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ART THEMEN, caught out by photographer MERLIN DALEMAN at the BIRMINGHAM JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL. Over the years Art has been one of the most frequent, as well as original and popular, artists at the Festival which is featured in BIG BEAR AT 55 (pages 16-18).

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UPFRONT

On pages 16-18 of this magazine you will find memories of 55 years of Big Bear Music, founded in 1968 as Big Bear Records, now the oldest independent record company in the UK. Next year the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival, part of the Big Bear group, celebrates its 40th anniversary.

The Birmingham festival has gone through many different forms and the wonderful array of American musicians who graced its early days (Miles Davis, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Clark Terry, Red Holloway, Hal Singer, Nat Pierce and the rest) are no more, but Birmingham still puts on almost 200 events, mostly free, in some 80 venues – not bad going!

A competitor in the oldest British festival, Brecon Jazz, has also fought its way nobly through unforeseen difficulties and can claim to be the oldest, reaching 40 years in 2023, but, with various years left blank, can't challenge Birmingham as the oldest *continuous* jazz festival. Mind you, even that can't touch Monterey at 66 and Newport, coming up to 70, though not all in Newport.

And next year is the most marvellous anniversary of all. In May Marshall Allen of the Sun Ra Arkestra turns 100!

JAKE LEG ON THE ROAD

Jake Leg Jug Band's album launch at Velvet Music Rooms in Birmingham on December 1 has been moved down Broad Street to O Bar. Other December dates for the band include the Worcester Christmas Fayre (3 – lunchtime), Carlisle Jazz Club (7), the Queen's Tap, Swindon (8), the Walnut Tree, Blisworth (10 – lunchtime) and Der Engel, Leek (31). January kicks off with Jazz-a-Matazz, Coventry (7) followed by Leeds Jazz Club at the Mainline Club (9), Ye Olde Rose and Crown Theatre Pub (13), Dove Jazz Club, Dove Holes (20) and Romanby Jazz, Swing and Cabaret Club, Northallerton (31).

www.thejakelegjugband.com

RAH CHRISTMAS

Highlight of Christmas at the Royal Albert Hall is the eighth successive edition of Guy Barker's Big Band Christmas on December 20. As always he has assembled big band, orchestra and a splendid succession of guests: Clare Teal, Tommy Blaize, Vanessa Haynes, Joe Stilgoe, Giacomo Smith and Flight Call.

Also part of the Christmas celebrations are Jamie Cullum with

Pianist at Christmas (8), Gregory Porter (13) and La La Land in Concert (27), while the Late Night Jazz series in the Elgar Room continues with the Mario Bekune Band (7) and Jazz at the Movies (14).

RONNIE SCOTT'S AT CHRISTMAS

From the EFG London Jazz Festival to Christmas! Ronnie Scott's main Christmas show is Ray Gelato and the Giants (December 18-23), with, after the Christmas Eve/Day closure, Liane Carroll offering Cold Turkey lunch and evening of Boxing Day. December otherwise is dominated by a whole sequence of Christmas lunches with the All Stars! January features include Cleveland Watkiss' Great Jamaican Songbook (6), Elaine Delmar (Sunday lunch -7), Bird with Strings with Gilad Atzmon and the Sigamos String Quartet (11) and the Simon Spillett Quartet playing Tubby Hayes (Sunday lunch-time – 14). Ruby Turner does two nights (22-23) and the Andrew McCormack Trio with Denys Baptiste is there for one (27) before Curtis Stigers settles in for a week (29-February 4).

www.ronniescotts.co.uk



SOUTHPORT AT THE GRAND

Southport Jazz Festival (February 2-4) offers a nicely-balanced festival over three days at the palatial Grand in Lord Street, three events a day, with a fourth on Saturday. Dean Masser's Salute to Dexter Gordon, Matt Carmichael and the Swingtime Big Band are the Friday attractions, Jez Murphy's big band with two star singers, Matt Ford and Emma Holcroft. Saturday welcomes the Wigan Youth Jazz Orchestra, the Gaz Hughes Trio, the Clare Teal 4 and the Elliot Henshaw Band, with the final

day's attractions Mike Smith's Quintet with Jamie Brownfield, TRYPL and the Joe Stilgoe Trio.

www.visitsouthport.com

11TH YEAR OF LIVERPOOL

Hope University's Capstone Theatre is the venue for the 11th Liverpool Jazz Festival, with five concerts in four days: Tomy Smith/Gwilym Simcock (February 22). David Helbock Austrian Syndicate (23), Attuned Quartet (24 – matinee), Yolanda Charles Project (24 – evening), Denys Baptiste with Late Trane (25).

www.capstone.hope.ac.uk/jazzfestival



PIZZA EXPRESS CHRISTMAS REVELS

The Pizza Express in Soho has a remarkable December programme, with Christmas treats alongside outstanding jazz. The last days of November anticipate the fun to come, with the Mark Nightingale/Alan Barnes Sextet (28) and three shows by legendary trumpeter Eddie Henderson (30 and two shows on December 1).

Chris Ingham figures large on the early December programme, with Jazz at the Movies (3) and a series on lunch-time concerts (4-8) where his Dean Street All Stars play host to a guest star a day: Alan Barnes, Ben Holder, Jo Harrap, Joanna Eden and Denny Ilett. Meanwhile Antonio Forcione takes over the evenings, either solo or with his trio. Claire Martin takes the stage on 9-10 with Freddy Gavita before the Clare Teal Four embark on another lunchtime series (11-15), with the likes of Sammy Rimington (13) taking over the evening slot.

Then it's the turn of Acoustic Alchemy to return for their always popular Christmas slot (16-23) before Tipitina make sure patrons start the year right with their New Year's Eve Party – and what better way to start than seven nights of Scott Hamilton (January 1-7)?

www.pizzaexpresslive.com

VENTURE AWAY

Recently Venture Away announced that the company was ceasing its Jazz Weekends and concentrating on Rock'n'Roll Weekends for 2024. Such was the response that they have decided on one final (or not final if the demand's sufficient) Jazz Weekend. September 27-30 is the date, the venue Sandford Holiday Park, near Poole. As well as seven rock'n'roll bands, the weekend offers jazz from the Jive Aces, Baby Jools and the Jazzoholics, the Golden Eagle Jazz Band, John Maddocks' Jazzmen and Jeremy Huggett's Jazz and Boogie Band.

www.ventureawaymusicweekends.co.uk

BUXTON 2024

Having pulled off the coup of booking Wynton Marsalis in 2023, Neil Hughes has a lot to live up to at Buxton. Preliminary announcements for Buxton International Festival (July 4-21) are promising, with five operas plus two appearances by Carlos Acosta scheduled along with the regular features of an opening Jazz Weekender and further concerts through the ensuing fortnight. Among the jazz bookings are Adrian Cox's New Orleans Social Club with his quintet, strings and Tommy Blaize, Alan Barnes, Deschanel Gordon, Ubunye, Zoe Rahman, Nearly Dan and Ian Shaw.

www.buxtonfestival.co.uk



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Jazz Steps are concluding their excellent Autumn programme of a monthly concert at the Bonington Theatre, followed by the same band for three nights at local libraries with the Luke Bacchus Quartet's Windrush Celebration (December 7) and Tony Kofi's Tenor Legacy at Beeston Library (11), Worktop Library (12) and West Bridgford (13).

www.jazzsteps.co.uk

The Stables at Wavendon are going steady on the jazz content during December, with the Christmas demands of *Hansel and Gretel*, but Alec Dankworth presents The Dankworth Family Christmas Show on December 9 and musical courses (everything from concertina to melodion!) continue. Karen Street brings L'Esprit du Jazz to the Mancini Forum on Sunday morning (17), followed by Ben Holder on January 21. January ends on a positive note with the Jive Aces (28)

www.stables.org

Eastleigh's Concorde Club tends to give December over to Christmas celebrations, with the appearance of the Clare Teal Seven (November 29) the last of the Wednesday nights for 2023. They resume in March with the Pasadena Roof Orchestra (6), Georgina Jackson's Sass and Brass (13) and the Temperance Seven (20) kicking things off. Before then look out for a special Night of Blues 'n Boogie (January 12), with Neal Richardson, Stompin' Dave and Lucy Piper, and Zoe Schwarz Blue Commotion.

www.theconcordeclub.com

Wakefield Jazz's Friday nights for the year come to an end with Emma Johnson's Gravy Boat (December 1) before the club does the unthinkable – deserts Friday for a Sunday Christmas Party (16)!

www.wakefieldjazz.org

Leeds Jazz in collaboration with the Howard Assembly Room have just launched a new series of Sunday afternoon concerts in the Howard highlighting upcoming local talent such as Joanna Myra and Emma Johnson (November 26 – 4.00 pm).

YOUR WEEKLY DOSE OF THE BLUES

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DOT TIME RECORDS

Dot Time Records have two albums on offer. The first pairs trombonist Roswell Rudd and guitarist Duck Baker in a memorable meeting from two decades ago. Baker, with his blues and folk background, blends perfectly with Rudd's free-wheeling improvisation. Summer Changes features legendary vibraphonist Wolfgang Lackenschmid in a series of mostly originals devoted to the changing of the seasons.

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Normal service at Seven Arts resumes with Alina Bzhezhska's Hip Harp (30) and Hejira, Tony Oxley's tribute to the songs of Joni Mitchell (December 14). Sunday lunchtime sessions in December feature Trio JDM (3), the 007's (10) and JazzLeeds' Schools show (17).

www.leedsjazz.org.uk

Watermill Jazz in Dorking are taking their regular December break. When they return to the Betchworth Park Golf Club, it's with the Liane Carroll Trio (9), followed by New Focus

The last two of Graham Brook's Tuesday night sessions at Morley Green Club, Wilmslow, feature Phil Shotton's Christmas Big Band (December 12) and Alan Barnes with the Morley Green Trio (January 9).

www.grahambrookjazz.co.uk

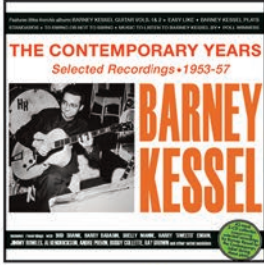


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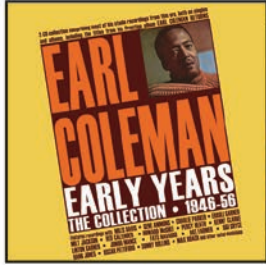
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I GET A KICK OUT OF...

NICK PHILLIPS, producer for Craft Records, has the answers.

What track or album turned you on to jazz?

Although I was already playing trumpet in the jazz band in middle school and learning to improvise, the first album that really got me into jazz was Clifford Brown and Max Roach-- the album with *Joy Spring*, *Daahoud*, and *Jordu* --which I first heard as a freshman in high school. A friend of the family said, 'Oh, you play trumpet? You have to check this out,' and he gave me a copy of the album. I couldn't stop listening to it.

What was the first jazz gig you went to?

While in middle school, I attended what I'd call a 'gateway' jazz concert--Chuck Mangione playing with a full orchestra at the Greek Theatre in Berkeley, California. I was blown away by the power of the ensemble and the arrangements.

What is your favourite jazz album and why?

I can't say that I have a favourite jazz album. It really depends on

my mood at that moment. That said, I find myself returning time and time again to *Relaxin'* with the Miles Davis Quintet album on Prestige Records. I love the way the rhythm section--Red Garland, Paul Chambers, and Philly Joe Jones--plays differently behind each soloist. And I love that we hear Coltrane pushing to find his voice and Miles' nuanced playing with a Harmon mute in his trumpet bell for most of the album.

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

The next one! But seriously, that's impossible to answer. There have been so many. I've been playing jazz trumpet for 48 years and I've been working in the jazz industry for more than 35 of those years. I've heard countless live performances as well as had the privilege of being in the recording studio for numerous recorded performances. I'm often amazed that, after all this time, attending live jazz

performances continues to inspire me. That's the power of restless creativity and spontaneity heard in jazz.

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

Probably Herbie Hancock at the Monterey Jazz Festival back in September of this year. His 'in the moment' creativity continues to amaze me.

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

Well, this response is both biased and a shameless plug, but I'm really excited about the Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach 3-LP collection *Hot House: The Complete Jazz at Massey Hall Recordings* that Craft Recordings will be releasing this month. I've been working on this project for quite some time, and in that process, I've listened to the music countless times. I still get excited

every time I hear these recordings of these five jazz masters spurring each other to new heights, fueled by an enthusiastic live audience.

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

John Coltrane. Not only because of his musical genius and the way he continued to stretch and search for something greater than himself in his music, but also because of the kind and gentle human being he seemed to be. It would be fascinating to sit down and have a conversation with him about music and life.

In addition to his work as record producer, Nick Phillips is a celebrated recording artist and President of the California Jazz Conservatory.



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Guy Barker's Big Band Christmas

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Wed 20 Dec



LAST MAN STANDING (ALMOST)

DAVID ROSE of MUSIC INN jazz record shop in Nottingham acknowledges that he is one of the last in a once prosperous trade, but that is not going to stop him carrying on. RON SIMPSON paid him a visit.

Music Inn, just up the slope from Old Market Square, is in Nottingham's oldest arcade, the West End Arcade, built in 1927, but, on turning into it, you hit a surprise at once: half way up a grille cuts off the upper arcade. No doubt David will explain. First of all a brief history of the firm.

David's great-grandfather started the business in Alfreton Road in 1919, selling mainly instruments and sheet music, though David is at pains to show me a 1924 photograph with four 78s in the window. His great-grandfather was a master of the mandolin and the business grew out of his giving lessons. Becoming irritated at the number of strings he had to replace, he decided to sell them at a small profit – and that's how it started. He lived with his family above the shop. He was a composer, too, with a few sheet music hits: 'we still have the original lead plates he used

to print his music and the baton with which he conducted his mandolin orchestra.'

Fast forward to 1960...

'My father Eric came into the business in 1960 and changed the name to Music Inn in the 1960s – a bit more trendy than Sanders Papworth Music Company – and turned it more into a record shop. Because he was interested in jazz, he specialised in that, but it was still a general record store. I joined from school in 1970 and we were still going great guns, then everyone started stocking records – supermarkets, garages, you name it. So we began to specialise more in jazz and big bands.'

However, in the early 1970s, a change of fortune opened up a new world for Music Inn. Stan Kenton wrote to all the record shops to ask if they would stock his records as he was starting his

own label. Apparently Eric Rose was the only one to reply and took five copies each of the five albums Kenton was bringing out. By the time he had paid customs duties and purchase tax he was horrified to find the albums would cost £2.70 each, but he took an advert in *Jazz Journal* and in the end sold hundreds. But this was only the start.

