



Music

No Moutin Ruse

You're not seeing double. Identical twin Frenchmen lead jazz ensemble that's bound for Erie.

Published: September 29, 2005 7:00AM

Advertisement

Many things -- besides the exciting, inventive way they combine straight ahead and "neo-fusion" jazz -- make the Moutin Reunion Quartet a distinctive ensemble.

The band is co-led by identical French-born twin brothers Francois and Louis Moutin. Louis, a drummer, lives in Paris, while bass player Francois has been a New Yorker since 1997, making the band bi-continental.

Each has an advanced degree, but neither one is in music. Louis has a master's in math, Francois has a Ph.D. in physics. They turned their backs on careers and almost certain financial security in favor of one of the most problematic occupations out there, a life in jazz.

"For us, music has always been fun," said Francois by phone from Paris. "Then it became a passion, so we knew we had to do it to be more in touch with ourselves, although we realized our lives would be less comfortable."

The siblings, 43, played together until age 20, then separated to become sidemen with folks such as John Abercrombie, Albert Mangelsdorff, Michel Legrand, Martial Solal, Toots Thielemans, and Archie Shepp.

In 1999, they decided it was time to be together again, and formed a band. Current members include pianist Pierre de Bethmann and saxophonist Rick Margitza, who's played with Miles Davis, Maynard Ferguson and Maria Schneider. Francois can't say enough about Margitza.

"He's one of the few saxophonists who could handle what we're playing," he said. He praised his "poetic sense of phrasing," and called him "soulful and energetic, but controlled."

The twins are enjoying considerable success -- working often, recording regularly, and getting generally excellent reviews for live shows and CDs.

Firmly established abroad, the Moutins and their band have toured the U.S. several times annually for the past four years. The visits are paying off.

"It's hard work, but rewarding to succeed on two continents," Francois says. "In jazz, America has always been considered the real thing, so our success in the U.S. makes the French and other countries proud and has increased our notoriety there."

From the opening notes of the title tune of the quartet's new CD "Something Like New" (Nocturne), the experienced jazz listener might think, "Sounds like Weather Report."

"Yes, we did connect with them in those days, but if you listen closely, I think you'll notice that the similarity is mostly in the writing (done primarily by the brothers), rather than the sound of the group," Francois says.

He makes it clear that he and Louis learned jazz and its history from listening to their parents' exhaustive record library. They've also played the music since age 5, so that they've incorporated elements from many great figures.

The result? Their music -- mostly acoustic, except for the occasional use of electric piano -- is high energy, free-wheeling, yet also lyrical and terrifically interactive.

However it is labeled, Francois says the band's music is about "intimacy" and "sharing our emotions" with one another and listeners.

"After all," Francois says, "music expresses life."

Moutin Reunion Quartet will perform Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Erie Art Museum Annex, 423 State St. Admission is \$10 for Erie Art Museum and JazzErie members; \$12 for general public; \$6 for students and seniors.