18 which partially paralyzed his left hand. This disability contributed to the



It all started with Belgian-French guitarist extraordinaire, Django

syncopation which we instantly identify as “jazzy.” Reinhardt’s energizing of three and four-note jazz chords with the faster rhythms characteristic of traditional Eastern European Romani music also went on to leave an indelible mark on blues, country and rock guitar flat-pick styles.

Reinhardt, avec Quintette du Hot Club de France circa 1940. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The highly resourceful Reinhardt used his fused ring-finger and pinky to play single notes, and also to serve as a barre to play more than one note. His signature loping, conversational instrumental style pulses through Fabrice’s arrangements, updated and rocket-fueled by retro rock and rustic American raunch, twang and torch.

Fab speaks of “*La Pompe*,” meaning “the pump,” a vigorous strumming technique which essentially replaced percussion since early Gypsy swing bands were all-strings. Drums being absent, rhythm guitarists provided the driving beat as well as harmony, carried further by violin and bass. Used this way, the guitar can suggest the sound of the drummer’s high-hat, with four-to-the-measure quarter-note beats and ghosted eighth-notes on beats two and four. Like a snort of Jazz Age bathtub gin or maybe a sly sip of absinthe, the effect is *louche*, sophisticated, and dangerously sexy.

Often, the Gallic essence of the source music tends toward the melancholy, but not in the gifted hands of The Vignatis, who are relentlessly upbeat. Tracy says “Knowing that music is one of the few things that makes me lose track of

time and space always keeps me inspired to keep going and creating and doing. There is so much unnecessary social noise so it's great to be able to do something of value that can make a difference. There is no greater way to do that than through music whether it's writing it, recording it, sharing it and of course, performing it.”

Fabrice is energized by the pure joy of his craft. He says “My immediate inspiration is avoiding stagnation. To know that I can always improve my playing, my technology knowledge, and set new goals, always inspires me to keep going and hopefully inspire someone else. I always refer to the greats that came before me and draw inspiration from what they left in their legacies.”

Both performers are practicing Nichiren Buddhists, although discreetly low-key about it. But in the aftermath of the Los Angeles-area fires, perhaps that Buddha wisdom comes into play when Fab says, “Whether a listener or a creator, music has the power to transcend and transform a lot of things. If someone can find a little bit of medicine in just a few notes or words, then the music has done its job. Remember, winter never fails to turn into spring and after rain there is always sunshine. Time heals all wounds.”

Go, cat, go! Later this spring, the talented pair are on their way to Austin, then on to Japan in September, with tentative gigs pending in the UK and

Scandinavia. And, with even a smidge of *bonne chance*, they'll be back at The Barkley soon.

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## DEETS

- The Vignatis – Gypsybilly Jam
- The Barkley, 1400 Huntington Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030
- April 11, 7:00 PM, no cover
- 626-799-0758

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### Victoria Thomas

**Victoria** has been a journalist since her college years when she wrote for Rolling Stone and CREEM. She is the recipient of a Southern California Journalism Award for feature writing. Victoria describes the view of Mt. Wilson from her front step as “staggering,” and she is a defender of peacocks everywhere.

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