'Every time Kenton did a tour we would go round the country selling records. And it was the same with Basie, Ellington, Maynard Ferguson, Buddy Rich and singers like Jack Jones. For years we were the only people selling records at concerts. Stan was a lovely man and in the late 1960s, he asked Capitol how many records were in the printed catalogue. They said four. He had made about 40 and he was so incensed he bought back all his masters and set up his own label, Creative World – and that was such a boost for us.

'Whenever Kenton came over, we had a local promoter John Carter, who was a millionaire, and he would contact Harold Davison and put Kenton on in Nottingham. Then we'd go to Halifax, Stockport, Croydon and Ronnie Scott's, a regular circuit. Maynard Ferguson was the next generation. He used to come to a place in Nottingham called Commodore International which was one of those chicken in a basket places. I remember he was supposed to finish at midnight, so he'd start a 20-minute version of *MacArthur Park* at 5 to 12. I was fortunate enough to meet Jimmy Webb a few years later and he said he made a lot of money out of Maynard Ferguson's version.

'I had lunch with Buddy Rich once at a services on the motorway and he came in with somebody from Ronnie Scott's. The waitress came over and asked him what he wanted and



Photo by Ron Simpson

he said, "What's he having?" I was having beans on toast. He said, "I'll have that – without the toast." The waitress couldn't comprehend this, so in the end they had to make beans on toast, then throw the toast away.'

So that's what they mean by a hill of beans!

'There's a photograph of me with Tony Bennett in 1999. Just behind him you can see the clock – 10 to 8. He was due on stage at 8 o'clock, but he was quite happy to stand there with me, sign autographs, then just walk out onto the stage – totally laid back. His son Danny had to stop him touring in the end. When he was about 90, he still wanted to tour, but was finding it too tiring. One of the last things I remember him doing was with Billy Joel at the last show at Shea Stadium and Billy Joel brought him on to do *New York State of Mind* and it's a superb version. He's on great form and that's how I want to remember him. Wonderful voice: they talk of Sinatra and Jack Jones, great singers, but Tony Bennett had that something about him. A lovely man!'

Since the demise of the great generation of bandleaders and singers David kept his hand in for a while by promoting gigs in large local pubs with Scott Hamilton, Harry Allen, Warren Vache, Buddy de Franco and Terry Gibbs. Scott Hamilton is another

to be described as 'a lovely man' and you have to believe it when David tells the tale of a thinnish audience, a loss for the promoters and Scott insisting on being paid £200 instead of the agreed £300.

About 30 years ago Music Inn upped sticks from Alfreton Road and moved to 38-42 West End Arcade, to a bigger shop than the current premises. There David lasted out the compulsory three months closure through Covid, only to be confronted with an unexpected problem. In January this year. The arcade has two owners – one owns the top half, one the lower – and the owner of the top half (whoever he is – David always dealt with an agent) decided he wanted to replace the shops with accommodation and gave everyone a month to leave. Eventually, having stirred up support in the local paper, David got an extension to three months and took advantage of luck and local knowledge to move down the arcade to his present shop which fortunately had just become vacant. The move itself sounds relatively simple – the keys were left for collection at a neighbouring hairdresser's and it was downhill all the way from 38 to 12 – but a Laurel and Hardy-type saga in which Open Reach took three months to connect him to broadband (no credit cards!) means that Music Inn is only just getting on its feet again after the move.

'But we're here – and we're still trading!' is David's comment.

Not that trading is the same as in former years. The shop opens four days a week (Wednesday-Saturday) and footfall is – shall we say? – limited, but increasingly Music Inn does business by mail order: as customers age, they no longer make the journey to Nottingham and many have no internet access, preferring to rely on David's comprehensive printed catalogue and order by email or phone. But, at a time when many record shops are closing or going over totally to mail order, he still prefers to keep the shop as a base:

'It started to occur to me that I was one of the last when I contacted Crazy Jazz in Northampton to buy a CD a customer wanted and he asked me if I still had a shop. I said yes and he said, "Why?" He was trading out of his back bedroom, not keeping any stock, but just listing them on the website. And I realised then I was a bit of a dinosaur.

'My jazz sales through the door are dwindling: a lot of my elderly customers don't like coming into Nottingham and have become mail order customers. I do quite well on my second-hand LPs, but most of my customers can't justify spending £25 or £30 on a new LP when you can get an eight album set on CD for £11. But the youngsters are the ones who are buying the old Sinatra albums on LP and to them it's new. So I'm trying to broaden my range a bit and appeal to the under 70s.'

Without rancour David's conversation often returns to the things that are longer around: no trade distribution to shops for CDs (no shops!), the dwindling club scene in Nottingham. Peggy's Skylight and Jazz Steps still remain, but the small clubs are disappearing. This stirs a memory: as a boy his maternal grandfather ran a garage below the famous Dancing Slipper in West Bridgford, so David would spend his time on the fire escape listening to Ken Colyer and his like – and not having a clue who they were.

On 2019 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the business local radio interviewed David. Finally he was asked how he saw the future of the business:

'The only way I can describe it is the business is sitting on an ice floe which has broken off the ice shelf and is drifting into warm water and all the time the ice floe is getting smaller. I don't see a way out of it: it's OK for now, but we're looking at a younger generation who don't buy CDs.'

And that was before Covid!

Eventually I get round to the million dollar question: is the sort of jazz being put out today the sort his customers want to buy?

'Some of my customers are willing to take a punt on things they have read about – "That sounds like my sort of thing – swinging small group – get me one!" – but the majority are a bit shy of names they don't know. I get a lot of sales from *Jazz Record Requests* on the radio because people listen to that and pick up new names. I don't sell much avant garde stuff – I sometimes read what record companies are putting out and they say the music is discordant, avant garde, improvised and I think, "That's not going to appeal to my customers." Sometimes I put some of this on my list and it's the only thing that doesn't sell.'

So long as record companies continue packaging pre-1963 LPs into multi-album CDs and labels dig out live sessions and radio shots by the likes of Count Basie, Ken Colyer and Doris Day (to pick three from David's list of guaranteed sellers) and talents as diverse as Simon Spillett and Chris Ingham carry on issuing new product, Music Inn will continue. David acknowledges that the golden years are in the past, but the present's not too bad either.

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Photo by Ron Simpson

CAESAR FRAZIER – 50 YEARS ON

In 1972 Hammond organist CAESAR FRAZIER cut the album *Hail Caesar* with the likes of Houston Person. To fans this side of the Atlantic he has been an elusive figure since, pretty much by his own choice. RON SIMPSON delves into his career as his Stunt release, *Live at Jazzcup*, his first live album as a bandleader, draws new attention to him.



Born in 1947 in the Bronx of New York City, NY, Caesar Frazier moved to Florida at a young age and became known as a musical prodigy as a pianist, first working professionally with a rhythm and blues band at the age of 15. After gaining his degree from Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, he moved to Indianapolis where he started his own band. His burgeoning reputation as an organist then brought him a spot in Lou Donaldson's band and that breakthrough recording, not his first, but his first as a leader. Donaldson's influence arranged for his debut album to be recorded by legendary engineer Rudy van Gelder for producer Bob Porter. Caesar told Erik Jensen, writer of the liner notes for *Live at Jazzcup*:

'I flew to New York from a Lou Donaldson concert in Detroit, Michigan, with Melvin Sparks, the guitarist from the band. Here we met Bob Porter and Rudy van Gelder in the studio and recorded the album in one day. We had great musicians like Houston Person on tenor sax and Idris Muhammad on drums. But still I never expected the album to become a classic. Indeed, today it's a rarity that people pay a lot for. I still get emails from people all over the

world who want to buy it, but I've sold my own copies.'

However, rather than developing his jazz career, Caesar's next move was to join Marvin Gaye's band on tour. Does he think this versatility is the reason he has fallen off the jazz radar from time to time?

'Yes! My hiatus from the jazz recording world did take place, but for me the decision was a business decision, borne out the fact that in the US, the business of jazz changed, so I made changes at times to accommodate both making a living and my love for other genres. I grew up hearing and loving numerous genres, so when the shift in the music business occurred, I had no problem using other style interests. Some of the first music that I heard and loved at an early age, was country, blues (the real blues), rhythm and blues and Frank Sinatra with big bands before I heard Jazz.'

However, the love of the organ in jazz persisted, as much as anything because of his regard for one man:

'Early in my life as a teenager falling in love with the organ, it was indeed Jimmy Smith primarily! He is the creator of all

things Hammond organ when it comes to the playing approach techniques that he pioneered. Beyond Jimmy, I listened to Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Larry Young and numerous other players that were all influenced by Jimmy Smith. In fact, Jimmy and Jack among others became friends of mine.'

Caesar explained to Erik Jensen that he first heard Jimmy Smith playing on the juke box in the all-black bar across the street from his home in rural Florida:

'Every night when I was going to sleep, I would lie in my bed and hear the music streaming in through my window over there from the juke joint. I listened to it all carefully. Even to the gospel songs we sang in church. And to the country music they were playing on the white radio stations. Today I'm deeply grateful that I had such a broad musical upbringing.'

Caesar has worked as both pianist and organist. When asked

which he considers himself, his response is emphatic:

'Neither! I consider myself a keyboardist that have a profound love for both the Hammond organ and the piano. Both are my favourite instruments. I have played quite a lot of electronic keyboards over the years as well.'

Despite recording with the likes of Houston Person, Jon Faddis, Idris Muhammad, Melvin Sparks and Billy Wooten, Caesar went on to diversify in many unexpected ways. Having obtained a second degree from Saddleback College in Mission Viejo in California, an associates degree in Radio, Television and Film, he began to make his mark in radio – and not always with a jazz angle. His work on news led to him covering presidential candidates Bill Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot.

After spending two years hosting the talk show, *The Saddleback Forum*, on KSBR, he found himself back in Florida working on



jazz radio stations WLOQ and WUCF as on-air announcer or interviewer. All of this may account for the fact that Caesar Frazier is very little known this side of the Atlantic.

Fortunately in recent years he has founded his own record company, Track Merchant Records, and returned to his jazz roots. In 2020 he released *Tenacity*, with an all-star team of Peter Bernstein, Eric Alexander and Vince Ector. And now, following up on that, Stunt Records have brought out the *Live at Jazzcup* album with Swedish tenor saxophonist Jonas Kullhammer joining the Danish duo multi-instrumentalist Kresten Osgood, here playing drums, and guitarist Johannes Wamberg, an album which should (belatedly) cement Caesar Frazier's reputation in Europe.

In his long career Caesar has relocated to many different parts of the United States, but it seems now he is happily settled back in Florida:

'I have relocated numerous times in my life. Seemingly a sort of nomad. When I've tried to give myself logical reasons for such a life style, I've not been able to

reach any conclusive thought. It seems that most of my career moves were done in pursuit of "the end of the rainbow" career gratification. However, I think that many artist/musicians that I have known personally or heard of, lived a similar lifestyle. Chasing the "end of the rainbow". Being sort of transient seems to fit the character of the artworld. Although in recent years, I've been quite stable. I started my music career in Florida years ago and I will in all likelihood end my career with my homebase being in Florida.'

But if we would like to think of Caesar Frazier embarking on a series of straightahead jazz recordings, we had better think again. It's perfectly obvious that his regard for music stretches beyond jazz and his own playing:

'I was and still am very attracted to producing music. That said, when I moved to Los Angeles years ago, my hopes were to become a successful R&B, pop music producer. I had produced recordings on an R&B female singer in Miami and always have been very attracted to the genre. Of course, I always produced my own recordings that included



writing the music, organizing the flow of the production and directing the musicians.'

With regard to the Jazzcup session, Caesar hedges his bets when I say that it's a return to straightahead jazz:

'You're partially correct. I say partially because, my approach and direction is always fluid, that is on the conditions in the business of what's marketable and where my creative emotions are when I conceive a project. I have never been a one dimensional thinker. Keep in mind that I produced and recorded vocal R&B/disco music

as well. Right now I am writing a project to record next year that I intend to be a little more Latin/Fusion influenced. I intend to use an electric bass and more percussion on the project and include perhaps three horns.'

Caesar Frazier is an example of a jazz type that is more common than we like to think, the man with a range of musical/technical/verbal skills and an eye on the market. It may be less romantic than the lone musician resolutely refusing to play anything other than jazz, but it's been a successful and rewarding career path for 60 years.

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THE RETURN OF SOUTHPORT



Jez Murphy

Many of us thought that Southport Jazz Festival was gone for good when a whole sequence of events overtook it: the venue, the Royal Clifton Hotel, was bought by the notorious Britannia chain; the new venue closed for Covid and never reopened as a concert venue; Director Neil Hughes was next heard of making a huge success of Buxton Festival. That January/February date – a time when few festivals are around – seemed to be going begging when, in 2023, it rose up again in a new venue in Lord Street, the Grand, under the direction of the two founder members of the Swingtime Big Band: leader JEZ MURPHY and singer EMMA HOLCROFT. Another member of the band, trumpeter CLIFF RAY was asked to come on board shortly after.

Emma and Jez came up with the answers to Jazz Rag's questions.

First of all, how did their love of jazz start?

Jez first..

I was born into a musical family, my grandad (who I unfortunately never got to meet) was a trumpet player and ran a big band in the war years entertaining workers and playing for dances on Friday and Saturday evenings. My mum is a highly accomplished piano player and played for the local singers and choirs in the St Helens area when she was young. Dad was a huge Nat Cole, Perry Como and Matt Monro fan and so we'd have this music playing in the house alongside his love of brass and military bands. I started playing

baritone horn from the age of 9, mainly because the music service had run out of trumpets. I soon took up trombone alongside it and by my late teens I had pretty much ditched the Euphonium and was playing in local big bands – this gave me the most pleasure. Maybe it's in the genes following on from my grandad but I always wanted to run my own band and hence Swingtime being formed once I'd got my 'socialising' years out of the way.

....and now Emma

I've been surrounded by jazz music all my life: with my dad's love of Tony Bennett and my mum's love of Hollywood musicals I was hooked.

I started singing professionally with a function band and later with a nine piece swing band called Manhattan. I formed my own band 'The Emma Holcroft Quintet' and sang songs from the Great American Songbook in smaller clubs and festivals. I was one of the founder members of Swingtime and have been their resident singer for the last 11 years.

As well as singing, I work in local schools with Wigan Music Service who work incredibly hard to promote music to the next generation, encouraging children to play, sing and learn to appreciate music. I'm in the process of setting up outreach projects to promote music in local primary schools, and concerts for people who are not normally able to attend the festival. Cliff and I are also working with the SKY music hub to encourage children from secondary

schools who play in The Sefton Youth Jazz Orchestra to have opportunities to perform with other jazz ensembles.

I now spend my time balancing singing, teaching, looking after my chickens and preparing for the next Southport Jazz Festival in February 2024.

