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SANDWELL & WESTSIDE  
JAZZ FESTIVAL**  
JULY 16TH TO 25TH 2021

# THE JAZZ RAG

LEN SKEAT 1937-2021

ISSUE 165 SUMMER 2021

UK £3.25

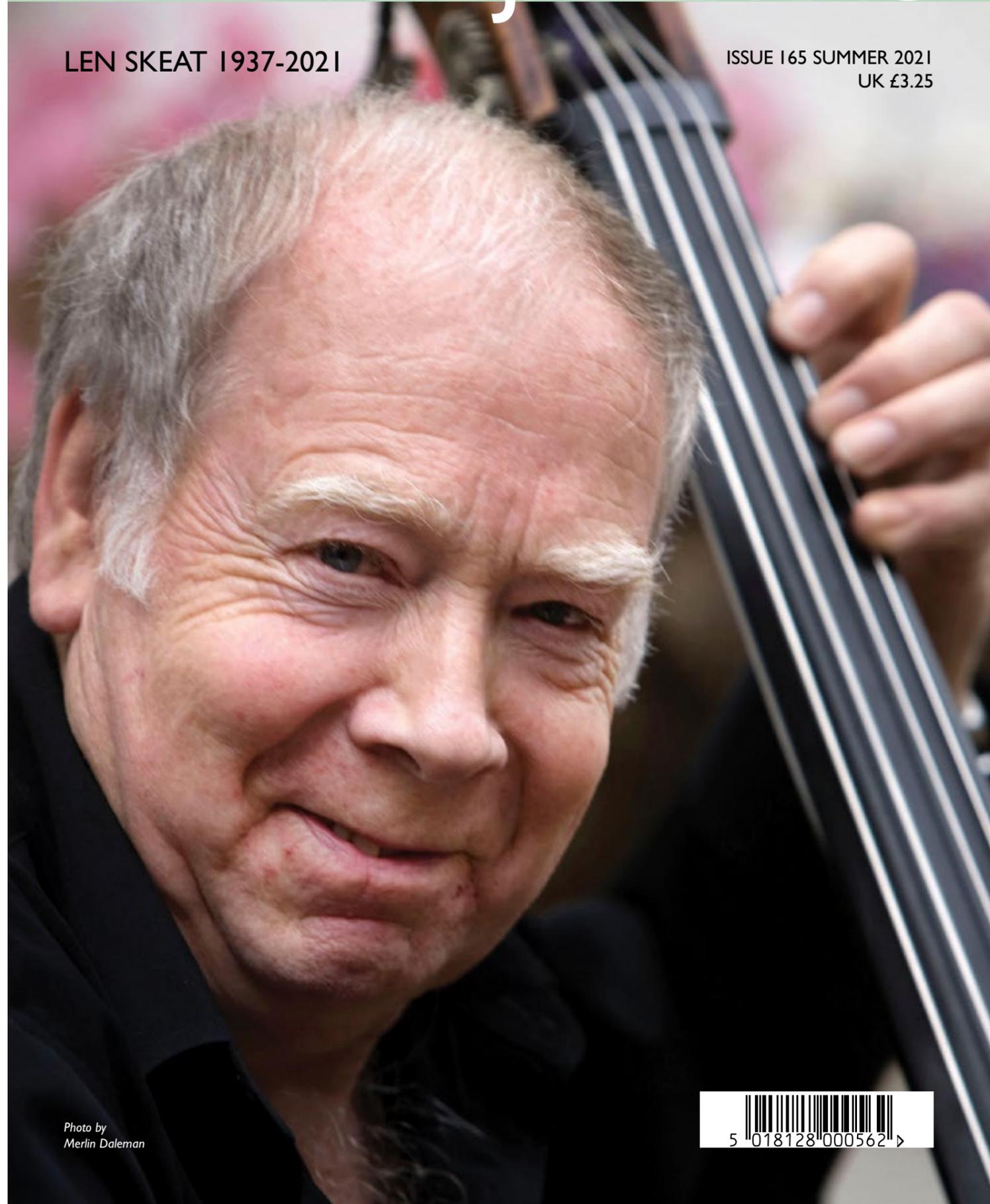


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Photo by  
Merlin Daleman

LEN SKEAT (1937-2021), master bassist and jazz legend, left us recently. DIGBY FAIRWEATHER sums up his career. (pages 12-13)

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Commercial Director: Tim Jennings  
Subscriptions & accounts: Nick Hart/Charlie Moore  
Designed by Nerys James  
Printed by Warwick Printing  
[www.warwickprinting.co.uk](http://www.warwickprinting.co.uk)

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**UPFRONT**

As we were putting this magazine together the news came that Bude Jazz Festival had been postponed for a second year. This is sad news indeed for one of the best loved and most typically British of festivals, but optimism demands that we take note of how many are going ahead.

Whether to plan to stage a festival or not in these strange times depends on many different factors: the date, of course, but also ease of enforcing Covid-related guidelines, flexibility of organisation and dependence on income from ticket sales (necessarily much reduced). In the circumstances we should rejoice in the number committed to going ahead (see pages 8-9), albeit, in many cases, with a limited programme and last-minute scheduling.

On Divine Providence's established principle of kicking a man when he's down, the jazz world (in fact, the music world) has now to cope with the problem of barriers in Europe. No one seems quite sure how well the internationalism of our music (Brits touring the Continent, European groups and musicians playing here) will survive the pernicious influence of Brexit – but it will, in one shape or form!

## JAZZLEEDS IN ACTION

JazzLeeds is quicker off the mark post-lockdown than most clubs. Already there is a full weekly programme in place at Seven Arts from May 20, with About Time, trumpeter Malcolm Strachan's sextet. There is limited seating for this, as for the next four weeks: Ian Shaw with What's New (27), Liam Noble/Seb Rochford/Tom Herbert (June 3), Josephine Davies' Satori (10) and Byron Wallen's Four Corners (17). From June 24, hopefully, restrictions are removed, with Andrew McCormack – solo and trio – the first gig to benefit. Meanwhile, a Sunday afternoon spot for local Leeds bands, currently livestream, goes live on May 23.

[www.jazzleeds.org.uk](http://www.jazzleeds.org.uk)

## EARLY DOORS AT WAKEFIELD

Wakefield Jazz Club is resuming on the first possible date, though with early timings and mandatory advance booking. The first two sessions feature local stars Rory Ingham (May 21) and Nicola Farnon (28).

[www.wakefieldjazz.org](http://www.wakefieldjazz.org)

## COLCHESTER IN JUNE

Colchester Jazz Club's Sunday evening sessions at Marks Tey Parish Hall resume at the end of June, with a healthily full programme for the rest of the year. The Louisiana Rhythm Kings kick things off on June 27, followed by Johnny Baker's Joymakers (July 4), Pete Rudeforth's Jazz Band (11), the Yerba Buena Celebration Band (18) and Bob Dwyer's Bix and Pieces (25).

[www.colchesterjazzclub.co.uk](http://www.colchesterjazzclub.co.uk)

## ALEX KEEPS BUSY

Saxophonist Alex Clarke is already looking forward to a crowded date-sheet as restrictions begin to be lifted. Plenty of guest spots testify to her ability to fit in with musicians in many different styles. Among her upcoming gigs are appearances with the Ben Holder Trio (Draycote Hotel, Rugby – May 21), Jonathan Taylor (Witney Jazz – June 4), her own quartet featuring T.J. Johnson (Albrighton Jazz Club – June 6), with the Alex Voysey Blues Band (Broadway Arts – June 13), with Tad Newton's Jazzfriends (Walnut Tree, Blisworth – June 20), with the Jeremy Huggett/Alex Clarke Quintet (Livermead Hotel, Torquay – July 11) and two appearances at the Pershore Jazz Festival, with Martin Veasey (August 13) and with Alan Barnes (15).

[www.alexclarkejazz.co.uk](http://www.alexclarkejazz.co.uk)

## NO FIXED ABODE!

Club 90 at Albrighton is one of the great survivors among jazz clubs, but even so October 25, 2020, must have seemed even gloomier for Albrighton than for most other clubs – and it was pretty gloomy everywhere! October 25 should have been a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the club and the 5th anniversary of its happy move to the Social Club after the brewery removed funding for jazz at the Harp. Sadly the Social Club was in the process of being sold and no longer trading as licensed premises. But Club 90, now labelled as 'no fixed abode', is planning to resume activities, now at the Royal, formerly the British Legion.

[www.jazzclub90.co.uk](http://www.jazzclub90.co.uk)



Alex Clarke with Digby Fairweather

Photo by Merlin Daleman

## BLUES AND JAZZ IN THE GARDENS

Birmingham's Botanical Gardens have an excellent record of staging music events, including a regular appearance in the Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival. This year jazz is scheduled for every Sunday afternoon in July, not only at Festival time. Before that the Sunday afternoon programme features blues under the banner of Henry's Botanical Blueshouse. The Nitecrawlers feature on May 23 and Tipitina on May 30, with a June programme of the Catfish Kings (6), Big Jim and the Alabama Boogie Boys (13), the Whiskey Brothers (20) and the David Moore Blues Band (27).

[www.blueshouse.bigbearmusic.com](http://www.blueshouse.bigbearmusic.com)

## RONNIE'S BACK IN ACTION

From May 20 Ronnie Scott's in London moves from livestreaming to a full programme of live shows, though, inevitably, with reduced capacity. The programme from then until the end of June includes, among many others, Nikki Yeoh's Infinitum with Michael and Mark Mondesir (May 24), Bird with Strings with Gilad Atzmon (25), Alan Barnes and Gilad Atzmon with the Lowest Common Denominator (26), Tim Garland Quartet with

Jason Rebello celebrating Chick Corea (June 2), Ian Shaw with the songs of David Bowie and Joni Mitchell (4/5), Joe Stilgoe with The Entertainers featuring Giacomo Smith (8/9), Antonio Forcione Trio (12), Binker Golding (16), Ray Gelato and the Giants (19-21) and Jim Jam featuring Jim Mullen and Hamish Stuart (26).

[www.ronniescotts.co.uk](http://www.ronniescotts.co.uk)

## NEWCASTLE JAZZ CO-OP GIGS

Newcastle Jazz Co-op at the Globe presents the Dean Stockdale Trio (May 23), Josephine Davies' Satori (30), the Charlotte Keeffe Quartet (June 13); Noel Dennis Trio (27), House of the Black Gardenia (July 4); Rafe's Dilemma (11); Alter Ego (18) and Leeds City Stompers (August 6).

## CONCORDE WEDNESDAYS TO RETURN

The regular jazz nights every Wednesday at the Concorde Club, Eastleigh, are scheduled to resume in June. There's a sort of a blues feel to May 26, with Paul Jones and Mike D'Abo, but the jazz programme begins in earnest with the Derek Nash Quartet on June 23, followed by Andy Dickens' Hot Gumbo Jazz (30), Clare Teal and her Sextet (July 7), the Ben Holder

# DARTINGTON SUMMER SCHOOL RETURNS

The Dartington Music Summer School and Festival resumes this year on July 24 to August 21 at Dartington Hall in Devon. This celebrated event has been an annual event since 1953, but of course 2020 brought an enforced break. Over four weeks musicians of all abilities learn in small groups from top professionals. Each week deals with a specific genre: early music, baroque and folk, chamber music and jazz and experimental.

The fourth week brings a remarkable collection of professionals to the jazz and experimental course. Pianist and composer Peter Edwards makes his Dartington debut with his Nu Civilisation Orchestra.

Quartet (14), John Maddocks' Jazzmen (21) and Bix, Bunny and Billy, a tribute to Beiderbecke, Berigan and Butterfield by a fine septet headed by Enrico Tomasso (28). And additional Thursday concert features Yolanda Brown on July 15.

[www.theconcordeclub.com](http://www.theconcordeclub.com)

## 7 VIRTUAL JAZZ CLUB CONTEST

The sixth edition of the 7 Virtual Jazz Club's Contest to find musicians and raise their profile is open for entries until June 15. There are two categories: Under 25 for people of that age with no prior experience with a producer or artistic promotion and Pros and Amateurs for all musicians not belonging to the Under 25. An international panel of 32 jurors will decide the winners who will such prizes as scholarships, masterclasses and workshops.

[www.7virtualjazzclub.net](http://www.7virtualjazzclub.net)

## STABLES PROGRAMME

Jazz is playing its part in a returning music programme at the Stables, Wavendon, with several postponed events back in the schedule. The Jazz Dynamoes appear on a Sunday morning event on May 23, moved from the Mancini Forum to the Marshall Auditorium for reasons of social distancing. Evening events include the Pasadena Roof Orchestra (June 24), Ronnie Scott's All Star Band (29) and The Manfreds (July 14), with Clare Teal and Darius Brubeck among the attractions booked for August.

[www.stables.org](http://www.stables.org)

Advanced jazz instrumentalists will work with them in Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts, joined by Dartington's amateur Choir under Carol Pemberton and Celia Wickham-Anderson of Black Voices.

Dartington is also joining forces with the creative team behind London's innovative Café OTO. Ryoko Akama will lead a new course in site-specific and situational performance, using found objects and natural phenomena to create a sounding space, whilst multi-instrumentalist Ashley Paul and Crystabel Riley offer a course on free improvisation.

## JAZZFRIENDS MEET UP

Tad Newton's Jazzfriends have Sunday lunch-time gigs at the Walnut Tree, Blisworth, on June 20 and July 18, in addition to evening sessions at Olney Jazz Club (July 7) and Sidcup (15). In present circumstances four days at Festjazz in Brittany (July 22-26) must be regarded as provisional.

[www.tadnewtonsjazzfriends.com](http://www.tadnewtonsjazzfriends.com)

## CLARK TRACEY ON THE ROAD IN NOVEMBER

After organising and playing in the Herts Jazz Festival in October, Clark Tracey takes to the road in November with his sextet, a busy tour starting on November 5 at Wakefield Jazz. Before that the sextet can be heard at the Hotel and Golf Club in Stoke-by-Nayland on September 29.

[www.clarktracey.com](http://www.clarktracey.com)

## NORTH EAST EMERGING FROM LOCKDOWN

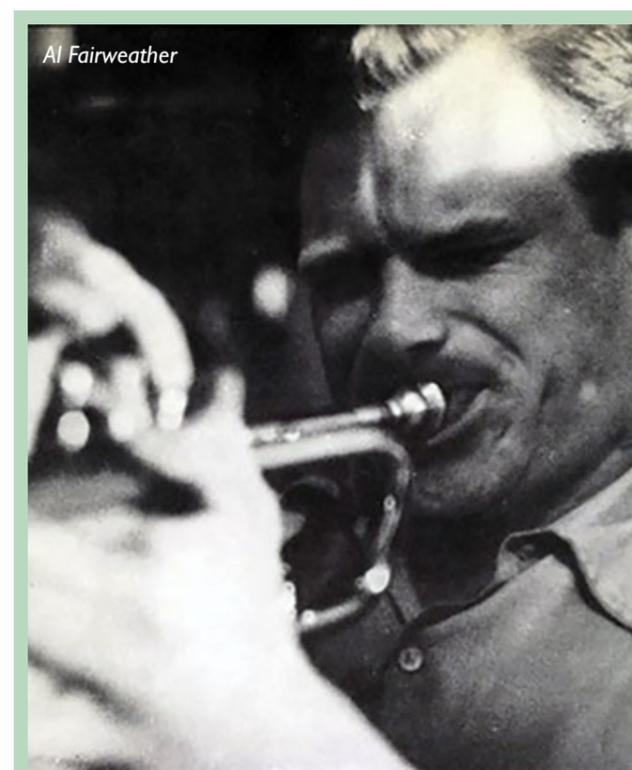
Jazz gigs scheduled for the North East include the Washboard Resonators (June 16) and Emma Johnson's Gravy Boat (July 25, 3:30pm) at Newcastle's Punch Bowl Hotel; Harry Keeble Quartet (May 25) and Abbie Finn's Finntet (June 8) at the Black Swan; the Dean Stockdale-Mick Shoulder Duo (May 30) at the Stage Door, Darlington; and Hot Club du Nord (June 25) at St Mary's Parish Hall, Barnard Castle.

Besides further courses in experimental music, the jazz offering continues with Peter Edwards and member of the NCU leading courses on jazz improvisation and jazz standards, plus specialist sessions for wind players with Steve Dummer and the Magnard Ensemble and brass workshops with Brett Baker and Paul Archibald. 2021 also sees the launch of a daily Open Space session for participants to rest, explore the grounds and try out new workshops and each week features a Future Sounds course aimed at opening up the conversation about music.

Artistic Director Sara Mohr-Pietsch commented, 'After the last year it feels particularly special to be bringing this year's Summer School and Festival to life. We need music more than ever and I am excited to welcome an incredible line-up of artists to teach and perform, all of whom bring great integrity and vitality to their work.'

Unfortunately the pandemic is still having an effect with social distancing and reduced numbers, making early booking even more important than usual.

[www.dartington.org](http://www.dartington.org)



Al Fairweather

## NEWS FROM SANDY

John Latham has continued producing the Sandy Brown Society Newsletter despite difficulties with the coronavirus and we were intrigued by the information about the London Jazz Big Band in the February and March Newsletters. Firstly there was a long and enthusiastic review by Peter Vacher of the band's debut at the 100 Club in 1975, then followed details of unissued recordings from 1977 and 1983. Organised by Stan Greig and Al Fairweather, the LJBB was an outstanding, if occasional, outfit, with such musicians as Ray Crane, Colin Smith, Tony Milliner, John Picard, Willie Garnett and Al Gay among the regulars and occasional appearances from the likes of Bruce Turner, Lennie Hastings, Bill Eyden and Henry Lowther. John Latham opines that, if the 1977/1983 tracks were issued on CD, they would provide Britain's answer to *The Atomic Mr. Basie*. But there appear to be copyright issues – questions should be asked in the House!

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# I GET A KICK OUT OF...

Performer, composer, writer and absurdist RON GEESIN answers the questions

## What track or album turned you on to jazz?

Louis Armstrong's Hot Seven *Potato Head Blues* (1927) - as balanced a 'black classical music' construction now as when I first heard it in 1959.

## What was the first jazz gig you went to?

Not counting the candlelit jazz club in Glasgow run by a little round fellow called Clifford Stanton, it would have been a Chris Barber concert at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, 1959.

## What is your favourite jazz album and why?

Too many to mention! I'll pick out Earl Hines *Spontaneous Explorations* as an album. Difficult to surpass in his displays of invention by straying into the ethereal upper atmosphere, spinning round and getting back safely. If you're talking 78s, it's the Dixieland Jug Blowers'

*Banjoreno* (Victor, 1926) as the most wonderfully absurd composition in both structure and lineup.

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

Coleman Hawkins and Benny Carter at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon shortly before Hawk died. I touched the great man - and there was nothing inside his jacket!

## What's the best jazz performance you've seen in the last 12 months?

I just imagine the REAL Ma Rainey.

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

Jelly Roll Morton - to probe the facts of his partially realised art, and follow his fantasies for my own partially realised art!



Ron is just finishing his next album *RonCycle2 - the Journey of a Rhythm* and has supplied many tracks, including unissued tests, for

the forthcoming *Complete Ma Rainey (Jazzology, USA)*, properly mastered by Doug Benson. More information from [www.rongeesin.com](http://www.rongeesin.com)

**DARTINGTON MUSIC** — **SUMMER SCHOOL & FESTIVAL 2021**

**ADVANCED JAZZ COURSE**  
**14 - 21 AUGUST**

Under the baton of renowned jazz pianist Peter Edwards, instrumentalists and singers have the unique opportunity to work on and perform Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts alongside members from Nu Civilisation Orchestra. Singers will also receive coaching from Carol Pemberton and Celia Wickham-Anderson of Black Voices.

Four weeks of shared music-making and learning accompanied by a festival of concerts, all set against the backdrop of a beautiful estate in the heart of Devon. See website for all info and bookings.

[DARTINGTON.ORG/SUMMERSCHOOL](http://DARTINGTON.ORG/SUMMERSCHOOL)



# IN SEARCH OF LINDA LIPNACK KUEHL

RON SIMPSON tries to find the truth behind BILLIE HOLIDAY's would-be biographer.

Many *Jazz Rag* readers will have been mightily impressed with *Billie: In Search of Billie Holiday*, James Erskine's documentary shown on the BBC in March. The choice of performances was excellent, with two tracks backed by Count Basie's 1951 septet, a stunningly bleak version of *Strange Fruit* and that wonderful *Fine and Mellow* from *The Sound of Jazz* (Billie watching Lester Young aided by Erskine's split screening) among the highlights. The cutting in of interview material was generally done with such skill that the integrity of the performances was preserved.

And then there were the imaginatively chosen images to illustrate not only Billie's career, but life in Harlem, for instance, or the persecution of African Americans. But the interviews were the most astonishing part of the programme, mainly because they brought together views of Billie from childhood friends, relations, lovers, Harlem entertainers (Pigmeat Markham), lawyers, narcotics investigators (including Jimmy Fletcher, foregrounded in *The United States v. Billie Holiday*) and even a psychiatrist in addition to a stellar array of jazz musicians, from a wonderfully combative Jo Jones to long-time accompanist Bobby Tucker.

The quality of the interviews was another factor. The interviewer was prepared to be casual, friendly, but she was equally prepared to challenge, to probe, and had the knowledge to do that effectively. That interviewer was Linda Lipnack Kuehl and most of the interviews on *Billie* were taken from 125 audio tapes she recorded in the 1970s.

*Billie* begins and ends with the death of a woman somehow out of step with society in controversial circumstances at a sadly early age, but it's not Billie Holiday in New York's Metropolitan Hospital in 1959, but Linda Lipnack Kuehl on a sidewalk in Washington, D.C., in 1978. Born in 1940, she was a Jewish feminist journalist who had dedicated herself in the 1970s to

intensive research for a biography of Billie Holiday; hence those 125 tapes and what she called 'a long paper trail including police files, transcripts of court cases, royalty statements, shopping lists, hospital records, private letters, muddled transcripts and fragments of unfinished chapters.'

Kuehl's tapes have surfaced before: privately purchased after her death, they have been used in various books, notably Julia Blackburn's *With Billie* in 2005, well received, but, it seems to me now, inadequate as an exploration of the tapes. But it's only in the last few months that she has been widely written about and, while facts are accurate, I can't help feeling a misleading image emerges.

Let's start with the name. She was born Linda Lipnack; the 'Kuehl' was picked up on one of her two marriages, presumably the second. These marriages are almost never mentioned in all the reviews and features, allowing the reader to imagine the young writer fixating on a feminist icon in place of her own experience of life. There is absolutely no suggestion that Mr. Kuehl, whoever he was, was a John Levy or a Louis McKay, but Linda was surely more worldly than the general coverage suggests.

More annoying is the repeated information that Linda Lipnack Kuehl was a high school teacher and part-time journalist. I'm sure this is factually true, but again misleading. She was not some kind of dilettante, sending articles to magazines in between marking 10th grade papers. She was entrusted by *The Paris Review* to interview such eminent authors as Eudora Welty and Iris Murdoch at considerable length and her final interview was with Joan Didion. She died before publication and Didion introduced the interview with a paragraph in praise of Kuehl's intelligence and acuity - and few American women stand higher than Joan Didion in the world of literary and social commentary.

In other words, Linda Lipnack Kuehl knew what she was doing!

And what was she doing? She claimed, not unusually, to be looking for 'the real Billie Holiday'. Much more unusually, she set out to achieve this by interviewing 'anyone who had a personal association' with Billie - obviously not achievable, but Kuehl was fearless and open-minded: a pimp who knew Billie's world in the 1930s and a narcotics agent who busted her in the 1950s were equally approachable.

Kuehl approached Billie 'as listener, not biographer or critic. Her voice was more true than anything else I'd heard before and I wanted to know where that voice was coming from.' Her version of Billie used her music as a counter-balance to a world of violence, misogyny and racism. So what did a comfortably off girl from the Bronx have to relate to in Billie's life? Not the extremes of deprivation or segregation certainly, but presumably two broken marriages and life as a Jewish woman gave her some basis for identification. There might even be a hint of envy when she writes, 'She did not relate to legal codes. She did what she wanted - with a vengeance.'

Two problems, I don't doubt, appeared during Kuehl's years talking to everyone with a view on Lady Day. I expect the material began to expand beyond control: as the book became more and more comprehensive and insightful, it also became more difficult (impossible?) to write. Secondly Kuehl's natural dialogue with all and sundry produced too many revelations for comfort: we know that pressure was on to suppress tales of affairs with Orson Welles and Tallulah Bankhead, but who else felt threatened?

A joy of these years was her friendship with some of the people she interviewed, notably Count Basie. Kuehl's sister remembers taking a call for her from 'Bill' and Linda saying, 'You know who Bill is?' and it was Basie. Her sister, choosing her words carefully, says, 'There was a closeness there,' and nobody seems clear just how close.

On the night of February 6th, 1978, Linda Lipnack Kuehl returned to her hotel room in Washington, D.C., after attending a Count Basie concert there. Shortly afterwards she pitched through the window onto the sidewalk. The inquest verdict was suicide and I suppose everything might have got on top of her, but her sister is insistent that, if she had planned suicide, Linda would not have applied her regular cosmetic facemask.

The family is convinced she was murdered, but by whom?

The possible affair with Basie had apparently caused distaste in some quarters and various commentators suggest, without much conviction, that someone in the Basie circle might have been responsible or even someone whose white supremacist views went to extremes. Much more likely, it seems to me, is someone who feared the revelations in her planned book. Christopher Stephens in the *Daily Mail* went out on a limb for Louis McKay, Billie's final protector/tormentor, and anyone who has seen *Billie* could believe he was capable of tossing anyone through a bedroom window. One is also tempted to look at the forces of law and order (narcotics enforcement?) as the connivance of the D.C. police force seems very possible: all records of the case have been destroyed.

Reviews of *Billie* have been very favourable, but a number of reviewers thought there was too much about Linda Kuehl and a similar number thought too little. Me, I thought it about right, but would love to see Kuehl herself the subject of an investigative documentary.



## FESTIVALS LIVE!

Coronavirus has had a disastrous effect on the jazz festival scene, as on so much else. Many festivals are now in the position of cancelling for the second year running or, in many cases, simply announcing nothing beyond the 2020 cancellation, obviously hoping (but not expecting) the clouds to roll by.

For all that there are plenty of jazz festivals to look forward to, even though, understandably, many are as yet unable to announce their programmes:



Gambit Jazzmen

### JAZZ JURASSICA (MAY 28-31)

The Marine Theatre and Theatre Square in Lyme Regis host a series of jazz and soul concerts, some of them free, with such performers as Dom Pipkin, Zoe Gilby, the Martin Harley Band and the FB Pocket Orchestra.

[www.jazzjurassica.co.uk](http://www.jazzjurassica.co.uk)

### LOVE SUPREME JAZZ FESTIVAL (JULY 2-4)

The first ten acts announced for the festival at Glynde Place in Sussex include Nubya Garcia, the Brand New Heavies, Candi Staton and the Isley Brothers.

[www.lovesupremefestival.com](http://www.lovesupremefestival.com)

### BURTON AGNES JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL (JULY 9-11)

As yet the Burton Agnes Festival is unable to announce its programme, but plenty of variety is guaranteed, together with a beautiful pastoral setting complete with Elizabethan manor house.

[www.burtonagnes.com](http://www.burtonagnes.com)

### MOSTLY JAZZ FUNK & BLUES FESTIVAL (JULY 9-11)

The popular event in Moseley Park is headlined this year by such acts as Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, the Wailers, Neneh Cherry and the Fatback Band.

[www.mostlyjazz.co.uk](http://www.mostlyjazz.co.uk)

### 35TH WIGAN INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL (JULY 9-12)

The highly respected festival returns to the Village on the Green in Aspull for a programme that reflects as far as possible last year's cancelled event.

[www.wiganjazzfest.co.uk](http://www.wiganjazzfest.co.uk)

### 37TH BIRMINGHAM, SANDWELL AND WESTSIDE JAZZ FESTIVAL (JULY 16-25)

Practically the only jazz festival to be staged during the restrictions of 2020, though in a severely reduced form and away from its traditional July date, the Birmingham festival moves back to its customary slot and to something nearer its normal size. Because of the pandemic there will be more use of outdoor venues and a limited number of streamed events, but for the most part it will again be a crowded programme of events in informal settings, with participation in everything from ukulele lessons to jitterbug sessions.

[www.birminghamjazzfestival.com](http://www.birminghamjazzfestival.com)

### 9TH RYEDALE FESTIVAL OF TRADITIONAL JAZZ (JULY 24-30)

Ryedale Jazz again take the stage for a week of traditional jazz in North Yorkshire.

[www.ryedalejazz.com](http://www.ryedalejazz.com)

### PERSHORE JAZZ FESTIVAL (AUGUST 13-15)

The festival at Pershore College has already lined up an excellent programme featuring top, mostly British musicians in various combinations. A sample of the programme gives us Hot Harlem led by Michael McQuaid, Hot Fingers with Robert Fowler, Alan Barnes/Alex Clarke/Andy MacKenzie, Trumpets in Jazz with Bruce Adams, Enrico Tomasso and Jamie Brownfield and a Tribute to Keith Nichols.

[www.pershorejazz.org.uk](http://www.pershorejazz.org.uk)

### NEWCASTLE JAZZ FESTIVAL (AUGUST 13-15)

Three days of jazz, the first at Newcastle Civic Centre, the next two at Tyne Bank Brewery, feature such attractions as the Strictly Smokin' Big Band, the Abbie Finn Trio, Jay Phelps, Swing Manouche and Dennis Rollins' Velocity Trio.

[www.newcastlejazzfestival.co.uk](http://www.newcastlejazzfestival.co.uk)

### RYE INTERNATIONAL JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL (AUGUST 27-30)

In addition to single concerts at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea during the summer, the festival stages a

series of concerts at St. Mary's Church, Rye, over four days in August, featuring such artists as Incognito, Ashley Henry and Ian Shaw/Liane Carroll.

[www.ryejazz.com](http://www.ryejazz.com)

### WARNER JAZZ FESTIVAL (SEPTEMBER 10-13)

Pete and Heather Lay host a fine line-up of traditional jazz bands at Gunton Hall, Lowestoft. As well as Pete's own Gambit Jazzmen, the programme features the New Orleans Jazz Bandits, Andrew Hall's Memories of New Orleans, the Golden Eagle Jazz Band, Baby Jools and the Jazzoholics and the Tenement Jazz Band.

Email [petegambit@gmail.com](mailto:petegambit@gmail.com)

### VENTURE AWAY JAZZ WEEKENDS (SEPTEMBER 17-20, NOVEMBER 5-8)

Venture Away are staging two of their three night, five band seaside events. Blackpool Jazz and Lights (September 17-20) at the Savoy Hotel features Baby Jools and the Jazzoholics, the Savannah Jazz Band, Richard Leach's Street Band, the Eagle Jazz Band and, on their farewell tour, New Orleans Heat. Then on November 5 there's a similarly explosive mix at the Grand Hotel, Torquay.

[www.ventureawaymusicweekends.co.uk](http://www.ventureawaymusicweekends.co.uk)



Dom Pipkin

### LAGAVULIN ISLAY JAZZ FESTIVAL (SEPTEMBER 17-19)

Under the sponsorship of a local distillery, the jazz festival on the most southerly of the Hebridean islands tends to be a convivial affair.

[www.islayjazzfestival.co.uk](http://www.islayjazzfestival.co.uk)

### SCARBOROUGH JAZZ FESTIVAL (SEPTEMBER 24-26)

Three days high-quality jazz in the elegant Spa building are compered in inimitable style by Alan Barnes whose octet usually gets to round off the final night of the festival, in this case with his Jazz Portraits. A sample of the rest of the bill comes up with Tony Kofi's tribute to Cannonball Adderley, the Nikki Iles Jazz Orchestra, the Karen Sharp Quartet and the Fergus McCreadie Trio.

[www.scarboroughspa.co.uk](http://www.scarboroughspa.co.uk)

### CALLANDER JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL (OCTOBER 1-3)

The largest rural jazz and blues festival in Scotland resumes its activities this year.

[www.callanderjazz.com](http://www.callanderjazz.com)

### MARSDEN JAZZ FESTIVAL (OCTOBER 8-10)

The well-regarded festival in a Pennine village takes a slightly different form this year, with outdoor events playing a larger part. The Festival has also announced a partnership with Black Lives Matter.

[www.marsdenjazzfestival.com](http://www.marsdenjazzfestival.com)

### HERTS JAZZ FESTIVAL (OCTOBER 15-17)

This year's festival under the direction of Clark Tracey takes place in South Mill Arts, Bishops Stortford, which, as the Rhodes Arts Complex, hosted the 2019 festival.

[www.hertsjazzfestival.co.uk](http://www.hertsjazzfestival.co.uk)

### MIKE DURHAM'S INTERNATIONAL CLASSIC JAZZ PARTY (NOVEMBER 5-7)

33 musicians from eight countries – the United Kingdom, the United States, Norway, France, Germany, Australia, Italy and Sweden – assemble in the Village Hotel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne for an ever-

changing programme of themed classic jazz, revisiting the music of neglected figures such as Noble Sissle and Oscar Aleman as well as the acknowledged greats. The recent death of Keith Nichols will be reflected in the programme in memories of, and tributes to, a much-loved musician.

[www.whitleybayjazzfest.com](http://www.whitleybayjazzfest.com)

Then there are the postponements. Sad as it is to be unable to stage a festival at the chosen time, there is always something more cheering about being able to substitute a later date rather than cancelling.

### THE ISLE OF WIGHT JAZZ WEEKEND (www.iwjazzweekend.co.uk)

is now scheduled to move from its customary May date to September 9-12. A rather reduced festival will focus on the town of Newport.

### THE 23RD KIRKCUDBRIGHT JAZZ FESTIVAL (www.kirkcudbrightjazzfestival.co.uk)

leaves its traditional June date for a hopefully virus-free (or nearly) festival on October 14-17.

### THE SWANAGE JAZZ FESTIVAL (www.swanagejazzfestival.co.uk)

is off the programme for a second year, but the festival's determination to continue is shown by its setting its 2022 dates already (July 8-10) and even announcing its headline act, the Simon Spillett Big Band.

No doubt there are many other festivals that are in the same position as Swanage – no 2021, but anticipating a normal 2022 – but, understandably, given the constantly changing circumstances, few are making such a precise commitment.

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# CHRIS BARBER: A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

MIKE POINTON, fellow-trombonist, writer and broadcaster, reflects on a remarkable career.



Chris Barber's enduring contribution to British jazz and blues can never be overestimated. Many younger musicians owe much to his dedication that made it possible for them to hear and see in person so many of the major American musicians playing the music he loved. It was through Barber's passion for the blues and gospel music that such key figures as Muddy Waters, Brownie McGhee & Sonny Terry, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Alex Bradford were able to appear on concerts promoted by Barber and his long-term business partner Harold Pendleton under the aegis of The National Jazz Federation and their Marquee Club. Such visiting giants influenced a whole generation of performers like Alexis Korner, The Rolling Stones and countless others.

Donald Christopher Barber was born in Welwyn Garden City on April 17, 1930, and learned violin from the age of seven. When attending St. Paul's School in London he discovered jazz, started collecting records and going to hear the few bands then playing traditional jazz. He recalled in his 2014 autobiography *Jazz Me Blues* that while he was training to be an actuary in 1948 he went to a session by Humphrey Lyttelton's first band. Humph's trombonist Harry Brown offered Chris his instrument for £6 which led to Barber studying trombone and double bass at the Guildhall School of Music. He soon found kindred spirits, including his lifelong friend, clarinetist Alex Revell, and formed a semi-pro band playing classic King Oliver-style jazz. By 1952 Chris felt he needed to play jazz professionally and assembled a line-up with

the same ambition. Clarinetist Monty Sunshine from the New Orleans Revival-influenced Crane River Jazz Band was the first to join, together with fellow Crane, drummer Ron Bowden. Banjoist Tony 'Lonnie' Donegan and bassist Jim Bray completed the rhythm section. Pat Halcox was first choice on trumpet but, after rehearsing and playing local gigs, had to leave to complete his studies as an industrial chemist.

Chris and Monty knew that Ken Colyer (also an ex-Crane) was due to return from his pilgrimage to New Orleans so they contacted Ken and offered him the trumpet chair in the new band which became Ken Colyer's Jazzmen. In spring 1953 they toured Denmark with some success and were recorded there by the new Storyville label. Colyer also sang and played guitar, leading to forming with vocalist Donegan (also on guitar) what became known as the 'breakdown group' with Chris on bass, performing blues and folk songs. When they returned to England this band-within-a-band became a popular segment of their club dates. Colyer's brother Bill sometimes joined in on washboard and named the music they played 'skiffle', after a black Harlem group's records he had discovered. The Jazzmen made their first LP for Decca, *New Orleans To London*, which met with much acclaim and included some of Chris's ragtime arrangements such as *Cataract Rag* and *Harlem Rag*. They also broadcast, but sadly, after a year or so, musical and personal dissension led to their break-up. Ken felt that the band's rhythm section didn't capture the idiom he'd been steeped in when

he played alongside the New Orleans pioneers. It also became clear that his often introvert on-stage personality clashed with Donegan's flamboyant persona. When I interviewed Harold Pendleton for *Goin' Home*, the biography of Colyer I wrote with Ray Smith, he explained that somehow it was inevitable that the band couldn't survive such internal conflicts. Ken left to form a group more in keeping with his musical aspirations, but until the end of his life Chris regretted that such a good band hadn't lasted longer. And, despite their differences, Lonnie told me in later years that Ken's playing was the most moving he'd ever heard.

