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Source: *Jazz & Culture,* Vol. 1 (2018), pp. 104-121
Published by: University of Illinois Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jazzculture.1.2018.0104
Accessed: 08-08-2018 12:53 UTC

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Rich Theory: Mandino Reinhardt on *Jazz Manouche* in Alsace

Interviewed by Siv Lie

Mandino Reinhardt (b. 1956) is one of France's greatest living players of *jazz manouche*, a genre based primarily on the work of guitarist Django Reinhardt (1910–53).[1] Like Django, Mandino is a member of the Manouche subgroup of Romanies (also known pejoratively as "Gypsies"), a population known especially for its musical talent but otherwise the object of much racial discrimination.[2] In what follows, Mandino describes how *jazz manouche* became a cultural practice and emblem of identity among Alsatian Manouches thanks in large part to his own performance, teaching, and mentoring. Starting in the 1970s, he and other Manouches began playing *jazz manouche*, quickly adopting it as both a community practice and a means of income. Mandino was hired by a local pro-Manouche nonprofit organization, L'Association pour la Promotion des Populations d'Origine Nomade d'Alsace (APPONA), to instruct young Manouches on guitar, guiding a generation of professional and semiprofessional musicians and helping to establish Alsace as France's "cradle" of *jazz manouche*. Mandino also achieved international success with his ensembles Sweet Chorus and Note Manouche alongside his cousin Marcel Loeffler, a renowned jazz accordionist.[3]

In recent years, a number of studies have foregrounded the stories of jazz musicians and communities otherwise marginalized in or excluded from U.S.-centric narratives in jazz histories, focusing on important sites outside the United States where jazz has developed both in place-specific ways and as part of transnational musical networks.[4] Although Django is sometimes portrayed in traditional jazz histories as an influential guitarist, the practice of *jazz manouche* and its links to Manouche communities usually go unmentioned. This oral history contributes to a dual restitution

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in contemporary jazz historiography: that of the importance of Alsatian jazz practice to French and global jazz practices and that of the socioeconomically marginalized, yet incessantly romanticized, ethnic group of Manouches. Mandino's story offers a unique perspective on how jazz performance articulates racial and ethnic politics in France and in Europe more broadly.

This oral history was conducted in French at Mandino's home in Strasbourg, France, on April 15, 2014. I have translated it into English and edited some portions for readability. For reasons of semantic clarity, I retain the French *Tsigane*, since it is not directly translatable in English as either Romani or Gypsy. Although Tsigane is an exonym, it is not considered nearly as pejorative as Gypsy and is still used widely in academic and activist discourses in France. Many Manouches also refer to themselves as *Sinté* or *Sinti*, another subgroup of Romanies to whom Manouches are closely related (or virtually synonymous with, according to most of my interlocutors). *Gadjé* is a Romani term used to refer to non-Manouche people (noun masculine singular *Gadjo* and noun feminine singular *Gadji*). *Romanes* is a term used by Romanies of various subgroups to refer to the Romani language.

SIV LIE: To begin, I'd like to ask you about your history, how you began to play.

MANDINO REINHARDT: I have some very old memories that go back to my childhood—family parties, communions—where music was always present, especially with my grandparents. My grandfather was a violinist and my uncles were guitarists and violinists. My father, he played a little violin and a little guitar. I always had musical instruments in my house, especially guitars, and violins from time to time. I'll say that it was totally natural that one day I started to play, because my brother Sony started playing a little before me. It was around the age of twelve or thirteen, I think, when I started to pick out a few notes, a few chords. There was a chaplain, one [who worked specifically] for Gypsies, named Marcel Daval who lived in the heart of the neighborhood where I grew up. I was about fifteen when, one day, the sons of Piton Reinhardt, a cousin of Django, came to Marcel Daval's house. They played amazingly well, and I decided right there that I wanted to do that, that it pleased me. I had a guitar in my house, so I went home, I remember, and started to play. I was determined, firmly determined. So at fifteen years old, I stopped going to school [*laughs*], and I said, "I want to do this." That was at the same time that I also got my [antique trading] business off the ground, everything you see here [*he laughs and points to the musical instruments in his living room*], among other things. And I learned with someone who came to the Manouches, but who wasn't Manouche, who was named Joe Nizard. He knew this music very well. With him I evolved pretty well and learned a lot of things. But he would tell me, "Learn by yourself, form your own opinion." He showed me some things on the guitar neck, but very little. Among other things, he would tell me, "Play the way you are, listen to Django, listen to other guitarists, do your work yourself."

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Something that's very important at the heart of Manouche families is that children are not obligated to play. Still, at the heart of families and communities, music has an *important place*, I'd even say a primordial one. The youth today who listen to music that I don't like [*laughs*] recognize themselves in [*jazz manouche*] all the same. When they want to show a good side [of their ethnicity], they'll put on Django or certain other famous musicians above all to make themselves known among a non-Manouche public.

SL: OK, so even though they listen to a lot of things—

MR: —yes, a lot of things that aren't so beautiful to listen to sometimes. [*Laughs*.] But that's the way it is.

SL: So you were very influenced by Joe [Nizard] and Piton Reinhardt's sons.

MR: They are the ones who made it click for me. Of course I was already familiar with Django because my grandfather played a few [of his] tunes, but very little. You also have to know that before [the 1970s], the elders didn't play much jazz. When Tsiganes came to France, the musicians played tunes that they heard from here and there, and they interpreted them in their own style, but maybe always in a sort of clever way. Musicians who were hired to play at weddings or private parties had to be good, so they always played a little better [than others]. In the general history of music, there have been people like Liszt or Paganini who contacted Tsiganes. Some people even told ridiculous stories, like, "Oh yes, [the Gypsy] plays well because he signed a pact with the Devil, but that doesn't shock us because he hangs out with Gypsies," among others. These are things we heard. So music has a very, very important place, like I said, among Tsigane families.