Moving on to the joint questions...

When did Swingtime start and what are the highlights since then?

It was formed in 2012 originally as a 12 piece swing band but I soon realised that I wanted it to be a full big band so I scouted around to find the most suitable musicians and it went from there. We performed our first gig as a big band at Wigan Jazz Club. The band quickly became very popular with audiences.

We have had the opportunity to work with many guest musicians even before appearing at Southport festival. From 2015 we started collaborating with legendary vocalist and big band leader Andy Prior resulting in many sell-out shows. Other guests have included Pete Long, Mike Lovatt, Georgina Jackson, Ian Shaw, Guy Barker and Louis Dowdeswell among others.

In 2017, Swingtime made its Southport Jazz Festival debut featuring Clare Teal alongside Emma Holcroft. It proved to be a very popular event and every year that the festival has taken place since has featured us with a different guest artist on the opening night. After Clare came Matt Ford and Joe Stilgoe, each

performance special in its own way. As it proved to be such a winning formula we decided to keep the opening night as big band night and we were delighted to welcome Liane Carroll as our first guest of the new incarnation of the jazz festival.

What made you decide to renew the old Southport Jazz Festival on very similar lines?

When we were approached by Neil Hughes, the previous festival director, to take over after his departure we didn't really have to think about our answer for very long. We had made so many great memories over the years thanks to Neil and had the opportunity to work with the most incredibly talented people that we just couldn't say no.

We had put on many shows of our own over the years so we already understood what is involved in promoting live music events. We were able to use our own successful experiences and we were also fortunate to be able to draw on the knowledge of previous directors, Neil Hughes and Geoff Matthews, who have always been very generous with their time and support.

Southport as a town is changing, like a lot of towns some retail is closing and is being replaced with really top quality hospitality venues. This is bringing new people into the town and from 2026 there will be the brand new lakeside theatre and events centre. This brings with it the opportunity to stage other events throughout the year.



Emma Holcroft and Liane Carroll

What were the problems in setting up the new Southport Jazz Festival?

Our first job was to find a new venue. For years the festival had been held at The Royal Clifton Hotel but we thought that we would take the opportunity to find somewhere new for our first outing as directors and the opportunity arose to host right in the centre of town at The Grand on Lord Street. It is an historic building that had recently undergone a 4 million pound transformation turning it into the finest venue in Southport. It has a stunning art deco look and lends itself perfectly to what we do.

The venue proved to be a great fit for the festival and we are happy to say that the next festival will be held there too. We're glad to say that we haven't faced problems as such its just been an exciting learning journey, one we've really enjoyed so far and long may it continue.

What did you learn from the experience?

Personally we have learned a lot about each other as colleagues and that it is fun to work together. We work really well as a team having very different strengths and skills which when combined cover most of the bases. We decided early on that having another viewpoint would be useful.

We were very lucky that our friend Cliff agreed to get involved. He brings a real understanding of the festival from the musician's point of view and has worked closely with many of the artists himself.

Finally, we have learned that the public are lovely but with jazz being such a diverse art form, you will never please everyone all the time and we hope that by trusting our instincts we can create a festival that gives all of our guests an enjoyable and memorable weekend.

So far, what have been the highlights?

The main highlight has to be the support we've received. This is from our very loyal attendees, who came out in great numbers, to the people, businesses, and local authority of Southport. Times are tough at the moment.

However we have received great support, resources and logistical help from Sefton MBC and lots of local businesses and people keen to see the festival develop and hopefully grow over the coming years. Standing back and seeing a huge crowd of people smiling and enjoying what you've created is the best feeling and drives us on to keep doing it. The feedback from the artists too has been fantastic. We have tried to make performing at Southport one that people enjoy and we're sure that experience will be talked about and make other artists keen to want to appear with us.

Another highlight for me was my school choir having the chance to open the festival singing *It Don't Mean a Thing* accompanied by Cliff on trumpet and the fabulous Liane Carroll on piano and vocals, an experience that they will never forget.

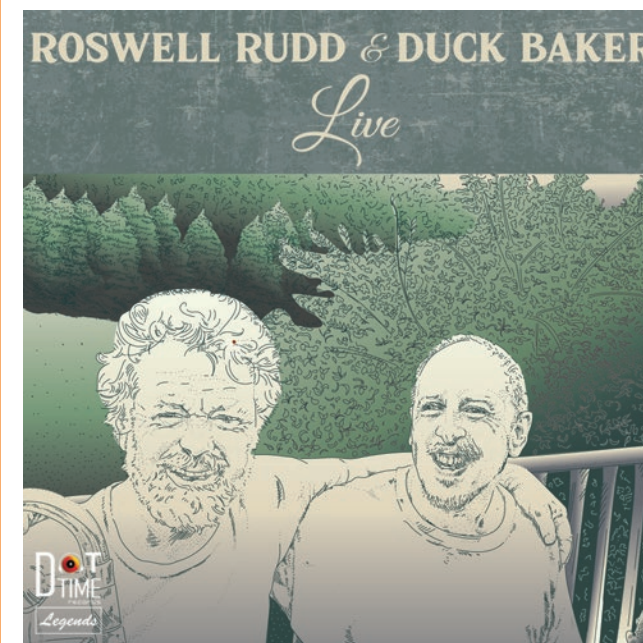
Apart from Southport, what gigs do Swingtime and Emma play in a year?

2023 has been a quiet year for Swingtime, I think a lot of that is down to us having the time to create, promote and sell events as well as organising the jazz festival and doing our day jobs. It's something that's very much at the forefront of our minds as the band is too good not to be heard and so 2024 will hopefully see the band out a lot more. It's unusual for a big band to just be 'bought in' we've found that historically most of the shows the band has performed have been our own ideas and creations and we've been very fortunate in that the vast majority have been very successful. It felt like the 2023 jazz festival had only just finished and we were on with organising 2024! Emma performs as a solo artist, duo or with a quartet or quintet. These things take a lot less effort to sort and so she manages to keep busy with these steadily throughout the year.

Southport Jazz Festival runs from February 2 to 4, 2024, with Swingtime and Emma joined by Matt Ford for the opening night finale.

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BIG BEAR AT 55

Jazz Rag is prone to respond to anniversaries and, if 55 is not the roundest figure, it's certainly a notably high one to achieve in the music business. In October 1968 Big Bear Records' first release, *Rudi the Red Nosed Reindeer* by Steam Shovel (aka The Locomotive) made its debut to an unsuspecting public.

First of all, who/what is Big Bear? Having spread its wings to become Big Bear Music, it's Big Bear Agency, Big Bear Records – the longest established independent record company in the UK –, Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival, Henry's Blueshouse (Tuesday night blues at O Bar in Birmingham, promotions elsewhere and a weekly Henry's Bluesletter) and, of course, *Jazz Rag*. It has, at different times, been responsible for managing Black Sabbath and many other Midlands-based groups, touring and recording American blues men, both individually and in American Blues Legends tours, running the British Jazz Awards and organising festivals elsewhere, notably in Marbella.

So, to celebrate the 55th birthday, we thought we'd look back at some of the adventures enjoyed (or, possibly, endured) by Big Bear over the years. The words mainly come from company director Jim Simpson's memoir, *Don't Worry 'bout the Bear*.

The formation
The Birmingham band Locomotive (Jim Simpson as trumpet player and manager) had had a hit with Rudi's in Love and, as is the way of such things, split before the next release between Norman Haines' doomy Mr. Armageddon and the far more cheerful Rudi the Red Nosed Reindeer. The result, ultimately, was the end of Locomotive, but in the meantime, with a fully mastered single by Locomotive, Simpson decided on a name change and the creation of his own record company – Big Bear.

So what was I to do with a finished master-tape? The logical way forward was to form a record company and release the single. I floated the idea to David Betteridge, the head of a leading independent record label, Island Records. He liked the record and offered me a straightforward distribution deal. I gave his offer my serious consideration for probably five seconds – and we were in business!

The first thing we needed was a name for the label. I had learned

from several sources that the broadcaster John Peel had a party piece where he adopted a bear-like shamble which he fatuously claimed was an approximation of my gait and referred to me as the Big Bear from Birmingham. Actually I had always had a soft spot for bears and in fact counted among my closer male friends a Himalayan Sun Bear who lived in Dudley Zoo and was known to me as Gene Sedric.

It was a done deal; Big Bear Records it was. For the time being *Rudi the Red-Nosed Reindeer* was its only release, but Big Bear was launched on its career of 50 years and counting. With Christmas 1968 looming, I quickly needed a logo, so I turned to John Creasey and Associates, a classy design company in Birmingham, and paid £25 for a design. That bear looked somewhat familiar, I thought, but maybe that was a good thing.

So, in October 1968, Big Bear Records' first release, *Rudi the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, billed as by Steam Shovel, saw the light of day. It carried the number TR 635 of Trojan Records, a subsidiary of Island, as there had been no time to create and integrate a new numbering system into the Island Records catalogue.

The single was rushed out in time for Christmas and enjoyed a few radio plays, though we lacked the high-powered plugging of a Tony Hall. Nevertheless we sold a respectable 4,500 units in the UK and subsequent annual Yuletide re-releases grossed over 18,000, a good return on the small initial investment.

However, the most striking response came from a London-based lawyer representing no less than the Walt Disney Corporation. They were concerned that our bear bore more than a passing resemblance to their Baloo the Bear which, with hindsight, I can see was a perfectly reasonable observation. So I went back to John Creasey clutching Walt's missive, only to be told that, yes, they had based their creation on

Baloo, but they had added extra hairs to avoid any infringement of copyright, so I was not to worry. But with Walt's demand that I "cease and desist" ringing in my ears, that is exactly what I did. The replacement logo – the work of a different designer – has served Big Bear Music well for 50 years with no hint of intervention by film studios or movie moguls.

Melly breaks ranks
The Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival, coming up to its 40th year, has seldom had any trouble with the police (or vice versa), but there was one night when George Melly acted out of character.

It was on the Melly night that the police were summoned by the girlfriend of a young man who had approached Gorgeous George to ask for his autograph. George had asked if he had something to rest on while he signed, so the chap handed over his wallet which George promptly trousered. No amount of persuasion, reasoning or threats could persuade Melly to release the wallet. The young man was getting more frantic by the minute and his girlfriend made the call. The law arrived in the impressively large shape of a seasoned bobby who asked George to be reasonable and hand over the wallet. To the surprise of everyone in the rapidly growing crowd George began to attack the constable. Perhaps 'attack' conveys a misleading impression. George reached up as high as he could and struck the officer,

ineffectually, half a dozen times on the chest. Clearly not injured in the slightest, the officer drew himself to his full height, towering over George, and simply bellowed, 'How dare you?' which had the desired effect. George apologised, we invited the young couple into the concert as our guests and the constable disappeared into the night, chortling.

This was a one-off blip in George Melly's behaviour in our experience. We booked his band for the Festival many times, usually in the splendid Grosvenor Suite of the Grand Hotel, our favourite festival venue. His shows were invariably sell-outs and he always delivered a fine performance. It has to be said that George was not a particularly good singer – actually, that is being kind. He was, however, extremely knowledgeable about the music, compiled an interesting repertoire, surrounded himself with capable musicians and, above all, had unquenchable enthusiasm and irresistible charm. Jazz was not his only specialised subject: a noted cultural commentator, a respected film and television critic and author, he was particularly distinguished as an expert on surrealism.

When he was invited, as the guest of honour, to open a very serious exhibition on the Harlem Renaissance at the University of Warwick, he asked me to drive him there. It was a most satisfying day. My knowledge of Harlem before that was probably limited to Harlem's Harmful Little



Jim Simpson with the Count Basie Orchestra

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys



Photo by Jim Simpson

Armful, Fats Waller, fellow stride pianists Willie 'The Lion' Smith and James P. Johnson, rent parties, the Cotton Club and the Apollo Theatre. On the journey there George talked non-stop about the literature and art of the 1920s. It was just like watching a television programme, except that at exactly midday he insisted I find him a hostelry where he could have 'a glass of the black stuff' – which turned out to be three glasses! His opening of the exhibition was captivating, though it must be admitted that the return journey became increasingly chaotic,

punctuated by regular pauses at a variety of watering holes.

In truth Melly was one of the great English eccentrics and the worlds of music and art are a lot less colourful now that he has gone.

On the road with KayPees
Big Bear's longest relationship with a band, still ongoing, is with King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys. Their appearance at the Arctic Border Blues Festival involved a visit behind the Iron Curtain to visit Nikel. Organiser David Benton was the main cause of friction, with cancelled dates and crazy plans to smuggle

his girlfriend out of the Soviet Union, but on the final morning the KayPees made their contribution to the chaos.

The schedule called for a 5.30 am departure for the Biscuit Boys' party to get us across the border and into Kirkenes Airport in time to check in at 8.00 am for the flight to Oslo which then connected with our onward journey to London. Not feeling too good after the previous night's excesses, I had yet more reason to curse David Benton and his amateurish organisation when we found that, instead of our rustbox of a 50-seater bus, we were to

be taken to Kirkenes in what was actually a seven-seater – yes, nine of us, our baggage and instrument cases. It wasn't possible to complain to the driver as he spoke absolutely no English.

There was no alternative to finding a way to squeeze our already battered selves into the van and, in doing so, I realised that we were a man short, Piano Man Skan. Now I had been aware for some time of the general ill-feeling towards Skan from the rest of the band, but I had no idea how intense it had become until that moment when Mark told me – and I think he meant it reassuringly – that it was OK, I should relax, they had decided to sack Skan and leave him in Russia.

When Skan first joined the band, his playing wasn't too strong, but he could hold his own musically with a bit of sleight of hand. Furthermore he was a good showman and a decent singer and he looked and behaved as a Biscuit Boy should. The problem was that he didn't work on his technique, as did the rest of the band, and he began to slip behind until it was felt he was hindering the band's development. There were personal issues, too, which in such a small

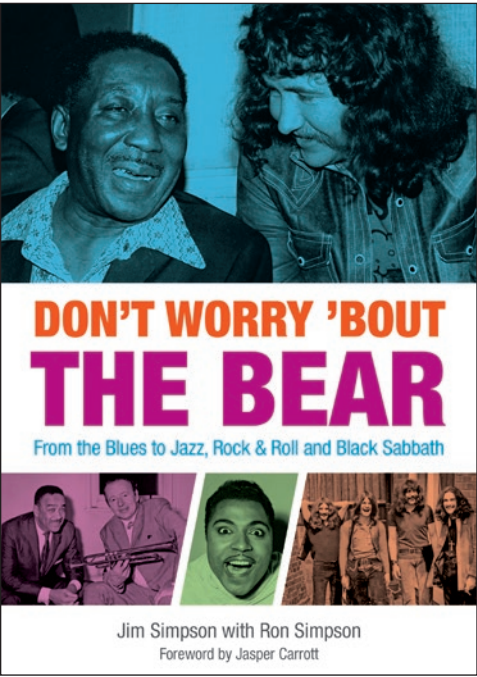
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community as a band just got worse until constant bickering became the order of the day.

