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THE JAZZ RAG

ANNIE ROSS

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Photo by
Merlin Daleman





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Photo by Merlin Daleman

ANNIE ROSS (1930-2020) The great British-born jazz singer remembered by **VAL WISEMAN** and **DIGBY FAIRWEATHER** (pages 12-13)

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FIND US ON FACEBOOK

The *Jazz Rag* now has its own Facebook page. For news of upcoming festivals, gigs and releases, features from the archives, competitions and who knows what else, be sure to 'like' us. To find the page, simply enter 'The Jazz Rag' in the search bar at the top when logged into Facebook.

THE JAZZ RAG
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UPFRONT

BRITISH JAZZ AWARDS CANCELLED

This is the time of year when *Jazz Rag* readers expect to have the opportunity to vote for the Jazz Oscars, the British Jazz Awards. Sadly this year's event has been cancelled. Though what is essentially an on-line operation could take place safely in the pandemic age, the organisers feel that the awards' integrity would be compromised: after all, the awards relate to voters' reactions to performances in a single year, not existing reputations.

The official statement put it clearly: 'To make an award in a year which gave pitifully few opportunities for musicians to perform would be a mockery of this well-respected event.'

So, for the first time since Humphrey Lyttelton and Benny Green inaugurated the British Jazz Awards in 1987 with a splendid event in Birmingham's Grand Hotel, the awards take a sabbatical - back in 2021!

FROM JULY TO OCTOBER

As with all festivals in the UK scheduled for Spring and Summer, the 36th Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival didn't happen this year – except that, in a way, it did. The Virtual, but Remarkably Real, Jazz Festival appeared daily between July 17 and 26, the original dates of the Festival. Not only that, but the festival – in real, live, though possibly socially distanced, form is on for October 16-25.

The Virtual Festival contained features that we associate with the real thing such as photographic galleries, sketches and cartoons, plus sessions and stories from previous years. One attractive element was the large number of friendly 'missing you' messages of good will, and a tune or two, from (mostly) young musicians and groups from all over Europe who had enjoyed appearing at Birmingham over the years and planned or hoped to return in 2020.

This goes to the heart of one way that Birmingham 2020 will be different from usual. Normally a succession of European bands become firm festival favourites year on year – and it is sadly easy to see why, in planning a festival two months in advance there is little hope of programming bands from, say, France or Spain. For all that, the European contingent is to be headed by the always exciting Jim Dandies from Italy and The Schwings from Lithuania.

With 60 events scheduled as against the customary 200-plus and contingency plans being developed for some performances being streamed into venues rather than staged live, this will be a different festival from usual – a one-off before the Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival (as, hopefully, with life in general) returns to normal in 2021.

However, some things will be just as usual. At least 90% of



Jim Dandies

Photo by Merlin Daleman

events will be free, festival goers will have the chance to jitterbug and play the ukulele, though not at the same time, and jazz will occur in the most surprising places, though not quite as many as usual. The British musical contingent is full of festival favourites, from the Festival Patron Digby Fairweather (who played the Festival Jam Session even before it was officially a festival) to young saxophone

star Alex Clarke. Look out for top instrumentalists Alan Barnes, Bruce Adams, Dave Newton, Julian Marc Stringle and Art Themen, singers Val Wiseman and Roy Forbes, and blues and/or Americana from Tipitina, the Whiskey Brothers, Shufflepack, Chickenbone John and Bob Wilson/Honeyboy Hickling.

www.birminghamjazzfestival.com



Enrico Tomasso

Photo by DJC de la Haya

WHITLEY BAY PLANS AHEAD

When our Lockdown edition was being prepared, we singled out the Mike Durham Classic Jazz Party (aka Whitley Bay Jazz Festival) as one of the few scheduled events still going ahead. Sadly, as the Lockdown Jazz Rag was being printed, the organisers bowed to the inevitable and cancelled. As the pandemic developed as a global crisis, there was no hope for a festival whose 30-plus musicians were drawn from the UK, five European countries, Australia and (a sizeable contingent) the USA. The Classic Jazz Party is not the sort of festival that works in an abbreviated (and non-international) form, so the positive course of action was to announce that, as far as practicable, the same musicians would perform the same programme at the Village Hotel in Cobalt Business Park on November 5-7, 2021. So Guy Fawkes Night next year will see fireworks from such UK stars as Rico Tomasso, Martin Litton, Spats Langham and local favourite Emma Fisk, a host of Americans such as Duke Heitger, Andy Schumm and Josh Duffee, musicians from Norway, Germany, Italy, France and Sweden – and a solitary Antipodean, Michael McQuaid. www.whitleybayjazzfest.com

LET'S HEAR IT FOR WKCR-FM!

WKCR-FM is a student-led non-commercial radio station based at Columbia University in New York City. Every year the station runs a weekend of tribute programmes to commemorate the coincidence that the birthdays (not birth-dates, of course) of Lester Young and Charlie Parker fall two days apart at the end of August. This

year, after the customary features on Lester, WKCR celebrates Bird's centenary with 120 hours of programmes! The whole feast of jazz runs from midnight on August 27 to midnight on September 4.

www.wkcr.org

ANOTHER GIANT STEP

As we move further in time from the classic jazz recordings and have the technical means to issue them in many different forms, a luxury market has developed alongside the CDs and downloads that just bring us as much music as possible. The 60th anniversary of the issue on Atlantic of John Coltrane's innovative and much-garlanded album, *Giant Steps*, is a pretty good reason for a luxury reissue and in September Rhino provides just that: the music re-mastered, original and newly written notes, all sorts of ephemera, outtakes galore. If the 60th Anniversary De Luxe Edition is not enough for you, try the Super De Luxe, with no fewer than 28 re-mastered outtakes and alternative takes.

THE NEW NORMAL

The EFG London Jazz Festival is due to be staged from November 13 to 22, despite the coronavirus pandemic, but it will take a rather different form from usual. Details have not been announced yet – not surprising as festival organisers need to be light on their feet to adjust to changing circumstances – but London 2020 will go under the name *Living in Two Worlds* and feature both live and digital events. www.efglondonjazzfestival.org.uk

COSTA DEL TYNE

The North East seems particularly determined to get back into the routine of regular jazz events. Elsewhere



Fergus McCreadie

in this issue we report on the Vieux Carre Jazz Band resuming its regular residency at the Holystone. On September 6 the band re-starts its series lunch-time gigs at the Spanish City in Whitley Bay.

KEEP CALM – AND PLAY THAT CD!

Pitlochry is not generally thought of as a hotbed of jazz, but for many years it's been home to Hep Records, responsible, among other things, for classy reissues of the finest big band and swing music. At a time when many of us are spending more time at home, Hep Records are offering many quality CDs at bargain prices for Jazz Rag readers. Now is the time to boost your collection of Buddy Rich or Benny Goodman – and dip into a collection of Harlem groups of the 1930s, with such stars as Buster Bailey and Roy Eldridge and a few much less familiar names. www.hepjazz.com

SLOWLY RETURNING

Like Ronnie Scott's whose early August live gig with Pete Long and Simon Spillett had to become closed doors at the last minute, the Stables at Wavendon has shelved plans for August performances. However, as we go to press, there is activity planned for September. Enterprisingly the Stables has set up a series of workshops and courses in saxophone (at many

levels), harmonica, ukulele, conga drums and mandolin. A couple of Sunday daytime concerts are also scheduled: the Dime Notes in the Mancini Forum (Sept. 13) and pianist John Lenehan with The Roaring Twenties (20), old films and the music of Gershwin, Fats and the Duke, among others. By October a fuller programme is scheduled. Instrumental workshops continue, with far more live events, including the Fergus McCreadie Trio (14 – Stage 2), Nearly Dan in the main auditorium (17) and Joanna Eden in daytime performance in the Mancini Forum (18). November headliners include Elkie Brooks (12 and 14) and Clare Teal (20). www.stables.org

CONCORDE JAZZ YET TO TAKE OFF

Reports from Eastleigh's Concorde Club are mixed. Jazz events (which the club has promoted for over 60 years) are only part of the mix and, as, for instance, the Ellington Lodge hotel begins to return to normal and a modified programme of mainly tribute shows is scheduled for outdoor performance, jazz to date plays little part in the Concorde's new normal. An appearance by the John Maddocks Jazzmen on Bank Holiday Monday afternoon is doubtless the sign of improvements to come. www.theconcordeclub.com

ANATOMY OF A MURDER COMPETITION

Congratulations to Mr Barry Shaw of Hornchurch who won the competition for a copy of The Criterion Collection's rerelease of classic Ellington-scored film *Anatomy of a Murder*.

The answers to the questions posed last issue were that *Black and Tan* was Duke Ellington's first film, while Saul Bass was responsible for designing the striking publicity.

JAZZ RAG Hep Specials

CD56 Buddy Rich The Legendary 46-48 Orchestra Vol. 2
Titles: Let's Blow, Oh, What It Seemed To Be, Somebody Like You, Handicap plus 16 more.

CD12 Buddy Rich The Legendary 47-48 Orchestra Vol. 1
Titles: I've Got News For You, A Man Could Be A Wonderful Thing, Good Bye, Blue Skies plus 14 more.

CD60 Claude Thornhill The Transcription Performances 1947
Titles: Robbins' Nest, Don't Call It Love, I Knew You When, Love For Love plus 22 more.

CD76 Mary Ann McCall You're Mine You
Titles: Big Wig in the Wigwam, 720 in The Books, Busy As a Bee, Romance in the Dark plus 22 more.

CD71 Sam Donahue Take Five - 1945-47
Titles: Song Of The Seabees, Drunken Sailor, Farewell to Grog, Maid of Amsterdam, Dinah plus 19 more.

All at £4.00 inc. pp-£20 for 5!!

CD1050 Red Norvo Wigwammin'
Titles: Daydreaming (All Night Long), A Cigarette & A Silhouette, (I've Been) Savin' Myself For You, You Leave Me Breathless and 19 more.

CD1065 Sounds of Harlem
Titles: Get Goin', Get Goin', Fore-Thee-Well To Harlem, Tailor Made, The Gold Digger's Song (We're In The Money) and 19 more.

CD1057 Red Nichols Wail of the Winds
Titles: The Hour Of Parting, Our Love, You're So Desirable, The King Kong plus 22 more.

CD1057 Red Norvo Dance of the Octopus
Titles: Knockin' On Wood, Hole In The Wall, In A Mist, Dance Of The Octopus plus 22 more.

CD1055 Benny Goodman Plays Mel Powell
Titles: I'm Not Complainer, Scarecrow, Let the Doorknob Hitcha, Take It plus 18 more.

Payable PayPal or cheque to Hep, 4 Kirkmichael Rd., Pitlochry PH16 5EH www.hepjazz.com

CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT TJCUK

On August 10th a Press Release emerged, entitled, rather forbiddingly, 'Jazz Charity Thinks Business with New CEO.' What it was telling us was that Digby Fairweather was being replaced as CEO of The Jazz Centre UK by Mark Kass who runs the Hive Enterprise Centre in the same Beecroft Gallery as TJCUK. Digby remains as a Trustee of the centre and becomes Creative Director. Given Digby's unflinching devotion to TJCUK, there has to be more to this than meets the eye – and there is, but anyone looking for a palace revolution, a coup d'etat by Mark Kass, can forget it. Digby comes out with a bland, but totally sincere, statement: 'I look forward to supporting my friend Mark Kass and feel sure that he will do a lot to take the project forward over the years to come'. And in conversation he makes it clear that he is very happy to have Mark in place, at one point saying that, if they had advertised nationally, he doubts if they would have found anyone as good.

The story is really about two things. The most important is the immense service that Digby Fairweather has given jazz in this country; the other is the frequent incompatibility of the creative spirit and the bureaucrat. Digby charitably suggests that part of the problem is that he is preoccupied with other things (writing, of course, but mainly playing and practising trumpet), but really it's the dichotomy between the enthusiast who wants to get things done and the controller who does everything by the rule book.

Digby, remarkably, has set up two national jazz bodies where there were none. The National Jazz Archive in Loughton, founded by him in 1988, is now recognised as our national research centre for the music and what is now 'The Jazz Centre UK' in the Beecroft Gallery actually began, via Digby, as an annexe for the NJA to store their duplicate stocks. When Digby fell foul of the NJA's 'collections policy' (over artefacts from the likes

of Humph, Louis and John Dankworth) TJCUK came into being as a separate charity. Now both organisations are, in Digby's words, 'better after the divorce'.

Soon Digby was acquiring additional space in Southend's Beecroft Gallery, setting up a Jazz Heritage Centre, building a team of 25 dedicated volunteers, showing jazz films, staging concerts, helping editor Phillip Waterhouse to produce an excellent Newsletter and generally developing the new department. After a successful National Lottery application all seemed set fair for progression to the sort of comprehensive national jazz centre that was Digby's dream. But, even before the coronavirus blighted TJCUK just like everywhere else, he realised that all was not well. To put it simply: after five years of protracted administrative differences - some minor, some less so - with several local authority officers, Digby became aware that a change of CEO had become

necessary for his organization to move forward smoothly.

And there was the perfect candidate on the fourth floor of the Beecroft: Mark Kass has worked with the officers of Southend Borough Council for years. He is also a (former) Trustee of the National Jazz Archive, directs the East London Jazz Festival, and runs his own jazz radio station. The perfect choice!

It seems sad that, after his prodigious work on behalf of TJCUK, Digby has not felt able to enjoy his position in a glorious progress to CEO Emeritus, but let's look on the bright side. Digby is able to concentrate more on playing, including fulfilling his record contact with Acrobat; TJCUK is firmly based, with a new CEO, a great team and canny Creative Director, for when the world comes out of hibernation; and, best of all, Digby and Mark both have ambitious projects for the centre which remain, thus far, on the secret list.



OTHER NEW RELEASES



Callum Au / Claire Martin
SONGS AND STORIES
CD: STUCO 20082 / LP: STALP 20081
Claire Martin (voc), 62 musicians Orchestra and 21 musicians Big Band recorded in London, produced and arranged by Callum Au, Conducted by Mark Nightingale.



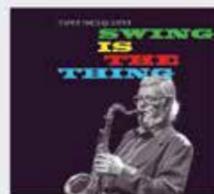
Carsten Meinert
MUSICTRAIN
CD: STUCO 20022 / LP: STALP 20021
C. Meinert, J. J. Gjørdsted, E. Kroner, M. Hove, J. Nehammer, O. Matthiesen, T. Backhausen, P. Dørge, L. Schipper, H. Hove, O. Streenberg, C. Sjøkvist, B. Clausen, J. Finsen, N. O. Gudme, C. Gauquin.



Ibrahim Electric
TIME MACHINE
CD: STUCO 20042 / LP: STALP 20041
Niclas Knudsen (g), Jeppe Tuxen (organ), Stefan Pasborg (d).



Sinne Eeg & The Danish Radio Big Band
WE'VE JUST BEGUN
CD: STUCO 19132 / LP: STALP 19131
Sinne Eeg (voc), The Danish Radio Big Band, conducted by Nikolai Bøgelund. Produced by Andre Fischer and Sinne Eeg.



Jesper Thilo Quartet
SWING IS THE THING
CD: STUCO 19142
Jesper Thilo (ts), Søren Kristiansen (p), Daniel Franck (b), Frands Riltberg (tr)

Stunt Records

Stunt Records, Sundance Music / Gothersgade 107 / DK-1123 Copenhagen / Denmark / sundance@sundance.dk / www.sundance.dk

Distribution: Cadiz Music, www.cadizentertainment.com, +44 (0)20 8692 3555

WHAT I DID IN LOCKDOWN

It would be foolish to imagine that this is the end of lockdown, but, certainly in the UK, musicians are beginning to emerge blinking into the sunlight to play the occasional gig, their first for maybe five months, and promoters and festival organisers are desperately consulting diaries, wondering about how soon they can start filling them. It seemed a good time to take stock and ask a selection of musicians, promoters and writers how they had spent lockdown so far and how they saw the future.



Photo by Lance Liddle

Abbie Finn Trio

LANCE LIDDLE
Award-winning website, Bebop Spoken Here.

From a jazz point of view, *Bebop Spoken Here* has been busier than ever – almost to breaking point! Whereas, in pre lockdown times we'd have maybe one or two gigs to preview/review, now there are countless livestreams from all over the world! Some of the American ones look very inviting, but because of time differences I am usually in bed by then. Quite often, if I do stay up, things don't work out. Not that this is unusual. I watch a lot of gigs on Facebook and, frequently, I give up in despair at the infuriating stop/start freeze moments. YouTube seems to work better – just...

On top of all this, the CDs pile up in the passage, the downloads arrive every ten minutes and, occasionally, some of them are jazz-related. I've long given up

replying and saying, 'We don't do rap, hip-hop, punk, funk, skunk, junk,' because we sometimes do!

Last weekend (written on July 28) was good with the Abbie Finn Trio playing an open air gig in the grounds of a Newcastle church. It was well-attended and the band probably picked up more in donations than they do at the average pub/club gig! Fortunately, it was a warm and sunny day bookended by two cold and rainy ones – who says that the power of prayer doesn't work? Well, my bookie for one!

So, like all of us, I don't know what the future holds but, as long as there's music ...

DENNY ILETT
Guitarist/director Bristol Jazz and Blues Festival

At Bristol Jazz & Blues festival, we were forced to cancel our March event which was heartbreaking.



Denny Ilett

We looked at rescheduling for October, but with venues not able to run at full capacity we've now decided to postpone and hold the event next March.

For myself, I was able to continue teaching my Bristol and Bath University students and I was grateful to also be involved in some remote recording sessions. At the start of lockdown I decided that I'd feel better about being stuck at home if I adopted the role of 'amateur musician' so I've been learning the trumpet. I practise 3-4 hours a day which, weirdly, feels more proactive than practising the guitar right now although I do manage an hour or two to stop myself going backwards! I've also had time to go through my large collection of vintage jazz biographies, essays and criticism along with a LOT of listening to my vinyl collection too. I've rediscovered so much great music from King Oliver to King Crimson!

I'm starting to pick up some work for August and September but all of it is either Switzerland or Germany. I feel fortunate that the 20 years I spent touring with Lillian Boutté enabled me to make connections outside the UK.

As for the future, who knows? I have faith that we'll get back to normal, but I've no idea how long that will take. I just hope

that all the great musicians I know are hanging in there! Take care everyone.

DIGBY FAIRWEATHER
Trumpeter/bandleader/ Creative Director TJCUK

For me the result has been an enforced period of 'off the road' time – not altogether unwelcome maybe – and perhaps for some other performers too (opinions please?) who, like it or not, have had to park their cars, stow their charts and – hopefully - see the first few compensatory pounds from the Government arrive in their bank accounts.

The break has allowed me to go on developing The Jazz Centre UK's latest Heritage Lottery project called 'Celebrating the 100 Club; bringing history to life'. The 100 is the longest-running music venue in the world, and our book called *Ace of Clubs* telling its story from 1944 to 2020 in 34,000 words of oral history and pictures is out this Autumn. I'll keep you informed!