SL: Yes, of course. So you said that before, people didn't really play jazz. Do you remember when that became something really important for your community?

MR: Yes, but first it was Django who kind of revolutionized things, who became the emblematic figure for nearly all Tsiganes because he is the most famous Tsigane in the world.[5] He made connections between many genres of music including French popular music and *bal-musette*,[6] as well as classical music. Django was a very, very open person, [open to] American jazz of course. But you can also hear a very Tsigane way of playing, a very personal way of interpreting jazz that became his style.

Beyond that, you have to know that for the Manouche community, [this style] of music was played a lot in Paris, but very little in the French provinces [during and just after Django's time]. Manouche musicians continued to play, but not necessarily jazz. They played old waltzes, old marches, things like that. But it was especially with the advent of a German group led by [Sinto violinist and vocalist] Schnuckenack Reinhardt in the 1970s that this music came back.[7] With that, it was really a kind of explosion among Manouche families in France, almost everywhere. Alsace was maybe one of the first regions where a number of important [*jazz manouche*] musicians were trained, and then groups, recordings, CDs, records. I'll say that the *renewal* of Django's music, in the 1970s, was thanks to Schnuckenack Reinhardt.

SL: So you were young when [Schnuckenack's group, Musik Deutscher Zigeuner] came to France.

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MR: Yes, I was fourteen or fifteen. [Schnuckenack] was also an explosion on a European level. He recorded a lot, had a lot of gigs, a lot of concerts everywhere. He came to Strasbourg, to Paris. So it's thanks to him that a lot of people play this music today. It's thanks to him that people rediscovered Django, that we *really* know Django in his music. You say to yourself: "Wow, what a genius!" [*Laughs*.]

SL: When Schnuckenack came on the scene, did everyone start learning this music instead of old waltzes and all that?

MR: The new generation, people my age who are now a little over fifty years old, started doing that because we became interested all of a sudden. We liked it right away, and then we discovered Django's work. We said, "Wow, in twenty years he made eight hundred recordings! I don't know how many compositions he made. [*Sigh*.] [These were] absolutely magnificent works. One of the first times he tried to record with the Quintette du Hot Club de France, [the record producer] said, "I refuse to record this because it will never work." [*Laughs*.] And history proved otherwise, apparently.

SL: What were the first groups you performed with?

MR: When I was seventeen, some people came to ask if I wanted to play in a group, so these first ensembles played in cafés in Strasbourg. We gigged in trios, in quartets, sometimes as duos. We schlepped around the cafés in Strasbourg, sometimes with a huge double bass, and it was difficult but it worked well. We saw that the public was enthusiastic about this music. Then while I was still seventeen, a clarinetist asked if I wanted to join a group for an evening. It was me, the clarinetist, my brother [Sony, on guitar], a double bassist, and a drummer, and we did our first concert in [the Strasbourg neighborhood] Le Meinau. That was a very important step. We did a few concerts like that.

[At this time,] I continued my education in order to evolve, always with Django's music. I tried to copy his solos in a very laborious manner because I used LPs. I had to lift the turntable arm every time [I wanted to relisten to a passage] until the day I was able to buy myself a little cassette player. Then things became a lot simpler. I played [the famous Django tune] "Minor Swing" I don't know how many hundreds of times. At night, I went to sleep with "Minor Swing" twenty times in a loop, so that I could have it in my ear. You have to use your ear, *especially* your ear. You can look at other guitarists to see what's happening technically on the guitar neck. But above all, it's the ear.

SL: Of course, and that starts when you're little.

MR: Yes, when you are immersed in a familial musical environment, that helps a lot. It helps with tempo, with chords, with intonation.

SL: Yes. When you started to learn and really work on music, did you use notation?

MR: Oh, no no no no! Today, I still don't know how. I know the names of chords, the way a lot of Manouche musicians know the names of chords, but not all of them, never all. [Manouches] don't know exactly what an eighth note is, or a sixteenth note. We learn the way Django did, when he dictated to his clarinetist Gérard Lévêcque a score he wanted to play, a violin section, a clarinet section. He would say, "I want this or that chord." He'd play the parts on his guitar, and Gérard Lévêcque would notate.

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SL: Good thing he did that! I actually know the guitarist who has the original scores, Jean-Marie Pallen.

MR: Ooh! You've seen them? Wow!

SL: He has all of them, and even recomposed Django's [unfinished] symphony. It's a goldmine.

MR: Oh yes, I'm sure.

SL: So that's a subject I'm really interested in, learning with the ear. Is solfège ever a part of this in your teaching?

MR: Well, when someone is learning, I think that the decision always comes from [whether or not that person is] interested. A person decides to learn that. But there have been schools, including the [nonprofit organization] APPONA school, which was the first school for learning music with Manouche families. We realized that music was beginning to disappear and no longer have an important place [in Manouche families]. So Marcel Daval, the chaplain for Gypsies, founded an organization that defended culture, among other things, and addressed all the problems that Manouche families faced. A music school was created in 1978, and I was the first employee of the organization. They told me, "OK, you're going to teach the youth how to play." [I wondered] "How am I going to do that?! I don't know how!" [*Laughs*.] I said to myself, "OK, I'm going to draw a guitar neck, with frets," but it was too complicated! I abandoned that very quickly, and all of a sudden I had success! There were a dozen kids or more, and I said, "Look at what I'm doing. Open your ears." I would place their fingers at first, but the kids figured it out. They wanted to learn such and such music by Django, or what I knew how to do at this time, and we evolved like that. It was by following the enthusiasm of the child[ren] who came to my home for lessons that [my method] progressed fairly quickly. The school had a lot of success and the kids learned very, very quickly. They were capable of accompanying those who were much more experienced. They were capable of making melodies. There are of course a lot of stages to pass through, and some [students] dropped out. Others became well-known and managed things well.