So there was Val, who always tried to stay out of the band's business, attempting to reason with half a dozen badly hungover rock and roll hooligans, pre-dawn in a forgotten corner of Soviet Russia as the time to our check-in in neighbouring Norway steadily ticked by. Frankly, I did see the merits of making the grand gesture, though I wasn't sure it was quite fair to take his passport, as Mark had done. I figured that this might get the band into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as the most characterful, colourful sacking ever; on the other hand we might get to feeling pretty bad about the whole thing if this passport-less itinerant piano player found himself slammed up in some gulag or other. So, between us, Val and I managed to persuade P. Popp, always too much the nice guy, to go and retrieve the bedraggled and bewildered Skan.

The next – and, in retrospect, predictable – hitch came when we approached the Russian border and our driver refused to go any closer. It slowly dawned on us that he was trying to tell us that he hadn't the right papers and he could be arrested if he was questioned by a border guard. Accepting the inevitable, and again cursing David Benton, we unloaded the gear and made our way to the border post, where a sleepily uninterested guard did little more than glance at our passports, and then we plodded the mile or so down the road to the Norwegian border.

Which was closed until 8 o'clock.

That scuppered any chance that we ever had of catching our flight and the connection to London. As soon as the border opened, I

borrowed their phone and called the hotel in Kirkenes, insisting that they immediately despatch their courtesy bus to the border post to collect our party and take us to the hotel where we could clean up and have breakfast. I convinced the Duty Manager that David Benton, unavoidably detained in Nikel, had authorised this to be put on his bill. It transpired that there were no other connecting flights to London that day, so we overnighted in an Oslo hotel, flights and hotel on my American Express, and flew out to London a day later than expected.

There is a footnote to this tale of incompetence and misadventure. Two or three years later, when Big Bear was booking the bands and doing the PR for Ronnie Scott's, Birmingham, I had a phone call from somebody who told me that Steve Firman of Kodak International, a particularly good friend of mine, had asked him to phone me. When he told me he was David Benton, I greeted him with something like, 'Benton, you incompetent bastard, you owe me £700 and I want it now!' – that's very much a sanitised version of my response. When my anger had subsided, it began to dawn on me that this was indeed David Benton, but not the one I knew. This one was a personal friend of George Melly who was resident at Ronnie Scott's that week and he was phoning to invite me for lunch with George, Steve and himself – at which I was able to entertain them with the Norwegian and Russian odyssey of the other David Benton.

Marbella Sun
Running a jazz festival in Marbella brought such little inconveniences as working in the shadow of Spain's biggest ever corruption case and with a council still under the influence of the infamous Jesus Gil y Gil (who inconsiderately died in prison on the eve of the Basie



Band concert), but many more compensations such as working with the wonderful Sun Ra Arkestra.

Come the night of the concert and I figured that by then I had become pretty much accepted as one of the gang. Pre-show, sitting in the dressing room, ready to go on stage, just waiting for the end of the intolerably lengthy speeches by local politicians, they unexpectedly asked me to leave the room which I did, albeit a little grudgingly. As I left, I saw them all gathering in a circle to pray. I lurked outside the dressing room, waiting for the cue from the radio producer that the speeches were about to end and the band should make their way to side stage. Suddenly the dressing room door burst open: the prayers had now been replaced with a strange chant and the line of musicians began dancing their way towards me. I quickly decided to let things roll as, quite frankly, I might as well have tried to stop an advance by the entire Sioux Nation. It was beautiful: suddenly the pontificating politicians were surrounded by a chanting, strangely attired mob of musicians, live on radio. They did the only thing possible in the circumstances, they slunk off into the night, leaving the stage to one of the most original

of jazz attractions to deliver a tremendous live broadcast with three encores for which the broadcaster, wisely, stayed on air.

I was sorry to have to wave them off to Malaga Airport the next day. It had been such an enlightening experience having them around. To a man they were co-operative, helpful and patient beyond belief, posing for photographs wherever they went and for an hour after the show. The Sun Ra Arkestra don't always get the acknowledgement they deserve from the Jazz Mafia. One thing is certain, they are all fine musicians; the orchestrations are not straightforward, but the discipline is there and they play them impeccably. Maybe some folk shy away, put off by the nutty background story that was circulated when they first came to notice. Perhaps some were discouraged by Sun Ra's assertion that he was not born on this planet, but came from Saturn, and some media comment, true or not, that there is no record of his birth anywhere in the United States. Maybe not, but they should really be checking out pianist Herman 'Sonny' Blount who recorded with Wyntonie Harris and played with such luminaries as Fletcher Henderson and Coleman Hawkins before changing his name and forming the Arkestra.

Sun Ra died in 1993 and, when his successor, Arkestra stalwart John Gilmore, also died, founder member Marshall Allen assumed the leadership of the Arkestra, a task which, in 2023, he is still doing in exemplary fashion at the age of 99.

Don't Worry 'bout the Bear, by Jim Simpson with Ron Simpson, is published by Brewin Books.



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THE 66TH MONTEREY JAZZ FESTIVAL

By Scott Yanow

Terence Blanchard



Ever since it was founded in 1958 by Jimmy Lyons and writer Ralph Gleason, the Monterey Jazz Festival has been held during a September weekend at the Fairgrounds in Monterey, California. The Jimmy Lyons years (1958-91) could easily be divided into two. The first decade found Lyons booking top jazz stars of all styles, from Louis Armstrong to Ornette Coleman along with plenty of bebop. Three of the most famous performances were not only the hits of that particular year's festival but became well-known recordings: Charles Mingus (1964), John Handy (1965), and Charles Lloyd (1966). In the 1970s and '80s, Lyons seemed to run out of ideas, taking it easy by booking similar groups each year. The festival became more of a yearly reunion party of Lyons' favourite musicians than a cutting edge event.

That all changed when Tim Jackson succeeded Lyons as Monterey's artistic director, sharing the 1991 festival and then taking over in 1992. Monterey once again became very relevant, including both veterans and up-and-coming players with the focus on modern jazz. The number of main stages expanded from two or three to seven and the weekend became a whirlwind of nonstop activity. COVID resulted in the festival being cancelled in 2020 and only having two stages in 2021 but it has since come back and this year featured music on five stages. Because only one

venue was indoors, the festival's hours were earlier than in the past (ending between 9-10 p.m. instead of midnight) but certainly no one felt cheated by there not being enough to see!

This was Tim Jackson's final year at the helm of Monterey, his 33rd festival (if one counts 2020), falling just short of Lyons' 34. The lineup that he put together was quite inspired. Monterey is one of the few American jazz festivals that is actually more than 95% jazz. Other than a very good blues singer (Chris Cain), an enjoyable soul/R&B cover band (Tony Lindsay and the Soul Soldiers), and the completely out-of-place thunderous rock of bassist-singer Thundercat, I heard nothing but high-quality jazz during the entire weekend.

With five stages going on simultaneously, it would have been difficult to see everything, and this year I did not try. I opted to skip the more famous artists who I have seen fairly often (including Herbie Hancock, Samara Joy, Terri Lyne Carrington, and Snarky Puppy) in favour of discovering other musicians and seeing some who rarely come to Southern California.

Before getting to the musicians who made the biggest impressions, here are a few brief mentions of some of the other artists who are probably not all that well known to most British readers. Bassist Zach Westfall started the festival

by leading a boppish quartet that featured standards with altoist Ben Herod hinting at Richie Cole at times. Keyboardist Kait Duncan reminded one of Les McCann a bit with her brand of funky jazz. The trio of violinist-singer Lucie Micarelli, guitarist Leo Amuedo and percussionist Danilo Amuedo played a wide variety of music including melodic jazz, Americana, East European music, folk and some beautiful renditions of classical themes; a rapid *Tico Tico* was a highpoint. Pianist-composer Billy Childs with a quartet that included trumpeter Sean Jones played a set of his inventive originals. The Azar Lawrence Experience, a septet with the leader on tenor, brought back the style of spiritual jazz of the late 1960s/early '70s and was notable for the playing of trumpeter Chris Lowery. Soul jazz was represented by organist Delvon Lamarr's trio with guitarist Josh Perdue while Latin jazz was provided by the four-horn octet accurately called the Latin Jazz Collective, Ray Obiedo's Latin Jazz Project (which included steel drummer Phil Hawkins), and percussionist John Santos' sextet which focused on 1950s-style Afro-Cuban jazz.

Trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire debuted a commissioned piece, "Isakoso Ara," that mostly showcased Malian singer Oumou Sangaré but the modern groove music did not feature the leader or the other three horns very much and became a bit dull. More rewarding although also having an incomplete feeling was a partial retrospective of trumpeter Terence Blanchard's career. Blanchard was in fine form performing music from the Jazz Messengers and the documentary *When The Levees Break* (about Hurricane Katrina's effect on New Orleans) and he had opportunities to interact with the always-fiery altoist Lakecia Benjamin, tenor-saxophonist Ben Wendel, pianist Benny Green, bassist Christian McBride, drummer Kendrick Scott, the Turtle Island String Quartet, and Dianne Reeves. The latter, who is one of jazz's top singers when she actually chooses to perform jazz, was in prime form during her own set. Highlights included *What's New*, a reharmonized *Someone To Watch*

Over Me, and her lyrics to Horace Silver's *Peace*.

When attending Monterey, there are so many opportunities to at least briefly see a wide assortment of top jazz artists that it does get to be a bit hazy after a while but here are a few memories. Pianist/keyboardist James Francies with his trio played high-energy and often free improvisations even on a standard such as *Invitation*, really tearing into the music. Tenor-saxophonist Donny McCaslin, who has often switched to rock in recent times, was back to playing fiery jazz while also emphasizing electronics and fairly simple vamps. Also performing with an electric ensemble was keyboardist Taylor Eigsti (who played passionate Avant-funk with a group that co-starred Ben Wendel) and pianist Kris Davis' Diatom Ribbons, a quartet whose avant-garde music had a major role for Val Jeanty on turntables. In contrast, the duo of vocalist Gretchen Parlato and guitarist-singer Lionel Loueke performed creative music at a low volume (including Herbie Hancock's "Butterfly") while never losing the audience's attention.

There were several groups that did not use piano or keyboards at all. Bassist Christian McBride's New Jawn is a quartet with trumpeter Josh Evans, Marcus Strickland on tenor and bass clarinet (hinting at various times at both Eric Dolphy and Booker Ervin), and drummer Nasheet Waits that displayed the welcome influences of both Charles Mingus and Ornette Coleman. The duo of flutist Ali Ryerson and guitarist Ricardo Peixoto performed pleasing Brazilian jazz. Tenor-saxophonists Ben Flocks (with bassist Corbin Jones and drummer Evan Hughes) and Chris Potter (with bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Kendrick Scott) were both in trios, mixing together standards and originals while expertly contrasting sound with silence. Particularly rewarding was a set by the great veteran tenor-saxophonist and flutist Lew Tabackin who joined forces with trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, bassist Peter Washington, and drummer Lewis Nash, digging into the original *B Flat*, *We're Flat*,

an atmospheric *Desert Lady*, *Black And Tan Fantasy*, and *Body And Soul*.

Some of the key musicians had opportunities to perform in several different settings. Guitarist Jon Scofield, this year's Showcase Artist, first appeared with a wild and somewhat Rock-ish funk quintet called Scary Goldings that also featured keyboardist Larry Goldings; it was quite rollicking. He later led a quartet called Yankee Go Home with keyboardist Joe Cowherd that focused on several country-flavored tunes including "Wichita Lineman" which somehow ended up becoming *The Creator Has A Master Plan* with the guitarist playing some trills that purposely came close to sounding like Leon Thomas' yodelling. Finally, near the end of the final night, Scofield performed a set of solo guitar, utilizing a pedal that recorded and played chords on such tunes as a swinging *There Will Never Be Another You* and a wistful *Here's That Rainy Day*.

While many different jazz styles are explored at Monterey, unfortunately there is generally very little pre-bop jazz. However this year the always-delightful singer Catherine Russell brought swing to Monterey, leading a group that also included guitarist Matt Munisteri, pianist Sean Mason, bassist Tal Ronen, and drummer Mark McLean. She performed such numbers as *Jubilee*, the humorous double-entendre Bessie Smith piece *Kitchen Man*, *You Turned The Tables On Me*, *I Cried For You*, an up-tempo *I'm An Errand Girl For Rhythm*, the saucy *Aged But Mellow* (which really delighted the audience) and *Doctor Jazz*.

The Next Generation Jazz Orchestra, an all-star group of

college players, always performs on Sunday afternoon. This year it was directed by Gerald Clayton. Unlike with the typical stage bands, Clayton had the Next Generation really wailing during stretches where several soloists (and even the entire ensemble) were soloing at once a la the Mingus Big Band. The passionate guest altoist Lakecia Benjamin (one of today's greats) blew the roof off during an up-tempo blues. 90-year old altoist John Handy, who played with Mingus in the 1950s and was the star of the Monterey Jazz Festival 58 years ago, sounded quite good on *The Nearness Of You*, getting a standing ovation from the appreciative audience. Charles Lloyd, the hero of the 1966 festival who is a mere 87, has been quite active despite his age. With Gerald Clayton, Reuben Rogers and Kendrick Scott, he performed a full set of his own that was filled with many warm tenor and flute solos. Lloyd's performance reached its climax with *Forest Flower* which sounded as fresh as when he played it at Monterey 57 years ago.

But even with all of those events, it was up to four very different pianists to provide the most memorable performances of the weekend. The brilliant Benny Green played a full set of unaccompanied solos. Most of his selections were designed as tributes to other pianists including *If You Could See Me Now* (Tadd Dameron), *Come On Home* (Horace Silver), *New York Attitude* (Kenny Barron), and *The Soulful Mr. Timmons* (James Williams). Green's light stride, sophisticated chord voicings, use of space, and melodic improvising were a joy to hear. He showed reverence for his predecessors while adding his own musical personality to the pieces.



Christian McBride

Sullivan Fortner



Connie Han is one of today's top modern pianists, sounding quite original while creating intense statements. Joined by bassist Ryan Berg and drummer Bill Wysake, she played consistently powerful solos. Han tore into *Yesterdays* with dense chords and an unrelenting swing, effortlessly romped on Wysake's complex *Boy Toy*, paid tribute to McCoy Tyner (*For The OG*), turned Stephen Sondheim's *City Woman* into jazz, and also performed a medley of three songs from her recent *Secrets Of Inanna* recording.

