

BWH Music Group  · 2 hours ago · 10 min read

## The Vignatis - 10 Questions Music Interview

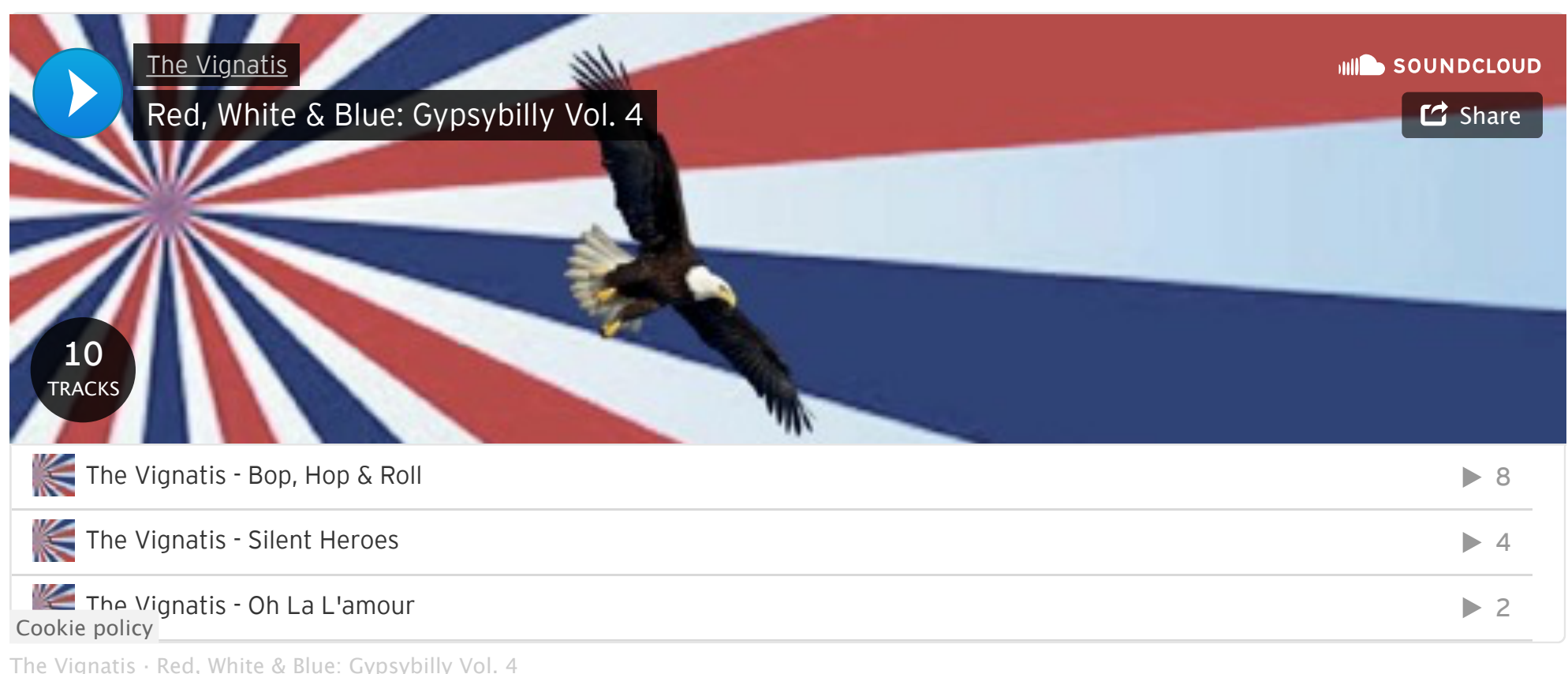
The Vignatis have been rockin' their Gypsybilly style for 4 albums. The duo defines Gypsybilly as a Rockabilly, Gypsy, jazz and country all mixed together. Add some beats and you get The Vignatis' genre called "Electrobilly." The aurally and visually colorful Los Angeles-based group fuses American/European traditions, musicianship, and a sense of humor cleverly expressed in their 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.