[This] pedagogy, it's more based on listening, on the aural, on imitation, also seeing how another person does [it]. But we don't give precise [instructions], saying, "It's this or that name, it's this or that note. Open your ears and look at how I do it without slowing down, what the positioning is." I don't say it that way, I don't analyze. It has to be natural. The desire to make music has to come. You can't force anybody! If he doesn't want to, he doesn't want to.[8] The way of placing the left hand on the guitar neck, or of taking the pick in the right hand, that has to come naturally.

SL: So you don't explain—

MR: —you *don't explain*—

SL: —you don't say—

MR: —you don't explain, or say, "Look at the position I'm in." He sees it! And after, he'll correct it himself. There are [also] Manouche pianists, and they learn by themselves. There's nothing very academic [about it]. The style always comes by itself, I mean naturally. The hands will arrange themselves, maybe if [the student] gives a little more time. There are good pianists, good violinists, good guitarists [among

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Manouches]. [But] they're not obligated. I don't reject the theoretical aspect of music, because in my own way, I do it. I know how to explain things about music theory. Maybe not with the vocabulary adequate to conservatories.

SL: Yes, but all the same, it's a very rich theory, just not in the same terms.

MR: Voilà. After all, Django's history, with many other musicians, proved to us that you can make music otherwise. What's more, something I have to insist is that I know Marie-Claude Ségard well, who was the director of the Conservatory of Strasbourg. I had the chance to meet her during a film shooting, and since I had invited her to some concerts, she asked me to come to the conservatory to teach what I do. I was not very much at ease with that. I said, "But I can't! I'm intimidated." She said, "I want you to teach my teachers how you make music." I wasn't too thrilled, but she persuaded me. She said, "Yes, yes, I want you to teach them simplicity, [. . .] and the pleasures of playing." So I found myself multiple times at the conservatory with some important musicians, but I saw that they were completely ignorant of this way of playing. And the truth was revealed when I explained how you place the fingers like that, and this is a chord you can replace with that, with that, with that. Fortunately, I knew the names of certain chords, [but] I was nearly a beginner.

SL: It's a difficult thing to do with people who don't have this way of playing.

MR: Yes, and then, what really made them ask questions was the ear. You can manage to listen to something and reproduce it, or to recognize rhythmic positions, without theory, without anything. At its beginning, music was not written. Music was in birdsong, in the rustling of a tree. Tempos [*he knocks on the table*], drum [parts], were not written. You have it in your ear, that's how it is. It's another way of making music than on paper. [Written music is] *good*, I'm not saying otherwise.

SL: Yes. And I think that this way of learning to make music is well-respected by many other jazz musicians, certainly those I know in the United States who learned [written] notes and solfège and all that, and who now say, "That prevented me a little from listening because I was too dependent on sheets."

MR: Me, I love classical music, but I remember the first time I listened to classical music, I was disappointed by the musicians because I saw that they were *fixed* behind their sheets, and that they didn't *live* their music well. I saw that they were too *obsessed* with what they were playing from the sheet, but they didn't feel it. I had the impression that these were some automatons behind a page. Well, that's the impression I had. I'm not neglecting this visual aspect of the sheet, [since] the music was written on it. But at a certain point, you have to let yourself go in order to feel a piece, to live it better, because music lives!

SL: Absolutely, you can't forget that! So at the beginning of your school, where exactly did you teach?

MR: It was in Neuhof [in Strasbourg]. It was not far from the place you know, the Django Reinhardt Center [L'Espace Culturel Django Reinhardt].[9]

SL: And it was only with Manouche boys at first?

MR: Yes. At the beginning, it was *exclusively* reserved for the Polygone neighborhood, in Neuhof, only for the Manouche population.[10] That was the main objective, to renew interest from the [Manouche] youth, but very quickly we opened up to

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non-Manouches. The school grew [over time]. There was a person who taught piano, Madame Hème, with whom I had a long history.[11] I worked with her for over ten years, and it was very good. As it happens, a lot of Manouche girls came [to the school] and said, "I want to learn *that* [tune]. I don't want to learn this or this or this, it's *that* that interests me." So Madame Hème had to learn that tune, to procure sheet music. She taught [written] notes, but she realized very quickly that many Manouche girls play by ear. I had many opportunities to work with her. We performed with the piano and guitar classes together, and that worked well. From time to time, we had to give concerts for the city of Strasbourg, where other schools were represented, but not many kids played [from those schools]. Yet when we were present, *all* the kids played, and it *worked*. It worked *well!* [*Laughs*.]

SL: So at first, one of the reasons why you started the school was because music was not being transmitted [within families]. What happened, exactly? Why was there this lack [of transmission]?

MR: Well to begin with, we were in a rough neighborhood where there was a lot of unemployment and where Manouche families faced a lot of difficulties. There was also a little revolution, I mean technologically, with modernity, these things, [and] also with the advent of other musics. Music [performance] began to disappear. [However,] there were a lot of things that were positive: people got into the music that Schnuckenack Reinhardt brought back to them again, and some groups were born. I was part of this generation. [But] Marcel Daval was concerned, saying, "We need to *reintegrate* music into the families, and we have to interest the youth." Voilà. So after that, there was no problem, because there was enthusiasm right away. Then [there was] the [nationwide] trend of Django that came back in the 1990s, with films, festivals, and lots of things.[12] Now we're kind of at the end of this, the trend is passing, but for those who have learned this music, it's fine. As it happens, that [wave of interest] has allowed a lot of people who didn't know this music to learn it. Lots of people came from diverse horizons of different musics, like country or rock and roll, who were directed toward this acoustic guitar music because Django played [it] a lot. He is very well-known as an acoustic guitarist, but we also know that he played electric guitar at the end of his life.