Finishing our project has also meant learning how to interview on Zoom; watching great big bands (including saxophonist Tom Smith's) somehow playing together on-screen from single rooms in their separate houses, and discovering Jamulus. This new computer-app with only the addition of an Ethernet cable to your PC ('did that come



Digby Fairweather

Photo by Bradley Pearce



Simon Spillett

Photo by
Merlin Daleman

outta me?' as Louis would have said!) allows jam sessions and rehearsals to be conducted on-screen at home too with just a pair of headphones for company.

It's a new world alright! All we need to know in Ira Gershwin's words (or very nearly) is, 'How long will this be going on?'. How about it, Johnny Mercer? 'Sunday, Monday (but hopefully not always...'

SIMON SPILLETT

**Tenor saxophonist/
jazz writer**

Lockdown. The pluses and minuses? Hmm? First, let's get the downside over with. I did my last gig on March 8th and then following the government's announcement of lockdown lost 42 gigs, including my big band's headlining appearance at the Swanage Jazz Festival.

Some of those that remain in the diary up to the end of the year (including a further big band appearance at the Herts Jazz Festival) have also been scrubbed (as were the vast majority of my teaching activities since March). I daren't even calculate the actual loss of earnings. I'm not even sure I've taken on board the impact of such a blow but like every musician I've spoken to over the past few months I'm taking one day at a time. It's been the biggest psychological challenge I've ever known in nearly 25 years as a professional musician. Indeed, I didn't even pick up my saxophone for two straight months from March, so demoralised did I feel. I'm not alone; you'd be surprised how even the most positive and outgoing of jazz performers have taken this enforced hiatus.

On the plus side, I have been writing a lot; three liner note commissions from Rhythm and Blues Records (Don Rendell/Ian Carr, Ronnie Scott, The Spontaneous Music Ensemble), an online article on the impact of Social Distancing on live performance, some record reviews and – I'm very pleased to say – a new book *Upward, Backwards and Free: A Journey Into Jazz*, a collection of essays on jazz recordings that influenced me in my teens. That kept me occupied. That and lots of listening to albums.

On the musical side, once I returned to practising I found that my mind had become somewhat clearer with regard to the kind of things I want to play in the future. I think the break actually did me some good; without the constant pressure of weekly gigs I was able to take stock and identify my weaknesses and strengths. I've been playing a lot of piano too, and I find that's also been immeasurably helpful in focusing my mind. I also find it very relaxing.

My first gig back is at Ronnie Scott's on August 3rd (some comeback!) and a few other things are trickling in – gigs with Pete Lemer, one with Tina May – but I'm treating everything with caution. I'm hoping that my autumn gigs will still happen (including my big band's London debut at the 100 Club in November) but we'll have to see. I certainly can't see the business – at my end of it at any rate – returning to anything like normal until next year. And I really do fear that some 'grass roots' gigs may never return; you only have to think of the age of a whole swathe of the traditional



Claire Martin

jazz audience. As for the impact on the economics, who knows? Will smaller audiences mean smaller fees? Is the 'old' model of promoting gigs now completely untenable? Who can say? As someone who started his own 'club' earlier this year (The Jazz Bunker in Chorleywood, Hertfordshire) I've experienced a little of both sides of things and, as yet, have no idea whether the rest of the planned programme for 2020 will go ahead.

This pandemic has forced us all to change and I'm not at all certain how my own future will pan out or indeed if I will continue to be able to make music my living. I really do hope so. We've been told repeatedly that this crisis had been a great leveller. In theory yes but I don't see true parity in the profession. That's nothing new, of course, but I'd hate anyone to think that just because someone is an established 'name' they're impervious.

One further thing; I feel that the way musicians interact with one another has undergone both good and bad changes. 'Virtual' performances were a useful stopgap, of course, but I worry certain quarters of the music business will see this as a permanent modus operandi. I also fear a backlash against the arts in general, following press opinion that music is a non-essential profession. We need that like a hole in the head!

Like all musicians, I've got a million and one observations to make about the current situation but as I said we can't know anything for certain just yet. Except maybe that jazz will survive somehow.

CLAIRE MARTIN

Award-winning singer
At first I was still teaching a lot of classes on Zoom as I teach at IC Theatre school in Brighton, so that was a huge learning curve. Now I am doing 1-2-1 classes on Zoom and also I've been doing some masterclasses/interviews via this medium. It's not perfect, but it's been a lifesaver, I think, for many of us now that our live work has all been cancelled. I've also started the *Croydon Omelette* live on Facebook with co-host Pete Long which is a jazz show with clips of the greats combined with our chat and some larks. We have a competition every week and it's starting to get a cult following! It's such fun as Pete is one of the funniest and most informed musicians I have ever met and it's been a joy getting it all together. It's 9-10pm on Sunday night - tune in!

Luckily for me, the amazing arranger and musician Callum Au released his epic orchestral/big band album in June so thanks to him I've had quite a bit of jazz press coverage with reviews and it's been a brilliant experience. I've been listening to the American pianist Christian Sands a lot and also to Chris Potter and my dear friend Ian Shaw who has a lovely album out called *What's New*.

For me there's not much sign of coming out of lockdown. I've done a streamed gig with Ian Shaw from Ronnie's and I do have a few 'might happens' for 2020, but I've written the rest of the year off with regard to live shows. We are all reeling from this virus.

I do think gigs 'as we used to know them' will be a thing of



Scott Yanow

the past until they find a vaccine for Covid-19. Singers especially are getting it in the neck due to our instrument, so sadly I can't imagine how long it will take to get us back to even anything near the way it used to be. I try not to think about it as it's quite overwhelming to imagine how and when we will all get out of this. Smaller clubs and gigs in pubs which is our music's life blood will be worst hit. It's all so very sad; I hope we can all hang on.

SCOTT YANOW

Author of 11 jazz books

Unlike waiters, shoe salesmen, airline personnel, or nearly everyone else, I have been very fortunate to be able to continue my jazz journalist career as before. CDs still come out, artists still need liner notes and press releases, magazines want reviews and articles, and the music never stops, at least on recordings. While a few projects got postponed, others have taken their place and, amazingly enough, I am as busy as ever while always

looking for more to write about. Although I have not seen a live performance since late-February (I have used that spare time to start writing what I hope will be my twelfth book), otherwise life is still a nonstop jazz festival.

In California, there has been a resurgence of Covid due to the incompetent federal government in the US, and the carelessness and selfishness of many who are negligent about wearing masks. But since I live in a rural area an hour outside of Hollywood and Santa Monica, it is easy for me to avoid direct contact with people. I do not see the situation changing until at least next year, and am resigned to a lack of festivals, concerts, clubs and record stores to go to. Fortunately my stereo and computer show no signs of old age, and I'll never run out of exciting jazz to listen to and write about.

I'm just grateful that the *Jazz Rag* is continuing as before.

BRUCE ADAMS

Jazz trumpeter
If someone had told me in mid-March, that I would be spending my birthday in July walking round a garden centre, I would have told them that they had taken leave of their senses. Well, how wrong was I?

Jazz has always been the more precarious edge of the music business up until now, but I find myself no worse placed than my friends in the commercial sector. Being a jazz musician prepares you for a lot. Kicks in the teeth are usually at the top of the list. For my part, I've tried to treat the lay off as a bit of a sabbatical

and concentrate on practising things I always felt I could do better, but could never find time for.

Regarding the future. Just prior to the lockdown I signed a new horn deal with Eclipse trumpets, a British firm. Through this I became the proud owner of a beautiful long model cornet. This has inspired me to expand on my *Sweet and Hot* show I did a few years ago, revisiting the music of some of the great cornet players of yesteryear. I'm currently working on hopefully producing an album. Alan Barnes is always writing, so I'm always trying out some of Alan's music. There's never a shortage of music to practise. Because of my grandchildren I've become an expert on the intricacies of playing *Nellie The Elephant* and the *Death March from Star Wars*. Also serenading the cows on my daughter and son-in-law's farm.

Frustration is a tough one to deal with as hanging out with your musical friends and colleagues is a huge part of our life. It's almost as important as playing. You miss the constant exchange of ideas and the humanity of playing with like-minded individuals. That's why for me the constant recording with backing tracks and posting them on social media is not an option. I find that they're only a tool, albeit a useful one, to help keep you in shape, but not music, or even a poor substitute. I've been fortunate to have spent a lot of time over the past 35 years playing with some world class accompanists. People who could make you surprise yourself. You could say I've been spoiled.

I'm fortunate to live in a small jazz enclave with Alan Barnes, Simon Spillett, Tina May and Arnie Somogyi as neighbours, so I don't have to travel far for words of wisdom, comfort or to be insulted.

I suspect that things will never be quite the same regarding work. The only thing I feel is that jazz musicians never went into our business for an easy life. I'm hoping that we can weather the storm and leave a business for the next generation. This will take a huge effort from musicians and promoters alike, and a lot of mutual co-operation. We have



Debbie Jones

Photo by
Merlin Daleman

to grasp the nettle and support each other.

I for one have no intention of giving up.

DEBBIE JONES

Singer in Tipitina/choir leader
When lockdown began, it was the day before Mother's Day, so we decided to video *You Are A Blessing* and upload it to Facebook, a dedication to everyone that was missing their mums. It all went well and gave us something to do for a few hours on that first night (took a few takes - giggling, wrong lyrics, cat joining us!)

Then the week later, after having lots of requests for songs, we ventured into the strange world of Facebook live! Playing in our living room to no audience did feel odd, but having people commenting and listening really made us feel like we weren't alone at all. We had some great little sessions and even managed the first few without waking our 6 year old boy Zak up. We also raised around £1000 for our local hospital thanks to our lovely fans.

Matt and Phred's Manchester asked us to do a session for them, and Zak decided that sleep wasn't an option - he'd seen Justin setting up the equipment and decided there was no way he was missing out on all the fun. So we had to start a little late with Zak in his PJs and a tambourine! It was a lot of fun, despite me stressing at him on occasion.



Bruce Adams

Photo by Bradley Pearce



Strange what you have to do in these times!

I also have been running my choir via Zoom sessions. It's interesting as we can't all sing live together, but at least we can still learn new songs, see each other and have fun and sing. Zoom teaching is also a new concept for me, but it seems to work ok when the technology is nice to us! I've been busy arranging choral music and I've also written a few bits and pieces for Tipitina. It's very hard to stay motivated as time is going on, and, as much as I'm enjoying working virtually, it's not the same.

I miss the rapport with an audience, I miss the vibe of being on a stage, I miss working with other great musicians and feeding off them musically. I miss the festival fever that comes in the summer, I miss meeting new fans. I miss everything about being a live musician (apart from setting up the PA).

It's such a hard time for us all and I know this time will pass, I just wish it would hurry up and pass. Will things ever be the same as they were? Who knows? - I'm trying to stay positive. Whenever I've felt low in the past, Dr. Gig has always been there to help out.....

Dr Virtual Gig will have to make do for a little while longer.

JERRY ROCHE Executive at Dot Time Records

I am most grateful to have been able to spend more time with my daughters, Mighty Quinn & Emerson. They have helped me immeasurably, keeping me sane with lots of laughs, while they learned the difficulties of home schooling.

The lockdown was very hard in relation to having to change our scheduled releases on the fly. This was fairly easy for the Legends, but contemporary artists like John Minnock, Nicole Zuraitis and Bret Reilly were extremely difficult. These artists have their heart and soul in their release and to have to wait or reimagine a project without performing live is painful. Our extraordinary PR whiz Lydia Liebman handled the fluid action with amazing aplomb.

I've been stacking projects up and have recently started back in the studio, working on the next Lackerschmid/Baker with Coryell, Buster & Tony Williams, I've been working on Tristano Duo Sessions LP, signed The Kaleidoscope Quintet, and scheduled a live recording featuring Dave Liebman & Joe Lovano for November release. I'll also be in the studio with Roni Ben-Hur for an early 2021 Dot Time Release.

I've been able to get some reading in, *Gonzo Girl* by Cheryl Della Pietra, *Can't Be Satisfied* by Robert Gordon and I finished my copy of *Don't Worry 'Bout The Bear* by Jim and Ron Simpson.

I hope this doesn't change the way I do business. I really enjoy travelling and seeing my friends in the UK, as well as France and our office and all my friends in Bremen, Germany.

ALAN BARNES Saxophonist/arranger/ composer

Last March, all musicians had the horrible experience of watching the diary gradually empty.

However, most of us are adept at staying positive and making the best of things.

Despite my income dropping drastically there have been some good things.

I've caught up on sleep for the first time in decades and I don't have a massive petrol bill every month. Regular healthy food helps, as does my policy of getting up as soon as I wake so I don't start thinking about things.

I've changed my views on teaching via Zoom and Skype and have had really good results with students via both. I've purchased a microphone and audio interface and have played on a few tracks - most memorably for pianist Jeremy Monteiro's birthday celebrations in Singapore and, for the Brecon Jazz website, with the Japanese pianist Atsuko Shimada whom I've never met. I've done workshops and talks for Watermill Jazz and Suffolk Jazz School, taken part in Clark Tracey's *Jazz Lockdown* quizzes (fourth series currently being recorded) and performed virtual gigs for Birmingham Jazz, Greensands Jazz and the Reform Club.

I try to keep in shape playing with backing tracks on Youtube - Graham Harvey and Jeremy Brown have recorded some superb ones that I strongly recommend.

I'm also working on a new *David Copperfield Suite* for my octet - we still haven't really played the *Jazz Portraits* pieces that I wrote before lockdown, so I'll have a lot of new music to present.

There are some signs of getting back to some kind of normal. Gigs are in the book in Guildford, Norwich and Swindon and a live stream from Norden Farm. Birmingham Jazz Festival is also a strong possibility in October.

I can't wait to get back to regular performing - when it does happen, I'll keep on the on-line teaching and even recording from home, but for the real jazz experience, the musicians and listeners need to be interacting in the same (socially distanced if necessary) place.

See you all on the other side.



MIKE GORDON Scarborough Jazz Club and Jazz Festival

When you've been putting on live jazz 50 weeks of the year for over 35 years you don't just give up without a fight. Only one week after closing our doors due to Covid-19 restrictions, Scarborough Jazz Club launched a new web presence - the Lockdown Club.

The idea of having a weekly jazz DJ mix during lockdown and keeping the club alive in spirit came from drummer, DJ and music educator Rowan Oliver, and with help from local design studio Electric Angel, quickly grew into the idea of a weekly online magazine, also sharing links to some of the online jazz content we hoped might spring up during lockdown. The primary



aim was to encourage support of musicians who we realised were really going to struggle over the coming months.

It was also an opportunity to share music by local musicians, many of whom regularly play at the club and to continue our recently launched initiative of providing support slots for young musicians in the area through our New Jazz Generation programme. In fact much of the content of The Lockdown Club has been written by Dylan Riley, a 16 year old multi-instrumentalist from Scarborough who has also featured in some of the video performances shared over lockdown with such as local teenage jazz-funksters Purple Cheesecake and the town's Hip-Hop Jazz Jam. Occasional guest DJ mixes and archive footage have completed the weekly editions which go live every Wednesday at 8.45pm - the time live music would usually start at the club.

This has been an opportunity to explore new ground too. Can a niche music like jazz reach out to a wider audience online? Our visitor numbers suggest so with online listeners sometimes double what we would see at the club - perhaps the DJ element, including guest mixes, and a more open-ended idea of what constitutes jazz have helped spread the word. This gives us hope for the future and is food for thought about how we might package and promote the club in the future, particularly to bolster our loyal audience with some new faces.

Will we be returning to live music any time soon? It is impossible to predict at the moment although in a town with as strong a music scene as

Scarborough, there are already pockets of activity as people negotiate the new normal. In the meantime we are keeping that Wednesday 8.45pm slot alive in people's minds for when we hope to return to live jazz. The Lockdown Club can be visited at www.jazzlockdown.club

DAVE NEWTON

Jazz pianist
FEBRUARY Eight nights playing at a festival in a five star hotel in Tenerife with old friends and new. Couldn't have been a nicer start to the year but for the arrival of two unusual happenings. A sandstorm blew in from Africa which lasted three days and turned the air into a red soup and then the coronavirus flew in from China and landed at a hotel just up the road from us resulting in much talk of quarantine but thankfully, nothing more. A close encounter; I thought at the time, but glad to get home where that sort of thing never happens.

MARCH Felpham, Folkstone and Frampton, then two in London (gigs that is) and the rumours of a lockdown are suddenly announced as a reality and my last night out for twenty weeks was in the company of five other pianists playing at the Steinway Festival at the Pizza Express in Soho. The mood was sombre to say the least but the Dog and Duck was still open so although we felt like the band on the *Titanic*, we at least had the comfort of knowing there was a liferaft just round the corner.

APRIL I started with good intentions and wrote a couple of new pieces and recorded them onto my ancient laptop with some marvellous new software I'd forgotten I had. Then we got a dog. And that was the end of that. I'd been getting



requests to record solo piano accompaniments for singers and saxophonists to sing and play along to, but by the time 'Getdown' (not his real name) had fallen asleep for the night, I was too tired to lift one finger let alone ten.

MAY Nothing happened.

JUNE Relatively speaking, quite a lot happened this month. A very nice man from New Malden has given me loan of a rather marvellous electric piano or 'Sootyphone' as recently sadly departed Don Weller used to call it and I have to say it has changed everything. Every day, I can't wait to play it. It's like having the Wigmore Hall in an upstairs bedroom. And then a gig came in. A socially distanced Zoom affair with A Barnes Esq. and A Somogyi for the Reform Club. Things felt on the up and up for all of two days at least. No sooner than the new keyboard was wired up for all things internet, the aforementioned ancient laptop (free with a pair of shoes in 2007) died in its sleep. Blessed with less memory than the fridge apparently, it at least afforded me access to my recording software so for now it's back to pen and paper, providing the dog hasn't eaten them.

JULY A gig came in and was then cancelled three hours later.

AUGUST My first live stream gig with Adrian Cox, Denny Ilett and Fergus Ireland. And that brings things up to date. Teaching restarts at the newly renamed Leeds Conservatoire in September; whether in person on online only time will tell. However, I imagine that like most other musicians I know and anybody else in the arts for that matter, it's food and shelter that

are going to be the most pressing concerns for a few months to come I fear.

PAULA DUNCAN Marketing Manager, Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival

After making the difficult, but inevitable, decision to cancel the 43rd Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival in April this year, we wanted to offer audiences something to lift them in difficult times, and give the musicians (whose livelihoods have been put on hold) something to work towards.

From July 23 to 26 July this year, we presented a variety of concerts, documentaries, kid shows and even a quiz via our Facebook channel and our website. We learned a lot about the amount of work that needs to go into putting on a digital festival, and this will inform conversations about process and activity going forwards.