By May 1954 Pat Halcox was able to rejoin the group and they were renamed Chris Barber's Jazz Band, making their first LP, *New Orleans Joys*, for Decca two months later. It became a best-seller with such tracks as Chris's popular arrangements of *Chimes Blues*, *Bobby Shaftoe* and *The Martinique*, a number composed by American trombonist Wilbur De Paris whose band had a similar approach to Barber's. But the great success from the album was *Rock Island Line*, a Leadbelly song featuring Donegan and the skiffle group which was released as a single and, unexpectedly, entered the charts in Britain and the USA, leading to Lonnie's solo career. Lonnie once told me that



he was present at a rehearsal in Soho when a young, petite girl arrived as the band were packing up. She asked if she could sing a number with them so they reluctantly allowed her to join them. After hearing her powerful voice that seemed to echo the spirit of Bessie Smith, Lonnie immediately told her, 'You're in!' even though Chris was absent due to illness. On hearing Otilie Patterson herself, Chris agreed she must join the band and Otilie was acclaimed for her first recording made live with them at the Royal Festival Hall in 1955 where she captivated the audience with *St. Louis Blues* and *I Hate a Man like You*. Chris and Otilie were married from 1959 until 1983 and she made her final tour with the band in 1991. She told me that a highlight of her time with Chris was when they toured the UK with Sister Rosetta Tharpe in 1957 and how Rosetta encouraged her, greatly influencing Otilie's stagecraft. During this period the band was recording regularly reflecting not only Chris's love of New Orleans music, but of other genres. Among the imaginative albums they made was *Echoes Of Harlem* with many neglected numbers from the 20s and early 30s including one of Barber's heroes Duke Ellington's *Doing The Crazy Walk* which the Duke himself never recorded and a tender trombone feature of *Porgy* from

*Blackbirds of 1928*. Chris also cut *Elite Syncopations*, an LP of rags, many previously unrecorded, on which he multi-tracked himself playing Joseph Lamb's *Bohemia Rag* from 1919.

In 1959 the Barber band had another chart success with Sidney Bechet's *Petite Fleur*, a feature for Monty Sunshine that helped make their first trip to the USA possible. They visited New Orleans and Muddy Waters' blues club in Chicago and Otilie never forgot how moved she was when, after hearing her sing with Muddy's band, the black audience paid her the ultimate compliment by telling her 'You're one of us.' I'd originally seen Muddy Waters for the first time when Chris and Harold Pendleton had brought the great bluesman and his pianist Otis Spann to Britain in 1958 to appear with the Barber band. Their powerful impact on audiences was electric in every sense and helped establish Muddy's worldwide reputation. This was confirmed to me many years later when I was working for the BBC in Los Angeles in 1980. By coincidence I was staying in the same hotel as Muddy without realising he was there. He must have picked up my English accent when we were at nearby tables and to my astonishment crossed the room and asked if I was from England. He then asked if I knew Chris Barber and when I said 'Yes', he immediately replied 'Well. Give him my love!' Muddy clearly appreciated how much Chris had done to advance his international career. When I compiled a BBC radio tribute to celebrate Chris's band's 40-year anniversary composer/pianist John Lewis of Modern Jazz Quartet fame, to my great surprise, informed me that it was he who had insisted Chris and Harold bring Muddy to Britain in the first place! (Chris recorded the MJQ's *The Golden Striker* in 1959.)

By the early 60s the Barber band was still filling UK and European concert halls as a major attraction, but, as ever, Chris was determined to bring over his favourites from America. One was the dynamic singer/saxophonist Louis Jordan in 1962. Chris told me that working with Jordan was like 'being dragged along by wild horses!' It seems that Jordan's tour wasn't as successful as it

should have been because in the depths of their ignorance some audiences expected to see the French film star Louis Jourdan! But at least the band was able to make an album with the great R & B hero where they were able to show their adaptability. They'd already risen to the occasion when they teamed with the great Jamaican saxophonist Joe Harriott the previous year for his composition *Revival*.

After the so-called 'Trad Boom' had run its course—a phenomenon Chris regretted, since it spawned so many misguided corruptions of the music he loved—the band, inspired by Chicago blues, enlisted the electric guitar of John Slaughter in 1964 which brought it an extra musical dimension and they started to be billed as Chris Barber's Jazz and Blues Band. Their evolving repertoire reflected this, but they never lost sight of the band's New Orleans origins, always using *Bourbon Street Parade* as their signature tune. Chris also took a great interest in contemporary New Orleans music and its developments.

Times and musical tastes were changing, but Chris's musical integrity never sold out and he always encouraged younger musicians. By 1968 gifted reedman John Crocker had replaced Ian Wheeler after Wheeler completed his first stint of seven years with the band. John was to remain with Chris for over 30 years and be teamed alongside Wheeler when Ian returned in 1979. In 1976 Chris achieved an ambition by recording his *Echoes Of Ellington* album with two genuine ex-Ellingtonians, Russell Procope and Wild Bill Davis.

Pat Halcox, a fiery player but a gentle man, remained alongside Chris for 54 years and was at the heart of the band's special sound until he retired aged 78 in 2008. Pat had naturally taken part in Barber's popular reunion tours for their 40th anniversary in 1994 where the early band appeared on the same concerts as Chris's current one to ecstatic audiences. He was also a founder of what proved to be Chris's farewell project: The Big Chris Barber Band.

Chris's newly-expanded 10-piece group was formed in 2002,



using several new faces and the talents of fellow trombonist and Ellington aficionado Bob Hunt to play alongside him and arrange much of their music in the Duke's style. The band was given a new lease of life and attracted audiences of all ages. Chris never lost his youthful passion for the music he'd given his life to. They played concerts throughout Britain and toured Europe with great success until 2019 when, sadly, Chris was forced to retire owing to the onset of advancing

dementia. He decided to live in a care home in Marlborough, visited regularly by his devoted wife Kate and such friends as pianist Ray Smith and recording authority Dave Bennett. Chris Barber passed away peacefully on March 2 2021, aged 90, having led a band for 65 years—longer than his idol, Duke Ellington. Chris once said to me: 'You have to play as if your life depends on it.' And he certainly did. Thanks, Chris, for everything.



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## REMEMBERING MR LEN...

Sadly the latest of our tributes to British jazzmen of a golden age of talent takes the form of an obituary for the great bassist LEN SKEAT (1937-2021) – in the words of his long-standing colleague and friend DIGBY FAIRWEATHER.



Mr. Len is what we called him. Never 'Lenny'. And of course never ever 'Leonard', the given name of Leonard Skeat born on February 9th 1937 and younger brother to saxophonist William Frederick James 'Bill' Skeat, born eleven years beforehand in Stratford, London, in 1926. 'Mr Len' was the affectionate diminutive by which all his later friends knew him best.

I don't know what they called him in the unforgiving musico-military ranks of Ted Heath's big band or the BBC Big Band where if you didn't shape up you were out of work, and where he was, for many years, a proud standard bearer for infallible musical delivery. Or indeed the equally testing surrounds of session work – anything from TV commercials to variety shows and even (for those who remember it) *Music While You Work* – when you put the music up on the stand, played it down in one for the old BBC Light Programme and where making

a mistake couldn't be allowed as the programme, and the music, were non-stop for half an hour. And that's pressure. Mr. Len was extremely proud of the musical medals he carried with him from those relentlessly testing years. But at the same time he carried his jazz gifts with equal pride and that's when and how I got to know him well; as a jazz bassist of supreme skills as well as a comrade, friend (and occasional fighting brother) for 43 years from 1978. That was when our group Velvet was formed; cornet, two guitars – gentle Ike Isaacs and dear irrepressible Denny Wright – and the Time Lord: the master of the three 'T's of time, tone and taste keeping us all on track. And as we lived near to each other – I, a non-driver, in Forest Gate, East London, Len down the road in Goodmayes, Ilford – we began the thousands of automative travel hours in his latest shiny car that would serve as a unique consultation-room for what I see now as mutual therapy sessions. Seated side

by side, we would approach – and sometimes confront – our deepest loves, our enthusiasms, our weaknesses and failings, and occasionally our differences too.

'The Time Lord', our latterday name for Mr. Len, was really no more than a light-hearted affectionate diminution of what he actually was; a musician of proud and unforgiving personal standards. To me – in one sense and in a word which requires underlining – Len Skeat was his double bass. He knew his instrument; he loved it and knew what it could do. Its sonorous frequencies chimed and accorded with his deepest and sometimes most concealed soul. And once at the double-bass he was, very regularly, at one with the world and the musical universe too. His happiest moments of all, I believe, may indeed have been playing at the heart of a great rhythm section, in the same way that his close friend Ray Brown, the lifelong associate of Oscar Peterson, believed that any jazz ensemble, large or small, turns on its double bass axis. And as a trumpet-player who shared his company for thousands of hours on both roads and stages I came to understand that. In the outstanding 1986 movie *Round Midnight* produced by French director Bertrand Tavernier and starring the great American saxophonist Dexter Gordon as Dale Turner, his nearest female partner Darcy Lee – played by the actress Lonette McKee – lovingly tells Dale: 'It was you who taught me to listen to the bass and not the drums.' Mr. Len taught me that lesson early on in my career too, when my own sense of time was much at fault. And in music, time is not just a great healer, but a *sine-qua-non* for a musical clean bill of health.

I mentioned that behind his bass Len became at one with the world. But I also believe that it became his protective saviour when (another underlining) the world was *not*, at various times, with him all the way. Often,

over our 43 years, my dear friend seemed – perhaps over regularly - to be at odds with life, which, admittedly, over the years dealt him some malicious and even thoroughly evil blows. And suspicious of the world, he was therefore - as I saw many times - sometimes ready (perhaps over-ready) to joust on a personal basis with what he perceived as its failings and shortcomings, to be protective of his personal landscape, and on occasion to shape-up verbally to perceived enemies who appeared to challenge that landscape in any way. But his double-bass was his safe refuge – and his armour. And remarkably, just the other day, I found words from the biography of Louis Armstrong – the veritable 'Shakespeare of jazz' - written by the great Ricky Riccardi. The words came from actor Ossie Davis who co-starred with Armstrong in the jazz movie *A Man called Adam*. 'The trumpet,' said Davis, 'was where the truth of Louis Armstrong resided. The moment he put the trumpet to his lips a new truth emerged, a new man emerged, a new power emerged and I looked on Louis for what he truly was after that.' And exactly the same could be said, I think, of Len Skeat, his double bass and the way in which the two of them dealt with his relationships with the world. I write 'the two of them' for a reason. It was his distinguished forerunner, and my great friend, bassist Tiny Winters (whose 60-year career began with Ambrose in 1931, moved on via Roy Fox, Lew Stone, Ray Noble and post-war West End shows and finished on record with rock singer Sting) who once told me a light-hearted story of walking into a tube-station in the early morning hours carrying his double-bass. To Tiny's delight he was greeted by a station-attendant with the cheery question: 'Where are you two off to?' And it sometimes occurred to me that in his earlier more turbulent and stressed-out years perhaps his double-bass really was Len's best friend of all.



But underneath that occasionally defensive exterior lay a man who was sensitive to (and sometimes apprehensive of) the feelings of others; who wanted to be loved and who loved in turn. His generosity to friends – very much including me – took many practical forms beyond those endless free lifts: the sharing of music which he felt might delight – or even enlighten – you on tape, CD or DVD; the regular giving of gifts to loved ones (I have them all around my house). And, speaking personally, I was privy to the deep concern that he would extend to friends in the smallest but most significant ways. Again there are many examples. But one such again concerns those miles we shared together in his car. At one point we lived in neighbouring counties; Mr. Len in Kent and I in Essex. And at the point where we went our separate ways at the great Queen Elizabeth Bridge over the Thames – and I would need a lift home – he would stay in the car with me until that lift arrived rather than leaving me in the dark night of a windy Essex outpost. And for that I could have hugged him.

I wanted to go back over those two other musical 't's – tone and taste. And for lovers of the jazz double bass Len exemplified both qualities. Early on in our friendship he had acquired a magnificently handsome antique bass which - when he plucked or bowed a note - practically shook the rafters of his beautiful home in Goodmayes (Len always had big and handsome homes). I loved the sound but, said Len, 'it's too big for our music.' So once again he returned to his favourite instrument which he played for life in the highest company. And if you look at that instrument now you can find the autographs of his fans – including Sir Paul McCartney and Tony Bennett – carefully and lovingly etched into

its body. I don't know whether his longterm musical partners Stephane Grappelli or Peggy Lee ever signed it? But Peggy did more than that. Whenever she came to Britain she asked for Mr. Len, as she knew that he was the best, and that no-one, for her, could play her biggest bass-based hit *Fever* better than him. Len loved Peggy and – perhaps with Billy Eckstine as a close second – she was the most famous of the dozens of American visitors who asked specifically for Len Skeat whenever they came to Britain. In any jazz club they knew that they could rely on him; that he could read any part; that the root and fifth of the chord would be at the heart of his work; that he would play the great double bass with the authority that it was meant to be played with – and that, as I said, the time would be good. When Len joined Ted Heath's unforgiving orchestra in the 1960s he replaced a player who in his words 'flew all over the place' on the bass. Len never did that. But at one Blackpool Jazz Festival in 2004 where we both appeared, and where he was invited at no notice to join the trio starring Rebecca Kilgore, Dan Barrett and Eddie Edwards, he could have had no idea that their opening number would be *The Trolley Song* from the Judy Garland movie *Meet me in St. Louis*. It was taken at a speed that, rather than a trolley car, much nearer resembled Japan's bullet train. And, when he came off the stand, I said, 'Mr. Len, that was sensational!' My old friend cocked his head and smiled. 'I can still burn,' he said. At other moments, in self-joshing mood, he might have averred: 'I can still bop the boogie!'; a phrase I loved and use to this day.

In his later days that must have been difficult. From quite early on Len suffered severe health setbacks; heart attacks which made me grateful that he was

born in the years following Christian Barnard when heart surgery became more of a possibility. And other physical challenges later on made it difficult for him even to lift and carry his bass. He wasn't always conscientious about his physical therapy exercises. But it was now that I noticed something else about Mr. Len – his bravery. He bore his increasing pains as a wounded soldier would bear them; with silence, dignity and immense courage – and would be on the bandstand on time every time. He was one of the bravest men I ever met.

But even if he was in pain Mr. Len could be funny, too. On one occasion, on behalf of Sir John Dankworth's Wavendon organization, we travelled down to the South Coast to play a concert with his great friend, pianist Brian Dee, saxophonist Olaf Vas and a drummer who I think was the incomparable Allan Ganley. Before our concert we were asked to conduct a workshop for a big class of schoolchildren: show them our instruments, explain how they worked and play a little. We all did, but when Mr. Len stepped forward with his beautiful double-bass, indicating its shapely curvaceous contours, his address to the class was stamped with his own kind of authority. 'Well, children,' he said, 'just look at that! All the shapes and beauty of a lovely woman's figure – and none of the troubles that go with it!'

But after those troubles that Len had experienced over the years, came Jill Gresty – now Jill Skeat – his first true love with whom he shared his last truly contented

15 years. I was privileged to see – sometimes quite close-up – how Jill protected him; how she wrote the letters to clear away the problems, personal and legal, that had long haunted his days and nights; how, at last, she sorted out his diet (previously a damaging and over-regular menu of fry-ups and fish and chips), and how she loved him as no-one else ever had done. She blessed him with more gifts, practical and emotional, than any of us. And whenever we spoke on the phone in recent years I would ask Len, 'How's Jill?' and his response would be, 'Oh, my little darling! She's simply perfect.' She was – and is - and there was a new deeply peaceful feeling in my old friend's voice. I really can't think of a happier ending.

But I remember one day, long ago now in 1978, when we were rehearsing with Velvet at Len's home in Goodmayes, and his father called in on his way to Foote's, the bass repairers in London. 'See you later?' Len asked and his father said, 'I won't be coming back this way'. He didn't; very suddenly but peacefully, just like his son, he fell dead later at his destination. Now Mr Len won't be coming back this way either. Like all of his musician friends I shall miss him most dreadfully and – although there are many truly great bass players out there – Len Skeat was my 'first-call' right up to my last solo album as he was for my first in 1978. Thank you, Mr. Len; it was a privilege, a wondrous friendship and an unforgettable lifetime's experience. And I will never forget you.



# ON A BALCONY IN COPENHAGEN

RON SIMPSON investigates the story behind *Balcony Lullabies* on Stunt Records, MIKKEL PLOUG'S positive and uplifting approach to the covid pandemic.



When I was reviewing CDs for this issue of *Jazz Rag*, one album stood out not only for the quality of the music, but for the inspiring story behind it, a story that is perfectly reflected in the music itself. To simplify the story, in the early months of the pandemic, on a balcony in Copenhagen, guitarist Mikkel Ploug began a nightly performance for his neighbours that became so popular that a highly acclaimed album followed.

Mikkel Ploug is a much respected and very versatile musician who has toured about 25 countries in many different combinations. Born in Denmark in 1978, he took up drums at the age of four, moving on to guitar eight years later. After graduating from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, he lived for a time in Berlin before settling back in Copenhagen. He remains – or did so whilst borders were open – a very international figure, with everywhere from the Faroes to Bela Horizonte in Brazil on his date-sheet. The UK has not been among his main ports of call, but even so he has recorded for the Whirlwind label (he has 12 albums for various labels to his credit) and played London's Pizza Express.

Primarily a jazz player, in his own words, Mikkel 'tends to do a lot outside just "jazz"'. In his early years he worked mostly with his quartet, the Mikkel Ploug Group, including the American saxist Mark Turner, but lately more of his work has been with his trios, in duo with Mark Turner or solo. He has worked with the Royal Ballet in Copenhagen and with the Danish Radio Big Band, has done a sound installation with speech translated to guitar and performed with choreographer and dancer Tilman O'Donnell. Early in 2020 he was working on a trio tour, a recording of classical composer Bent Sørensen's music for quartet, and a new acoustic solo album of his own compositions.

Then, as for so many of us, Mikkel suddenly found his horizons contracting: touring became impossible and the whole industry was overtaken by uncertainty. Now he recalls that Denmark did well in the beginning of the outbreak. The Prime Minister decided to lock down the country very early on and this controlled the spread of the virus and saved many lives. Mikkel points out that in Denmark people tend to trust

the government and follow its directives which has helped the country cope with the situation, but in March 2020 that was little defence against the prevailing fear. Mikkel takes us back to his feelings at that time:

'Like most I guess I was very scared and sad, especially about having to teach my small kids not to get close to other human beings. That was the worst part. The balcony performances were actually my wife's idea. I first said no, I didn't want to draw attention to myself, but then I saw the pictures on the news of trucks driving out of Bergamo and I thought, "OK, I have to do something! I'll play a song out in the dark for the kids to go to sleep." So I put my amp out there. Our apartment is on the highest floor and we have a large balcony facing the courtyard, so we have neighbours on all sides. I turned it up way loud and played a popular children's song, *Elefantens Vuggevise*. The response was just overwhelming, so I started playing every night and livestreaming the songs via Facebook.

'I played at sundown every night. I just played for five minutes. Some nights it was 2 degrees, freezing cold! I picked songs from a vast repertoire covering 100-year-old children's songs, standards, folk tunes, just music with powerful melodies that simply in my opinion transcend genre, melodies that we are made of. I varied the performances by making unique arrangements for each song. I made them during the day and played them the same night. I've never been this busy!'

Many of the songs are not very well known in the UK, but much more familiar in Denmark. Children's songs and lullabies are central, but Denmark's greatest classical composer, Carl Nielsen, also figures, as does a Eurovision entry (very unsuccessful at the time, but sounding fine in Ploug's version). A personal favourite of mine is one of the non-Danish songs, *You Are My Sunshine*, simultaneously poignant and soothing. As I noted in my

review, Ploug always credits the lyricist of the songs: even though there are no vocals, the meaning behind the melody is crucial to his performances. He explains – or, perhaps, is unable to explain – the reasons behind his choice of material:

'This was the craziest part, I felt completely open to all music in this period and spent many hours every day looking for songs that would just hit me "straight in the heart". Then I would try to play it on the guitar, add a little "new harmony" and, if it brought tears to me, then I went with it. I was just looking for a melody so strong it had to be played. A melody that could help us get through this absolute unreal situation we were all in all of a sudden. So I discovered many new favourite songs in this period, some I hadn't heard since I was a child.

