

at this time in their lives, so we leave.

Obviously Ade has put heavy responsibility for the film's quality on her two principals. She is justified. Lars Eidinger, as Chris, is just attractive enough, and he has polished a mode of acting that fits perfectly—old-timers might call it behaving, not acting. Gitti needs more because she is much more mercurial in her feelings, and Birgit Minichmayr easily handles the range. Her face, not immediately stunning, grows closer to beauty throughout. In these performances, in their impulses and lulls, we feel that we have been admitted to intimacies.

Ade uses the camera securely. Nothing seems to be composed for it, it just happens to be in the right place when needed. At the last, her film cannot compare with her model Bergman, but at least she shows that truth can come in different sizes.

FROM GERMANY, TOO, arrives a documentary called *NoBody's Perfect* that is warm, appealing, and tinged with humor. All this is somewhat unexpected, because it is about some victims of thalidomide seen fifty years later. The director, Niko von Glasow, who has made four previous films, is himself a victim, with diminutive arms and three-inch hands.

For those who don't remember, between 1957 and 1961 a pharmaceutical plague struck several countries, chiefly Germany and Britain. A drug called thalidomide was put on the market by a German firm, to be used by pregnant women as a cure for morning sickness and as a sedative. Before the drug was found to be harmful for these purposes, it caused about ten thousand defective births. The drug affected the baby's limbs rather than torso or head. American newsmagazines were filled with photos of beautiful babies with shriveled arms, or legs, or arms and legs. About 50 percent of the thalidomide babies are still alive. In Germany and Britain these people receive skimpy compensation from their governments. One of Glasow's purposes in this film is to help make the drug company supplement these payments: the company found legal means to quit long ago.

But *NoBody's Perfect* is, very soon and most powerfully, much more than a propaganda piece. Glasow found eleven victims, mostly German, some British, of considerable interest, and interviewed them in intelligent and comprehending ways, and always with pictorial zest. These people, now in their early fifties, are an actor, an astrophysicist, a teacher of horseback riding, a painter (with her

feet), a masseur, a solicitor, a politician, a gardener, a receptionist, and one who is called simply a mother. And the film-maker. All of them are attractively composed persons. (Glasow doesn't mention—probably assuming that he needn't—the most famous victim, the distinguished baritone Thomas Quasthoff, who is now world-renowned.)

Glasow's purpose was to find victims who had made their way, however it was, and who would therefore be self-confident enough to be interviewed and to pose nude for a calendar. This calendar would be used for propaganda purposes against the drug tycoons, to get more money especially for those who have done less well. As Glasow makes his interviewing way along, keenly intelligent and affable, he takes his nude shots—always at some distance—and finishes with his nude self frolicking with his young (fully clothed) normal daughter. And then there's a banquet for all of them.

Yet this film is nowhere near the sickening finish of many movies, a Technicolor affirmation of the human spirit marching bravely on toward the dawn. These people are for the most part more balanced than beatific. Suicide, some of them say, was once considered and rejected. My inference about them all is that at the earliest sentient age, each of them saw his or her disadvantages, then thought, "A person has now arrived in the world who has shriveled limbs and my name. That is grimly that. Now let's get on with it." It is more than courage: it is a triumph of salubrious ego over facts. The film does not jerk tears: it shames us who are stronger.

At the end Glasow tries to take a life-size nude photo to the drug firm's headquarters. His film would be well off without this Michael Moore stunt. Better is his title, adapted perhaps from the last line of Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. By capitalizing the b in the first word, it fits. ♦

DAVID HAJDU ON MUSIC TRIUMPH OF THE GYPSIES

DJANGO REINHARDT, the Gypsy jazz guitarist whose centennial fell early on this year's calendar, infuriated his closest friend and best collaborator, Stéphane Grappelli, with stereotypically Gypsy-ish bad behavior that only his sublimely atypical but deeply Gypsy-ish music could excuse. Early in the mid-'90s, when Grappelli was in his eighties but still playing regularly at the Blue Note in Manhattan, I did a fairly long interview with him in which he said, emphatically, "Django made me very angry. Django would not be there—we could not find him anywhere. He drank every day. He came [to performances] with no guitar. I gave Django my money. I hated him many times. Ooh . . . but when he played, I loved Django! Everyone loved Django. In the wartime . . . even the Nazis loved Django!"