The feedback we received commended us on the work, but many expressed a wish for live performance to return as soon as it was safe to do so. As impressed as audiences were with the digital output, and the convenience of watching at home, there is no replacement for the experience of watching live in a venue with an atmosphere and an audience.

However, there were several comments from audience members who hoped we continued some digital activity even when we are allowed to return to live performances. We hope to return to live gigs as soon as we are able, but accept that we may need to support these with digital output for the foreseeable future.

ANNIE ROSS 1930-2020

VAL WISEMAN and DIGBY FAIRWEATHER pay tribute to ANNIE ROSS who died in New York City four days short of her 90th birthday – and recall their own close encounters with the great jazz singer.

You never forget that special moment when you meet someone whose talent you admire and respect and my first encounter with Annie Ross, singer, lyricist and actress who died in July aged 89, was in a jazz club in London back in the 1960s.

I moved there in 1963 to join the legendary Monty Sunshine and his band, a move I often described as stepping out of a black and white movie into glorious technicolour! London was certainly the place to be seen and heard with its rich diversity of creative talent jostling for pole position and my self appointed guide around town was none other than British Blues Queen, Beryl Bryden! I was her replacement in Monty's band. Larger than life and big on personality, Beryl knew everyone.

One particular evening, she took me on a whistle-stop tour of nightclubs to see some of her showbiz chums in action. We looked in on Peter Cook's newly launched Establishment Club in Soho and the Blue Angel where Noel Harrison, son of Rex, was

performing and then it was on to Annie's Room. This former Lyons tea-room in Covent Garden was now the hippest jazz club in town run by Annie Ross. Born in Surrey to Scottish vaudeville parents and reared in Los Angeles by her jazz-singing aunt, Ella Logan, Annie was already an established star in plays, TV and musicals on both sides of the Atlantic. But it was Annie Ross the jazz singer I was eager to see. Still only in her early thirties, she had earned a formidable reputation as one part of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, the sensational jazz vocal trio who had transformed the concept of vocalese into an art-form. Annie's solo performance was no less impressive. Like a true jazzier, she took risks and the consummate ease of delivery on everything from torch songs to breakneck tempos made a lasting impression on me.

I discovered something else that night. Both singers were closely linked to Billie Holiday. Beryl had met her in Paris in 1954 and had taken those iconic dressing room shots of Billie on

her last visit to Britain in 1959. Visibly frail and painfully thin, she appeared on the TV show *Chelsea at Nine*. Seeing that performance in retrospect is all the more poignant knowing she died that year. Annie too befriended Billie, depping for her when she was too ill to perform and nursing her in her final days.

Some 30 years passed before I caught up with Annie again. Now based in New York, she was touring the UK and appearing in the then Birmingham arm of Ronnie Scott's. By now I was paying my own tribute to Billie Holiday in the show *Lady Sings the Blues* which gave us plenty to talk about! It was good to hear her, too. There was a lively *Saturday Night Fish Fry* and a heart-stopping *Lush Life* and so it came as no surprise when in 2002 Annie was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the BT British Jazz Awards held in London's Pizza on the Park. Presenting Annie's award was her friend Lionel Bart and I remember being humbly asked to be introduced to him by

actor John Thomson, who found fame as the smarmy spoof jazz presenter in *The Fast Show*. Nice!

Sharing the bill with Annie at the Marbella Jazz Festival in 2005 was another special moment. The first half featured *Lady Sings the Blues* with an all star line-up of British Jazz Award winners which included Bruce Adams, who recalled growing up round the corner from Annie's family in Glasgow! Annie was the star of the show and, although the vocal gymnastics were no longer featured, she still retained all the subtle inflections that only an artist of her calibre can convey.

The last time we met was in New York in 2006. She was performing in a little club in Greenwich Village. It reminded me of Annie's Room where we first met all those years ago. The magic was still there and her legacy can never be underestimated. Annie Ross was the real deal.

VAL WISEMAN

I must confess that – for once – it wasn't the eyes but the legs that had it. Annie Ross, perched on an upright piano with the adoring gazes of Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks looking up at her, was my introduction, one Friday night after school, to *la grande maitresse* of vocalese and my photographic overture to *Sing a Song of Basie*; one of the

greatest jazz records of all time and hanging in the window of my local informal jazz record shop run by Harry Strauss. 'Albums are like children', she said years later but (just maybe) this was the one of which Annie herself was – if only by a semiquaver – most proud. Its music turned my head around and the super-E concert to which Annie's voice effortlessly

climbed on the concluding chord of *Down for the Count* (track 3 side 2 back in those vinyl days) kept me awake for the next three nights of my weekend. When I met her years later on an interview mission for the BBC I told her and she autographed my album 'Dear Digby - Welcome to insomnia. With much love! Annie.'

Meeting her in person for the first time that day in London, the first impression, for me, was the *coiffured* mop of striking red hair topping a neat oval face that was, by turn, smiling, questioning and occasionally somehow rueful as she pottered round her kitchen-diner patiently answering my questions. For much of her life Annie commuted between the UK and the USA and if I remember correctly she had been filming for Robert Altman's 1992 *Short Cuts* movie. We talked about the 'rushes' ('dailies' she tactfully corrected

me); about Lambert Hendricks and Ross (LHR) of course; about her appearance as Rosie, Judy Garland's little sister in the 1943 movie *Presenting Lily Mars* - with Fay Bainter playing her mother Mrs Thornaway ('She played everybody's Mama!', we agreed); and there was brief talk of Manhattan Transfer whose 1985 album *Vocalese* had been, to my ears, a superbly-achieved contribution to the heritage. Perhaps Annie hadn't heard it, but her reaction to mention of the group was (to put it nicely) muted; the right-hand side of her upper-lip semi-lifted in an oft-seen *moue* that was, to put it frankly, sexy. I left the flat wishing we could have talked for longer and feel sadder today that I was never offered a copy of our taped conversation. But that was the way the BBC did things.

I already knew a lot about Annie and in retrospect (as



Photo by
Merlin Daleman

with other of my interviews) it was perhaps a pity that I hadn't made that plainer. There were subjects it was best to avoid of course: her affair with drummer Kenny Clarke in 1949 which had produced a son (Kenny Junior) and later another dangerous liaison with comedian Lennie Bruce. I knew about the addictions (including heroin) throughout her career which, so it was said, broke up Lambert Hendricks and Ross in London in 1962 (to me her one-word reason was 'egos'). And then there was her marriage to British actor Sean Lynch; a no-good whom she married in 1963 and divorced in 1975; who died soon after, and whose sole contribution to her musical heritage was playing jaw's harp on one track (*Country Pie*) of her 1964 album (probably titled with a sprinkling of optimism) *You and Me, Baby*. There were things I had yet to discover too; amongst them her creation at the age of fourteen of a competition-winning song for Capitol Records called *Let's Fly*, a tune so appealing (and also harmonically daring!) that it would have graced Tadd Dameron and which was recorded by her friend Johnny Mercer with the Pied Pipers a year later in 1945. But of course, there was *Twisted* (a story told so often that I may have avoided it); her cool recreation of *Charleston Alley* on the classic LHR album *The Hottest New Group in Jazz* (decorated with the harmonized trumpet of a close friend Harry 'Sweets' Edison); the

haunting solo outing on Buck Clayton's *Fiesta in Blue* from *Sing a Song*; the extraordinary almost mouse-pitch altissimo notes that concluded the album's final track *Avenue C* which had inspired the great Cleo Laine to aim for the sky and fly – all these were things that rang through my auditory memory like chimes.

After our BBC interview the next time I saw her, a few years later, was at a British Jazz Awards ceremony, hosted by one of her lifelong champions Jim Simpson and held at the now-legendary Pizza Express, 10 Dean Street, London. This was at the time that *The Fast Show*, starring Charlie Higson and Paul Whitehouse, was the hit of television and – probably misguidedly – I decided to emcee the ceremony using many of the show's most famous catchphrases; no doubt to the tedium of actor-comedian John Thomson who among others played the humorously-obnoxious stripe-suited jazz club host on the show; who had heard all the lines several million times before and who was Jim's guest of honour. More significant to me was that in a corner of the club were three more guests of indisputable honour who probably were totally bemused by my new-wave comedic references: the legendary Lionel Bart (whose musicals had included the incomparable *Oliver*, *Blitz*, *Twang* and more) sitting alongside Art Farmer and Annie who had worked together over 40 years

before in Lionel Hampton's big band. Its trumpet section (as Annie loved to recall) had been completed by Clifford Brown and Quincy Jones and Wardell Gray's recording of *Farmer's Market* in January 1952 had co-featured Art Farmer before being transformed by Annie into one of her most celebrated vocalese *tours-de-force* just ten months later in October. By now I had met both of them at the BBC but somehow the biggest celebrity visitors of all seemed to have enclosed themselves in a world of their own and it seemed somehow invasive to re-introduce myself. Now of course I wish I had, but it's too late now.

The next time I met her was on a big cruise for P and O organized by my friend, fellow-broadcaster and bandleader, the clarinettist Chris Walker. The cruise, on the *Oriana* was to feature myself (with Chris's Swingtet), a quintet featuring trumpeter Bruce Adams, The Best of British Jazz headed by Kenny Baker with Roy Wilcox, Don Lusher, Brian Lemon, Lennie Bush and Jack Parnell - and Annie. As guest player I was offered a first-class four-berth cabin which just happened to be opposite my heroine and happily unpacked, dreaming of three weeks of accidental meetings. But it wasn't to be. Chris had brought on board a Swingtet member who with his entire family had ended up billeted in a minuscule cabin in crew quarters; the last stop past steerage. A rebellion had ensued and, Chris asked, would I

very much mind changing cabins? I obliged, but was sadly aware that amid the multiple decks of our ship the likelihood of those chance meetings was now only a few in a million.

But we did meet here and there, notably at an on-deck jam session where Annie sat at the bar nearby, sipping a lunchtime drink in the sun. She liked my playing, she said, and we talked about *Let's Fly* and about Johnny Mercer who she remembered (as did many of his closest friends) as an adorable man and incomparable songwriter, but a 'bad drunk'. In the ship's cinema we were asked to co-introduce a showing of Clint Eastwood's movie about Charlie Parker called *Bird*. Annie had been close friends with both Parker and (especially) Dizzy and – having lived in the fast lane of their personal circles – was unlikely to be greatly impressed by their recreation in what amounted to little more than a Hollywood cartoon.

The last time I saw Annie was in her last musical home, The Metropolitan Room, a couple of years ago in New York City. At the Metropolitan, with her longterm supporters, pianist Tardo Hammer, cornettist Warren Vache and their rhythm section, she sang to an adoring salon of admirers; rusty-voiced now (and with an occasional interruptive cough) but still essaying everything from profound ballads to bebop fripples including the Carroll-Gillespie *Ooh-Shoo-bee-Do-bee* vocally shared with Warren, her perfect straight-man. Afterwards we said hello and chatted briefly amid a circle of friends, and I asked if she had completed the autobiography she spoke of to an interviewer in 2003 (the interview, like several of Annie's Metropolitan performances, is on Youtube). But she preferred not to say and my phone-call later to friend Warren, offering to fly to New York to help her complete it, met with her courteous but firm refusal. I hope they find a manuscript nonetheless. Annie's life flowed like a bloodline through seven decades of central jazz history and the loss of her story would be a genuine cause for the blues.

DIGBY FAIRWEATHER



Annie Ross with
Val Wiseman

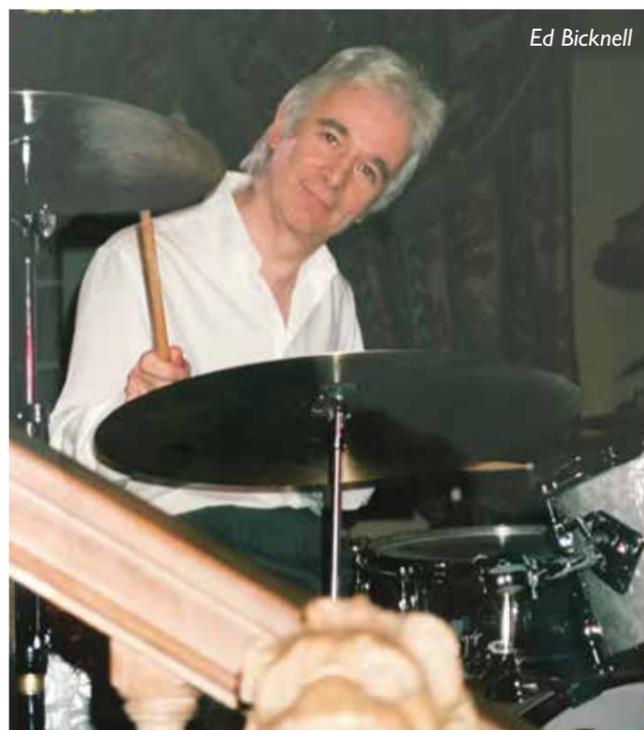
ED AND ELVIN

ED BICKNELL is the former longtime manager of Dire Straits, Mark Knopfler, Gerry Rafferty, Bryan Ferry and Scott Walker. Primarily a jazz fan and failed drummer, he was involved with Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club for many years as a 'friend' to the club in times of financial need, consultant on artist bookings and advisor on the menu (studiously ignored). Through the club he became a close friend of drummer **ELVIN JONES** and his wife Keiko. Here is his story of that friendship.

Every Friday Ronnie's surviving partner and club owner Pete King, John Ellson who booked many of the acts (unpaid), the club's lawyer Wally Hauser (unpaid) and myself (definitely unpaid) would meet for dinner at an Italian restaurant on Romilly Street in Soho. Not a single Italian worked there. The owner-cum-chef-cum-waiter-cum-maitre'd came from Ealing and the food was almost as bad as the club's, but not quite – which is why we went there.

Above the restaurant was a small brothel and if you went in the wrong door you'd get more than a cannelloni. The place was full of Soho's remaining gangsters, a rather sad looking bunch, and an ageing Danny La Rue was a frequent customer.

Still, it didn't matter; it was in La Cappanina that I became friends with Elvin Jones and his wife Keiko, as in friends, not music biz acquaintances.



One night in La Cap I decided it was time to get over being a star worshipper and engage him in conversation.

'Elvin, I know thousands of words have been written about this, but when you developed your style with John Coltrane, was that because you heard the music that way or was it some kind of accident?'

Pathetic, just pathetic! I felt like a male groupie and there's nothing worse.

Elvin grinned. His white teeth flashed across his black face. He spoke in a low, soft growl.

'Well, when I came out of the army, I was playing in this band in Detroit with Jimmy Forrest and we had to play four hours a night. So I figured if I just threw in the odd bass drum beat, my leg wouldn't hurt so much. Then I thought, well, if I play like that with my hands, my arms wouldn't hurt, so that's how it started.' 'So you're telling me you play that

way to stop your arms and legs from hurting. Are you jiving me?'

'Grrrrrr!'

He grinned again.

Pete King chimed in.

'I don't faaaackin believe it. I just don't faaaaackin believe it.'

I went every night, every time he came, both sets. Keiko was also his roadie and set up his pink champagne Yamaha kit and even tuned it every night.

Sometimes John Ellson and I would take them to lunch. They especially liked the Mirabelle, then on Curzon Street. Obviously Elvin had no idea what I did and certainly had never heard of Dire Straits, let alone Scott Walker. Keiko, who was pretty sharp and did all their business, cottoned on and filed that away.

One time they were visiting I asked Brian Bennett, my best mate and the Shadows drummer, if he'd ever seen Elvin. He hadn't so we went along. After the first set I got up.

'Come on, let's go and say hello.'

Brian didn't budge.

'I can't meet HIM,' he said, 'I just can't.' He was obviously flummoxed by the performance, as any drummer would be.

'Well, I'm going. Come on, he's great.'

So we went off to the so-called dressing room, really a cupboard behind the stage.

Elvin was a big man. At least 6' 2" with huge hands. His party piece when you met him was to give you a hug and lift you off the ground. I was used to this. I knew how to hold my breath and for how long.

Brian didn't.

When I introduced them Elvin duly picked him up and Brian soon started to turn purple. Eventually I had to ask Elvin to put him down.

We opened a bottle of wine. Brian doesn't drink, but no matter, after a few minutes it was as if we'd known each other all our lives, he was that kind of guy. Pat La Barbera who was playing tenor and who'd been lead saxophonist with Buddy Rich for many years came in. Another lovely man and a ridiculous player. We were chatting and Pat suddenly played the intro to the Rich arrangement of *West Side Story*. In that tiny room his sound was enormous. Elvin burst out laughing. It was so far away from his style of jazz and yet it wasn't, it was all part of the same thing.

On their annual visit to Ronnie's in 2002, Keiko asked me if I'd help her organise a concert in New York to celebrate Elvin's 75th birthday on September 9th.

Would I? Give me a break, of course I would.

I was given the K Zildjian cymbal and Yamaha endorsers lists. I had to cold call my drumming heroes and more.

'Hello, is that Mr Cobb? (Jimmy Cobb), you don't know me, but...'

Michael Shrieve from Santana. Louis Bellson. Jack de Johnette. Bill Stewart. Victor Lewis. Numerous others. They all came. Keiko arranged for some other guests, Wynton Marsalis, Michael Brecker and Bill Cosby as host. Yes. That Bill Cosby.

Somehow Brian got us a deal on Concorde and off we went. We checked into a hotel off Union Square. As soon as we got to the front desk I realised my travel agent had made a slight

boo boo. It was a gay hotel and the two guys on reception who could have been called Julian and Sandy but weren't, obviously thought Brian and I were a couple. Brian was oblivious much to my amusement, even when he discovered a mirror on his ceiling. The next day we did a bit of sightseeing, had lunch and were invited for a Japanese dinner at Elvin and Keiko's apartment on Central Park West. Don't let anybody tell you there's no money in Jazz. There is and Keiko had found it.

Elvin had just been given a test CD of the only live recording of *A Love Supreme* done at the Antibes Jazz Festival in July 1965. The studio recording by the John Coltrane Quartet which had been done in one day in December 1964 is generally regarded as one of the all-time classic jazz recordings. While Keiko cooked Japanese lamb chops he put it on and cranked it up to eleven.

As it thundered through the apartment there was a banging on the ceiling.

Elvin ignored it. The banging continued, it was strangely rhythmical.

'Grrrrrr! That's Max Roach. Asshole. Screw him.' Another huge smile.

Max Roach, one of the other great innovators on drums and a leading figure of the bebop movement, lived upstairs! Apparently there was little love lost between them. Elvin pushed the volume to twelve, like a jazz Spinal Tap.