'One of my favourite tunes that I discovered is *Vårvis* by the Danish singer/songwriter Sebastian. It's just a masterpiece of a song, and I didn't know that I knew it before an old lady suggested it to me via a Facebook message.'

When I cheekily ask if there was any adverse reaction (in a block of flats in the UK *somebody* would have complained!), Mikkel says he doesn't know of any, but, as for favourable responses...

'The positive reactions were just amazing. Who would have thought that it could make such a difference to people? Many wrote long thank you messages to me and told me the music had given them such comfort. An old lady would come out every night and have a glass of wine and I have been told she would shed a few tears. Really unbelievable when I think back! It went way beyond the neighbours, though. I got messages from all over the world where people were following this in Tasmania, USA, Italy, Canada, and so on...'

The next stage was to enshrine those balcony performances in

an album. Mikkel crowdfunded it on Kickstarter which he ran via his Facebook. Amazing numbers contributed and the album was made.

So how does Mikkel feel about the whole *Balcony Lullabies* project?

'Overwhelmed, humbled, full of hope for the power of music! Music came out and showed its importance. I really felt like I was just a vessel somehow for what happened.'

How has the story unfolded since then for Denmark in general and Mikkel Ploug in particular? The situation has been not dissimilar in some ways to other countries, including the UK, but less severe. Mikkel says with no hint of a dig at the British system (at least, I don't think so), 'It feels like such a privilege to live in a country with a well-functioning welfare system and a good government.' The general trend traces a familiar trajectory as two months of relative normality were followed by what Mikkel calls 'losing the grip' around Christmas. Another lockdown was the inevitable

consequence, but, at the time of this interview (late April) restaurants, music venues and so on were again opening up.

Mikkel has not resumed his normal musical activities, but for positive as well as negative reasons:

'Normal is far away as I used to tour a lot abroad. *Balcony Lullabies* has become very popular in Denmark, so 90 % of my planned concerts are solo with some kind of version of this repertoire. It's a wonderful challenge to play a whole concert solo and I'm just loving re-harmonising and reinventing old Danish songs from my childhood.'

It's very easy to talk glibly of the power of music – to listen to radio requests you might think that the most mundane of melodies have miraculous transformative powers – but *Balcony Lullabies* is a rare example of its ability to change lives. After providing delight and comfort in a temporary (we hope) time of suffering, it has had a long-term effect on both Mikkel Ploug and his audience:



'I have always had the feeling that a lot of the music I love and play myself could have a lot further reach audience-wise. Now I know it is true. There is really only a subtle difference to me playing a Danish lullaby, my own music or a modern composer such as Bent Sørensen's music. I'm very happy I have found a whole new audience who have lifted me up and sent me in a new unexpected direction I could never have foreseen.'

And what is remarkable about the album *Balcony Lullabies* is that, listening to it on a sunny day with lockdown gradually easing, it is impossible not to identify with the original situation: Mikkel bringing his guitar and amp out into the freezing night air, the old lady topping up her glass and coming to listen, and fearful and confused children being consoled by familiar lullabies in an unfamiliar setting.

[www.mikkelplog.com](http://www.mikkelplog.com)  
[www.sundance.dk](http://www.sundance.dk)  
(Stunt Records)



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# JAZZ BRITS IN AMERICA

By SCOTT YANOW

Jazz first entered the United Kingdom in a big way when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band took up residence in London during part of 1919-20, having some notable public appearances and making their finest recordings. As with other European countries, British musicians spent the bulk of the 1920s playing catch-up, learning how to play jazz and integrate it into their performances.

Since Americans had a major head start, when such artists as bass saxophonist Adrian Rollini, clarinetist Danny Polo and especially the very prolific trumpeter Sylvester Ahola spent time in England, they not only played with jazz groups but got a huge number of studio assignments. British musicians rebelled against the 'invasion' and restrictions were put into place by the British Musicians Union that greatly limited the freelance activity.

The American union retaliated and the result was that American bands were rarely able to perform in England and vice versa. There were a few exceptions (called 'variety acts') but, in general, during 1934-55 American artists mostly skipped England in favour of performing on the continent. In 1956, with the exchange of the orchestras of Stan Kenton and Ted Heath, the embargo began to gradually break down, but restrictions were still a handicap until the 1980s.

The result of all this meant that, while British musicians regained their jobs in the studios and dance halls, their jazz scene was pretty isolated from that of the Americans. They could learn second hand by listening to recordings or venturing overseas for brief visits, but there were no Sidney Bechets taking residence in their country to give advice to the younger musicians.

The isolation also meant that the British jazz scene was barely mentioned in the U.S. Few swing era fans in America knew about Nat Gonella even though he made brief visits and recorded with the John Kirby Sextet.

Humphrey Lyttelton's bands of the 1950s were completely overlooked until he later collaborated with Buck Clayton.

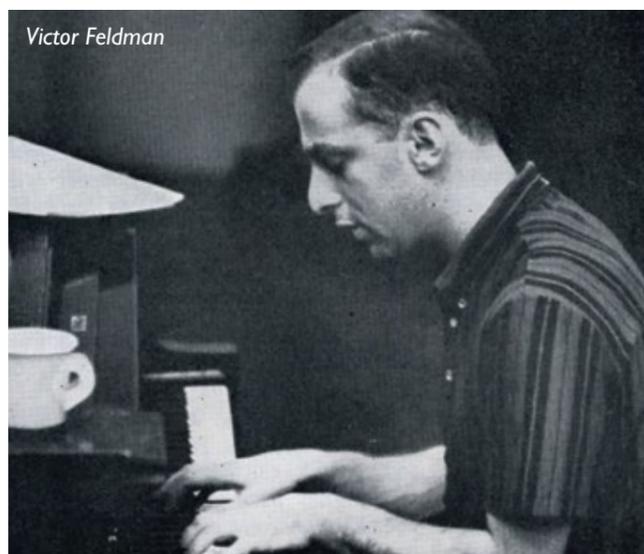
While there were a few British recordings that made the American charts during the height of the trad era (Chris Barber's *Petite Fleur*, Kenny Ball's *Midnight In Moscow* and Acker Bilk's *Stranger On The Shore*), Ronnie Scott (arguably England's top tenor before the rise of Tubby Hayes) was largely unknown until he opened up Ronnie Scott's, John Dankworth (a pioneer British bopper) is still mostly remembered for his later tours with his wife Cleo Laine, and Joe Harriott was never properly recognized as one of the first important avant-gardists.

A general inferiority complex among British jazz musicians was common because of their lack of interaction with American players. The top British players often felt that to prove themselves they would have to at least visit New York or New Orleans. Trumpeter Ken Colyer, while serving in the Merchant Marine, actually jumped ship in Mobile, Alabama, so he could meet and play with some of his idols in New Orleans; he was eventually caught and deported.

It was not until the second half of the 1960s when England developed its own avant-garde jazz scene that was separate from the Americans, when its popular fusion bands started touring the world, and when a local rock group called the Beatles made somewhat of an impact, that the situation changed. By the 1980s, it was finally realized that jazz could flourish anywhere and that being in New York and America was not necessary to be accepted.

Here are 26 British jazz artists who spent a significant part of their career (whether brief or lengthy) living and working in the United States. They are listed in chronological order by the time period that they were overseas.

**Fred Elizalde** (1907-79) pianist-composer – Elizalde, who was born in Manila, moved to England



Victor Feldman

in the early 1920s but spent a few early years in the U.S., at first studying law at Stanford. He switched to music and learned to play jazz while in America, leading his college dance band and making his first recordings before moving back to England in 1926. Arguably the first important jazz musician based in London, during the next few years he led Great Britain's most jazz-oriented orchestra before becoming a classical composer and going back to the Philippines.

**Reginald Foresythe** (1907-58) composer-pianist – An excellent pianist and a quirky composer whose more outlandish descriptive pieces predated Raymond Scott, Foresythe was in America on and off from the late 1920s to 1936, playing in Los Angeles with Paul Howard's Quality Serenaders, writing music for Earl Hines, Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman including *Serenade To A Wealthy Widow*.

**Spike Hughes** (1908-87) bassist-arranger – While Hughes, who led some impressive jazz sessions in England during 1930-33 and later became well known as a music journalist, never actually lived in the U.S., during April-May 1933 he led three all-star sessions in New York that featured the cream of the Harlem jazz scene including Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Red Allen and Chu Berry on 14 selections. Considering that a highpoint that

could never again be equalled, he soon retired from jazz.

**Ray Noble** (1903-78) leader-arranger – A top British bandleader who featured singer Al Bowlly, Noble moved to the U.S. in 1934 and led his most jazz-oriented orchestra during the next two years before eventually reverting to heading a sweet band and becoming an actor. He was the composer of *Cherokee* although few remember his version.

**Annie Ross** (1930-2020) singer – Born in England, she moved to the U.S. when she was four as a child performer. After recording *Twisted* in 1952, Ross was back in England for a few years before becoming famous with Lambert, Hendricks and Ross during 1957-62. She spent much of the next 20 years in England as an actress before returning to singing and the U.S. for her last 35 years.

**Marian McPartland** (1918-2013) pianist – After discovering jazz in 1938, McPartland performed in England until marrying cornetist Jimmy McPartland in 1945 and permanently moving to the U.S. It took some time, but by the 1950s she was making a name for herself.

**Beryl Davis** (1924-2011) singer – A professional vocalist by the age of eight who performed with Django Reinhardt when she was just 12, Beryl Davis moved to

the U.S. after World War II and continued singing into her eighties.

**George Shearing** (1919-2011) pianist – A major name in England during 1937-47 as a swing, stride and boogie-woogie pianist, Shearing moved to the U.S. in 1947, discovered bebop, formed his very popular quintet, and the rest is history.

**Peter Ind** (1928- ) bassist – While Ind has spent much of his life in Great Britain, during 1951-66 he was based in New York. He studied and played with Lennie Tristano and worked with Lee Konitz, Buddy Rich, Booker Ervin and Slim Gaillard. In later years the versatile bassist even recorded with the New Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

**Ronnie Ball** (1927-84) pianist – After gaining strong recognition for his British recordings in 1951, Ball moved to the U.S. the following year to study with Lennie Tristano and stayed, working with Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, Gene Krupa and Chris Connor.

**Ralph Sharon** (1923-2015) pianist – Born in London where he appeared on jazz recordings starting in 1946, Sharon moved to the U.S. in 1954, occasionally recorded jazz albums, and worked with Tony Bennett for 50 years.

**Victor Feldman** (1934-87) pianist, vibraphonist, drummer/percussionist – A child prodigy who played drums professionally at seven and performed with nearly all of the England's modern jazz players, Feldman moved to the U.S. in 1955, working with everyone from Benny Goodman and Cannonball Adderley to Miles Davis (writing *Seven Steps To Heaven*). He was a busy studio musician for decades.

**Dizzy Reece** (1931- ) trumpeter – Born in Jamaica but a major part of the British modern jazz scene in the 1950s, Reece moved to the U.S. in 1959. Despite recording for Blue Note during 1959-60, he never gained the fame and work that he deserved.

**Derek Smith** (1931-2016) pianist – A busy London-based musician (including with John Dankworth and Kenny Baker) during 1954-59, Smith moved to the U.S. in 1959, worked

with Benny Goodman and Doc Severinsen, and led many albums of his own.

**Dill Jones** (1923-84) pianist – A versatile swing and stride pianist, Jones emigrated to the U.S. in 1961 and worked with Gene Krupa, Jimmy McPartland, Yank Lawson and the JPJ Quartet among others.

**Tubby Hayes** (1935-73) tenor-saxophonist, vibraphonist – While the great saxophonist was never officially a resident of the U.S., he recorded two of his best known albums, *Tubbs In NY* (with Clark Terry) and *Return Visit* (with Rahsaan Roland Kirk and James Moody) during extended stays in 1961-62.

**Joe Temperley** (1929-2016) baritone-saxophonist – Born in Scotland, Temperley was a member of Humphrey Lyttelton's band during 1957-65 before moving to America where he worked with Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra and as Harry Carney's successor with the Mercer Ellington Orchestra. His ability to emulate Carney came in handy during his years with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

**Sammy Rimington** (1942- ) clarinetist-altoist – After working with Ken Colyer during 1960-65, Rimington emigrated to the U.S. where he worked with Big Bill Bissonette and a countless number of New Orleans jazz artists, keeping the styles of George Lewis and Capt. John Handy alive.

**Trevor Richards** (1945- ) drummer – Richards gained experience playing in England and Germany, studied with Zutty Singleton in NY in 1966, moved to New Orleans, and has played with many traditional jazz bands ever since, splitting his time between the US and Europe.

**Dave Holland** (1946- ) bassist – Holland was a fixture in the house rhythm section at Ronnie Scott's while exploring avant-garde jazz elsewhere. Miles Davis discovered him in 1968 which began two years with the trumpeter and a historic career.

**John McLaughlin** (1942- ) guitarist – One of the most innovative and brilliant guitarists



Joe Temperley

of all time, after a background in England playing bop, blues and rock, McLaughlin moved to the U.S. in 1969 to join Tony Williams' Lifetime, two years before forming the Mahavishnu Orchestra.

**Barry Martyn** (1941- ) drummer – A major force in the New Orleans jazz scene in London in the 1960s where he brought over many veteran musicians, Martyn moved to Los Angeles in 1972 (founding the Legends of Jazz) and New Orleans in 1984 where he has worked hard behind the scenes for the GHB label.

**Rick Laird** (1941- ) bassist – Born in Ireland, after spending time in New Zealand, Laird moved to London in 1962 where he was the house bassist at Ronnie Scott's, playing straight-ahead jazz. However he is most famous for playing electric bass with the Mahavishnu Orchestra, moving to New York in 1973.

**Bob Efford** (1928-2019) tenor and baritone saxophonist – A versatile saxophonist who played all of the reeds, Efford worked with Vic Lewis (1949-51), the top British boppers, Ted Heath, and in

the British studios until moving to California in 1976, where he was part of the big bands of Bob Florence and Bill Holman.

**Keith Ingham** (1942- ) pianist – A superior swing pianist, Ingham played with Wally Fawkes, Sandy Brown, Bruce Turner, Bud Freeman, and Bob Wilbur during 1964-74, moving to New York in 1978 where he worked with Susannah McCorkle, Benny Goodman, and Marty Grosz, and recorded many rewarding albums as a leader.

**Allan Holdsworth** (1946-2017) guitarist – A master of fusion whose main musical hero was John Coltrane, Holdsworth was already very influential and world famous (previously a nearly impossible accomplishment for a jazz musician based in England) by the time he permanently moved to California in the early 1980s.

**Scott Yanow, who has written 11 books on jazz (including *The Great Jazz Guitarists*, *The Jazz Singers*, *Jazz On Film and Jazz On Records 1917-76*), can be reached for interesting assignments at [scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com](mailto:scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com).**

# KING PLEASURE AND THE BISCUIT BOYS

It's been a long, long lockdown for all musicians, and sadly, too many bands have failed to make it to the other side. If there's one band that's determined to come out fighting, it's the rocking and rolling, jumping and shouting King Pleasure & The Biscuit Boys.

Born in a Darlaston coffee bar, now 34 years on the road – minus the last one of course – it seems timely to look back on those earlier, less complicated years.



1. Making their debut at Birmingham Jazz Festival in 1987. They might have been short on experience, but they clearly knew how to have fun and that swagger was already in place



2. A particularly memorable, early thrill was to share the stage at The Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham with one of their inspirations, the King of Hi-De-Ho, Cab Calloway and his Cotton Club Orchestra.



3. Probably the classic King Pleasure line-up. Gone are the white dinner jackets, dickie bows and, sadly, Lisa Sugar Lee who left with the memorable: 'You guys just don't know how to treat a lady.'



4. If there's one thing that marked the band as something special, it's the living legends of their music that have worked with them, including Slim Gaillard who they backed and...



5. ...The Boss of The Blues, BB King and his band who they opened for several times.



6. ...and the stars of the greatest film ever, The Blues Brothers Band who they supported on tours.



7. In 1995 King Pleasure & The Biscuit Boys recorded the album *Blues & Rhythm Revue Volume One* with Gene The Mighty Flea Connors, Howard McCrary, Val Wiseman and...the legendary Charles Brown.

8. Almost, but not quite, the current line-up when they were in Spain to headline the Marbella Jazz Festival:

'classy stuff in the style of Louis Jordan and Eddie Cleanhead Vinson, with nowt taken out'  
*Now Dig This*

"To those who say that swing is a musical form best left to Americans, prepare to be proven wrong. This British combo is bullet-proof!"  
*Atomic Magazine, New York*



Back on the road after far too long a break, King Pleasure & The Biscuit Boys will be celebrating the re-release of their *Hey Puerto Rico!* album.

## CD REVIEWS



## CLARE FOSTER

KUMBHAKA

Clare Foster/Jaya Jazz 2020 56.37

I was curious to uncover the artist behind the exotic cover images and my research reveals a singer with an impressive CV. Clare Foster, vocalist, lyricist, composer and educator, was born in England in 1968 to jazz-loving parents. She studied clarinet, vocal and acting skills in her early teens and in 1988 spent the next twelve months in America attending workshops, studying with acclaimed vocalist Judy Neimack and recording with Mel Tormé's pianist John Campbell, before returning home to complete her jazz studies at the Guildhall School of Music.

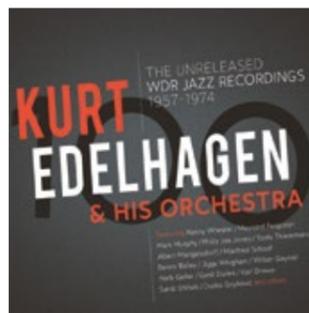
Foster developed her interest in Brazilian music whilst living in Amsterdam and toured with a Brazilian band through Europe and Asia. Here in the UK she continues to tour and record and runs jazz and Brazilian vocal classes, so it was inevitable this Latin-infused album would one day see the light.

Hispanic and Portuguese influences are ever-present in this collection of familiar standards and original compositions peppered with authentic timings and rhythms. Opening with Lionel Bart's *Who Will Buy* the genre works well with Foster's vocal skills applied with pin-sharp accuracy. *I Only Have Eyes For You* set in rumba time is equally effective and there's an imaginative reading of *Singing In The Rain* with verse and closing reference to the original Gene Kelly intro from vocals and guitar.

Not all the arrangements work for me. I had some harmony

issues with *I Get Along Without You Very Well* for instance, but there is pleasing input from guitar and trumpet on *I'll Remember April* and Fayyaz Virgi's trombone on *Stairway To The Stars*. Creativity defines this album. Originals include the zippy *Baiao Na Praia* and Foster's poignant *The Silent Space*. Overall, I feel this studio production doesn't quite capture the warmth and spontaneity of a live performance.

VAL WISEMAN



## KURT EDELHAGEN AND HIS ORCHESTRA

THE UNRELEASED JAZZ RECORDINGS 1957-1974

Jazzline Classics D77091 3 CDs 68.30/72.26/69.43

It's especially timely that this splendid triple-disc set, celebrating international musical collaboration centred on continental Europe should arrive now, in our muddled post-Brexit climate.

For those who don't know him, German bandleader Kurt Edelhagen helmed a hugely impressive big band at the Westdeutscher Rundfunk station in Cologne from the late 1950s to mid-1970s and this delightful collection – 40 tracks all previously unavailable on commercial issues – cherry picks many of its highlights.

