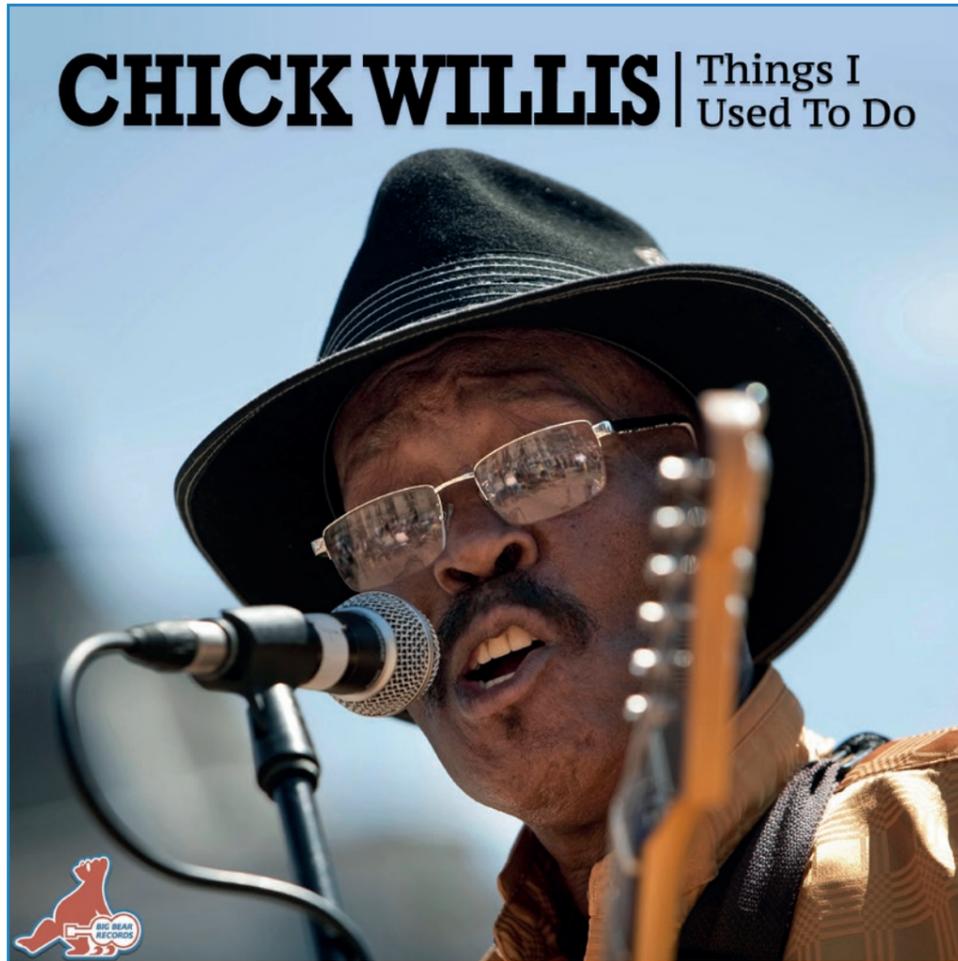


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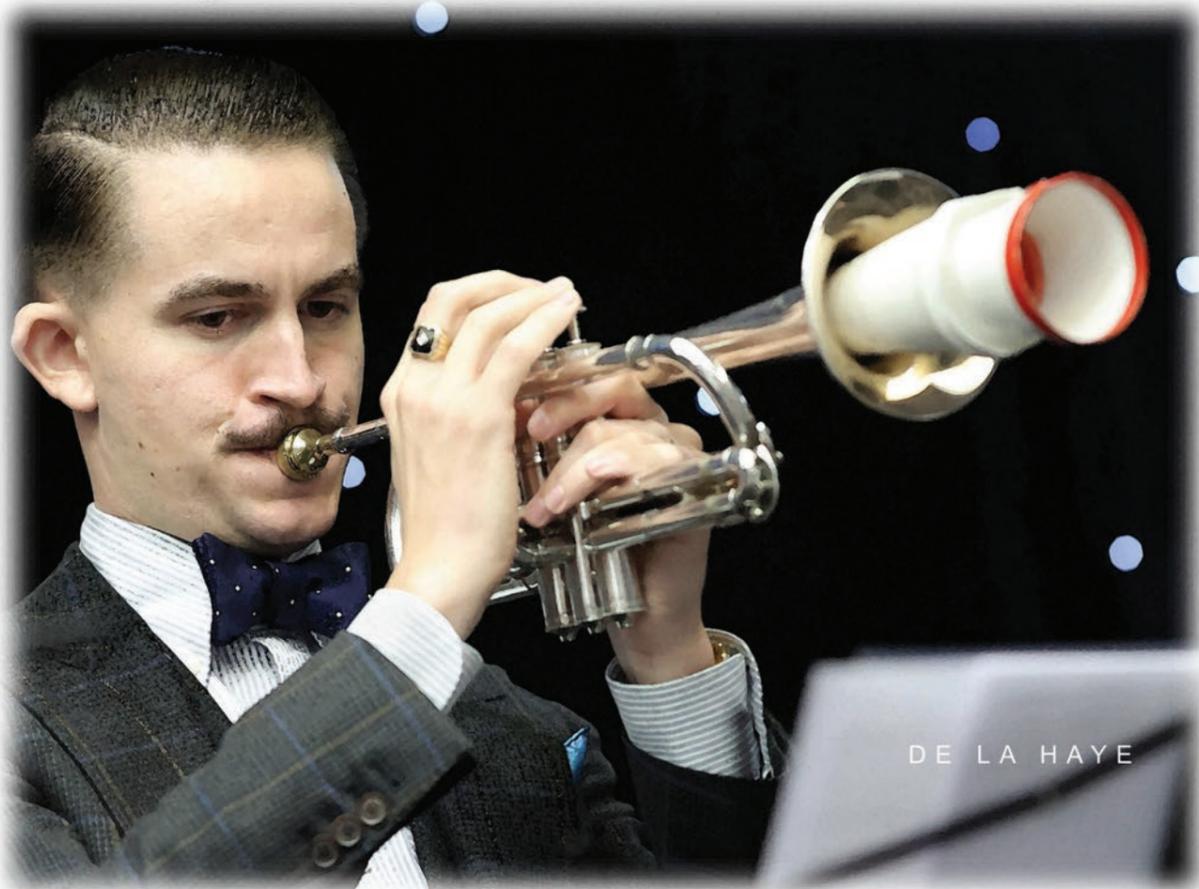
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HOMESICK JAMES, one of the stars of American Blues Legends 73. Henry's Bluesletter (pages 32-33) commemorates the 50th anniversary of the tour.

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## UPFRONT

We always used to be told that British (and European) jazz audiences were more serious than American which probably meant we were more inclined to sit and listen. But there's another side to taking jazz seriously.

A quick trawl of the internet, by no means comprehensive, reveals the existence of the New Orleans Jazz Museum, a Louisiana State Museum and the Jazz National Historical Park in New Orleans; the St Louis National Blues Museum with a state-of-the-art theatre; the American Jazz Museum on 18th and Vine in Kansas City, home of a jazz club four nights a week; and the National Jazz Museum in Harlem under the direction of Loren Schoenberg. All this plus the Louis Armstrong House in Queens, New York, and the Rutgers University Institute of Jazz, founded in 1952 by Marshall Stearns and helmed by such notables as the late Ed Berger and Dan Morgenstern.

And we have The Jazz Centre UK, founded by one man, Digby Fairweather's hustling and the support of a South Coast council. Now, thanks to what appears to be a handful of councillors' animosity, TJC UK looks likely to be out of its ear by August. Makes you think....



Brandon Allen

### PEGGY'S SKYLIGHT

The future of the popular Nottingham venue Peggy's Skylight is in doubt. The building which houses it is up for auction on February 23. The owners of Peggy's Skylight are keen to secure its future by purchasing it, but any attempt to build resources was stymied by the late notice they received of the sale: November 17. At the moment they are attempting to have the sale delayed so that they have time to get the money together. Further details on Peggy's Skylight website.

In the meantime the club offers jazz, folk and blues five days a

week, with such upcoming acts as Brandon Allen (February 25), Jo Harrop and Jamie McCredie (26), Pat McCarthy (March 5), Bryan Corbett (9), James Taylor (15), Elmo Hope Centenary with Raible and Gradschnig (18), Dennis Rollins (24) and Nicolas Meier (25). [www.peggyskylight.co.uk](http://www.peggyskylight.co.uk)

### HUGH AND MARION'S

Georgia Mancio and Dave Ohm have taken over the running of Eltham Jazz Club, now named Hugh and Marion's after the founders of the club, and have set up a splendid selection of gigs. Georgia herself launched the club



Dennis Rollins

on January 12 and the present line-up includes Denys Baptiste (February 23), Liane Carroll (March 9) and Stan Sulzmann (23).

### TOORAK BOOGIE

The Toorak Hotel Jump Jive & Boogie Weekend takes place at the TLH Toorak Hotel in Torquay on March 31 to April 3. Boogaloo Promotions have lined up King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys, Sugar Ray's Lucky Strikes, the Jiveoholics, Peter Gill's Good Time Charlies, Jim Hammond's Jumping Jamboree and Jon Clare and the Fabulous Doughboys, with a DJ and three separate dance classes, plus the facilities of the hotel on a half board basis.

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

### WESSEX CONTINENTAL JAZZ

Wessex Continental Travel have two jazz tours to Northern Spain lined up for the near future. On April 2 the Storyville Stompers accompany a visit to Cantabria for a six day break at the Hotel Olimpo in Isla, excursions during the day and jazz in the evening. On May 28 Asturias is the destination and the Panama Jazz Band provides the music. The

hotel is on a secluded beach and excursions run along the coast and into the Picos de Europa mountains.

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

### CHARITY NIGHT FOR CHARITY

On March 18 a first class evening of New Orleans jazz is promised at Puttenham Golf Club featuring Sammy Rimington and his New Orleans Jazz Band. An all-star line-up features Cuff Billett, Bob Hunt, Richard Simmons, Spats Langham, Andy Cleyndert and Emile Martyn. All proceeds will go to the Prostate Project and to book your place (hot meal included) Contact Kathrine Hammersley on 07724 465883.

### ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE

The Eastside Jazz Club at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire boasts a March 14 appearance by the Michael Janisch Band featuring Walter Smith III, Eric Harland and James Francies. The programme also includes provision for two prizes: the Phil Miller Guitar Prize (March 16) and the Tony Levin Drum Prize (part of a Jazz in Education Conference throughout the conservatoire - 19/20). Other gigs lined up

included the RBC Jazz Orchestra with Gloucestershire Music Young Musicians (February 20), Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra (24), Paul Dunmall Invites: Tony Bianco, Faith Brackenbury and John Pope (March 2) and Bruno Heinen (9). [www.bcu.ac.uk/concerts](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/concerts)

### VAN AT THE STABLES

The highlight of the upcoming programme at the Stables, Wavendon, is undoubtedly the three nights (sadly, sold out already) of Van Morrison with Moving on Skiffle (March 13-15). Also in the Jim Morrison Auditorium are Swinging at the Cotton Club (February 24), Liza Pulman and Joe Stilgoe (April 12) and the Pasadena Roof Orchestra (28). In the smaller auditorium, Stage 2, Rob Heron and the Tea Pot Orchestra hold the stage on March 23 and Zoe Schwartz and Rob Koral on April 13. The Joanna Eden Band have the Sunday gig at the Mancini Forum on March 26, followed by Art Themen with Thane and the Villeins on April 16.

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

### CONCORDE HIGHLIGHTS

Eastleigh's Concorde Club has a fine line-up of events lines up, beginning with Simon Spillet's Big Band (February 22). March brings the Alan Barnes/Andy Panayi Sextet with a Salute to Cannonball Adderley (1), the Pasadena Roof Orchestra (8), Pete Long, Enrico Tomasso, Georgina Jackson and the rest with *A Complete History of Jazz (Without the Boring Bits - 15)*, the Windy City Weatherbirds (22) and the Sammy Rimington Band (29). Ona Onabule and his Band (April 12) is followed by the Chris Ingham Quintet with The Jazz of Dudley Moore (19). The T.J. Johnson Trio is live in the Moldy Fig on March 12, the John Maddocks Jazzmen (lunch-time) and the National Youth Jazz Orchestra with Tommy Blaize (evening) double up on March 26 and Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Jazz Band are in action on April 10.

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



### FIONNA DUNCAN NOVEMBER 5TH, 1939 - DECEMBER 6TH, 2022

BRUCE ADAMS remembers.

Fionna Duncan who died on Dec 6th, 2022, was a stalwart on the Scottish jazz scene for as long as I can remember. I was truly shocked when I heard the news as we'd only been chatting the night before. We were on the phone for the best part of an hour and Fionna seemed in fine fettle.

We just seemed to be laughing at everything, even when she said to me, 'You know I shouldn't really be here', referring to the health scare she had a couple of years ago. Little did I know how prophetic she was being.

Fionna was in at the beginning of the trad boom in Scotland in the late fifties with people like Forrie Cairns and the Clyde Valley Stompers. I can't really remember a time when she didn't have a presence on the Scottish scene. In later years she sang regularly with George Penman's Jazz Band. Her style and knowledge of the repertoire was second to none. Although she seemed perfectly at home belting out the likes of *Salty Dog*, she also had a sophistication and timing in her voice that amazed me.

In the mid-eighties, pianist/arranger Bob Stephenson organised some sessions at the BBC with Fionna, a large string orchestra, Tommy Smith on tenor sax and myself on trumpet.

Fionna's bluesy delivery morphed into something quite beautiful. When singing *Don't Explain* in the second half of the bridge the lyrics are... Cry to hear folks chatter, And I know you cheat, Right and Wrong don't matter, When you're with me sweet.' I found the hair standing up on the back of my neck. She had the most wonderful time and intuition on how to deliver a song. Something that can't be taught.

I was lucky to get the chance to work a lot with Fionna in the mid-eighties. A golden period for me.

This brings me to another side of Fionna. Her kindness. A lot of us in Scotland had a leg up from Fionna when we needed it. It was Fionna along with her partner Ronnie Rae who got me involved with Mike Hart and the Edinburgh Jazz Festival. This really helped to fast track my career at a time when I really needed it. There are a lot of people who got started in this business through Fionna's help and encouragement.

Another side of Fionna's kindness was her willingness to look after waifs and strays. I don't know how many times I was at her house in Portincaple and she would be putting up someone whose wife had kicked him out. It was never a big deal to her.

Fionna is survived by her partner of forty years Ronnie and Ronnie's family which became Fionna's family. Come to think of it, we all became part of her family.



Chris Ingham



Van Morrison

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### LUNCHTIME IN THE NORTH EAST

Lunchtime gigs in the North East include monthly sessions at the Lit and Phil: Gaz Hughes Trio (March 17), Zoe Gilby Quartet (April 21), Windy City Weatherbirds (May 19) and Sue Ferris Quintet (June 16). After an evening gig at the Vault, Hexham (May 19) the Weatherbirds form part of another monthly lunchtime programme at Darlington New Orleans Jazz Club (May 20) along with New Century Ragtime Orchestra (March 4), Big Easy Swing Band (April 1), Jeff Barnhart's Mr Men (April 29) and Pedigree Jazz Band (June 3). The Gala Theatre, Durham, continues its lunchtime gigs with the Raible-Gradischnig Quintet (March 17), Brady-Rice Bossa Project (April 28) and Chris Grieve Standards Trio (May 26). Also offering a lunchtime programme is Bishop Auckland Town Hall, with Lewis Watson Quartet (March 31) and Giles Strong Quartet (April 21).



Curtis Stigers

### RONNIE SCOTT'S

Just looking at the main event in the evening, Ronnie Scott's has a huge variety of jazz acts in the next few months on everything from one-night stands to week's residencies. A sample of acts comes up with Xhosa Cole (February 23), Terence Blanchard (24-25), Ruby Turner (27-28), Ed Richardson Big Band with *The Atomic Mr. Basie* (March 6), Darius Brubeck (14), Mike Janisch (15), Chris Potter (16), Dameronia's Legacy All Stars (19), Courtney Pine (22-24), Curtis Stigers (28-31), Lee Ritenour (April 1-3), Mike Stern (10-11), Stacey Kent (12-16) and Kyle Eastwood (24-27).

### JAZZ CO-OP

Newcastle Jazz Co-op at the Globe has what can only be called a varied programme over the next few months: Xhosa Cole Quartet (March 5), The Project (12), Milne-Glendingin Band (19), Outlines (26),

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



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Archie Shepp, for instance, refers to it as 'immensely helpful to me' and recommends it highly. Tom Scott sees it as setting up 'a new standard in reed superiority.' Others who endorse the reed include Dave Liebman and the late Lee Konitz.

Apparently the key element in Fiberreed's production of clarinet and saxophone reeds is the Hollow Fibre Foamresin Compound. It offers superior sound and performance, plus 20 to 30 times the durability of a can reed – and, as a bonus, doesn't require warming up.

For further information, contact [www.fiberreed.de](http://www.fiberreed.de).

Stu Collingwood Organ Trio (April 9), Alexander Ord Trio (29), Eternal Triangle + Andy Champion (May 14), Jake Leg Jug Band (June 1) and Graham Costello's Strata (June 18).

### WATERMILL JAZZ

Watermill Jazz in Dorking brings the Fergus McCreadie Trio to Betchworth Park Golf Club on February 21, followed by Gary Willcox's Drummer. Composers Project, concentrating on music written by drummers (28). In this Jason Yarde, still recovering from last year's stroke, is replaced by Julian Siegel. The March programme includes Stan Sulzmann and Gwilym Simcock in a duo (7), Elmo at 100 - the Raible-Gradischnig Quintet, a truly international group (14), Tricotism (21) and Xhosa Cole's Rhythm-a-Thing (28).

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

### NEWCOMERS ON TYNESIDE

This year's Mike Durham Classic Jazz Party (Village Hotel and Leisure Centre –

November 3-5) had, at the last count, 33 like-minded jazz musicians from eight different countries on the roster to perform such programmes as The New Orleans Rhythm Kings and their circle, Paul Whiteman, Doc Cook, Dickie Wells and Django Reinhardt in Paris and Arthur Briggs in Berlin – to those who don't remember him, Arthur Briggs was a noted trumpeter who first visited Europe in 1919 and relocated permanently in the early 1930s.

Of the 33, three are making their first appearance at the Jazz Party alongside many ever-popular returnees. Trumpeter Jan Kaiser from Germany and reedman Lorenzo Baldasco from Italy are joined by distinguished American trombonist/bandleader, Dan Barrett, star of a whole host of Arbors records.

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

At Morley Green Club Graham Brook's Wilmslow Jazz, now into a fortnightly schedule, offers Spirit of Shearing (February 28), Alan Barnes and Alex Clarke (March 14), the Gaz Hughes Trio (28) and the Great American Songbook with Sue Barron (April 11).

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

Swansea Jazz's programme for the next two months includes Jeff Hooper (March 3), the Will Barnes Quartet (16), Simon Spillett with the Dave Cottle Trio (23), Alex Goodyear Quintet (30), the Malone Sibun Blues Band (April 7), Daniel John Masters with the Cottle Trio (13) and Derek Nash and Noel McCalla with *The Wonder of Stevie* (May 5).

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

Jazzleeds' programme of Wednesday early evening Rush Hour Jazz and Sunday afternoon sessions is broken up by appearances by the Paris Jazz Quintet (March 3) and the Elmo Hope Celebration Quintet (16).

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

The Bay Jazz Club at Botany Bay Cricket Club meets twice a month in the afternoon, with the Fenny Stompers lined up for March 7. They are followed by Kevin Grenfell's Jazz Giants (March 21), Gambit Jazz Band (April 4) and Frog and Henry (18).