SL: Yes, yes, and if he had lived longer, he would have still played electric.

MR: Certainly, certainly. Django's evolution was permanent. [His music] was different *every time*. When he recorded, when he played concerts, he *rarely* played the same solo. Today, I'll say it: nobody has Django's creativity. It was the reason he was such a genius. Throughout his career, he challenged himself to play differently each time. It was phenomenal.

SL: Of course. It was an inspiration for young artists to not really reproduce everything that Django did, but to have this artistic spirit to create something.

MR: I'm going to stop you there. You see that still, to reproduce is important. To reproduce works of Bach well, that's even older than Django. And it's *that* [impulse] that learning is made of. *All* the famous guitarists I know in Alsace, who are numerous, went through learning Django note by note. And after, some of them found other musical doors. But it's important because first, you listen to a solo on

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"Minor Swing," or on other tunes, "Manoir de mes Rêves" or "I'll See You in My Dreams." You hear that Django brings something out naturally without studying it, without preparing it. You say, "Wow!" It's *phenomenal*. You want to do it the way he does it, with his intensity, the sounds, the finesse, the different tones. He rarely plays on the beat. He plays either ahead or a little behind.

SL: And it's on purpose.

MR: Of course, he was a master of tempo.

SL: And of course, yes, you have to reproduce, because [musical ability] comes from somewhere. It comes from a lot of work.

MR: Yes, yes. There's another thing I want to shed some light on in relation to that, but perhaps you've heard it. Gadjé, I mean, non-Manouches, who listen to us on stage or elsewhere, say, "Yes, but it's normal for you [Manouches], you have a *gift*." Me, I stop them, [because] it's not true! There aren't any gifts! There is *work*. I remember when I was starting to learn guitar, I played eight to ten hours a day. As soon as I could play guitar, I played [for that long]. I listened, I became inspired, I watched, I listened to a lot of records. No no, it's work. It's not innate. Maybe some people are privileged in families where music is important. And with that, I want to say that with this current social period, I think that [music] has an importance. There have been a lot of [different] groups, a lot of people in this geographical corner of France. A lot of musicians outside of Manouches say that it's *here* where real music happens. What I mean is, maybe, with the current social phenomena, we show that we *can* do something well, and music is our thing.

SL: So with the history of the rebirth of this music [in your community], people felt more motivated to play it. Did that also come from a need to prove oneself in some way?

MR: Yes, I think. Yes, that's what I was trying to say.

SL: Yes, but to Gadjé like that?

MR: Yes yes yes yes yes. I'll say that above all, [when] you discover this music, you sense its root in Django's music. That's first of all why we play it. But then, when you're onstage, you feel something happening in the communication with others, with Gadjé. I know that when I still played onstage, for me it was very, very important to build this bridge, to say, "We're not just what you read about in the news briefs. OK? Come find us after the concert and we'll talk. After all, we're like you." That was kind of my approach, which was very important. I then had the opportunity to participate in a film directed by Tony Gatlif called *Swing*.[13] I play [a couple roles] in the film both as a musician and as an antique trader, which is my other passion. So this film allowed us to play a lot of concerts. With my cousin, [guitarist] Tchavolo Schmitt, I wrote a lot of the music for this film. I remember that in some of the theaters that showed the film, after the screenings, there were concerts with talks. It was an opportunity for me to showcase [Manouches], to say, "In this film, you've seen a little about the difficulties Manouches face: illiteracy, rejection, racism, voilà. But come find us. We'll chat warmly with you, and we'll be very happy to meet you, too." It's a vector. You bring music somewhere, you make people hear musical notes, and people assemble. No matter where, it's a totally natural phenomenon.

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SL: Yes, of course. But that was one of APPONA's approaches at the beginning, to link the social with the cultural, and to use music to attract the public.

MR: Yes, that was an approach. But the *first* approach, still, APPONA's first concern, was to reintegrate music within Manouche families. First, the familial recognition of music, its belonging. And *after*, to share it.

SL: OK, so first, for yourselves.

MR: To reintegrate it, yes. It's like personal care. At first, I made music for *me*, for my pleasure. A kid who does music, if you let him choose [to do it], he'll do it for his pleasure above all. Then he'll share it, he'll give it. It's natural.

SL: You have to have that at the beginning, and then you can do other things. [Your wife] Stella told me that you were the first Manouche person to speak out, to get onstage and to say, while you were there to play music, "You have to come meet us," and all that. So I'm wondering, why were you the first, and why didn't that really happen before?

MR: Oh, maybe I was the first to do it here [in Strasbourg]. I don't know. I think it was a little before [the filming of] *Swing* when I had already started to speak a little with the public. But Manouches don't have much self-confidence, even onstage. I remember that often, at the beginning when I did concerts, I *barely* dared to introduce the musicians. Despite everything, there was a musical link with others, the non-Tsiganes, but otherwise we were behind our instruments. We communicated, we made plenty of notes come out of our guitars or our violins, but that was it. A [Manouche] person could hardly introduce his friend [*laughs*], so I was the one who had to do it. I remember that at the beginning, it wasn't me who did it—it was my friend who was a Gadjo, with whom I played with my brother. He did it instead because I was too shy. [Speaking] was something that came later. But I'll say that in becoming aware of all these negative views that society had toward us, with the release of *Swing*, I really became conscious. And maybe it was then that I freed myself up in relation to speaking. I spoke more easily.

SL: Great. There were also others who started to speak out, right?

MR: Yes yes, there were other people, especially thanks to APPONA. These are people whom you've certainly met: Rosino [Hoffman], Engé [Helmstetter]. There are others who speak easily. But maybe this problem of speaking more easily is also a problem related to schooling, for people who haven't gone to school.[14] I didn't go to school, but [schooling allows one] to acquire a maturity. You know where you're going and what you want, and you also have more ease in communicating with others. This is an important point today, I find, in Manouche society. We should find our way more, open ourselves up more, communicate more.

