



## **Paul "Pazzo" Mehling - Leader, Guitar, Violin, Bass, Vocals**

Paul Mehling, the leader of HCSF, has been dubbed the godfather of American Gypsy jazz. He discovered the music of Django Reinhardt and the Quintet of the Hot Club of France in grammar school, and decades later the music that took root in his young soul finally bore fruit.

“I was born in Denver and grew up in what is now Silicon Valley when it was all fruit trees,” Mehling recalls. “My father was a record collector. I grew up with the music of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and all the swing era bands. He’d come home and turn on the stereo and, at a year old, I’d sit in front of the speakers and soak up the music. To this day, I get a sense of déjà vu whenever I hear a song I heard back then. When I was older, I became a discipline problem because I wanted to stay up all night and listen to records. Being exposed to swing at an early age predisposed me to playing this kind of music.”

“I had an older sister who turned me onto rock’n’roll. When I was six, we saw The Beatles on Ed Sullivan and it was like getting hit by lightning. I said, ‘I wanna do that - make the girls scream and give people the buzz I get from hearing the music.’ The Beatles made music guitar centric, and I picked up the guitar. I tried playing in rock bands, but it didn’t work for me. The music wasn’t satisfying. I liked the acoustic guitar better and learned classical music, but that wasn’t what I wanted either. Then I heard Django: three guitars, bass, and violin and they sounded and acted like a rock band. I saw pictures of them, and they looked sharp, sophisticated, and mysterious.

“When I was a teenager, I saw Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks and he was playing a contemporary blend of The Beatles and Django. I went to see them a lot and listened to their combination of rhythm guitar with jazz violin and tried to figure out how it worked.” Around the same time, Mehling discovered folk and bluegrass. He taught himself violin and mandolin after hearing David Grisman’s Dawg Music, a blend of swing and bluegrass that became known as ‘newgrass.’

After graduating from high school in Santa Cruz, Mehling landed his first gig as a professional musician playing rhythm guitar and banjo with Jake Stock and the Abalone Stompers, a New Orleans style traditional Dixieland jazz band. He played the happy hour at The Catalyst (the premier Santa Cruz live music venue) with the Stompers every Friday evening for the next 15 years. He freelanced with The Santa Cruz Symphony on viola and played in jazz and swing combos, including The Magnolia Jazz Band and **The Hot Club of Friends**, his first Gypsy jazz group.

In 1981, Mehling took a break from the Abalone Stompers to bicycle across Europe with his girlfriend. In Holland, he saw a live performance by Waso, a band from Belgium that played Gypsy jazz. “Fapy Lafertin was the lead guitarist, and he was playing Django solos note for note, then he’d take off and start improvising.” Mehling says. “It was galvanizing. I didn’t think anyone could really play Django’s style and I realized it’s no secret.

You just have to know how to do it. I decided I'd have to come back to Europe and learn to play Gypsy guitar.”

Two years later, Mehling was in Paris playing violin in Metro stations all day and looking for Gypsy musicians all night. He had a cheap apartment and made enough playing to support himself. “Then I got lucky. I met Serge Krief, a Django style guitarist. He was very warm; especially when he found out I could play guitar and violin. We played jazz in the Metro together, him on guitar, me on violin, and I watched his fingers like a hawk. When we counted the money out at the end of the afternoon, he'd insist I take my share. ‘You're my brother, but you're not my brother if you don't take your share of the money.’ I knew I could learn to play the way he played, so I made a bunch of cassettes. I'd take apart his solos and figure out what he was doing. I should have done that with Django, but it was too vast and daunting when I was young.” Krief also imparted an important piece of advice. “He told me Gypsy music is full of emotion and that's an important part of the music. It's hot, mysterious, emotional, and romantic. That stayed with me.”