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

Winter Reunion at the Winning Post at Whitton, near Twickenham, continues to raise money for The Shooting Star Chase Children's Hospices, with a lunch-time session by the Southern Revival New Orleans Jazz Band (March 9) and a Special

Event with Frog and Henry and Ewan Bleach on April 27.

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

Wakefield Jazz at Eastmoor features Kevin Figs with the music of Keith Tippett (February 24), Doncaster Jazz Orchestra (March 3), Scatter the Atoms that Remain (10), Brass Monkey (17) and Annette Granger (24).

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

Colchester Jazz Club meets weekly on Sunday evenings at Marks Tey Parish Hall, with the Windy City Weatherbirds (19) and George Tidman's New Orleans Jazz Band (26) lined up for February. March dates are Kevin Scott's Golden Eagle Jazz Band (5), the Savoy Super Six Jazz Band (12), the Gambit Jazz Band (19) and Alan Gresty's French Quarter (26).

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

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys are on home territory for the next two months, with dates including the Guildhall, Lichfield (February 24), Worthing Assembly Rooms (25), Ashcroft Arts Centre, Fareham (March 18), Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich (24), Pizza Express, Dean Street (25), Toorak Hotel, Torquay (April 2), Townsend Hall, Shipston-on-Stour (21) and Swingamajig, Birmingham (30).

Tel. 0121 454 7020

The Sage Gateshead has programmed the Fergus McCreadie Trio (March 3), Myele Manzanza (4), Sunna Gunnlaugs and Julia Hulsmann (23), Martin Speake and Bobo Stenson (April 20) and Post Modern Jukebox (May 5).

The Pizza Express in Soho has a coup in March with four shows from Larry Goldings, Peter Bernstein and Bill Stewart (3-4).



King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys



Fergus McCreadie

Other dates include Dom Pipkin and the Ikos (February 21), Mark Nightingale/Alan Barnes Sextet (March 7), Sammy Rimington (9), Mike Westbrook (12 – lunch-time) and Eva Scholten Sings Django (12 – evening). The Pheasantry hosts Salena Jones (February 24-25), the Jay Rayner Sextet (March 3) and

Paul Jones and John Etheridge (7), among others.

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

Strictly Smokin' Big Band can be heard at The Witham, Barnard Castle (April 28), Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham (May 20) and Alnwick Playhouse (June 17).



Alex Clarke &amp; Alan Barnes

Photo by Merlin Daleman

# EDDIE TAYLOR

by PETER VACHER



Premier Drums advertisement, *Jazz Journal*, April 1964

While I doubt that he might have seen it this way, you could liken the highlights of drummer Eddie Taylor's illustrious jazz career to a series of distinctive chapters studded like gems in an otherwise lengthy and varied musical life-story. Along the way, he moved from his early role as a dance band musician to that of an avowed jazz modernist who then became a mainstreamer before morphing into a West End cabaret and theatrical player. Briefly recruited to work on singer Val Wiseman's Billie Holiday stage show, he was next persuaded to prop up the avuncular not say outrageous George Melly's musical escapades.

Edmund 'Eddie' Taylor was born in Chadderton, Oldham, on 12 February 1929 where his people had a grocer and confectioners' shop. He recalled a formative experience in a conversation with Sinclair Traill, 'I was about 15 and I heard (trumpeter) Johnny Claes' band – I didn't sleep that night. That was the band with Ronnie Scott and a wonderful alto player I never hear about now, Harry Hayes. They played a week in Oldham and I heard them every night! His real start in music came with the Royal

Kiltie Juniors, a local musical variety group who dressed in Scottish costume. Their saxophonist, Roger Fleetwood, another Oldham-ite who later became prominent with the Northern Dance orchestra, tipped off Eddie that the group needed a drummer so he auditioned, 'And there was Bert Courtley on trumpet and Mac Minshull on trombone,' he said, and it was busking through a Stan Kenton thing that, 'really sold it with Bert and Mac. They all said they wanted me then. I was just 18. We wore kilts and had two lots of jackets, with epaulettes, sporrans, shoes with buckles,' he told me. They toured Scandinavia for six months. 'It was like heaven, especially going to Sweden. They'd never been in the war. Zildjian cymbals you could buy in the shops. White Pearl drums!'

Then came National Service spent in the RAF with plenty of dance band involvement at respectively, RAF Padgate (with Fleetwood and trombonist Bill Geldard) and for the Officers Mess at RAF Lindholme in December 1948. Newly demobbed in 1949, Eddie joined the Leslie Douglas band in Birmingham and followed up with

Vincent Ladbrooke's for the 1950 Isle of Man summer season before returning to Leslie Douglas but in Brighton this time ahead of joining Rae Allen's band (with Fleetwood) in Blackley. Already well known around town as an up-and-coming jazzman, he appeared with Manchester's All-Star Band, led by Mac Minshull for the Manchester Modern Music Club before Fate intervened decisively for him in July 1951.

'Opportunity knocked for Eddie Taylor one Sunday afternoon when he was depping with Tony Stuart's band at the Plymouth Grove Astoria (in Radcliffe, Manchester). Sharing the bill was the Johnny Dankworth Seven whose drummer Tony Kinsey was leaving to set up his own group. Evidently all the Seven were sufficiently impressed with Eddie's playing to the point where he was invited to join them as Kinsey's replacement.' (From *Keeper of The Flame – Modern Jazz in Manchester* by Bill Birch, 2010).

'Tony Kinsey and Jimmy Deuchar both decided that touring was not for them, and their places on trumpet and drums were filled by two Eddies - Eddie Blair, a young Scot whose brilliant trumpet playing fitted perfectly with our style, and drummer Ed Taylor, from Chadderton in Lancashire, whose wry sense of humour was to keep us in fits, and whose excellent drumming was to become a cornerstone of our rhythm section.' (From *Jazz in Revolution* by John Dankworth, London, 1998)

Johnny Dankworth Seven, 1951 L-r: Don Rendell, ts; Eddie Taylor, d; Eddie Harvey, tb; Eddie Blair, t; John Dankworth, as.



Thus began the transition of Eddie Taylor from dance band player to modernist jazz musician and the beginning of his recognition as one of the UK's leading bebop-oriented jazz drummers. Speaking about that time, he said, 'I used to see the Seven in Manchester and pretty well knew all the arrangements. I stayed with the band until it finished (in 1953).'

What with the presence of vocalists Cleo Laine and Frank Holder, and Johnny Dankworth's arrangements, the Seven became hugely successful on record and on the road, playing concerts and residencies. Consider soloists of the calibre of Dankworth himself, named as Top Alto Saxophonist and Top Arranger in the 1951-52 *Melody Maker* Poll, as well as Don Rendell, Eddie Harvey, Eddie Blair, and Bill LeSage. Looking back to the Seven, Eddie said, 'They queued around the block to see us in Edinburgh. Cleo, she was terrific already, raw as she was.' Yet there were times when the Seven needed to modify its hard-nosed commitment to modern jazz and develop some on-stage hokum to keep the dance hall patrons amused. As he explained, 'It's still dances you're playing. You had to play all waltzes. We'd worked up a stage show for Sunday concerts, a bit of comedy, which I always enjoyed – water pistols, things like that.' Why then disband? 'John wanted a big band. We were all offered the job but I wanted to go to the States. So, I got a job (via Geraldo's Navy) on the Queen Mary (with H. Jefferson Jones) in August '53.'



Tommy Whittle Orchestra, Café Royal, London, 1955 L-R: Tommy Whittle, ts; Eddie Taylor, d; Don Riddell, p; Kenny Wheeler, t; Freddy Logan, b; Ronnie Baker, as; Keith Christie, tb; Joe Temperley, bar. Photo by Barrington-Martin.

Taylor joined any number of the UK's aspiring jazz musicians in making that Transatlantic trip. What better way to hear the giants of American jazz than at first hand? He loved landing in New York and going on the town. 'The first time I saw Art Blakey, he was with the Teddy Gibbs Quartet, that was marvellous. Then Kenton, with Stan Levy, Lee Konitz, Zoot Sims, the Candoli's, Frank Rosolino, the whole lot. Clifford Brown, I saw with Blakey. Lester Young. And Basie at Birdland, of course. The whole place was jumping, and the atmosphere... Then when I saw Buddy Rich, I was floored, couldn't believe what I saw. Buddy Rich to me is a real genius.'

Once back in London, Eddie met up again with his friend Bert Courtley and worked with him locally before joining

Tommy Whittle's star-strewn orchestra playing London clubs and broadcasting. Add to this busy schedule, session work and occasional support for, surprisingly perhaps, organist Harold Smart and appearances (and recordings) with pianist Dill Jones' trio. It was Whittle's terrific sextet (including Dill and trumpeter Jimmy Deuchar) that played Le Cameleon in Paris for a fortnight in September 1956 as the exchange for Sidney Bechet who appeared in the UK, as detailed in *Jazz Rag* Issue 171. It was around this time that Eddie recorded with some of the brighter sparks on the modernist scene including baritone-saxist Harry Klein, altoist Bertie King, Kenny Graham and most, often, Tommy Whittle himself. Here's what the musician and critic Benny Green had to say about Eddie's drumming.



Humphrey Lyttelton Band, rhythm section, 1957. Eddie Taylor, d; Brian Brocklehurst, b; Ian Armit, p. Photo by Landseer.



'Rock Around The Clock aka The Tommy Steele Story' film still. UK, 1957 'Bermondsey Bounce' played by the Humphrey Lyttelton Band. L-R; John Picard, tb; Eddie Taylor, d; Humph, t; Jim Bray, b.

'An exception to the present-day rule of drummers, who use their playing as a jumping board for the most frightful facial contortions and bodily writhing, Eddie Taylor sits quietly at the drums, with stoic demeanour and just a dash of mild curiosity in his own technique. He is a study in comparative immobility, except from the wrists down... two of the glibbest and most accomplished wrists on the jazz scene. Decorous, tasteful, sympathetic, the perfect small-group drummer.' (Benny Green sleeve note from the original EP *Brash Baritone* (1955)).

Given that kind of praise, it's no surprise that for a period in 1955 and early 1956, Eddie seemed never to be out of the recording studios, one session with the Jazz Today Unit teaming him with Kenny Baker, Vic Ash, Jimmy

Skidmore et al. He was also to record again with Baker and his former Dankworth associate, vocalist Cleo Laine, and must have expected to continue taking his chances as a freelance after leaving Whittle. But then came the fateful invitation in October 1956 to join Humphrey Lyttelton's band, this enduring until summer 1964. Here's how Humph saw his arrival in the band:

'To our regular audiences, Eddie Taylor must be a constant source of perplexity. On some occasions he'll play a whole concert motionless behind the drums except for the flickering of wrists and fingers; the personification in fact of the 'cool' modernist who concentrates on his playing and eschews flamboyant showmanship. On other occasions, when the atmosphere is congenial and the



GEORGE MELLY & JOHN CHILTON'S FEETWARMERS

George Melly & John Chilton's Feetwarmers, 1990-93 L-R: Ron Rubin, p; Melly, v; Chilton, t; Eddie Taylor, d; Ken Baldock, b.

mood takes him, he goes into an intentionally exaggerated caricature of the showman drummer, flinging himself around the kit and bouncing the stick on the floor. Once at Norwich, he culminated one of these performances by leaving the drums and doing a cartwheel in the midst of the astonished front line.' (From *Gentlemen of the Orchestra, Second Chorus* by Humphrey Lyttelton, London, 1958).

It's no exaggeration to say that Eddie's entry into the ranks of the Lyttelton band caused consternation among its most die-hard fans who feared the worst. 'He won't fit into the Lyttelton pattern,' they said, 'much too modern for Humph'. But they were wrong and Humph was right. Instead, Lyttelton, who by then was edging towards a more mainstream concept saw Eddie's role as being crucial in achieving the desired change in the band's direction.' Musically we had embarked on a new course, and we had to stick to it,' he said. Adding that it was this 'unashamed modernist' who sparked the band's metamorphosis. Intriguingly when it was time to look for a replacement bassist and pianist, it was to Eddie that Humph looked for leads, with Eddie's Manchester associate Brian Brocklehurst coming in on bass and pianist Ian Armit joining him to complete an outstanding rhythm section.

Even so, *Crescendo* magazine still felt it necessary in their November 1962 issue, to remind readers that 'Eddie Taylor is a very fine, tasteful drummer capable of pulling his weight in any sort of band'. But what a time to 'pull his weight' with that marvellous front line of Humph himself, John Picard on trombone and saxists Tony Coe and Jimmy Skidmore, with Danny Moss and Joe Temperley, added later. This was the era when the band recorded some of its finest albums, starting with *Humph Swings Out* (1956) and on to *I Play As I Please, Triple Exposure, Humph in Perspective, Blues in the Night* (1960) etc, these mostly re-released on Lake or Calligraph, the late Humph's own label.

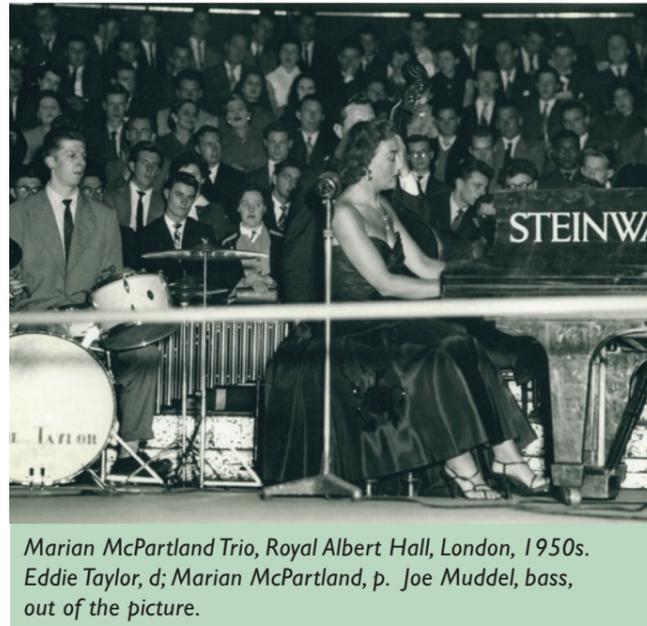
And there was more, much more, including the albums which teamed the band with hot gospeller Marie Knight, vocalist Jimmy Rushing or Humph's pal Buck Clayton, as

well as myriad singles, and EPs, all sparked by Taylor's meticulous drumming, swinging but always accomplished. 'I can't bear drummers who crash and bash just for the sake of it and usually all to no purpose,' he told Traill. There were occasional film appearances and overseas tours, every kind of musical adventure, you could say. One such was the band's tour of the States as part of the Newport Festival All-Stars package. Eddie remained awe-struck by the memory, 'Two Greyhound buses, George Shearing's Big Brass in one, Cannonball Adderley and us on the other, with Thelonious Monk, Lee Konitz, Lennie Tristano.'

And yet, come autumn 1964, Eddie Taylor decided to move on. 'I don't really know why I left then, really. Well, it was the money. And the work. The pianist Ian Armit was with (blues singer) Long John Baldry, by then and he wanted us to go with him,' he told me. And he did. Briefly, it would appear. Then followed a time of largely freelance activity, like a Mediterranean cruise with Lennie Felix, a residency at London's Mandrake club and plenty of session and pit work, this most notably including Kenneth Tynan's risqué revue *Oh! Calcutta*, starting in 1970 at the Royalty Theatre before transferring to the Duchess Theatre. 'From start to finish, nine years and nine months. And for seven of those years, I was doing another job as well, with Olaf Vas at Tiberio's. That was a restaurant for the stars. One night, Jack Jones, Buddy Rich and Buddy Greco all came in and played and sang,' he enthused.

In the decade prior to joining the Chilton/Melly extravaganza, Eddie played summer seasons in Germany and worked off and on with fellow Lyttelton veterans like Bruce Turner and Wally Fawkes. Having joined Val Wiseman's Billie Holiday tribute stage show alongside Digby Fairweather and Brian Lemon, he stayed just long enough to make the group's first album before being nabbed by John Chilton or as promoter Jim Simpson put it, being 'headhunted by George Melly', to be replaced by Bobby Worth.

'Drummer Eddie Taylor came in 1990 to replace Chick Smith who had decided to emigrate to Australia. He was exceptionally quick at grasping routines and



Marian McPartland Trio, Royal Albert Hall, London, 1950s. Eddie Taylor, d; Marian McPartland, p. Joe Muddel, bass, out of the picture.

memorising them so the 'new' Feetwarmers were soon in shape. Eddie, who had starred with John Dankworth and Humphrey Lyttelton, was a no-nonsense Lancastrian, whose considerable technique never became overbearing, truly a steady Eddie and, like George, passionate about fishing. He sometimes looked dour on-stage but just below the surface there existed a fine comic streak.' (From *Hot Jazz, Warm Feet* by John Chilton, London, 2007)

Melly the literary polymath had returned to regular stage and cabaret performances to great public acclaim, the package moving up and down the country's motorways to play theatres, before settling each Christmas into a month-long residency at Ronnie Scott's club. Stories abounded as to Melly's louche behaviour and the pleasurable mayhem that resulted; all grist to the publicity mill, of course. After a dozen years with Chilton and company, things came to an abrupt end after the 2002 Scott's engagement, much to the bandsmen's considerable disappointment, not to say resentment.

Thereafter Eddie's freelance pattern resumed, sometimes depping with Humph's band and playing in groups led by Al Wynette and pianist Jonathan Vinten, another ex-Feetwarmer. There was a final recording flourish with Eddie's participation in Decca's special *British Jazz Legends* album in July 2001 as Lyttelton, Kenny Ball, and Acker Bilk combined with Melly and

the Feetwarmers, this followed by sessions with old friends Wally Fawkes in 2002 and Danny Moss & Acker Bilk a year later. We often met up courtesy of fellow-drummer Don Lawson, a man with a penchant for salacious stories and a delight in sharing them at his local in Barnet, drink in hand. These were hugely enjoyable encounters but sadly, it was with Eddie that we went to Lawson's funeral in February 2016. By then, Eddie had retired, 'tired of schlepping drums down to basement gigs etc.' Still, he went out on a high in 2012, playing with Art Themen at the Princess of Wales in Primrose Hill. 'Always loved Art Themen's playing and I played at my best. Good place. Two 50-minute sets.' Job done.

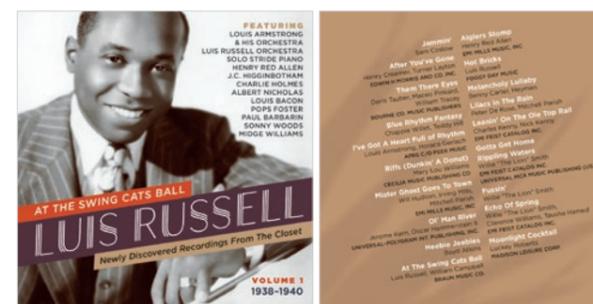
Eddie Taylor died on 20 December in Newark, Notts. He was 93.

**PETER VACHER**  
**Acknowledgements**  
 Eddie Taylor's words are from 'In My Opinion', *Jazz Journal*, Vol 17 No3, March 1963, and from 'Taylor's Tales' by Peter Vacher, *Jazz UK*, Issue 52, July/August 2004, and from telephone contact.

As ever, John Chilton's *Who's Who of British Jazz*, London, 2004, was invaluable. Other references as cited but also including *Phil Seamen Percussion Genius* by Peter Dawn (Wick, 2022).

