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JAZZ SPOTLIGHT

They're widening the global fraternity

France's Moutin twins exemplify the music's international appeal.

By Don Heckman

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Jazz has been reaching out globally at least since World War I, when the appropriately named Lt. James Reese Europe and his 369th Infantry "Harlem Hellfighters" brought the rhythms of ragtime to battle-scarred France.

Although the musical flow initially moved outward from the U.S., high-quality international jazz players began to arrive on the scene in the '20s. Since then, the romance with jazz has expanded to every corner of the world.

In more recent years, with few American icons around to create new, pervasive stylistic genres, jazz has blossomed in boundary-less fashion, a panoramic garden blending the essential elements of improvisation and swing with sounds and rhythms from every part of the planet.

"Red Moon" (Sunnyside Records) by the Moutin Reunion Quartet is a superb example of this cross-pollination. The group's leaders are French bassist Francois Moutin and his twin brother, drummer Louis Moutin. The brothers were heard most recently in the Southland as members of a trio led by the innovative pianist Martial Solal. Their ability to move gracefully with the sudden twists and turns of Solal's improvisational inventiveness stamped the pair as potentially significant artists in their own right.

In the opening track of "Red Moon," the twins duet adventurously through Charles Trenet's "La Mer," transforming the classic melody into a joyous, hard-swinging romp underpinned by an irresistible rhythmic groove. The album closes with a harmonically off-kilter rendering of "Stompin' at the Savoy" featuring the quartet's other members, French pianist Baptiste Trotignon and American saxophonist Rick Margitza.

In between are eight originals, four by each of the Moutin brothers. The moods range from the lyrical, inner atmospheres of "Soraya" and the roaring, groove-driven surge of "Jazz Married" to the disjunct rhythms of "Taking Off," the layered textures of "Sailing Through the Clouds" and the contemporary bop of "New-York Silly."

Margitza, a far too under-recognized player, swings with Coltrane-inspired energies throughout. Trotignon, 29, is a real find; a casually virtuosic technician with a subtle touch, a rich melodic imagination and a propulsive sense of rhythm.

But it is the playing of the Moutin twins that takes the music from the level of eminently listenable to the lofty plane of prime, world-class jazz.

There are other rhythm section brother teams in jazz; Percy and Albert "Tootie" Heath, Victor and Roy Wooten. But no identical twins that come immediately to mind.

And the remarkable interplay between Francois and Louis' intuitive, enmeshed, symbiotic is a convincing aural manifestation of the belief that identical twins are connected in remarkable, inexplicable fashion.