My favourite set of the entire festival was put on by pianist Sullivan Fortner who has gained some fame for his work with singer Cécile McLorin Salvant. With colourful accompaniment provided by bassist Tyrone Allen and drummer Kayvon Gordon, Fortner's performance can only be accurately described as wondrous. After playing his theme song (more bands should have one), he displayed dazzling virtuosity that was only matched by his knowledge of jazz history and desire to use the past to create futuristic music. On *9 Bar Tune*, Fortner hinted strongly at Thelonious Monk but played denser chords and took the music to some unexpected places. His rendition of Deford Bailey's *Davidson County Blues* had him sounding like 1920s bluesman Cow Cow Davenport and showed that he is a masterful boogie-woogie and stride pianist, reviving those styles but in futuristic ways. He uplifted a classical piece, performed what he called a deranged version of a Fauré theme, followed it up with a very slow version of Duke Ellington's *In A Sentimental Mood* which became a musical conversation between his two hands, played some joyous bop on

organ during Gary Bartz's *Libra* and performed what must have been the most rapid rendition of *East Of The Sun* ever creating, ending it all with a reprise of his theme song. I would love to see that entire performance again!

Finishing this somewhat breathless piece with an always-entertaining artist who was probably the only European performer at this year's festival, Jamie Cullum played at Monterey as part of a U.S. tour. I have always hoped that the talented singer-pianist would perform much more jazz. At the festival he largely fulfilled my wish. Leading a sextet along with two background singers, Cullum performed his nostalgic *These Are The Days*, a combination of *I Get A Kick Out Of You* and *Groovin' High*, his classic *Twentysomething* (which he recently brought out of retirement), an unaccompanied piano/vocal performance of *What A Difference A Day Makes*, and such crowd pleasers as the gospelish *I Won't Ride Up* and the very infectious "You And Me Are Gone" (which featured Nick Ellman on clarinet). The last few numbers of his set inspired some wild dancing. Cullum, who even stood on and jumped off the piano at one point (a trademark action of his that must be getting a bit difficult for one in their forties), succeeded at driving the crowd to a frenzy.

Darin Atwater, who will be taking Tim Jackson's place in 2024, has some mighty huge shoes to fill.

Scott Yanow has attended 44 of the 66 Monterey Jazz Festivals. His latest book is *Life Through The Eyes Of A Jazz Journalist* (available from www.amazon.com) and he can be reached at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

CLASSIC JAZZ PARTY 2023

Classic jazz at its best is for celebrating, bottom wiggling, foot stomping and joie de vivre. Every year the top interpreters of 'classic jazz' styles (from 1917 to 1940) convene at the Village Hotel near Whitley Bay in north east England to provide this in abundance. The 2023 Classic Jazz Party hosted musicians from the UK, Europe and North America who delivered the intense and exciting performances of 1920s' bands such as the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Charlie Johnson, King Oliver and Paul Whiteman, all faithful to the original arrangements. In addition, the musicians stretched the boundaries of 'classic jazz' to include Caribbean clarinetists, rare jazz films and a 'naughty' set.

On the opening day of the festival, following a *Tribute to Mike* (a set dedicated to the memory of festival founder Mike Durham who died ten years ago) an ensemble led by reedsman Michael McQuaid jumped right on in, creating classic Gennett recordings by the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, leading off with *Eccentric*, followed by numbers by the Original Memphis Melody Boys and Merritt Brunies' Friars Inn Orchestra. Hearing these performances - live and played with stomp and verve - which had been taken from early 1920s' acoustic recordings was a pure joy, demonstrating to the present day audience what the excitement was all about back then.

Later in the evening an ensemble, again led by Michael McQuaid, explored the 1921-22 Gennett and Okeh recordings of Loren McMurray, (the subject of a lengthy Vintage Jazz Mart article by Mark Berresford and Colin Hancock and a Grammy-nominated CD). The musicians meticulously detailed arrangements and solos from these early recordings offered a fresh look at this influential musician.

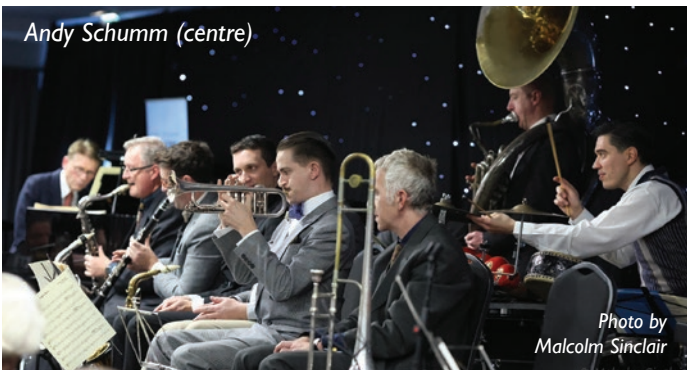


Photo by Malcolm Sinclair

The first day's programme also included classic clarinet trio sessions: Jelly Roll Morton's trio sessions were presented by Morton specialist Andrew Oliver and clarinetist David Horniblow taking the role of, variously, Omer Simeon, Johnny Dodds and Barney Bigard who played on the original recordings. Oliver was Morton on *Wolverine Blues* which was one of the New Orleans pianist's signature pieces and Horniblow was at his best on the Bigard sides such as *That's How it Ought to Be*, originally from 1929. The other clarinet trio session featured Lorenzo Baldasso alongside pianist David Boeddinghaus and drummer Josh Duffee playing the classic 1935-36 Benny Goodman trio sides, including *Avalon*, *Running Wild* and *Body and Soul*.

Other first day highlights included a set of Hoagy Carmichael songs as recorded by Hoagy himself in the late 1920s with Mike Davis on cornet, David Boeddinghaus, piano (playing some of the composer's more ethereal solos), Dan Barrett, trombone, and the reeds of McQuaid and Baldasso; an Eva Taylor-Clarence Williams' programme featuring Nicolle Rochelle singing *I'm Not Worried* and *Baby, Won't You Please Come Home?* from 1929, and an interpretation of *Moanin' Low* from an Eva Taylor-Charleston Chasers' session from 1930; and a swinging Dickie Wells-Django Reinhardt session featuring Dan Barrett's trombone and Félix Hunot in the role of Django.

The opening day concluded with a set titled *Listen to the Doc! Doc Cook's Dreamland Orchestra*. Much of the material came from Cook's 1926-27 Columbia sessions which included Freddie Keppard (Andy Schumm) and Jimmie Noone (Michael McQuaid). Once again it was instructive to hear the



Andy Schumm (centre)

Photo by Malcolm Sinclair

acoustic Gennett recording *The One I Love Belongs to Somebody Else* played live. The Columbia sides were excellently recorded in their day but here at the Classic Jazz Party the musicians raised the roof on *Here Comes the Hot Tamale Man*, *Spanish Mama* and *Willie the Weeper*.

Following a screening of rare film clips of Louis Armstrong from Michel 'Doc' Bastide's film collection, the second day of this year's CJP began with a session recreating bandleader Jack Hylton's earliest recordings from 1920-4, including a hot take on *The House of David Blues*. The day's programme moved on swiftly to mid-40s' Glenn Miller. As Miller went missing over the English Channel members of his Army Air Force Band carried on. Pianist Martin Litton's *Glenn Miller's Small Band - the Uptown Hall Gang* ensemble featured trumpeter Enrico Tomasso, Dan Barrett, trombone and Matthias Seuffert, reeds, performing numbers taken from radio transcriptions featuring Mel Powell's arrangements which included elements of bop in his charts, as evinced by *A Night in Tunisia*.

Michael McQuaid's *Caribbean Clarinets* offered something a little different. Leading a tribute to Caribbean clarinetists Alexandre Stellio and Eugène Delouche, McQuaid's ensemble interpreted songs recorded between 1929 and 1935 with elements of New Orleans' jazz rhythms which were beguine instead of standard jazz 2/4 or 4/4.

Enrico Tomasso tackled the difficult job of recreating Roy Eldridge's intense, rapid-fire upper-register trumpet playing - difficult because Tomasso had to negotiate difficult passages and still sound natural and swinging.

Ellington's 1929-31 Cotton Club period was a burst of creativity, his sound was very distinctive yet firmly in the jazz tradition. Trumpeters Mike Davis, Torstein Kubban and Malo Mazurié took the parts of Cootie Williams, Arthur Whetsol and Bubber Miley. Set leader Claus Jacobi transcribed the original arrangements, Nicolle Rochelle sang and highlights included an extended *Mooche* which followed the original arrangement but left room for additional solos in a medium tempo, rocking blues mood. The ensemble played a number of well-known pieces, including *Old Man Blues*, *Jungle Nights in Harlem* and *Maori* which had a Latin rhythm despite its title.

A Billie Holiday set - *I Hear Music - Billie in the Late 30s* - rounded out the afternoon session. Cia Tomasso's vocals were accompanied by her father, Enrico, as Roy Eldridge.

The centenary of King Oliver's classic Creole recording's opened the evening session which included reconstructions of the unissued Oliver Gennetts - *When You*



Nicolle Rochelle

Photo by Malcolm Sinclair

Leave Me Alone to Pine, That Sweet Something, Dear and a never-record Oliver composition, *Junk Man Blues* with Andy Schumm as Oliver. Torstein Kubban took Louis Armstrong's breaks and second cornet part on *Tears*, taken from a 1923 Okeh recording.

Nicolle Rochelle returned for *Young Woman's Blues*, a Bessie Smith set which, despite its title, mostly featured Bessie's few uptempo numbers such as *On Revival Day*, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* and *There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight*. Rochelle shared the stage with a first rate ensemble, including Torstein Kubban, Claus Jacobi and pianist Morten Gunnar Larsen.

The evening's finale - *Memories of Louis in California* - featured Enrico Tomasso in a set of Louis Armstrong recordings from the West Coast which included *Body and Soul*, *You're Driving Me Crazy* and *Shine*.

The final day of this year's Classic Jazz Party began with a review of

Charleston Chasers' recordings which were hot sides made by top studio musicians of the day, including Red Nichols (Mike Davis and Jan Kaiser), Jimmy Dorsey (David Horniblow) and Tommy Dorsey (Alistair Allan). Mid-afternoon featured a long set by the now neglected Bob Crosby band which, in the late '30s, featured such greats as saxophonist Eddie Miller and trumpeters Yank Lawson and Billy Butterfield. Trumpeter Enrico Tomasso played *What's New?* which would become a standard, and the ensemble got its kicks on *Stomp Off, Let's Go* and, of course, *South Rampart Street Parade*.

Nicolle Rochelle returned for a relaxed set featuring music associated with Maxine Sullivan and John Kirby, followed by Andy Schumm playing arrangements of Fats Waller organ pieces reimagined for full ensemble with Morten Gunnar Larsen at the piano.

Rounding out the day time session was one go the most rousing sets

of the festival featuring Charlie Johnson's 1926-28 recordings when he was a bandleader at the Paradise Club in Harlem. Claus Jacobi assumed the role of Johnson as bandleader; with Nicolle Rochelle as Monette Moore, the ensemble in full cry behind her. Andy Schumm and Jan Kaiser interpreted trumpeters Jabbo Smith and Thomas Morris with Jacobi and McQuaid in the reeds. The band began with *Paradise Wobble*, moving into *Charleston is the Best Dance After All* and some blues sides before ending on a high note with *Walk That Thing*.

The evening session opened with *Let's Get Together - Jabbo Smith's Rhythm Aces* with Jan Kaiser handling the Jabbo Smith parts with Jacobi and McQuaid in the reeds. Spats Langham's set *Listen to the 'Banned'* featured naughty songs by Ukulele Ike and Harry Roy before the 2023 Classic Jazz Party drew to a close with a Paul Whiteman concert. Twenty three musicians crowded onto the stage to present *Sensation Stomp*

- *Paul Whiteman & His Orchestra*. Mike Davis and Andy Schumm interpreted the Bix Beiderbecke material. The set included some hot Ferde Grofé and Lenny Hayton arrangements which Pops never-recorded such as *Clarinet Marmalade* and *Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down*. The ensemble matched the rich, full sound of the Whiteman band with Spats Langham making for a convincing Bing Crosby.

The recipient of the 2023 Classic Jazz Party 'Young Talent Award' was David Hermlin from Berlin. David is an exceptionally talented musician - drummer, singer, tap dancer and more!

Next year's Classic Jazz Party will once again be at the Village Hotel on North Tyneside. The dates for your diary are Friday 1 to Sunday 3 November.

RUSSELL SHOR

JAZZ IN MID ATLANTIC

870 miles due west of Lisbon lie the Azores, a group of nine islands in the mid Atlantic including the island of Terceira. Terceira is and has been for the past 24 years home to Angra jazz. The festival is held each year in the capital Angra do Heroismo, a town of just 34,000, notwithstanding the festival punches well above its weight and has during the past 24 years presented some of the greatest names in jazz. Its proximity to the US ensure that in addition to European artists particularly from its nearest neighbour Portugal, many of the biggest names on the US jazz scene are enticed to this remarkable island.

Since its inception in 1999 Angra jazz has presented an impressive array of some of the greatest names in jazz. From Toots Thielemans to Cedar Walton, Benny Golson to Enrico Rava, Herbie Hancock to Gregory Porter, in fact to date Angra jazz has presented over 650 musicians and 150 concerts.

Next year will mark the 25th anniversary of Angra jazz and it is for certain that this will be marked by another superbly curated festival in the mid Atlantic.

A UNESCO world heritage site with its colourful buildings also boasts, arguably one of the best auditoriums in Europe. A former bull ring beautifully repurposed for more genteel forms of entertainment, the Centro Cultural e de Congressos with its splendid acoustics excels. The festival is curated by Miguel Cunha who was also responsible for the design of this magnificent arena.



Ben Allison

Photo by Dennis Anguige



Carl Allen

Photo by Dennis Anguige



Vivian Buczek

Photo by Dennis Anguige

SCARBOROUGH JAZZ FESTIVAL

Scarborough Spa, September 22-24

Some things never change at Scarborough: the Jazz House van is still parked by the Spa, Elvis is still due on New Year's Eve and it still takes half an hour to check in at the Grand. However, this year was a bit different, Mike Gordon's last festival in charge. Next year his role will be taken by his son, Mark.

On his last festival Mike had much to be proud of, as good an assembly of jazz talent as ever. Of 17 acts in the Main Hall I caught nine (missing, among others, his only American bill-topper Randy Brecker), all of them impressing, though I must admit to the odd reservation in some cases.

Probably the outstanding set of the weekend came early on Sunday afternoon with the Art Themen/Dave Barry Quartet. Art seems to be collecting assorted groups these days such as his organ trio Thane and the Villeins and this one came about when drummer Dave Barry suddenly found a recording date free. Essentially a hard bop outfit, the quartet branched into all sorts of highways and by-ways of the music: the glorious *Without a Song*, for instance, with Gareth Williams beginning with a harmonically rich piano statement, or *Autumn in New York*, with delicious ballad playing from Art.