**Credit Courtesy Peter Vacher Collection on all photos.**

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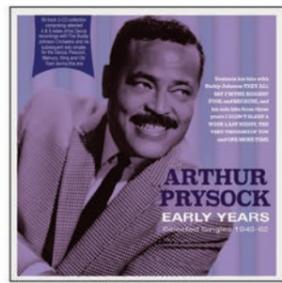
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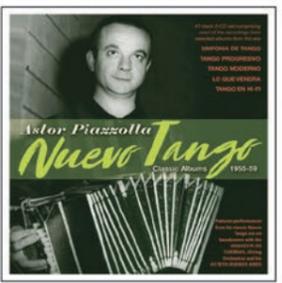
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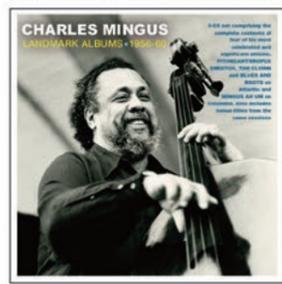
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# JAZZ FESTIVALS TO JUNE

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The first of Pete Lay's Warner Jazz Breaks (another is on September 8-11) is at Sinah Warren on Hayling Island and features, among others, the Gambit Jazz Band, John Maddocks Jazzmen and the Tenement Jazz Band.  
[www.warnerleisurehotels.co.uk](http://www.warnerleisurehotels.co.uk)

## HULL JAZZ FESTIVAL

(FEBRUARY 25)  
The first stage of Hull 2023 features Fergus McCreadie Trio at the Ropewalk, Barton.  
[www.hulljazzfestival.co.uk](http://www.hulljazzfestival.co.uk)

## GREAT NORTH BIG BAND JAZZ FESTIVAL

(MARCH 3-5)  
The annual festival takes place at Park View Community Centre, Chester-le-Street.

## JAZZ JURASSICA

(MARCH 24, etc.)  
Jazz Jurassica now divides into separate programmes at the Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis, with Xhosa Cole scheduled for

March 24 and Zoe Gilby/Tony Kofi and the Mark Carter Octet scheduled for the next two on April 15 and May 12.  
[www.jazzjurassica.co.uk](http://www.jazzjurassica.co.uk)

## CHELTENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL

(APRIL 26-MAY 1)  
Cheltenham Jazz Festival operates under the umbrella of Cheltenham Festivals, with Gregory Porter as its artistic director.  
[www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/jazz](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/jazz)

## RIBBLE VALLEY JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(APRIL 28-MAY 1)  
The Ribble Valley Festival, with headline acts at the Grand, Clitheroe, lines up this year with Jasmine Myra, Nearly Dan, the Aaron Liddard Band, Swing City Big Band and TC and the Groove Family.  
[www.rvjazzandblues.co.uk](http://www.rvjazzandblues.co.uk)

## HEXHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL

(MAY 12-14)  
Centred on historic Hexham Abbey, the festival includes performances by Claire Martin,

Freddie Benedict, Paul Edis, Jo Harrop and Jamie Safir.  
[www.hexhamabbey.org/events/hexham-jazz-festival](http://www.hexhamabbey.org/events/hexham-jazz-festival)

## LEEDS JAZZ FESTIVAL

(MAY 25-30)  
Going from strength to strength, the Leeds festival has a host of venues to call upon such as the Wardrobe, Brudenell Social Club, Seven Arts and the Howard Assembly Room.  
[www.leedsjazzfestival.com](http://www.leedsjazzfestival.com)

## SWALEDALE FESTIVAL

(MAY 27-JUNE 10)  
The festival throughout Swaledale includes everything from classical music to astronomy. Jazz this year is represented by Tim Kliphuis in Richmond and Claire Martin and Jim Mullen in Grinton.  
[www.swalefest.org](http://www.swalefest.org)

## UPTON JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JUNE 24-26)  
One of the best established of British traditional jazz festivals, Upton has its usual line-up of popular bands and soloists,



Claire Martin

such names as Alex Clarke, the Tenement Jazz Band, Ben Holder's Hot Club Quintet, Spats Langham and Hot Fingers and the Pedigree Jazz Band, all performing in the picturesque riverside town.  
[www.uptonjazz.co.uk](http://www.uptonjazz.co.uk)

## LOVE SUPREME FESTIVAL

(JUNE 30-JULY 2)  
The line-up for the Love Supreme Festival includes Marcus Miller, Candi Staton, Zoe Rahman and Thundercat.  
[www.lovesupremefestival.com](http://www.lovesupremefestival.com)



## POTATO HEAD IN BIRMINGHAM

Andalusia's Potato Head Jazz Band have built an enthusiastic following in this country after their appearances at the Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival. Their infectious style of Dixieland has wowed customers more year on year as they have bolstered their ranks with increasingly talented musicians. Now they are a truly international band with Italian trombonist Giorgio Gallina joining Argentinian clarinetist Martin Torres in the line-up. Torres is one of the three long-standing members of the band with trumpeter Alberto Martin and banjoist/guitarist

Antonio Fernandez. Now they are joined by Gallina, bassist Alejandro Tamayo and drummer Zeke Olmo.

Their UK tour runs from July 13 to 23, almost exactly the dates of the Birmingham festival which starts on July 14. From Sunday to Tuesday the band will play Birmingham and other dates arranged so far include Swansea Jazz Club (13), the Stables, Wavendon (19), Comrades Club, Wantage (20 - lunchtime), Assembly Rooms, Tamworth (21), Peggy's Skylight (22) and the Concorde Club, Southampton (23).  
[www.birminghamjazzfestival.com](http://www.birminghamjazzfestival.com)

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## 80 YEARS ON

RON SIMPSON shares some thoughts on the career of FATS WALLER (1914-1943)



80 years ago, 1943 saw an unexpected boom in black musicals in Hollywood. The occasional film had sought to provide the white man's view of the black perspective, such as *The Green Pastures* in 1940, but two musicals in one year was going some! Not that it was all plain sailing for the black community: *Ain't it the Truth*, sung by Lena Horne in a bubble bath in *Cabin in the Sky*, was cut on the grounds that the sight of a black woman in a bath would be too much for the delicate sensibilities of the white population. This brought the strange anomaly that Louis Armstrong, with an acting part in the film, had no featured solo number as his reprise of *Ain't it the Truth* was similarly cut.

For all that the film had Hollywood royalty to helm it, direction by Vicente Minnelli and Busby Berkeley, plus uncredited input by Marc Connelly of *The Green Pastures* fame. The cast included a whole slew of popular black performers: Eddie 'Rochester' Anderson (famed for his association with Jack Benny), Rex Ingram (De Lawd in *The Green Pastures*, now the Devil), Buck and Bubbles, Mantan

Moreland, Willie Best, Butterfly McQueen, the pert maid from *Gone with the Wind* – and the Duke Ellington Orchestra who did get a feature number! Main singing duties were in the hands of Ethel Waters and Lena Horne, two fine singers who spent their careers on the fringes of jazz.

The other film is quite different. In place of the fantasy fairy tale of *Cabin in the Sky* we have the fictionalised biography of Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, lightly repackaged as Bill Williamson. Once again, though, there was a stream of the best of African-American talent on offer. Bill's buddy is Dooley Wilson, he of *As Time Goes By* in *Casablanca*. Once again the romantic interest was Lena Horne, one of the few African-Americans to appear regularly in films through the 1940s, though very often as a detachable speciality act in scenes which could be removed for Southern showings. The Katherine Dunham Dancers and the Cab Calloway Orchestra put in appearances, as did the incomparable Nicholas Brothers in what Fred Astaire described as 'the greatest movie musical number he had ever seen.'

And then there was Fats Waller. In addition to accompanying Ada Brown he and a West Coast version of his Rhythm appear in a club scene delivering the definitive version of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. There's a comic edge to the scene, with a pot labelled 'Feed the Kitty' and Fats mugging away to his heart's content, but the music is superb. Fats starts off with a piano solo at relaxed tempo, paraphrasing the melody in the last eight, then, still at the same nonchalant tempo, Alton Moore's trombone, an unusual instrument for Waller's small group, smears an introduction to Fats' vocal which only finally descends into affectionate parody. Then the tempo doubles with Zutty Singleton's drums to the fore, Fats adds disjointed phrases, the rest of the group join in (Benny Carter on trumpet, incidentally) and pull back the tempo to a final triumphant vocal eight bars. Magic!

This is the song that, at the height of his show career in 1929, Waller composed for *Hot Chocolates*. Louis Armstrong's performance electrified the audiences at the Hudson Theater and sealed his cross-over to the world of mainstream entertainment – it didn't do Fats Waller a lot of harm either! Now 14 years later, in January 1943, Fats committed it to film in a year that would end, tragically, in his death at the age of 39. After a stint on the West Coast, during which he had developed a chill and missed some nights at the Club Zanzibar, he set off on the long train journey to New York, fortified by seemingly never-ending farewells and celebrations. On the second day he slept, on the third, shivering in the cold of Kansas, he died.

Now I think Fats Waller's place as one of jazz's great joy-bringers is secure – only Louis Armstrong contributed more to the gaiety of nations – but, like Louis, he came in for more than his fair share of criticism. Certainly he was a larger than life (285 lb apparently) entertainer, as known for his gargantuan appetites as for his musical skills, but what skills they were! It's a truism that his record company shoved all the vapid sentimental songs on

to him, knowing only he could make something of them, and there's a fair bit of dross in his vast recording catalogue (400 sides), but the cod-operatic vocal of *The Curse of an Aching Heart* doesn't rule out a superb piano solo, the verbal circumlocutions of *Your Feet's Too Big* ('Your pedal extremities are just obnoxious!') are genuinely funny, and so on. On *When Somebody Thinks You're Wonderful* and *My Very Good Friend The Milkman* ('Let the band play "Here Comes the Bride"', he yells at the end, having already introduced it into his solo) the easy tempos, the immaculate piano and the ready support of the Rhythm are guaranteed smile-bringers.

A word here about his Rhythm. Over nine years the band underwent changes, but many of them were Herman Autrey and Gene Sedric coming and going. John 'Bugs' Hamilton on trumpet and reedman Rudy Powell filling in for them. In the rhythm section the most famous name is guitarist Al Casey who was originally recruited while still at school and the number of bassists and drummers gets a bit bewildering.

Perhaps the problem with Fats Waller lies in his vast girth and unending bonhomie. While checking out this article, among the books I consulted was Alyn Shipton's biography. Shipton successfully refutes the idea that Waller was just 'a popular and humorous entertainer'. Yet the book is called *Fats Waller – The Cheerful Little Earful*. Next stop 'Harlem's Harmful Little Armful'! But what can you do with a man who in every picture of him has a huge grin on his face, a derby at a jaunty angle on his head and a fifth of whisky on the piano?

Well, you could of course consider his achievements which are pretty remarkable for a man who never saw his 40th birthday. He began young, on the organ bench of the Lincoln Theater and being taken around Harlem's hot spots by James P. Johnson. Early in his career he was as famous as an organist as he was as a pianist, recording for Victor, and 15 years later, could be heard playing organ immaculately

with his big band on a curiously stately version of *Jitterbug Waltz*. So first of all he can lay claim to the position of jazz's premier exponent of the pipe organ.

His piano recordings – *Handful of Keys*, *African Ripples* and the rest – reveal him as a virtuoso pianist, a giant of stride piano alongside James P and Willie the Lion, but, contrary to his image as a boisterous crowd-pleaser, much of his piano work on tracks with his Rhythm is marked by an unusual delicacy as well as that indefinable quality, lift.

Largely forgotten among his achievements is his work with his Big Band, four recording sessions between 1935 and 1942 which are under-represented in the many Waller reissues. Apparently the Big Band in action was a more formidable unit than emerges from the recordings,

but keeping a big band together is not what you expect from a happy-go-lucky entertainer.

Above all, Waller's talents as a songwriter were remarkable. The oft-told tale of him selling the same song to different publishers and signing his rights away to some white songwriter (Jimmy McHugh seems the most popular choice) obscures the quality of what we know he wrote. Who needs to claim *I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby* when we know he wrote *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, standby of so many jam sessions, the wonderfully layered *Black and Blue*, *Turning Grey Over You*? Many of these, with simply sympathetic lyrics by that scion of Madagascar royalty, Andy Razaf, came in that period of the late 1920s when Fats Waller provided the music for a series of Broadway shows and it seems his abandonment of musical

theatre around 1930 was by his own choice.

When a jazzman dies early, there's always a scurry of speculation: 'What would he have done given another 30 and 40 years?'. With Fats Waller it's particularly interesting. In the last year of his life he returned to theatre, writing the music for *Early to Bed*. Now, as it turns out, this was not a totally happy experience for reasons connected to racial prejudice and, possibly, drink-related unreliability, but it marks a new direction for Fats. We can't dismiss the possibility of more films after *Stormy Weather* in the manner of Louis Armstrong.

But what sort of music would he be creating? Two hints: a few years before his death he composed and recorded his *London Suite*, a more ambitious depiction of

London landmarks, and a track discarded from *Stormy Weather* was *Moppin' and Boppin'*. *The London Suite* is an example of the type of music that Waller would have liked to compose more of: you don't need to believe in the frustrated genius theory to imagine him occasionally wishing folks would take him seriously. And as for *Moppin' and Boppin'* I have no idea what currency the last word had in the jive talk of 1943, but it seems prophetic for a piece of musical mayhem that looks forward to developments already stirring.

For me, I'll settle for the sunny sounds and uproarious shouts of – to name one of dozens of glorious tracks – *Don't Let it Bother You*. If there's a serious composer inside there struggling to get out, he's not struggling too hard!

## I GET A KICK OUT OF...

STEVE RORIE of JJ Babbitt



**Meyer, Otto Link and Hite Mouthpieces are hugely respected within the music community – you must have an impressive list of previous/current endorsees?**

I am confident in saying no other company in our business has the roster of legends that we have been blessed to work with. From Cannonball Adderley and Sonny Stitt with Meyer and Coleman Hawkins, Stan Getz and Dexter Gordon with Otto Link, it's a who's who of jazz super stars. And this is just to name a few. The list is remarkable. And of course now we have Mike

Smith as an active member of our team who was lead alto and band leader for Frank Sinatra and Frank Jr. for 35 years. When you add Ernie Watts, Jim Snidero, Michael Stricklin, Brandon Fields, Ray Herrmann and scores of other professionals and educators worldwide, the support we have is astonishing.

**Tell us about JJ Babbitt's connection with the Elkhart Jazz Festival.**

JJ Babbitt has supported the Elkhart Jazz Festival from the very beginning having sat on the board (Rocky Giglio, then president), providing performers like Richie Cole, Red Holloway, Mark Colby, Mike Smith and others, and sponsoring stages and performance venues. The event we sponsored starting this past summer is the Elkhart Jazz Festival High School Jazz Band Showcase. It was so well attended and received we have made the decision it will be an annual EJF event.

**Where are the students of tomorrow - Is the outlook gloomy or positive?**

The Jazz students and performers of tomorrow are abundant and

advancing earlier and faster than ever before. Middle School and High School jazz programs in North America are thriving thus, the premiere college programs are as well. Coming out of the Pandemic we are more enthusiastic about the state of our industry and our company than ever before. We are on pace to set new all time records for sales ever recorded in our 100 plus year history. Our outlook is more than positive, we are ecstatic.

**What does the future hold for the company?**

I love answering the questions about our future more than any others. When I worked for Verne Q. Powell Flutes and Steven Wasser (may he rest in peace), I witnessed one of the greatest examples of blending old world craftsmanship and new age technology imaginable. That is my goal for JJ Babbitt... 'preserve our past while we embrace the future'. Our competitors are technologically advanced while we remain 'old world' in many ways. We still mold and vulcanize our own hard rubber mouthpieces. We still forge and braze our metal mouthpieces. It would be highly unlikely any of our competitors

would set out to duplicate any of those processes. But we can invest in CNC and automated technology as they have. So that is our long-term plan, to strategically blend old world and new age methodology so we can keep a foot firmly set in both genres. We believe that will further set us apart from the herd.

**Anything else to add?**

One last point to share and, dare I say, confess. When I joined JJ Babbitt in 2019 and then acquired it in 2021 I became increasingly aware of the often-said comments regarding consistency and variability of our brands. Certainly because Meyer and Otto Link are hand crafted there will be a certain amount of variability. But the range had become too wide for my taste. So I added Chris French and Mike Smith to the Babbitt Team and started revisiting and re-setting product and process standards on the factory floor. We have made great progress over the past couple of years but we plan to get even better with a bit more time and attention.

**STEVE RORIE is President and CEO of JJ Babbitt Co. Inc.**

# JAZZ CENTRE IN PERIL

RON SIMPSON reports on the current state of play regarding The Jazz Centre UK

One of the more surprising and distressing stories to emerge post-Covid is the news that The Jazz Centre UK is to lose its premises in the Beecroft Art Gallery in Southend. It has been circulating for some six months, attracting opposition from a number of councillors and support for the centre from the local populace. However, the idea has shown no sign of going away and centre founder Digby Fairweather sums up the present situation as, 'We are still currently due for eviction in August 1st, 2023, but it's not a done deal yet.'

The Jazz Centre UK began in 2015 as an annexe to the National Jazz Archive in Loughton, Essex. By then the archive was running out of space and Digby, as its founder and moving spirit, had to look for somewhere to store its duplicate stocks. Southend Borough's then-CEO Rob Tinlin invited Digby to the Beecroft and the centre began with one back room. The severance from the NJA came when Digby acquired the collections, work desk and instruments of the late Humphrey Lyttelton without the permission of the Trustees who did not take kindly to such independence of thought! Thus the centre was born as a separate entity.

In truth it goes back beyond that. Digby has always been haunted by the memory of the time in 1982 when three million pounds of public funding from the Arts Council, the GLC and the Pilgrim Trust allocated for the creation of a National Jazz Centre in Floral Street, Covent Garden mysteriously disappeared – no doubt into the pockets of the group of enthusiasts promoting the idea. The National Jazz Archive went some way to rectifying this 'carelessness'; TJCUK completed the process. Asked what the impulse behind TJCUK was, Digby strikes a defiant attitude:

'I suppose the simple answer could be "Because we've never had one" – despite the fact that jazz, in some form, has been in the UK for just short of a hundred and fifty years. I think – leaving aside the music's

unquestionably vivid heritage and continuing creativity – that things are slowly moving round. And that has a lot to do with new generations. I notice that a lot of people under twenty who come into The Jazz Centre UK are fascinated by the idea of jazz; it's like a whole new world to discover. That would never have happened thirty years ago!'

So, from the little back room, TJCUK has expanded and flourished until now it takes over a full floor of the Beecroft. In October 2018 Sir Michael Parkinson cut the ribbon on the launch of the new enlarged centre in a ceremony attended by Sir David Amess, a regular supporter of the centre who was tragically murdered at a surgery in the town. In fact, one shouldn't say 'town' now; thanks to Sir David's efforts, Southend is now a city. Closing TJCUK certainly seems a strange way to celebrate!

The centre is far more than an exhibition area, with John Dankworth's first piano and Humph's desk filled with other memorabilia, with space for art exhibitions and the like. Apart from its own Saturday afternoon jazz, TJCUK is the venue for two independent jazz clubs, Jazz825 and Spike's Place, hosted by Susan May, widow of the late tenorist Spike Robinson. Many young musicians including guitarist Harrison Dolphin and bassist Lorenzo Morabito have been encouraged and given a place to play and a special treat for Digby was having the opportunity to play alongside American singer/pianist Daryl Sherman. The project on the 100 Club, though unfortunately coinciding with Covid, produced a book, *Ace of Clubs*, as a permanent memento.

TJCUK also produces an excellent magazine, *Centrepiece*, which in its recent edition featured a fierce polemic from the Trustees: 'The loss of the rich jazz heritage embodied in the Centre would be an act of unutterable cultural barbarism, not least for a council that once had pretensions to make its city a focus of artistic and musical activity.' Time alone will tell



whether such thunderings are the best way to persuade the council to change its mind, but the simple accuracy is undeniable.

There appears to have been deliberate obfuscation on the part of some Southend councillors in promoting a premises on the High Street called the Ironworks. For any number of reasons this is totally impracticable. A failed bid to the Levelling Up Fund was the final nail in a coffin already pretty solidly secured by such things as the fact that the council has only a two-year lease, the Ironworks is on a sub-let from Morrison's, it's plagued by damp (a minimum of £500,000 to sort it out) and no one knows if the owners want to sell! A fine mess for TJCUK's 'ideal new home'!

