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# The Vignatis - Exclusive 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 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 is your genre creation, Gypsybilly?

**Tracy:** It's an Instant pot of our respective backgrounds of rockabilly, gypsy jazz, country and jazz. I come from a jazz background and learned standards before I could even walk, all from my mom who was a jazz and big band singer before she took on the parenting task of having me as a kid. Sorry, mom, LOL! I love big band, Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae, Nat King Cole, Mel Tormé, Miles Davis, Benny Goodman, the list goes on and on. I also grew up half of my childhood in Georgia where country music is deeply infused in the culture, so I learned tons of songs through osmosis and happen to love it.



I sang at an amusement park when I was about 14 doing a bunch of country songs so I learned a lot of songs to add to my arsenal.

**Fabrice:** I'm from France and was raised listening to all kinds of music including rockabilly and gypsy jazz and later on, I played a lot of those two genres that I particularly love. We created the Gypsybilly genre in 2009 after a couple year of ethnomusicological research, trial & error, and hard work. The word "gypsy" symbolizes freedom, family, celebration of culture, music and dance. The word "billy" means fellow, friend or companion. Both words represent people, usually rural and modest, and unfortunately 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. We created a new pathway for us, mixing those four genres, conquering the less-traveled road. It is our own adventure, and being different is fantastic! We use tricks like "la pompe renversee". Gypsybilly is guitar-based and by mixing these four genres it works great for either playing rhythm, chords, and scales that intermix in each genre creating a melting pot of sounds. Finally, we added some unique production choices to help develop that sound. Here we are in 2020 with four albums under our belts.

**Tell us about your songwriting process?**

**Tracy:** The idea 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 my dreams at night. Ideas can come as 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. Normally after I have an idea documented or imprinted in my head, I'll sit at the piano and start working some chords and sometimes I'll noodle out a melody on my clarinet. Fabrice will grab his gypsy guitar and we usually bounce ideas back and forth. I rely on my voice, my head and piano for writing though. Can't do chords on a clarinet, LOL! When writing we try to leave our egos at the door and really pay attention to what is best for the song. We try hard to always remind each other of this yet sometimes I may be slightly argumentative, I cannot tell a lie, LOL!

**Fabrice:** It's always aiming for a good hook, a simple melody on either a simple or complicated chord progression. It is a rule for us that no idea gets discarded for creating a song or to make one better, whether or not it ends up as a Gypsybilly song, or a song in a different style for our catalogue for licensing purposes or for others to record. Writing Gypsybilly songs comes naturally and it still demands discipline and self-reflection yet not omitting spontaneity. We always stay true to ourselves and the genre, and if possible, make sure that all four styles are present either in harmony, scales, lyrics, arrangement, or sound, etc. Adding beats to Gypsybilly drove us to the direction of the Electrobilly style. Our lyrics are message-oriented that can spark dialogue and/or self-reflection, even if that message is hidden. We consider ourselves story tellers or message tellers. The four genres in Gypsybilly help us deliver image-oriented lyrics like in country music, gypsy stories, poetic jazz lyrics and French romantic lyrics. I have an 11-year old guitar student named Wyatt who puts it beautifully, "Chords are the tracing,

melody is the ink and lyrics are the colors." How profound is that!

### Why this new 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. Each of our four albums are a little bit different within our Gypsybilly genre with "Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4" being the most Americana of the four.



**Fabrice:** We were supposed to release this album early 2019 but decided to wait, as we released Vol. 3 in early 2018. It is funny how the Universe kind of made that decision for us and we waited until now. Yes, it is a patriotic-themed album which is timely in this climate, as we are experiencing a global pandemic, racial conflict and a recession. It also emphasizes daily-life subjects like in "New Direction", which addresses that in life you have choices whether at a crossroads or consciously taking a new path to improve one's life. "Crystal Ball" is a humorous, tongue-in-cheek depiction of the future and the impact of new technology. For any Formula 1 fans, "DRS" is a song about overcoming obstacles that can lead to personal growth, viewing obstacles as opportunities, not hindrances. We use a lot of racing terms so it's a really fun way to convey a meaningful subject. We all want to win in life.

The Vignatis  
Red, White & Blue: Gypsybilly Vol. 4

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10 TRACKS

 The Vignatis - Bop, Hop & Roll	▶ 12
 The Vignatis - Silent Heroes	▶ 16
 The Vignatis - Oh La L'amour	▶ 3

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## What are the essential qualities that make a good musician?