SL: It's very important.

MR: It's *very* important. We can't forget that we are a people, I mean the Manouches of France or the Manouches in general. We haven't gone to school much, our language isn't written, and there are a lot of things being forgotten. Certain words in our language have disappeared. My grandparents are no longer here, and they were the ones who still had the entire vocabulary. Today, it's disappearing. It's a language that's becoming impoverished.

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SL: Yes, and like with any oral language, there is always this risk when you live within a dominant culture where there are other written languages that you have to know.

MR: I always draw a parallel with the Jewish people, who are kind of all over the world, a bit like us. But the history of the Jewish people is much older. At the beginning of the transmission [of knowledge] among Jewish people, it was only oral. Then came writing. . . . [In contrast,] our fault is that our language is going to disappear. It's certain. One day, nobody will speak Manouche anymore because we don't write it down. But our history also shows that [our language] saved us in a lot of cases, especially during the war and other difficult situations.

SL: Yes, and I've heard a lot of things about the Manouche language, like how many people don't want to share it. . . . I understand that I don't have the right to speak it, because it's not something you can do if you're not Manouche.

MR: Yes, you can see it this way, but not necessarily. It's true that we're skeptical of teaching the language to somebody who isn't Manouche. That's for sure, because we have, I don't know, a paranoia. [*Laughs*.] But we've also been ridiculed by certain writers, people like [ethnographer] Marie-Paul Dollé.[15] There are plenty of others who have written nonsense about us. But language remains something *very* confidential. But you can prove yourself to Manouche people, like [anthropologist] Patrick Williams [did].[16] He's not Manouche, but he knows the language well! He was close to families and still is. I sort of taught Joe Nizard, and he remembers it well. But it's hard for Manouches to teach it to others.

SL: OK. So if you trust someone—

MR: —yes, it's a question of huge, huge trust, that's for sure. But it's not just that. The person who's learning also has to understand the finer points of this population, its behavior. *That's* also important.

SL: Of course, that you don't just learn the language without all the other aspects of culture.

MR: Voilà. And when I say behavior, I mean that another aspect of the Manouche population is that you don't just do what you want in your attitude. You *don't* say just anything. You don't bring up certain subjects with just anyone. There is also always a question of modesty. You don't talk about sex, for example, in front of children or certain people like the elderly. That remains something very private. That is part of *good conduct*. . . . So when I speak about trust in relation to language, it's not just about trust. You have to know how to behave, to really grasp what a Manouche person is at the core. . . . Someone who understands this is [the non-Manouche music historian] Alain Antonietto, who [understood that] music is a *very* important element [of Manouche culture]. He always defended this music, always corrected the nonsense [that people said about it].[17] That's also why he doesn't agree with everyone. He's very concentrated on details. But he was always there [among Manouches]. He was there before, he was there during, and he is still there now.

SL: Yes, and that means a lot. Related to language and also to music, another thing that interests me is song. I've had the opportunity to sing your [Manouche-language jazz] songs with the choir [that you and your wife founded for Manouche women and their allies in Neuhof, Le C(h)œur des Femmes].[18] It really shocked me to be

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able to do this, given that there is this skepticism about sharing language. And yet, there is this coming together of Manouches and non-Manouches, who sing and share it with the public. I find it pretty rare to have this kind of collaboration, to be able to sing in Manouche.

MR: Well, to situate how Manouches came to sing onstage, we owe it to Schnuckenack Reinhardt [for inspiring us]. But there exist some recordings where you can hear Django singing with his wife.

SL: Oh really?!

MR: Yes, with his wife and [singer] Jean Sablon.

SL: Oh, right!

MR: You know which one I'm talking about? I don't remember the title.[19] You hear them, but it's a private recording that Jean Sablon made. Maybe Django would have [become a singer] one day. So yes, it was Schnuckenack Reinhardt in the 1970s who brought song [to Manouche communities], and it's great. It's absolutely great, right? Song [came to] exist at the heart of *families*. There have always been women and men who sang, but never onstage. So as a result [of Schnuckenack], there were certain musicians who decided to write songs. I think that's a plus, and I think [our] language works well with song. And speaking of the C(h)œur des Femmes, to sing just as many Manouche songs as American or French songs, I think it's really great to be able to share this with the world, to understand their meaning. And there, *there* you realize the importance of lyrics. [My lyrics,] very often, are about our elders, transmission, rejection, justice. We speak about these things.

SL: OK. Subjects that are—

MR: —*important*! That are contemporary.

SL: And of course, it's important that these [subjects] are tied to music.

MR: Oh yes, it's very strong!

SL: So that's a way in which you can really present the language in a context that is very meaningful, that's not just speech.

MR: Of course, of course. Do you have the translation of what you've been singing in Manouche?

SL: In fact, I was going to ask you, because I can figure out a few things, but not all the lyrics.

MR: Oh yes, OK. In the song "Mer Djina" (We know), I speak about the elders, about what they've transmitted to us.[20] They aren't around anymore. [The song is about] how we must be careful [in light of certain] things about today's society.

SL: OK. Also, when we started to sing "Digo O Dives" (We see the day)[21]—

MR: —is that so? You've started it?

SL: Yes!

MR: Oh, that's great!

SL: [The choir director,] Anne [Huber], has worked on it a bit with us. [The other Manouche singers] translated the lyrics for us.

MR: Voilà! So "Mer Djina" speaks mainly about the transmission from the elders who are no longer here today, that people should not forget. "Digo O Dives" is a little more contemporary. It's more a reflection on contemporary society. Let's be careful,

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defend ourselves, you have to be vigilant about the terrible things in society in relation to who you are. It's reclaiming a justice.

SL: OK. So with these lyrics, when you released them on recordings, was that something you wanted everyone to understand? Because since it's in Manouche, most of the public won't understand it.

MR: But I never worried about everyone understanding it. I've translated it more than once. There are a lot of people who have asked me for a translation, and I give it away very easily. I give it away very easily because it's my turn to address the Manouche population, but others, of course, should also understand what it is. The first goal is still for Manouches to be aware [of the song's meaning], but others should understand, too, of course.

SL: Of course. But when [Musik Deutscher Zigeuner guitarist and singer] Häns'che Weiss released the song ["Lass Maro Tschatschepen"],[22] there was a big controversy [because he provided a translation of the Romanes lyrics], right? Not everyone was on board with that. So, given what you've just said, I'm wondering, why was that such a problem?

MR: Yes. There are laws that exist with us that are kind of like the equivalent of the *kris* for Hungarian Tsiganes.[23] You shouldn't mix too much [with outsiders], you shouldn't give too much information. These laws exist more in Germany than among us in France. So there are still things that stay with us in relation to that. My grandfather was still very steeped in these laws. If someone makes a very serious error, he is banished. He's excluded. . . . These are things that are still around, sort of. But things are democratizing more and more. Not everything is good. I mean, a population has to evolve. If we stay in the nineteenth century, that's not going to work. Today, we can't do that anymore. There are evolutions that are natural, that are good for a population, and others that are not.

SL: Of course, people have to adapt. So now you can do translations without negative consequences?

MR: Yes, yes. [It depends on] the maturity of a person, and then, if [he or she] has good sense. I don't think it's crazy to say that.

SL: Yes. So when did you write the lyrics to "Mer Djina"?

MR: Ah! These lyrics—listen, this is a tune I composed at first without lyrics. I had the chance to record it a number of times, but each time differently. It's a tune I wrote for my grandfather—but I didn't know it. And when I wrote these lyrics, it came to me naturally to write about things that speak of our elders.

SL: So if you didn't know [what it was about] when you wrote it, how did you know after?

MR: I remembered! It's a very old composition that I had had for a very long time before I was able to record it. [That was] on my first phonographic recording made by APPONA. It was called *Gypsy Swing from Alsace*.

SL: Yes yes, I saw the video on YouTube with [your ensemble] Sweet Chorus.

MR: Oh yeah? [*Laughs*.]

SL: That was the first time I heard it. So did you write the lyrics specifically for the choir?

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MR: No no! In fact, this tune has been recorded for a CD. Unfortunately, this CD was released [only] in Canada. It was resold in France to someone, and this person never released the CD.

SL: That's too bad. . . . To come back to your school, we were talking about how at first it was only for Manouche boys, and then there were some girls who became interested in playing instruments. I'm interested in that because I understand that there are not many Manouche girls who take up instruments. So I want to know, how did that happen? Did it continue?

MR: [*Laughs*.] So, right now I teach only two girls, but who aren't Manouche. I have a young girl, and I have a woman of a certain age, who is almost as old as me [*laughs*] who comes to take lessons with me. No, just to respond to your question in a more precise way, there are very few Manouche women who play guitar or another instrument. My grandmother played guitar and sang. I knew another woman who played violin and sang. But very few women play. You also have to know that with daily concerns, the [Manouche] woman, unfortunately, doesn't have too much time. She has to take care of the kids. That's mainly her role, like in many French families from a certain era. The woman took care of the family, raised the kids, did household chores. Today, that's changed a lot in French and European society. You see a lot more women who play in philharmonic orchestras, among others, but the larger percentage remains men. So I don't know if it's a form of sexism. I don't know.

SL: [These roles are] traditional for Manouches, of course. I've heard from two sides, in fact. There's daily life for communities who maintain these traditions. It's a little different for those who have left the community, who aren't always surrounded by family.

MR: But I would really like for young girls, Manouches and others, to come [take lessons]. I ask for that.

SL: Are there any girls who have said they're interested in that?

MR: No. Unfortunately, sometimes when certain girls want to play music, and when they have a fiancé, the fiancé doesn't like it. He'll say, "Stay behind. No, you shouldn't do that." That's also a reality. But I think that in other French societies, there are still a lot of guys who are also like that. [*Laughs*.]

SL: Yes, that's not unique to Manouches! It's great, though, for the Manouche women of [this] neighborhood to have the chance to sing [in the choir].

MR: There's been great progress with the C(h)œur des Femmes. There are quite a few Manouches in it. They take pleasure in it; they sing well. There is a meeting, a mixing with other populations, other women, [such as] women who work in the social sector. It's very rich.

SL: Yes, and it's something that I like a lot, and that really gives women a chance to sing in a group when they wouldn't have that opportunity otherwise.

MR: Of course. And when we do small concerts, I'm very happy, very proud, since I'm sort of at the initiative of this project with Stella. I already knew Anne, so I asked her to come give singing lessons. We had done some concerts together before then. Now there is more of a demand for Manouche songs.

SL: Can you tell me more about your ensembles, like Sweet Chorus and Note Manouche?

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MR: Yes. There was Sweet Chorus and Note Manouche, but afterward I worked under my own name with a violinist from Paris. With [accordionist] Marcel [Loeffler] I did a number of things. The last CD [I made], in the title it was *Le Swing du Luthier*. That was just under my name.

SL: And why the names "Sweet Chorus" and "Note Manouche"?

MR: So Sweet Chorus was created by [guitarist] Patrick Andresz, who came to see me one day, though I didn't [already] know him. He asked if I wanted to participate in two or three gigs, then some tours, and very quickly there was a proposition to record an LP. After that there was another, and then that became Sweet Chorus. And Note Manouche was after some tours in Italy by some Italian producers. They asked me, "What do you call this ensemble?" At the time, I played with Marcel, my brother, and then Tchavolo [Schmitt] who was also part of the group that was recorded live, near Rome. Then I decided that this would be called Notti Manouche. That means "Manouche nights," because they were often long nights. [*Laughs*.] And then that became Note Manouche.