It seems that the majority of councillors are in the dark, either having been deceived by one of their number exploiting a sub-committee loophole, or by being led to believe that TJCUK was on its way to Paradise at the Ironworks.

So it's time for a full frontal assault on the councillors of Southend. As of now (end of January) Gary Evans, Chair of the centre, has emailed to all 52 councillors and two local MPs, spelling out the true situation and its consequences. And Digby himself has posted open invitations to all 52 to come and visit at the centre and hear the true story first hand, listen to some music, eat and drink.

Of course the defence of TJCUK is mounted on two fronts: trying to reverse the decision and looking for alternative premises if that fails. Big Bear's Managing Director Jim Simpson was the first to step in with the offer of future discussions leading to a relocation to Birmingham and there have been tentative opening discussions with the Barbican and Guildhall School of Music – 'But', says Digby, 'it's too early to make any kind of definite decision about either option yet.'

Ask Digby about the future of TJCUK and the reply might surprise:

'I feel that in an ideal world both The Jazz Centre and the NJA should belong under one roof in a securely staffed establishment, with a firm commitment towards their combined ideals. At present we don't have that; we're purely volunteer-run small charity existing on highly limited funds, with no immediate prospects of a long-term security. I also believe that any jazz centre that sets out to represent the central interests of our music in the UK should be doing a great deal more than we can do at present. That should include determined ongoing lobbying for all the causes that get ignored whenever jazz is mentioned.'

For now, however, he would settle for a permanent home, either at the Beecroft or elsewhere.

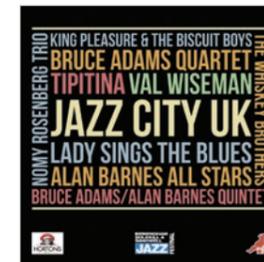
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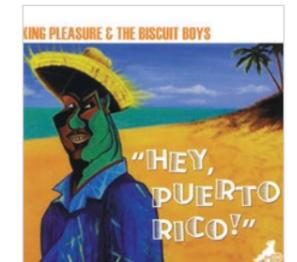
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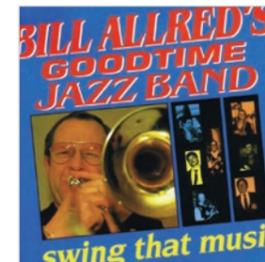
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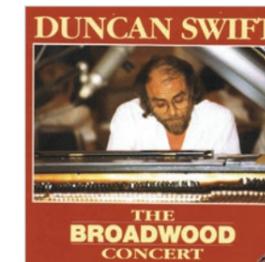
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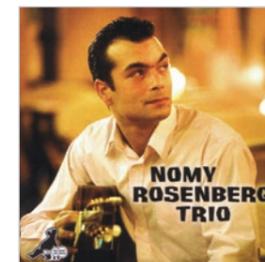
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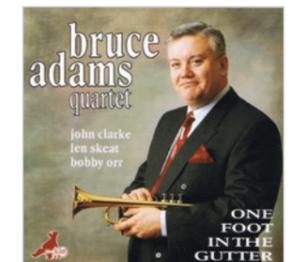
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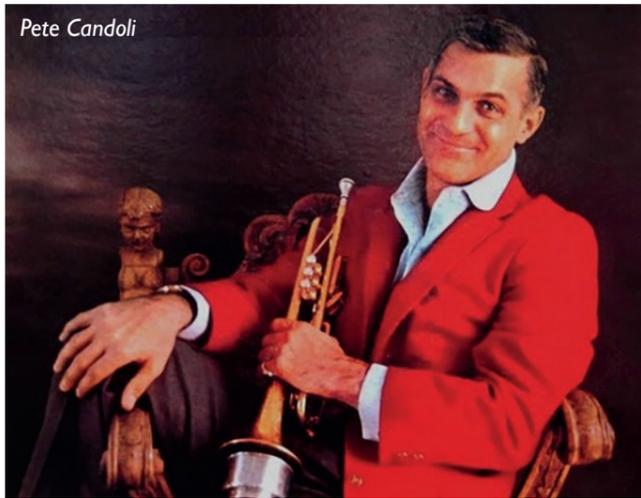
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# THE JAZZ CLASS OF 1923

by SCOTT YANOW



1923 was one of the great years for recorded jazz. While jazz had been documented since 1917 with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, relatively few African-Americans had yet to appear on record. However the blues craze sparked by the surprise success of Mamie Smith's *Crazy Blues* in 1920 woke up record company executives to the potential for blacks (and even some whites) purchasing recordings by black artists. In 1923 the floodgates opened and such immortals as King Oliver, Johnny Dodds, Louis Armstrong (the latter two as members of Oliver's Creole Jazz Band), Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, and Bessie Smith all made their recording debuts. The jazz record business, which included such older favourites as the ODJB and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings and a countless number of jazzy dance bands (including Paul Whiteman's Orchestra) was booming.

However all of that is quite irrelevant to this article which celebrates the centennial of the jazz greats who happened to be born in 1923, none of whom had anything to do with the jazz scene of the 1920s. Those who came into the world in 1923 were just old enough to gain early experience during the last years of the swing era. They all had to deal with the rise of bebop and Charlie Parker, the collapse of most big bands, the popularity of both Dixieland and early r&b, and making a living in the 1950s. Some were still active

at the beginning of the 21st century but none are still with us.

The last jazz survivor to record in the 1930s, singer Louise Tobin (who recorded with Benny Goodman in 1939), passed away last November 26 at the age of 104. The oldest current survivors are 101-year old trumpeter-bandleader Ray Anthony and 100-year old pop and singer Annette Warren, both of whom were born in 1922.

As for the jazz class of 1923, many future jazz greats were born that year, enough to fill up a couple of big bands. Among those who did not quite make the 'A' Team but should be mentioned due to their contributions to the music are trumpeter Marky Markowitz, clarinetist-leader Phil Nimmons, tenor-saxophonists Frank Socolow and Bjarne Nerem, pianists Dill Jones, Bobby Tucker, Ralph Sharon and Ellis Larkins, violinist Joe Kennedy Jr, harpist Betty Glamann, bassists Bob Bates, Joe Schulman and Wyatt Ruther, and drummers Tiny Kahn (also a notable arranger-composer), Art Mardigan, Jack Parnell, and Al Harewood.

The 31-piece Class of 1923 Big Band consists of five trumpeters, just one trombonist, two clarinetists, two altos, two tenors, a baritonist, a vibraphonist, and several rhythm sections that include four pianists (one of whom sings), four guitarists, four bassists, two drummers, and a percussionist plus a singer and an arranger. With just a few exceptions, most were

involved in the New York jazz scene of the 1950s.

**Thad Jones (1923-86)** The leader and head arranger of the 1923 Big Band, Jones was an inventive bop-based trumpeter who came to fame with Count Basie and co-led the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra.

**Fats Navarro (1923-50)** One of the great classic bebop trumpeters (arguably second to Dizzy Gillespie), the short-lived Navarro has a legacy that can be heard in the playing of Clifford Brown and, through Brown, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard and Woody Shaw.

**Pete Candoli (1923-2008)** Lead trumpeter in the 1923 Orchestra but also an underrated soloist, Candoli was with Woody Herman's First Herd (where he was known as 'Superman' due to his ability to hit high notes), Stan Kenton, and Boyd Raeburn, played in the studios, and with his trumpet playing sibling Conte co-led the Candoli Brothers.

**Willie Cook (1923-2000)** A solid soloist and section player with Duke Ellington throughout the 1950s, the often overlooked but valuable trumpeter also worked with Earl Hines, Jimmie Lunceford, Dizzy Gillespie, and Count Basie before settling in Sweden in the 1980s.

**Idrees Sulieman (1923-2002)** Born as Leonard Graham, Sulieman recorded with Thelonious Monk in 1947, was on a notable Coleman Hawkins album a decade later, and worked with Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Randy Weston and, after moving to Stockholm and later Copenhagen, the Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland Big Band. At his best, Sulieman was a powerful bop-based trumpeter with a wide range.

**Bennie Green (1923-77)** One of the few modern jazz trombonists of the 1940s not to be influenced by J.J. Johnson, Green had a full sound, and a good-humored and often witty style. He worked with Charlie Ventura's 'Bop For The People'

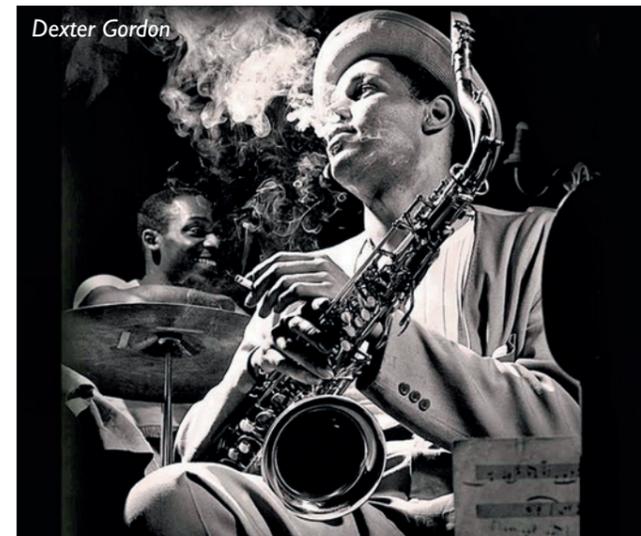
band and then led a series of enjoyable recordings during the second half of the 1950s.

**Buddy DeFranco (1923-2014)** The first clarinetist to fully master bebop, DeFranco was one of the all-time greats on his instrument. While he worked with the Count Basie Septet and Tommy Dorsey, DeFranco was at his best on freewheeling combo dates, even having a successful matchup with Art Tatum.

**Claude Luter (1923-2006)** Although a little out-of-place in this band, the Paris-born Luter was a top-notch clarinetist who often led the group that accompanied Sidney Bechet in the 1950s. Initially influenced by Johnny Dodds, Luter had a strong career playing New Orleans jazz both before and after his Bechet period.

**Charlie Mariano (1923-2009)** A bebop-based altoist who played with Stan Kenton and recorded some West Coast-styled sessions in the 1950s, Mariano moved to Europe in 1971 and became more of an avant-gardist in later years, doubling on the nadaswaram, an Indian classical wind instrument.

**Aaron Sachs (1923-2014)** A fine swing-to-bop alto and tenor saxophonist who also played clarinet (one could feature the clarinet trio of DeFranco, Luter, and Sachs), he also played Latin jazz in the 1960s including with Tito Puente.



**Dexter Gordon (1923-90)** A lovable personality who always had his sound and swinging style, Gordon (the first tenor-saxophonist to master bebop) had three major comebacks during his career and was always a joy to have around.

**Sam Rivers (1923-2011)** A consistently adventurous improviser, Rivers often played very free solos whether on tenor, soprano, flute, bass clarinet or piano, but he was flexible enough to also work with Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.

**Serge Chaloff (1923-57)** One of the top baritone-saxophonists of all-time, Chaloff gained fame with Woody Herman's Second Herd (a few years before Gerry Mulligan became prominent) but spinal cancer cut his life short.

**Milt Jackson (1923-99)** The most influential of all vibraphonists, Jackson could hold his own with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, was the main soloist with the Modern Jazz Quartet, and was always a master of bop, blues and ballads.

**Mel Powell (1923-98)** A brilliant swing pianist and arranger who was a bit of a prodigy, Powell was playing with major musicians and writing arrangements for Earl Hines by the time he was 16, and was 18 when he joined Benny Goodman for two years. He worked with Glenn Miller's Army Air Force Band (1943-45), was active in the studios, had reunions with Goodman into the 1950s, and ended up as a notable classical composer.

**Red Garland (1923 -84)** Pianist with Miles Davis' first classic quintet (1955-56), the distinctive Garland led no less than 30 albums (mostly for Prestige) during 1956-62.

**Elmo Hope (1923-67)** Always in the shadow of his friends Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, pianist Hope had his own voice within bebop, led a series of consistently stirring sessions, and was a fine composer who wrote 75 mostly obscure but worthy pieces.

**Bob Dorough (1923-2018)** A triple threat as a pianist, singer and songwriter, Dorough wrote such numbers as *Devil May Care*, *But For Now*, *Got Just About Everything*, and *Better Than Anything*, and co-wrote *I'm Hip* with Dave Frishberg.

**Wes Montgomery (1923-1968)** Montgomery was not 'discovered' until he was already 35 but his final decade found him universally acclaimed as jazz's top guitarist.

**Barney Kessel (1923-2004)** Inspired early on by Charlie Christian, Kessel had stints with Charlie Barnet and Artie Shaw, made a series of rewarding albums for the Contemporary label in the 1950s, and later on teamed up with Herb Ellis and Charlie Byrd in the accurately-titled group The Great Guitarists.

**Chuck Wayne (1923-97)** Among the first guitarists to learn bebop (recording with Dizzy Gillespie in 1945), Wayne was with Woody Herman's First Herd, participated in plenty

of jazz dates in the 1950s, and ended up mostly being employed as a studio musician.

**Remo Palmieri (1923-2002)** Also an early bop guitarist, Palmieri was mostly off the jazz scene during his 27 years working on Arthur Godfrey's radio program, making a comeback in the jazz world starting in the 1970s with his playing still in prime form.

**Percy Heath (1923-2005)** A member of the Modern Jazz Quartet during its entire existence and one of the Heath Brothers (with siblings Jimmy and Albert 'Tootie' Heath), the bassist always displayed a big tone, a swinging style, and an upbeat personality.

**Eugene Wright (1923-2020)** While he had a busy early career in Chicago (including working with Gene Ammons), Wright will always be best remembered for being the bassist with the classic Dave Brubeck Quartet.

**Wilbur Ware (1923-79)** A busy bassist during the second half of the 1950s (including with Thelonious Monk, Kenny Dorham, Johnny Griffin and Sonny Rollins), drugs resulted in Ware having an episodic career although he made a partial comeback in the 1970s.

**Arvell Shaw (1923-2002)** Easily the youngest member of Louis Armstrong's All-Stars in 1947 (he had played since 1945 with Satch's big band), the bassist was with the All-Stars during three stints, also working with Teddy Wilson and Benny Goodman.

**Philly Joe Jones (1923-85)** Although he had a wide ranging career including being the house drummer at Café Society in 1947,

leading his own groups, working with Bill Evans, Archie Shepp and Dameronia, and living in Europe for five years, Jones is best known as Miles Davis' favourite drummer, working with the trumpeter during 1955-58.

**Osie Johnson (1923-66)** Somewhat forgotten today, the tastefully swinging drummer was on a countless number of jazz sessions during his final decade including with Al Cohn, Ray Bryant, Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges, Joe Newman, and Ben Webster.

**Tito Puente (1923-2000)** One of the most important leaders of Afro-Cuban or Latin jazz, Puente (on timbales, vibes and percussion) was a vital musical force and a popular figure for 50 years.

**Johnny Hartman (1923-83)** A great ballad singer with a deep and appealing baritone voice, Hartman's album with John Coltrane and his version of *Lush Life* are classics.

**George Russell (1923-2009)** While he played drums early in life, Russell was an arranger-composer who wrote very adventurous works including *Cubana Be* and *Cubana Bop* for Dizzy Gillespie and *A Bird In Igor's Yard* for Buddy DeFranco. He led a sextet (playing piano) with Eric Dolphy and Don Ellis in the early 1960s and wrote the influential *Lydia Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*.

**Scott Yanow, who was not around in 1923 and missed seeing King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, has enjoyed an infinite number of jazz recordings made since that time. He can be reached for liner notes, bios, press releases and other interesting assignments at [scottyjanowjazz@yahoo.com](mailto:scottyjanowjazz@yahoo.com).**



# DOT TIME RESCUES JAZZ FROM THE CLOSET

Dot Time Records have a reputation for discovering, remastering and repackaging lost recordings by the greats of jazz, most notably Louis Armstrong. He is tangentially involved in their latest set, due for CD release in March.

Luis Russell was a Panamanian pianist/bandleader whose path crossed with Armstrong's over a spell of some 20 years. He took advantage of a Lottery win to relocate to New Orleans where he played with Armstrong in 1922. From then until 1943 their music intertwined and overlapped, increasingly under the control of Louis' manager Joe Glaser.

In 1929 the Luis Russell band was the chosen vehicle to back the great soloist, not surprisingly as he led one of the hottest bands in New York City. Through the 1930s the Russell Band alternated between periods with Armstrong (sometimes billed as 'Louis Armstrong's Orchestra') and their own independent life. The band, initially a 10-piece, grew and expanded during this period, but was always known for the quality of its soloists: J.C. Higginbotham ('Here comes Brother Higginbotham down the aisle...'), Henry 'Red' Allen, a wonderful trumpeter whom Joe Glaser arranged to keep close to Armstrong's chest, Albert Nicholas, Charlie Holmes. Allen and Nicholas were home-town boys, from Louisiana, known to Russell and Armstrong from New Orleans. Behind them was a tremendous rhythm section of Russell and two more New Orleans musicians, bassist Pops Foster and drummer Paul Barbarin. As the band enlarged, such names as Bingie Madison and Wilbur de Paris were added to the roster.

In January 1938 the Russell/Armstrong Orchestra returned to the New Grand Terrace in Chicago for an extended stay. James J. Gentry acclaimed Armstrong as the great trumpet genius of the previous quarter century and commented:

'The band under the guidance of Smiling Luis Russell played with grace and ease.'

Sam Honinberg from *Billboard* might have been at a different show in a review that suggests the underlying racism of the time. Basically he admired Armstrong, but thought the music of these 'Negro notables' was too loud!

Tracks from this residency are to be found on Dot Time's *At the Swing Cats Ball – Newly Discovered Recordings from the Closet 1938-40*, re-engineered for public consumption by Doug Pomeroy. Many of the tunes, such as *Mr. Ghost Goes to Town*, were ones which Russell and Armstrong never recorded.

Other tracks feature the orchestra with vocals from Midge Williams and Sonny Woods, a singer whose 1934 recording of *Ol' Man River* was so popular that the band was briefly christened the Old Man River Band. A bit of detective work identifies a band track without opening melody statement as *Hot Bricks*. Of particular interest are tracks which put Russell under the spotlight as a solo stride pianist.

Unfortunately Luis Russell's relationship with Louis Armstrong was about to change. A few months after the Grand Terrace tracks he was sacked as orchestra leader, no doubt by Joe Glaser, and re-hired a week later as band pianist, a situation he put up with, no doubt still smiling, for three years.

The Dot Time recordings show the relationship between the band and the soloist at its best, as well as the orchestra operating independently. The booklet is full of insights into the Russell band and is written by Paul Kahn, Russell's son-in-law, being married to the singer Catherine Russell, and author of the forthcoming book, *Call of the Freaks*. And Dot Time have another raid on Luis Russell's closet planned, with tracks from 1945-47.

If Luis Russell strikes you as a forgotten figure from the past, just tell that to the inhabitants of the island of Bocas del Toro where Luis was born and where last year a splendid new Luis Russell Mural was created!

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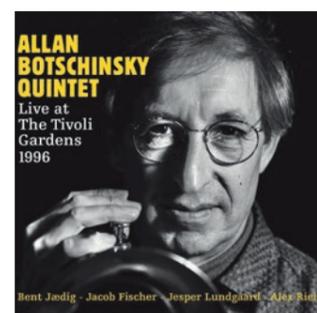
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# CD REVIEWS



## ALLAN BOTSCHINSKY QUINTET

LIVE AT THE TIVOLI GARDENS 1996

Stunt Records STUCD 22042: 2 CDs, 68.00/69.03

Ole Mattheiessen is responsible for mixing, mastering and restoring this terrific night in July 1996 at the Jazzhus Slukefter in Tivoli and the results are remarkable. The quintet – Botschinsky on flugel, Bent Jaedig on tenor, Jacob Fischer on guitar and a powerhouse rhythm team of Jesper Lundgaard (bass) and Alex Riel (drums) – seldom put a foot wrong in expansive treatments of seven standards, three bebop classics and one original from Botschinsky. The shortest track is 9.40 and all five stretch out at length in a typical late-night session.