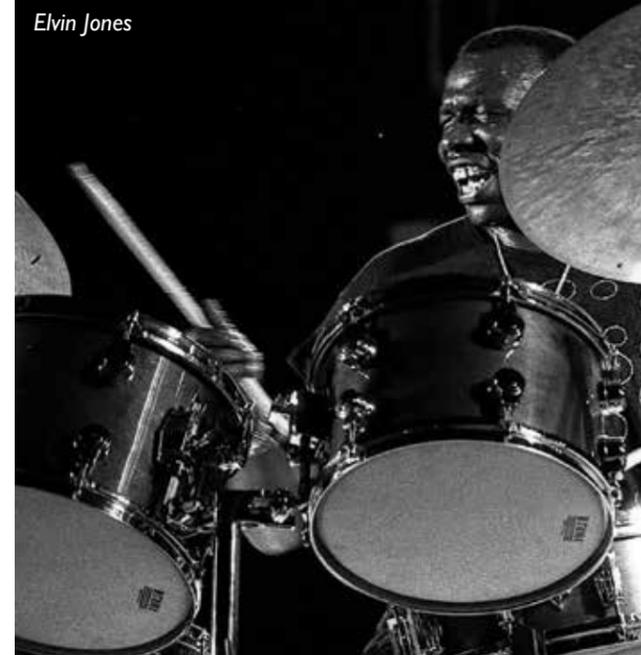
As we ate Elvin would make announcements. 'Bass solo' and for 20 minutes we listened to Jimmy Garrison thrumming his bass.

The food was ridiculous, Nobu, eat your heart out. After the meal we were ushered downstairs. They had TWO apartments! This one was full of racks of Keiko's clothes and, on shelves against the wall sat at least 15 or 20 1960's Gretsch drum kits in every finish imaginable still in their plastic bags, unplayed. Coming out from the wall were piles of K and Avedis Zildjian cymbals of all sizes.

'I used to endorse them,' said Elvin by way of explanation, 'they gave this stuff to me.' Later on I asked Brian if he'd been thinking what I'd been thinking. Yes. Would Elvin sell us a couple of kits? Of course we didn't ask, it would have been impolite and being British and guests in their home that wasn't going to happen, but I've often thought since that we should just have been rude.

The next day we went down to the Blue Note in Greenwich Village for the soundcheck. I asked Elvin if Brian could play his drums. Sure, no problem, so up he got and we took many photos of a grinning Brian not quite able to believe his luck.

That evening we sat in the dressing room as drummer after drummer dropped by to pay their respects and wish him a Happy Birthday. When Cosby came in, Elvin blanked him. It was obvious he didn't like him and I thought Cosby was an asshole. Arrogant and self-obsessed. This



was way before the sexual assault allegations came out.

I remember dear Michael Brecker, RIP, saying to Elvin in the afternoon, 'What are we going to do?'

'We're gonna play,' he responded, laughing and beaming. So no set list and certainly no rehearsal.

Yamaha had made about a dozen gold plated 10" snare drums in his trademark champagne sparkle, complete with a plaque giving the date and occasion. Elvin had signed them inside the shell.

Before the gig got underway I was astonished to hear Cosby call out my name to go up onto the stage where Elvin presented me with one and gave me THE hug. Unusually I nearly passed out. A very proud

moment and one of my most prized possessions.

The musicians played a blistering set. Elvin sat there in a white kaftan, sweat streaming down his face as he BECAME his drums. The whole thing was joyous, uplifting.

Afterwards we went to say our farewells. Suddenly he looked tired. Frail. Exhausted.

I never saw him again. He died May 18 2004 aged just 76.

I think of him pretty much every day, not just as the extraordinary drummer he was, but as one of the most inspiring, kind and funny people I've ever met.

It was a privilege to know him.

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SETTING THE STANDARD

CALLUM AU tells RON SIMPSON of the choices involved in making *Songs and Stories*, his excellent new album with CLAIRE MARTIN.



It's refreshing to find a highly regarded young jazz arranger coming out firmly on the side of melody and enjoyment. Thus Callum Au, talking of the reaction to his acclaimed album, *Songs and Stories*, on Stunt Records:

'I've been really pleased with the reaction to the album so far – I'm glad people are enjoying it. There is a tendency in some modern jazz circles for people to look askance at the sort of music that has a broader popular appeal – I feel that this is a great shame – albums like *Here's to Life* (Shirley Horn), *Only the Lonely* (Frank Sinatra) and *Both Sides Now* (Joni Mitchell) are some of the greatest works of art in jazz music. I suppose I'd want people to see this in a similar light, serious art music with jazz at its core, but not enough to be inscrutable to all but the dedicated jazz acolyte.'

Songs and Stories consists of eleven performances of what I may loosely call 'standards', something I always find difficult to define – is a wonderful song from, say, the 1930s or 1950s

a standard if only a few singers record it? And the selection here ranges from evergreens such as *Stars Fell on Alabama* via great songs less well known than they should be (*I Concentrate on You*, for instance) to songs which Callum admits to not knowing before preparing for this recording. Claire Martin sings on all the tracks, accompanied by a sizeable string-heavy orchestra (five tracks), an orthodox jazz big band (three) or both (three).

This is a project that has taken some two years from Callum's original conception to album release – and, as he tells me about it, it's clear that the creation of it has all been about choices. The key choice – of singer and close collaborator – was not difficult:

'Claire Martin was my first choice as singer and I was thrilled when she agreed to be involved. I spoke to her at the very beginning and she has been an enthusiastic and active partner-in-crime ever since. Of course she needs no introduction as one of the finest jazz singers the UK has ever

produced. I first started working with her in Matt Skelton's *Hollywood Romance* project with the Tippett Quartet and it struck me that she is really wonderful at telling the story of a song in a heartfelt way. As an interpreter of popular song she's in a class of her own.

'We chose the repertoire together over a few weeks of back and forth via email. Once we had a long list of up to 25 titles, we got together round a piano to narrow it down some more. We wanted a nice mix of light and shade and a balance of different moods and feelings. Claire introduced me to a couple of songs which were new to me: *The Night We Called it a Day* and *I Never Went Away*. Claire knew the latter from her connection with its composer Richard Rodney Bennett.'

So that's one essential choice (and, given the results, a totally successful one), but what of Callum's initial decision? What sort of an album did he set out to make? Part of the inspiration was the fact that many of his favourite albums are what he calls 'large-scale orchestral jazz projects with vocalist', though one suspects that the likes of Frank Sinatra might have found his terminology too near 'with vocal refrain' to be tolerable! In fact Callum's respect for the role of the singer is obvious from his comments on Claire, but it's true that his love of the big orchestral sound is central to this project:

'I have always felt that the orchestra is the musical ensemble with the most emotional weight – the range of textures and timbres you have to work with is second to none.'

Callum's prior arranging experience stretches from big band jazz to pop and classical, but this one was to be unique in a special way:

'The main way that this is different is that I had complete creative control and could handpick the musicians,

repertoire and recording and mixing engineers. Having this sort of freedom allows for a huge amount of creativity and lets me try things that I would otherwise have been unable to do.'

So let's look at the choices that Callum made. First the repertoire. His attempt at the difficult task of defining a standard gives a pointer to the album's title:

'Any good piece of music needs to be melodically, harmonically and rhythmically interesting and memorable. But that isn't enough to turn a song into a great standard. I believe a truly great standard tells a story, both in its musical structure and its lyrical pathos. An arrangement done well highlights and complements these elements.'

With a fair number of the songs being established favourites and Callum's devotion to classic singer-and-orchestra albums, an interesting problem appears: how do you present a song that is so closely identified with one arrangement that it seems to have become part of the song itself – Nelson Riddle's take on *The Folks who Live on the Hill* for Peggy Lee, for instance?

'The way I dealt with this for that particular song was by very deliberately changing the style, omitting the rhythm section entirely and cutting down the orchestral forces to just strings, piano and horn. Restrictions breed creativity and I naturally write different things with a smaller ensemble.'

'More generally I find there are two ways to go: lean into the version everybody knows with overt references or go in the opposite direction and do something completely different. Vince Mendoza's take on *At Last* for Joni Mitchell is fascinating: his intro is taken directly from the famous string intro to Etta James' soulful 12/8 version of the tune, but reharmonised and scored for a cold, distant woodwind section which gives it a completely

different character.'

The element of choice became especially precise in the matter of soloists. Whilst trombonist Andy Wood and alto saxist Sam Mayne combined solo features with a place in the regular big band, Callum matched a series of guest soloists with individual songs:

'I really wanted to feature some of the jazz musicians who have inspired me with their playing. It's really nice to write with specific soloists in mind – as I know what their playing is like through many years of listening to (and, in some cases, playing with) them, it's easy for me to imagine how their contribution will fit into the overall picture.'

Most arrangers would be happy to have the brilliant Scots trumpeter Ryan Quigley or Freddie Gavita ('my friend and colleague from the Ronnie Scott's Jazz Orchestra whom I always find inspirational') as trumpet soloist. Callum casts both of them in different songs, Ryan in *You And the Night and the Music*, Freddie in *Pure Imagination*. Also on the solo roster are Nadim Teimoori ('my favourite tenor saxophonist in the world – no exaggeration! – since we were in NYJO together') and Andy Martin ('a Los Angeles-based jazz trombonist whose playing has always been the high-water mark for me').

The attentive reader will have noticed that there are two trombone soloists, neither of them Callum Au. He had two different roles within the orchestra and big band tracks. Conducting the

orchestra was another member of the trombonists' union, Mark Nightingale:

'I sat in the control booth while Mark conducted. I wanted to hear everything that was going on in the orchestra really clearly. It's easy to get lost in the performance when conducting and, given that we only had six hours in the studio with the full forces, I wanted to be a bit more forensic. For the big band bits we didn't need a conductor – it's all in tempo – so it was easy enough for me to play in the section – in part to save myself a session fee!'

The meticulous planning extended to the personnel of the two aggregations, largely distinct, although a few versatile performers such as Andy Wood, saxist Simon Marsh and drummer Matt Skelton show up in both. What intrigued me was that the woodwind section of the full orchestra is stuffed with jazz players: Howard McGill, Pete Long and, of course, Simon Marsh – another calculated choice by Callum Au:

'The jazz musicians are more comfortable with playing multiple instruments to a very high standard than the classical musicians are, so, when I needed all of flutes, clarinets and saxophones, they were a natural choice.'

Laying down eight tracks in six hours requires the ability to switch instantly, I guess!

Callum's experience in a range of musical settings helped him choose classical musicians with

the same discrimination. Some 40 string players were involved and the choice of leader was obviously crucial. John Mills is leader of the John Wilson Orchestra and involved in all kinds of film projects and he is described by Callum as 'one of the best violinists I have ever heard. His warmth of both sound and character make him the perfect concertmaster for a project like this.' Equally important, John is the leader of the previously mentioned Tippett String Quartet, the other three members of which came on board as section principals, giving a sense of unity.

Then there is the man whom Callum describes as 'just as important as Claire or me in the creative process', Louis Dowdeswell, co-producer of the album and one of Callum's closest collaborators since they were together in NYJO in 2011:

'Aside from playing exciting and swinging lead trumpet in the big band, he put a tremendous amount of time and effort in mixing the audio with a perfectionist's eye for detail and I couldn't have made the record without him.'

Callum is unashamedly (and understandably) delighted with how *Songs and Stories* turned out and happy to single out parts that give him particular joy, starting with a generous comment on a fellow-trombonist:

'My favourite moment on the album is Andy Wood's trombone solo on *I Get Along Without You Very Well*. I'm a huge fan of

Andy's playing and it's been great to sit next to him in various trombone sections over the years. My two favourite overall tracks are *I Never Went Away* and *I Concentrate on You*. The former was a new song to me that I have really grown to love and I am still amazed at the orchestra's rich sound, particularly the solo moments from Jane Marshall (cor anglais), Richard Watkins (horn) and Karen Jones (flute). The latter was inspired by the Pat Metheny Group and I wrote the arrangement specifically with Nadim Teimoori's sound in mind. Nadim is a rare genius – and I don't say that lightly.'

Ask the conventional 'What next?' question of any jazz musician at the moment and you are liable to get a tale of postponements and cancellations. Callum certainly has plenty on the stocks for when the music scene returns to life: a possible tour of *Songs and Stories* with Claire; an album launch anniversary gig at Cadogan Hall on June 19, 2021; Louis Dowdeswell's second big band CD, Callum's arrangements all written, waiting for the studio to become a safe place again; a recording by Callum's quintet with James Davison, with the original recording sessions inevitably cancelled.

Not one to succumb to lockdown inertia, however, Callum has been working on a new series of big band playalongs with Louis Dowdeswell, with the first batch are due for release in September/October.

www.callumaumusic.com



60-PLUS YEARS OF JAZZ – AND MUCH ELSE!

In November 2019 the *Melody Maker* New Star of 1960 finally called an end to a 63-year career in music. In the latest of our features paying tribute to a great generation of British jazz stars, RON SIMPSON looks back on pianist BRIAN DEE's career.



Brian with Alan Barnes

Brian Dee made a huge impact early in his musical career. He was born in 1936 and, even with the distraction of two years National Service in the RAF, he was an established figure in British jazz circles by the time the 60s came around:

'When I came out of National Service in 1956 I started going round sitting in at various clubs. I met a vibes player, Lennie Best, and we formed a quartet in the style of the MJQ. Although we were semi-pros we began to get gigs in the London clubs and also broadcasts with the BBC. So I became known to all the top players. One day I received a phone call from Pete King who said, 'Ronnie and I are opening a new club – would you like to come and play there?'

Thus Brian was in at the start of Ronnie Scott's in Gerrard Street and embarked on almost exactly 60 years as a full-time musician. This opened the door in time to working with many of the great American jazz soloists and also an unexpected early brush with fame. Tenor saxist/clarinetist Vic Ash and baritone saxist Harry Klein were only about 30 at the time, but they had been mixing it with the best for some 10 years and they decided to form a band that would take on the mantle of the recently disbanded Jazz

Couriers. Malcolm Cecil was the bassist, Bill Eyden the best known of a succession of drummers, and the pianist was Brian Dee. Not only that, but in 1960 the unimaginatively named Jazz Five got to tour with Miles Davis, a man not easily impressed, who apparently liked the band.

The Jazz Five's album for Tempo was the first recording of Brian's career. I'm not going to attempt a full discography as he appeared in so many unexpected or untraceable settings – would you believe playing harmonium or organ on Elton John's first four albums, for instance? The jazzier end of his recording output is varied enough in all conscience, from solo and trio albums to major big band dates to small groups with the finest British players to a particular much lauded talent of Brian's, accompanist to many of the best singers of the time – of which more later.

That Tempo album was the only official recording by the Jazz Five, but it's possible to pursue BBC *Jazz Club* sessions from 1960-61 which were issued on Acrobat. Then once again two chaps had the idea of starting a club:

'In 1962 Peter Cook and Dudley Moore opened a club in Soho called the Establishment and

Dudley asked me to lead the trio opposite his. He would play after finishing the evening performance of *Beyond the Fringe*.'

A word of explanation to readers of less than a certain age. *Beyond the Fringe* was one of the beacons of the satire boom of the 1960s, a revue with four Oxbridge types who went on to become legends of the entertainment industry: Jonathan Miller, dignified by opera productions and a knighthood, Alan Bennett, now safely installed as a National Treasure, Peter Cook, anarchic humourist and backer of *Private Eye*, and Dudley Moore, similarly anarchic humourist and unlikely Hollywood star.

'Dudley was a marvellous jazz player, hard-swinging in the style of Oscar Peterson and Erroll Garner. I used to do an early stint upstairs in the restaurant and one night a man came in and sat right next to the stage. When I looked down, I saw it was the great Erroll Garner himself. He was Dudley's idol and he had no idea Erroll was in the club. Later, when Dudley was playing, Erroll walked into the room. Dudley's mouth opened in astonishment and the music sped up immediately. It was a wonderful moment.'

If we look at Brian Dee's discography, the years between

1960 and 1976 (a George Chisholm album with John Horler on piano and Brian on organ) are barren of jazz performances, except for a 1962 BBC session with Graham Bond and the Jazz Five rhythm section. Not that he was underemployed in those years – anything but! – simply that his celebrated versatility was working overtime. When the Establishment closed after 18 months, Brian worked all over the country as accompanist for Lita Roza, the accomplished ex-Ted Heath singer who was unfortunate to be best known for her Number 1 hit, *How Much is that Doggie in the Window?*. No doubt to Brian's relief, she hated the song and would never sing it in live performance. Throughout his career Brian has rubbed shoulders with jazz royalty, but it was a surprise to me to discover his connection with the real thing:

'After my stint with Lita I did a show called *Sweet Charity* which got my reading up to speed, so gradually I got into session work. Doing sessions and jingles was lucrative, but could be nerve-racking as you never knew in advance what was coming up. I also worked for a society bandleader, Confrey Phillips, and it was not unusual to see the Queen and other royals three or four times a week at various stately home functions.'

In the 1970s and 1980s the jazz quota in Brian's date-sheet remained prolific. While he was playing in studio orchestras accompanying such great jazz fellow-travellers as Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire and Johnny Mercer, the small group engagements took in regular broadcasts (hard though it is to believe today) as well as club engagements:

'At the time I was very involved in doing broadcasts for BBC Radio 2 with my trio and various singers three or four times a week. *Through till Two, Music till Midnight* and *The Early Show* were some of the shows we would appear on. I worked with Elaine

Delmar from this time right up until four years ago and we did lots of stints at Ronnie Scott's, usually quartets with such as Duncan Lamont and Jim Mullen. 'Over my time I worked with many American musicians who came to this country, more than 50, and I have great memories of the likes of Benny Carter, Ben Webster, our own Victor Feldman, Zoot Sims, Lockjaw Davis, Mark Murphy, Peggy Lee and many more. One or two of the lesser names could act up sometimes, but we were well prepared for most of it.'

His first mention of Elaine Delmar prompts consideration of one outstanding feature of Brian's accomplishments, his work as accompanist. During their long and successful association Elaine and Brian recorded four albums, most recently in 2005 on Joy Records, but his discography also features albums with Barbara Jay, Rosemary Squires, Maxine Daniels and Tina May. Then there is his association with Val Wiseman, for many years as part of her *Lady Sings the Blues* band and to be heard on a live recording, *Laughing at Life* on Big Bear, but also in another venture that broke down conventional jazz boundaries. Val, as an enthusiast for the Bronte sisters, put together a programme, entitled *Keeping the Flame Alive*, of their poems and her lyrics on situations and characters in the books. Brian Dee wrote and played the music – which brings us to another aspect of

Brian's work, songwriting: the 2000 Doz solo CD, *It's Always Like This*, consists entirely of his own compositions.

What does Brian have to say of the art of accompaniment and of the allied skill of performing in a duo?

'I loved accompanying right from my early days when we used to listen to, and copy, the men who were great accompanists and soloists in their own right, men like Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones and my own influence, Wynton Kelly. It's a matter of taste, supporting and feeding the soloist or singer – there's no difference, they're both voices, though you may need a touch more modification in a duo set-up. I've done several duo recordings, one with the late great Duncan Lamont and one with Bruce Adams.'