The level of inspiration from the whole group was remarkable, Gareth Williams and Dave Green following Art Themen's unexpected direction on *Solid* and joining in the mayhem on the album's title track, *Hanky Panky*, Dave's beautifully constructed solo following Art's bruising tenor. And, just for a change, early in the proceedings, Art switched to soprano for *Black Narcissus*, his sound as distinctive as his tenor sound, aggressive, with the same edge to it.

Later in the day the Mark Nightingale & Alan Barnes Sextet provided another highlight, a suitable finale to Mike Gordon's time in charge. This made use of Mark Nightingale's arranging skills at the suggestion of John Billing,

re-casting old favourites in a novel form. There were plenty of fine solos, but within a framework of changes of key and rhythm, tricky endings and everything else Mark could pull out of a hat.

A gloriously eccentric *Take the 'A' Train* proved a show-stopper, with Mark's bizarre rhythmic figure suggesting a train whistle and Alan Barnes and drummer Ian Thomas creating a cacophony of noise before Alan emerged with an exultant solo. Pianist Graham Harvey may have a case for *Canteloupe Island* being the best example of Nightingalian wizardry, given the constantly changing patterns he negotiated with (apparent) ease. *Take Five* was, appropriately enough, a poised alto feature, but Brubeck would have been surprised at the climax generated by the three-man front line – the admirable trumpeter was James Davison.

Earlier Graham Harvey and Ian Thomas had again had the chance to work on Mark Nightingale's arrangements with Rory Ingham's Trombone Assembly, five trombones and a rhythm section with Sam Quintana on bass. Working with a judicious mix of solos and edgy section work – or, indeed, the two combined with one instrument on top of the section or different players trading fours – the group came up with fine versions of such bebop standards as *Cheese Cake* and *The Eternal Triangle*. Andy Wood took time out from bass trombone duties to produce a smooth *Stardust* with elaborate introduction, but what stood out for me among the outstanding soloists was the work of Daniel Higham. Once again his unhurried approach, his ability to combine power and time to spare, made a huge impression.

Having missed the Doncaster Jazz Alumni, the remaining item on the Sunday programme inspired a rather more mixed reaction. *An Adventurous Dream* was a programme by Ian Shaw and Tony Kofi devoted to the songs of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. I must admit

that Ian Shaw's much admired idiosyncratic style is an acquired taste that I have struggled to acquire. Here he seemed at first, on the wonderful *I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart*, to be giving his considerable technique full play without freakish distractions.

In the end his love of the bizarre took over a bit too often for my taste and his amusingly self-indulgent introductions meant that the programme had to be cut to fit in with Scarborough's tight scheduling. But, despite this, it was a very good set, thanks to Tony Kofi's beautifully lyrical alto on tunes such as *Blood Count* and *Lush Life* and the immaculate contributions of Barry Green and (once again) Dave Green.

I had arrived at Scarborough on Friday evening, with Ivo Neame's Dodeka the first band up. This was a band that turned everything back to front, with the rhythm section of Neame, Tom Farmer (excellent) and Josh Blackmore in front of the nine horns. Unusual orchestration (clarinets and flute on *Lost in the Stars*, for instance) and bursts of Ellingtonian power from the horns gave us plenty to enjoy, plus dynamic solos from the likes of Jon Shenoy and Emma Rawicz, but the over-elaborate arrangements and classical-style piano solos prevented things really taking off.

That was never a problem with the Brandon Allen Groove Band, an exciting five-piece with Allen's sax backed by potent solo work from Mike Outram on guitar and Jim Watson on keys, driven by the superb rhythm team of Flo Moore (bass) and Jamie Murray (drums). A fine uncomplicated set with terrific work all round was exemplified by the Ray Charles-ish *I Didn't Mean to Hurt You*, wailing tenor followed by cracking solos from Watson, Moore and Outram.

The Georgia Mancio Quartet brought Friday to a close, stepping in for Clare Teal, laid low with Covid. Georgia, as always, sang with immaculate control and phrasing and was supported

by immensely sympathetic piano from Robin Aspland. I would only question (as with Ian Shaw) the excessive length of her introductions and her choice of material, mostly the result of her collaboration with Alan Broadbent, with the rather unlikely inclusion of an Italian workers' anthem.

I was able to take in two sessions on Saturday, both high quality, one of them a total surprise. You know that, when you get Alex Clarke with David Newton, Dave Green and Clark Tracey, you're in for a great set – and so it was. Incidentally it was the sixth number before Alex ventured one of her own compositions. Instead we had numbers by the likes of Phil Woods and a delightful *Where or When* in ¾ time, Alex on alto, with a long introduction before a hint of the tune appeared. With her essentially economical style backed by the experience of a great rhythm section, it was a splendid start to Saturday.

Mighty like the Blues was the surprise! I had anticipated an enlarged organ trio led by Jim Mullen. Instead we had a smart little band, led by Pete Horsfall playing muted most of the time and with Sam Braysher in fine form, sounding for all the world like the John Kirby Sextet in appealing versions of such numbers as *Jazz Me Blues*.

RON SIMPSON



Brandon Allen



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CD REVIEWS



ALISON CROCKETT

ECHOES OF AN ERA
REDUX: MY FATHER'S
RECORD COLLECTION
VOL. 1

Sol Image/Antidote Sounds 56:11

Now in some ways this is a curious release. A live recording from *Blues Alley* in Washington D.C., this is vocalist Alison's fifth set as leader, and the first in her projected *My Father's Record Collection* series. It is an interesting concept – this is music that draws on the classic (if under-valued at the time) album *Echoes Of An Era* released in 1982 and which featured Chick Corea, Joe Henderson and others, including perhaps most pertinently for this release, singer Chaka Khan – at that time still best known as 'the Queen Of Funk'. It left a lasting impression on the young Alison, as she describes in her sleeve notes. It is far more obvious though from even the most cursory listen to this 'revisit'.

With the support of a bunch of acclaimed players – trumpeter Thad Wilson, tenor man Paul Carr, pianist Todd Simon, bass player Eliot Seppa, and drummer Dana Hawkins – Alison takes on most of the standards that made up the original release. She swings, she scats – lend an ear to *Take The A Train*, or *I Get A Kick Out Of You* for particularly fine examples – and she can be extremely bluesy as on the opening *Them There Eyes*, with equally appropriate bluesy playing by Carr, who is obviously schooled in the classic Texas tenor tradition. She also certainly engages the audience; in between the seven songs are short interludes in which she supplies (brief) reminiscences of her upbringing.

Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most is for me one of the highlights of a very impressive set

and even though Alison tells the audience she didn't learn it from Ella Fitzgerald or Sarah Vaughn, but rather from Chaka Khan, her rendition – as on all tracks here – is a very fine jazz vocal. In contrast to the restraint shown on this classy performance, she simply soars on Corea's *High Wire* – *The Aerialist*, the last song before she introduces the band rather entertainingly. It's a nice touch and a fitting conclusion to this extremely enjoyable release.

NORMAN DARWEN



TUBBY HAYES

LIVE AT THE FLAMINGO
1958

Rhythm & Blues Records
RANDB092 58.22

This fresh addition to the array of Hayes finds came via discographer Tony Middleton who spotted 'a complete tape reel of a Hayes band (with track listing) among the late promoter and club compere Bix Curtis's personal effects. Luckily for us that he did, for this augmented Hayes line-up came together just once, on 21 December 1958, at London's legendary Flamingo club. Curtis had taped it for his own listening interest.

Simon Spillett's note is both erudite and informative as he describes the restoration process and inks in the context for this admirable and unexpected release. Perhaps surprisingly, the first piece is the old swing standby, *Stomping At The Savoy*, with then newcomer Alan Branscombe's spiky alto featured. Given the recording's provenance it's no surprise that balance and depth are variable; thus, Terry Shannon's piano is distant while Ronnie Scott's baritone, yes, baritone, emerges rather prominently in the ensembles.

Nice to hear trumpeters Les Condon, Stuart Hamer and Dickie Hawdon battling it out on Gillespie's *Owl*, with Hawdon the winner, even if Eyden's drums do appear to lack subtlety. Branscombe is the soloist on a fine version of *Autum in New York*, lyrical and poised, the audience responding very positively. Jimmy Deuchar's *Treble Gold* is impressive, the trumpets biting into it, with 23-year-old Hayes in ebullient form, his own *Lifeline* similarly potent, Tubby sounding relaxed and almost joyous. Scott and Hayes go at *Sonny Sounds* at full tilt, much as they did every other night with the Jazz Couriers. So, good sight reading all round, crunchy charts, decent solos, and the extensively-featured Branscombe as the emerging star: not bad for a one-off outfit!

PETER VACHER



CHARLES MINGUS

MINGUS-CANDID

Candid Records- CCD35212-
2022 40 minutes

Mingus was recorded in 1960 and includes three extra tracks from the *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* LP, produced by the co-founder (along with Brit Alan Bates) Nat Hentoff, who also provided the lengthy and informative liner note.

The CD opens with *MDM*, a 20-minute blues which is an amalgamation of Monk's *Straight No Chaser* and Ellington's *Mainstem*. A taxonomy of full throated solos by Eric Dolphy, Booker Ervin, Charles McPherson, Jimmy Knepper, Britt Woodman, Ted Curson and Lonnie Hilyer sparkle throughout sustaining this lengthy track with verve and forward motion. This is followed

by a 13-minute treatment of the Arlen/Koehler 1933 classic, *Stormy Weather* featuring Dolphy's alto to great effect embracing a balladic lyricism. A quality not often associated on his own recordings or those with John Coltrane's groups in the mid 1960s.

Another blues, *Lock Em Up*, incorporates Bird's *Relaxin At Camarillo* (played by McPherson) which presumably refers to Charlie Parker's 6-month stay at the California State mental hospital in 1945. Tenor saxist, Booker Ervin takes the solo honours with his urgent and impassioned outing.

While recorded in a studio, Mingus decided to set a mood that might resemble a night club in hopes to capture the fierceness the musicians had been exploring on stage. 'I finally realised that lots of jazz records don't make it because the guys almost unsoundly cage their approach in a studio from what they do every night on the job' said Mingus. Despite the raucous and lack of cohesiveness on the three tracks there are many marvellous moments to treasure here. Don't let the 40-minute playing time put you off as its certainly worth the brevity.

FRANK GRIFFITH



PETE NEIGHBOUR

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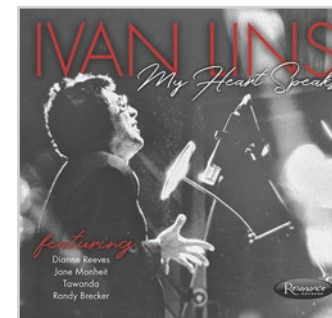
London-born clarinetist Neighbour has built a highly successful career as a soloist and bandleader on US-based cruise ships. He lives in South Carolina and is now a US citizen; even so, he still comes home every now and then. This album is from a 2014 visit when he teamed up with some 'old pals', including

pianist Dave Newton, vibist Nat Steele, Andy Cleyndert on bass, drummer Tom Gordon and guitarist Jim Mullen, with vocalist Louise Cookman added on two of the dozen pieces.

Newton kicks off *I Want To Be Happy* at up tempo, all present adding their own solo interjections, Neighbour Goodman-like, the jammed finish a swinger. *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* is pensive, the clarinet pure-toned and perfect, Steele and Newton in tow. Cookman sings on *You Make Me Feel So Young*, nicely, the band swinging neatly behind her, and she's fine on the lovely *What Will I Tell My Heart*. Clarinet and vibes combine on *Opus One* as they always did, Gordon kicking hard, Neighbour flying as Newton prompts and Mullen plunges in. *Come Sunday* is poised, sedate, the clarinet restrained with vibes as a melodic cushion and is quite sublime. Mullen stars on *Willow Weep*, this given a bluesy feel, Neighbour's variations the best-in-class. Much the same goes for *A Foggy Day*, Newton's perfect accompaniment making me think of Ellis Larkins. If the spirit of Goodman hovers here, then that's

fair enough, but this far more than mere replication, all concerned intent on swing and keen to impress. Pete is a Neighbour worth getting to know.

PETER VACHER



IVAN LINS

MY HEART SPEAKS

Resonance RCD-1040 52:39

Quincy Jones brought Ivan to a wider audience around 1980 and the American jazz scene has drawn on him liberally since then, though the process has been mutual, as this rather impressive album reveals. Singer and composer Ivan Lins has a lovely, cool voice as he

intertwines Brazilian *samba* and the *bossa nova* of his youth with jazz and a European pop sensibility – just take a listen to the opening track here, *Renata Maria*, or the lush *My Heart Speaks* (Antes E Dupois) with guest vocalist Dianne Reeves soaring on the latter.

The ninety-one piece (!) Symphony Orchestra Of Tbilisi, Georgia adds a rich, multi-layered flavour to the album, in addition to Ivan's core band of Uruguayan guitarist Leo Amuedo – listen to his jazz-fusion flavoured playing on *Não Ha Porque* (There's No Reason Why) – Los Angeles jazz pianist Josh Nelson, who takes a soul-jazz tinged solo on the same number, and bassist Carlitos Del Puerto, who was a founder member of acclaimed Cuban outfit Irakere. New York-based Brazilian drummer Mauricio Zottarelli completes the line-up.

I'm Not Alone (Anjo De Mim) is an English version of the bracketed title, sung breathily by relative newcomer Tawanda and incorporating some scatted lines. Singer Jane Monheit, who

wrote the English lyrics for the title track and has covered Lins' songs previously, tackles *Rio* in fine, cool and controlled fashion, and veteran trumpeter Randy Brecker appears on the relaxed *Missing Miles*.

But good though these guests are (and they are very good indeed), Ivan himself remains undoubtedly and consistently the focus of this album. *Congada Blues* finds him improvising vocal lines over a busy rhythm, and the more serious side of his artistry is evident on *Corpos* (Bodies), written with fellow composer Vitor Martins at the time when Brazil was still under a military dictatorship and those who protested might simply vanish. The sumptuous arrangement adds a rather bitter-sweet flavour.

If you are looking for a different, cool, approach to jazz singing, this certainly fits the bill. And if your jazz tastes stretch towards a 'world' outlook, then do definitely investigate.

NORMAN DARWEN

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CAESAR FRAZIER

LIVE AT JAZZCUP

STUCD23042, approx 64 minutes

This is the real deal. Hard grooves, a crunch to the Hammond and a funk to the horn and guitar. The album is a live recording from Jazzcup in Copenhagen in November 2022 and it has all the grease and intensity you want from an organ quartet. I don't know if they serve chitlins in Denmark, but you can smell them on this album.