Tracy: Wow, so many factors so I'll try to keep it brief. I am only speaking of musicianship, not monetary or popular success. Three big ones for me are sensitivity, study and expression. So much of these components come from one's life, or life condition. Sensitivity doesn't mean touchy-feely, it means acute awareness along with the ability to respond, from Frédéric Chopin to the greatest of heavy metal guitarists. Be aware of your surroundings and train yourself to use your senses to their maximum ability. That helps to become more sensitive. Second, study. Studying music is **extremely** important, both academically and by observing others. Learn strong technique, your scales, appropriate vocal exercises, music theory, etc. Study the greats so that you can develop your own abilities, always challenging your last achievement. Lastly, express your authentic self. People can see through falsehoods. One final thought; I have worked with extremely high-level, high-profile musicians and it comes down to one thing for me...the heart. I would trade an exceptional chop monster who is only after the money for a musician whose heart is in the right place and has genuine interest and concern about what I'm doing. That, my friends, cannot be purchased. Life condition is what will shine.

Fabrice: 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 including animals, plants, etc., is gratifying. This may sound lofty however, this is what we are and should do for our fans and for the world. We use our lives and crafts 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. We do try to keep a healthy balance between repaying our debt of gratitude to our mentors and predecessors that led the way, and move forward through the 21st century on our journey. By establishing our new genre, we also hope to inspire other artists to take on the unknown and push boundaries of their own art. Now, let's get to work!

What inspired you to make music together?

**Tracy:** The Universe has a very succinct way of operating. We both practice Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism with the SGI and were involved in an organizational activity of a big band. I was the singer, and Fabrice was the guitar player. It was a natural progression that we went from fellow practitioners, to partners, and we soon found ourselves wanting to blend our backgrounds both culturally and musically. It is a great journey and with each project we continue to challenge ourselves and each other. We both have the drive to experiment and carry on, always moving forward. I am always in need of a project or challenge. It's what fuels me. It is very difficult for me to relax, take vacations and do the "normal things" that most people do. We are not normal people. Lucky for us we are both the same or that would be a recipe for disaster! We are always willing to do what others don't or won't do. It is something I inherited from my Air Force father, a quality that I embrace 100%. We inspire each other to improve and strengthen our weaknesses both personally and professionally. It comes with the territory of our karmic connection. (Footnote: not always "conflict-free", LOL!).



**Fabrice:** Our ultimate thrill is through our Franco-American culture, our Gypsybilly genre creation, and our deepest intention through our Buddhist practice, to contribute to the building of a "Culture of Peace" so desperately needed now in the world. One of our music mentors and fellow SGI mentors, Herbie Hancock, said, "We are humans before musicians." Make no mistake, that is what we strive for on a daily basis before music. Through our prolific musical collaboration and union as husband-wife, we add another dimension to our team. I have deepened my trust in our natural abilities to create great art together, and our union humanistically and professionally. This trust has built a healthy way to push each other to progress and realize our full potential. How fortunate!

**Question 6:** If you had a message to give to your fans, what would it be?

**Tracy:** Thank you so much for hanging in there with us! You make this all worth it. We have such appreciation for all of you. Yes, we create music for ourselves, however, it is

ultimately a gift for others. I mean, who listens to their own music after it's released? We do this for those who enjoy it. We would love to hear from you so please don't be shy and email us, hit us up on our socials, whatever. Don't forget, we also have a podcast series called the [Rock Your Life Show](#) where we discuss all kinds of topics on life, not music, so please listen when you are running, working, cooking, etc. You just may find something really helpful!

**Fabrice:** Our fans may not realize we are actually having a dialog with them with our music. We rarely witness it, as we are not with our listeners 24/7. It happens like a silent, underground conversation as they listen to our music/lyrics, which can transmit our intentions behind the music. It's like an invisible tie or connection. The feedback we receive is merely a byproduct of this concept. This connection is beyond social media, meeting them or knowing them personally. It's an unconscious process that helps to feed our creativity, and helps to keep our egos in check in order to create music of value. In 5 words, "for the sake of others". We thank all of our fans from the bottom of our hearts who are the ones who keep us inspired and motivated. Hey, we've just gotten started. Wait and see what we have in store!

### What's next?

**Tracy:** Unfortunately, no shows this year due to the pandemic, so we have been utilizing our time building our catalog writing and recording over 100+ songs in all different styles for licensing purposes and for others to record for their own projects. We have been self-quarantining anyway over the last four years with the exception of playing shows, in order to do the magnitude of this work, so not a lot of free time. That's the price for creativity, I guess, LOL! Yes, we are already discussing what we are going to do for a next album, a Vol. 5. You'll have to wait and see what we come up with.



**Fabrice:** This is the best question since that is what we always focus on, the future, and let me tell you, it is bright and an open book waiting to be written. Right now, we are promoting the new album, which is another hat we are sporting. We are connecting with others and telling our story. As you enjoy this new album, we are already planning the Vol. 5 Gypsybilly album to add to the ongoing series of Volumes we will continue throughout our lives. Quality is important, yet so is quantity. Yes, we are working on our catalog with over 100 songs in all kinds of styles. That is the beauty of being versatile as musicians and songwriters. You name it and we will write it. Our studio surrounds us with plenty of guitars and instruments to be picked up and played, keeping the dream

alive and well.

For more information on Vignatis, please visit their [website](#).

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