

From Paris, France, to Paris, Texas

"There's nothing else like it around," says Steve Curry of Local 72-147 (Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX) offering his 30-second elevator speech describing The Texas Gypsies. "We do gypsy jazz, European style, but what's different is that we have a lot of vocal songs. We write a lot of our own material in the 1930s style, but with more of the pop influence. The Texas Swing sound is in there too. The mix creates its own little sound that's fun and energetic."

The gypsy jazz style originated in France, and thanks to the work of 1930's era guitarist Django Reinhart, the genre became popular. Though the style has its largest audience in Europe, this jazz sound has a notable fan base around the world, including a growing number of fans in Texas. At least, Curry hopes so.

"This thing just kind of took off because it was so different," Curry says. "We play a lot of festivals, and though the sound might be new to the audience, by the third or fourth song, we've won them over. They're interested in the style because it's upbeat, and we've even taken some hit songs and reworked them in this style, such as that old disco hit, 'I Will Survive.'" It made a perfect gypsy jazz-style song, says Curry. "Restyling familiar tunes is a good way to introduce people to Reinhart's style of music."

Curry didn't foresee the part he'd play bringing gypsy jazz to the masses because when he started his band, he was fairly new to the genre himself, although his stint as a session musician in Los Angeles made him well versed in a variety of styles.

"A few years ago I just really started listening to Django Reinhart and other jazz guitar players of that era and I bought that style of guitar," he says. "I started to jam on it and other guys found out about it and said they'd like to come over and jam too. We were all new to this style of music." Curry says that his friends came over so often that he finally asked if they wanted to be in a band.

Fellow members of Local 72-147, guitarist Erik Swanson, bass player John Hewitt, and violinist Mark Menikos, make up the core of this acoustic swing combo. This year, The Texas Gypsies added horns and drums, to increase their band to seven members.

Curry points out that the style has its own challenges that allow him to grow as a musician. "I used to write a lot of pop music, which often is based on finding a new drum beat or groove or something like that," Curry notes. "This music is based on chord progression and melody, popular in the '30s and '40s."

"It's a big challenge to play the Selmer style of guitars," Curry continues. "These acoustic guitars mean you have to develop a new technique that doesn't quite work on electric guitars. You really have to produce a lot of volume from the strings, and it's a challenge to develop the technique when you've spent the last 20 years playing rock guitars." But as far as Curry is concerned, the challenge is accepted and met. And the added bonus: getting to share an evocative, fun musical style with thousands of new fans.



Audiences across the Lone Star State have been exposed to gypsy jazz, thanks to acoustic band The Texas Gypsies. (L to R) Paul Nagy, Steve Curry, Brandon Lusk, Erik Swanson, John Hewitt, and Mark Menikos, all members of Local 72-147 (Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX).

international **MUSICIAN** 
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA