

Review**CMA VIVA! & Gala: Paris Combo (April 19)**

by Mike Telin



The sounds of the streets of Paris filled Gartner Auditorium on Friday, April 19 when *Paris Combo* kicked off their 12-city US tour with a fun, musically intelligent and entertaining concert as part of the Cleveland Museum of Art's VIVA! & Gala series.

The group's engaging style, described as “a unique mélange of colorful cabaret, elegant jazz, multicultural world music and sassy alterna-pop,” was in evidence from the opening *Ce que j'amie, c'est le debut* (what I like is the beginning). From the first to the final song during the 70-minute set, vocalist Belle du Berry's sultry tone combined with all the right facial expressions rendered the printed English translations nearly pointless. Du Berry's colleagues, David Lewis, trumpet and piano, François Jeannin, drums and backup vocals, Potzi, guitar, and Emmanuel Chabbey, bass, expertly created colorful lines that were far more than accompaniment but truly part of each song's musical fabric.

Paris Combo came together in the early 1990s when du Berry, Potzi and Jeannin were performing together in Paris. Lewis, a native of Australia, joined the group in 1994. Following a four-year break the group reunited in a rehearsal studio composing new songs. Chabbey was added to the group's lineup in 2011 and *Paris Combo* resumed extensive touring and performing new material that would evolve into their recently released fifth CD, appropriately titled “5”.

Paris is the city of love and for the most part all of the evening's lyrics were about the many aspects of that human emotion, a fact that du Berry playfully emphasized during her introductions. Some standouts of the set included *Good by Pinocchio*, a song about liars, the sad *Senor* about being single for too long, and *Sous la Lune* (Under the Moon) a beautiful ballade that ended with an other-worldly trumpet sound created by Davis playing with his bell placed in a bowl of water. And, *Je te vois partout* (I see you everywhere) was stunning. Midway through the set du Belle let the band have their own moment in the sun and drummer François Jeannin showed off his own vocal skills during *I Saw Stars*.

The never-ending dilemma when hearing groups like *Paris Combo* in a soft-seat auditorium, is that in spite of continued encouragement from the stage to get up and

dance, it always takes the audience far too long to do so. Finally a small group did begin to dance and luckily the calls for an encore from the balcony loosened people up a bit more during the two encores, *Je rêve encore* (I still Dream) and *Moi, mon âme et ma conscience* (Me, My Soul and My Conscience) when the room achieved the necessary dance party atmosphere. But with the Atrium completed, more performance space options are now available. Nonetheless, this was a thoroughly entertaining evening on all levels. Paris Combo is the real deal and hopefully they'll be back in Cleveland sometime soon.

Published on clevelandclassical.com April 23, 2013