Frazier has the credentials that mark him out as a true Hammond evangelist. His sparring with Jimmy Smith, Jack McDuff and other pioneers of the instrument, as well as extensive touring with Lou Donaldson and Marvin Gaye, have honed his technique without diluting his own funk-drenched style.

On this session he has with him three stars of the classy Scandinavian jazz scene. Drummer and album producer Kresten Osgood has sessions for Sam Rivers and Dr. Lonnie Smith on his long CV; Johannes Wamberg has a cool tone and touch that sits comfortably alongside definitive organist partners like Thornel Schwartz or Grant Green; saxophonist Jonas Kullhamner channels his inner Turrentine, while bringing the freshness and imagination that characterises the new jazz generation.

They serve up an eclectic menu of grooves, opening with a nod to Brother Jack on Nat Adderley's *Jive Samba*. Other standards include a heavy, bluesy *Willow Weep For Me* and a flying take on *A Night In Tunisia*. But there's also a swinging version of David Gates' *I Wanna Make It With You* and a deep funk jam on Prince's *Thieves In The Temple*. Throughout, you can tell they're having a great time and it's infectious.

Hammond is an instrument that imposes itself; if there's a Hammond in the band, then it's only going to go one way. If you compromise, you sink into lounge music or 1960s B-movies. Fortunately, Caesar Frazier is a stranger to compromise. He's presented us with a swirling, drawbar-driven celebration of the instrument he loves.

STUART MAXWELL



JOHNNY HARTMAN

SMOOTH AND SWINGING- THE SINGLES AND ALBUMS COLLECTION- 1947-58-

Acrobat- ADDCD3488. 2023 2CDs, 71.00/72.00

Johnny Hartman (1923-1983) was an American balladeer vocalist with a rich and resonate voice that is well captured on this extensive 2 CD collection. A combination of singles and album tracks from his early years (age 24 to 35) it displays a wide array of genres ranging from pop songs, classic standards and the odd jazz or blues groover of the day.

Most impressive were the name bands that he recorded with which include Earl Hines, Dizzy Gillespie, George Williams, Prez Prado and one led by Ernie Wilkins, a legendary arranger/composer who also contributed countless scores to the bands of Count Basie and Harry James. In addition, there are four tracks with the Erroll Garner Trio including a standout but lesser known Irving Berlin song- *Remember*. All recorded in 1949 and particularly notable as a rare example of Garner accompanying a vocalist or instrumentalist.

Hartman's smooth delivery and natural charm are enhanced by his velvety vocal quality resulting in an understated yet profound meaning. The arrangements score highly too, sporting a ready interplay with noted jazz

instrumentalists that swing playfully creating an organic sympatico amongst the forces.

The lengthy and detailed liner notes by Paul Watts, while extremely well researched spend a good deal of time lamenting Hartman's lack of popularity and career success compared to the likes of Sinatra, Bennett, Torme, Mathis, et al. This might be the case but for a release like *Smooth and Swinging* with its comprehensive and impressive attributes one feels that there is no need to take away from Hartman's oeuvre as it stands. His powerful and unique contributions to the canon of jazz singing will continue into eternity.

FRANK GRIFFITH



DONCASTER JAZZ ALUMNI

50 YEARS

Ubuntu UBU 0150CD: 2 CDs, 38.53/35.21

In 1973 John Ellis founded the Doncaster Youth Jazz Orchestra. 50 years on this fine double CD features various mixes of alumni (including such notables as Andy Vinter, Nadim Teimoori, Pete Beachill and Rory Ingham) on a dozen favoured tracks under the musical direction of Reuben Fowler, Al Wood and John Ellis himself.

Things kick off with a typical piece of Bob Brookmeyer wit, *Hello and Goodbye*, Teimoori on fine solo form, as he is throughout the album and Ingham maintaining Brookmeyer's quirkiness, before the second track gives proof of DYJO's reputation. *You Know It Makes Sense* is a new commission from Tom Kubis based on a favourite saying of John Ellis', Beachill's valve trombone solo a highlight.

Composer/arrangers include Laurence Cottle, Bob Florence, Bob Mintzer, Allan Ganley, Sammy

Nestico and Reuben Fowler's recreation of a Francy Boland chart, *Sax No End* which brings the second CD to an end with Mark Ellis (son of...) and Nadim Teimoori chasing each other in an exhilarating finale. Other highlights include Bob Florence's intricate two-tempo arrangement of *Body and Soul* (Andy Vinter poised and elegant in his solo) and Allan Ganley's swinging *Victor*, fine solos all round. Drummer Joe Sykes excels on Wayne Shorter's *Elegant People* and Steve Perry's arrangement of *My Favourite Things* where trombonist Ellie Smith and bassist Paul Baxter also make their mark. Overall, though, it's the overall power and precision of the Alumni that impress in frequently complicated arrangements.

RON SIMPSON



THE JAZZTET

FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid Jazz AMSC 1442: 2 CDs, 80.36/79.12

Art Farmer and Benny Golson formed the Jazztet in 1959 and in its first incarnation it ran until 1962. These four LPs cover that version of the Jazztet, though with many personnel changes, playing very disciplined hard bop, mostly in Golson's arrangements.

The first album, *Meet the Jazztet*, sees them starting at the top, with a group including McCoy Tyner and the incomparable trombonist Curtis Fuller who is the outstanding soloist on the date. His lightning quick work on his feature, *It's All Right with Me*, contrasts with some delightfully burry solos elsewhere. Four Golson originals figure, along with a delicious *Avalon* which only gets to the tune when it's winding down. Farmer on *I Remember Clifford* and Golson on *Easy Living* both shine on their features.

The only album not recorded at Nola Studios in New York, *At Birdhouse*, comes from 1961, recorded live in Chicago. In a totally transformed group Cedar Walton, magnificent on *Farmer's Market*, and Albert Heath stand out, but the most significant development is Farmer's recording debut on flugel for a delicate *Darn that Dream*. By the next album he was playing six of eight tracks on flugel, a touch soft-edged for hard bop.

It's probably purely coincidental, but the final two albums, *Here and Now* and *Another Git Together*, recorded just before the group's break-up in 1962, whilst undoubtedly accomplished, seem to lack a touch of the bite of the earlier two. This time the group remained unchanged between the two albums, with the idiosyncratic trombonist Grachan Moncur III and – especially – impressive pianist Harold Mabern – the best of the newcomers.

RON SIMPSON



FLIP PHILLIPS

THE CLEF YEARS CLASSIC ALBUMS 1952-56

Acrobat ATRCD9136 69.10/68.20/65.59

Here's another of Acrobat's generous compilations: a three-CD set of tenor performances by one Joseph Edward Filippelli, better known in the jazz world as Flip Phillips (1915-2001). Lauded for his ten-year stint with the touring Jazz At The Philharmonic package, Flip was a crowd-pleaser and inclined towards excess on the concert stage but came good in small group situations like these collected here.

Happily, for today's listeners, JATP boss Norman Granz recorded Phillips regularly as a leader with his peers for his Clef label and Acrobat have collected ten of

these albums in their entirety and mightily impressive they are. Flip's advanced fluency, tonal warmth and swing feeling made him one of the top mainstream soloists of his day. At first, he's heard in a quartet with Hank Jones, then it's a favourite, the Bop-tet with trumpeter Howard McGhee followed by quintets with the likes of trombonist Bennie Green and Bill Harris, augmented later by Harry Edison.

Phillips isn't fazed by any of these groupings, handling the bebop-inclined sets with total assurance, his Hawkins-like delivery and seemingly endless creativity, allied to his sumptuous ballad capability, like a master-class in tenor excellence. Hearing him play *My Old Flame* at ballad tempo or tackling *Cheek to Cheek* with Harris at speed is to highlight just two of the joys of this 58-track collection. Flip is especially adept at combining with trombonists like Green and Harris, knocking out the riffs before moving on to fast-action improvisations with JATP stars like Oscar Peterson. The final track is a Norman Granz jam session from 1954, with Gillespie, Eldridge and Harris among his bandstand pals, Flip heard at length.

PETER VACHER



CHRIS BOTTI

VOL. I

Blue Note 00602455165862: 47.16

You could not assemble a much better selection of ballads than Chris Botti does here: *Bewitched*, *Someday My Prince Will Come*, *Time on My Hands*, *My Funny Valentine*, *Old Folks*. And you'd be hard put to it to find a more delicate, technically accomplished trumpeter than Chris Botti.

In the end, though, the result is rather bland. Apart from the strings that are there on six of ten tracks,

the line-up can reach as many as seven, but apart from Botti they are essentially accompanying instruments, a monster-sized rhythm section with only Taylor Eigsti's piano supplying dream-like solos. The exceptions are John Splithoff's vocal on his own *Paris*, Chad Lefkowitz-Brown's moody saxophone on two tracks and classical violinist Joshua Bell's elaborate contribution to *My Funny Valentine*.

Chris Botti outcools Miles on *Blue in Green* and the temperature never rises far above that. Drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, a distant tasteful presence through most of the album, does get a chance to be noticed on *Fix You* which I guess is a Coldplay song which, surprisingly, makes more impact than all the great tunes.

RON SIMPSON



CUFF BILLET'S NEW EUROPA JAZZ BAND

AT LAST!

Upbeat Jazz URCD 329: 56.23

The title – and, indeed, the subtitle, 'The Much Awaited Album' – are justified by the fact that this sat on Renee Long's shelf for 29 years after being recorded at the Ken Colyer Trust Easter Parade Weekend at Sand Bay in 1993. Renee disarms criticism by pointing out that she and Cuff agree the album has its faults, but undersells it rather by suggesting that its main value is proving that 'the Europa Band existed'!

The most unusual feature is the band's repertoire. There are a couple of wonderful love songs from the Great American Songbook: *You Call it Madness – I Call it Love* and Vernon Duke's classic *I Can't Get Started*, taken at an amiable slow-medium tempo minus Berigan-esque extravagances, except for a final flourish. Aside from these

two and the occasionally heard *Spanish Shawl* everything is (to me, at least) a discovery.

So *Pal of My Cradle Days* is a sentimental ditty, marked by plaintive muted trumpet, and *Sweetheart of T-K-O* bounces along with the rhythm section in top form. *Chant of the Tuxedos* is perhaps the highlight of the album, a 1930s-style swinger with Loz Garfield switched to tenor sax.

Cuff Billett is certainly the stand-out in the front line, providing a crisp lead and warming up as the session proceeds into more adventurous touches such as the Bixian flares on *Spanish Shawl*. The other notable soloist is pianist John Clarke, finishing up playing the blues on *Blues for a Pretty Woman* (could he be the Clarke who gets composer credits?), but Loz Garfield on clarinet and trombonist John Wiseman add to the sound of a thoroughly workmanlike band.

RON SIMPSON



ALEX RIEL

IN NEW YORK

Stunt STUCD 23062 65.37/66.44

Riel (born 1940) was house drummer at Copenhagen's famed Montmartre Jazzhüs where he accompanied a panoply of US soloists with great distinction and has an impressive discography. This re-release is of a pair of albums Riel made for Stunt in New York in March 1997 and October 1999, first issued as *Unriel* and *Relatin'* respectively. Each featured appearances by tenor star Michael Brecker on two tracks per album, the remainder with fellow-tenorist Bergonzi solo, guitarist Mike Stern a constant, pianists Niels Lan Doky and Kenny Werner swopping roles.

The opening track *Gecko Plex* on CD1 is an epic of distortion,

gladiatorial even, each tenorist seeking to out-do the other; the effect far from sanguine, Riel quite passive. This is post-Coltrane playing. *He's Dead Too* is calmer, both men exploiting the tenor's altissimo range, but seldom settling to a measured or detached exposition. Bergonzi's *Amethyst* is like a balm, his tenor measured and assured, before he sits out on Bruze where Stern's echoey guitar and Doky's piano stage their own animated debate. Riel solos at length on *Moments'* *Notice* with bassist Eddie Gomez featured, Stern and Bergonzi combining pleasingly. CD2 opens with a surprise: Ben Webster's *Did You Call Her Today?* the tenors combining at mid-tempo, Werner spare and timely, the solos quite un-Ben-like, Bergonzi scoring best. I liked Bergonzi again, solo this time, on Charlie Parker's *Dexterity*, his angular style and fluency blanketing the performance. Riel gets *In My Own 'Sweets' Way* all to himself, channelling his early influences as he rolls the snare and opens up like Zutty Singleton et al, before Werner plays a beautifully balanced duo version of *I Fall In Love Too Easily* with Gomez, the others sitting out. This pianist is impressive throughout.

PETER VACHER



HANK JONES

HANK JONES SOLO AND WITH HIS OWN BANDS 1947-59

ADDCD3487

Pianist's pianist and perfect sideman Hank Jones was such a ubiquitous presence in high profile bands throughout the late 1940's and 50's, that his solo work of that period has been sadly neglected. This superb release from Acrobat, featuring music from a dozen or so albums, firmly rectifies the situation.

Ella Fitzgerald, Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges, Miles Davis, Milt Jackson, Sonny Stitt, Bob Brookmeyer and Al Cohn were amongst his esteemed employers, but the pianist still found time to make several brilliant recordings under his own name.

The 1947 tracks were recorded for Norman Granz' Mercury/Clef label and all the influences of Waller, Hines, Tatum and Nat Cole are already clearly on display but have become distilled into a unique style.

After a six year hiatus when he was just too busy to pursue his own projects, Jones came back in 1953 with a cracking session featuring guitar virtuoso Johnny Smith. Other sessions include great work from guitarists Barry Galbraith and Kenny Burrell, and top bassists, Paul Chambers, Milt Hinton and Ray Brown. There are also welcome spots from Donald Byrd and Joe Wilder on trumpets, Belgian Bobby Jasper on flute and a bit of superb tenor from Jerome Richardson on *Wine and Brandy*.

Stand out tracks from the solo album *Have You Met Hank Jones* include *How about You* and *But Not For Me* and there are brilliant readings of *Easy to Love* and *If I Love again* from *The Talented Touch*. There are also several catchy and hip originals by Hank and his contemporaries which are included to good effect.

This is very much the opposite of just a blowing session. Every single track is tightly scripted and arranged with out any hint of self indulgence. The pianist's sensitive touch, mastery of light and shade, driving sense of rhythm, immaculate taste and sense of form are on display in every single track. His solo lines are in the lovely 'Swing to Bop' style that is so attractive and he is a brilliant small band arranger, incorporating stride, block chording, counter melodies and intriguing harmonisations.

This double album is an essential and hugely enjoyable listen for anyone who values great jazz piano playing.

