

## Wanted: A Minnesota Reunion With the Moutin Quartet

Contributed by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor

Tuesday, 09 January 2007



Moutin Brothers © Pamela Espeland

My friends Jay and Elizabeth and I always try to find something interesting musically for our annual holiday gathering, which usually comes a little after the holiday rush. So they were game when I suggested this “jazz violin duo at the Dakota, and oh, yeah. There’s a second set with some French quartet. It will be fun.”

Oh, yeah. The jazz violin due (Diane Delin and Dennis Luxion) was derailed by Delin’s illness, leaving the double header fully in the hands of the Moutin Reunion Band. And I’ll go to their reunion any time. As John Kellerman (*All About Jazz*) noted after hearing the French quartet at the 2005 Ottawa Jazz Festival, “While most people didn’t know who the Moutin Reunion Quartet was walking into the show, it’s a sure bet that they’ll be remembering them for a long time to come.”

The Moutin Reunion Quartet is the “reunion” of bassist Francois and drummer Louis Moutin, twin Parisian jazz artists touring in partnership with pianist Pierre de Bethmann and saxophonist Rick Margitza. Their stop in Minnesota was also a reunion of sorts, with pals Mike Lewis, Adam Linz and JT Bates—aka Fat Kid Wednesdays, who were largely responsible for ensuring that Minneapolis was on the Moutins’ North American tour this winter.

Moutin Reunion wasted no time endearing themselves to the Dakota audience. Sure, those French accents are charming, and having a bass/drum pair that are mirror images of each other adds a “Je ne sais quoi” quality, but from the first percussion splash to the last glissando, the quartet engulfed us in 75 minutes of explosive invention, from original masterpieces like “MRC (Minor Rhythm Changes)” to an amazing bass/drum duel based on Charlie Parker covers. Collaboration was the theme throughout, and while the arrangements generally might have been pre-ordained, the free-wheeling nature of both collective and

individual improvisation made for an ever-evolving journey through sight and sound. And it's all acoustic, although if you closed your eyes during some of Francois' bass antics, you might swear he was using some pedal effects. But no, it's entirely sleight of hand... and fingers.

The opening "MRC" covered far more than "Minor Rhythm Changes," introducing the audience to the range and experimental *joi de vivre* of each musician. And the most memorable bass solo I ever heard—until tonight—was Charnett Moffett's 8-minute ramble a few years ago with the McCoy Tyner Trio. But I had never heard Francois Moutin. His extended prelude to "Echoing" was not only a master class in prestidigitation for acoustic bass, but further an exhaustive demonstration of how to use every one of the 27 bones in the human hand to coax layers of sound from a mere four strings, with clusters of double-stops, sinewy slides, and staccato punctuations yielding aural delights ranging from buzz to whine to sigh to pop, from melodic to malicious, orchestrally multiphonic and polyrhythmic. No accompaniment needed. Anyone who thinks the bass solo is a mere break between acts must meet Francois Moutin.



Francois and Louis Moutin

Brother Louis Moutin creates a similar sonic (and visual) menagerie with his drum kit, and like his brother, he can use his hands alone to create symphonic layers. The brothers' duet in the first set was billed as improvisations on a medley of Charlie Parker tunes, including "Confirmation" and "Donna Lee," quite a feat without a traditionally melodic instrument to carry the themes. Yet there was no doubt this was Parker, albeit a Bird with a new set of feathers. Louis played hands-on throughout, and like Francois, his hands have infinite capacity to shape and transform sound in an evolutionary pattern of rhythms and dynamics, totally in sync with the bass' explorations. Immersed in music since early childhood, the brothers also excelled in math and science, both obtaining graduate degrees in physics and engineering before their passions solidified in jazz. That mathematical precision and inner sense of structure may explain the cohesiveness of their experiments, but there is nothing mechanical or formulaic in their expression.

Pianist Pierre de Bethmann also followed a dual path of music and business, trying his hand at management consulting before music called him back. The most recent addition to the Reunion Quartet, his contributions are pivotal, his spiraling solos often a melodic and introspective contrast to the explosive duo downstage right, yet he too can evoke a firestorm of cascading notes and tumbling chords, particularly abundant in the first set's unnamed closing composition.

Were this but a trio, it would be a most successful one, but the Moutin Reunion features one of the most under-rated modern saxophonists on the planet, tenorman Rick Margitza. One of the most respected if not most recognized horn players of his generation, Margitza comes from the Coltrane/Shorter tradition like a sleeping volcano prone to eruptions that exude power and poetry, somewhat reminiscent of the best of Chris Potter.

The energy and finesse of the Moutin Reunion Band warrants many return visits. Ooh-la-la.