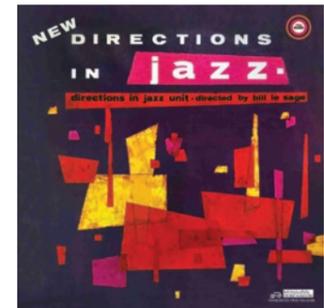
Botschinsky is veering towards preternaturally fluent – almost too much so at times – but always sounds perfectly relaxed and in control, as in the opening to *I Thought about You*, linking lines with Jaedig before elaborating effortlessly on the melody. Jaedig is more down to earth, more straightforward, but comes out with a coruscating solo on *Rhythm-a-Ning* (for my money, the best track on the album) before handing over to Fischer and Lundgaard for superb solos that refer back to Monk's theme.

The policy of everyone soloing on virtually every track should have produced repetitive solos, but such is not the case. Lundgaard and Riel, rock solid in ensembles, solo uninhibitedly, Riel positively explosive, and hold the attention with no trouble. As for Fischer, he is singled out in Kjeld Frandsen's 1996 review for

the invention and lyricism of his guitar work: at the time still in his 20s, he makes an impression with the range and dexterity of his playing. To hear him at his best – and Botschinsky and Jaedig, too – listen to the lyricism of *It Might as Well Be Spring*.

This is a perfectly balanced quintet at the height of its powers playing live in a congenial setting.

## RON SIMPSON



## BILL LESAGE

## NEW DIRECTIONS IN JAZZ

R&B Records RANDB090 78.10/64.53

The prolific LeSage's New Directions in Jazz Ensemble made a pair of albums in 1964 and 1965 for Phillips – overdue for reissue, given the quality of what is revealed on this double album of TV and radio broadcast content. R & B Records deserve thanks for plunging into the archives and retrieving these performances by the ensemble. CD1 comprises 15 tracks aired on NDR Funkhauses TV in Hamburg, while CD 2 is principally taken from BBC broadcasts from 1963-6. Duncan Heining's expert note fills in their background most helpfully.

Lesage's *Night Talk* opens and reappears twice on CD2. It has the kind of perky, urgent quality that marked much of John Dankworth's writing. With a line-up of three saxophones, plus LeSage on piano and vibes, master bassist Spike Heatley and drummer Tony Carr, augmented in novel fashion by the Freddie Alexander Cello Ensemble, there's a feeling of orchestral freshness throughout. The writing is uncluttered and clear-eyed, the aim according to LeSage to provide an effective springboard for the soloists. He wanted,

'an orchestral sound with as few instruments as possible' and my, how well he succeeds. The wonderful Ronnie Ross on baritone stands out on his own ballad-tempo *Lady Day*, the strings and LeSage's piano solo cleverly placed to complement Ross's sublime line. Add in Johnny Scott on flute (he's exceptional on *So What*) and the irrepressible Canadian altoist Bob Burns and there's so much to enjoy. This is sophisticated music by any measure, authentic and approachable; not the much-touted Third Stream fusion of jazz and classical, rather an elegant combination of swinging, imaginative jazz with its own orchestral flourish. A gem of British creativity: do not hesitate.

## PETER VACHER



## ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

## NUEVO TANGO 1955-59

Acrobat ADDCD 3450: 2 CDs, 72.30/72.40

I know it's not jazz – though jazz versions of his music by the likes of Richard Galliano have appeared from time to time – but Astor Piazzolla is such a major figure in world music that no doubt our readers will forgive me reviewing it. These tracks precede his international fame and his most famous pieces such as *Libertango* and *Oblivion* are not here; this is his early years from his studies in Paris through to his decision (short-lived) to return to New York.

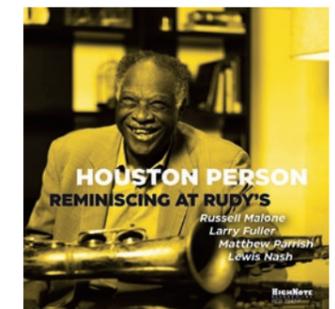
This is not tango as Joe Brown and Jack Lemmon experienced it in *Some Like it Hot*. That the tango establishment turned against Piazzolla is no surprise: the 'nuevo tango' is not something to dance to, with its abrupt changes of tempo and influences from both classical music and jazz.

The two-CD set comprises nearly all the tracks from five LPs. The first of these is *Sinfonia de Tango* recorded in Paris in 1955. As the title suggests, his inclination on this album was more towards classical music, with a sizeable string section from the Paris Opera, a harp and a pianist who may well have been Lalo Schifrin. The piano and Piazzolla's bandoneon light up the rather formal arrangements.

For the jazz lover the two central LPs, *Tango Progresivo* and *Tango Moderno*, are the highlight of this set, from the crashing discords of the opening of *Lo Que Vendra*, with intense violin work and assured guitar solo. In fact Horacio Malvicino's electric guitar digs deep into jazz influences and over the two LPs his partnership with the violinist (Enrique Mario Francini, perhaps) conjures up memories of Django and Stephane. With Piazzolla's virtuoso bandoneon, these tracks are a joy.

The fourth LP takes its name from *Lo Que Vendra* and begins with a much lusher account of that song. On both this and the final album, *Tango in Hi Fi*, Piazzolla leads his string orchestra, there are a few overwrought vocals (Jorge Sobral?) and the film music influence becomes stronger.

## RON SIMPSON



## HOUSTON PERSON

## REMINISCING AT RUDY'S

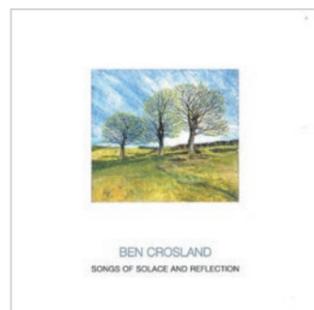
HighNote HCD 7343 (57.24)

Tenor-saxophonist Houston Person is now in his 90th year yet shows few signs of slowing down, continuing to appear at US festivals and special club events in and around New York. His discography is already immense and here he is with another

HighNote album, one more in a long series which he produces and stars on.

Where once he had a regular quartet, Person now assembles a different group of like-minded companions each time and then takes them through a series of pleasing songs. Nothing is over-arranged, rather he allows his fellow players to follow his lead and 'share in the emotion' as he puts it. He lets his lovely, smoky tone do its work, the phrases now shorter than they used to be, the tempos manageable, the approach largely melodic, the embellishments quite minimal. This is epitomised by *Moon River* taken at a steady clip, with guitarist Russell Malone offering a more detailed investigation of the tune, as drummer Lewis Nash and bassist Mathew Parish bolster things. Paul Anka's *Put You Head On My Shoulder* is almost elegiac, Person and Malone conversational, ahead of pianist Larry Fuller's nimble solo. Rather surprisingly, Nash offers a vocal on *Nothing Ever Changes My Love for You*, hinting at Nat King Cole's laid-back style, Person adding his own nifty commentary. Above all, Person was and still is, a master ballad player, sounding soulful on Percy Mayfield's classic *Please Send Me Someone to Love*, Malone's bluesy commentary just right. The title track, a riff-based blues, has Person digging in just like the old days.

PETER VACHER



BEN CROSLAND

SONGS OF SOLACE AND REFLECTION

JAZZ CAT: JCCD119 56:48

The Yorkshire-based bassist, composer and barrister, Ben Crosland, well known at the Marsden Jazz Festival, probably reached his widest audience with an acclaimed album, *The Ray Davies' Songbook*.

He began collecting ideas for this album during Lockdown, re-arranging existing material to pass the time and exploring new ideas with musical friends and colleagues.

It all came together in a two-day recording session in London, in November 2021, the subtly evocative fruits of which he has now released on Jazz Cat. This, his own label, has issued many concept albums, usually on northern themes and featuring his own work played by small groups, quartets, quintets and octets.

All ten compositions are his own and the band consists of himself on electric bass, Theo Travis, flute; the redoubtable, multi-award-winning Alan Barnes, clarinet; Steve Waterman, trumpet and flugelhorn; Clare Bhabra, violin and Deirdre Bencsik, cello.

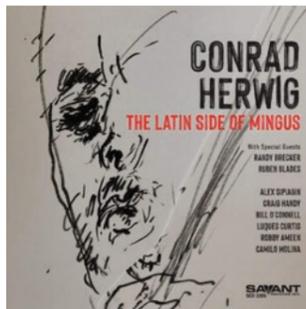
Most of Crosland's work is inspired by an affecting theme or place or a person close to his heart. *Solway Stories*, for example, released in 2020, poignantly harked back to a memorable visit with his late mother to the South West of Scotland, in 1988.

This album's theme is 'consoling and comforting in nature', the liner notes inform. Several lyrical compositions are the manifestations of acute personal loss. *Sarah's Trees*, the opening number, was written to celebrate the life of the late Sarah Lucas, wife of Mike, founder of the Marsden Jazz Festival. *Cowgill Lament* is dedicated to a friend, who took his own life. *Song for Dorothy* is again addressed to his mother who died in 2019 at a great age. The chief exception is the glorious *Heartland*, a paean of pleasure inspired by Steve Redgrave's Olympic success in Sydney.

There is something to celebrate or lament attached to all of them and much for the listener to rejoice at, not least in the skill, artistry and sheer inventiveness of the three wind-instrumentalists. It is the first time Ben has recorded with strings in his band and their presence is lightly resonant, in keeping with the generally subdued mood of these reflections.

Good to know something good came out of the Lockdown!

ANDREW LIDDLE



CONRAD HERWIG

THE LATIN SIDE OF MINGUS

Savant SCD 2205 56.40

Trombonist Herwig is one of the cadre of top New York jazz players who seem to fit successfully into any kind of situation. A versatile instrumentalist certainly, but also an adroit soloist in post-Johnson fashion, technically assured, and at home with Coltrane's innovations. As a regular sideman with the Mingus Big Band and member of Eddie Palmieri's Latin orchestra, he's well-qualified to take on this idea of performing Mingus's music in Latin style. Whether the exercise is justified or whether Mingus himself would have approved may be a moot point, though. With a series of arrangers, including Herwig himself and pianist Bill O'Connell, who is on the record, and with Randy Brecker leading the ensemble plus tenorist Crag Handy as well as an all-Latin rhythm section, it's clearly a case of adjusting one's perception as these familiar pieces unfold.

Brecker erupts into life on the opening *Gunslinging Bird* over the pattering of the congas, the riffs pumping in behind him. As is so often with Brecker, less might be more, as the ideas peter out before Herwig's high-register solo takes over. Author Raul De Gama's booklet essay makes the case for Mingus's employment of Latin rhythms and the charts do display the kind of energy and drive that infused much of Mingus's music. *Boogie Stop Shuffle* has more Herwig and *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat* is calmer, the soloists more subdued, the writing keeping the band's energies within bounds, O'Connell interpolating helpfully. Perhaps *Better Git in Your Soul* is the

epitome of what's going on here, with the opening bass figure and that familiar swaggering motif. Overall, an interesting project, well performed, with bravura playing from all concerned.

PETER VACHER



JEWEL BROWN

THANKS FOR GOOD OLE MUSIC AND MEMORIES

NIC Allen Music Federation MF22JB01 37.09

There is a lovely video on Youtube of singer Jewel Brown onstage in Australia in 1963 with the Louis Armstrong All-Stars singing a hip version of Harry Belafonte's *Jerry* – 'everybody loves to cha-cha-cha, she tells the audience beforehand, referencing the great Sam Cooke. She opens this album with a remake of the same song, slowed down just a little and with the Latin elements even more pronounced; it may be sixty years on but this version is just as worthwhile.

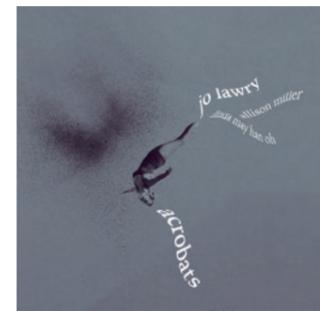
Jewel is still best-known for her stint with Satchmo from 1961 until 1968, although she was already an established performer and recording artist before she joined him. She is obviously still singing her jazzy blues – well, after a forty year break anyway – but there's no lessening of standards, as that opener shows. These days she is based back in Texas, and the accapella *Pain And Glory*, with just a male vocal group for accompaniment, refers back to Jewel's earliest days singing in the Church, tempered with many years experience.

Most of the songs were co-written by Jewel with Nic Allen, the long-time musical director for the late Joe Sample of The (Jazz) Crusaders. Nic's

background (and production expertise) comes out in the funk-, jazz- and rhythm and blues-tinged accompaniments for these tracks. They are relatively modern, yes, but also completely in harmony with the artist. *Song Of The Dreamer* is a jazzy soul ballad, or try the romping R'n'B of the cover of Stargard's 'Which Way Is Up'. Better still, listen to the attitude-laden, moody, *Nitches And Glitches*, sounding bang up-to-date, with tinges of jazz, funk, blues, and even hip-hop in the mix – and it works perfectly. On a few tracks there is some subtly under-stated blues guitar work from Clayton Dyesse too, and the closing *How Did It Go* is a fine mid-tempo, more or less straight-forward, swinging blues.

So no, don't come to this album looking for Louis' All-Stars Mark II. Jewel has moved with the times, but she still has that talent that Louis recognised – and yes, overall she does still keep things on the jazzy side, even if the definition of 'jazz' itself is somewhat wider these days.

NORMAN DARWEN



JO LAWRY

ACROBATS

Whirlwind Recordings WR 4798: 42.25

Now and then, when reviewing, you come up against the ultimate roadblock: you listen to something, think it's very skilful and really dislike it. Such is Jo Lawry's *Acrobats*, an over-clever (or, as she puts it herself, playful) deconstruction of mostly standard tunes: Frank Loesser alone charts up four out of eleven.

Jo Lawry apparently has been away from jazz for some time, working, among others, with Sting, and decided, for her jazz comeback, to set herself the

task of doing the hardest thing, as she puts it, recording a vocal album with just bass and drums. Certainly Linda May Han Oh and Allison Miller do everything required of them – and a fair bit more – but I find myself wondering, 'Why is it necessary to do the hardest thing?'

The opening two numbers, Loesser's *Travelling Light* and the title track, bewilder more than charm, with Lawry providing everything but straight singing: near speech turns into wordless wails or rapid-fire, out of time delivery. From *Taking a Chance on Love* onwards, things take a turn for the better, with subtle key changes and a version of 'Deed I Do' that probably justifies the word 'playful'. *Takes Two to Tango* is a smart duo performance with Oh, but we then move to virtuoso, but hardly pleasant, scatting on Lennie Tristano's *317 East 32nd Street* and a perverse return to Loesser: Lawry explains her love for *My Time of Day* (which I share), sings it movingly, but very briefly, then wreaks havoc on *I've Never Been in Love Before*.

By the time this issue of *Jazz Rag* comes out, Jo Lawry will have completed a UK tour. I would sincerely welcome any views opposed to the above opinions.

RON SIMPSON



RON CARTER

FINDING THE RIGHT NOTES

In+Out Records IOR CD 77151-2

This album is described as an original motion picture soundtrack. A little investigation reveals that *Finding the Right Notes* is the title of a 2022 PBS documentary film documenting the music and career of this pre-eminent double bass player who holds the accolade of being the most recorded jazz bassist in history. Readers



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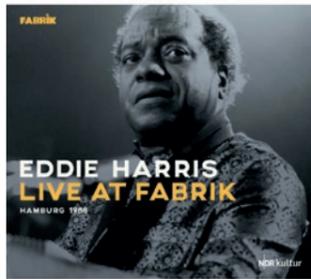
Seeing and hearing is believing.



will, no doubt, be familiar with his extensive discography, and extended period as a member of the Miles Davis Quintet from the mid-1960s and as a stalwart of the Blue Note record label and later as a mainstay of CTI Records. Despite a recent health setback, Carter has recently received the all-clear to resume gigging and this at the age of 85.

This release is not a career retrospective but does provide an interesting overview of a varied career. It opens with *Receipt, Please*, a Carter composition which features the outstanding WDR Big Band in a performance from 2014. Carter's regular current trio with Russell Malone (guitar) and Donald Vega (piano) are featured on *Soft Winds* from 2019. Malone reappears for a rendition of *Bag's Groove*, together with the twin basses of Carter and Stanley Clarke. Carter and fellow-bassist Christian McBride produce an astounding *Willow Weep For Me*. The WDR Big Band return for two further features and a duet with guitarist Bill Frisell on *My Man's Gone Now* is particularly effective. The changing group permutations throughout the ten tracks hold the attention throughout. Any music from Ron Carter is always most welcome. This music will lift the spirits as we look towards springtime.

#### ALAN MUSSON



#### EDDIE HARRIS

LIVE AT FABRIK /HAMBURG 1988

Jazzline Classics D 77106  
47.27/49.36

Chicago-born Harris (1934-1996) started out as a juvenile pianist, touring in his teens with Gene Ammons – indeed he moves over to piano from his more usual tenor saxophone on several occasions during this quartet gig. Increasingly alienated from the jazz

gnoscenti, Harris re-invented himself as a populist, happy to fuse jazz, funk, and soul in his performances; a restless crowd-pleaser who never quite settled, as this double-album live set demonstrates only too well.

Dental problems made him concentrate on the tenor's higher register which he deploys quite appealingly on Kenny Dorham's *Blue Bossa*, sounding unflustered and coherent over some nineteen minutes. Then follows *La Carnival* which is essentially a crude farrago of vocal sounds, matching animalistic grunts with a-rhythmic guttural shouts, over his piano-led funk backing. Ugh. Then it's his famous *Freedom Jazz Dance*, also lasting nineteen minutes, the tenor distorted and strained in the prescribed avant-garde manner; guitarist Darryl indulging his inner Jimi Hendrix and bassist Ray Peterson emulating Pastorius while drummer Norman Fearington stays funky.

In total contrast, *Ice Cream* is a 6-minutes plus continuous solo tenor improvisation, much in the manner of latter-day Sonny Rollins. Nothing odd or extreme, this time. CD2 is all Harris compositionally, with a strong jazz-rock run on *Ambidextrous*, followed by a rather engaging harmonised scat vocal-piano routine. Almost the best thing amid this strange melange is *Eddie Who?* taken as a straight vocal in the Joe Williams manner; the lyrics telling Harris' story, over nicely spare blues piano. So, something for everyone, you could say.

#### PETER VACHER



#### CHICK COREA

THE MONTREUX YEARS

BMG CAT 583CD 74.08

When Corea died in September 2021 aged 80, the jazz world mourned the demise of one of the music's greatest contemporary players. Having

served his time with Miles Davis and Stan Getz, Corea had shown himself open to a variety of musical stimuli and spent the second half of his career touring and recording with varied line-ups of his own. Classically trained, he sometimes returned to these formative roots but always with a degree of distinction and an impeccable keyboard command. As its title suggests, this elegant release is a kind of compendium of Corea's Montreux Festival appearances, celebrating his love affair with the venue as much as his willingness to re-purpose his varied ensembles and present them to his Montreux audiences over the album's 1988-2010 timespan. Thus, we move from his New Trio, bassist Avishay Cohen dazzling, and on to the Freedom Band with Christian McBride for Cohen and Kenny Garret playing searing alto with Roy Haynes on drums. Then comes the Akoustic band with virtuoso bassist John Patitucci prominent and the Electric Band follows with its augmented personnel preceding the Quartet with tenorist Bob Berg added and Corea with the Bavarian Chamber Philharmonic, Corea's UK sideman, Tim Garland in riveting form. So, a tribute to Corea, and his spacious, harmonically wide-ranging piano approach. He was, with Hancock and Jarrett, clearly one of the most gifted jazz pianists of this or any era.