SL: OK. I'm going to ask you a question: there is something that I've heard a lot in my interviews with other musicians. They tell me that you can hear, in a person's guitar or violin playing, whether that person is Manouche or not.

MR: That's a very pointed question.

SL: In your opinion, is that the case?

MR: A lot of Manouche musicians say that, actually, that you can hear when it's a Gadjo playing or that you can hear that it's not a Manouche playing. And you could ask, "Is it necessary to be Manouche to play Django's music?" Me, I say no. I say no, but you have to be well immersed in this music, though not the way of life. What's happened over the last ten or fifteen years is that non-Manouches have thought that you have to *live* [in a supposedly Manouche way]. That you have to have a mustache [shaped like] a circumflex, wear a hat, be a little disheveled, and live à la Manouche, vagabond, like that. It's totally *crazy*. And there are many who have been duped. They thought that they had to be like that, to copy the lifestyle. It's a cliché, an awful cliché. I don't live in a caravan [*laughs*], and I'm [still] free. This thing about freedom, I think it's important. But no, I don't think—no, there are some very, very good musicians who play this music and who are not Manouche. It has to be recognized.

SL: But is there a specifically Manouche way of playing?

MR: I don't know. Maybe at a certain moment, in certain specific cases, I'll say that it's true. I'll say, "*Merde*, that's no joke! He can't be anything *but* Manouche, the way he plays." For certain situations, for certain styles of guitar playing, I'll say, "Merde, that's a Manouche," and I'm mistaken. I got it wrong. I think that the evolution today is that people want to do *better* than Django. So in order to be a very good musician, do you necessarily have to play faster in order to be better than Django? I'll say no, of course. Django proved to us that sometimes, in playing three or four notes, it was amazing, or sometimes, in playing a burst of notes, or some fantastic arpeggios, it was magnificent. But it was always done with a *good* musical sense. Today, . . . *everyone* plays fast, very fast. It's nothing more than that. So that's too bad.

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SL: It's a competition among musicians.

MR: Voilà. It's become a competition on the neck of the guitar. And the person who plays the fastest is the best. But music is *not that*.

SL: But that's the way things are now, and still, you're not the first person to tell me this.

MR: Yes, but what I mean is, you listen to Django, to one of his choruses, and you say, "Wow! What magnificent form! What *sensitivity*! What intelligence to have put these two notes in this place!" With his two fingers, he invented a new technique on the guitar neck, due to his handicap.[24] When you hear him play fast, you say to yourself, "Oh wow! What is that?" Effectively, he had to place [his fingers] there, and not elsewhere. *That* makes the difference. So [the music] has taken a direction that is no longer *right*, that has been deformed. In the minds of many, it's become *only* about the visual onstage. It's really too bad. It's no longer about the music, it's about speed.

SL: Are there people who [falsely] claim to be Manouche?

MR: There are a lot! A lot! Take someone like [the non-Manouche guitarist] Romane. At first, he played a lot with ambiguity. So Romane has done a lot for the pedagogy of this music, very well, but at first he really played with this ambiguity, you see? Manouche, not Manouche, the stage name "Romane," you see, with its Manouche insinuation. As a result, he's been chastised, and not even by Manouches! Not even by Manouches! Because non-Manouches said, "You have to stop appropriating. You are an *appropriator*." You see? Yes, there are others! But maybe not at the same level. . . . Sometimes guys like that, who do that, it's stupid. Stay who you are! I've met a lot of people like that, and I say, "It's not important. You're not Manouche." [But] it doesn't do anything.

SL: You say that [directly] to them?

MR: Yes, I say it to them.

SL: Have you had students like that?

MR: No no no. These are people I've had the chance to meet in major venues, in France or elsewhere.

SL: Since you started teaching, has your pedagogical approach changed? Is it necessary to adapt it to different people?

MR: No no no. I think that my pedagogy has matured a bit over time. But it's fundamentally the same. At the beginning, when I asked myself questions, drawing the neck of the guitar on a sheet of paper, by the end of my second lesson, I quickly realized that this accomplishes nothing. I thought, "How did I learn music?" Then I progressed in my way of working with youth. It's always the *same*. I mean, if the person who is with me wants to learn, I can give some things, but it's up to him to do the work, not me! I can show *everything*—[on] a slowed-down solo, [I might say,] "Use this finger instead of that one." I can explain everything, but one has to do the work. It's always [about] desire and passion. That's out of my control!

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SL: Do you have students who don't practice?

MR: Oh no. I always say, "Working with me is not enough. You have to work afterward and not think of that as a constraint." If it's a constraint, it's poorly conceived. You have to be inhabited by passion.