### Why did you decide to create a new genre called Gypsybilly?

**Tracy:** I come from a jazz background and learned standards before I could walk. I grew up half of my childhood in Georgia so country music was just part of the deal. It's so infused in the culture and I love the simplicity in its meaning. Fabrice is from France, and when we met, he was playing a lot of gypsy jazz and rockabilly. We decided to start our own gypsy jazz group and did countless gigs which forced me to get reacquainted with my high-school clarinet. As time went on, we wanted to expand and somehow combine our backgrounds further to create something that we didn't really know yet, something that truly represented ourselves, suited our roots and personalities and that made us shine individually and collectively. Several years ago, at a Grammy Members event we had the opportunity to speak with Quincy Jones. We asked him where he thought music was headed. He said that boundaries would be broken with lots of genre crossing. That's all we needed to hear from the Master himself!

**Fabrice:** We created the Gypsybilly genre in 2009 after a couple of years of ethnomusicological research, trial and error, hard work and always pressing forward! We developed the will to experiment and bring our musical and humanistic talents together to create a new pathway for us. Conquering the less traveled road is noble. It is our own adventure; life is not a dress rehearsal. Being different is fantastic. We used our musical versatility as did Frank Zappa, Pink Floyd and Brian Setzer, to name a few. Though a lot of music has 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 in February this year we discovered in a music magazine that another musician professed to have created Gypsybilly. Although we had to set the record straight with him, we were flattered and happy to see that others are thinking outside the box. It is merely validation as to how appealing and real this style is. We hope others will play Gypsybilly in the future. We are glad to contribute a new link in the chain of musical genres.



The screenshot shows a SoundCloud playlist interface. At the top, there is a play button icon, the artist name 'The Vignatis', the album title 'Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4', and a 'Share' button. Below this is a circular badge indicating '10 TRACKS'. The main image features a bald eagle flying over a background of a red, white, and blue striped flag with a starburst pattern. The playlist list includes:

- The Vignatis - Bop, Hop & Roll (8 tracks)
- The Vignatis - Silent Heroes (4 tracks)
- The Vignatis - Oh La L'amour (2 tracks)

At the bottom, there is a 'Cookie policy' link and the text 'The Vignatis · Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4'.

## What is the origin of Gypsybilly and what makes it unique?

**Fabrice:** Contrary to what one may believe about the gypsy community, they are people symbolizing freedom, family, celebration of culture, music and dance, all around the globe, in spite of suffering oppression clearly exhibited in their music. "Billy" means fellow, friend or companion. Both words represent people, usually rural and modest, and oftentimes are not very socially accepted by the masses. Both have roots-oriented authenticity, just like the origins of the four genres of music contained in Gypsybilly.

**Tracy:** Gypsybilly is a mélange of the four basic styles of gypsy jazz, rockabilly, country and jazz. Respectively, each of these styles were very popular during the 20th century. We have carefully experimented to create this identifiable sound not only harmonically, but sonically. We use tricks like "la pompe renverse" and some unique production choices to help develop that sound. It is upbeat and generally happy music and lyrics, that hopefully will stimulate dialogue and self-reflection. The cross-pollination of these elements has created a sound that is somewhat difficult to classify. I mean, who do you know that runs their pink clarinet through guitar effects AND plays a kazoo solo in one take?!

**Fabrice:** Gypsybilly is guitar-based music, so these four styles work great for guitar playing; rhythm, chords and scales intermix in each genre creating a melting pot of sounds. We know our sound is recognizable. Our mixer, James "Jroq" Norton, who mixed this new album and the last

one, told us we definitely have a distinct sound. Others in the music business have told us the same thing so that's always a good thing. For more information about the explanation, go to the "About" page on our website and check out "What is Gypsybilly?"