#### PETER VACHER



#### JOHN HELLIWELL AND JASPER SOMSEN

DON'T EVER LEAVE ME

Challenge Records CR 73536:  
69.21

John Helliwell of Supertramp seems to be spending much of his time now playing jazz with the Supertramp Big Band or, as in this case, with double bassist Jasper

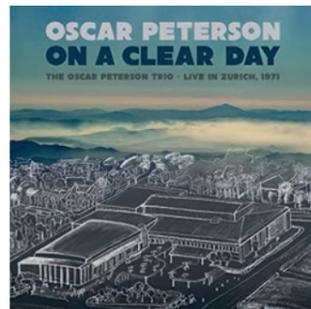
Somsen. An attractive album, *Don't Ever Leave Me* is, for the most part, meditative, even serene, with empathetic contributions from all four quartet members, pianist Hans Vroomans and drummer Marcel Serierse the other two.

The use of the title track is unusual. Beginning as a quartet piece, with Helliwell elegantly fluent on clarinet, it then puts in three further brief appearances: as a double bass solo, in trio and duo versions, all very different, all very soulful. The ninth track (there are 18 in all) is the first Helliwell original, among popular songs, folk songs and Somsen's compositions, and is the first to break the mood of serenity, *Hop Sax*, raising the tempo a little and the intensity a lot, with fine work from Vroomans and Serierse in support of Helliwell's tenor sax.

Immediately following that, Dick Gaughan's *Lassie Lie Near Me* is repetitive, mysterious, and later *Liten Visa Till Karin* again shows off Helliwell's clarinet in another meditative piece. Lynne Arianne's *Arise* features all four to great effect and the closer, *Blue is Central*, also by Helliwell, finds him on clarinet enjoying himself on a jaunty melody, Serierse also well featured.

The partnership of Helliwell and Somsen clearly works, finding clean, melodic lines, sometimes hardly straying from the theme in solos and creating an appealing mood.

#### RON SIMPSON



#### OSCAR PETERSON

ON A CLEAR DAY

THE OSCAR PETERSON TRIO – LIVE IN ZURICH, 1971

Mack Avenue MAC 1199

1971 was something of a transitional period for the Oscar Peterson Trio. It marked the

consolidation of what was to become a long-standing musical relationship with double-bass player Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen, which had commenced in 1970, when he replaced Peterson's regular bassist George Mraz. The association with drummer Louis Hayes that had begun in 1965 upon his leaving Cannonball Adderley after many years was also to continue. The music is the product of two 6-week tours of Europe, some of which had previously been documented on the album *Great Connection* recorded for MPS Records. However, the music here emanates from a recording made by Radio Zurich for broadcast in Switzerland and has not previously been released. Given the provenance of the recording it is of no surprise that the sound quality is excellent. The repertoire consists of eight tunes, mostly familiar to the seasoned jazz listener including *Younger than Springtime*, *On a Clear Day*, *Young and Foolish* and *The Lamp is Low*. It is always a joy to hear music from the exuberant Peterson and this set is all the more important as it features virtuosic playing from Pedersen who sadly passed away in 2005 at the age of 58.

This nicely produced album also includes notes from the renowned double-bassist, composer and educator Mike Downes providing an eloquent testament to Pedersen's talents. All-in-all this is a valuable addition to the pianist's extensive discography.

#### ALAN MUSSON



#### COURTNEY PINE

SPIRITUALITY

Destin-E 777103579X 41:45

It's coincidence, of course, but just as I began thinking about this review, my inbox 'pinged and

there was a notification about a 'deluxe reissue' of material by Clint Eastwood and General Saint from the early 80s. This popular reggae duo of the time employed a young band called Inity Rockers, a member of which was Courtney Pine. Their success ensured an appearance for the young sax player (in a backing role) on that British institution, *Top Of The Pops*. In a few short years he and his peers would be re-defining and re-invigorating the British jazz scene.

Throughout his career Courtney has drawn on American jazz, his Caribbean heritage and his British upbringing for inspiration. In 2015 he made the album *Song: The Ballad Book* with pianist Zoe Rahman, and *Spiritualities* can be seen as something of a follow-up though it certainly stands tall on its own merits. Courtney is again playing bass clarinet and Zoe reprises her role but one difference is that also present here is a string quartet on half of the ten tracks, which certainly adds a 'chamber-jazz' feel to several numbers.

The material draws on the likes of Rodgers & Hart, Irving Berlin and the cool strut of Neal Hefti's *Girl Talk*, with Michel Legrand's *Windmills Of My Mind* and Charlie Chaplin's 'Smile' perhaps only a little more unexpected – and the classic spiritual *Motherless Child* is the kind of thing I would perhaps expect from someone like Ornette Coleman, say, though Courtney sticks far closer to the melody. *Ayr Hod Y Nos* is the beautiful Welsh song known in English as *All Through The Night* and this version is a truly moving performance. Courtney's own compositions fit well with these, with the closing *Your Majesty*, though originally written in 2000 when he was presented with his O.B.E. by Queen Elizabeth II, gaining an added poignancy given her death in 2022 (note this version was recorded in January 2022).

The set is overall somewhat introspective and reflective, dedicated to several musicians/friends who have died recently. The music itself is beautiful, though I don't think I have ever before described a jazz set as 'bittersweet'.

#### NORMAN DARWEN



#### DIGBY FAIRWEATHER

NOTES FROM A JAZZ LIFE, VOLUME 3

Acrobat: ADDCD3445  
68:37; 75:14

Digby Fairweather is the nearest thing British Jazz has to fulfilling the Renaissance ideal that a man of genius can do all things in life if he so chooses. He is seemingly limitless and unparalleled in his talents, capacities and accomplishments - in his chosen field. As a cornetist or trumpeter, writer, broadcaster and, incidentally, the founder of the Jazz Centre UK in his native Southend, he turned professional in 1977, dedicated his life to playing, promoting and preserving the music, picking up just about every conceivable jazz award in the process.

This is the eagerly awaited volume three in the Acrobat series, *Notes From A Jazz Life*, a retrospective of his career, with material chosen by himself. The first double album, issued in 2020 to coincide with the 25th Anniversary tour of his Half Dozen, features a fine selection of the band's recordings from 1970 to 2013, previously released on his own Rose Cottage label. The second volume, from 2022, showcases his work with the cream of British jazz, the list of participants reading like a veritable Who's Who of greats from Dominic Ashworth to Roy Williams.

Again compiled by Digby himself, this 26-track set, on two CDs, shares the unabashed joy of live recordings, captured at clubs, festivals and all-star jam sessions, starchy, starchy nights from 1975 to 2014, virtually forty years, spanning five decades. There are also for good measure some fine studio recordings. The wide choice of material showcases a developing style that interweaves many strands of jazz, and reflects a wide range of influences from Louis

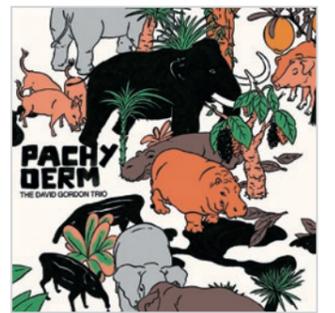
Armstrong and Red Nichols to Billy Butterfield and Ruby Braff and then some!

Again it features professional engagements with a host of the top names. We see Digby cutting his bandleader's teeth, you might say, with Ron Russell's Band, Dave Shepherd's Dixielanders, the Danny Moss Quintet, the Lennie Hastings' Band - and fronting his own ensembles with musicians of the stature of Stan Barker, John Barnes, Denny Wright, Danny Moss, Brian Lemon, Keith Nichols, Keith Ingham, Pete Strange.

Just to put it in perspective in the limited space available, suffice it to say the memorable M&B Jam Session recorded at the Birmingham Arena in 1984 boasted a line-up including Humph, Bruce Turner, Randy Colville and Roy Williams. It is fitting that the festival that Digby has set on fire so many times is featured here, to be reviewed in the magazine run by Jim Simpson, the progenitor.

The accompanying 28-page booklet, written by the man himself, provides a priceless insight into the selections, artists and occasions. This and the first two volumes offer collectively a fascinating opportunity to experience the development of one of the great figures of recent years as well as giving a dazzling glimpse of the British Jazz scene over the period.

#### ANDREW LIDDLE



#### DAVID GORDON TRIO

PACHYDERM

Mister Sam Records SAMCD  
005: 65.30

David Gordon has a rather unusual keyboard hero for a jazz pianist – Johann Sebastian Bach – and most tracks on *Pachyderm* reflect his influence. Why not? Jacques

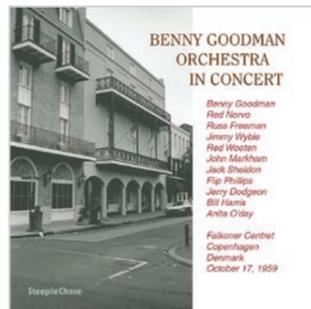
Loussier made a career out of it, but Gordon's approach is rather more tangential. It's not a matter of applying jazz rhythms to Bach compositions, more that the pieces are Bach deconstructed.

All the tracks on the CD are Gordon's own compositions. The central and longest track is the one that puts its Bach credentials up front: *Goldberg Variations Variations*. Both drums (Paul Cavaciuti) and bass (Oli Hayhurst) have highly individual solos between an understated piano chorale before the whole thing ends up as a romp for home. The variations is one of several tracks where Gordon introduces the distinctive sound of the melodica.

To me the most Bachian track is one that conceals its credentials in a punning title *Brandy for Four* – Brandy in this case short for Brandenburg. The airiness of the music is very much school of Bach. *Il Filo* (the thread) is another that links the melodic flow through a spaciousness of sound. The title track suggests the lumbering gait of an elephant in its broken phrases, with admirably sympathetic backing from Hayhurst and Cavaciuti. By the time we come to *Shifting Baselines* Gordon's shift onto virginals comes as no surprise!

The trio operates beautifully as a group and Gordon's use of classical originals is unfailingly ingenious, but sometimes ingenuity wins out over spontaneity.

#### RON SIMPSON



#### BENNY GOODMAN ORCHESTRA IN CONCERT

SCCD36501 78:28

Small group swing or big band bounce? Whatever your taste in jazz the maestro will not fail to deliver. This previously unreleased material from a Benny Goodman concert at the Falkoner Centret,

Copenhagen, on 17th October, 1959, combines both and is intriguing for a number of reasons.

Immediately we demand to know why it has never been released and speculate that some duplication of the other three extant concerts, in Basle, Berlin and Stockholm, on the same European tour, might be the reason, since there are no problems with recording quality.

It's a ten-piece (plus vocalist, the wonderful Anita O'Day on a couple), four musicians larger than one of his famous sextets; four fewer than the bands with which he had ushered in the Swing Age, a quarter of a century earlier. In a sense, with only two brass instruments, trumpeter Jack Sheldon, and trombone Bill Harris, and on reeds, Goodman, alto Jerry Dodgion (now in his nineties) and tenor Flip Phillips, all wonderfully swinging musicians, we have the small and intimate.

But the definitive sextet, if you like, the one in make-up that recalls the leader's preference in the mid-1940s, is himself plus the ready-made quintet (excluding pianist Bill Miller) with which Red Norvo had backed Frank Sinatra in Australia in April of the same year. Norvo, vibes; Russ Freeman, piano; Jimmy Wyble, guitar; Red Wooten, bass; and John Markham, drums remain on stage throughout.

We begin with the full complement for the first couple of tracks after which brass and reeds come and go with the abandon of a gloriously fluid jam session, soloing ingeniously on well-known Goodman pieces and Swing classics, adding new themes while respecting old. There is the unmistakable air of a gala occasion – as if this is more than a jazz concert but a joyous celebration of Swing's enduring popularity. We can almost hear champagne corks popping on *Marching*, parodying a Souza stomper with a jingle of Gershwin's *Strike Up the Band*.

One lovely tune only ever heard on this tour is Goodman's own composition, *Go Margot Go*, written for German singer and film star Margot Hielscher, whom he had met and befriended while performing in Munich in August, 1958. The King of Swing had a sweet soul!

ANDREW LIDDLE



#### JESPER THILO QUARTET

80: LIVE AT JAZZCUP

Stunt Records STUCD 22062: 76.20

This superb live session, recorded last year at Copenhagen's JazzCup, finds Danish tenor saxophonist Jesper Thilo, then aged 80, in dominant form on a set composed almost entirely of standards: after all, *Lester Leaps In* and Dizzy's *Blue 'n' Boogie* are standards in their own way. The only tune I was unfamiliar with is *Sweets to the Sweet* by Danish bassist Hugo Rasmussen, a chance for excellent Swedish bassist Daniel Franck to demonstrate his melodic skills.

Apart from that Thilo sounds thoroughly relaxed on a series of great songs, incisive and assured in his uptempo improvisations, warmly melodic on the ballads. Twice, on *If I Had You* and *Memories of You*, he reverts to clarinet, sticking closer to the melody, playing with a delightfully fluent lyrical tone. Regular showpieces *Body and Soul* and *Stardust* (complete with evocative verse) are treated with warmth and subtlety, even if pianist Soren Kristiansen has a tendency to over-elaborate, most obvious on *Tenderly*. On the uptempo numbers he solos impressively and backs the clarinet features beautifully.

Drummer Frands Ribbjerg sets off *I'll Remember April* dynamically and enjoys solo exchanges with his ever-alert leader on *Just Friends* and *Blue 'n' Boogie*, making up a quartet that works together perfectly. Above all, though, this is Jesper Thilo's album, picking just the right tempo for an easy swinging *Like Someone in Love* and roaring uninhibitedly into the close *Lester Leaps In* before metamorphosing into Oscar Pettiford's *Montmartre Blues* and a rousing finish.

RON SIMPSON



#### DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET

DEBUT IN THE NETHERLANDS 1958

The Lost Recordings TLR 2204043 78.04

As we pointed out in *Rag 172* when writing about an Ellington release, this label specialises in tracking down previously unheard or 'lost' material. This time they have chanced on the proceeds of an Amsterdam concert undertaken when the Quartet was making its first visit to the Netherlands and just months before the *Time Out* album had changed their lives.

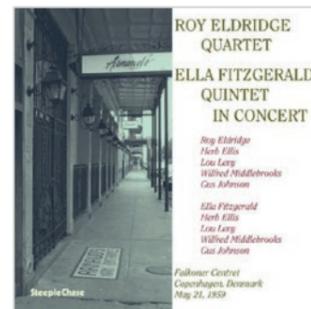
It opens with *Two Part Contention*, a rarely-heard piece that Paul Desmond and Brubeck had premiered back in 1956. Its first three minutes contain a breathtakingly beautiful passage of play by altoist Paul Desmond, plaintive yet purposeful, this superimposed contrapuntally on Brubeck's piano line as both men improvise over the impeccable beat created by bassist Gene Wright and drummer Joe Morello. Brubeck fills out his solo part with some neat swing piano before thudding into one of his passages of heavily-struck chords, Desmond returning at speed as the piece resumes. Joy abounds. *These Foolish Things* tops everything for time at 17 minutes plus, Desmond animated, Brubeck responding with a heady mix of understated bebop piano and a sudden interjection of block chords, firmly administered, the odd quote thrown. Desmond is again supreme on *For All We Know*, Brubeck nimbler this time. Much the same goes for *The Duke* and the drumsticks fun on *A Train*.

The tracks here are lifted from a concert recorded in Copenhagen in May 1959 with fiery trumpet star Roy Eldridge opening the programme with a stellar team fronted by pianist Lou Levy. A regular member on the JATP tours, Eldridge applies his considerable chops to Benny Goodman's *Soft Winds*, first on muted trumpet with some impressive input from guitarist Herb Ellis, before switching to open horn with great alacrity and precision. The whole ensemble ignites on *Roy's Riff* with bassist Wilfred Middlebrooks setting the pace, Levy providing some Basie inspired riffs and Eldridge again switching from muted to open horn to deliver some high octane exchanges with drummer Gus Johnson.

However, the star of the show is waiting in the wings and Ella

palpable, Desmond the clear-eyed visionary as Brubeck steers the ship to harbour. The crowd loved it all: rightly so. Nine tracks to savour, all in superb, re-mastered mono sound. Beyond perfection, really.

PETER VACHER



#### ROY ELDRIDGE QUINTET : ELLA FITZGERALD QUINTET

#### ROY ELDRIDGE : ELLA FITZGERALD IN CONCERT

SteepleChase Productions SCCD 36503 52.03

Jazz promoter and record producer Norman Granz hit on a winning way to promote his recording artists in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. His hugely successful Jazz at the Philharmonic touring shows certainly sold records and elevated his stars onto the international stage.

The tracks here are lifted from a concert recorded in Copenhagen in May 1959 with fiery trumpet star Roy Eldridge opening the programme with a stellar team fronted by pianist Lou Levy. A regular member on the JATP tours, Eldridge applies his considerable chops to Benny Goodman's *Soft Winds*, first on muted trumpet with some impressive input from guitarist Herb Ellis, before switching to open horn with great alacrity and precision. The whole ensemble ignites on *Roy's Riff* with bassist Wilfred Middlebrooks setting the pace, Levy providing some Basie inspired riffs and Eldridge again switching from muted to open horn to deliver some high octane exchanges with drummer Gus Johnson.

However, the star of the show is waiting in the wings and Ella

Fitzgerald takes over with the same line-up minus Eldridge. It's a pity they didn't share one number at least! There are breezy standards alongside some unusual pairings. *I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire* segues into a beautifully rendered *All I Need Is You* and *Whatever Lola Wants* teams up with *Who's Got The Pain?* both from the musical *Damn Yankees* and deftly applied with characteristic good humour. I enjoyed hearing *Lady Be Good* presented in ballad format and Fitzgerald's sensitive reading of *I Loves You Porgy* is matchless. Crowd pleasers are a terrific blues swinger incorporating *Boogie Blues* and *Alright, OK, You Win* and the singer's trademark *How High Is The Moon* which just about crams in as many titles as is humanly possible.

Neil Tesser reminds us in his informative sleeve-notes that Fitzgerald was always anxious about her performance. It certainly doesn't show here!

VAL WISEMAN



#### STEVE GADD EDDIE GOMEZ GOMEZ RONNIE CUBER / WDR BIG BAND

CENTER STAGE

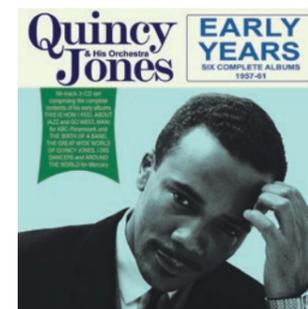
Leopard D 77107 56.16

This well-presented new release has already been listed for Grammy consideration and must be a contender, as they say. The always impressive WDR big band, that's Westdeutscher Rundfunk based in Cologne, invited star drummer Gadd, bassist Gomez and baritone specialist Cuber to join them for this broadcast programme arranged and conducted by Michael Abene in early 2022.

It's worth noting that these sessions may well be among Cuber's final recordings for he

died in October the same year. Even so, he was in good shape in Cologne, soloing with vigour on these hard-driving charts, Gadd powering every piece in his well-established rock-oriented style. Abene's eight charts cover compositions by Stevie Wonder, Bob Dylan, Otis Redding, Buddy Miles, Wilton Felder, Bill Doggett and Gadd himself so it's easy to sense their character and to imagine the band's approach. The tempos are upbeat, the phrasing direct and the feeling that swing is the thing is uppermost. This is romping stuff, by any measure and it's played with real zest, the band's soloists like trombonist Ludwig Nuss and altoist Karolina Strassmeyer taking their chances brilliantly. Otherwise, there are brief cameos from guest Hammond organist Bobby Sparks and blues guitarist Bruno Muller. So, a classy affair, with the visiting Americans justifying their fees, Gomez soling ably on Gadd's 'Lucky 13' and Cuber in extrovert form on Gadd's 'My Little Brother', co-written with Richard Tee, the drummer's boogaloo beat and rousing solo making for a solid finish.

