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# The Vignatis - Insider Interview

The Vignatis are a Gypsybilly duo who have released 4 albums. The duo defines Gypsybilly as a Rockabilly, Gypsy, jazz and country all mixed together. Add some beats and you get "Electrobilly!" The Los Angeles-based group fuses American/European traditions, musicianship, and a sense of humor cleverly expressed in their unique songs. Their unmistakable, neo-nostalgic sound is a natural musical union so diverse it avoids strict categorization. As prestigious voting members of The Recording Academy and Grammy Awards, The Vignatis have performed at many esteemed events and venues including The Grammy Museum, Emmy Awards Parties, and as the opening band for the renowned swing band, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.



## What messages does your Gypsybilly music carry?

Fabrice: Gypsybilly carries messages in 3 different ways. First, the music itself is a new style of music or sound in this new century mixing different genres. I'm not talking about influences which are usually people. It's a blend that conveys the importance of crossing or mixing genres, pushing the envelope to always move forward, making something fresh and interesting. Many artists do this however, we just happen to give it a name that fits our blend. Second, lyrics play a big part in Gypsybilly and Electrobilly too, as it is primarily vocal music more than instrumental on each of our albums. The choices of lyrics are message-oriented. It's a form of expression that helps enhance the mood and style of the song to which, hopefully the listener will pay attention. In some songs we choose lyrics that can spark dialogue or self-reflection, while others are purely silly and fun. Nothing wrong with that if it is suitable. Overall, we consider ourselves storytellers and/or message tellers

meaning, we observe the world around us, report a story or draw from it. The four genres of music contained in Gypsybilly lend themselves to image-oriented or fun-day- to-day lyrics like in country music, gypsy stories about families or traveling, poetic thought like in jazz, or French romantic lyrics. In the end, it's a melange of what Tracy and I are about as individuals, and what we believe needs to be said and done for the world. Lastly, it's a message of happiness. It is an upbeat and happy genre of music that will cheer you up and make you want to dance.

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[Tracy](#): Our new album “Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4”, contains a lot of the songs that pay tribute to or honor various groups of people. I’m always inspired by others. For example, “Silent Heroes” gives thanks to behind-the-scenes workers in thankless jobs that make the world function, “Oh La L’amour” pays homage to great artists of the past who have left legacies of everlasting art like Chopin, Rodin, Beethoven, etc. and “Third Eye” pays tribute to our U.S. Military, a reminder to appreciate their selfless dedication and continuous protection of our country, “New Direction (feat. Total Bliss)” which addresses the current social climate encouraging others to change direction to improve one’s life and the lives of others, and the instrumental track “Manouchified” which is our shout-out to the Manouche Gypsy community. On the lighter side, “Tahiti” praises the natural beauty of French Polynesia with light-hearted lyrics. Others are simply have-fun songs like “Bop, Hop & Roll” comparing the simple times of the 1950s to present day, along with the title track, “Red, White & Blue” for summer, backyard fun, which simultaneously expresses patriotism and the privilege of our democracy. No matter the song, there is something to take home in hopes of lifting people’s spirits. Doing for others creates fortune not only for others but for oneself. We have a series of videos of the song explanations so visit our [YouTube Channel](#) to learn more.

The Vignatis  
Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4  
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The Vignatis - Bop, Hop & Roll	▶ 22
The Vignatis - Silent Heroes	▶ 17
The Vignatis - Oh La L'amour	▶ 3

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[The Vignatis - Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4](#)

## Describe this genre. What exactly is Gypsybilly?

[Tracy](#): Gypsybilly is like an Instant Pot of French Gypsy Jazz, Rockabilly, Country and Jazz. It is a direct result of our melded backgrounds both culturally and musically. It's a creation we have cultivated for the past 10 years, unique in its harmonic choices, melodies, lyrics, instrumentation and arranging values. With 4 albums under our belts, I think we've reached a stride although it has evolved considerably even since Vol. 1 with regard to

harmonic/melodic decisions, to instrumentation, arrangement and lyrics. It will continue to evolved because we are both people who need constant movement and change, new ideas, etc. Whether one likes it or doesn't, and I hope it's the former, Gypsybilly is unique with our sonic stamp that is difficult to classify due to its eclectic nature. When you hear it, you know it's The Vignatis. I mean, who else plays a pink clarinet and runs it through guitar effects?