Around about 1990 Brian, who had been sadly under-recorded in a jazz context for over two decades, came out with a series of striking albums including two on Spotlite that teamed Brian's trio (with Bobby Worth and Mario Castronari) with two outstanding front lines, one led by Don Rendell, the other a superb sextet under the name Perfect Pitch, with Peter King, Dick Morrissey and Jim Mullen. *Tipping the Scales* was reissued in 2008 and is well worth tracking down.

Through the 1990s Brian was a member of the Ted Heath Band,

Brian Dee has been the go-to piano player for both Big Bear Records and the Birmingham Jazz Festival for more than 25 years. He has long been the first name on the team sheet for the festival, forming a Rolls Royce house rhythm section with bassist Len Skeat and drummer Malcolm Garrett – much to the delight of many an American and British jazz star.

Brian held down the piano chair in Val Wiseman's Billie Holiday tribute, *Lady Sings the Blues*, for many years, his ballad duos with Val always a highlight of the show, and, when Pete York and I decided to put together a tribute to Gene Krupa, again our first call was to Brian. There's a record release imminent of *Drummin' Man* which rocks along splendidly, but listen to Brian's playing on the ballad *I've Got a Crush on You* featuring, again, Val Wiseman – impeccable, textbook stuff on how to accompany a jazz singer. I've lost count of the number of times a singer has expressed gratitude that we booked Brian into the piano chair.

A master of big band piano, a formidable exponent of bebop – the complete, all-round, never repetitive, always melodic, ever surprising jazz piano player – Brian Dee.

Jim Simpson, Big Bear Music.

then under the direction of Don Lusher. In 2000 Avid recorded the Farewell Concert of the band, with a line-up packed with legendary big band musicians from across the decades. Ted Heath's glory days were probably the 1950s and coincidentally Brian was also on hand when Kenny Baker's Dozen – the inspiration via the radio to so many jazz fans in that decade – was revived in 1993, for the first time as a live working band. The Big Bear CD, *The Boss is Home*, captures live the excitement of another great band which included several of the musicians (including Lusher himself) who featured with the Heath Band seven years later – plus the bandleader who had prompted Brian to go professional 33 years before, Vic Ash. The most recent example of Brian's assurance in a big band setting came with Duncan Lamont's jazz settings of his own music for the children's television series, *Mr. Benn*, with another all-star aggregation featuring Kenny Wheeler, for Jellymould Jazz. Connoisseurs of the 'they just don't get it' school of reviewing should take a look at the reviews on Amazon where ***** comments nestle alongside * and ** complaints that it doesn't sound like the original!

So that's Brian Dee whose mastery of so many of the facets of jazz piano continued throughout 60-plus years. Now we have to ask the question: why, after the *Melody Maker* readers displayed their discernment in 1960, have awards eluded him? He didn't really go along with my theory that, for much of his career, he was such an outstanding accompanist that too many people thought of him as just that and no more.

His theory certainly carries some weight:

'I am well aware that being an all-rounder meant that I never appeared in the jazz polls at the diehards don't recognise you as the real deal.' For all that he has no regrets about branching out into so many areas of music, having come up against the artificial barriers of the music establishment early in his career:

'I can remember well in the late 1950s wanting to go to Trinity College once a week, paying to learn technique, and, having passed the ear test with flying colours, being rejected because I put jazz and dance music as my interest.

'I have loved all the different genres of music I have played in hundreds of functions, sessions and broadcasts, and of course the music I love most is jazz. I am sure that being an all-rounder improved my jazz playing and, if I'd played solely jazz, I'd have become stale.

'I feel my generation had one advantage over today's players in that we were not musically educated in colleges, so we all sounded different. I could tell who it was just by the sound. While today's players are amazing technically, harmonically and reading-wise, it would seem harder to achieve a distinctive voice of their own.'

And finally?

'Last year I decided that I'd done enough: most of my colleagues weren't around any more and to have 63 years in the music game was fantastic. I'm a very lucky man: I did all the things I wanted to do in my career and now I can do a lot of listening in my retirement!'

Photos by Merlin Daleman



Brian with Jim Douglas, Val Wiseman, Alan Barnes and Len Skeat

THE V-DISC STORY

by SCOTT YANOW



Billy Butterfield

V-Discs have a unique place in jazz and music history. During the early days of World War II, record labels were generally happy to send their latest releases overseas to the American servicemen fighting in Europe. The problem is that around 80% of the 78s, which were made of easily breakable shellac, arrived damaged and were useless.

Another major problem was that on July 31, 1942, the American Federation of Musicians went on a recording strike. The musicians led by the Union president James C. Petrillo, were angry because they were not being paid any royalties for records sold to jukeboxes.

The emergence of the V-Disc (victory disc) programme helped with both complicated situations. Recordings were needed for the world-weary and battle-hardened servicemen, serving as a brief relief from the fighting. After much negotiation, it was decided that special recordings would be made, free of charge, and sent to the men in the military. The record labels agreed to allow their artists to record V-Discs, and Petrillo agreed that the Union musicians could record for free.

The main stipulations were that these special recordings would not be sold or distributed in

the United States and that they were purely for the ears and the enjoyment of the fighting men. When the programme ended, all of the recordings and the masters were supposed to be destroyed.

The problem with 78s being easily breakable was also solved. Rather than being 10-inch discs made out of shellac, V-Discs were made out of less fragile plastic and were 12-inches in size. Instead of being limited to around three minutes a side, a V-Disc could hold up to six minutes of music.

Sometimes there were two songs per side while, in other cases, the musicians had more of an opportunity to stretch out, performing for 4-5 minutes. In addition, in a charming touch, many of the V-Discs began with a spoken introduction, often from the bandleader, wishing the servicemen well.

The V-Disc programme outlived both the recording strike and World War II. The strike of Union musicians was pretty complete until the Decca label in September 1943 and Capitol the following month settled with the Union. Columbia and RCA Victor, who had most of the best-known artists, would not settle until November 1944 so bands such as those of Duke Ellington, Count

Basie and Tommy Dorsey were off commercial records for nearly 2½ years. Fortunately all three of those orchestras plus many others made V-Discs that decades later helped to fill in the gap.

There were 905 V-Discs in all and they fall into three different categories. At first, many of the releases were just reissues of earlier studio sessions although a few contained previously unreleased alternate takes.

Some of the other V-Discs were taken from radio shows, rehearsals for the programmes, film sound tracks, or excerpts from live concerts including the 1944 *Esquire* Jazz Poll concert and Duke Ellington's November 1946 performance at Carnegie Hall. Most significant was the fact that the vast majority of the V-Discs comprised new studio sessions. Some of those were early versions of what would be popular recordings by top swing bands.

Both black and white bands were represented and many arrangements that might not otherwise have been recorded were documented. And because all of the record labels participated, stars who might not otherwise have had a chance to record together during the era were able to jam in combos without having to worry about label contracts.

The V-Discs featured the top big bands of the period (including Ellington, Basie, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller's Army Air Force Band, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Les Brown, Charlie Barnet, and Harry James), all-star small groups which ranged from heated Dixieland to modern swing, small pianist or guitar led groups (including the King Cole Trio and many titles by Les Paul's Trio), vocalists (Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra made many V-Discs) covering a wide range of genres, long-forgotten but sometimes quite talented performers, country music, some blues, classical (including Igor Stravinsky), novelties and comedy, easy-listening, and pure schlock

like Andre Kostelanetz. It gives one a good idea of what the popular music world sounded like, particularly during 1943-45.

The V-Disc programme was quite popular among servicemen and it was continued for several years past the end of World War II. Although it might have seemed a bit pointless during 1946-47 when commercial recordings were readily available both in the U.S. and overseas, V-Discs continued to be released on a regular basis.

A second recording strike which lasted from January 1, 1948, until December 14 of that year (the Union wanted record companies to pay a percentage of sales to a union fund to help pay musicians for giving free concerts) was less complete than the first one. Charlie Parker recorded *Parker's Mood* in 1948 and other underground recordings were made. Despite the continuation of the programme, V-Discs were considered less essential during this strike. U.S. servicemen were no longer at war and they could easily purchase 78s from the previous year.

While V-Discs from 1944 covered the current music scene well, there were almost no bop recordings on the 1945-49 V-Discs other than accordionist Joe Mooney's odd version of *Tea For Two*, two early numbers by Lennie Tristano, a few titles by Boyd Raeburn's orchestra, and two obscure Tadd Dameron recordings that featured singer Kay Penton. Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk did not make any V-discs and the programme was still emphasizing singers and swing groups up until its end.

It all stopped in May 1949. By then, 8 million V-Discs had been produced resulting in around 2,000 songs during the 5½ year programme. After the V-Disc programme was discontinued, all of the recordings (8 million!) were supposed to be destroyed.

The FBI and the U.S. Provost Marshall's office were in charge



Hoagy Carmichael

of achieving that rather dubious goal. An arrest or two was made of V-Disc collectors in the early 1950s and many of the discs were destroyed along the way, but virtually all of the performances survived; the Library of Congress has a complete collection. It took many years before more than a few began to be reissued.

Finally, starting in the 1980s, many of the more worthy recordings have been made available on a variety of CDs although there are some hot performances that have not reappeared yet. While there is no coherent reissue programme of all of the jazz-oriented V-discs, several worthy CDs contain some of the best jazz performances, a few of which I will mention here.

The four-CD Time/Life Music box called *The Songs That Went To War – WWII 50th Anniversary Collector's Edition* came out in 1992 and can be found online. Most of the 79 performances are jazz or swing-oriented with a few departures. The recordings include Jo Stafford with Billy Butterfield's hot combo on *Blue Moon*, Martha Tilton and her



Peggy Lee

V-Disc Play-Fellows on *Beyond The Blue Horizon*, Hoagy Carmichael singing his heated *Billy-a-Dick*, groups ranging from Bunk Johnson to Stan Kenton, and appearances by Paul Robeson, Josh White, Perry Como (backed by Benny Goodman), and even Ethel Merman.

The RST label out of Austria put out three CDs that contain some of the most rewarding jazz V-Discs. *Volume 1: The Combos* is particularly recommended. Featured along the way are Hoagy Carmichael (singing and piano playing on his *Riverboat Shuffle*), the two Lennie Tristano numbers, the King Cole Trio, Joe Marsala, Roy Eldridge, Will Bradley (*Basin Street Boogie*), Connie Boswell (*Way Down Yonder In New Orleans*), and various all-star jams with Charlie Shavers, Bobby Hackett, Jack Teagarden, Trummy Young and Don Byas.

Most memorable are three numbers led by tenor-saxophonist Bud Freeman which contain explosive trumpet playing from Yank Lawson. Two start out with very funny monologues

(in his fake English accent) by Freeman: *For Musicians Only* and *The Latest Thing In Hot Jazz* (which is listed as being by "Eight Squares and a Critic").

Volume 2: The Big Bands has swinging numbers by the big bands of Jimmie Lunceford, Louis Prima, Cab Calloway, Jess Stacy (*It's Only A Paper Moon* from his very short-lived orchestra), Sam Donahue, Jimmy Dorsey, Buddy Rich, Stan Kenton, and the service band 17 Skymen Of The 718th. *Volume 3: The Girls* may not seem all that promising with such vocalists as Martha Tilton, Jo Stafford, Monica Lewis and Dinah Shore being featured along with Ella Fitzgerald, June Christy, and Kay Starr, but in most cases the singers are joined by top jazz soloists of the mid-1940s. Billy Butterfield, Yank Lawson, Charlie Shavers and Joe Venuti keep things consistently stimulating.

Released in more recent times is the four-CD set *Les Disques De La Victoire 1943-1949* from the Fremaux & Associates label in France. The 92 selections stretch beyond jazz at times and give one an excellent overview of

the V-disc programme, covering the entire span of the project. Among the many who are heard from are Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Benny Carter, several jam sessions, a few military jazz bands, Louis Armstrong, Bob Crosby, Art Tatum, Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra, and (in 1949) Randy Brooks. There are only a few duplicates with the other sets.

When coupled with commercial recordings, surviving radio broadcasts, transcriptions made for radio airplay, and live concerts, V-Discs add to the huge musical legacy of the mid-1940s. While not all of the 905 discs are filled with essential sounds, the V-Discs contain many surprises and quite a bit of delightful music. It certainly would have been a major crime if they had been destroyed.

Scott Yanow, who was not around yet during the V-Disc era, has heard nearly all of them. He can be reached for liner notes, bios, press releases, reviews and other interesting assignments at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

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THE LAST WHOOPEE!

RON SIMPSON belatedly marks the passing of the last of the comedy jazz bands, BOB KERR AND HIS WHOOPEE BAND.



Photo by Merlin Daleman

It all began round about 1942 when the percussionist with the highly respectable John Scott Trotter Orchestra (Bing's accompanists on *White Christmas*, no less) had his first hit under his own name. *Der Fuehrer's Face* launched a decade and a half of musical depreciation by Spike Jones' City Slickers and a world-wide boom for comedy jazz.

Here in Britain the foremost comedy bands were Dr. Crock and his Crackpots, Sid Millward and his Nitwits and Freddie Mirfield's Garbage Men, the jazziest of them all, developed out of a straight jazz band and including, for a time, the likes of Freddie Randall and Johnny (as he then was) Dankworth. Mirfield died in Southend-on-Sea in 1974 – let's hope he's suitably honoured by the Jazz Centre UK – Digby, we need to be told!

Quite possibly, it all came to an end on April 9th, 2018, at the Irish Centre Jazz Club, Basingstoke, when Bob Kerr, having developed cancer (now, happily, cured) and having driven more van miles across Europe than anyone should have to, decided it was time to quit. It was a good send-off!

'It was a packed house and I had a great band: John "The

Professor" Percival on sax and clarinet, Spats Langham on banjo and guitar, Richard White on piano, Malcolm Sked on sousaphone and bass guitar and me on the rest. Probably one of our best gigs for a while and a fitting end.'

That brief quotation points up two of the most notable features of the Whoopee Band. They might have been exceedingly silly at times, but musical standards were high and that final line-up included highly respected names from the jazz scene. (That has been a common feature of the best comedy jazz bands – Spike Jones and Miles Davis even used the same trombonist, Frank Rehak!) And that simple phrase, 'and me on the rest', reminds us of Bob Kerr's astonishing range of instruments. We might associate him with a hot trumpet or cornet lead, but he also played euphonium, trombone, baritone and soprano saxes, guitar and banjo – all self-taught!

Bob began in the early 1960s playing trumpet with such bands as the Savannah City Jazz Band in Luton, then, on moving to London, he joined Spencer's Washboard Kings on baritone sax and second trumpet. Spencer's had a reputation for authentic performances of 1920s

jazz, but at the same time the fact that their first single release was *Masculine Women, Feminine Men* places them firmly as part of the growing taste for parody of 1920s jazz and popular song. The most popular exponents of the genre were The Temperance Seven and Bob played briefly with them before joining The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band who brought a rather more subversive and anarchic spirit to the style.

It's odd that the cheerful and joy-bringing music of the Bonzo/Whoopees clan has so often been accompanied by split and schism. The first of these occurred in 1967 and ended up being beneficial to all parties. There were two main elements involved: the Bonzos, tiring of comparisons with the Temperance Seven, were thinking of shifting more towards rock than jazz and a songwriter called Geoff Stephens had a hit with a catchy melody called *Winchester Cathedral* recorded with studio musicians under the name 'The New Vaudeville Band'. Bob Kerr's version of events makes it sound all so simple, but it ended up with a worldwide number 1 hit and Bob getting the opportunity to sing through a megaphone on possibly the most famous American television show of the time:

'Geoff Stephens had a hit and a band name, but he didn't have a band. Henri Harrison was a drummer and a great friend I had played with on and off since I was 18 and Geoff asked us to form a band. We stepped in and it took off. After a tour with Dusty Springfield and a few spots on *Top of the Pops* we were whisked off to America. The first gig was on the Ed Sullivan Show and then it was off to Las Vegas. Our first live gig was at the Tropicana Hotel sharing the bill with George Shearing and his band.'

By the time Bob's American adventure was over the New Vaudeville Band had toured most of the USA and Canada, appeared on Dean Martin's television show and shared bills with an assortment of great names: the Beach Boys, the Buddy Rich Orchestra, Bob Dylan, the Who. So the New Vaudeville Band became international stars and the Bonzos didn't do too badly out of the split either: they did make the move towards rock and in 1968 they came up with their biggest hit, *I'm the Urban Spaceman*.

While the rest of the New Vaudeville Band stayed on in the States, when the major tours started to peter out, Bob headed for home to create a band in his own version of the crazy comedy style:

'I felt it was time for me to start my own band. I wanted it to be a sort of straight/comedy band if there was such a thing. I was always impressed by Spike Jones as he always used great musicians, so I got down to picking good musicians and forming my Whoopee Band. Our first gig was on television for the BBC in 1967. It was all about American Presidents. We had to play and sing the Presidents' campaign songs – "I like Ike" and that sort of thing.'

More than a band, the Whoopees were at the heart of show-business from the start. It's no coincidence that Bob joined Actors Equity! Visual fun being



a major part of the Whoopees' appeal, it's perhaps not surprising that television and film figured largely in the band's output in the 1970s. A long-time associate and fan of the band was Bob Godfrey, one of the country's leading animators who is best remembered generally for children's television's *Roobarb* and *Henry's Cat*, but who inspired a generation of animators, notably Richard Williams of *Who Killed Roger Rabbit* fame – also a jazz cornetist and leader of Dick's Six. The band had their own television shows in Germany, Austria and France as well as the UK. In addition to acting in films by Bob Godfrey and recording the soundtracks, the Whoopees appeared in two feature films in the mid-1970s which can be tracked down on Youtube. Despite the presence of Barry Humphries and Terry-Thomas *Side by Side* is a run-of-the-mill comedy, but the story of two rival night-clubs gives ample room for songs from the Whoopees, Mud, the Rubettes, Mac and Katie Kissoon, Desmond Dekker and many others. *Never Too Young to Rock* is a similar excuse for musical acts such as the Whoopees to strut their stuff.

And what was their stuff? The band's publicity referred to 'unashamed nostalgia, honest fun and great entertainment' and a German newspaper settled for a cross between Spike Jones, the Marx Brothers and Monty Python. The band's motto, wholly engaging if mathematically unsound, was '100% music + 100% fun = 200% entertainment'.

The strange mix of comradeship and divisiveness in the world of the Bonzos and ex-Bonzos

caused the next shift in the band's fortunes. Things being a bit slack, Bob had agreed to Neil Innes' request to return to the Bonzos for a few gigs, only to find most of his own band disappearing from view: 'They wanted to take over the Whoopees, so it was a bit of a coup. They took all the props, etc., and started their own band, telling people the Whoopees had packed in and they were doing the gigs. I heard about this and thought to myself, "I'm not packing it in. I started the Whoopee Band and I'm the only one who can finish it." Fortunately two of the guys, ex-Bonzo Vernon Dudley Bowhay-Nowell and Frank Tomes, a fine sousaphone player, stayed with me and I sorted out new musicians and never looked back. Soon we were working all over Europe and beyond.'