PETER VACHER



#### QUINCY JONES & HIS ORCHESTRA

EARLY YEARS: SIX COMPLETE ALBUMS 1957 - 61

Acrobat ACTRCD9127 3 CDs: 69:57/ 72:56/ 70:40

Quincy Jones' list of achievements is truly remarkable: he produced Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the biggest-selling album of all time, has had too many Grammy nominations to list (80 so far!), and broke down many barriers. These achievements were all in the future when the

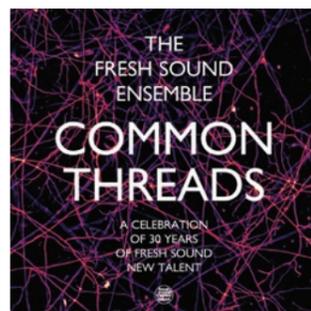
material on this three CD box-set was first issued.

The six albums included are 1957's *This Is How I Feel About Jazz*, *Go West, Man!*, *The Birth Of A Band*, *The Great Wide World Of Quincy Jones*, *I Dig Dancers*, and *Around The World*. These early recordings profile Quincy leading his big band, consolidating the reputation he had already established, having worked with some of the biggest names in the jazz of the time, including Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Dinah Washington, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Lionel Hampton. Some might be interested too that he even played trumpet behind Elvis Presley on the latter's first television appearances.

The cast list for this music is an all-star affair: names like Charlie Mingus, Art Farmer, Phil Woods, Sam 'The Man' Taylor, Lucky Thompson, Clark Terry, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Oliver Nelson, Milt Jackson, Kenny Burrell and Tito Puente are involved, among many others. The albums have vague themes e.g. *Go West, Man!* is Quincy's take on the California jazz scene of the time. The music is generally swinging, sophisticated big band jazz, with soloists given plenty of opportunity to stretch out, though many numbers are between three and four minutes in length. The material is generally warm, accessible and often relaxed, the modern jazz of the 50s and 60s with Quincy's arrangements delivered by some of the masters of the genre, and many standards are on offer alongside fine original compositions.

I was about to start this sentence with 'Sadly', explaining that around the time of the last album here, Quincy learned the harsh reality of the expense of trying to keep even a widely-acclaimed big band as a working and touring outfit. He shifted his focus elsewhere, and though judged on the quality of the performances here, it was certainly a loss jazz-wise, for the man himself it was just another step towards a glittering, genre-spanning career.

NORMAN DARWEN



## THE FRESH SOUND ENSEMBLE

### COMMON THREADS

Fresh Sound New Talent FSNT 645: 68.03

Anniversaries abound! This year is the 40th anniversary of Fresh Sound Records; last year, when this recording was made, was 30 years from the start of Fresh Sound New Talent. Jordi Pujol decided to celebrate the occasion by creating the Fresh Sound Ensemble, a group of young British musicians, to put together an album made up entirely of originals and produced by Alex Merritt.

The result was two sessions at Porcupine Studios, with four or five saxes, trumpet and rhythm, guitar replacing piano on eight of eleven tracks, with full-scale pieces for octets and nonets sitting alongside quartets and quintets. Not all the music is easy to get your head round, but who ever said it would be? *Do You Like Apples?*, for instance, with Ronan Perrett and Alex Hitchcock improvising together, is as exhilarating as confusing.

*El Murcielago*, an original by Steve Fishwick, crops up twice in very different treatments, the first featuring solos all round and allowing us to contrast the saxophonists, the second featuring much fewer solos, with Tom Ollendorff's guitar particularly impressive. He excels throughout and contributes a striking original *Asimuth* (good solos from all, notably Sam Braysher's alto sax). Ollendorff and bassist Conor Chaplin add fine solos to the evocative *Simplicity*. This is one of two numbers by guest musician, Helsinki-based Adele Sauros, whose tenor sax is featured on this and the opener, her rather mysterious *Erased*. Also guesting is John Turville

whose thoughtful piano shares solo duties with the composer on *JT and the Planets* (Alex Merritt) and *Bin Raccoon* (Alex Hitchcock).

RON SIMPSON



## JACK SHELDON/ CAPPY LEWIS

A JAZZ PROFILE OF RAY CHARLES/GET HAPPY WITH CAPPY

Fresh Sound FSR CD 1073: 65.45

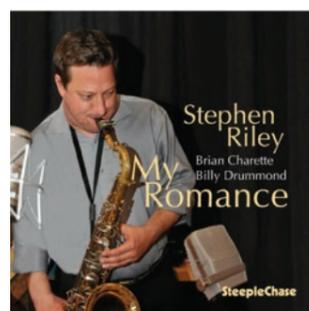
Fresh Sounds' series, *Rare and Obscure Jazz Albums*, brings together two surprisingly similar West Coast offerings. Each runs to 12 tracks with a trumpet-led quartet and of 24 tracks only five reach the three-minute mark. Songs, even on the Ray Charles tribute, are mostly well known standards. Both albums have a definite air of being produced for the general popular market rather than aimed at the jazz public, but thanks to Jack Sheldon and Cappy Lewis there is plenty of good jazz along the way.

Jack Sheldon was one of the most lyrical, quizzical of trumpets, combining delicate ballad playing with crazily mazy runs and sardonic half-valving. *A Jazz Profile of Ray Charles* begins with a quirky organ figure from Marty Paich on *Am I Blue?* which goes on to feature Sheldon at his bubbling best. Thereafter Paich plays very conservatively behind Sheldon who relaxes on ballads such as *Just for a Thrill* and *Moonlight in Vermont* and borrows a touch of Armstrong phrasing on *Basin Street Blues*. Joe Mondragon and John Markham get very little feature until late on when Sheldon really opens out on *One Mint Julep* and *Rosetta*.

The swooping start to *Charmaine* is an unpromising

beginning to *Get Happy with Cappy*, but clearly he was in no mood to fit in with the intention of producing a sweet album. After years in the trumpet section of big bands such as Woody Herman's and in the Hollywood studios, Cappy Lewis was not going to mess up on his first solo album. *Undecided* and *Swanee* demonstrate control at manic tempos, *Imagination* borrows some of Sheldon's lyricism. Jimmy Rowles, Morty Corb and Jack Sperling are more prominent than Paich & Co., with Rowles particularly impressive.

RON SIMPSON



## MY ROMANCE: STEPHEN RILEY, BRIAN CHARETTE, BILLY DRUMMOND

SCCD 31932 66:29

Stephen Riley, a native of Greenville, North Carolina, has made numerous recordings with bass and drums, establishing himself as one of the most inventive tenors on the New York scene. Since coming of age in the 1990s, he has worked with a wide range of big names, among others Wynton Marsalis, Marcus Roberts, Ray Charles, Christian McBride, Jason Moran, Natalie Cole, and Nora Jones. This, his thirteenth album with the Steeplechase label alone, is his first with organ accompaniment.



The tenor-organ-drums trio is not a line-up over-recorded in jazz, although it has a rich and varied history across a range of music, like R&B, Rock, Reggae. The iconic, immediately recognisable sound of the Hammond B3 organ, playfully plished, fondled, and nudged by Brian Charette, will almost immediately trigger associations - for readers of this print - with a uniquely distinctive sub-genre virtually created by Jimmy, the Smith of Smiths (Johnny, Lonnie, Ethel *et al*).

From Meriden, Connecticut, and another mainstay of the Danish Steeplechase label, prominent on the Downtown NYC scene, Charette gained the first of many awards in 2014, when singled out by *Downbeat's* critics as the 'Rising Star' among organists. His not inconsiderable biography shows a wide range of interests and expertise, not just musical.

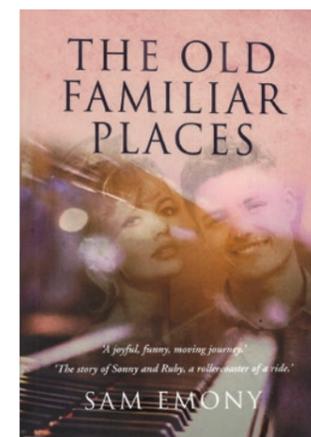
One of the most sought-after drummers, with an immense discography, Billy Drummond needs no introduction - but it's worth noting that compositions of two of the legendary greats with whom he's worked, Sonny Rollins (*Paul's Pal*) and Joe Henderson (*Recorda Me*), find him in fine form.

This intimate combination of breathily sensitive, high-spirited, and exuberant sax, and a highly strung organ, cool and impish by turn, both exponents inventive and full of improvisatory skills on some real gems from the pen of such as Charlie Parker (*Steeplechase*), Billy Strayhorn (*Rain Check*) and Fats Waller (*Jitterbug Waltz*), qualifies this as a candidate for one of the albums of the year. *My Romance* might well be a match made in heaven.

ANDREW LIDDLE

# THE NEXT JAZZ NOVEL – OR WHO IS SAM EMONY?

RON SIMPSON investigates



Lance Liddle, writing on *Bebop Spoken Here*, opined, 'It's been said that the great jazz novel has yet to be written', then went on to say that *The Old Familiar Places* by Sam Emony comes pretty close to being that jazz novel! Praise indeed, but who is Sam Emony? Jazz promoter Neil Hughes comes clean:

'Sam Emony was my maternal grandfather. Patricia Emony was my mum. I decided to use my grandfather's name to distinguish between the club I ran and being a writer.'

So Sam Emony is Neil Hughes and the novel is described as 'a love letter to jazz'. Remarkably, each of the 67 (!) chapters, all quite short, is prefixed by a song title, every one meticulously checked out to make sure it was published before the time of the chapter! Neil/Sam's first novel is a love story, a coming of age tale about Sonny Jackson, a teenage pianist and his extraordinary career under the tutelage of Ruby, a young widow, covering the years 1975 to 1979, with an emotional final chapter set in 2019 at the church where it all started. It's peppered with familiar names, Charlie Watts,

Syd Lawrence, Dave Green. Dave who is the only living musician mentioned according to Neil has agreed to provide the music, with John Pearce, for the book launch at Ronnie Scott's on February 22. Drawing on his promoter contacts and friendships, Neil has arranged for the evening to be introduced by Ian Shaw.

This is the fulfilment of a long-held ambition for Neil (he studied English and Drama 40 years ago!), but what about his interest in jazz?

'My way into music was via concerts in Bristol. I was going to the usual teenage concerts by Aztec Camera, Blondie, Deacon Blue and Queen, but my parents were taking me to jazz as well. I absorbed my parents' albums through osmosis: Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald especially, Billie Holiday, Coltrane. I got involved in jazz with the Cinnamon Club in 2003. I sold my software business, took a lease on an old building in Altrincham, went back to the names I remembered from my parents and booked in the likes of Humphrey Lyttelton, George Melly, Georgie Fame. I used those names to get my fledgling business going, then gradually learned more and more about local and national musicians until I was booking 80 gigs a year.'

When he sold the Cinnamon Club after 17 years – fortuitously just before Covid struck – he found himself with time on his hands and decided it was time to start writing, settling into a routine of working in the morning and walking on the hills in the afternoon. Neil seems to have been a singularly well-organised

writer, doing his two and a half hours every morning, but also planning his novel in incredible detail – and also planning his writing career several steps ahead:

'This is Novel Number 3 – the others haven't seen the light of day yet. They're on the back burner at the moment because I'm working on a 90-minute TV drama which isn't really music-related and a five-part television series which will have music in it.

'I have set up a blog with all the details about every song I use as a chapter title. It tells you what happens in that chapter and the relevance of the song. I pick on a lyric that means something to me and use it, so it's a blog about the inspiration behind the song titles. There is much more material than the 93,000 words in the book. I was far more disciplined with writing than I expected to be. I plotted the whole novel before I started, written on post-cards, everything colour-coded, so, when I started writing, I knew exactly how things would turn out. I loved it, then it came to the editing – and that was hard work!'

Neil is obviously excited by the process of writing – and reviews like Lance Liddle's – and clearly has so many other ideas coming to the boil, doubtless as meticulously plotted as *The Old Familiar Places* – but is also back in the music business. In July he comes up to his second year as Jazz Director for Buxton International Festival which begins with a Jazz Weekender from July 6 to 10. He is so pleased with how 2022 turned out that he sees no reason to change the format of a jazz-packed Weekender followed by occasional gigs throughout the

Festival. The big difference this year is that the Jazz Weekender is extended by one day until the Monday – the reason? The astonishing coup that Buxton has made in securing the services of Wynton Marsalis. The obvious question of who is to play with Marsalis is still under the covers, but what is certain is that he will be playing Buxton Opera House on July 10. Also, of unusual interest this year is an operetta, *The Land of Might-Have-Been*, book by Festival CEO Michael Williams, songs by Ivor Novello, based on the early life of writer Vera Brittain. Though not strictly jazz, this is included in the Jazz Weekender package.

In the meantime I have a book to read. Neil assures me that *The Old Familiar Places* takes a mere six to eight hours. I won't be timing myself, but stand by for my review in the next *Jazz Rag*. Or, of course, those too eager to wait can always enter our competition.

### Links for you

The Blog

<https://www.emony.co.uk/musical-inspiration/>

Event at Ronnies

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/book-launch-for-the-old-familiar-places-tickets-520342266727>

Where to buy the book

<https://linktr.ee/SamEmony>

### BOOK COMPETITION

Neil Hughes has persuaded Sam Emony to let us have THREE copies of *The Old Familiar Places* for *Jazz Rag* readers. All you have to do is answer the question below and sent your entry to [jazzrag@bigbearmusic.com](mailto:jazzrag@bigbearmusic.com) by March 24, 2023.

**All the chapters in the book derive from song titles, but which song is referenced in the book title? A clue: the book title comes in the second line of the song.**

## LIVE REVIEWS

### SOUTHPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL

FEBRUARY 3-5, 2023

Southport Jazz Festival proved a nice mix of continuity and innovation. Geoff Matthews' Jazz on a Winter's Weekend established a huge reputation, then Neil Hughes took it over and introduced one or two very popular innovations, then, after the 2020 festival, a whole raft of reasons seemed to have killed the Southport Jazz Festival: the Covid outbreak, the sale of the Festival venue, the closure of its replacement, later on, Neil's appointment at Buxton...

Then Emma Holcroft, Jez Murphy and Cliff Ray of the Swingtime Big Band, regular stars of the old Festival, decided to take a hand. Sourcing a glitzy new venue, the Grand (the Festival itself in the Princess Grace Suite), they echoed the format of pre-2020, minus the late night gigs, and were not ashamed to carry on existing traditions, notably the appearance of the Swingtime Big Band, with added guest singer, and a last-night closer from the Alan Barnes Octet. They also secured the services of Liane Carroll as Patron.

Having attended five of the ten gigs, my impression is that they could not have got off to a better start: a near-full room, plenty of familiar faces, including the two previous directors, clearly enjoying themselves. As for policy, the Festival seems to have edged a little closer to the mainstream, even taking us to the borders of jazz, but this is no bad thing when trying to re-build an audience.

It was Jeremy Sassoon's MOJO (Musicians of Jewish Origin) that was the main reason for that last observation. I was intrigued by



The Copperfield front line

the use of the word 'musicians' rather than 'music' and puzzled over what line he would take: jazz versions of the songs of Gershwin and Berlin, perhaps, or even Ziggy Elman. The answer was, in part, the first. Seating himself at the grand piano, he launched into a dramatic truncated *Rhapsody in Blue* and then introduced his trio, Nicola Farnon and Phil Johnson, both excellent, both rather under-used.

For the next half hour Sassoon filled us full of facts about great Jewish songwriters (Jerome Kern, apparently, missed the *Lusitania* on its doomed last voyage owing to his over-indulgence in an all-night party) – immaculate research followed for the most part by a medley of their songs, delivered in a mostly laconic style – very nice, but it was good when he gave *The Way You Look Tonight* the full treatment and better yet when Phil Johnson got the chance to channel his inner Gene Krupa on a conflation of *The Lady is a Tramp* and *Sing Sing Sing*.

Then suddenly we were in the 1950s, with Elvis (interesting facts about how many of his hits were Jewish-composed), pitching towards cabaret with Lionel Bart's *Review the Situation*, and a second half that went from Bob Dylan to Amy Winehouse, finishing on Barbra Streisand and Barry Manilow, with Sassoon also recalling his days in a piano bar with brief versions of top songs by Billy Joel and Randy Newman. By the end it was pure cabaret, but the crowd loved it.

Back to the out-and-out jazz events. Friday night concluded with the Swingtime Big Band under Jez Murphy and, as usual when I hear them, I regret that they don't have more instrumentals, but there again, if you've got Emma Holcroft and a star guest (in this case Liane Carroll), programming must be difficult. As it was, the opener, *Bugle*

*Call Rag*, got the evening off to a blazing start, the acoustics in the low-ceiling room a boom to the tremendous trumpet section. Cliff Ray excelled, of course, as did, in the course of the evening, saxist Mike Smith and the remarkable trombonist Ellie Whitley.

Emma Holcroft brought a keen sense of pitch, stylish phrasing and plenty of swing to such numbers as *Too Dam Hot* and extracted all the delicacy of *The Very Thought of You* in two sessions before holding her own in a final duet with Liane Carroll. As for Ms. Carroll, looking highly amused at finding herself in Southport, she romped through the likes of *Blue Skies*, mined the beauty of *In the Wee Small Hours* (lovely flugel from Cliff Ray) and soared through *Skylark*. Incidentally, she and Emma had already put in performances that afternoon for a performance by the Southport Children's Jazz Choir – it certainly made a difference when Liane Carroll took the piano chair!

One of the mysteries of Alan Barnes' *Copperfield* was how it would compare in performance to on CD. Apart from the obvious impact of soloists in the flesh, the main impact, oddly enough, was how much Alan's rather rambling introductions (involving such unrelated matters as Brexit and Liz Truss) brought to the proceedings. The extracts from *David Copperfield* enabled us to see how far the music reflected the novel. Bruce Adams' puppyish nuzzlings and scurryings as Jip were always evident, but much more emerged more forcibly: Rob Fowler's bare-bones clarinet depicting Tommy Traddles' drawing of skeletons, the gentle descent to earth of Mr. Dick's kite, the *faux* jauntiness of Mr. Micawber's theme, the contrasts between Dave Newton's noble piano theme for Steerforth (how he saw himself) and the reality introduced by Andy Cleyndert's bass and Clark Tracey's drumming. Best of all was the Ellingtonian *Uriah Heep*, with Alan's oleaginous bass clarinet creepily depicting the 'umble trickster.

The second group on Friday was Djanco, very accomplished masters of the art of the Hot Club, but making less impression on me than on the majority of a highly enthusiastic crowd. Certainly they played some lovely songs (*Out of Nowhere*, *Autumn Leaves*, etc.), certainly Thom Whitworth (guitar) and Andy Aitchison (violin) are superbly adept and Whitworth's forays on to trumpet were an unexpected bonus, but there was an overall jokiness (all those false endings and occasional lengthy chats about this and that) that I could have done without.

All in all, next year's festival is fixed for early February again and the expectation in more of the same!

RON SIMPSON



Liane Carroll

any excesses in writing, as Alan constantly reminded us – it was unlikely to be anything else!

At the other end of the Festival the Brownfield/Byrne Quintet made a rare appearance with a splendid set that took them well outside their original bebop territory. Jamie Brownfield played with authority and dynamism, Liam Byrne, a little slower to warm up, was in glorious form by the second half and Tony Hulme, Ed Harrison and Jack Cotterill gave immaculate support. In truth it was the pre-bebop pieces that made the biggest impression: *The Dance* (or was it *The Bounce?*) of the *Sugar Plum Fairy*, based on the John Kirby arrangement – Tchaikovsky arranged Charlie Shavers arranged Liam Byrne! A set of six Ellington songs after the interval put the icing on the cake: Brownfield incandescent on *It Don't Mean a Thing*, Ed Harrison to the fore on *The Mooche*, Byrne sounding oddly Hodges-like for a tenor player on *Mood Indigo* and so on until the final race through *Cottontail*.