Mehling returned to Santa Cruz and the Abalone Stompers, but he was getting restless. In 1985, he heard Dan Hicks was looking for a lead guitarist for his new band, The Acoustic Warriors. Mehling got the job and stayed with the band until 1990. “After the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, I finally decided it was time to make the leap. I moved to San Francisco and auditioned people for months, but nobody knew how to play this music. Finally, I started training people how to play Gypsy style jazz.” In early 1995 Mehling made two instructional videos (now on DVD) for Homespun Tapes: “How to play Django Style Gypsy Jazz Guitar” volumes one (rhythm) and two (soloing) which were the first instructional courses ever made for this genre. This early foray into the educational realm helped, in a small but incontestable way, the current craze for all things Django. In a short story about Mehling and his contributions to the study of Gypsy jazz guitar technique NPR nicknamed Pazzo “the Godfather of Gypsy Jazz in the US.”

The band's first album was produced by Mehling and put out on the band's own label (Hot Club Records). Since then, they've put out 15 unique recordings of Gypsy flavored jazz including “The Lady in Red,” a set for Clarity Recordings in 1999, featuring Maria Muldaur, Dan Hicks and San Francisco jazz singing legend Barbara Dane, “Swing This” (2003) and “Postcards from Gypsyland” (2005) which includes tangos, waltzes and sparkling Mehling originals. In 2000, The Hot Club of San Francisco was the first American band invited to play the Festival de Jazz Django Reinhardt in Samois-sur-Seine, ground zero for the current Django revival. The foundation of the current HCSF has been together for ten years, anchored by Mehling and the improvisational brilliance of violinist Evan Price. Their “Hot Club 30 Years” (2018) CD is a sampler of some of their VERY best.

Critics have noted that the music of Mehling and the HCSF owes as much to the Swing Era as Gypsy jazz, a characterization Mehling doesn't dispute. “We have a swing or die approach to the music that's distinctly American. We're trying to challenge the tendency to slavishly imitate Django's style, without watering down the Gypsy tradition or diluting the music. We bring out the visceral element of the music that Serge Krief told me is so important. When I talk with Gypsy musicians, they say that they love what we do because they can tell we love the music. If people dig our music, when Gypsy bands come to America, there will be an audience waiting to hear them.”

## **Evan “Zeppo” Price - Violin, Melodica, Guitar**

Evan Price is steadily becoming one of the most respected jazz violinists of his generation. A native of Detroit, MI, his musical background includes some earnest dues-paying in a variety of genres. As a young competitive fiddler, he won his share of awards, having been named the U.S. Scottish Fiddling Champion, Canadian Junior Fiddle Champion, and Canadian Novelty Fiddling Champion. He also performed with some of the masters of fiddle lore—Stephane Grappelli, Johnny Frigo, Claude “Fiddler” Williams, Johnny Gimble, Buddy Spicher, and Vassar Clements—as well as a diverse array of pop icons from Stevie Wonder and Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and Robert Plant to comedian, Steven Wright.

Evan's college career included stints at both The Cleveland Institute of Music and at Berklee College of Music and has himself served as a member of the music faculty at Wellesley College.

Evan is a ten-year veteran of the world-renowned, paradigm-shifting jazz ensemble, the Turtle Island Quartet. During his tenure in Turtle Island, Evan gave over five hundred performances in concert venues from Latvia to Australia and had the opportunity to collaborate with many musical luminaries, such as Cuban clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera, and pianists Dr. Billy Taylor and

Kenny Barron. He recorded five CDs with Turtle Island, two of which “Four + 4” and “A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane” received GRAMMY® awards in 2006 and 2008 in the Classical Crossover category.

Since 1998, Evan has been proud to call himself a member of The Hot Club of San Francisco, perhaps the most venerable Gypsy jazz band in the US. During his tenure, the group has thrilled audiences from Iceland to Mexico and across the United States and has released six CDs which feature Evan on violin.

An accomplished composer, Evan has contributed compositions and arrangements to the repertoires of HCSF, Turtle Island Quartet, Quartet San Francisco, Orchestra Nashville, The San Francisco Girls’ Chorus, and the New Century Chamber Orchestra. He lives in Mill Valley, CA, with his wife and daughter.