[Fabrice](#): We created Gypsybilly after some serious ethnomusicological research of the 20th century, trial and error, and hard work. We wanted to conquer a less traveled road. It is our own adventure, our lives, without a dress rehearsal. Being different is always fantastic. We used our musical versatility like many pioneers did even if a lot of music has already been written. Musicians can still pioneer new genres in that 21st century. That's what we did within our own world, for the world. Here we are in 2020 with four albums. It must have an impact because radio has been telling us our sound is unique and are spinning us for that reason. We appreciate the positive validation. We hope to encourage others to think outside the box yet still staying true to yourself. At this juncture, being indie artists has allowed us the freedom of unsupervised experimentation, which in the future may not always be the case to which we are not opposed. However, it must be the right union. We are thrilled to contribute a new link to the chain of musical genres and musical history as many pioneers did.

### **How do you deal with criticism?**

[Tracy](#): I am a hypersensitive person by nature so it has been a challenge throughout my past to hear criticism and process it. I would read a review or article or even a college jury that was primarily positive with one detail that was not favorable, and I interpreted the whole review, article or critique negatively and obsess over it. Well, NOW, that has changed due to a certain spiritual practice which we will discuss a bit later. When I read something now that is not favorable, I seriously don't give a shit! It is an impossibility to have everyone like you or what you do. The difference now is that I embrace the ones who do like what I do and cherish those individuals. It's really just an internal shift in perspective, a change in belief system, if you will. We've all heard the quote "opinions are like \*\*\*holes....." and I'm sure you know the rest of that quote, LOL! Now I do what I do and you like it, or you don't. Simple. Life is too short to let that rent space in my head. That is far different than constructive criticism, which I take VERY seriously. It is all based on the person's intension who is offering the criticism. Anyone can be an "armchair critic" and enjoy watching others fail. Offer something useful to help me improve and I'm in 100%! Pioneers of anything or anyone trying to do new things, to excel at something, will always be subject to ridicule and scrutiny. It comes with the territory. Just ask Thomas Edison.

[Fabrice](#): Because of my deep passion for music and strong life determination to always do my best, criticism is a dilemma for me. First, I have to listen carefully as the saying goes: "two ears for one mouth," and avoid exploding negatively, internally or verbally, in the face of what could be constructive criticism. I understand now with time and experience that we can't control what other people say, think or write. I CAN control how I process it and