Whoopees in St. Petersburg

The breakaways went out under the name of Bill Posters Will be Band and eventually played their last gig shortly before the Whoopees.

Fortunately it's easy enough to see what the various eras of the Whoopee Band were up to by checking on Youtube. Probably the best example – because the most extensive – is 80 minutes of the band at the Half Moon in Putney from 1990. The all-action seven-piece (in later years it slimmed down to five or six) romps through a varied programme, with appropriate hats for each number: 'Flying hats!', shouts Bob – literally true as he hurls an appropriate hat to each band member before *Me and Jane on a Plane*. *Cocktails for Two* recalls the Master, Spike Jones, with some outstanding gargling, and Leslie Sarony's *Jollity Farm* brings memories of the Bonzos, but only the Whoopee Band could dish up a hot version of *Royal Garden Blues* in House of Windsor masks (Bob as Queen Mum) or explode *Tiger Rag* so wildly. It's worth mentioning that they do melody, too (occasionally): the horse-play on *Spread a Little Happiness* never distracts from the music which is as sweet as it should be.

So there they were from the reconstituted band of 1983 to retirement in 2018, touring 'all over Europe and beyond', wherever 'beyond' may be – Russia, I guess. As Bob remarks

disarmingly, 'I drove the van to Russia and back which was a trek, but interesting.' A well-known story has Bob spending days negotiating seas and frontiers and finally arriving at a club in St. Petersburg to be told he was on in an hour!

'Normally I drove to most gigs home and abroad with the gear' (and the Whoopees had decidedly more 'gear' – props and costumes – than most bands) 'and flew the band abroad via the cheap airlines as it saved money and I just loved driving. I learned a good deal of German as we travelled there so much; also my French got a bit better after a three-month tour of French theatres.'

The achievements of Bob the Driver only come into focus when you read the list of 15 countries the band toured to, including Iceland and the Faroe Islands – how do you drive a van to the Faroe Islands?

So was that gig in 2018 the end of the era? It is tempting to think not – and we would love to hear of some rollicking comedy jazz band operating successfully – but I fear such is the case. I believe the Bonzos are still technically active in their fourth or fifth incarnation, but their 2019 appearances seem merely to have been in court in a dispute over trademarks – more schisms, more splits!

IT'S TRAD, GRANDAD

ANDREW LIDDLE looks back



Kenny Ball

Trad Mad, by Brian Matthew, is a book I bought and devoured in its year of publication, 1961, which has been on my shelves unread for years. It makes fascinating reading about pop music at its precise moment in time. In these changed days I have returned to it to review it retrospectively with the clarity of hindsight and the certain knowledge of where it was, alas, badly wrong.

Culturally, it represents where my love of jazz first began and where it is rooted even if I have subsequently travelled much in its realms of gold, and many goodly styles and syncopations heard. It is difficult to convince people who were not around in the 1950s and early '60s how popular such music was among teenagers. There was an immensely pretty girl who sat in front of me in class at school who gave me a flash of Humph's smiling teeth and gleaming trumpet every time she lifted the lid of her desk. Yes, Trad was pop although pop was not Trad, but a mixture of it, rock'n'roll and Tin Pan Alley.

'Freight train ... freight train ... going so fast ...'

I can hear it now, in memory, so many years later. *Freight Train* was the song of the summer of 1957, never off the wireless, heard coming out of doors and windows, filtering through the neighbours' walls or being sung by passing strangers. For me, 1957 is the one summer I remember, musically, in almost every detail, like a film shot in the sort of 'glorious technicolour'

that was beginning to goggle the eyes of cinema-goers. And Chas McDevitt's big hit, a Skiffle sensation, provides the sound track. I loved that record, its poignant lyrics and infectious rhythms, but it was Lonnie Donegan's *Rock Island Line*, around Christmas 1955, that had first awoken my interest and I'd wager that of the girl who sat in front of me and a generation of Trad Jazz lovers, who make up the grey audience in our jazz clubs.

It was a natural process, it seemed, to go from Skiffle to Trad.

Matthew writes about Trad as an immense popular musical phenomenon, an established fact which is here to stay. Even allowing he is writing uncritically for very largely a teenage audience, his book, for all its naive misreading of the future, actually is a hugely important historical document. It offers a fascinating insight into the cultural zeitgeist of the period betwixt rock'n'roll and Beat(les) music briefly occupied by Trad Jazz and how much the BBC and, therefore, the country was still under the prescriptive and proscriptive moral influence of Lord Reith, former Director General of the BBC.

'Nowadays the pendulum has swung away from Rock,' he writes, by which he means rock'n'roll. He says, cleverly, that lots of people thought this was the time for calypso to take over but, no, they were very much mistaken. He, in the music business, with his finger on the

pulse, is happy to put them straight. 'It looks as though the sixties may well come to be labelled the ten years of Trad,' is his confident opening assertion. As far as he is concerned, this is the music synonymous with 'present day entertainment'.

He was monumentally wrong on two counts but could, perhaps, no more have predicted the arrival of twanging foursomes than we might have spotted Covid on the horizon. The popularity of rock'n'roll ('the simplest thud and crash form of beat music') had, indeed, waned, but it would never go away for the next sixty years. Alas, as pop music, Trad did. In fact its mainstream course barely had more than eighteenth months to run. Matthew was writing at both its zenith and apogee.

For page after page Matthew writes with utter conviction about Trad's never-ending appeal, linking its enduring success to the fact that Jazz had already been around for at least fifty years. He was, intriguingly, both very wrong and totally right. The music would survive for the minority, as our Trad Jazz clubs attest, but not for the many who tuned into his programmes.

It's a slim book, 125 pages, with only eight chapters, written in a light conversational tone. I remember the author best as a radio disc jockey with a warm sunny voice who hosted *Saturday Club*, compulsory listening for me before I set off early to the football in the afternoon. A sunny disposition is confirmed in his writing, even shining through the occasional clouds of morality gathering overhead. Though he was no different from other record-spinners in that he moved on and embraced other styles throughout a long career, it seems clear that he did have a deeply sincere love of Jazz and was very knowledgeable about the contemporary scene, less so about the music's history.

Usually when he tips someone for success, he is about right, notwithstanding the music's

decline in popularity. The majority of the book is given over to three bands that had just topped the BBC's 1961 popularity poll, Kenny Ball's, Acker Bilk's and the Temperance Seven. The last-named sneak into the pantheon by some sleight of hand: they are not Trad, but Trad enthusiasts like them. In later chapters, he speaks of 'the big six', to which are admitted Chris Barber, Terry Lightfoot and Alex Welsh. Two more tipped for the big time are Bob Wallis's Storyville Jazzmen and Dick Charlesworth's City Gents.

Ken Colyer's name crops up occasionally but slightly dismissively - as 'that stalwart of New Orleans purists'. Late in the day, he adds: 'There can scarcely be a jazz man of note whose career has not been influenced at some point by Colyer' - yet in total the Guv'nor is afforded no more than five lines when Jackie Lynn, for example, a glamorous and largely forgotten vocalist with Dick Charlesworth, gets three pages, about the same coverage as Otilie Patterson.

Did jazzmen at the time really refer to each other and everyone else as 'Dad'? Many do in this book including Acker, 'a gentleman-farmer', who seems incapable of addressing anyone otherwise. Acker receives high praise for rehearsing thoroughly and being uncompromisingly self-critical. We learn how meticulous he is in keeping detailed records of the band's repertoire 'annotated with such necessary information as the duration and tempo of each number'. On the stand, however, it is Colin Smith, the trumpeter with 'a phenomenal memory', who calls the key and the order of solos.

Writing in a period with a different moral compass from that of the present, Matthew feels an obligation to mention Acker's court martial and dishonourable discharge from the forces and brief imprisonment. It seems that this blot is somehow effaced, however, by his subsequent appearance at a Royal Variety performance. If he is good

enough to be presented to the Queen Mother, we can have no fear about his standing and, indeed, his band had just been voted by *New Musical Express* readers as 'top trad group of 1961, with a clear lead of 2,000 points over its nearest rival.' Royal patronage only just trumps mass popularity in establishing bona fides.

That nearest rival happens to be Kenny Ball, and his radio appearance on Sunday morning's *Easy Beat* was apparently the subject of much discussion in Reith-redolent BBC corridors. It seems Jazz was fine for Saturdays but, well, Sundays were different. Matthew is happy to expatiate on his own role in persuading the assistant head of the Light Programme, Jim Davidson, to give it a try. Initially 'with appropriate caution' Kenny Ball was booked for a four-week trial. After making a 'colossal impact', he had his first big hit with *Samantha* and was kept on for the next seven months. 'It's ridiculous, Dad,' was Kenny's verdict, blown away by not being able to find a jazz club big enough to accommodate his fans.

There is almost the sense that all this might get out of hand and a word of caution is interjected. Such was the popularity of the music that the very label 'Trad' in some quarters was 'sufficient in itself to mean success for many bands playing very bad jazz ... offensive to the ear'. The message seems clear: it's much safer, all round, to stay with radio Jazz and keep buying the records.

The Temperance Seven have a whole chapter to themselves and in spite of being treated for the most part as a novelty act, creating their own eccentric 'myth' and 'odyssey' (presumably what today would be called 'image'), at heart they are sincere musicians 'who will remain a top attraction for a very long time'. At least that was true in part.

Chris Barber is lumped in a chapter with 'three of the best', although rated by many Jazz fans as 'not only the most popular but by far the best band in Britain.' Chris is not apparently the sort of chap to call anyone 'Dad' and, it slightly amuses the author, that he loathes the very word 'Trad',

feeling it is restricting and giving a false impression. Anyone who has ever met Chris will not be surprised to hear his slightly pedantic alternative: 'creative jazz ... in the traditional idiom'. Matthew goes on perceptively to describe Chris's entrepreneurial instincts, his 'brilliance at mathematics' and his 'built-in slide-rule'. One suspects that this might be euphemism for saying Chris knows his own value and drives a hard bargain - slightly surprising from a man so 'quiet and unassuming'.

There is some suggestion that Matthew does not entirely revere this man, for all Chris's acknowledged devotion to Jazz. He comes across, in the modern parlance, as something of a control freak and tight-fisted to boot, adding up restaurant bills in advance and correcting mistakes. Greed rears its ugly head, in fact. 'As far as eating goes, Chris takes the cake, and not only that, but as many other courses as any restaurant is capable of serving. At meal times he really comes into his own, and it is then that his alcoholic indulgence becomes apparent.' Apparently Chris has a naughty taste for white wine, too, and sometimes, amusingly, 'gets to the giggly stage.' Who would have thought it!

In a book full of incidental comments, many of them trivial and transitory, one of the most far-sighted is reserved for trombonist, Roy Williams, about 24 at the time and working with Mike Peters: 'I firmly believe we are going to hear a great

deal of Roy Williams ... [and] ... it wouldn't really surprise me if he eventually ... became a modernist.' Banjoist Hugh Rainey is perceptively singled out for his brilliance and great promise.

Finally, Matthew touches on televised Jazz and his involvement with the short-lived and well-named *Trad Fad*, preening himself for having been the original compère for the only television programme to feature nothing but Trad. The set, designed by Cephaz Howerd, of the Temperance Seven, was 'clean, modern and spacious, as far removed as possible from many a jazz cellar'. To maintain visual interest professional dancers were employed. The audience was by invitation only and there were 'no beatniks and no weirdies.' Jeans were impermissible; girls had to wear skirts. It does get even more patronising: 'the great unwashed, with their bizarre clothes and off-beat habits,' to be found in jazz clubs, were excluded.

The producer, Johnny Stewart, declared himself to be on a mission 'to prove to detractors that it is a most entertaining form of music, which does not have to be presented in dirt and discomfort'. He is quoted as saying: 'I have built a clean, bright set and I want it filled with clean bright people who enjoy jazz'.

Trad Fad was not long lived.

Reading the book again after so many years and now in possession of some critical

judgement, it becomes crystal clear that the Trad Boom, so called, was merely a manifestation of Tin Pan Alley, rather than a radical alternative to it. In this respect, we ought not to be surprised it came and went like a shooting star. Like many and indeed most manufactured pop cults it lasted only until the next craze came along.

Its demise had nothing to do with the intrinsic merits of its music. It had run its course and was eclipsed in the popular consciousness by something new, which I forebear to mention. The real traditional jazz had been played in rhythm clubs from the late 1940s onwards and is still alive in our jazz clubs. So good is it that it has survived without significant changes in style or substance.

Trad fads for Trad-mad Trad dads was commercially inspired and embraced by two types of people: those who are always into the latest thing and quickly tire; and those who developed a genuine love for it and stuck with it. The real stout oaks of their generation, not blown about by every modish breeze, still listen to it and those still able attend it in their clubs. This second group were never 'Trad mad' but simply intoxicated, body and soul, by jazz's heady brilliance. Having once had a taste of it, they could never give it up.

Let's hope they can return soon, post-Covid.



Acker Bilk's
Paramount
Jazz Band

I GET A KICK OUT OF...

PAOLO FORNARA, pianist with The Jim Dandies, answers the questions

What track or album turned you on to jazz?

It was 1987 and I was 11. I remember that day as if it was yesterday. I bought that album almost by mistake, without even knowing who the musician was. I went home and put it on record player and my musical life completely changed. That musician was Professor Longhair and the album was *Rock'n'Roll Gumbo* on the Dancing Cat Records label.

What was the first jazz gig you went to?

Keith Jarrett in Venice at Teatro La Fenice in 2006.

What is your favourite jazz album and why?

Lil Johnson - *The Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order - Volume 1*. It is actually a collection of all the recordings of Lil Johnson in the period from 1929 to 1936. For me it is a very important album because it is the album that made

me discover one of my main musical influences: at the time Lil Johnson was accompanied on the piano by Black Bob Hudson, whose real name and identity are still unknown today.

What was the best jazz performance you've ever seen?

The Bill Murray Experience with Jessy Carolina at the Main Street Museum, White River Junction, Vermont on 19/06/2010.

What's your favourite jazz release (new or reissue) from the last 12 months?

Tuba Skinny - *Quarantine Album: Unreleased B-Sides*

If you could meet one jazz musician, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Pianist Jimmy Blythe (May 20, 1901 – June 14, 1931). He was the first pianist I started studying, listening to piano rolls and recordings.



Photo by Merlin Daleman

Piano rolls were one of the teaching tools I used most at the beginning of my career and they were the only way to really understand the original piano playing style. Blythe was one of the earliest boogie-woogie pianist to be recorded. His hit *Chicago Stomp* was recorded in 1924 for Paramount Records in Chicago. Blythe's style was a mix of stride piano at its finest, boogie woogie and classic blues.

Hailing from Bassano del Grappa in northern Italy, The Jim Dandies are fast making waves on the European festival circuit. Their album, *The Hottest Girl in Town*, is set for release on Big Bear Records in October this year.

VIEUX CARRE JAZZMEN

THE HOLYSTONE, NEWCASTLE, 9TH AUGUST 2020

This year the phrase 'live stream' has entered the jazz lexicon. In lockdown - five months and counting - the online, virtual jazz gig has become the 'new normal'. We've given up on, perhaps forgotten about, the live gig experience.

Predictions of the end of the jazz world as we knew it seemed plausible with festivals, jazz club dates and residencies cancelling left, right and centre. Musicians stared into the financial abyss, venues likewise. The gig-goer resorted to dusting off vinyl and CD collections.

Some expressed surprise: *I'd forgotten about that one. I haven't heard it in years!* Then word got out that sitting in front of a PC/laptop/tablet/other

device watching musicians in action was the 'new thing'. The platform - Facebook/YouTube/other - was where it was at as your favourite musician invited you to log on, sit back and enjoy a virtual performance.

Some live streams were good, some very good. Some were plagued by bouts of buffering. A bout of buffering provided an excuse to go to the bar (kitchen) to open another bottle.

The live stream culture could be here to stay but the live gig experience hasn't quite taken its last breath. Word got out that a socially distanced gig was in the offing. Yes, a real, live gig! The Holystone pub on Whitley Road near Newcastle upon Tyne re-opened in July, keen to impress upon its clientele that it was 'Covid-secure'.

The pub happily played host to the Vieux Carré Jazzmen's weekly (Thursday lunchtime) residency until the pandemic closed

down it and just about every other venue on the planet. Pete Deuchar formed the Vieux Carré in 1954. The sextet became an instant hit and has remained popular to this day. Some of the band's loyal following fondly recall the early days; it remained to be seen how many of them would be prepared to venture out into the strange, brave new world of 2020.

Band leader Brian Bennett arrived in good time to oversee matters. Arrowed flooring directed gig-goers around the Holystone's sun-drenched beer garden as the Vieux Carré boys set-up under an awning.

The novelty of table service proved popular although the prohibition of ritually going to the bar hit home. Some things that we take for granted will be somewhat different for the foreseeable future. One thing that hasn't changed is the Vieux Carré's brand of New Orleans and Dixieland jazz. In these

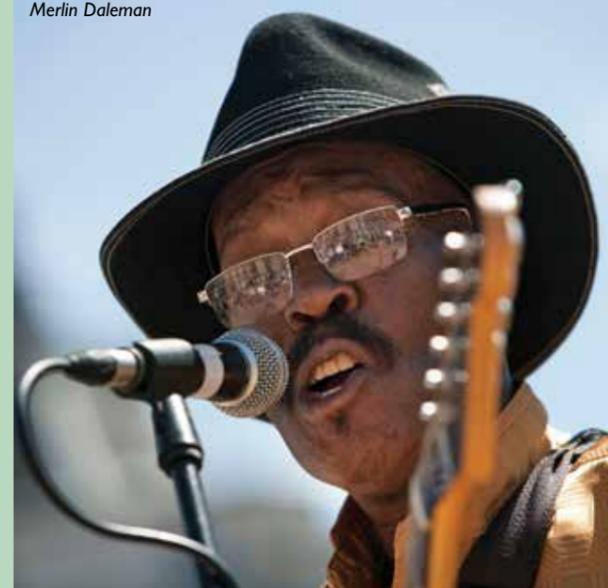
strange times familiar numbers proved to be reassuring; *Way Down Yonder in New Orleans*, *Bye, Bye Blues*, *Ace in the Hole* and *The World is Waiting for a Sunrise* were but four of many tunes played across two sets.

The Vieux Carré's frontline of the McBriarty brothers - Jim, clarinet and vocals, Lawrence, trombone - was bolstered by award-winning trumpeter Ray Harley, up from Darlington for the day. The engine room boys - Messrs Bennett, banjo and guitar, Bill Colledge, bass and singing drummer Fred Thompson - stoked the fires as the band cruised down the Tyne Mississippi.