**"Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4" is the new album. Why this album and why now?**

**Tracy:** We wanted to write an Americana-themed album paying tribute to and honoring the greatness of our nation and those behind-the-scenes people who are deserved. So many people are in thankless jobs that make our lives easier. That's why we wrote "Silent Heroes" for those who make the world go-round and "Third Eye", honoring our U.S. military. So often these people are forgotten and not even acknowledged. It's an overall tribute to American values, the greatness of the USA and its resilience.



**Fabrice:** We were supposed to release this album at the beginning of 2019 but decided to wait, as we had just released "Let's Hit the Road: Gypsybilly Vol. 3" in early 2018. It is funny how the Universe kind of made that decision for us and we waited until now. It certainly is timely in this climate we are experiencing with racial conflict, a global pandemic and a recession. Each album is a little different inside of our genre of music with "Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4" being the most Americana of the four.

**Question 4: What is most challenging in writing and recording Gypsybilly songs?**

**Tracy:** For me it's always the same issue of trying to not over-complicate the song harmonically and melodically. It's difficult to "de-jazz" myself at times because it is my default setting yet, I am getting way better about it. The songs need to be accessible by all listeners and easy to digest. Fabrice has been so great in helping me achieve this even though I may get defensive and pouty, LOL! The lyric subject matter needs to match the vibe of the song. Sometimes it is an undertaking to get those to match. Also, switching from one hat to another, from writer to player to arranger to producer can be demanding. That's where we make such a great team. We can trade hats.

**Fabrice:** To always staying true to ourselves and the genre containing its four elements is challenging, making sure all four styles are present either in the harmony, scales, lyrics, arrangement, etc. Writing Gypsybilly comes naturally for us but it still demands discipline and self-reflection, yet not omitting the spontaneity and to always progress writing well-rounded songs both musically and sonically. A good song should transcend genre of music when covered. I never cease to keep improving myself on guitar, writing or singing in each of those four genres. It's already hard to do one, so imagine four. It's also a challenge to reinvent or innovate within this Gypsybilly style, as we did on this new album by adding a rap section, and me learning the ukulele. Keeping up with software and technology as we blend digital and analog will always be on the list as well. Of course, making beats, which is not our forte, is an undertaking for us in the

Electrobilly style but we try.

## Where do you get your inspiration and what is the process?

**Fabrice:** The first one is life itself by what happens to us internally and expression of feelings. Second, inspiration from society, the good and the bad. Creativity itself is an inspiration and such a joy. The positive and/or negative feedback of people whether in live situation or by online comments is big motivation to carry on and improve. Concerning the process in songwriting, it's always aiming for a good hook, a simple melody on either a simple or complicated chord progression and to be open-minded. It is a rule for us that no ideas get discarded for creating a song or to make one better, from blank page or one just an idea, to full completion of a song. In other words, the process gets explored and finished from beginning to end. Wyatt, one of my 11-year old guitar students, put it beautifully in words: "Chords are the tracing, melody is the ink and lyrics are the colors." Brilliant!!!

**Tracy:** Inspiration can come from all kinds of sources from daily life, traveling, history or a life-changing experience. The process is all over the place for me. I will say that my iPhone is my BFF. It's loaded with ideas that I get at any time, some even from dreams at night. A melody with some chords or just a lyric, or a melody and lyric together. Because it's not scientific, it is difficult to give a concise answer. When writing, we try to leave our ego at the door and really pay attention to what is best for the song. We try hard to always remind each other of this point.