Notes

1. Reinhardt is a common surname among Manouches and Sinti (a Romani subgroup closely related to Manouches) in Western Europe. Although Django Reinhardt has familial origins in Alsace, Mandino Reinhardt has not divulged to me any traceable kinship with him. To avoid confusion among Reinhardts, I refer to each by their given name.
2. Romanies, also known generally as Roma, comprise an ethnic group with northwest Indian ancestry that migrated westward beginning around the year AD 1000. Romanies now live throughout the world but are most prevalent in Europe. Many Romanies face widespread racial prejudice, including the denial of access to employment, healthcare, education, housing, and other rights of European citizens. Manouches have lived in France since the eighteenth century or earlier and many have long been subject to mobility-restricting French laws rooted in anti-Romani racism.
3. Sweet Chorus, founded by rhythm guitarist Patrick Andresz and also known as Mandino Reinhardt and Sweet Chorus, released its eponymous first album in 1984, followed by *Californian Wine* in 1986. Sweet Chorus continued to perform intermittently through the late 1990s. Note Manouche released two albums, *Gypsy Swing from Alsace* in 1994 and *Note Manouche* in 1999.
4. David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); E. Taylor Atkins, ed., *Jazz Planet* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Philip V. Bohlman and Goffredo Plastino, *Jazz Worlds/World Jazz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Nicholas Gebhardt, "When Jazz Was Foreign: Rethinking Jazz History," *Jazzforschung/Jazz Research* 44 (2012): 185–97; Jerome Harris, "Jazz on the Global Stage," in *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 101–35; and Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Bea Benjamin, *Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking in Jazz* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
5. Mandino's usage of Tsigane here refers to Manouches specifically, since he knows that other Romanies have achieved similar degrees of fame as Django.
6. Bal-musette was a style of popular dance music that developed in Paris in the early twentieth century and featured the accordion as its main instrument.
7. The group to which Mandino refers is Musik Deutscher Zigeuner (German Gypsy Music), a collective frequently led by Schnuckenack, that released a series of eight albums during the late 1960s and 1970s.
8. Here and elsewhere, Mandino uses masculine pronouns to refer to jazz manouche learners. I attribute this largely to the fact that among Manouches, instrumental jazz manouche is performed almost exclusively by male-identifying players. For Manouche women, instrumental performance is typically discouraged, if not proscribed in some communities. Manouche women sometimes engage in vocal performance, though certain communities require that a woman be accompanied instrumentally by at least one close male relative. Even among non-Manouches, the jazz manouche scene is overwhelmingly male dominated.
9. Neuhof is a socioeconomically marginalized neighborhood in the south of Strasbourg, home to a number of low-income immigrant families and their descendants, as well as large proportions of Manouche people. L'Espace Culturel Django Reinhardt is a municipally funded cultural center that opened in 2010 and promotes arts education in Neuhof.

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10. Until very recently, the Polygone was an impoverished neighborhood within Neuhof that originally comprised military barracks squatted by homeless Romanies following World War II. Over the past few years, the municipal government has funded housing projects to replace the structures its residents lived in and to provide services such as in-home running water and waste removal. The Polygone remains predominantly inhabited by Manouches.
11. According to a retrospective of the APPONA music school, "In 1987, a piano school was created, led by Agnès Hème and open exclusively to children and to young tziganes. Initially attended only by young girls, it is now mixed [gender]. Young girls' access to music education was, in itself, a little revolution. If they did not become professional pianists, they acquired the fundamentals of a musicality that often led them to singing, to dance, [and] to storytelling." "Bilan de l'Ecole de Musique de l'APPONA 1978–1998," (internal document, private APPONA archive, n.d.), 2.
12. The France-based trend to which Mandino refers includes the proliferation of a jazz manouche industry, with a number of Manouche and non-Manouche performers establishing commercially viable careers; the popularization of jazz manouche festivals, some of which continue to the present day; and the releases of several Django- and jazz manouche-themed films in France and abroad, among them Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999) and Etienne Comar's recent semifictional biopic, *Django* (2017). Woody Allen, dir., Sweet and Lowdown (1999; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD; Etienne Comar, dir., *Django* (Paris: Pathé, 2017).
13. See Tony Gatlif, dir., *Swing* (2002; Paris: Editions Montparnasse, 2003), DVD.
14. Schooling in France is compulsory until age sixteen. According to Stella Funaro, Mandino's wife and a literacy educator for low-income residents in Neuhof, Manouche youth have a tendency to drop out of school as soon as it is legally permissible, sometimes with the approbation of their families.
15. Marie-Paul Dollé, *Les Tsiganes Manouches* (Sand, France: self-published, 1980).
16. See Patrick Williams, *Gypsy World: The Silence of the Living and the Voices of the Dead*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
17. See Alain Antonietto and François Billard. *Django Reinhardt: Rythmes Futurs* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).
18. "Le C(h)œur des Femmes" is a French pun indicating "choir (*chœur*) of women" and "heart (*cœur*) of women."
19. The tune was "Blue Drag" by Josef Myrow. The recording under discussion is available on Django Reinhardt, *Django Reinhardt—Intégrale Volume 4: Magic Strings 1935*, recording date unknown, Frémeaux et Associés FA304 (1996), 2 CDs.
20. "Mer Djina" has been recorded under the title "Souvenir" (Memory) in versions with lyrics (Mandino Reinhardt, *Le Swing du Luthier*, self-produced [2008], CD) and without, as performed by Mandino's ensemble Note Manouche (*Gypsy Swing from Alsace,* Materiali Sonori MASO90056, [1994], CD; *Note Manouche,* Djaz 714–2 [1999], CD).
21. "Digo O Dives" is available on Mandino Reinhardt, *Digo O Dives*, Le Chant du Monde 2741226 (2006), CD.
22. This recording is available on Häns'che Weiss Quintett, *Fünf Jahre Musik Deutscher Zigeuner*, Intercord 160.088 (1977), LP.
23. The kris is a traditional court of justice among certain Vlach Romani groups.
24. At the age of eighteen, Django survived a caravan fire that severely burned parts of his right leg and left arm. This experience left him with very limited use of his left ring and pinky fingers. Contrary to popular belief, the fingers themselves were not burned, but

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rather the outside of the left hand, leading to tendon damage that permanently contorted his ring and pinky fingers. Although Django relied primarily on his left thumb, index, and middle fingers to play guitar, he was also able to use the other fingers to a certain extent. For more information, see Charles Delaunay, *Django Mon Frère* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1961); Benjamin Marx Givan, *The Music of Django Reinhardt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Alexander Schmitz and Peter Maier, *Django Reinhardt: sein Leben, seine Musifv seine Schallplatten* (Buchendorf, Germany: Oreos Verlag, 1985).

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