The Holystone's publican couldn't have been other than delighted at the turn out. Some in attendance had been shielding for weeks on end, but they weren't about to miss this day, in its own small way, an historic day.

RUSSELL CORBETT

Photo by Merlin Daleman



CHICK WILLIS REVISITED

One thing that has emerged during lockdown is the realisation that looking back is more certain than looking forward in 2020. When Big Bear Records revisited its archive of previously unreleased material, an album by Georgia bluesman Chick Willis stood out. Recorded in 1997 with a top-class British band (Tony Ashton, Roger Inness and Sticky Wicket), *Things I Used to Do* was soon available in digital form, with a CD (hopefully) to follow.

Blues authority Stuart Constable is in no doubt of the importance of this release 23 years on.

Chick dug into the blues just as its audience was changing. The new generation of black American fans preferred the soul and funk of James Brown, Motown and Atlantic, but the world's newly empowered and rebellious white students were finding their righteous identity through rock and roll, blues-driven rock and the blues itself.

So Chick, the Kings (B.B., Freddie and Albert), Buddy Guy and countless other guitar-toting blues players found themselves to be big stars on the college and club circuits across the US and Europe. And for many American blues artistes, the road to Europe was built by the Big Bear himself, Jim Simpson.

In all, Jim fixed four tours of the UK and Europe for Chick, but it wasn't till the last trip in 1997 that they got time to put Chick in a studio with a cooking band.

This album was recorded in two sweaty days in August 1997 at the Chipping Norton Studios run by Richard and Mike Vernon. It's a swinging celebration of the sly, soulful blues that Chick put out there for almost 60 years. The band was fresh from gigs in Birmingham, enough to knock off a few corners and tighten things up without choking them. Everyone knew what they had to do.

Here you have thirteen tracks captured in one or two takes, as live as you could possibly get outside a raucous club. And there's that hallmark Big Bear sound, which is the real sound of the band, unfiltered by studio processes, fresh and direct to your ears.

Chick Willis sang the blues with joy, teasing, laughing and occasionally shedding a sentimental tear. Always, he entertained. Just listen to this.

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CD REVIEWS

LYNNE ARRIALE
TRIO WITH K J
DENHART

CHIMES OF FREEDOM

Challenge Records CRY3494
45.56

It seems that since she won the Great American Jazz Piano Competition back in 1993 Lynne Arriale has been hiding in plain sight. By this I mean that, despite this remarkable musician producing an impressive number of albums (this is her 17th) she hasn't really attracted the attention she, and her distinctive talent, have deserved.

Arriale has shared the stage with such talents as Tommy Flanagan, Ray Bryant, Monty Alexander and Hank Jones, amongst others, where she has made no concessions. She has collected many awards and drawn copious praise, her albums consistently showing up in best of recommendations. Yet real fame has eluded her.

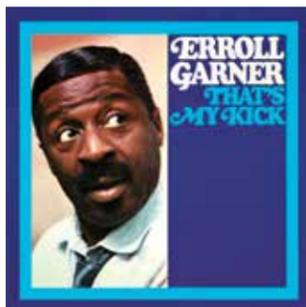
This album takes Martin Luther King as its inspiration and racial equality as its goal. 'Luminous' is the word to describe this graceful salute. The pianist brings a classical discipline and a strong sense of dynamics to these ten tracks: seven originals, one gospel song, the Paul Simon song *American Tune* and Dylan's *Chimes of Freedom* which dictates the theme.

The mood is, by turns, reflective, passionate, sad and always intensely musical. Her touch is firm: ringing. Her technique is faultless and each tune is treated with a vigorous invention. This is jazz piano at its most compassionate.

Although the piano is the dominant presence, bassist Jasper Somsen and drummer EJ Strickland are collaborators, rather than just backup musicians, emphasising that this is a trio. They are joined on three tracks by KJ Denhart, the kind of singer which American black churches seem to produce by the hundreds. She is a fine example of that tradition.

Music for grown ups.

JOHN MARTIN



ERROLL GARNER

THAT'S MY KICK

Octave Remastered Series
07 39 :55

This is the seventh in the Octave (monthly) series of re-mastered Erroll Garner material. It marks the exceptional occasion the great pianist stepped back into the recording studio for the first time in about five years, during which period he had been far from inactive, bringing out recordings of live concerts. First, we must commend the scope of the series: 12 albums from the last two decades of Garner's relatively short but prodigious career, prime years, in which after his parting of the ways with Columbia, he fully and most creatively expressed himself with RCA.

Recorded in April and November, 1966, these 12 tracks, laid down in the company of kindred spirits, Milt Hilton on bass, José Mangual on various forms of percussion, guitarist Art Ryerson, drummer George Jenkins, in many ways represent the Pittsburgh-born pianist's genius at its most unbridled, freewheeling and joyous. Every few bars he grunts in sheer joy of the vibe, especially – it seems – on the songs he, himself, has composed.



No one played quite like him. True, there's a lot of Earl Hines, also born in the Burgh, about him, but the rest is pure originality. On these swinging tracks, we find him scatting, bopping, making with the bossa nova groove, big right hand striking octaves on the off-beat, left punching ever-changing sequences of rhythm, crossing over, punctuating the melody, emphasising it, occasionally suspending it. *The Shadow of Your Smile* is a thing of expressive beauty; *Autumn Leaves* is just heart-stopping; *Blue Moon* will touch your soul – and *More* will make you want to conga. *Passing Through*, his own composition, fairly swings along and is the nearest thing on the CD to the sort of easy-listening salon sophistication that Columbia had demanded. Just when you think it's heading for a comfortable ending, it stops dead. Erroll Garner always surprises. Being in the presence of radiant genius is exhilarating, sometimes unsettling.

ANDREW LIDDLE

CALLUM AU /
CLAIRE MARTIN

SONGS AND STORIES

Stunt Records STUCD 20062
46.35

Martin needs little introduction here. She's an award-winning UK vocalist, at ease singing jazz with

small groups or soaring over an ensemble.

What she had yet to do, until this marvellous opportunity came along, was to record with a big band. More to the point perhaps, not only to record with a big band but also with a full orchestra.

That all of this has been accomplished via the arranging miracle that is Callum Au is even more noteworthy. Callum is a freelance trombonist, schooled in NYJO for seven years – he joined when he was fifteen – and a regular with every kind of big band ever since, notably those fronted by Peter Long at Ronnie Scott's and beyond. What those outside that circle might not have realised until now is that he is an arranger of peerless quality, as adept at punching out a big band backing for Martin as he is giving her the lushest of string-based backgrounds.

Pure Imagination sets the mood so ably, a brass chorale preceding Martin's entry, *sotto voce* over minimal rhythm, the orchestral backdrop subtle as Freddie Gavita's sublime trumpet rides over the strings. *Let's Get Lost* follows, taken as an up-tempo romp with Riddle-like big band bravura and is the perfect contrast, Martin at her best, guest US trombonist Andy Martin (no relation) contributing an improvisation of glorious quality.

If that were not enough, local trombone star Andy Wood comes in with a fine solo too on *I Get Along*, Martin handling the lyric with the kind of yearning intensity that serves it well. I'm tempted to focus most on the quality of the solos which adorn these songs, but then again, it's Martin's singing that deserves the plaudits. Or should it just be the writing for both the

orchestra and the big band? Take Cole Porter's *I Concentrate on You*, with a quite delicious repeated orchestral motif, Martin tumultuous and a peach of a tenor solo from Nadim Teimoori or *You and the Night* with high note trumpet from Ryan Quigley over a Latin beat.

So many delights; eleven tracks, 82 musicians, all up on their toes. A triumph for all concerned.

PETER VACHER

THE COON-
SANDERS ORIGINAL
NIGHTHAWK
ORCHESTRA

COLLECTION 1921-32

Acrobat ACTRC9098
3 CDs, 72.34/73.04/71.43

Acrobat present 69 beautifully-restored tracks from The Coon-Sanders Original Nighthawk Orchestra, almost their entire oeuvre from the pre-electric days of 1921 to the relative sophistication of 1932.

The first Depression to the worst of the Great Depression as a period can only be called the 'Roaring Twenties' for one reason: Dr Jazz had discovered a vaccine for the pandemic. *Everything Is Hotsy-Totsy Now*, of 1925, is a great driving jazzy number could start a party in a morgue. *Yes Sir! That's My Baby!* is an enormous invitation to get up and strut. They are typical of the mood-lifting potency of this concoction of black jazz, vaudeville and the residue of ragtime syncopation that was the uber-popular dance music of its day.

Jazz in its various kinds took the world by storm and this band, led by drummer Carleton Coon and pianist Joe Sanders, was among the most influential, because from 1922 onwards their nightly

broadcasts, uniquely, reached the entire nation.

Coon, born in 1894, was first exposed to black music in Lexington, where he heard dock workers singing spirituals, saw them dancing to their rhythms. Sanders, born in 1896 in the state of Kansas, had a natural talent for piano.

A chance meeting saw them form a singing duo, and after the Great War they formed their own dance band and enjoyed a decade of enormous popularity until Coon's premature death.

Their driving syncopated take on *After You've Gone*, cut in December 1929, is a fine track, but Paul Whiteman's version in October, with Bing, Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang, is vastly superior, much closer to Jazz. This in a nutshell is why the big guy, known to some white audiences as 'The King of Jazz', is still remembered whilst Coon-Sanders are largely forgotten. Of course, King Louis's version, made in December, 1929, makes you instantly conscious of white jazz's limitations.

ANDREW LIDDLE



CARSTEN MEINERT

MUSICTRAIN REVISITED:
THE REMIX & MOREStunt Records STUCD20022
64:00

Saxophonist Carsten Meinert formed C M Music Train in the late 1960s and the music, which was composed by Meinert, has its roots in the jazz of that period, but was also forward looking. The 16-piece group, including no less than four drummers plus additional percussion, was already experimenting with what would later be termed 'world music'.

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The lengthy opening track *San Sebastian* has a distinctly Basque tinge. The spectre of free jazz also looms large, especially on *Before Sunrise*. The group also flirts with the then fashionable fusion of rock with jazz on *C M Music Train*. The influence of Miles Davis can be felt on the modal *This Time*.

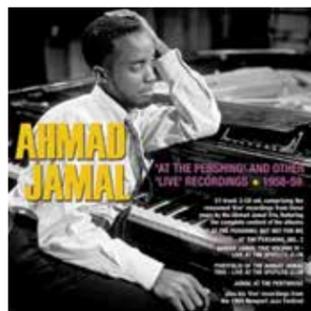
Viewed from 2020, it is hard to imagine that this Danish group was, at the time ground-breaking in its originality. However, the influences of then contemporary masters such as Charles Mingus and Gil Evans can also be heard.

The original tapes for the album may have been lost when the recording studio burned down, but more recently a tape with some extra takes has surfaced. These are included here together with the original pieces restored and enhanced.

This is certainly challenging music. It will appeal to the more adventurous reader of this magazine. What does come across is the raw intensity and passion of this young generation of musicians fearlessly exploring new ground.

As with all Stunt releases, this is a quality product with a 24-page booklet including rare photographs and an informative essay from the leader. The album is available on CD and LP as a limited edition.

ALAN MUSSON



AHMAD JAMAL

AT THE PERSHING AND OTHER 'LIVE' RECORDINGS 1958-59

Acrobat ACTRC9094 3 CDs 75.22/73.06/73.59

Pianist Ahmad Jamal (formerly Fritz Jones) emanated originally from Pittsburgh but made his

name in Chicago via a lengthy residency at the Pershing Lounge located on 64th and Cottage Grove in the city's South side. Already a trio leader of some renown, by 1958 he had settled on Israel Crosby as his bassist and Vernel Fournier from New Orleans on drums.

Once the local Argo label was persuaded to record the trio live, Jamal's fortunes changed, if not overnight then pretty soon thereafter. The album that emerged *At The Pershing Vol 1*, whose eight tracks open CD1 in this collection, went to number 3 in the Billboard 'Hot 100' and stayed in the chart for two years. *Poinciana* from the session was released as a single and again did extraordinarily well, in effect becoming Jamal's signature piece.

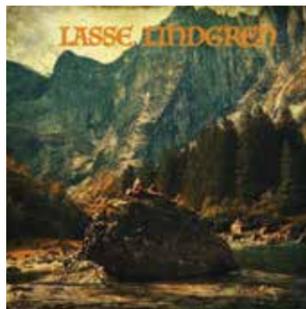
As will be evident, Jamal's piano style moved away from the busy, almost tumultuous approach of a Bud Powell towards a more spare, spacious manner which intrigued many of his peers, Miles Davis famously more than most when he instructed his pianist Red Garland to take note of Jamal's use of space. None of these 57 tracks is overlong, each performance is cleverly structured, Crosby and Fournier dovetailing perfectly with their leader on the way to becoming one of the most celebrated piano trios in all of jazz.

Of course these tracks swing and if it's Erroll Garner's style that sometimes comes to mind, that's fine. Jamal is subtle, harmonically canny and never less than intriguing while Fournier brings a street-wise kick to *Poinciana* that influenced many other players.

Unsurprisingly there was a follow-up album taken the next night also from the Pershing (released as *Vol 2*) and Acrobat have helpfully combined the Pershing pair with two more made by the trio at the Spotlight Club in Washington, also in 1958, together with other recordings from New York and the 1959 Newport Festival.

Often reissued but seldom so completely, this is essential music. Fine booklet too.

PETER VACHER



LASSE LINDGREN

LASSE LINDGREN

Sleepy Night Records SNRCD014 72:17

Lasse Lindgren, born in 1962 in Gothenburg, Sweden, is a graduate of the Royal College of Music, Stockholm. He has played lead trumpet with a variety of Scandinavian big bands and is one of Jazz's great polymaths, a writer, composer, bandleader and lecturer in one dynamic package.

In his acknowledgements he speaks of this CD as a 'project'. Both kicking off and signing off with the moody melancholia of *Nature Boy*, plus the pictures of Lasse, trumpet in hand, communing with nature in Norway's idyllic Romsdalen valley, might suggest something vaguely hinterlandish, overflowing with natural sensibility.

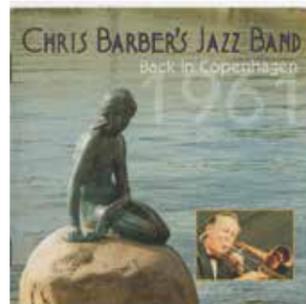
That's not exactly the mood that rolls through some amazing arrangements, striking a variety of tempi, on these 14 tracks, disparate in style, ranging from a funky *Watermelon Man* to a moody tinkling *Eleanor Rigby*, from the Maynard Fergusonesque *Maria* to ABBA's virtually unrecognisable *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)*.

Common to them all is Lasse's virtuosic trumpeting, the strobe glow of white heat bravura of his salvos of straight eighths. His high-wailing pitch transports the listener to an agitated mental state very far removed from Scandinavian folklore and totally at odds with the ethnic-style floral woven jacket of the maestro pictured on the cover.

The bonus track of Ferguson's big hit, *Rocky*, probably tells us as much as we need to know about who taught Lasse to fly right. One cannot help but be rendered

awe-struck by the artistry of someone somehow firing off these crazy wonderful high notes with such control. Much of it, unfortunately, is over my head.

ANDREW LIDDLE



CHRIS BARBER'S JAZZ BAND

BACK IN COPENHAGEN 1961

Lake Records LACD360

The title of this recording makes it clear that this is not the Barber Band's first appearance in Copenhagen. Indeed, an earlier album was released in 1960 by Denis Preston on his Lansdowne Jazz Series. There is no duplication of material here which seems to be mostly standard fare from the Barber repertoire of the time.

Having said that, some surprises are included. Some of the tunes, *Shine*, for instance, had apparently never been recorded on a commercially available album. Alongside the familiar *Isle of Capri* and *Stevedore Stomp* we get *King Kong* and *Rent Room Blues*, which seem to have only ever been in the band's repertoire in 1961.

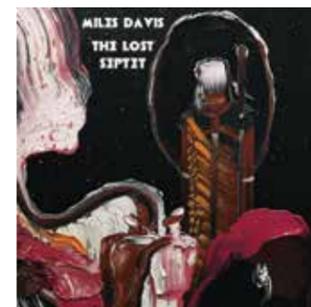
This album marked only the second recorded appearance of Ian Wheeler on clarinet and alto saxophone, with the frontline being completed by regular band member Pat Halcox on trumpet, alongside Barber. The recording is also notable for including Malcolm Cecil, depping on bass for the incapacitated Dick Smith.

Cecil started out as a confirmed modernist and was a member of the Jazz Couriers and worked regularly with tenor saxophonist Dick Morrissey. Later, however, he was in the original line-up for Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, so

perhaps his inclusion here is not so incongruous as it might at first seem.

No concert by a Barber Band of this vintage would be complete without the inclusion of Otilie Patterson who provides fine vocals on three tracks. Comprehensive booklet notes and contemporary photography makes for an indispensable release for Barber aficionados.

ALAN MUSSON



MILES DAVIS

THE LOST SEPTET

Sleepy Night Records SNRCD020 2 CDs 51.04/50.15

I suppose I'd better come clean from the off; I'm patently the wrong man for reviewing this album.

The Miles Davis I like, you see, is the doyen of acoustic jazz, the ceaseless trendsetter who created a series of LP-sized stepping stones into jazz's future over a remarkable decade-long run between 1955 and the mid-Sixties. And I'm not ashamed to admit my failing at not appreciating his 1968-onwards 'plugging in', a move which, despite the trumpeter himself admitting it was caused in part by his losing ground to rock figures like Jimi Hendrix, some still maintain was the next great leap forward. Me, I think it's the tail wagging the dog.

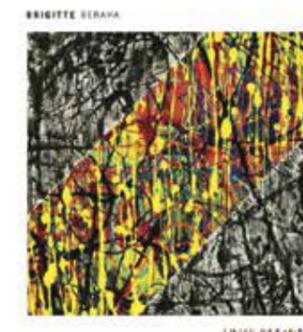
This new release, from 1971, is more of the same. And forget all the attention-grabbing 'lost' nonsense. This is a radio broadcast from a not particularly noteworthy European tour, not a previously unknown Dead Sea Scroll!

If the sound quality is excellent the playing is typical of Davis' live sets of the era - a shifting melange of eight beat rhythms, surplus percussion, some squally saxophone from Gary Bartz and the leader himself spending as much time depressing a wah-wah pedal as he does depressing this writer.

Were all this 'you had to be there' stoned-out, pot and pills pretence not enough, the production values on this record really take the biscuit. With a booklet inlay so badly cut that it hardly fits the CD tray (and printed on what appears to be home printer grade paper) and an anonymous quote appended to the rear inlay that'll have your blood boiling if you have even the most rudimentary grasp of English grammar ('Miles your the man!' sic.) we're deep into dilettante territory here.

Miles' completists may well welcome it, but I'm with Philip Larkin on this sort of stuff; 'Muzak-like chicka-chikka-boom-chick' as he once wrote of *Bitches' Brew*. Buy *Birth of the Cool* or *Kind of Blue* instead.