I presumed that last line was a joke, until I saw, in *Swing Under the Nazis*, an odd little book by the jazz writer Mike Zwerin (who died a few weeks ago), a wartime photograph of a uniformed Third Reich officer posing in front of La Cigale, a Parisian nightclub. Standing alongside him, to his right, was Django Reinhardt. To his left was a row of men, three

of them black and one (according to the book) Jewish. The officer was a Luftwaffe Oberleutnant named Dietrich Schulz-Koehn, who, Zwerin said, had a fondness for what Goebbels, in a term that Nazis alone could devise, called "Americano nigger kike jungle music." Schulz-Koehn supposedly helped keep Reinhardt busy performing throughout France during the war, sparing him from the Holocaust that Gypsies call the Porrajmos.

With due respect for Grappelli, who is no longer here to amplify, defend, or retract what he said, I have to take as an absurdity—more than that, as an offense—the proposition that the beauty of Django Reinhardt's music was such that it could melt the Nazi heart. To think of participation in the Third Reich and jazz fandom as meaningfully compatible is to deny—worse, to betray—the values of the music: the free-spiritedness, the exultation in ethnicity, the sheer joyfulness, the robust humanity, of jazz. (The Czech writer Josef Škvorecký touched on this indelibly in *The Bass Saxophone*.) These qualities precisely have made Reinhardt's music a refuge from (if not a defense against) fascism of any form, and they are among the main reasons it endures one hundred years after Reinhardt was born.

If Grappelli was correct and everyone loved Django when he played, a great many people have also struggled, as Grappelli himself sometimes did, to reconcile the pleasure they took in his music with the displeasure they found in nasty habits of his that are too easy to ascribe to his Gypsy origins. Much as I did at the start of this piece, journalists, critics, musicians, and pretty much all others who have ever referred to Reinhardt have characterized him first as a Gypsy and then as a jazz musician. This makes more sense than it would, say, for people to describe Benny Goodman as a Jewish jazz clarinetist, or Stéphane Grappelli as a gay French-Italian jazz violinist. After all, Reinhardt, by not only drawing deeply from the traditions of Gypsy music but also bringing those traditions to the foreground of his work, created—that is, almost single-handedly invented—a new style: Gypsy jazz.

Still, I didn't hyphenate that phrase as a compound modifier when I introduced Reinhardt here; I let the ethnic term define the artist rather than the school of art. I could not resist carrying on the conception of Reinhardt as a Gypsy who was also a jazz guitarist, in part because his heritage informs his music so obviously and so profoundly, and in part, too, because the very fact that a person is a Gypsy still seems wonderfully strange. Gypsies are the last exotics—more precisely, one of the last people whom others feel free to exoticize, and often to demonize, with impunity in an allegedly enlightened age. The timeworn conception of Gypsies as colorful freaks—entrancing but not to be trusted; uneducated and ungovernable; fearsome but magically endowed, like all people untouched by civilization, with the secrets of love, music, and art—lives on.

In fact, this hoary line of thinking has flourished to help make Gypsy music—in a variety of strains and mutations, including variations on Reinhardt's style of Gypsy jazz—vogue today, especially among young hipsters desperate to find realms of authenticity and bohemianism that the previous generation of hipsters did not already claim. I should add here that I use mainly the traditional term Gypsy, rather than the more conservative Roma, which has currency these days, because Gypsy applies broadly to many lines of people commonly linked as an ethnicity, including Reinhardt's tribe, the Manouche. Gypsy is the term that Reinhardt himself used, and it is still widely employed by Roma in the titles of their formal organizations, much as Na-

tive Americans commonly refer to themselves as Indians.

THERE HAS been a bit of progress since Reinhardt's day in the way Gypsies and their music are perceived by outsiders (or *gadje* in the Roma language, a word that means "civilians," an artifact of the Gypsies' early history as slave warriors in first-millennium India). A few years before Reinhardt was born, *The New York Times* sought to educate its readers with the insights of an expert lecturer on Gypsy culture, who explained that "These people are scarcely worth even the limited attention that has been paid them in history. All writers agree in the belief that Gypsies as a race are utterly worthless, and their salient characteristics are outshone by the ordinary tramp. They have no literature . . . [and] we have never read of one being an accomplished musician."