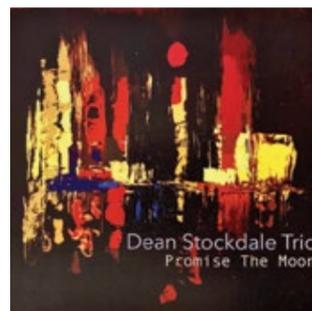
Featured guest stars include Maynard Ferguson, Toots Thielemans, Mark Murphy and Philly Joe Jones, and there are some wonderful cameos for various 'Yanks in Europe' ranging from Herb Geller to Sahib Shihab. Indeed, in some senses this was a band both prefiguring and contemporaneous to the more celebrated Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland big band, which operated along similar multi-national lines.

British jazz fans will be pleased to find space for trumpeters Jimmy Deuchar, Kenny Wheeler and Shake Keane, the sadly overlooked altoist Derek Humble (*Shaw 'Nuff*) and – on one engaging guest spot – Tubby Hayes. Stylistically, these tapes cover an impressively wide range of big band approaches (with the occasional small group feature), from an almost dance band-like sweetness (*Till*) through to the rough 'n' tumble of free jazz (Albert Mangelsdorff's *Triple Adventure*), everything captured in crystal clear audio.

Compiler Bernd Hoffman has done a fabulous job in assembling such diverse material, with only the odd lapse of accuracy to be expected in such a mammoth undertaking (the Hayes title was taped in 1964, not 1967, for instance). Sometime these rediscovered gems reveal themselves to be music known in other guises; Francy Boland's arrangement of *Chinatown*, *My Chinatown*, for example, includes a sax solo later made famous as *Sax No End*. Likewise such disparate items as Kenny Wheeler's *Ow Dallab*, which is better known as *Ballad Two*, and Jimmy Deuchar's *KE*, recorded elsewhere as *Friends Blues*.

All in all a superb release, one which can be highly recommended to those who love their jazz full of zest, character and swing. This could well be my record of the year, in fact. Don't miss it!

## SIMON SPILLET



## DEAN STOCKDALE TRIO

PROMISE THE MOON

Self-released 52:27

In recent (pre-pandemic) times Dean Stockdale has been working from his County

Durham base with frequent engagements across the Pennines in the Greater Manchester area. The pianist's new trio album, *Promise the Moon*, features bassist Mick Shoulder and drummer Abbie Finn, themselves resident in the Land of the Prince Bishops. This self-released recording, comprising four of Stockdale's compositions and five standards, is one of first class musicianship and choice material.

The first of nine tracks, a delightful take on Henry Mancini's *Moon River*, cleverly references Stockdale's recording of Charles Mingus' *Nostalgia in Times Square* (the opening track on the pianist's *Origin* album from 2017). Listening to this 2020 CD, review notes consistently read: 'elegant', 'swinging' and 'tasteful'. Indeed, the album's foundation is built upon Stockdale's innate sense of elegant swing, a quality shared by Mick Shoulder and Abbie Finn.

It would appear Stockdale takes great care with a composition's intro, perhaps thinking about it for some time, reworking and refining ideas until he is ready to take it into the recording studio. The album's title track, *Promise the Moon*, illustrates the trio's subtle, swinging sensibilities, the contribution of Shoulder and Finn wholly empathetic to the composer's musical vision. *Mia's Lullaby* follows, and, by accident or design, the placement of the two numbers, one after the other, works well.

The trio's swinging take on Gershwin's *They Can't Take That Away from Me* and again on an effective arrangement of *On the Sunny Side of the Street* are particular highlights, and the closing selection, *Witchcraft*, with its fleeting echoes of *Moon River*, make *Promise the Moon* a fine album.

*Promise the Moon* was recorded at Simpson Street Studios near Rothbury, Northumberland in November 2020. Ian Stephenson recorded, mixed and mastered the album - hats off to Mr S for making such a good job of it. The marvellous cover art is by none other than Mr Dean Stockdale.

RUSSELL CORBETT



## MARTHA TILTON

THE MARTHA TILTON COLLECTION 1937-1952

Acrobat ADDCD 3358: 2 CDs, 72.45/72.47

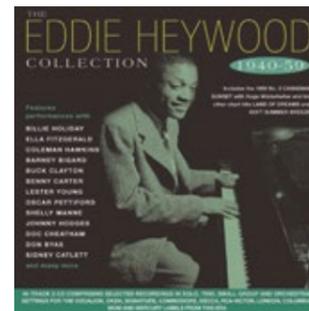
Martha Tilton is best remembered in jazz circles for her part in the 1939 Benny Goodman classic, *And the Angels Sing*, her vocal followed by the iconic Ziggy Elman trumpet solo. That was the last recording of her two years with BG which cover the first 19 of 50 tracks on this generous double CD. Thereafter she worked successfully as a solo without the impact of some other singers who came out of the big bands.

It's impossible not to like Martha Tilton's singing: bright-voiced, with good intonation and perfect diction, she appears to be totally without ego, putting herself at the service of the song, never pushing her own personality. However, that's also a problem: she did everything well, without establishing her own distinct territory, and, as a voice for hire, found there were some pretty bad songs around in the 1940s.

Things begin in fine style with Johnny Mercer's *Bob White*, *Whattcha Gonna Swing Tonight?*, Johnny Mercer's ornithological fantasy in a fine Fletcher Henderson arrangement, and two tracks later *Loch Lomond*, Claude Thornhill arrangement, Tilton swinging remarkably cheerfully for one who will never see her true love again. Other gems from the Goodman years, besides *And the Angels Sing*, are a splendid *I Let a Song Go Out of my Heart* and a remarkable *Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen* by the quartet with the addition of Ziggy on a dummy run for *Angels*, though I'm not sure of the wisdom of including only Part 2 of an ambitious two-sider just because that's where the Tilton vocal is.

The post-Goodman tracks include little that is memorable: though Tilton always sings well, there are too many undistinguished ballads and novelty songs to grip the attention. When she gets the chance of duetting with Johnny Mercer on *A Fine Romance* or swinging through *You Make Me Feel So Young*, both in smart Paul Weston arrangements, all is well, but I found *I Said My Pajamas* (*And Put on My Prayers*) less entertaining than I did in 1950!

RON SIMPSON



## EDDIE HEYWOOD

THE COLLECTION 1940-59

Acrobat ADDCD3349 2 CDs 71.12 / 72.25

Who, today, remembers pianist and bandleader Eddie Heywood? He toured and recorded regularly in the 40s and 50s, his undemanding melodic style tailored to the tastes of US nightclub audiences. The son of a theatre musician, Heywood was born in Atlanta in 1915 and worked first in territory bands and then in New York where he played for Benny Carter, before forming his own band.

Happily for today's listeners, he always hired musicians of quality, viz. his 1941 session with Billie Holiday as the vocalist, Lester Young perfect in solo. A swinging player, his style broadly modelled on that of Teddy Wilson, but with his own rococo details and mannered touches, Heywood was good enough for Coleman Hawkins, in magisterial form, on *Crazy Rhythm* in 1943 and for Barney Bigard on his trio version of *Step Steps Up* from 1944.

Thereafter it's Heywood's own swing sextet that we hear mostly and with regular sidemen like Doc Cheatham and Vic Dickenson, it's no surprise

that the musicianship and solo playing is spot-on, even if the arrangements are over-stylized. Once his slick 1944 version of *Begin The Beguine* became a hit, Heywood was a bill-topper, playing residencies in the best clubs and appearing in films.

He recorded again with Holiday in 1944, and stayed busy until he was stymied by partial paralysis of the hands, from 1947 to 1950. Having resumed playing he was again affected by paralysis although his composition *Canadian Sunset*, recorded in 1956, did bring him further success. He died in Miami in 1989.

Engaging, always tuneful, there are gems here, not least the 1944 trios with Johnny Hodges and those Holiday sides.

PETER VACHER



## KEITH JARRETT

BUDAPEST CONCERT

ECM 2700/01 0730194 2 CDs 37.46 / 56.43

This concert, recorded live in Budapest in 2016, may prove to be the Keith Jarrett's farewell to his legion of dedicated followers. In 2018 two devastating strokes left him without the use of his left hand and it has been only last year that he has been forced to admit that his playing days are, probably, over.

His extraordinary career, which has seen him grow from child prodigy, develop into one of the most accomplished musicians anywhere in the world, and then become a pioneer of all types of contemporary music, has been silenced.

In that time he has taken improvisation and experimentation in jazz to new heights and he has spent his life in an internal quest for perfection.

His solo long-form concerts began in 1973 and were unique in their introduction of large swathes of spontaneous improvisations, often untitled, always unpredictable and prodigiously intense. Jarrett is able, in his lyrical wanderings, to weave a unique spell with an incongruous mix of jazz, classical, funk, Indian music and even plainsong, to project an almost ethereal vibe of romanticism.

It is a coalescence of the emotional, the cerebral and the visceral. During this long journey he has had to battle serious illness and has overcome that – until now.

The concert featured here is segmented into ten parts, nine untitled, the tenth a blues, plus two popular tunes, *It's a Lonesome Old Town* and *Answer Me, My Love*.

*Part 1* is an assault on the senses - a *piece de resistance* into which he seems intent to cram every musical idea he has ever had. It is, by turns, restless and meditative with dazzling agitated toccata, shimmering tremolos and challenging chords.

In all the other tracks there are moments of genius; the serene and reflective *Part 2*, *Part 4* is a delightful tango, *Part 9* is an appealing, gentle waltz and *Part 10*, titled *The Blues*, taken at a brisk pace, is full of frills.

And overarching the whole performance is the spiritual and devotional ambience that you can find in most of Jarrett's work. Over the two hour recital the sheer diversity of the programme manages to keep his audience enraptured.

To me, this is Keith Jarrett's finest concert, even including the much-lauded Köln recital. For one thing, unlike the recalcitrant instrument he had to fight in Köln, the quality and timbre of this piano was excellent.

You don't come out of a Jarrett concert whistling the tunes but you do feel that you have had a unique experience.

No doubt, Manfred Eicher at ECM still has masses of Jarrett tapes in his vaults, so hopefully we haven't heard the last of this superb musician, but his live

performances will be a great loss to the jazz world

## JOHN MARTIN



## CHARLIE BARNET AND HIS ORCHESTRA

THE COLLECTION, 1946-50

Acrobat Music ADDCD3345 2 CDs 74:23/72:08

Saxophonist Charlie Barnett led one of the most jazz-orientated big swing bands - with a dozen Billboard hits - until 1942 when the American Federation of Musicians recording ban kicked in.

This double CD, from the agile Acrobat, finds his band adapting to changing times rather than like several others being brought down by new austerities and changing tastes.

They clearly spent far more time in the recording studio than previously when they were on the road and these 45 tracks, from 1946 to 1950, were originally released on the National, Apollo and Capitol labels, before Charlie temporarily disbanded.

His work from this period is not easy to come by in the commercial market which makes this offering of interest to the



Willie Smith

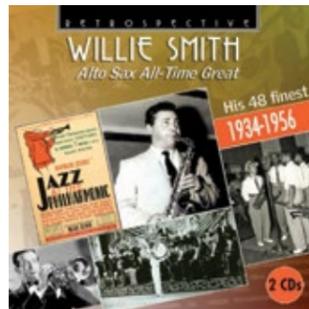
collector, providing a chance to hear new arrangements of previously recorded material rather more advanced in style, in addition to a quantity of progressive new material. You might say bebop was definitely spoken among band members such as Doc Severinsen, Ray Wetzel, Johnny Howell, Rolf Ericson and, not least, trumpeter and arranger, Clark Terry.

Undoubtedly the Capitol recordings are the most interesting. On the first, from September 1947, Paul Villepegue, 29 years old and an Ellington devotee, immediately announces his arrival as arranger with his own name-reversing composition *Eugipelliv*, distinctly more Stan Kenton in sound than erstwhile Barnett.

Maynard Ferguson brought his stratospheric trumpet from Canada to the States a year later, and his screaming solo on *All The Things You Are* so enraged the widow of composer Jerome Kern that Capitol withdrew it from sale.

These CDs offer a great opportunity to hear Barnett's postwar bands which feature excellent solo work across the ensemble and represent, arguably, some of his most distinctive and musically innovative work.

## ANDREW LIDDLE



## WILLIE SMITH

ALTO SAX ALL-TIME GREAT: HIS 48 FINEST 1934-1956

Retrospective RTS 4368 2 CDs 77:25/79:56

The album title certainly makes a sweeping statement and I'm not qualified to disagree. However, it is a claim which might take some living up to. Hyperbole or not, there is plenty to enjoy in this set.

Disk one covers the period 1934-1946 and include Smith's work with Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra, Harry James, Jazz at the Philharmonic and sessions with his own sextet and orchestra. The repertoire includes such classics as *Avalon*, *Sleepy Time Gal* and *Blues in the Night*.

Disk two covers the period 1946-1956 with more from Harry James, Smith with his quintet and with the addition of contributions from Juan Tizol and his orchestra, Lionel Hampton and his Just Jazz All Stars and Duke Ellington, both with Billy Strayhorn and his All Stars and with his own Orchestra. The disk ends with Nat King Cole performing *I Was a Little Too Lonely*. My feeling is that the second disk will be of most interest to jazz aficionados, including as it does *The Young Man with a Horn*, *Perdido* and *Cotton Tail* in the repertoire.

The CD booklet is enhanced with an informative essay from the very knowledgeable Digby Fairweather, which for me is the icing on this entertaining jazz cake.

## ALAN MUSSON



## SARAH MOULE

STORMY EMOTIONS

33 Records 33JAZZ285 48.13

For the past 24 years Sarah Moule, in conjunction with her husband, Simon Wallace, has been championing the cause of the American poet, lyricist and performance artist, Fran Landesman. This is the fifth album of Landesman's work which Sarah has recorded.

For the last 18 years of Fran Landesman's life (she died in 2011) Simon and Fran met every week for Simon to fit his music to Fran's eloquent and highly

literate lyrics; a collaboration which produced more than 300 songs.

Over her busy career the lyricist had created a substantial body of work, and had her songs recorded by Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Barbra Streisand amongst many others. Her most known song is *Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most*, a hip translation of the first line of T.S. Eliott's poem *The Waste Land*, 'April is the Cruellest Month'.

Sarah Moule is the perfect choice for the interpretation of Fran's introspective take on life and love. Her voice has the warmth, range and adaptability which the lyrics call for, especially, as the songs are so diverse.

Simon Wallace is an exceptionally talented and prolific composer. It is hard to understand why he is not better known.

He has matched his music to Fran's lyrics with admirable empathy and understanding. He writes beautiful melodies which, hopefully, in the future, will find a place in other repertoires.

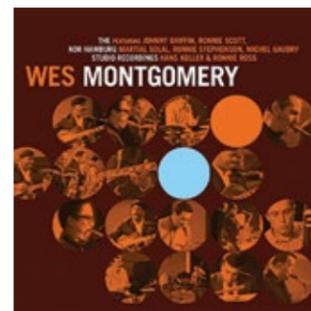
His writing is eclectic, tracking from a bluesy, *Never, That's When*, a world-weary acceptance of unrequited love, through a samba-ish, *Close to Tears* (a lovely Mark Lockheart soprano sax solo on this one) and on to *After the Fall* on which he succeeds in making his excellent eight-piece band sound like a full orchestra.

Simon has acted as M.D. for a score of singers and has contributed scores to TV shows such as *Absolutely Fabulous* and *French and Saunders*. Wider recognition must be on the way.

But back to the singer. Sarah Moule has never disappointed. She has great taste and always makes a good choice of material. This, to date, is her finest album.

The last track, *Stormy Emotions*, is the first song which Fran and Simon worked on together and *Nothing is Mine Now* was their last collaboration. The song was finally completed on the afternoon of the day that Fran died.

## JOHN MARTIN



## WES MONTGOMERY

WES MONTGOMERY

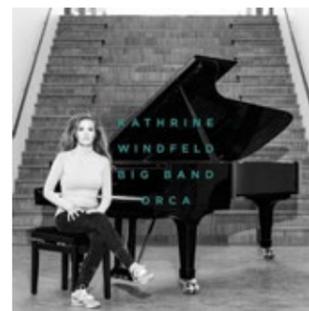
Jazzline D77078 2 CDs 58.44/34.00

Like the Kurt Edelhagen box set reviewed elsewhere in this issue, this sumptuous release confirms just how culturally enlightened German radio was in the 1960s. Taken from tapes originally made for the Norddeutscher Rundfunk 'Jazz Workshop' series in 1965 (and long familiar through poor quality bootleg versions), with the added bonus of a Blu-Ray disc of contemporary TV material, these are some of Montgomery's finest latterday jazz performances, recorded just as his career was set to head off in an altogether more compromising commercial direction.

But what makes these sessions so appealing is that the guitarist's signature style and repertoire (*West Coast Blues*, *Four on Six*, *Twisted Blues*) is off-set by an all-star sax section including Hans Koller, Johnny Griffin, Ronnie Scott and Ronnie Ross. Sparks fly between all hands and it's especially intriguing to hear Montgomery dive in to such unusual fare as Ross's modal cooker *Last of the Wine*. Audio-wise, these tracks are also top notch, with everything revealed in pin-sharp accuracy.

Sadly, there's a little too much candour on the Blu-Ray footage, which ostensibly features a 'rehearsal' for the radio material. While Montgomery plays as imperturbably as ever, one of the UK players is clearly very worse for wear, delivering a performance that is downright embarrassing. A minor caveat then on what is otherwise an exceptional issue, one recommended to all straight-ahead jazz fans.

## SIMON SPILLET



## KATHRINE WINDFELD BIG BAND

ORCA

Stunt Records: STUCD 20092 63:02

Kathrine Windfeld, Danish pianist and composer, a rising star in Scandinavian progressive jazz circles, has issued her third CD with her 16-strong big band, which contains some first-rate soloists, not least Gabor Bolla on tenor and Magnus Thuelund, alto.

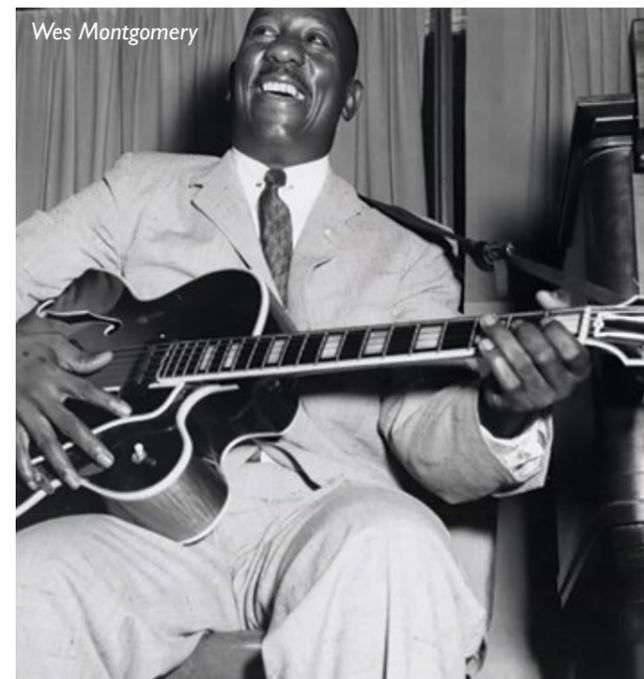
*Orca* is in modern terminology a concept album, a collection of 8 lengthy *études*, related to a maritime theme. We probably intuit this from track titles like *Undertow*, *Ferry*, *Fish* and *Seaweed* even before we have given it a spin.