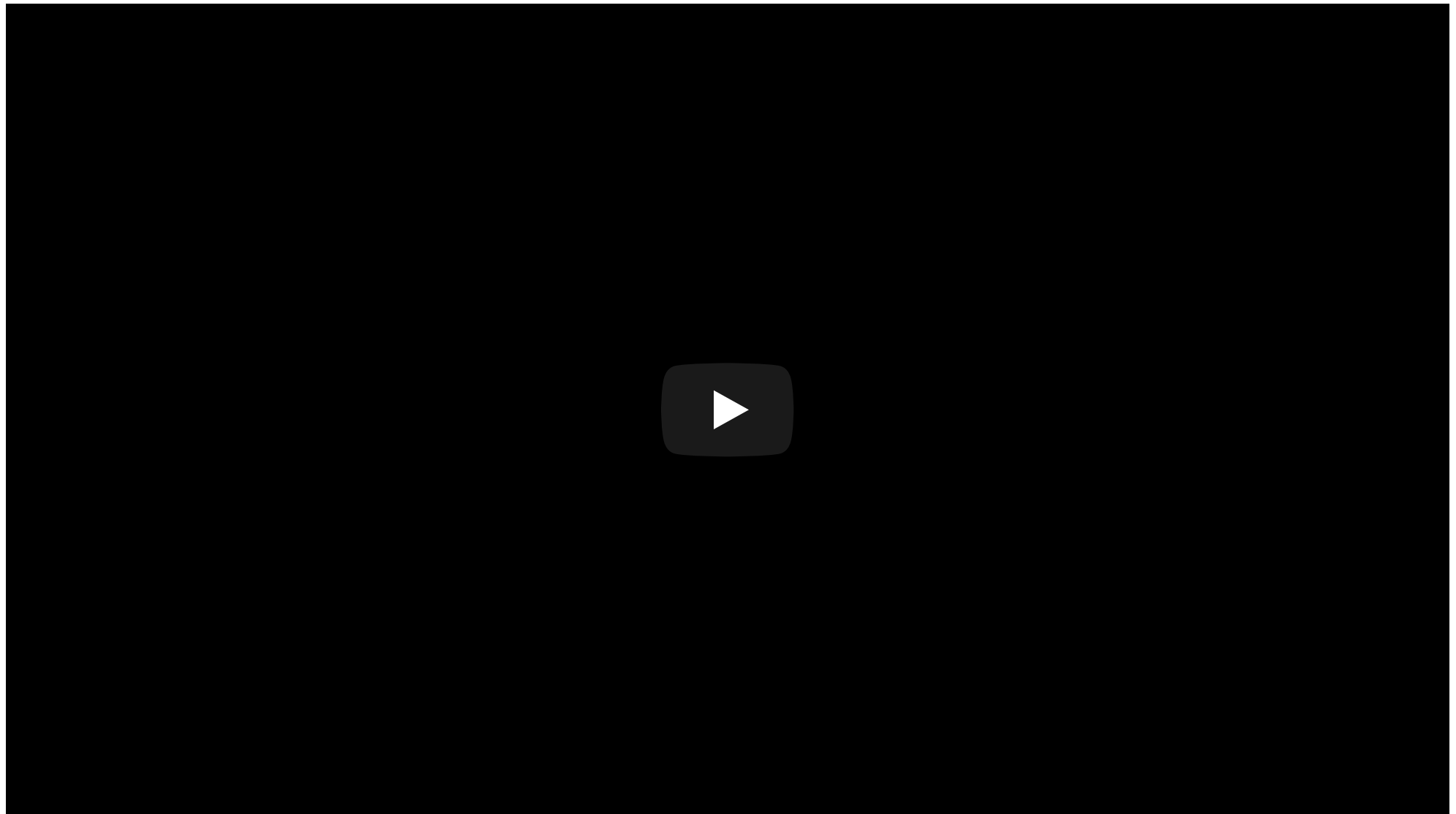
## Are there any hidden meanings in any of your songs?

**Tracy:** Sure. On "Let's Hit the Road: Gypsybilly Vol. 3" we wrote "Th 232". For any chemistry nerd, you'll know what this is. It's the element Thorium (232 being its atomic mass) on the Periodic Table of Elements. It's an alternative to Uranium for the use in nuclear power. In this album Vol. 4, "Crystal Ball" is a tongue-in-cheek depiction of the future and the impact of new technology.