In the world into which Reinhardt was born, Gypsies and their musical art were commonly viewed through the same prism of stereotypes as African Americans and the black music that was already a dominant force in our popular culture. Gypsy tunes and Negro songs were described in nearly interchangeable terms: unlike proper music made by educated whites, the musics of both Gypsies and blacks were thought of not as products of training, practice, expertise, and talent, but as the spontaneous, intuitive responses of primitive creatures. As the *Times*, again, explained, "Like Gypsy music, the songs of the Negroes seem never to have been composed but to be the unpremeditated utterance of experience—of suffering, patience, submission, hope, and spiritual triumph. One cannot hear, unmoved, these memorials of the history of an inarticulate race." Adapting this trope for a kind of progressive advantage, Walter Damrosch, a classical musician sympathetic to jazz, argued, "If proof positive of a soul in the Negro people should be demanded, it can be given, for they have brought over from Africa and developed in this country, even under all the unfavorable conditions of slavery, a music so wonderful, so beautiful and yet so strange that, like the Gypsy music of Hungary, it is at once the admiration and despair of educated musicians of our race."

Reinhardt's mother made some money by fashioning brass jewelry from buried shell casings that she dug up in battle sites of World War I, and her eldest son, Django, grew adept at the skill of creative re-invention valued in his culture. Like many Gypsy performers before

and after him, he seemed to understand that the contempt of the *gadje* for people like him also drew them to him, and he both accommodated customers eager to pay for a Gypsy caricature and cheated them by providing music of unforeseeable complexity and sophistication. (Before Reinhardt was doing this in France, his base for most of his professional life, Louis Armstrong was accomplishing something parallel in America, simultaneously exploiting and defying black stereotypes.) For some time now, the story of how he lost two of his fingers on the hand he used on the guitar fretboard in a caravan fire, and then devised a method to play with the nearly immobile stubs, has been popular lore. As a writer for the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, in 1946, in the opening sentence of the first major profile of Reinhardt in the American press, "Django Reinhardt is a temperamental Gypsy whose deficiencies, which include illiteracy and two paralyzed fingers on his left hand, have not prevented him from becoming the most sophisticated hot-guitar player in the world."

Taught by musical members of his extended family, Reinhardt started out playing Gypsy folk tunes, first on the violin, then on a Moreau-like creation with the body of a banjo and the neck of a six-string guitar, and, finally, on a conventional guitar. Once he discovered Armstrong and American jazz, in the late '20s, Reinhardt veered away from Gypsy material in his repertoire, and he devoted the rest of his career mainly to composition, and to re-composition through improvisation. He drew heavily from the Gypsy musical tradition and re-invented the jazz standards that he played, often re-harmonizing pieces with a dense chromaticism to imply both minor and major keys. His music was opulently emotive, euphoric in allegro and wrenching in adagio. Like Armstrong, he had a stunning command of musical time and an uncanny facility as a musician. Steeped in the tenets of showmanship, he liked to stun and to inspire awe. The high drama and wowie factor in Reinhardt's music disguise its rigor and its seriousness, and no doubt contribute significantly to his ongoing appeal among contemporary listeners who would otherwise be put off by the Depression-era ditties he played, such as "Pennies from Heaven" and "Sweet Sue."

Since the guitar replaced the piano as the dominant instrument of popular music—a change not just in instrumentation but also in cultural orientation, from the formal and literate to the informal and vernacular—Reinhardt's rep-

utation has only grown. When he died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1953, his passing was little remarked. (The major American papers ran notices of a few brief paragraphs.) Rock-and-roll legend tells us that Jimi Hendrix called one of his groups Band of Gypsies in honor of Reinhardt. Boomer rock stars of the guitar-fetish school, such as Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers and Tommy Iommi of Black Sabbath (who lost parts of two fingers in a youthful day-job accident), cite him as important influences. David Crosby named a son after him. (Until Reinhardt, Django was not a name at all; in the Roma dialect his mother spoke, the word was a verb form that translates approximately to "I wake up.") Literally all of Reinhardt's recorded output is well preserved on CD, and much of it is available on iTunes. Among the many worthy packages on CD are *Djangology*, a forty-four-track, two-disk compilation of highlights from Reinhardt's collaborations with Grappelli in the Hot Club de France and other material; *Complete Recordings of Solo Guitar*, twelve tracks, most of them original compositions or improvisations, every one exquisite; and *The Chronological Classics 1951-1953*, my own favorite of Reinhardt's record-

ings, his mature and lyrical final work, in which Reinhardt brings the bebop vocabulary into his musical language—on electric guitar.