All in all, next year's festival is fixed for early February again and the expectation in more of the same!

All in all, next year's festival is fixed for early February again and the expectation in more of the same!

RON SIMPSON

## PETE MORGAN, ART THEMEN, MARC PARNELL, ALASTAIR GAVIN

RUISLIP JAZZ CLUB, NOVEMBER 16TH, 2022

This was wild. It was all Pete Morgan's fault, although everyone was complicit. It says something when Art Themen is the normal one.

Morgan, with his larger-than-life bass to match his imposing Gandalfian persona, was partnered by a stylishly-dishevelled Marc



Art Themen

Photo by Merlin Daleman

Parnell on drums. This was jazz pulled through a hedge backwards and it was all the better for it.

On piano was Alastair Gavin. He committed the cardinal sin of bringing an electric piano, a Wurlitzer no less, to an English provincial jazz club. A club, furthermore, that uses a Conservative Association as its venue. Then, and you can look away now if you're a purist, he scattered a load of pedal effects all over it.

Clearly, this was not going to be another swinging evening of straight-ahead jazz. Don't get me wrong, I love a set full of Hank Mobley, Sonny Rollins, Tadd Dameron and the like. But every now and then someone comes along and reminds you that this music is first and fundamentally about improvisation. The Moment. And these four subversive and unlikely characters gave us plenty of moments to savour.

On paper it looked respectable enough. *All The Things You Are*, *Softly As In A Morning Sunrise*, *Someday My Prince Will Come*. Nice tunes, with charming arrangements. There were a couple of lovely

ballads, and at one point an itinerant blues singer was even invited to inject a bit of mediocrity into the proceedings.

All pretty safe, really. Except nothing, *nothing* was sacred.

Where jazz went wrong was when it lurched into its fusion with rock. The bass locked up tight and became repetitive and solid. Pete Morgan was having none of that tonight, even though the drums looked like a Pink Floyd rig and there was that rogue Wurlitzer. He used his monster sound to kick everything to pieces almost from the get-go and the rest of the band plunged joyously after him.

It wasn't long before we forgave Alastair Gavin for his crime. He turned his miniature air traffic control centre into an incredible array of magical sounds, singing, howling, kicking and grooving. Even when it crackled flatulently during the Mal Waldron ballad *Soul Eyes* it kind of made sense and just added to the utterly gripping nature of the performance.

There was a sax player in the room as well, we should not forget that. If he chose, the clean-headed, heavy-lidded Art Themen could easily have blended in with the generally unsettling look and feel of the ensemble (he is, after all, deft and quick with a scalpel) but there's too much of a twinkle in his eye for that.

As ever, he played very much as an ensemble musician, revelling in the collective explorations and taking no more of the limelight than was musically appropriate. His avant-garde credentials are impeccable and, although he never went completely out to lunch, it was a joy to hear him in a much freer jazz setting than he usually brings to gigs such as Ruislip.

It was bound to fall apart in the end, though. Proceedings almost ground to a halt as the quartet squabbled amiably about which versions of *What Is This Thing Called Love* they should bring to the table. It didn't matter; they just did all of them and none of them and created something all of their own. It came and went much too soon.

STUART MAXWELL

## GET YOUR BLUES FROM THE BEAR

### THE SHUFFLEPACK



### THE SHAKEDOWN BROTHERS



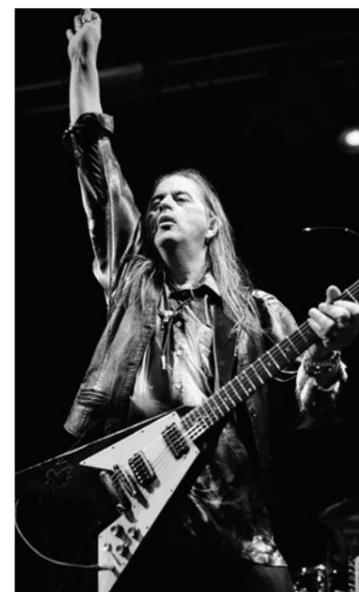
### ROY FORBES' TEXAS RUMBLE



### THE NITECRAWLERS



### JAMIE THYER & THE WORRIED MEN



For bookings call Tim Jennings or Charlie Moore at Big Bear Music on 0121 454 7020 or email [tim@bigbearmusic.com](mailto:tim@bigbearmusic.com) / [charlie@bigbearmusic.com](mailto:charlie@bigbearmusic.com) Big Bear Music Agency PO Box 944, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 8UT

REAL MUSIC – PROPERLY PLAYED

# HENRY'S BLUESLETTER

Difficult as it is to imagine today, but back in the 1970s, it was not totally uncommon hereabouts to encounter American Bluesmen in your local supermarket, laundromat or in the pub.

The reason was that Birmingham-based Big Bear Records, who had discovered and then managed Aston-based blues band Earth, namechanged them to Black Sabbath, taken them to two hit albums and a hit single, and then lost them to a pair of London sharp suits in posh cards, found themselves somewhat disillusioned by the experience.

So Big Bear decided to go back to an earlier love – American Blues.

The European blues boom of the early 1960s had propelled a handful of blues artists to enduring fame – B.B. King, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Freddie King, and the like, but that left a lot of important bluesmen scuffling, playing on street corners, Levee camps and bars for tips and having to take on poorly paid menial jobs outside of music to help scrape a living. We found

Louisiana swamp blues star Lightnin' Slim stoking a furnace at Pontiac automobile plant in Michigan, Doctor Ross, the legendary Harmonica Boss sweeping floors at General Motors in Flint, Michigan, blues harmonica giant Whispering Smith building swimming pools in Louisiana and Washboard Willie driving a school bus in Detroit. Snooky Pryor was playing Chicago clubs night-time and working days as a carpenter, while the legendary Homesick James, who was probably the originator of the blues standard "Dust My Broom" was odd-jobbing, playing on Maxwell Street Market in Chicago and taking whatever gigs he could scrape together.

In 1971 and 1972 Big Bear had arranged tours through UK and Europe and initially had arranged tours through UK and Europe for Canadian harp man The King Biscuit Boy, then with Belzoni, Mississippi-born Eddie Guitar Burns, both backed by fine Birmingham blues musicians.

When a pal of mine bought himself a 10-seater Mercedes



Photo by Jim Simpson

splitter van, it seemed too good an opportunity to let pass, so that became the inspiration for the first of those annual Blues tours.

From January 26th to March 1st, 1973, the first American Blues Legends show, based out of Birmingham, toured Europe appearing before 35,000 people in 33 concerts in 35 days. They visited 10 countries and appeared on three TV and seven radio shows. The internationally distributed album was recorded at the end of the tour. Musicians featured were Lightnin' Slim, Whispering Smith, Homesick James, Snooky Pryor, Boogie Woogie Red, Washboard Willie, plus Birmingham's Roger Hill and Tom Farnell.

Fifty years later, I still find myself amazed and impressed that these guys, who up to the very eve of that tour were

working in the most back-breaking and mundane of jobs, would take to a concert stage in front of an audience of several hundred people, and deliver a performance with a confidence and swagger that suggested that they had never done anything else. They were simply terrific and never let me down. The fact that Lightnin' Slim never had to go back to his day job as a furnaceman still makes me feel good.

Big Bear was to tour and record Slim and Moses Smith, Homesick James and Snooky Pryor again, and it was great to see their reputation building, but it was the thrills and spills of that American Blues Legends '73 tour that remains among my very best memories and which we will be celebrating, 50 years later to the day, the appearance of Lightnin' Slim, Whispering Smith, Homesick James, Snooky Pryor, Boogie



Photo by Jim Simpson

Woogie Red and Washboard Willie at Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham in front of a capacity audience.

The celebration will be at Henry's Blueshouse at Velvet Music Rooms in Birmingham on Tuesday 28th February with The Shufflepack from High Wycombe taking care of business.

## VARIOUS

**JACK O'DIAMONDS: MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES SET 9**

*Matchbox M5SET9, 6 CDs, approx 4 hours 40 minutes*

If the word quaint comes to mind, it's about not about the music in this collection. It's about the liner notes.

They're reproduced faithfully from the original LPs issued in the 1970s. Each one is scholarly and meticulous, documenting the recordings and the relative fame or notoriety of the musicians. They're useful as an archival record, but somehow dissatisfying as an accompaniment to the performances.

It's a curse that has dogged the blues since it became a study of folklorists in the 1920s. People approached the works of these early artists with the same hushed reverence you would bring to a Bach manuscript.

Blessed with a post rock-and-roll mindset, and a much more enlightened understanding of black history, we can take the recordings for what they are: killer, killer blues and folk performances, hammered out in the moment by unschooled musicians who gave full rein to their raw virtuosity.

This is the ninth of the superb reissues of the Matchbox Bluesmaster Series from Saydisc. It's a labour of love for series producer Gef Lucena and he's given the world's blues fans a priceless gift.

In this six-CD set we wander from Mississippi to Georgia, Texas and Florida and meet

The story of the American Blues Legends '73 is included in the Dirty Stop Outs Guide to 1970s Birmingham book written by my brother Ron and myself and is packed full of rare photography and memories.

The Dirty Stop Outs Guide to 1970s Birmingham is available from all good

blues singers, songsters and folk singers of every kind and ability. Our guides are the folklorists working for the US Library of Congress, including John, Ruth and Alan Lomax and Zora Neale Hurston. Theirs was a worthy mission: to preserve the black culture that was fast being absorbed into modern America. In doing so, they managed to create a body of work that took on a life of its own.

These performances might well have gathered dust in a corner of the library had not white collectors 'discovered' the blues and turned it into a study of near-cult status. Well-intentioned and sincere as they were, the purist attitudes they adopted often obscured the real value of the music. The only thing to do is to listen.

There are 101 tracks in this set and a conventional review is meaningless. Each one stands on its own merits. But until you have heard Buster 'Buzz' Ezell crashing through a mind-bending, gut-kicking rendition of Salt Water Blues, you cannot conceive how utterly compelling these recordings are. And its impact is only increased because the recording cuts out, leaving us in a void of visceral excitement.

Booker T. Sapps, Buster Brown, Rochelle French, Hattie Ellis; their immortality is well-earned and a privilege for those of us who can connect with them across the decades, thanks to Gef Lucena and those earnest folklorists. As usual for the Matchbox Bluesmaster series, *Jack O'Diamonds* is an essential addition to any sensible collection.

STUART MAXWELL

bookshops for £17.95 and from the Big Bear Music website for £15.00.

JIM SIMPSON

It's 50 years next month – on February 28th, 1973 – since Birmingham's Digbeth Hall hosted its own landmark gig as the tour reached its climax. Jim/Ron Simpson are

## VARIOUS

**HOME TOWN SKIFFLE: MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES SET 10**

*Matchbox M5SET10, 6 CDs, approx 4 hours 75 minutes*

We've reached the tenth in the unmatched series of Matchbox Bluesmaster reissues and the quality is undimmed. Actually, the quality is patchy, but that's the recordings, not the project.

These Matchbox collections are meticulous and thorough and they make no apology for some of the distinctly odd bits and pieces that nestle in between the timeless gems. They are what they are and they are part of the history and development of our music.

The title of this collection comes from two sides preserved on disc six, *Home Town Skiffle Parts 1 and 2*. They were advertising discs promoting the label and, while they feature key figures like Blind Blake and Blind Lemon Jefferson, they don't really stand repeated listening. Nor yet does Blind Blake's strange rendition of the old musical hall favourite *Champagne Charlie*, or Sonny Jones' contrived take on Blind Boy Fuller's *Dough Roller*.

Still, the legacy preserved here for blues and folk lovers is about as comprehensive a representation of the early days as you could hope for. It's fascinating, bemusing and amusing listening. And, of course, lots of it is fantastic.

Disc four, *Those Cakewalking Babies From Home*, is a superb compilation of recordings by some of the great female singers of the 1920s and 1930s.

set to mark it at their regular Henry's Blueshouse night at the Velvet Music Rooms with leading British blues band The Shufflepack from High Wycombe, which falls on Tuesday, February 28th, 2023 – 50 years to the day that the American Blues Legends tour appeared in Birmingham.

Lucille Bogan and Memphis Minnie are featured alongside lesser-known names like Lulu Jackson and Madlyn Davis and there's not a filler among them.

Discs one and two are devoted to Blind Boy Fuller, whose place in the pantheon of blues legends is unassailable. If you're a blues fan, you're now likely to have a lot of these sides in other formats but the original of disc one was among the first to compile Fuller's work. The second of the two discs takes a novel approach in that it traces Fuller's influence on the work of other artists. Buddy Moss, Blind Gary Davis (in his pre-Reverend days) and Brownie McGhee all feature.

On disc three we have John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson, the first Sonny Boy (probably...) and the father of modern blues harmonica. As a harp player, it's impossible to be objective; you hang off every breath. But this is a collection of extra quality because it showcases Sonny Boy as an accompanist as well as a front man. Classics like *Decoration Day* and *Honey Bee* are complemented by Yank Rachel's gorgeous vocals on *Army Man Blues*, *Worried Blues* and others, with Sonny Boy riffing inimitably in between.

There's one annoying thing: the picture of Sonny Boy in the booklet is actually of Sonny Boy II. It happens all the time, but it never fails to irritate me. Mind you, Rice Miller, or Aleck, or whatever his real name was, would have loved it.

Minor quibbles apart, if you have any love of the simple yet elusive magic that is the blues, you have to make room for this set.

STUART MAXWELL

## HENRY'S BLUESHOUSE AT VELVET MUSIC ROOMS

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

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Weighing in at 3+ kilos and hard to handle, this is the Tyson Fury of jazz books. An imposing 750 pages long, crammed with pictures, its 35 chapters are replete with comment, opinion, and facts. And yes, I do mean facts. The fruit of ten years of exhaustive research with every flam and paradiddle of Phil Seamen's heady (if curtailed) career documented, this vast compendium was considered too risky for your every-day publisher, so first-time author Dawn has had to bankroll it himself. So quite an undertaking and at £45.00 a pop plus P&P (while stocks last) quite a weighty outlay too. Happily, this has not proved a barrier to sales thus far and I understand that at press time, some 150 copies had been sold and there are enquiries for more.

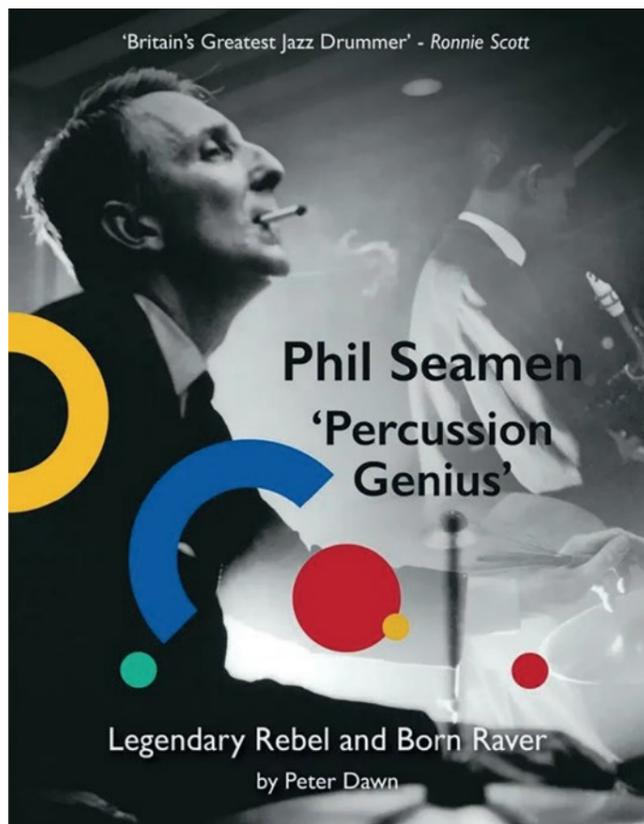
That front-cover encomium from Ronnie Scott says it all: 'Britain's Greatest Jazz Drummer.' No ifs or buts. Unequivocal. For Scott, read Tubby Hayes, too. The praise for Seamen is unstinting throughout the book, whether from his modernist contemporaries, his peers, or more prosaically, from local dance band players and aspiring amateurs. Critics, too. There's a palpable sense of awe permeating these pages. How could this essentially self-taught ex-brewery worker have attained such technical capability and at the same time, achieved a reading level that enabled him to walk into orchestral sessions as a first-call player? Or to be the obvious choice to play in the pit for *West Side Story* as well as being at one with Joe Harriot's 'free-form' jazz?

Whole chapters are devoted to Seamen's technique, his unprecedented adoption of the matched grip for his sticks, now common but then considered frankly wrong, and to his approach to teaching and the percussion exercises he devised for his students.

Add in his influence on younger players, many from the rock world, notably Ginger Baker and Charlie Watts (who contributed an affectionate foreword), let alone the myriad jazz drummers who sought to work out what made Seamen swing. Running through this entire vast narrative, above all, is Seamen's generosity of spirit, despite his many calamities, paralleled by his insatiable musical curiosity, and desire to play. Humour too.

Like his subject, author Dawn is from Burton-on-Trent and brings a topographical awareness to the street scape in which Seamen grew up, having followed his father into the brewery, while always looking for the chance to bring his drums out and play. Dawn has tracked down his friends, and recorded even the tiniest of details of their boyhood encounters, caught up as they were in Phil's personal slipstream as he made his way in and out of the club and dance bands of his neighbourhood. Born in 1926 and a drummer from age 14, Seamen's early years took in cabaret jobs, a summer season and a first 'name' band engagement with Nat Gonella in 1945, plus a period with Joe Loss before his immersion in the London jazz world. He had already starred with Jack Parnell's big band – their paired drum routines were a sensation – but along the way succumbed to the jazz scene's worst scourge, that of drugs, heroin in particular.

From there on, as a fellow musician later observed, 'Phil had a talent for addiction', not to say a compulsion, whether it was for mainlining heroin, popping pills, or drinking industrial quantities of alcohol. Sensible enough to know that his fate lay in his own hands, Seamen made a few attempts to reform, but drifted back, saying, 'I just love the stuff. I'm a victim of my own choices.' It led his marriage to fail and denied him the chance to go to the US with the Ronnie Scott band when he was intercepted at Southampton and banned from travel – a setback that he regretted for the rest of his time. Dawn devotes a substantial passage to an examination of Seamen's patterns of addiction and of course cites his unreliability and



self-destructive lifestyle, even as he continued to pass through the ranks of the most prominent British modernist bands of the day. Later there were periods with Alexis Korner and Georgie Fame as musical tastes changed and then came the final tragedy, when Seamen died in a senseless railway accident when 'out if it'. Aged just 46.

If Dawn's text is straight-ahead in tone and intention, no matter, even if tighter copy editing might have improved it, curtailing repetitions and eliminating some minor errors. The selected discography is helpful, although Dawn details much of the data in the body copy as he does the various day-by-day engagements performed by the many and varied ensembles graced by Seamen, this even including ticket prices. All grist to the Seamen mill, I guess. The bibliography is outstanding; he has trawled every source possible, printed or oral, and provides detailed references and timings for his myriad personal interviews. There's also a separate chapter making the argument for Harriot's pioneering role in the development of 'free' jazz.



The former *Melody Maker* writer Chris Welch, himself a drummer, who helped Dawn with the editing process tells me that the book was set to be even longer. Oh well. For now, this is an extraordinary achievement and an exceptional tribute to the man who lived the ultimate jazz life. Yes, a 'legendary rebel and born raver' but undeniably 'Britain's Greatest Jazz Drummer' too.

PETER VACHER



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