SIMON SPILLETT



BRIGITTE BERAHA

LUCID DREAMS

Let Me Out LMOCD001 40:21

Brigitte Beraha's new album is her first as leader in more than a decade. A resumé boasting performances with an array of familiar names as disparate as Alan Barnes, Tim Garland, Kim Macari and Kenny Wheeler makes it difficult to pigeonhole the Italian-born British vocalist.

Lucid Dreams was recorded in January with gigs to follow only to be derailed by the pandemic



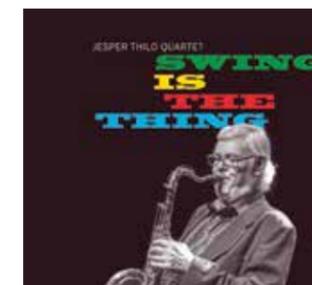
Miles Davis

lockdown. Five tracks (four of them Beraha's compositions) feature George Crowley's tenor saxophone, clarinet and electronics, Alcyona Mick's piano and drummer Tim Giles with additional percussion and electronics. Beraha's instrumentation is listed as 'voice, electronics, singing bowl'. The common denominator is electronics and 'voice' rather than 'vocals' will come as no surprise to the reader familiar with Beraha's work.

This Let Me Out Records album bears the catalogue number CD001 which is a clear indication that Beraha considers *Lucid Dreams* to be a cherished project and the label is a vehicle to get the music out there.

Comparison with Norma Winstone is unavoidable and Beraha has expressed admiration for the doyen of contemporary British jazz singing. The album's five tracks, the first of which is *The Meaning of the Blues* (Bobby Troup, composer/Leah Worth, lyrics), don't attempt to impress with a display of pyrotechnics, although each member of the quartet is more than capable of frightening the horses. Rather, this recording of a shade over forty minutes' duration is an exercise in controlled dynamics enveloped in an ethereal mist.

RUSSELL CORBETT



JESPER THILO QUARTET

SWING IS THE THING

Stunt Records STUCD 19142: 66.50

Veteran Danish tenor sax star is a splendidly uncomplicated player, technically assured, direct, melodically inventive and not given to extravagant gestures and elaborately long solos. To me he is very much of the school of Zoot, though apparently he himself cites as his heroes Don Byas, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young - nothing wrong there, then!

Swing is the Thing was recorded live, without an audience, but equally without edits or any kind of trickery, and it sounds it, fresh and with a natural blend within the quartet. Most of the material is familiar, but not hackneyed, with Thilo's love of the Great American Songbook evident. The

Webster influence is strongest on the ballads, notably a delicious reworking of *I Can't Get Started* and a warmly evocative *Embraceable You*. A re-phrased *I Want to Be Happy* and *Rosetta* are among the up-tempo swingers.

Pianist Soren Kristiansen, bassist Daniel Franck and drummer Frands Ribbjerg are a tight unit and also get liberal solo space. Dizzy Gillespie's *Woody 'n' You* is pretty much a drum feature, precise, inventive and controlled, and Franck follows in the Scandinavian tradition of melodic bass soloists by taking the lead on Oscar Pettiford's *Swinging till the Girls Come Home*. Kristiansen fines down his normal two-handed style to introduce the album's closer, *Splanky*, with a touch of Basie. He is heard in rather more florid vein on the only track that doesn't really seem to fit, *Nature Boy*, a touch of Thilo clarinet, then a rather otherworldly vocal from Rebecca Thilo Farholt with sympathetic piano accompaniment – something of an oddity on a thoroughly recommendable album of jazz in the great tradition.

RON SIMPSON



THE GERRY MULLIGAN / CHET BAKER

THE COLLECTION 1952-53

Acrobat ADDCCD3339 2 CDs 72.38/72.48

If the merit of *Acrobat*'s new celebration of the classic Mulligan-Baker association is that it is offered at a knock-down price then so be it, but the truth is that this much-admired and often reissued music is a kind of exercise in small-scale modern jazz perfection. Although pianist Jimmy Rowles joined them for

the first rehearsal, thereafter the quartet went piano-less, trumpeter Baker combining with baritone star Mulligan, with just bass and drums for company and stayed that way.

As Cook and Morton put it, it is ranked now as 'one of the epochal jazz groups even if it had no such aspirations, formed for nothing more than a gig at the Haig club' in Los Angeles. Moving on from the slightly tentative music-making of their initial get-together, the Baker-Mulligan rapport developed via their live performances and studio sessions becoming ever more intuitive.

Their interplay can seem like a kind of cool polyphony, the instrumental lines interweaving, the sparsity of the rhythm support grounding the ensemble perfectly. It also earned the quartet a degree of popularity well beyond the narrow confines of jazz hipsterdom, with pieces like *Bernie's Tune*, *Line for Lyons*, *Walkin' Shoes* and *Makin' Whoopee* almost attaining pop song status.

Timeless, a tribute to the exceptional musicianship of the co-leaders but above all, this is music that's a delight to hear. Overly familiar to some maybe, but a joy for newcomers to discover.

PETER VACHER



PETER ROSENDAL WITH THE ORCHESTRA & TRIO MIO

TRICKSTER

Stunt STUCD 19152: 42.38

With a CD entitled *Trickster* one is entitled to expect the unexpected – and Peter Rosendal doesn't disappoint. All the



background information – and the colourfully bizarre collage-style cover illustrations – serve to ramp up the expectation of the unusual. Rosendal is a jazz pianist, but is also known for his work with his folk group, Trio Mio. The trio is joined on this album by the experimental big band, The Orchestra, under Nikolai Bogelund – and, for a final twist, Rosendal's sources of inspiration include the music of the island of Fano in his home country of Denmark and – it could hardly be more different – Bela Horizonte in Brazil.

So how does it come out? Surprisingly accessible, though certainly Rosendal's use of the orchestra is far from the concept of sixteen men swinging – there are far too many shifts of rhythm for that. His writing for the sections of The Orchestra is highly ingenious: he loves setting extremes of pitch against each other, often in rhythmically contrasted patterns. His writing for the woodwind (so little use is made of saxes that sax section seems inappropriate) is particularly striking, with clarinets, bass clarinets and flutes to the fore. Solos tend to be short, but there are fine contributions from trombone and guitar.

I actually found the more folk-aligned tracks the most enjoyable parts of an attractive album. *Hu Hej Hummel* IAEVand begins with folksy fiddle before a mazy orchestral deconstruction; *Geddefiskeren* is a lilting melody for the trio before the entry of sympathetic orchestral harmonies; after the complexities of *The Trickster*, the trio, with added flute, concludes with an infectious dance piece, *Dieselvals*.

RON SIMPSON



T-BONE WALKER

FIVE CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid Roots AMSC1359 2CDs 76:45 & 78:52

Each new release from Avid is useful as either an introduction to a performer who one is unfamiliar with or as a career retrospective. In this case, although Walker is certainly known to me, he wasn't someone whose work I was familiar with. The recordings here date from between 1953 and 1961. *Classics in Jazz* sees Walker singing alone with his guitar. *Sings the Blues* dates from 1959 and includes eleven accompanists in a variety of line-ups. *T-Bone Blues* from the same year lists nine accompanists including Plas Johnson on tenor sax and Barney Kessel on guitar.

As on the previous albums, much of the material is credited to Walker. *Singing the Blues* again has a larger aggregation with Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis listed amongst some of the lesser-known accompanists. There is more variety to the performances and a greater mix of composers credited. *I Get So Weary* dates from 1961 and shares a similarly large-scale personnel to some of the earlier offerings. It's notable here that the repertoire comes from a far wider roster of composers.

As always with Avid releases, the sleeve-notes from the original albums are reproduced in the CD booklet, but perhaps a little annoyingly for some, due to space limitations and data accuracy full details of exactly who played on which tracks is omitted. This undoubtedly will not spoil the listener's enjoyment of an absorbing collection of performances.

ALAN MUSSON



JOHN COLTRANE

GIANT STEPS (DELUXE EDITION)

Atlantic R2625106 2 CDs 37.22/40.02

Released sixty years ago last January, and given a nice anniversary revamp by Warner Music Group, *Giant Steps* is an album no true jazz fan can ignore. This new 2-CD edition tells its whole story too, right from the rejected early stabs at the title track and *Naima* (with the young Cedar Walton on piano) through to a scholarly reappraisal by noted Coltrane authority Ashley Kahn, which takes in the opinions of several generations of saxophonists impacted by the album, from veteran Archie Shepp to new noise Shabaka Hutchings.

Some see the album as the end game of bebop, *Giant Steps* itself signalling the ultimate destination for time/changes playing. Others look at it as the beginning of Coltrane blossoming into his own true self – a manifesto of his contemporary wares, as it were.

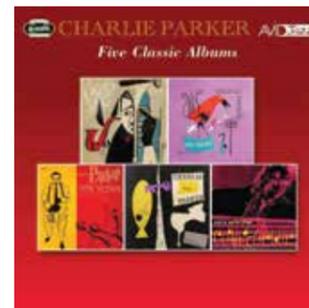
A couple of truths are universally agreed upon. The first, that this was the start of albums that truly had Coltrane's 'sound' (as Ben Ratliff had it in his book *Coltrane: The Story of A Sound*). There was

a band of his own choosing, all the compositions are his, and the record label, unlike his previous affiliation Prestige, actively worked with the artist to make the whole a package. The second is that on this album all the harmonic wonders the tenorist had shoehorned into countless conventional blowing sessions at last sat within a bespoke framework.

The end result is a record not only of immense import to jazz history, it's also one of the best programmed, most consistently enjoyable and enduringly engaging of all Coltrane's albums. It wasn't his debut LP, of course, and yet in many ways it plays as if it might be.

The sound (and it's been beautifully remastered too) really does capture a moment: that of Coltrane seizing his, and how. Add in a whole disc's worth of alternative takes and some fetching period memorabilia and you have a winner of a reissue. If you've never heard it before – or even if you have – don't ignore this new incarnation. How I envy those encountering it for the first time.

SIMON SPILLET



CHARLIE PARKER

FIVE CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid AMSC1364 2 CDs 78.00/80.56

In many ways, Parker's best recordings are beyond comment now; as with the Armstrong Hot Fives, Morton's Red Hot Peppers, the Benny Goodman small groups and Ellington's 1940s output, they form part of the great fabric of jazz development. These five albums date from Norman Granz's supervision of Parker's recordings and first appeared as Mercury, Clef or

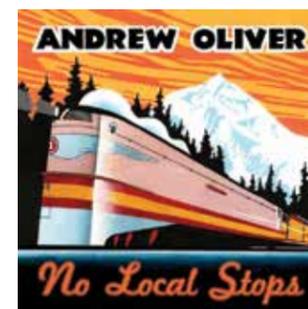
Verve releases: *Bird and Diz*, *Charlie Parker Big Band*, *Charlie Parker With Strings*, *Charlie Parker Quartet*, *Charlie Parker Plays Cole Porter*.

Certainly a mixed bag with the small group sessions the most satisfying, the initial collaboration with Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk from 1949-50 certainly revealing the empathy between the two protagonists, even if the presence of Buddy Rich on drums seems incongruous now. Parker still sounds supremely radical, almost unfathomable in his creativity, Dizzy panting to keep up.

This was Monk's only studio session with Parker. *Visa*, the final track, is from an altogether different date, not noted in the album notes, with the raucous Tommy Turk on trombone. The *Big Band* album offers little reference to Bird's bebop inclinations, with the orchestra augmented by strings, lushly scored. Even so, *Bird* rides through, quite spectacularly, as he had done throughout the earlier *With Strings* album. Engaging as these sessions are, it's the quartet recordings that matter most, with *Bird* at full tilt and the right companions alongside.

It's far from clear that Avid have sorted out all the necessary session details correctly but even so, much of this music is priceless and the opportunity to acquire it should not be missed.

PETER VACHER



ANDREW OLIVER

NO LOCAL STOPS

Rivermont BSW-2253 61:04

Earlier this year Andrew Oliver bade farewell to Britain having lived and worked in London for

seven years. During his sojourn on this side of the Atlantic some of the pianist's many concert appearances, not least recent online lockdown sessions, were noted for a distinct absence of sheet music in front of the man from Portland, Oregon. It appears Oliver is in possession of a photographic memory.

Known primarily as a student of the pioneering practitioners of jazz and blues piano, there is a lesser known side to the youthful American's work. As a member of the Kora Band operating at the contemporary end of the jazz spectrum our pianist demonstrated a thorough understanding of current developments during a 2015 tour of Britain. All this leads one to conclude Oliver is a virtuoso musician.

No Local Stops comprises no fewer than 18 tracks; 15 solo piano pieces, three in duo form with vintage percussion specialist Nicholas D Ball. The ragtime and stride pianists of the 1920s and 1930s made concise statements due to the limitations of the recording process and on this 2019-2020 recording Oliver takes a leaf out of their book. Brevity is the watchword across all tracks with running times ranging from 2 minutes 22 seconds (Jimmy Blythe's *Five O'clock Stomp*) to an extended workout (Jelly Roll Morton's *Creepy Feeling*) clocking in at 5 minutes 41 seconds.

The title track is Willie 'The Lion' Smith's, which, as Oliver points out in his liner notes, the composer never recorded. Seger Ellis' *Sentimental Blues* is an example of the Texas school of blues piano. Arthur Schutt's *Piano Puzzle* dazzles, James P Johnson's *Carolina Shout* makes the cut, perhaps for no other reason than it is one of the enduring piano pieces, and the inclusion of six Jelly Roll Morton compositions suggests Oliver has yet to tire of the music by the man who claimed to have invented jazz. This Rivermont release should be in the collection of every jazz fan and it is worth noting the excellent cover art is by Nicholas D Ball.

RUSSELL CORBETT

THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG

PETER VACHER on campus

In *Jazz Rag* 150, we wrote about the arch exponent of deep-down re-mastering, Dave Bennett, and his new series of reissues published under this generic heading. The initial pair of releases covered the King Oliver band in 1923 and the famed Hot Five recordings of 1925-26 respectively and were eye-opening, not to say revelatory, in their sound quality.

Now Bennett has taken the Armstrong story a stage further with the Hot Five & Seven of 1927-1928 (HQ Disc HQ 04) and more Oliver recordings, coupled with the complete Red Onion Jazz Babies and Clarence Williams' Blue Five sides, all from 1923-1925 (HQ Discs HQ 05).

Each CD comes in a neat clear plastic case, with full data, the inlays adorned with contemporary photographs, advertisements and label shots, the artwork skillfully devised and executed by the redoubtable Anne Bennett. As the on-cover

strap lines proudly assert, they offer 'Advanced Transfer Technology' giving 'Remarkable Sound Quality' and 'High Grade 78 Sound'.

As Dave makes clear, he has achieved these exceptional results through the use of 'Peter Ledermann's miraculous Soundsmith Strain Gauge cartridge', an imposing piece of kit which I know produces exquisite outcomes but has also made a substantial dent in the Bennett bank balance. Add in the additional restoration and noise removal skills of Martin Haskell and the provision of the original 78s from specialist collectors, plus the input of other noted Armstrong authorities, and it can be seen these releases represent an unparalleled example of collective sonic enterprise.

More to the point, their appearance adds valuably to the listening experience and to our better understanding of the musical interplay involved.

Clearer sound, sharper definition of each instrument's contribution and the chance to again assess the extraordinary burgeoning of the young Armstrong's talent. After all, for many of us, or at least those in my generation, these recordings, issued on 78rpm breakable shellac, were often our pathway into the music. We knew them off by heart and played them over and over.

I remember the trumpeter Al Fairweather telling me that he and Sandy Brown would whistle the respective cornet and clarinet parts of the Hot Fives as they walked to the Royal High School in Edinburgh every morning and we know where that led them. Quite frankly, it's not for me to argue the merit of these pieces of music: they represent the building blocks not only of Armstrong's formative brilliance but are the very stuff of early jazz itself.

Just to revisit these sides is to recall the impact they had on tyro enthusiasts like me, but

more to the point, to appreciate the additional treasures that have lain hidden deep in the grooves, these now plumbed by Mr. Ledermann's 'miraculous' cartridge and Dave's manipulation of it.

Take *Cake Walking Babies From Home* by the Red Onion Jazz Babies, the second-ever 78 recording that I bought – the first had been Jelly Roll's *Smokehouse Blues* – and now to hear it again, brought blinking in to the full Bennett-prompted daylight, is quite breathtaking: Armstrong wonderfully crisp and assertive, Sidney Bechet at his most potent, the two rivals going at it hammer and tongs, the ensembles positively leaping out of the speakers. Even the vocal chorus by Hunter and Todd is reinvigorated. And that's just one track from the 52 on offer via this pair of HQ discs.

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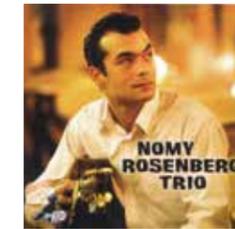
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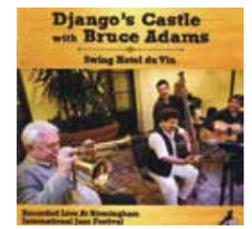
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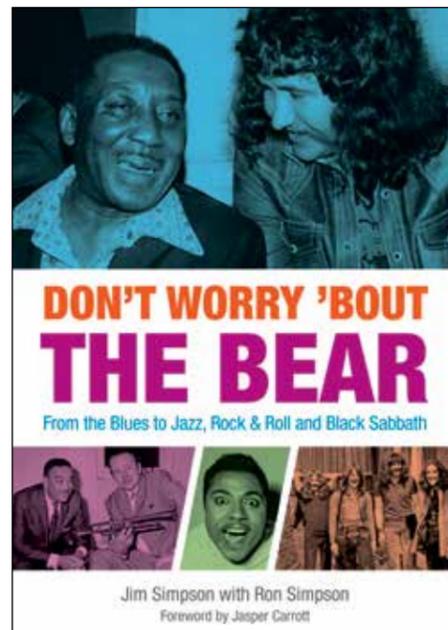
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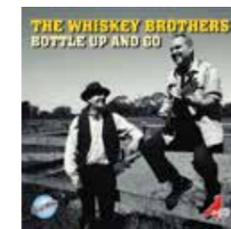
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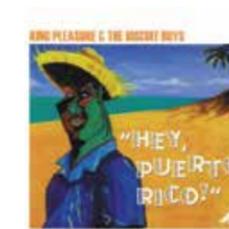
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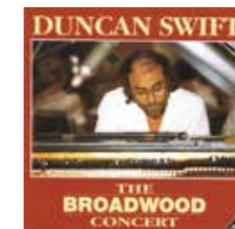
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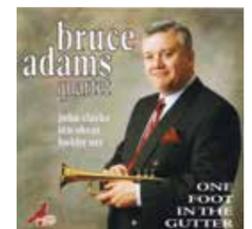
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