AT A TIME WHEN jazz festivals have been shrinking or disappearing, an annual series of concerts celebrating Reinhardt and Gypsy swing has been running in New York for ten years now, and the shows have been fine, on the whole, and consistently well attended. Another popular Reinhardt festival has been staged for several years in Detroit (I have never been to it and cannot speak to its quality), and centennial events are scheduled at points around the world this year. A Django Reinhardt centennial tour began several months ago at the Kennedy Center and stopped at the Iridium in Manhattan for three days, and I caught the first and second of its three shows. Dorado Schmitt, a seasoned virtuoso of the Reinhardt style, played impressively with his son Samson, a guitarist with a more contemporary approach, and the hard-swinging accordionist Marcel Loeffler. The club was packed—overcrowded, in fact, and not with the usual Iridium crowd of thick-waisted jazz-bos, but with the undergrads and beauti-

ful young professionals who typically fill trendier spots like Le Poisson Rouge, the City Winery, and the Highline Ballroom. At the second show, I was shoehorned into a seat at a table with three graduate students at Pace. The guy to my right watched me taking notes for a while and finally said, pre-emptively, "Don't ask me anything. I don't really like jazz. I'm just really *intrigued* by the Romanies."

That fascination is likely connected to the rise in Gypsy-flavored music in pop and rock over the past decade or so. At least a dozen bands have adapted aspects of the Gypsy sensibility—or the Western conception of that sensibility as crazed, unruly fun—to pop forms. The best known and most influential is without question Gogol Bordello, an exuberant group led by Eugene Hutz, a theatrically madcap singer and songwriter with some Gypsy on his mother's side. The group's music is a hearty, spicy peasant stew made from canned ingredients: folk-song tunes, reduced; street-band instrumentation (guitar, accordion, cymbals, and such); and punk screaming. The band comes off best in concert, where its dancing and clowning can be seen as well as felt in the music. Like many of the other groups often clumped



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together under the fittingly untidy category of Gypsy rock, including Mad Man-oush, Slavic Soul Party, and Balkan Beat Box, Gogol Bordello provides something precious in rock of any era: pleasure without apology and with only intermittent pandering.

It takes a rarefied kind of cool to earn the approval of so fierce a guardian of coolness as Johnny Depp. Who are his friends? Oh, Iggy Pop, Jim Jarmusch—official paragons of edgy bad-ass “downtown” iconoclasm. And what kind of music does he favor? “I’ve always loved Gypsy music,” he said in a 2006 interview for the film *Gypsy Caravan: Where the Road Bends*, a documentary that followed five Gypsy-music troupes on a six-week tour through North America. One of the groups was Taraf de Haïdouks, whom Depp met on the set of *The Man Who Cried*, the Sally Potter film of 2000 in which Depp played a mysterious Gypsy horseman. Duly taken by music that he describes as “insane . . . this motherfucker thing,” Depp brought his cooler-than-cool buddies to see the Haïdouks and recalled that “They were floating! They couldn’t believe it.” “By experiencing their music,” Depp said, “people can understand that what you’ve believed about these people has been a lie.”

Depp found himself captivated by the Haïdouks, Roma who perform a mixture of Gypsy tunes, Romanian folk songs, and other traditional music in a similar vein. They are superb, virtuosic, and profoundly stirring—and surely

the most successful Gypsy group in the world today, not counting Gogol Bordello. Taraf de Haïdouks has released three CDs on the Nonesuch label, and I saw them play a dazzling show at Carnegie Hall a few years ago. (Their name, I should add, translates as Band of Outlaws, and Haïdouks is an alternative spelling of Hajdu, pluralized. This minor fact gives me no special connection to the group’s music. My paternal grandparents were born in Brooklyn, and they didn’t think of themselves as Roma; my grandmother, who died giving birth to my father, was probably Jewish—we don’t know for sure—and her husband was oddly acultural, though enough of a scoundrel to stir talk that he must have been part Gypsy.)