"New Direction" addresses that every instant in life is a choice, a crossroads that can determine a new path to one's life. For any Formula 1 fans, "DRS" expresses overcoming obstacles that can lead to personal growth, viewing obstacles as opportunities, not hindrances.

**Fabrice:** Lyrics play a big part in Gypsybilly, as it is primarily vocal music more than instrumental. Choices of lyrics that are message-oriented, even if hidden, are usually our aim; lyrics that can spark dialogue or self-reflection. We consider ourselves storytellers and/or message tellers. The four genres of music contained in Gypsybilly deliver image-oriented lyrics like in country music, gypsy stories, poetic jazz lyrics and French romantic lyrics. In the end, it's a mix of what we are as individuals and what we believe needs to be said and done for the world.



### **What is your goal or purpose of being a songwriter and artists?**

**Tracy:** The goal is to make ourselves happy and others happy, ultimately bringing the utmost humanity to people with our songs. This may appear lofty however, this is what we are and should do for the world. We use our lives and crafts for personal fulfillment to create feelings that we then hope to pass on to others. Contributing to society with art is our mission as artists, which we take very seriously. I liken it to baking. I first bake for myself for pure selfish reasons. I love the process. After the cookies are out of the oven and I've had my fill, it's time to give them away. THAT is the joy!

**Fabrice:** We are dialoguing with the world via our art, and the great part is that we rarely witness it because we are not with our listeners 24/7, yet it happens like a silent, underground conversation. This forms an invisible tie with our listeners, fans and public. This unconscious process keeps our creativity fluid and our egos in check. We create for the sake of others. By establishing a new genre, we hope to inspire other artists to take on the unknown and push boundaries of their art. For us, it's music and we try to keep a healthy balance between repaying our debt of gratitude to our mentors and predecessors that lead the way, and moving forward through this 21st century on our journey. By the way, we just got started. Wait and see what we have in store for you!

## What do you enjoy most about being an artist?

**Tracy:** There is nothing that removes me from time and space like creating and performing music. It's a world all its own like a sphere, and when it's really flowing, I feel in complete rhythm with the Universe. Inspiring others is always a pleasure, nothing new here. We are both long-time practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism with the SGI and hope that our music will trigger the listener's imagination or awaken one to a mission or redirection in life, to help people in overcoming their own obstacles. To keep moving forward no matter what is a great motivator and joy in itself. The end result is that we get to leave something behind for others to enjoy.



**Fabrice:** It is important to be able to express myself in creating which does forge the loss and notion of time, like Tracy said. It's work without working. Being an artist is welcoming the unknown, immediately responding and committing to the creative process. I believe any of our songs or albums can have an impact at any given moment whether immediate or delayed. The thought that we have the ability to contribute to the happiness and wellness of any "living being" which includes animals, plants, etc., is gratifying. The ultimate thrill is through our Franco-American culture, our Gypsybilly genre creation and deepest intension through our Buddhist practice, we are contributing to the building of a "Culture of Peace" so desperately needed now in this world. One of our music mentors and fellow SGI mentors, Herbie Hancock said, "We are humans before musicians." That is what we strive for on a daily basis.

## What's coming up in the future?

**Fabrice:** We are promoting the album now which is another hat we are sporting. Having a maximum of people hear our story and listen to our music, yep, like a vast desert with a never-ending sea of people, that's where we are right now. The more the merrier. Also, we are writing, practicing and recording. Repetition was Beethoven's secret to greatness and as Beethoven said, "not a day without a line." We are going to carry on with Gypsybilly albums, although the landscape is the valley of singles. Quality is important but so is quantity. While you are enjoying Vol. 4, we are already planning Vol. 5 and are excited to see how it will develop.

**Tracy:** Since all of our summer shows in Europe got cancelled, we have been utilizing this time wisely. We have been self-quarantining anyway over the last four years by writing and recording over 100+ songs in all kinds of styles for licensing purposes and for others to record. Needless to say, not much free time, LOL!

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