## **Jordan Samuels - Rhythm Guitar**

Jordan Samuels is an accomplished guitarist who has been studying, performing, and teaching throughout the San Francisco Bay Area for the last twenty years. While at San Francisco State University, he completed his formal training in music composition under the guidance of Ronald Caltabiano and Richard Festinger while simultaneously pursuing a jazz studies curriculum directed by Andrew Speight and John Calloway.

Since completing his studies in 2010, Samuels has become an in-demand jazz guitarist and can be seen performing regularly with the Hot Club of San Francisco, Erik Jekabson’s Electric Squeezebox Orchestra, and his own trio Certified Organic. He has also appeared with Doug Martin, Paula West, Wil Blades, Smith Dobson, Adam Theis, Matt Clark and Bobby Watson among many others.

## **Dexter Williams - String Bass**

Dexter Williams is an upright bass player living in San Francisco, California whose style is heavily influenced by traditional jazz, swing, Gypsy jazz, and bebop. He was immersed in the world of jazz from an early age and consequently took to music naturally, learning violin at age 6 and guitar at age 11. Finally, in high school band, he took on upright bass and shortly after developed a love for jazz, starting to play his first professional gigs at age 16. Since then, he has dedicated his time to broadening his understanding of different styles of jazz, working on rhythmically and harmonically supporting a band, and all the while dialing in his technical ability on the upright bass.

Dexter currently makes his living performing locally with a wide range of SF Bay Area artists as well as traveling for interstate and international music festivals. Lately, he has been immersing himself in the world of Gypsy jazz and playing consistently with The Hot Club of San Francisco, committing himself to melding with the group and learning its repertoire. His sound has been described as highly lyrical and melodic, showing a deep familiarity with the styles and vocabulary of jazz.

## **Nelsen Hutchison - Rhythm Guitar**

Nelsen Hutchison is a San Francisco Bay Area based guitarist, educator, and scholar. As a teenager in Alameda, Nelsen developed an interest in jazz and was initially inspired by guitarists associated with hardbop in the 1950s and ‘60s such as Grant Green, Kenny Burrell, and Wes Montgomery. To pursue his passion Nelsen took private lessons, attended group classes and clinics at the Jazz School in Berkeley, listened to his parents’ record collection, and regularly attended concerts with his family. As Nelsen worked to immerse himself in the jazz tradition, he encountered and fell in love with the music of Django Reinhardt through watching the Hot Club of San Francisco perform and listening to their records. Though he largely continued to focus on learning and performing “straight-ahead jazz,” the spark of his interest in hot jazz and Django had been ignited.

After graduating high school, Nelsen continued to pursue his interest in jazz guitar through college, studying at the Berklee College of Music in Boston for a year before transferring to the New School for Jazz in New York City where he had the opportunity to study with guitarists such as Howard Alden, Ed Cherry, Satoshi Inoue, and Peter Bernstein.

Upon graduating college and returning to the Bay Area, Nelsen continued to practice and began performing locally, occasionally being asked to perform in the style of Django Reinhardt.

A few years later, he had grown frustrated with “faking it” and, along with some friends, decided to rekindle the spark of his interest in hot jazz and commit himself to learning the music of Django Reinhardt.

Over the next few years Nelsen spent many hours practicing, listening, and attending concerts, clinics, and lessons with guitarists such as Paul Mehling, Jimmy Grant, Paulus Schaefer, and Doug Martin. Today Nelsen has a rising profile in the Gypsy jazz/swing scene in the SF Bay Area and is thrilled to have the opportunity to perform with Le Jazz Hot and the Hot

Club of San Francisco. In addition to his passion for jazz guitar, Nelsen also maintains an interest in the academic study of music. He is currently a PhD Candidate at the UC Santa Cruz, where his dissertation focuses on the working lives of the Bay Area jazz musicians and the ways in which they practice and theorize the “gig economy.” He has taught courses in jazz, American popular music, and the music industry at UC Santa Cruz and University of the Pacific and now teaches courses in guitar and global music traditions at Skyline College in San Bruno.