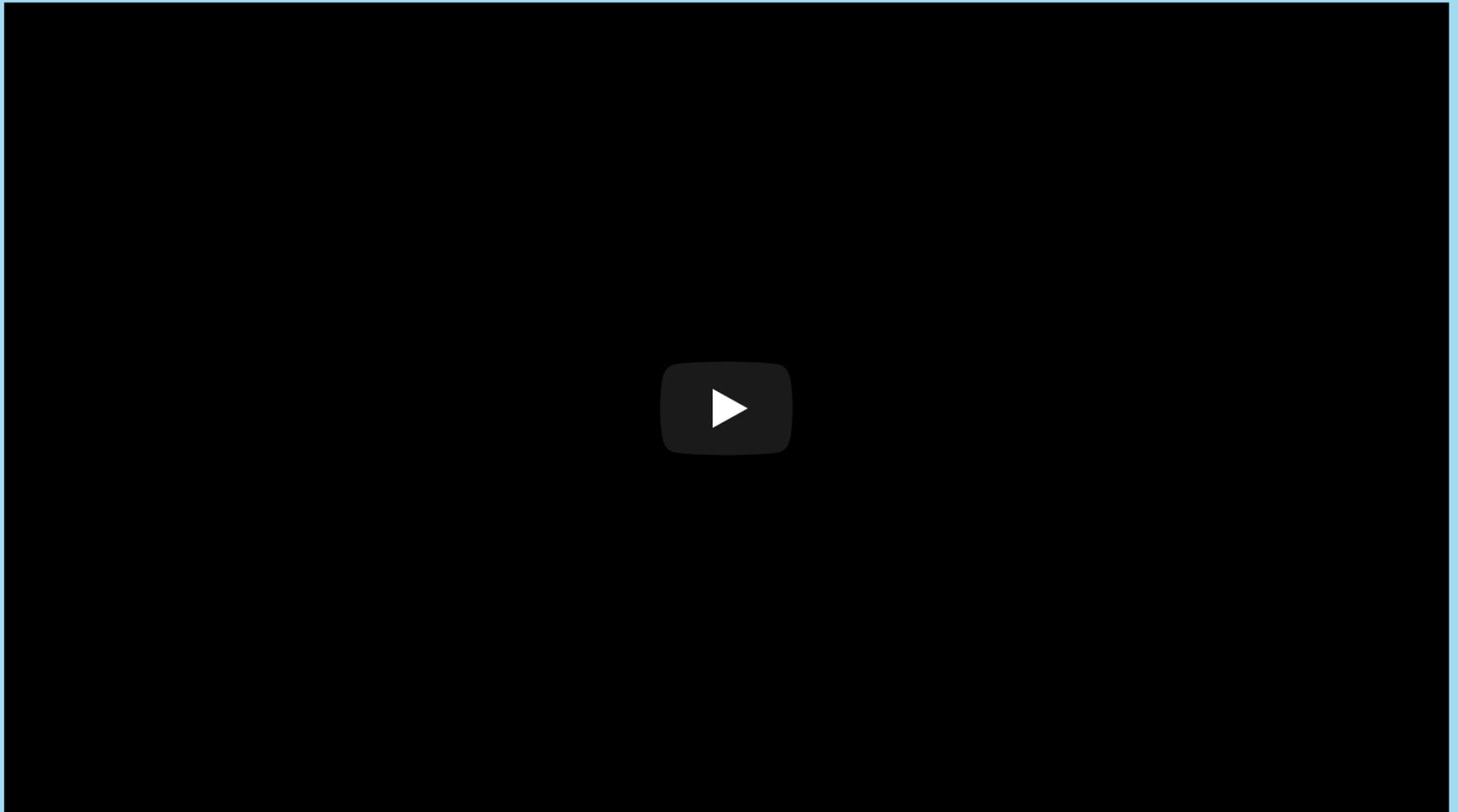
respond. Think about it; the word “responsibility” when broken down is “response” and “ability.” Now flip those two words and you have “the ability to respond” either in a positive or negative way which will have an effect. This is where I pay close attention to criticism. I first process it by taking my time, observing what type of feedback or criticism it is and its intentions, embracing the opportunity to have a critic, and may be choosing to process it differently if it bugs me. Second, I take action making a plan to act on the constructive criticism and turn the negative ones into positive. By doing this, it gives me the chance to foster my problem-solving skills, improve my craft and help shift the creative exchange out of combat mode into collaboration. A long-time friend who has listened to our 4 albums just gave me a detailed report of this latest album, some good criticism, some bad. First, I thanked him for offering criticism, then I had to deal with it. I know I'm perfectly imperfect and always keep in mind that **it's not just about me.**

### **What are your deepest values, how do you stay true to them?**

Fabrice: When it comes to my deepest values, I mention the values I nurture through hard work and experience. The first thing that comes to mind is a deep sense of appreciation for life itself and my life; from headache to heartache. Next, taking responsibility, as I refer to concerning criticism, meaning that I am responsible for my thoughts, words and actions. Another is a sense of justice for oneself and others. I see this more in terms of cause and effect, or “what goes around comes around.” Additionally, consistency/perseverance on which I heavily and constantly rely, especially when it comes to attaining my goals or finishing projects. Lastly is understanding, which is very useful in drawing correct conclusions or decisions. I use these values whether for business or creativity. Being objective in evaluating the right situation or make the right call is very difficult due to the abundance of social media surrounding us. I rely on myself through introspection, my daily Buddhist practice, and good dialogue or exchange of ideas, which is essential in a music collaboration like ours. I've learned that each human being possesses what we called in Buddhism the Four Qualities: Liferforce, Wisdom, Compassion and Courage. Some have more than others however, I try to re-enforce them every day through daily life. I apply all of this when I make music which keeps me going strongly in the right direction. It re-affirms my belief that I can change people's lives through our music, and who knows, maybe create a sense of peace in the listeners' lives by bringing forth the Greater Self rather than the Lesser Self. I see many musicians doing this; Steve Vai immediately comes to mind. What???! I know, too deep of an answer. Well, then it's time to loosen up and listen “Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4”, LOL!

