

THE ZYDEPUNKS Reviews



Live from Jazz Fest

Edna Gunderson, **USA Today**

With furious energy, The Zydepunks, a young genre-defying New Orleans group featuring drums, bass and dueling violins and accordions, wailed through a variety of original mash-ups blending Yiddish, zydeco, Klezmer, rock, Irish, Cajun and Slavic music.

Zydeco Goes Punk

By John Nova Lomax | **Houston Press**
4/4/2008

Finding Cajun and zydeco CDs in “World Music” record store bins has always annoyed me, especially when they are filed that way in stores in Houston. Sure, some lyrics are in French, but when you get right down to it, most modern zydeco has about as much business in the world music section as Labelle’s “Lady Marmalade” and its *voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir* chorus. And then there’s that whole thing with zydeco being more or less the official music of some neighborhoods right here in town. But if there is a zydeco-tinged band on the Gulf Coast that you could truly describe as music beyond borders, it is this gang of tattooed twentysomethings from New Orleans. Zydeco and punk only begin to describe their mix, which also includes hypnotic Balfa Brothers-style Cajun melodies, frenzied klezmer, Breton folk, and rollicking Gypsy styles; vocals come phrased not just in French, Spanish and English but also Yiddish, Portuguese and German. So as the say in FrenGermIsh, *laissez los güt tiempos roulez!*

Cajun Spice and Thrash

The **Zydepunks** – a New Orleans quintet with dueling accordions and fiddles instead of rock guitars – play a fast, whirling music that is not just zydeco and way more than punk. Their set at this year’s New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival had the Cajun waltzers baffled. Everyone else just jumped for joy to the speed-core mélange of klezmer tornadoes, Balkan dances, Celtic reels and bayou-squeezebox war – also available, at high velocity, on the band’s latest album, *Exile Waltz* (Nine Mile).

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Creative Loafing, Atlanta July 06

The Zydepunks

This raucous New Orleans quintet pays tribute to its Cajun roots by increasing the music’s tempos to radar-triggering speed and spitting out lyrics, many not in English, like they had a mouthful of jalapenos. Add some Klezmer, Irish, Slavic and punky power chords to the already hopped-up mix, and be prepared to dance like nobody’s watching. World music never sounded like so much frantic, frenetic and sweat-soaked fun.

Frank Etheridge, *Gambit Weekly*, New Orleans, LA - October 2006

The New Orleans-based Zydepunks inhabit a realm where driving rhythms and ingenious melodies patch together scenes as foreign as life on the Louisiana bayou, Celtic jigs, klezmer on the kibbutz and Old World waltzes -- all delivered fast and furious via a punk rock energy and ethos.

The Zydepunks: (504) 232-9930, booking@zydepunks.com, www.zydepunks.com

Inspired by a lineage of punk/folk bands including The Pogues and The Ukrainians, the Zydepunks (drummer Joe Lilly, fiddler Denise Bonis, bassist Paul Edmonds and accordianists Eve and Kuffner) formed in 2003. Over the last three years, the band has produced a reputation for fiery live shows with a sonic synergy ideal for intimate clubs such as the Circle Bar and Dragon's Den.

Songwriting is primarily shared by three members: Eve, who comes inspired by Jewish and Eastern traditions; Lilly, whose style lies in punk/indie sensibilities, but whose writing comes with the band's unique instrumentation in mind; and Kuffner, whose main interest is technical compositions of varied folk forms.

"It's kinda like starting with a palette that already has a framework on it," Kuffner says.

But drawing from such traditions doesn't mean there isn't plenty of inspiration stemming from the heady mood of post-K New Orleans.

"It's a hectic time to be living here, that's for sure," Kuffner says. "All this murder and death. It's a strange time -- pretty insane. The new lyrics reflect that."

Nick Pittman, *Times of Acadiana*, Lafayette, LA - February 2006

If zydeco festivals featured speed instead of cracklins, contemporary was defined as klezmer-infused instead of R&B influenced and the language barrier was shattered and multiplied as performers sung in six different languages instead of two, The Zydepunks might not be so damn unique. But those things aren't normal and neither are the Zydepunks. As they play accordion to a beat too fast for most dancing machines to keep up, genre is a suggestion simply tossed by the wayside. With their combination of South Louisiana sounds (accordions, but not washboards, Cajun French), Celtic jigs, German sounds plus boot-kicking Russian rhythms and Slavic lyrics, The Zydepunks could have only come out of New Orleans.

Dan Willging, *Offbeat Magazine*, New Orleans, LA - August 2005 In of the Top 50 Albums of 2005: *Offbeat Magazine*

Originally Christian Kuffner envisioned zydeco cranked with punk energy but once Eve Venema jumped into the fray, they veered into a heavy klezmer bent with a little Irish and Louisiana French on the side. By then it was too late for a name change, so punk Celtic klezmer Cajun it was.

A raucous rendition of "Madeleine" inaugurates the proceedings but even then there's a Shane MacGowan influence lurking about the mumbly vocals. "Satan" sports a Dennis McGee fiddle riff before inciting more Eastern European madness with "Dance You Fuhr". Several Tunes ("A Fistful of Oysters") hatch as stately waltzes before erupting into whip-lashing frenzies and thunderous tribal beat poundings. They never stay in place too long, blitzing into Irish with "Reel & Jig Set" and spoofing political satire on the amusing "Lowlands of Baghdad". Additionally, Kuffner sings in English, Spanish, French, Yiddish, and his native German as heard on "Die Schwimmbadpiraten".

Whacked-out fusions and kidding aside, the Zydepunks surprise with sublime accordion-fiddle fueled playing that would delight any Jewish glass-stomping wedding party. One that would have "Johnny Can't Dance," that is. Mazeltov, chère.

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By Jennifer Patton 2/14/07

I absolutely adore all of the world's b****rdized styles of music - especially anything that includes traditional Eastern and Western European - and therefore was quite giddy to discover the Zydepunks while searching for some new (to me) "gypsy punk." While the New Orleans based group has released two albums on its own, it seems word-of-mouth is still the norm and I'm glad to be newly in the know. What drew me to the Zydepunks was the band's self-description, which includes "Cajun," "Irish," "Klezmer," "Slavic," and, of course, "Zydeco." How could I resist?

The first song the group offers up is an Acadian traditional called "Madeleine." Though I can't understand a word of what is being sung, I really dig the raucous beat driven by the fiddler. The Zydepunks website does offer an English translation, but it is almost more fun to stay clueless about the lyrics and just enjoy the music.

The second song, "Satan" pulled me in on the name alone, but I discovered a great instrumental with enough flair to give some of my favorite bands a run for their money. "Satan" would be perfect for a bit of dancing on a hot summer night, which is the perfect vision on this cold, cold night in February. In addition to the lovely accordion on this track, the fiddle player shines again.

The Zydepunks are well worth checking out if you enjoy fun, upbeat music of any of the styles listed above. Like Gogol Bordello, Kultur Shock, and many of the other similar bands making a name for themselves in the past few years, the Zydepunks expertly blend traditional styles with contemporary and the results couldn't be more enjoyable.

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