

Grappelli grapples with fiddle

by Keith Layton

Stephane Grappelli played to an enthusiastic crowd of about 1000 people during the second concert of the evening, Friday night. Accompanied by the Diz Disley Trio, the world renowned jazz violinist played over an hour's worth of the music that made him famous.

This music evolved from the 1930's and 40's when Grappelli played in the Paris "Hot Club Quartet" along with the gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt. The combination of Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt produced a series of classic recordings and set a standard of excellence in European jazz until the time of Reinhardt's death in 1953. Since that time Grappelli has continually asserted himself as one of the all-time great jazz violinists the ranks of which include such formidable names as Joe Venuti (Grappelli's one-time mentor) Stuff Smith and of late Jean-Luc Ponty.

The Diz Disley Trio, consisting of Diz Disley and Ike Isaacs on guitars, and Brian Torff on bass are well accredited also. Brian Torff has accompanied the likes of Cleo Laine, Ike Isaacs played with Ted Heath, and Diz Disley has backed up Grappelli in England and Europe.

Hot Club jazz was the order of the night with the music for the most part starting with its conceptions of phrasing and rhythm. It was this emphasis on the music of the past that was the concert's strong point and weakness. It is always enjoyable to hear music of a classic genre especially when played by one of the originators of the form. Grappelli however, while staying within a conception of jazz (ie. improvisation on a given melody versus, for example, exploring the possibilities of the avant garde and transcending melodic form) has not been static within that conception. He has worked with numerous contemporary artists and his music has become more contemporary as well. That this aspect of his music was not more prominent was a bit of a disappointment.

Still, taken for what it was, the concert could hardly be called a disappointment. The dancing, lyrical quality of the music was delightful. While Grappelli was not always rhythmically precise with his phrasing, it was the subtle eloquence of his style that was far and away the dominant feature.

The concert began with introductions and Canadian jokes by Diz Disley, a Canadian emigrant at an early age. Upon its introduction the band fell into the quick pace of the Hot Club. The strumming of the acoustic guitars provided light but firm emphasis for Grappelli's violin to flit and dance over top of. The third tune, *Misty*, provided a contrast to the previous quickness of pace. Grappelli handled the tune superbly with the clarity and richness of his tone well suited to its mood. The evening's seventh tune provided more contrast. Based on a blues



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progression, the tune featured several rhythmic shifts. Grappelli's soulful treatment of the form served to emphasize his inherent eloquence. Disley's soloing was excellent and among his best of the evening.

Towards the end of the evening the trio left the stage and Grappelli displayed his ability at the piano. In a free flowing medley of his favorites Grappelli brought forth not only his typical melodic genius but the rhythmic co-ordination and independence (the ability to perform different tasks simultaneously — for the pianist the ability to work the right and left hands independently of one another) of an accomplished pianist. Grappelli's right hand flowed over the keys,

sweeping out melodic phrases with his left working in near perfect sympathy.

The band returned, performing another two numbers with Grappelli in bringing the concert to a close. A standing ovation is a typical response in Edmonton at the end of a concert but seldom are they as well deserved as the one given Stephane Grappelli. Throughout the concert he played with imagination and flair that did not diminish. That it didn't diminish is interesting in that he is 68 years old and he had played close to three hours in the course of the evening. It seems that Stephane Grappelli is a man with a lot to give and only too willing to please his public.

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