And Pete H Larson's sleeve notes apprise us of the necessary confirmatory information. Listening to the eponymous *Orca*, which bristles with discordant menace, he says rightly: 'We can hear how it sounds when a killer whale hunts its prey.'

Apparently Windfeld is fascinated by the sea, not surprising having been raised on the South Funen Archipelago, a place of wondrous beauty, the remembrance of which 'is paired with her strong impressionistic genes and transformed into music.'

This is fascinating programmatic music, doleful for the most part, unsettling and demanding. A subdued aquamarine palette has been smeared expressionistically across a rough canvas to capture the living ocean, its emotional currents, its turbid ebb and flow, its unfathomable depths and distant gleams.

The orchestra's first album *Aircraft*, released in 2015, won the Danish New Jazz Artist of The Year award. *Latency*, released



Wes Montgomery

in 2017, brought international recognition and the band toured England in 2018.

This third album, released by Stunt Records, seems destined to gain more plaudits.

## ANDREW LIDDLE



## MO FOSTER &amp; FRIENDS

IN CONCERT

Right Track Records RTR171 CD 2 CDs: 57:40/61:56

For anyone like me who was lucky enough to see this group live in concert in Birmingham in November 2019, or indeed at any of their other live appearances, this 2 CD set will be a welcome reminder of a wonderful night of music-making. With the exception of one title, all pieces were recorded live and this is where the group excels.

Alongside Foster on bass guitar we have Ray Russell on guitar, Chris Biscoe on soprano and alto

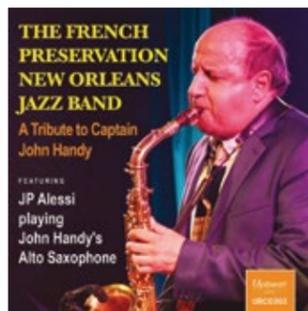
saxes, alto clarinet and piccolo, Jim Watson on keyboards, Nic France, drums and Corrina Silvester, percussion. They are aided and abetted on some tracks by Chris Haigh, fiddle, Malcolm Edmonstone, keyboards, and Frank Ricotti, percussion.

The particular pleasure to be gained from this album, apart from the undoubted musicianship of all concerned, is the variety both of the musical sound palette afforded by the unusual instrumentation and the selection of repertoire, reflecting Mo's wide musical interests. Mo selects music from the likes of Gil Evans, Mike Gibbs, Jaco Pastorius and Jimi Hendrix and includes a couple of his own compositions for good measure.

The recorded sound is excellent and everyone makes telling contributions to the group's sound. Particular favourites for me are *Some Echoes* from Mike Gibbs and *Sing Me Softly Of The Blues* from the pen of Carla Bley.

Both Mo Foster and Ray Russell have enjoyed long and illustrious careers in the session world, so it is a particular joy to hear them in a jazz setting where they really belong. Buy this album - satisfaction is guaranteed.

## ALAN MUSSON



## FRENCH PRESERVATION NEW ORLEANS JAZZ BAND

A TRIBUTE TO CAPTAIN JOHN HANDY

Upbeat Jazz URCD303 63:50

In the 1920s Captain John Handy played clarinet in New Orleans. Some years later Mississippi born Handy switched to alto saxophone and found himself in the right place at the right time to take advantage of the revivalists' determination to revisit the Dixieland era.

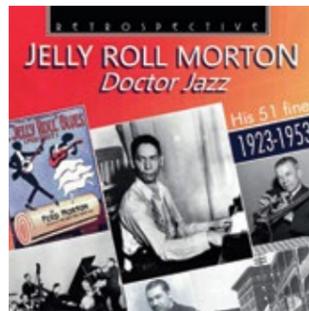
Fast forward to the twenty first century where Jean Pierre Alessi set about making it his life's work to not only play the music of Handy but to play the American's alto saxophone! In July 2019 Alessi acquired the instrument (quite how is another matter). One thing is abundantly clear, the Frenchman has boundless enthusiasm for his idol and the release of the French Preservation New Orleans Jazz Band's latest album is testament to it.

A *Tribute to Captain John Handy* was recorded in a Perignat barn in October 2019 in the presence of an enthusiastic audience, an enthusiasm matched only by the irrepressible Alessi and his band mates. Alessi's approach is to charge headlong into the material without ever thinking he should apply the brakes. Across 11 tracks spanning some 63 minutes the pace is relentless. Pianist Cyrille Ouanich's muscular, boogie-woogie style suits the occasion, as does Jacques Bourdi's propulsive drumming.

The tracks are regulation fare: *Handy's Boogie*, *Hindustan*, *Caldonia*, *Ice Cream*, *Washington and Lee Swing*. Alessi isn't the greatest technician but what he lacks in the way of ability he

more than makes up for it with infectious enthusiasm.

RUSSELL CORBETT



## JELLY ROLL MORTON

DR JAZZ

Retrospective: RTS4376 2 CDs 78:42/79:59

New Orleans-born Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe, Jelly Roll Morton as we know the virtuoso pianist and composer, soberly asserted that he invented jazz, in 1902. Born in 1890, he would have been twelve at the time of the creative moment. Did he also invent hype?

Yet it is certain that his *Jelly Roll Blues*, arguably the first written jazz composition, was published in 1915, fully two years before the ODJB released *Livery Stable Blues*.

By the late 1930s when he was making the claim, he had almost become a caricature of himself, portrayed as a washed-up diamond-toothed hustler, ridiculed for self-aggrandising and robbed of his royalties. Fortunately his reputation did recover and his music speaks for itself.

He was the first jazz composer to so methodically contrive introductions, multiple themes, changes in texture and tempo for an 'orchestra', his Red Hot Peppers - which boasted some major talents, not least at various times and among others, Kid Ory, Omer Simeon, Johnny St. Cyr, Barney Bigard, Johnny Dodds and Baby Dodds.

This budget-priced two CD set from Retrospective traces his genius from these early Red Hot Peppers recordings, made in 1920s Chicago, to the revivalist stomps and marches cut in New York in 1940, a year before he died, in the company of such as

Albert Nicholas, Sidney Bechet and Red Allen.

Today he is recognised as a seminal figure in American music, a brilliant innovator, who unified ragtime, blues, spirituals, brass band instrumentals and pop in a sophisticated whole, energising them with shots of stop time and double time, adding what he called a 'Spanish tinge', the habanera-influenced bassline that replaces ragtime rigidity with a swing. Indeed, he is credited with writing the first stomp, *King Porter Stomp*, and the first swing tune, *Georgia Swing*.

Highlights of this collection of 51 of his finest include *Dr Jazz*, *Grandpa's Spells*, *Wolverine Blues*, *Sidewalk Blues*, *King Porter Stomp* and *The Pearls*, unsurpassed masterpieces of early jazz. Just listen to the breath-taking transitions in *Shreveport Stomp*, the sudden startling key changes of *The Chant*, the tonal subtleties of *Mournful Serenade* if for a second you doubt his genius.

ANDREW LIDDLE



## PIERANUNZI FONNESBÆK DUO

THE REAL YOU

Stunt Records STUCD 20132 65:16

Italian pianist Enrico Pieranunzi and Danish bassist Thomas Fonnesbæk released a first duo recording in 2017 and this follow up album, dedicated to Bill Evans, maintains the exceptionally high standard of their debut outing. Two of Bill Evans' compositions - *Only Child* and *Interplay* - and Phil Markowitz's *Sno' Peas*, which the revered American pianist recorded in 1979, feature on a disc of 13 tunes spanning some 65 minutes.

Pieranunzi's elegance emulates that of Evans and his musical

partner on the CD, Fonnesbæk, exhibits similar qualities. Pieranunzi contributes five compositions, Fonnesbæk three, alongside the duo's two co-written charts. *Our Foolish Hearts* is their sublime reworking of Victor Young's *My Foolish Heart*. This Stunt Records album will appeal to fans of Bill Evans with Fonnesbæk dedicating *The Real You* to Evans' bassist Scott LaFaro who was tragically killed in a car accident at the age of 25.

RUSSELL CORBETT



## MIKKEL PLOUG

BALCONY LULLABIES

Stunt Records STUCD 20102: 47.52

This totally delightful album is also a serious tract for our times. It grew out of the covid crisis and is an effective response to that crisis. In early 2020 Mikkel Ploug's frustration at the isolation of lockdown led to nightly lullaby performances on the balcony of his apartment in Copenhagen. He built so strong an audience, initially among his neighbours, that in three weeks he succeeded in crowdfunding this album, recorded in May last year.

The result is a solo guitar album, mostly electric guitar like his balcony performances, with a consistent mood, soothing, but not bland, gently uplifting. Several of the songs are in fact literally lullabies - two of them apparently among Denmark's favourite lullabies - but one of the striking features of the album is the variety of material absorbed into the prevailing mood: Danish songs range from two by the great composer Carl Nielsen to the 1993 Eurovision Song Contest entry (nine points, apparently!), non-Danish composers range from Hoagy Carmichael to John Lennon.

Ploug's performances are unfailingly melodic, technically challenging, but to the listener deceptively simple. To me the outstanding track is a stunning version of *You Are My Sunshine*, slowed right down, with no loss of joy, elaborate figures finally blending into a serene, almost oriental pattern.

And it's followed by the most affectingly simple performance on the album: Jens Rosendal and Per Warming's *Du kom med alt det der var dig*. Interestingly, in his notes, Ploug constantly credits the writers of the words or original poems, often quoting or summarising them.

Despite virtuosic flourishes such as the opening harmonics on *Under stjernerne på Himlen* this is never only about technique or even the creation of a mood - the positivity comes from the meaning.

RON SIMPSON



## JORGEN EMBORG

SWAN SONGS

Stunt Records STUCD 20052: 2 CDs, 64.25/76.19

*Swan Songs* is a well-conceived double tribute to Danish pianist/composer Jorgen Emborg who found at the turn of the year 2019/2020 that his Parkinson's disease had worsened to the extent that he could no longer play the piano. Recorded early in 2020, *Swan Songs* consists of 12 of his compositions performed under his supervision by a classy Danish sextet. The second half of the tribute, titled *Jorgen Emborg Greatest*, is exactly that, 12 of his best recordings with different groups from 1979 onwards.

Emborg is a highly accessible, genuinely melodic composer, as evidenced as the band sprints into the opening *Running*. The integration of the

musicians is striking, especially the unorthodox front line of saxophone (Hans Ulrik) and harmonica (Mathias Heise). Ulrik's excellence is a given, but Heise is equally impressive, a focussed and inventive soloist who contributes greatly to one of the more delicate delights of the album, *Beautiful as a Spirit*. Even better in the same vein is *To Lars*, a gently affecting piece in the hands of Thomas Fonnesbæk (a bassist in the great Scandinavian tradition) and Lars Jansson, poised and authoritative in Emborg's piano chair.

*Swan Songs* is nicely balanced, *A Cowsome Loneboy* playful, *Why Bother* recapturing the insouciance of the opener and four songs featuring the lyrics of Emborg's long-time associate, Lisa Freeman, and the precise and assured vocals of Sinne Egg - *Remember* being one of the defining tracks of the album.

The variety in *Jorgen Emborg Greatest* is too much to chart in what is mainly a review of the 2020 recording, but stand by for an aggressive jazz-funk start with *February Crystals* (Emborg on keyboard rather than piano), plenty of examples of his skill in supporting singers and, of course, being Scandinavia, some superb bass solos.

RON SIMPSON



## CARLA BLEY

LIFE GOES ON

ECM 2669 56.43

How long it is since Carla Bley was introduced to British jazz listeners with a *Melody Maker* article titled (rather chauvinistically) *The Good Looks of The New Wave*. Mind you, even back in 1965 she'd already begun to contribute significant themes to the jazz songbook, namely *Sing Me Softly of The Blues*.

There's something of an echo of that composition in the opening of *Life Goes On*, on which Steve Swallow's graceful bass guitar and Andy Sheppard's breathy, delicate tenor step lightly around each other. And that in itself might be a good way to sum up the entire album: considered music, sometimes sidelong and ironic (hear the witty put-ons of US patriotism on *Beautiful Telephones*), very often starkly lovely, always highly concentrated.

Occasionally, the instrumentation and interplay recall Thelonious Monk's *Monk's Mood* session with Coltrane (*On*). Elsewhere (*And Then One Day*) they seem to be channelling Erik Satie through a glass darkly, but Bley being Bley even at their most sombre there is something quietly hopeful about everything. Indeed, although recorded in May 2019 - pre-Covid, as it were - one can't help but feel the album's title might have been thought up specifically with our uncertain, locked-down world in mind.

The brief sleeve annotation certainly helps support this assumption, asking 'Could this be the ending or just the beginning of life without music or fun?' With this debate still to be settled, this album makes a charming distraction.

If you know Bley, Swallow or Sheppard in any context do please check this out. It's a record that sings softly, and not just of the blues.

SIMON SPILLETT



## LAUREN WHITE

EVER SINCE THE WORLD ENDED

Café Pacific Records CPCD 5020 30.52

Ms White is an LA-based singer, new to me, but evidently a well-

established performer for this (somewhat abbreviated) CD is her fifth, and her credits include periods as an actress in daytime soap operas and stints in musical theatre on and off Broadway. Her accompanists are classy, the trio led by pianist Quinn Johnson including Trey Henry, bass, and Tierney Sutton's drummer Ray Brinker, with added percussion and extra rhythm on a couple of numbers.

In fact, if I were to recommend the album to *Rag* readers it would be principally for the excellent instrumental work that underpins White's rather lived-in vocalisms. In effect, she is an old-style supper-club singer, fronting these varied songs in somewhat tremulous style, the jazz artistry quite limited.

It's hard to listen to Mose Allison's *Ever Since The World Ended* without hearing Mose's laconic sound in the mind's ear, whereas White seems to want to turn it into a blowsy blues. White says she saw the album session as a glimpse of normalcy during lockdown. Good for her.

Top musicianship, forgettable vocals. What more can I say?

PETER VACHER



## MAYNARD FERGUSON

LIVE AND WELL IN LONDON

Sleepy Night Records SN RCD19 2 CDs 71:22/32:48

I confess. I am confused. And that is because, with this package, I don't know what I am reviewing.

Let me try to explain. A Columbia album bearing the title *Alive and Well in London* first saw the light of day in 1971. This was Maynard's stab at tackling a selection of pop songs. Subsequently, another

album was released in the UK under the same title on CBS and yet another released on the small label Wounded Bird in 2005, this time on CD.

This record is none of the above.

This one is titled *Live and Well in London* (note the difference) but confused reviewers are still reviewing under both titles and that is because the information put out by the record company, *Sleepy Night*, is confusing and none of the tracks on this album are the same tracks that are on the original Columbia album. The tracks on this album have either been re-recorded or are missing.

However, the record company thinks those 'new re-recorded tracks' may have been recorded at a live gig that Maynard's British big band played at London's 100 Club somewhere in the past. BUT the record company is not sure of that because, when the tapes came into its possession, the only evidence it has for that assumption, is that the outer packaging had the words '100' scrawled on the outside.

So, the company thinks that these tapes must have been recorded at 'that live gig at The 100 Club'. Are you with me so far?

So what is this? Well, there are some tracks that may have been recorded at Lansdowne Studios, to which Maynard later added some overdubs, and, according to the sleeve cover (which shows the beaming bandleader standing outside the Pheasantry Jazz Club in Chelsea) some other recordings 'may' have been made there (although I am not entirely clear about that).

So, here's what this mystery is:

Side 1. This seems to be what we think - or rather what the record company thinks - is the 100 Club set....but they are not sure. So, neither are we.

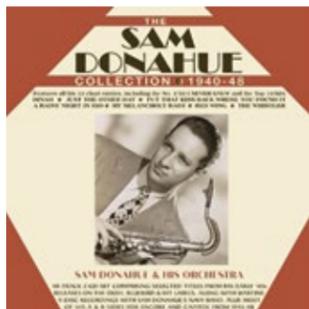
Side 2 is 8 tracks, of which 5 are outtakes and one is a rehearsal. I don't know what the eighth track is. I haven't had the courage to continue that far.

To further persuade us to part with good money, the record company informs us that this

album will be a limited edition of 500. Good luck with that, guys!

Oh, by the way. The live session is O.K if you make allowances for the sound quality. I almost wrote 100 Club instead of live session, but who knows?

JOHN MARTIN



**SAM DONAHUE**  
COLLECTION 1940-48

*Acrobat ADDCD 3370: 2 CDs, 71.12/73.35*

For me Sam Donahue has always meant one thing in particular, his stint in charge of the highly rated Navy Dance Band. But you can't make a career on a couple of

years as a sort of nautical Major Glenn Miller and these CDs give a pretty thorough impression of a largely forgotten bandleader.

The problem, posterity-wise, is that assured, but rather bland, versions of popular songs may sell well, but don't buy you a place in the musical histories. In the years after World War Two Donahue's records were often hits, but even as knowledgeable a writer as Scott Yanow opined they didn't create much of a stir. A rather stolid *I Never Knew*, a Number 2 hit, squares the circle between those two views.

So what we have in this admirable collection is a reminder of the work of an accomplished arranger; capable composer and versatile tenor saxist whose bands were stronger on section work than in solo power (Donahue himself the prime soloist) and who could do the swing thing better than most when he got the chance. Donahue's reputation in 1940 was such that Count Basie guested to fine effect with the band on *It Counts a Lot*, but too many mediocre songs followed.



Eight tracks with the Navy Dance Band are a real highspot: longer, with more solo space (and good soloists, too, though unnamed), swingers such as *C Jam Blues* and *Moten Swing* and a fine arrangement of *I Found a New Baby*. After three tracks by a smart septet with John Best and Willie Smith on board it's back to the big band assortment: Donahue raising the temperature on *Suicide Leap*, Bill Lockwood giving his all on mostly forgettable songs and a rather appealing *Red Wing* moving from Millerish opening ensembles to Native American effects.

RON SIMPSON



**COUNT BASIE AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

COLLECTION 1937—39

*Acrobat Music ACTRCD 105 3 CDs 51.45/52.51/53.40*

Nothing could be more welcome than the re-release of this superb collection of 78s which have been out of the catalogues for some time. These 63 gems are all the

A and B sides of Basie's earliest band recorded during its Decca period, 1937 to 1939.

It is hard now to imagine what was the sensational impact on the New York jazz world when Bill Basie and his Kansas City band arrived there in 1935, breathing fire.

This rough and ready combination simply blew away everyone who heard them, pushing a style of basic blues-based, riff-laden roaring big band jazz. Basie, the King of Jazz, though, sadly, uncrowned (that title had been mistakenly awarded to Benny Goodman) was in town to stake his claim. The top two bands at that time, on the East Coast, were led by the urbane Duke Ellington and the highly organised Jimmie Lunceford and they offered their own versions of big band swing

But the Basie band was different. It sounded impromptu and immediate. It had a strong sense of the value of dynamics. This was a band which could roar and whisper.

But no-one was prepared for this wild and spontaneous bunch of out of towners, although there were rumours that there was something very special coming out of Kansas City.

Basically the two elements which were the secret of the band's success were, firstly, as Basie himself told it, 'I wanted my 13

pieces to sound like my old nine piece band so I could get the same effect and I got this by choosing the right guys. I wasn't looking for a big sound. I was looking for a tight sound'.