As always, the Gypsies’ otherness, their status as outsiders—in concert with a conception of their music as a counteragent to that status—defines them in the imagination of the *gadje*. At the Iridium, Gypsy jazz is thought not to be jazz: therein lies its extramusical appeal. To hipsters like Depp who have “always loved Gypsy music,” everything everyone else knows about the Gypsies is a falsehood: to understand the Roma is to share in secret knowledge and assume some of that vaunted otherness. The truth about Gypsies and their music is that the audience has always come to them in pursuit of a lie. It is not the lie of black blood, the Nazi lie, but a relatively benign lie, the lie of narrative myth, of fortunetelling and folk songs. ♦

ern Lutherans on her father’s side, Zora “had not a spark of religious faith,” as she described herself in her unpublished autobiography. A feminist and a rebel, she was very much a product of the Roaring Twenties, Nebraska-style. After receiving her doctorate in philosophy from Bryn Mawr, she returned to the state university in Lincoln but was denied permission to teach ethics because of her commitment to naturalism. She included among her acquaintances John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. The only thing she had in common with the fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan was her home state.

Robert came from an even more agnostic background than his wife. His parents did not attend church, and although they enrolled their son briefly in Sunday school, before long, as Robert put it, “the pretense of piety was gratefully dropped.” He spent his life in the field of journalism and his politics in the service of the left. A Midwestern progressive committed to social justice at home and skeptical of the projection of American power abroad, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1966 for his antiwar editorials published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Robert outlived Kit, as his son would always be known. Doing so enabled him to communicate his displeasure toward Kit’s preoccupation with religious themes. “You must be back from your vacation by now,” he wrote him in 1990, “the biggest question of it being: ‘What in God’s name were you doing at a conference on theology?’” Robert found it difficult enough to accept Kit’s increasing cultural conservatism. The son’s interest in religious questions left the father baffled.

Kit Lasch died at the age of sixty-two, and so we will never know whether he would have eventually gone all the way and joined a church; chances are he was too much of an iconoclast for that. It hardly matters, though, for when it came to the form and content of the jeremiad, the prophetic tradition of reminding us ferociously of our fallen state, there was no greater master during his lifetime. It seems appropriate that the first full-length biography of this major critic of American society and American culture should be written by a historian who teaches at a Christian college—Geneva, near Pittsburgh—named after Calvin’s hometown. And Eric Miller’s fine book has been published by Eerdmans, a press founded by a Christian Reformed Church immigrant from Holland and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the epicenter of Calvinist America. Compared with an era that produced Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, America

Alan Wolfe

JEREMIAH, AMERICAN-STYLE

**HOPE IN A SCATTERING TIME:
A LIFE OF CHRISTOPHER LASCH**

By Eric Miller

(Eerdmans, 394 pp., \$32)

I.

IN A MOVING TRIBUTE to Christopher Lasch written shortly after his death in 1994, Dale Vree, a Catholic convert and the editor of the *New Oxford Review*, wrote that “Calvinism was his true theological inspiration.” Lasch was certainly not one of the faithful. “Even before I took so rashly to writing about religion,” he once scribbled to himself, “it was an embarrassment to admit that I had none.” Yet despite his skepticism, the crucial idea associated with Calvinism since the sixteenth century—

an insistence on the complete and utter depravity of the human race—fit Lasch’s increasingly dark vision of human purpose almost to perfection. “Calvinism (via Perry Miller) was my downfall,” he wrote to an inquiring Barbara Ehrenreich in an undated letter. “Or was it Luther’s commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans, taught to me by Sidney Ahlstrom? Some ancestral throwback to some distant German past? Or just orneriness and perversity? I kept it under wraps for years, but it was bound to come out in the end.”

If Lasch’s peculiar form of secular Calvinism was a throwback to his family’s past, it must have been a distant one. Lasch was born to Robert and Zora Schaupp Lasch in Omaha, Nebraska in 1932. Although descended from Midwest-

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