

Banjo Nickaru & Western Scooches



Very Next Thing EP

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DownBeat Magazine ****

"... As a sideman, he's worked with artists all over the jazz spectrum, from Jimmy McGriff to Mark Turner to Vince Giordano. It should come as no surprise that for his latest release, which trains its eye on hot jazz, Russo and his band (vocalists Betina Hershey and Miles Griffith, with percussionist David Pleasant and numerous guests) bring a decidedly unorthodox approach."

Times of London

"There's no point in trying to pin a label on an extrovert American band, led by guitarist, Nick Russo, who set out to cover so many bases from hot jazz to folk, blues, and Big Easy funk.... unfailingly high-spirited."

The New York Music Daily

"...their sound is totally retro – yet completely in the here and now, another case where the old is new again"

New York City's Banjo Nickaru & Western Scooches is one of the only groups to bring a Gullah-Geechee element into the folk world. The band also plays folk, country, 20s/30s, music of New Orleans, blues, old-time music, and roots music.

*****Western Scooches & Their Bios:

Nick Russo leads the charge as bandleader and composer. Russo plays guitar, banjo, and resonator and has appeared on "Good Morning America" as well as the **Sam Mendes** film, **Away We Go**, and was a sideman with the greats - **Jimmy McGriff**, **Teddy Charles** and **Sonny Dallas**. Russo had the honor to jam with **Sir Paul McCartney** while performing at **Gwyneth**

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Paltrow and Chris Martin's home, regularly accompanies Antonique Smith, and recently performed for actor/comedian/composer, Jim Dale in Jon Weber's band.

Betina Hershey appears as the principle dancer in featured films, Disney's Enchanted and Mona Lisa Smile with Julia Roberts. Hershey performed on international and national tours of Broadway shows such as "West Side Story," "Phantom of the Opera," "The Fantasticks," and "Pump Boys & Dinettes," just to name a few. She composes music and plays guitar.

Gullah-Geechee percussionist and composer - Dr. David Pleasant has performed with Wynton Marsalis, Paul Simon, Cecil Taylor and many others. David also performed on Nickelodeon, TED talks, ABC with Ted Koppel, Broadway, and all around the world.

Rounding out the band is Miles Griffith. His non-traditional use of the voice as a percussive instrument, combined with an uncanny harmonic sense has made him a prime choice. He is a composer and has performed with Max Roach, Reggie Workman, T.S. Monk, Barry Harris and others. He played the lead role in Wynton Marsalis' jazz oratorio "Blood On The Fields," which premiered at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall.

*****Banjo Nickaru & Western Scooches Songs & Their Stories:

"We picked 'You Are My Sunshine' because my Mom used to sing it to me, and I just loved singing harmony with her. She died 3 weeks after we Nick and I married and she has had a huge influence on my musicality since she loves country, bluegrass, and so many genres of music," said Betina. "She sang to me all of the time, and now I get to sing to my kids all of the time, too. They're 5 1/2 and they were singing this song to me the other day as we walked home from school... I just loved that!"

"The song 'I Don't Believe in Love' is a saucy flirtation of a song. I do believe in love, but it puts all kinds of pressure. Since we were having so much fun together, maybe we should leave the 'love' pressure out of it," said Betina. "And by the way, we didn't get married in Spain, but we did have a musical honeymoon there."

"It was obvious to us that Elizabeth Cotten's 'Freight Train' was going to be our first track," said Nick. "The vibe Betina creates with this tune with my added slide fills and David's harmonica playing creates our sound. By all means, we are not only inspired by Elizabeth Cotten's piece, but the way she sings and plays guitar on her version, it's certainly a masterpiece and part of our African American heritage."

"Since the 1923 hit The Charleston, and the folk standards of Porgy and Bess, the American sound has benefited from a good dose of Gullah-Geechee culture.

Banjo Nickaru and Western Scooches has established a unique connection to the Drumfolk spirit of Gullah-Geechee culture."

David Pleasant