The second element which defined their sound was the familiarity of the musicians with each other, and, consequently, with each other's playing. Most of Basie's players stayed with the band for long periods. Incredibly, the guitarist, Freddie Green, was with him for 50 years.

But there were other reasons why the Basie band sounded so different from all the others, apart from his unerring choice of soloists. That was the peerless rhythm section of Walter Page, bass, Freddie Green, guitar and Jo Jones, drums - a rhythm section which, many think, has never been eclipsed.

Listening to these sides again is to realise just how big a part Page's unflinching bass played in the identity of the band at that time. The soloists, Buck Clayton, Lester Young, Herschel Evans, Dicky Wells and Harry Edison were all outstanding and with styles which were, above all, distinctive.

All, except Evans who died young, were destined to become major names in the future. A hugely popular feature of the band was 'the battle of the tenors', a musical gunfight between the cool, laid back style of Young and the gutsy big-tone of Evans, a fake enmity which the wily bandleader secretly encouraged.

The close friendship of the musicians encouraged a unique spontaneity where they were able to construct riffs on the spot, and Basie's one finger prompts helped to point the way. In that time Basie played much more piano and it is a delight to hear more of him on the 6 tracks with just the piano and the rhythm section.

The bandleader was, also, fortunate to have superior arrangers in Eddie Durham, Don Redman and Jimmy Mundy who knew his style, intimately, and wrote to suit. In the Thirties, singers were essential parts of big bands and Basie was very lucky to have Jimmy Rushing and

Helen Humes on hand and who could hold their own in front of the band.

Amazing, too, to see those classic numbers, *Every Tub*, *Swinging the Blues*, *Jumping at the Woodside* and, their one big hit at the time, *One O'clock Jump*, all still in the repertoire 50 years on.

So here is where it all started (and continued) with the band which has been called 'The Magnificent Swing Machine'. It is 84 years ago since Basie recorded these tunes but there is no need to make allowances for the passage of time. Here they are again in 2021 and still fresh as daisies, thanks to brilliant re-mastering by, that doyen of sound engineers, the late John RT Davies.

Paul Watts has contributed comprehensive sleeve notes, although, in my copy the pages are out of sequence. A small matter!

JOHN MARTIN



**TOMMY FLANAGAN**

IN HIS OWN SWEET TIME

*Enja ENJ-96872 53.00*

While there is no shortage of 'name' albums by Tommy Flanagan (1930-2001) among his extensive discography, this solo recording does feel extra-special. Recorded in October 1994 at the Birdland Jazz Club in Neuburg in Germany on the club's Bosendorfer grand piano, it radiates class.

The notes make it clear that Flanagan was reluctant to take on the idea of a solo recital and he may well have been dissatisfied with the results, hence the lengthy delay in their appearance. Happily the proprietor of Enja Records felt no such reservations and it has thus belatedly become the tenth release by Flanagan on his label.

It was at the suggestion of Diana, his wife and manager, that

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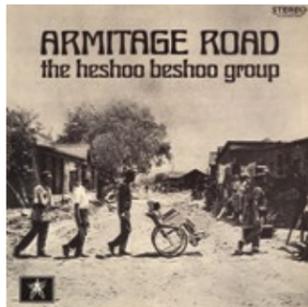
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the pianist chose to perform ten standard songs and slower pieces rather than the nifty post-bop originals that might have been expected. Even so, he infuses each composition with an implied pulse and the kind of harmonic niceties that a player of his pedigree should deploy, taking each song for a pleasing excursion, this embodied by his reading of Tadd Dameron's *Smooth As The Wind* where he even interpolates a momentary hint or two of stride.

He follows with more Dameron via *If You Could See Me Now*, nursing this lovely melody through a gentle make-over, the technique and touch impeccable, nothing rushed or irregular. His own *Untired Blues*, intricate and almost quirky, is a standout too, a verdict that serves to sum up the album in its entirety.

Worth waiting for? Definitely.

#### PETER VACHER



### THE HESHOO BESHOO GROUP

#### ARMITAGE ROAD

*We Are Busy Bodies* WABB 063: 45.00

*Armitage Road*, produced by John S. Norwell in 1970, appeared on various EMI subsidiaries in the early 1970s, but this 2020 release on the Canadian label *We Are Busy Bodies* is the first in 46 years – and one can only ask why! This is uplifting, spirited, frequently wild and sometimes lyrical music, distinctively African, but in touch with the contemporary trends in American jazz.

The Heshoo Beshoo Group was a five-piece of 20-somethings based in Soweto. Brothers Henry and Stanley Sithole are a compelling combination on alto and tenor sax respectively, but the presiding genius of the

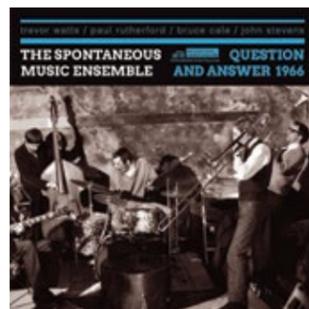
group is guitarist Cyril Magubane. Crippled by polio, he can be seen in his wheelchair on the cover photograph, a sardonic parody of *Abbey Road*, but there's nothing sardonic about his music.

Four of five tracks are his compositions, attractively simple and optimistic, with *Lazy Bones* having a particularly traditional feel. His solos are the most considered and melodic on the album, with an extended solo on *Amabutho* a highlight, his ringing tone in contrast to the counterpoint of bassist Ernest Mothle.

The Sithole brothers provide the more avant-garde elements, Henry in particular prone to joyous or agonised shrieks and wails, both sounding excitingly on the brink, the wilder free jazz elements never losing the intense focus of their playing. And drummer Nelson Magwaza is simply terrific, a driving pulse with undertones of African rhythm, but controlled and capable of subtlety.

It's shaming to think I had never even heard of the Heshoo Beshoo Group who made just this one album – but what an album!

#### RON SIMPSON



### THE SPONTANEOUS MUSIC ENSEMBLE

#### QUESTION AND ANSWER 1966

*RnB Records RANDB068 2 CDs* 69:35/62:35

The Spontaneous Music Ensemble enjoys mythical status, not least among free jazz devotees. Its driving force, drummer John Stevens, determined early in his career to focus upon 'free' and 'improvised' music. From the mid-sixties until his untimely death in 1994, Stevens' story is one of creative achievement with little in the way of financial reward.

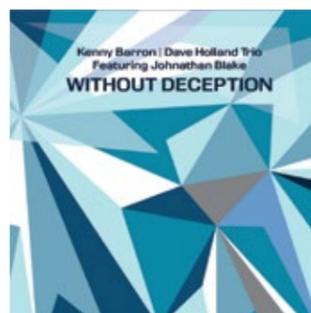
London's Little Theatre Club supported the attempts of Stevens and others to forge a new music at a time precious few other venues were willing to do. The Prince Albert in Greenwich did offer the SME a gig (June 22nd 1966 to be precise), the session was recorded and it forms the basis of *Question and Answer 1966*, a two-disc release from Rhythm and Blues Records. Stevens teamed up with like-minded souls Trevor Watts alto sax, Paul Rutherford, trombone, and bassist Bruce Cale to explore the possibilities of a new approach to music first signalled by Ornette Coleman. Their efforts on the night of June 22nd, in a typical pub setting, were committed to tape and it is only now that we can hear the previously unreleased material.

Disc One comprises some thirty eight minutes of music followed by a lengthy Q & A played out against a low level hubbub punctuated by the ringing of the pub's cash register. The music comprises four tracks: two by unknown composers (the first of them titled *Unknown*) and two by Watts. If you were present on the night and didn't take notes it's unlikely that some 55 years later you'll be able to recall in detail the titles of the improvisations! The music could be described as regulation high octane free jazz interspersed with moments of quiet reflection.

Disc Two features more from the Prince Albert and a session at an unknown London recording studio dated August 30th 1966. A lack of discographical information adds to the romance of it all.

The question and answer session will appeal to the serious student of improvised music: a combination of earnest, inquiring minds and the musicians' considered yet informal responses sketch a picture of musician and audience experiencing a counter culture happening. The SME's improvisations will meet with the approval of the free jazz/improv aficionado.

#### RUSSELL CORBETT



### KENNY BARRON – DAVE HOLLAND TRIO

#### WITHOUT DECEPTION

*Dare 2 Records DR2-011 65.35*

I was fortunate enough to see a slightly different version of this trio at Ronnie Scott's as part of their Piano Trio Festival in August 2019 just two weeks prior to the recording of this album in New York. Barron's bassist then was Kiyoshi Kitagawa; here it's Dave Holland, with drummer Johnathan Blake as the constant. So what changed in that fortnight, apart from 3000 miles of cross-Atlantic travel?

Well, repertoire for a start, for nothing here was heard there. And, candidly, the extra energy and urgency that's apparent in Barron's own playing once back on home ground compared with that at Frith Street; not a criticism in itself, the apparent difference perhaps understandable at the end of a European tour.

Anyway, here's the 76-year old master in prime form, refreshed, lucid and dynamic, the epitome of jazz piano creativity as he works through some cleverly structured original pieces, rising to each challenge with a palpable degree of drive and zest. He's reunited on record with Holland for the first time since their duo album *Art of Conversation* made in 2014 and their collaboration is a joy in itself, which when framed by Blake's rhythmic variety makes this recording a true three-way enterprise.

As usual, Barron picks a Monk tune: this time it's *Worry Later*, rhythmically turbulent at first, before he opens up in animated fashion, percussive, the odd Monk-ian hint thrown in. In contrast, Duke's *Warm*

*Valley* receives more decorous treatment, the improvisation quite spacious and harmonically canny, Holland's pin-point solo the perfect commentary.

Essential music.

#### PETER VACHER



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

#### NEW ORLEANS LEGENDS

*Upbeat URCD309 72:28*

Jazz Crusade was the label for the second generation of revivalists, providing a rich treasure trove of New Orleans music, produced by Big Bill Bissonnette. As its name suggests, it was aimed at proselytising and preserving traditional jazz. It constitutes a priceless archive of over 250 high-quality recordings.

Upbeat have been re-releasing some of them recently and now bring out a sampler, mostly featuring the late contemporaries of the *ci-devant* 1940s revivalists, playing standards of the genre. There are also younger musicians, not least our own Sammy Rimington, relishing the opportunity to play with those who inspired them, like George Lewis, Kid Thomas, Captain John Handy, Albert Burbank, Manny Paul.

In addition to these luminaries we also find Big Jim Robinson, Victoria Spivey, Punch Miller, Sammy Penn, Louis Nelson, Alvin Alcorn, Polo Barnes, Kid Sheik and 'Slow Drag' Pavageau among others. These are legendary names to aficionados.

It is a pity that the recordings are not dated, but for the most part they belong to the 1963-69 period, when Bissonnette's studios were a magnet for New Orleans' musicians to come and record, often with his Easy

Riders Band. It's churlish to quibble because this is wonderful stuff, the bands full on, in their element, as at ease as if parading along a sunny Bourbon Street or steaming down the big river.

No one is ever more full-on than Kid Thomas who is happily on 9 of the 14 tracks. Of special mention is the gloriously free 14-strong ensemble formed when the Japanese New Orleans Rascals keep company with the Mouldy Five, Big Jim and Kid Sheik, and burn off on *You Rascal You*. This is what the pros in the Crescent City call a hot plate!

#### ANDREW LIDDLE



### MUGGSY SPANIER

#### EXTREME RARITIES: THE JUKE BOX SESSIONS

*Upbeat URCD 310: 75.12*

In a way Muggsy Spanier had a strange career. For 40 years he was much loved by all as a hot cornet player, 'direct, honest and vital' according to George T. Simon, quoted in Mike Pointon's liner notes, yet he is remembered primarily for just two wonderful, but short-lived, bands in the middle of his career (1939-1940). The Bechet-Spanier Big Four, assembled solely for recording, made a triumphant success out of an unlikely pairing and The Great 16 squared that as the number of tracks recorded by Muggsy Spanier and his Ragtime Band, a superb Chicago/Dixieland band that heavily influenced the upcoming Revivalist movement.

Probably Muggsy spent too long in not strictly jazz settings (notably with Ted Lewis) to build his recording career consistently, so it's a joy to encounter these rarities, though there is an obvious limitation. 18 of the tracks were recorded in two sessions in 1956 for juke box use, which explains why most of them



Muggsy Spanier

are very short (2 ½ minutes typically) and why the repertoire is so predictable, with boisterous 1920s numbers predominating.

Muggsy plays with crisply edgy power, soloing briefly but incisively, both open and muted, and leading the line with unfussy authority. A bonus is the presence of ex-Ragtimer George Brunis, a fine ensemble player and a controversial, but always entertaining, soloist, going from circus trombone on *The Saints* to smooth lyricism on *Ja-Da* (Muggsy's lyrical side also apparent here). Peanuts Hucko, on the first session only, shines on *Clarinet Marmalade* and Floyd Bean's urbane piano recalls Billy Kyle.

The bonus tracks, with a capable sextet from 1954, have no restriction on time and the final two tracks are quite possibly the highlight of the album: Muggsy's blues playing at its best on *Memphis Blues* and an exhilarating, if somewhat hectic, *Royal Garden Blues*.

#### RON SIMPSON



### QOW TRIO

#### QOW TRIO

*Ubuntu UBU0078 50.07*

The trio's title is taken from a Dewey Redman number that is

second up on this stimulating and ultimately intriguing album. Led off by Irish tenorist Riley Stone-Lonergan with bassist Eddie Myer and veteran drummer Spike Wells alongside, the initial inclination is to cast this as a kind of tribute to Sonny Rollins and his penchant for recording in such pared-down circumstances. Maybe so, and Stone-Lonergan's glorious sound and desire to explore every pore of a piece is certainly reminiscent of the now-retired master, but put that consideration aside for what we have is something refreshingly original.

Consider *Slow Boat to China*, taken at a pleasing lope, the tenor spacious and ingratiating, Myer's line buoyant, Wells tucked in nicely. If the tenorist tends to open proceedings on these pieces by elbowing the theme, giving it a prod you could say, then either Myer or Wells will respond in their own adept ways, making each performance seem fresh, the swing implied, the outcomes unexpected.

Just to hear Billie's *God Bless The Child* at solemn pace, with Myer's expansive bass followed by Stone-Lonergan's rich re-entry is to sense real spontaneity. Same goes for the up-beat *It's All Right With Me*, the ebb and flow quite captivating, Wells surging underfoot, Myer flying before Stone-Lonergan re-enters and shakes the old song to bits. Wow!

Nothing routine here: just music in the moment. Sleeve-note writer Daniel Spicer calls it 'an infectiously joyful compendium' and he's right.

#### PETER VACHER



**ANAÏS RENO**

LOVESOME THING

Harbinger Records HCD 3701 53.08

Well, here is something of a surprise, for this US singer is just seventeen years old and has embarked on a 12-track programme of songs by Ellington and Strayhorn for her debut CD. Ambitious? For sure.

What's more, she has attracted a booklet essay by Will Friedwald, a leading US commentator on all things vocal, and is accompanied by pianist Emmet Cohen, now highly prominent on the New York scene. Both Reno and Cohen come garlanded with awards so one is inclined to expect good things. Happily, any such expectations are, if anything, exceeded.

*Caravan* opens with a suitably Middle Eastern-style wordless vocal over drum taps before Reno moves into the familiar theme, band riffs leading into a klezmer-like solo from tenorist Tivon Pennicott, over a Latin beat, a piano pattern persisting before a final vocal. Phew!

*Mood Indigo* is more stately, as it should be, the vocal measured, the depth of sound and maturity of approach on Reno's part quite astonishing, her mother, violinist Juliet Kurtzman, soloing appropriately too. *Still in Love*, a rarely-performed Strayhorn composition, comes across as a parlour piece, taken at an even-pace with Cohen playing stride and it's a gem. *Chelsea Bridge* is conjoined with *A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing*, Pennicott's plaintive tenor alongside.

A clever mix of the familiar (*A Train*) with the less-heard (*UMMG*) allied to thoughtful routines is enough to make Reno's debut a highlight. Just

consider *I'm Just a Lucky So and So*, all easy swing and subdued re-invention, the vocal momentarily reminiscent of Diana Krall, and elegantly poised. Even her scating on this is just right, as is Cohen's sprightly solo.

Grab this and you'll be in on the beginning of a career that seems destined for fame.

PETER VACHER



**FONNESBAEK & KAUFLIN**

STANDARDS

Storyville 1018488 55.09

The combination of the American pianist Justin Kauflin and Danish master-bassist, Thomas Fonnesebaek makes this an album to go searching for. This is the second outing by the duo — the first was *Synesthesia* which was well received. This is even better with their uncanny interweaving being even more impressive. Fonnesebaek is as much to the fore as his partner as they have fun challenging each other with teasing exchanges.

The record came about almost by accident. In a casual warm up for the *Synesthesia* session the two musicians played around with several standard tunes unaware that they were being recorded.

Later, when the record company executives played the tapes back, they realised that they had something special in this impromptu recording of two musicians, working uninhibitedly with no audience or recording pressures, and decided to release the recording entirely unedited.

Although the title *Standards* suggests familiar and long-loved tunes, the melodies are hard to find. A more accurate title would have been 'based on the chords of Standards',

cumbersome but more accurate, because the musicians play fast and loose with those evergreens. The thinking is just let's start playing and see where we go.

We know that with Fonnesebaek we can always expect virtuosity and he doesn't let us down. But Kauflin is a revelation. His influence seems to be Art Tatum; a presumptuous ambition for any pianist, but Kauflin, like Tatum, blind since the age of 11, seems unfazed by what many would have thought was an unreachable target.

Yet Tatum's phrasing and awesome technique is there and these dazzling arpeggios are pure Tatum.

Like Tatum, he can, sometimes, be tempted into over-elaboration, but what he offers is never tasteless. The only word to describe this youngster's brio is astonishing. I hope to hear much more from him in the future.

JOHN MARTIN

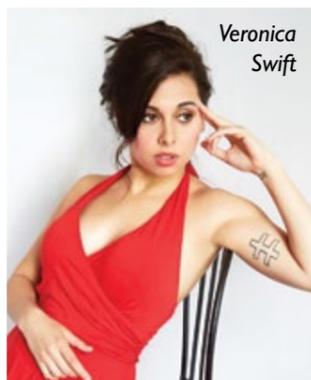


**VERONICA SWIFT**

THIS BITTER EARTH

Mack Avenue Records MAC1177 61:13

Veronica Swift is a revelation. Raised in Charlottesville, Virginia by her parents, acclaimed bebop pianist Hod O'Brien and vocalist Stephanie Nakasian, she was performing with them and making albums from a very early age. With prestigious awards under her belt, a bachelor's degree and headlining with the likes of Wynton Marsalis, Chris Botti and Michael Feinstein, this 27 year old singer has already made her mark. Stylistically, she is up there with all the greats; Ella, Sarah, Dinah, Anita - you name them! She carries their musical DNA in her bones.



Following her *Confessions* album on the Mack Avenue label, *This Bitter Earth* recorded during 2020 reflects the world in crisis, with the title song sensitively delivered by Swift and talented pianist Emmet Cohen. There is a winning collaboration which reverberates throughout this album.