Tracy: As I mentioned earlier about a spiritual practice, we both practice Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism with the SGI. The teachings are based on the Law of Cause and Effect. That is the way I live my every-day life. A thought, a word, an action, they are all “causes” which in turn will produce effects, whether it be immediate or delayed, just as in Newton's Third Law of Motion (yes, my inner nerd). Honesty, loyalty (yes, I'm a Cancer) and purity are the only ways I can live. No one can truly be happy through cunning or conniving behaviors. The Universe will take care of those who make those kinds of causes. Please don't confuse this withbeing silent or docile; it's actually the contrary. I have a Type A personality and will say

what needs to be said for the sake of justice, and will always come from a place of truth without deceit. Practicing this Buddhism teaches me how to revolutionize internally and shows me that the power is in me, not outside of myself. I always strive to overcome my negative tendencies. No one is perfect. I now value living in the present moment. I used to be so attached to my past, hanging on to relationships that I should've released long ago, some still need that release. Nothing is permanent and it isn't right or wrong. It's just momentum or movement. Life is always moving on and when one door closes, there is a bigger one opening. Hope that bigger door has a Grammy behind it!



### **What is the difference between writing Gypsybilly music versus other genres of music?**

Tracy: Although writing Gypsybilly songs comes naturally, there are so many factors to consider which makes it more challenging for me. I have to make sure to try and simplify the harmony and “de-jazz” myself a bit, so to speak. As we write the songs, we have to keep in mind the 4 genre elements that are contained in Gypsybilly as well as the potential arrangements and live performance (let's end this pandemic, please). In writing other genres, it seems to be a bit more straightforward with maybe the general instrumentation and feel of the song in mind, sticking to more traditional harmonics and melodies. Lyrics come to me at the strangest times for any style, a lot of times from my dreams. Gypsybilly songs seem to have more freedom for me, and less confines or expectations than other genres may require or expect.

Fabrice: Gypsybilly is definitely who we are so like Tracy said, it comes more naturally yet still requires a lot of attention due to the mix of the 4 genres and their musical interactions with each other. It's a constant battle between the complicated like in "Paris to L.A." from Vol. 2, to the simpler like "Let's Hit the Road" from Vol. 3. Guitar solos are also a combination of these 4 genres. There are usually more instruments to record, so arrangements must very clever and on the money otherwise it won't be effective and reflect the style. The key to

maintaining our Gypsybilly sound is great mixing from someone who “gets it”, and James “Jroq” Norton was the answer to our last two albums. He’s as rock-solid as his name. When we record other styles of music for our catalogue and potentially for other artists, like Rock, Funk, Blues, Arabic, Classical, Gypsy Jazz, Reggae, Pop, Alternative-Rock, Country, etc., it is less complicated and usually with simpler chord progressions. Other styles are more unidirectional with not a lot of cross-over. In that regard it is less demanding for me musically however, it is very interesting due to the fact that I can improve my songwriting, guitar playing and voicings, and switch between a wide range of guitar tones. I would say that Pop is definitely the most challenging for us since it leans toward electronic sounds with less organic elements. With that said, we welcome challenges and quite enjoy them.

### **What is your “Rock Your Life” Show podcast series about?**

Tracy: Oh, this is definitely a pet project, labor of love. Everyone is struggling with something, right? We talk about life topics that can help and inspire others in some way. Neither one of us has a counseling or psychology degree, however what we can do is pass on information that we have learned and/or utilized, in hopes of helping others. The goal in life is to be happy, not master suffering. We try to choose relatable topics like “Got Goals?”, “Have Appreciation!”, “The Importance of Having Mentors”, to name a few. We keep it more conversational between us and share our thoughts and experiences. It is always helpful for me to hear that someone else has experienced or feels the same way I do about something. It’s nice to know that we aren’t alone in this world. You can go to the [Podcasts](#) tab on our website to listen or on Spotify, Apple Music or other streaming services.