It's an album of contrasts. Swift can disarm you with her subtle approach to challenging lyrics; you sense the irony in *How Lovely To Be A Woman*, a super swinger with vocals firing at full range and in Rodgers & Hammerstein's racially aware *You've Got To Be Carefully Taught*, producing some sparky bebop with Cohen and the creative rhythm section; and she can charm you with *Getting To Know You* in waltz time, before switching the pace to a high energy swinger.

There's a masterly reading of Gershwin classic *The Man I Love* with superb solo from bassist Yasushi Nakamura, followed by an explosive delivery of *You're The Dangerous Type* with quick fire lyrics and scat choruses reminiscent of Annie Ross!

Every track is vibrant and refreshing, with humour from the pen of Sammy Cahn, bold statements in Carol King's provocative *He Hit Me* performed in duo with guitarist Armand Hirsch and the mesmerizing closing track *Sing*. Stand outs for me are *As Long As He Needs Me*, beautifully rendered with brilliant changes and a powerful *Prisoner of Love*.

Veronica Swift's extraordinary ability could embrace any musical genre. The field of jazz she chooses to inhabit is all the richer for it. Highly recommended.

VAL WISEMAN

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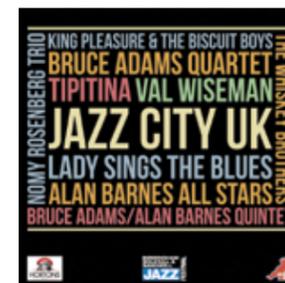
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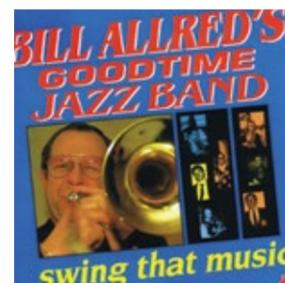
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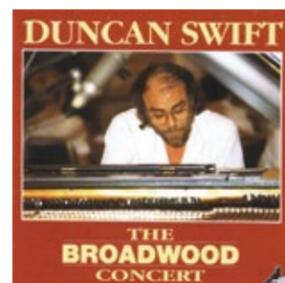
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# HENRY'S BLUESLETTER

## MORE MASTERS OF BLUES MATCHBOX BLUESMASTERS – SET 3 (SAYDISC)

2021 seems to be shaping up to be a good year for folk who are interested in those earliest recorded blues, with the release of seven CD sets, each set comprising of six CDs, in the *Matchbox Bluesmaster* series. This month sees the release of the third set, and the remaining four will see the light of day later this year.

The series concentrates largely on the little-known and the almost totally unknown singers and musicians who were among the first blues performers to be recorded – and it's fascinating stuff.

A lot of the music is quite primitive, but in most cases the musicians had been scraping a living playing on street corners for nickels and dimes, performing a gruelling four- or six-hour stint at parties or if they were more fortunate, appearing in a vaudeville or medicine show.

### Disc 1: The Complete Recordings in Chronological Order of Noah Lewis and Jed Davenport

This opens with three unaccompanied solo harmonica tracks nicely showcasing the intricate and expressive playing of Lewis, one of the more important pre-World War 2 blues harmonica players who sowed the seeds for the more sophisticated players that were to come.

Noah Lewis' Jugband features guitarist Sleepy John Estes, mandolin player Yank Rachel and jug blower Ham – for Hambone – Lewis for a stomping *Ticket Agent Blues* and *New Minglewood Blues*.

The Beale Street Rounders were founded by Mississippi-born Jed Davenport on harmonica – just check out

his pyrotechnics on *Beale Street Breakdown*, one of the ten tracks that feature both this band and his Beale Street Jug Band. His classic *How Long, How Long* recorded in The Peabody Hotel is included here as well as the splendid *I'm Sitting on Top of The World*, sung by Too Tight Henry Castle. A fine dose of romping and stomping Memphis Jug music, that includes Jed's famous harmonica imitation of a piccolo and rare snapshots of his trumpet and tin whistle playing.

### Disc 2. Texas Alexander 1928-29

Texas Alexander had a primitive, powerful voice that echoed the field hollers, work shouts and prison songs of the early 1900s. With regard to his prison songs, it could be said that he might well have brought some personal experience to the table. It is reported variously that he was sentenced to six years in the state penitentiary for the murder of his wife, or alternatively, he could have been sentenced to a spell in a Prison Work Farm for

singing lewd songs in public. Based on the explicit nature of many of his songs, the clever money is on the latter. Jazz musicians Joe King Oliver, Eddie Lang and Clarence Williams make an appearance on some tracks.

### Disc 3: Ramblin' Thomas 1928 – 32

The 16 tracks come from sessions in Chicago in February and November 1928 and from 1938 in Dallas, all of them featuring Willard Ramblin' Thomas singing and playing guitar. He sings of enjoying Chicago so much that he stayed there for an entire week, whereas he didn't find Dallas as accommodating as conveyed in his *Hard Dallas Blues*. In his inventive songs, many of which was drawn from his experiences, he sang of being imprisoned for vagrancy. 'Man, don't never make Dallas your home.' As well as writing well-constructed songs, he also accompanied his tough, hard-edged vocals with inventive slide guitar using a clasp knife or bottleneck. Thomas generally delivers slower blues, though his jumping *Shake It Girl* demonstrates that he would also cater for dancers in the jukes and parties he played.

### Disc 4: Country Girls 1926-29

An interesting collection of pretty much unknown singers with all but one, Pearl Dixon from Tennessee, either from or associated with Texas. The first five tracks feature a blues girl with attitude, Lillian Miller of whom almost nothing is known. On the opener, *Kitchen Blues*, she is accompanied by the tasteful piano-playing of 16-year-old Hersal Thomas, who died of food-poisoning shortly after the Chicago session. His elder brother, George W. Thomas, takes over the piano duties on her remaining tougher tracks which include *Dead Drunk Blues* which was later associated with Ma Rainey. There are two songs credited to Hattie Hudson with Willie Tyson on piano and I wish there were more. Hattie's real name was probably Burleson, and her singing is outstanding on two good songs, *Dog Gone My Good Luck Soul* and *Black Hand Blues*.

On the same day, December 6th 1927, Gertrude Perkins took over from Hattie, adding an unknown guitar (probably Coley Jones) and Octave Gaspard on brass bass for the defiant *No Easy Ride Blues* and *Gold Daddy Blues*, both credited to Burleson. Country Blues singer and songwriter

Pearl Dickson, born Dixon in Somerville in 1903, only recorded four songs, two of which remain unissued. Here we have *Twelve Pound Daddy* and *Little Rock Blues* recorded in Memphis for Columbia in 1927.

Laura Hendon was a big-voiced gospel singer whose recordings consisted of the tracks recorded for Columbia in 1928 in Dallas, accompanied by unknown piano, guitar and brass bass, and four more cut for Brunswick the following year in Kansas City. On there she is backed by Bennie Moten on piano, Eddie Durham on guitar and Joe Page, who was actually Walter or Vernon, on double bass. Laura's singing

was spirited, infectious and rocked along nicely, and it's a mystery that she wasn't to record again. The finisher is Bobbie Cadillac with *Carbolic Acid Blues*, well-sung, but with disturbing lyrics: 'She looked at me with burning eyes, threw carbolic acid in my face.'

### Disc 5: Rufus & Ben Quillan (1929 – 1931)

Singer and pianist Rufus and singer Ben Quillan were members of a family of ten from Gainesville, Georgia. As the Blue Harmony Boys, they are joined by singer James McCrary and an unknown guitarist for a set of good-natured, slick harmony, hokum blues. Ben recalled that most of their songs were

'kinda indecent for that day, but not for today. We were a little ahead of our time. We had a lot of fun, played a lot of house-parties, small dances.'

### Disc 6: DeFord Bailey & Bert Bilbro (1927-31)

Although DeFord Bailey was black, he was best-known for his 15 years with The Grand Ole Opry, He favoured his Marine Band harmonica and found fun in 'imitating everything I heard – hens, foxes, hounds, turkeys, everything around me. In the evenings we'd call the cows and goats with cow and ox horns.' His train songs are remarkable, capturing in some detail the sounds of individual trains, *Pan American Blues* and *Dixie Flyer Blues*.

Almost nothing is known of D.H Bert Bilbro except that he was white and from the Piedmont region and his only recordings are those included in this set. This harmonica style is not dissimilar from that of DeFord Bailey and his terrific opener is also a train song, *C. & N. W. Blues*. Of the five songs Bert recorded are a couple with him singing and playing harmonica to guitar accompaniment on *Yes, Indeed I Do* and *We're Gonna Hear It Go On Time Tonight* which have a decidedly Swiss Alpine feel, recorded in Atlanta in 1929 and they are real sing-alongs – a surprising ending to a surprising CD set!

JIM SIMPSON

## HENRY'S BLUES PROFILES VICTORIA SPIVEY

One afternoon back in 1973, I took an unexpected telephone call. It was Victoria Spivey. Considering that we had only previously been in contact by letter, and that had mostly been about business, she was extremely chatty, friendly and most entertaining. She was telling me about the guys she had worked with – remarkably she had recorded with Louis Armstrong who she toured with in the 1930s, King Oliver, Luis Russell and Clarence Williams as well as so many great bluesmen. The conversation must have gone on for nearly an hour, so long that I beginning to worry about the telephone bill she was running up. Suddenly she said that she had better ring off now, she was using 'the phone of the guy who runs the drug store on the corner.'

Despite the best of intentions, we never did manage to get that tour together; it would have been a real high-spot for Big Bear.

Victoria Regina Spivey was one of God's more interesting characters. Equally at home in jazz and blues settings, she sang, played piano, was a prolific and witty songwriter, an inveterate tourer who worked right up until the end, a shrewd businesswoman, one-time club owner and boss of her own Spivey Records label. Born in 1906 in Houston, Texas, where her father, Grant, played in the family string band, she was one of eight children, at least three of whom were singers. She showed an early interest in piano and by the age of seven was entertaining at local parties and in bars and barrelhouses.

By the time she was twelve she was playing piano at The Lincoln Theatre in Dallas and it wasn't long before she was appearing in Vaudeville and barrelhouses, often teamed with her two sisters, Elton Island Spivey, known as The Za Zu Girl, and Addie Spivey, known as Sweet Peas.

Still in her teens, Victoria was appearing in Galveston and Houston saloons, gambling clubs and sporting houses with Blind Lemon Jefferson. She reached St. Louis, Missouri, in 1920, recorded for Okeh Records and stayed in the city as staff writer for the St Louis Publishing Company.

Back on the road, sometimes calling herself Queen Victoria, no doubt in reference to her middle name, she appeared in revues, in the Minsky Burlesque, at Smalls Paradise and The Apollo and recorded in 1929 in New York for Victor Records. Somewhere along the way, in 1936, she recorded for Decca in Chicago using the name Jane Lucas – there must be a story there.

In 1950 Victoria retired, to sing, play pipe organ and lead the choir in church, but by the end of the decade was back playing countless one-nighters, many of them with her then husband [she had a total of four] the dancer Billy Adams. She appeared as Missy Rose in the all-black musical movie *Hallelujah* and was featured in musicals including *Hellzapoppin'*.

In 1962 she launched Spivey Records and recorded, amongst others, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Sippie Wallace, Roosevelt Sykes and a young Bob Dylan singing backing vocals and playing harmonica with Spivey herself and Big Joe Williams.

In 1963 she toured Europe with The American Folk Blues Festival and appeared on French and UK TV.

Spivey wrote dozens of songs. The first recorded was *Black Snake Blues* for Okeh in 1926. Her *TB Blues* drew attention to the 1920s prevalence of the disease, maybe her *Dope Head Blues* was the first to warn against cocaine use while her *Organ Grinder Blues* was a comment on the erotic.

Victoria Spivey died in New York in 1976, nowhere near as well-known as her talent warranted.

JIM SIMPSON



Victoria Spivey

Read more of Henry's Blues Profiles on Henry's Blueshouse weekly online Bluesletter - to subscribe free of charge email [admin@bigbearmusic.com](mailto:admin@bigbearmusic.com)

# THE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC

RUSSELL CORBETT reviews a year of livestreaming in the North East.

Throughout the pandemic some of us have been to hundreds of gigs. All perfectly above board, of course, the live stream - or is it the livestream? - has afforded the opportunity to tour many of the world's famous and not so famous jazz venues. It has been possible to watch performances round the clock from near and far. The quality of the audio-visual presentation has varied enormously and, it would seem, it's not solely down to financial resources. The online experience has enabled promoters and venues to offer musicians paid gig opportunities. Once we're through the other side of this long pandemic tunnel the live stream will continue. The smaller venue, regularly attracting, say, 40 to 50 patrons (perhaps approaching its capacity) is constantly mindful of pitching the price of admission to match the budget of the gig-goer. The emergence of a global online audience offers the prospect of a regular additional income stream.

The Globe (Newcastle Jazz Co-op) has presented online concerts on a weekly basis and intends to continue doing so long into the future, pandemic or no pandemic. This model is certain to be replicated throughout the country. The Globe's community ethos has seen musicians from across the region and, when ever-changing regulations permitted, from further afield, perform to a previously unimagined worldwide audience. Recent pre-Conservatoire status Leeds College of Music graduates Abbie Finn and Harry Keeble have seized the opportunity to present their music to the world. Live streams and proactive social media engagement has led to airplay on Jazz FM, local community radio stations in Newcastle and Newton Aycliffe and elsewhere. Similarly, All Party Parliamentary Jazz Appreciation Group award-winning vocalist Zoë Gilby graced the same stage on Railway Street, as did one of the region's Honourary Geordies, American trumpeter Pete Tanton working with his Riviera Quartet. In autumn 2020 an all-too-brief window permitted limited

audience numbers to attend gigs. The irrepressible Nigel Price made the trip north to play a Jazz Co-op gig in the company of Vasilis Xenopoulos, Ross Stanley (Hammond and Leslie cabinet!) and drummer Joel Barford. One word best describes the occasion: incendiary!

Newcastle Arts Centre got in on the act with live streams by vocalist Alice Grace, multi-reeds virtuoso Sue Ferris and Berklee student drummer Matt MacKellar, riding out the pandemic at his Tyneside home. Gosforth Civic Theatre, a not-for-profit community venture, has done its bit, recently hosting the album launch of Teesside based trumpeter Noel Dennis' cherished Aurora project, recording music inspired by Tom Harrell. On June 25, when all lockdown restrictions could be a thing of the past, Archipelago will launch their latest album, *Echoes to the Sky*, at the same venue. Prohibition Bar, formerly Newcastle's Jazz Cafe, opened its doors to musicians, with one of its Sunday afternoon live streams attracting the attention of the local constabulary. Mid-tune, bobbies on the beat ducked under the Pink Lane premises' half-raised shutters to inquire in time-honoured fashion: 'Ello, 'Ello, 'Ello, what's going on 'ere then?' The proprietor explained that everything was in order, government guidelines were being adhered to, and with that, our law enforcement officers went on their way!

Musicians streaming from attics, bedrooms and kitchens, determined to maintain a presence on the scene and links with their audience, became a regular occurrence. Streaming a big band set from multiple locations, the aforementioned attics, bedrooms and kitchens, can't be anything other than difficult. That didn't stop Dave Hignett's Tyne Valley Big Band putting something out online, ditto Michael Lamb's Strictly Smokin' Big Band. The SSBB's other lockdown activities included a successful crowdfunding campaign to record

three albums, the first of which will be released later this year.

Throughout lockdown many virtual gig-goers posted comments, frequently saying hello to friends they hadn't seen for some time and looking forward to the time everyone can meet up again at a real, live gig. That time is almost upon us. Musicians, promoters and venues are beginning to confirm dates for the resumption of gigs and residencies. The Vieux Carré Jazzmen were first out of the blocks in announcing a socially distanced outdoor gig set for April 29. The Holystone pub on North Tyneside hosts the VCJ's weekly residency and an enclosed beer garden is available to the band until indoor gigs can resume (presently set for May 17). The long established Vieux Carré are set to return to Whitley Bay's iconic Spanish City (Sundays from May 23) and Cullercoats Crescent Club (Wednesdays from June 2).

In the coming weeks Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society (an independent library known to all as the Lit and Phil) plans to reopen its doors to the public. The historic venue (in 1815 George Stephenson first demonstrated the miner's safety lamp and in 1881 Joseph Swan lit the world's first public room with electric light) presents a successful monthly Friday lunchtime jazz concert series. Award-winning vocalist Georgia Cécile is due to appear with pianist Euan Stephenson and

bassist Mario Caribé on July 16. Jazz North East also promotes concerts at the Westgate Road venue. A double bill featuring improvising pianist Paul Taylor and the bass-reeds duo of Andy Champion and Graeme Wilson is scheduled for the evening of July 9, the first of many concerts during the year.

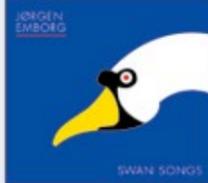
Lockdown has had the positive effect of encouraging the stay-at-home jazz fan to search online for jazz elsewhere, home and abroad. Last year's virtual London Jazz Festival presented numerous performances and more recently the Aberdeen Jazz Festival featured some big hitters including Brian Kellock, Tommy Smith and Mike Stern. Live streams from established London venues, including Ronnie Scott's, continue to be of the highest quality, musically and in terms of online presentation. A nightly (11:00pm BST) virtual trip across the Atlantic to Smalls, NYC, has become eye-opening required viewing. An endless parade of A-list musicians live streaming from the Greenwich Village venue reaffirms the view that the Big Apple remains the jazz capital of the world. That said, in this year of the pandemic, Kansas Smitty's streams from London's Spitalfields Market have been consistently excellent with many highly talented, young musicians coming to the fore. One of many names to keep an eye on is Ella Hohnen-Ford. A recent graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, vocalist Ms Hohnen-Ford is a rare talent.



Nigel Price



**OTHER NEW RELEASES**

 <p><b>Marilyn Mazur's Future Song LIVE REFLECTIONS</b> CD: STUCCO 20062 M. Mazur (d, perc) N. P. Molvaer (tp), H. Ulrik (as, ts), M. Hirabayashi (keyb), E. Aarset, K. Jonsson (gl), K. Howman (b), A. Kleive (d), T. Aase (voice) A. Kemanis (voice), E. Plenar (keyb).</p>	 <p><b>Julia Werup w. Trio Blachman, Aman, Lundeqvist THE THRILL OF LOVING YOU</b> CD: STUCCO 20032 / LP: STUCCO 20031 Sven-Erik Lundeqvist (p), Johnny Aman (b), Thomas Blachman (d).</p>	 <p><b>Jørgen Emborg SWAN SONGS</b> CD: STUCCO 20062, LP: STUCCO 20061 Hans Ulrik (ts), Lars Jansson (p), Thomas Fønnesbæk (b), Morten Lund (d) + Mathias Heise (h), Johan Dymnensen (perc), Sinne</p>	 <p><b>Maria Faust Sacrum Facere ORGAN</b> CD: STUCCO 20072, LP: STUCCO 20071 E. Maniscalco, U. Krigul (org), M. Faust (as), N. Ferm (ts), F. Bigoni (c), T. Wiklund (tp), M. Hyhne (trn), J. Ahlbom (tba).</p>	 <p><b>Callum Au / Claire Martin SONGS AND STORIES</b> CD: STUCCO 20062 / LP: STUCCO 20061 Claire Martin (voc), 62 musicians Orchestra and 21 musicians Big Band recorded in London, produced and arranged by Callum Au.</p>
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