Fabrice: Everybody has life experience, some more than others. We both are very comfortable discussing life in a philosophical manner. Like the recipe of our music, we decided to combine our knowledge and experiences to share it with others in the form of an unrehearsed podcast series. Verbal spontaneity plays a big factor in reaching people's lives. Each time we record a podcast, it’s like a jazz improvisational solo of freedom, wisdom and knowledge. Listeners get to know us as people, which helps to form a human connection in addition to the listener-artist connection happening through our music. I believe that learning and sharing is key. Like my mentor, Daisaku Ikeda, said, “Knowledge alone does not produce wisdom. Transforming knowledge into wisdom requires input from the heart.” I am happy to contribute in this regard, just like the music we write.

### **A fun question...what is on your bucket list?**

Tracy: Oh, wow! My bucket is pretty big so I’ll keep the list as brief as possible. 1) My passport is waiting to go to Africa because I MUST see my precious African elephants living the way nature intended. All animals deserve to live the lives they were born to live; 2) French Polynesia (Tahiti, Bora Bora) so much that we wrote the song “Tahiti” and put it on this album about a place we haven’t even seen; 3) Winning Grammys is for certain on my list. The wins would not be just for myself or Fabrice, but for those who have offered their continuous, selfless support; 4) Building a house and recording studio that we design

ourselves with all sustainable materials, as clean, green and independent as you can get with sizeable acreage for me to fill with rescue animals. No animal left behind! Those are a few drops for my ginormous bucket.

[Fabrice](#): Whoa! I thought you said “kick the bucket” which I’m not ready for; too much music to write and record. Yes, I’m American now, but this French native still mixes up American expressions. I need a wheel barrow, not a bucket! Here's a few: Go to Japan to visit Tokyo, Sado Island, and Kyoto which are some historical origins of the Buddhism we practice; win Grammys, as it is always good to have your work recognized by your peers PLUS to get into the good after parties; contribute to the global switch from

Uranium to Thorium to help nuclear energy become safer; get my dream car (too many in mind) like a Ferrari 250GT, 1950's convertible Stingray Corvette, Bugatti Chiron, or Chevelle 454 LS6; attend a Formula 1 Grand Prix from the paddock/pit garage and hang with Rosco Hamilton afterwards; do a USO tour and a couple of world music tours; buy a few more guitars (never too many); complete at least 10 Gypsybilly Volumes in this lifetime; 500 written and recorded songs hopefully more (we are ¼ in); and of course build our custom studio in a killer house (yes, same house as Tracy. I don’t plan on living in the shed, LOL!). Oh yeah, a busy man!!



For more information on The Vignatis and their latest album, *Red, White & Blue*, please visit their [website](#).

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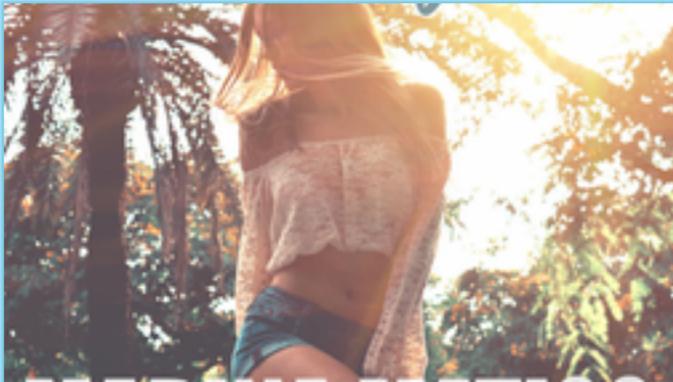
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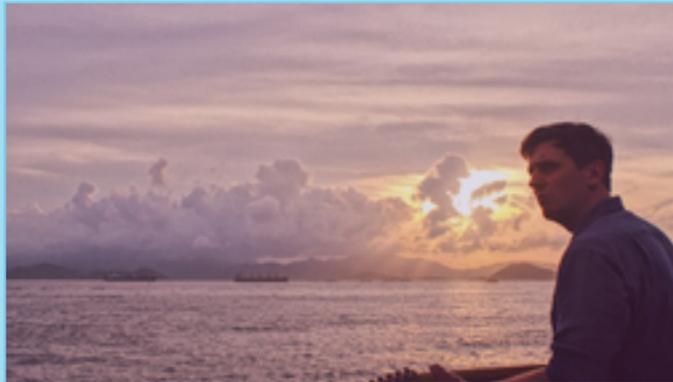


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