ALAN BARNES



SIMON SPILLETT BIG BAND

DEAR TUBBY H

Mister PC: 68.00

Simon Spillett's involvement with the music of Tubby Hayes is well known and early in 2020 his years of research on Tubby's big band charts – aided by the copying skills and more of Mark Nightingale – meant that the Simon Spillett Big Band was ready to go. So, too, unfortunately, was Covid. So, after hugely successful appearances mainly at festivals, it was April 2023 before 12 of Tubby's charts, eight of them his own compositions, made their way onto record.

And, yes, it was worth the wait. *Dear Johnny B* opens proceedings as they mean to go on, Pete Cater's crisp drumming launching an on-the-limit uptempo piece, Sammy Mayne's blistering alto solo setting the tone. The majority of the tracks deal in excitement, only Horace Silver's *Peace* (delicate trumpet from Steve Fishwick), *Solweig* (Spillett taking one of his rare solos) and the sinuous *Soft and Supple* lower tempo and temperature. Even *Star Eyes* operates at a clipped uptempo, with Mark Nightingale contributing a poised solo.

Otherwise *Take Your Partners for the Blues* is a romp, Alan Barnes' baritone coming in with rare authority before handing over to Ian Bateman's trombone, then paired solos for trumpets and tenor saxes. *Rumpus* lives up to its name, with Alex Garnett in incandescent form. Much the same could be said of Pete Long's alto on the quirky *She insulted me in Marrakech*, a final flourish after Nightingale has raised the roof on *Blues for Pipkins*. But it's not the soloists, excellent as they are, that are

the real quality of this album; it's the crisp, polished, totally committed section work that brings to vibrant life music that is, astonishingly, 50 years old.

RON SIMPSON



ESPEN BERG

THE HAMAR CONCERT

NXN 2019: 67.44

Last year Espen Berg released *The Trondheim Concert*, his first fully improvised solo recording. Now we have *The Hamar Concert* from the Hamar Kulturhus in the town in Norway where Berg lived until the age of 19. The result is tremendously impressive, but perplexing and inconclusive.

The CD consists of eight parts, each with the title *Part 3* or whatever, except for Part 1 which is unaccountably divided into *Part 1a* and *Part 1b*, a gentle thrumming of chords separating the two. The different parts have lyrical interludes, strenuously rhythmic chordal passages which build to climaxes and fade away, distant, spacey Nordic themes, hints of childhood memories and occasionally a thundering mass of notes that tests the resilience of Hamar's brand-new Steinway. All is managed perfectly, but I found myself wondering where it is all going.

Of course it's not just in jazz that improvisation is a key element: J.S. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven are only a few of classical music's renowned improvisers. And at times I could hardly tell whether this was classical or jazz. In a sense this hardly matters: Espen Berg's improvisations lead him wherever his remarkable pianistic ability takes him. But I would be delighted if, having proved twice over that he can pull off the magic feat of over an hour's improvised music with never a

flaw, he turned back once again to his trio or his work with singer Silje Nergaard.

RON SIMPSON



MEL TORME

FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid Jazz AMSC1428 2 CDs

The four albums here are taken from the period 1955 to 1959. Starting with *It's a Blue World* and followed with *Sings Fred Astaire, California Suite (1957 Version)* and *The Mel-Tones-Back in Town*. All albums are in partnership with the pianist and arranger Marty Paich. On the first album, recorded at the age of thirty, Torme is accompanied by an anonymous studio orchestra conducted by Stan Pellegrini and featuring Frank Beach (trumpet) and Al Hendrickson (guitar) performing a set of twelve 'love songs of the last 25 years. Often the song's verses are sung with just guitar accompaniment and include such classics as *Isn't It Romantic*, *I Know Why* and *Stay As Sweet As You Are*.

Sings Fred Astaire is a joy with a contingent of West Coast musicians in support, including Herb Geller and Pete Candoli and includes songs that will all be familiar to Astaire fans; *They All Laughed*, *A Foggy Day* and *A Fine Romance*. A very fine collection. On *California Suite*, Torme is supported by additional vocalists and The Bethlehem Orchestra, which again included musicians from the West Coast scene. This is a suite written by Torme. This version is seven minutes longer than the original 30-minute version from some eight years previously.

The final selection reconvenes the four-piece vocal group The Mel-Tones, the original version of which disbanded in 1946. The

recording is enhanced by the presence of Art Pepper, Victor Feldman, and Jack Sheldon. The repertoire consists of more familiar themes from stage and screen of the time. Fans of Torme and his music are sure to delight in this selection.

ALAN MUSSON



SYLVIA BROOKS

LIVE WITH CHRISTIAN JACOB

Rhombus Records RH0-7159 43.52

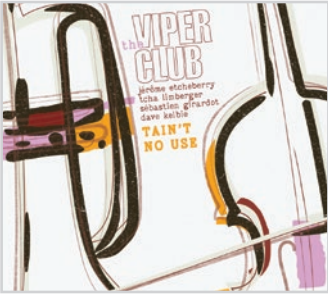
Born in Florida, her father jazz pianist Don Ippolito and her mother opera singer Johanna Dordick, Sylvia Brooks studied classical theatre before moving to New York to work in theatre productions, playing Anita in *West Side Story*. Relocating to Los Angeles in 2009 and rekindling an interest in her father's music, she released her first album *Dangerous Liaisons* to critical acclaim. Three more albums followed in collaboration with respected arrangers and composers, earning Brooks recognition as a talented singer songwriter and establishing herself on the jazz stage.

Recorded live at Herb Albert's Vibrato Jazz Grill in Los Angeles, this fifth album revisits material from earlier releases alongside tributes to the great American songwriters. Brooks opens the show with a high octane version of Harold Arlen's *When The Sun Comes Out* in the company of talented pianist, composer and musical director Christian Jacob heading a first rate line-up. I must confess I didn't warm to the vocals on Arlen and Mercer's *Blues In The Night*, not helped with overuse of reverb, or *Come Rain Or Come Shine*. No question, Brooks exudes style and panache. Armed with musical theatre credentials, she

possesses musicality, a wide range and perfect enunciation, but I felt her vocals, strident at times, lacked the depth and subtlety of a jazz performance. No light and shade. Some nice arrangements helped capture the poignancy of *Guess Who I Saw Today* and Cole Porter's *Night And Day* and Van Heusen/Cahn's *Tender Trap* were redeemed with fine ensemble work and inspired horn and tenor solos from Jeff Bunnell and Brian Scanlon.

Brooks, however, excels as a lyricist. Her collaborations with Jacob on *The Flea Markets of Paris* and *Holding Back Tears* were stories beautifully told and delivered here. Overall, a presentation full of contrasts, leaving me with a curiosity to hear more from Sylvia Brooks, the songwriter.

VAL WISEMAN

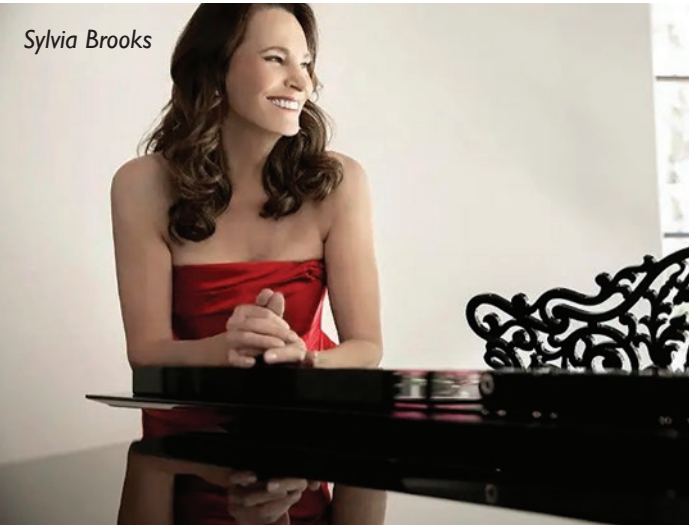


THE VIPER CLUB

TAIN'T NO USE

Camille Productions MSO72023CD

Here we have four of Europe's foremost jazz musicians playing 17 tunes from an era when popular music was 'hot'. The answer lies in the music contained on this recording.



Jerome Etcheberry (trumpet), Tcha Limberger (violin/voice), Sebastien Girardot (bass) and Dave Kelbie (guitar) together perform a vast variety of music from the relatively obscure to the better-known classics of the time. The quartet focus on the now almost forgotten 'partnership of African American musicians Stuff Smith (violin) and Jonah Jones (trumpet)' who together "as the Onyx Club opened up the sound of swing in the mid-to-late 1930s".

Together, they produce a blistering, blues-drenched performance. The repertoire includes the familiar *Ballin' The Jack*, *My Blue Heaven*, *Swanee River* and *After You've Gone* and the less well-known *My Walkin' Stick*, *Smoke Rings* and *Onyx Club Spree*. The music is expertly played and the joy of performing shines throughout the album. The unusual instrumentation, not often replicated, works perfectly in this musical environment.

The Viper Club's determination 'to honour those who have come before them' is palpable. They maintain that 'jazz from the pre-WW2 era was just as incendiary and innovative as that made by modernist icons of the LP age'. A debt is surely owed to the quartet for shining a light on an overlooked jazz style and igniting interest once again in this delightful music.

ALAN MUSSON

HENRY'S BLUESLETTER

LITTLE JOE BLUE

It always was, and still is, surprising and really disappointing that many of those fine bluesmen that I booked onto those Big Bear UK & European tours back in the 1970s did not get accorded proper recognition when they got back to the U.S. with the sound of that European applause still ringing in their ears. I'll never understand how Americans never really understood the value of their hometown blues singers, musicians – and performers.

Conversely, it was always a bit of a mystery, albeit a most pleasant one, as to how a guy working in a factory in Chicago or Michigan, driving a school bus, working street corners, Jukes or driving a cab, could come over to this side of The Atlantic and straightaway capture the stage with the confidence to strut his stuff just as if he had never done anything else.

Little Joe Blue was a prime example.

Born Joseph Valley Jr in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1934, he was brought up in Tallulah, Louisiana, one of eight children. As a six year-old he worked the fields until he was 19 when he relocated to Detroit to work in an automobile factory. Most of his young life he had been fooling around on guitar but once in Detroit he began to get out there, playing and singing the blues. Joe was drafted into the US Army where he served from 1953 to 1956, returning to Detroit to pick up where he had left off, working days in the factory, sitting in with local bands, playing parties and talent show evenings, forming his own band, The Midnighters.

Determined to break into the blues business, he moved again, this time to Reno, Nevada where he played local bars and clubs and got to make his first recordings.

Things picked up for Little Joe Blue when, in 1961, he moved, yet again, this time to Los Angeles where he still took a job outside of music at the same time featuring at Mo's Swing Club, The Tropicana,

The Shylock Club, Perkins Club and importantly getting proper opportunities to record. In 1963 he recorded for Howard Ransom's Nanc Records and a year later, with his regular – and very classy, band, Larry Green on guitar and later, piano, the mighty tenor sax man Maxwell Davis, Curtis Tillman on bass and drums Chuck Thomas. The sessions were produced by Fats Washington and included his song "Dirty Work Going On". For reasons that remain unknown, this was never released by Kent Records, but was again recorded for Kent, but leased to Checker, with the same musicians, with "Dirty Work Going On" making #40 on the Billboard R&B chart.

Joe continued to record, for Jewel, Kent and Checker.

Big Bear picked up with Little Joe Blue in 1975 and brought him out for a six week UK/ European tour in April and May that year. The other guys featuring on the tour were Homesick James, Billy Boy Arnold, Lonesome Jimmie Lee Robinson, Eddie Guitar Burns and Tommy Tucker – he of "High Heel Sneakers" fame. Pete York, drummer and founding member of The Spencer Davis Group completed, the tour line-up. Big Bear recorded the "American Blues Legends 75" album live at The 100 Club on Richard Branson's Manor Mobile recording unit, with Brits Bob Hall, piano, Harvey Weston

from The Alex Welsh Band on Double Bass as well as guitarist Martin Stone, famed for his time with Savoy Brown Blues Band, Mighty Baby, Chilli Willi & The Red Hot Peppers and Wreckless Eric.

Little Joe Blue was the Wild Man of the tour regularly stealing the show despite the very stiff competition.

Back in the U.S. Joe continued to record and to tour, occasionally getting to feature at the level his talent demanded, such as major U.S. festivals and a 1982 European tour, but as far as I'm concerned, never get the recognition he deserved.

Little Joe Blue did suffer somewhat over unwarranted criticism that he was a B.B. King copyist. There was a resemblance in style, but Joe remained his own man. B.B. was an influence, of course, but so were Louis Jordan, Joe Liggins, Roy Milton, Mr. Bo and Lafayette Thomas.

Little Joe Blue died in Reno from stomach cancer in 1990, leaving a wife, a son and a daughter.

He was only 55 years old.

JIM SIMPSON

BLUES DOG FINDS NEW HOME

It came as something of a shock to learn, with just two weeks' notice, that the home of Henry's Blueshouse for the last two years, that's Velvet Music Rooms had been sold. Fortunately, The O Bar, just a short stroll away down Broad Street, couldn't resist the temptation to become Brum's new Home of The Blues and stepped into the breach. Now, 3 weeks into our new relationship, we're already feeling nicely at home.

The O Bar is neatly placed directly opposite The Black Sabbath Bench on the Black Sabbath Bridge. I say neatly, because, back in 1968, Henry's Blueshouse in its first location, was where Black Sabbath made their very first appearance.



Little Joe Blue

LARRY TAYLOR AND THE TAYLOR FAMILY

GENERATIONS OF BLUES

Nola Blue Records NBR024, approx 55 minutes

The best of intentions can still lead you down the wrong road. Larry Taylor and his family have released this album to honour the 100th birthday anniversary of their father Eddie Taylor Sr., but, sadly, it's doesn't work.

What we have is a dull, messy collection of performances that lacks any coherent identity. It doesn't help that it's made up of three separate recording sessions. Ten of the tracks were recorded in 2015, two tracks in 2017 and one in 2023. The last of these is a rap recorded by Larry's son Dullah, under the name Lilijet2x, with Larry on guitar and drums. It's hard work, even if you like rap.

The blues has to accept its share of the blame here. It suffers from a surfeit of sentiment and puritanism that venerates anything that nods towards tradition. If this album was not a family affair, it would struggle

to stand out from the sea of soundalike 'authentic' blues records that insist on dragging us back to some golden age.

As it stands, it's a well-meaning vanity project featuring some adequate but routine playing and a fair amount of dodgy singing. What's lacking in albums like this, and in other more-vaunted offerings from tired old rockers trying to get back to roots they never had, is the fire and menace that defines the greatest blues performances.

You can't play the blues by shuffling through twelve bars and singing about whisky and women. You have to dig deep into who you are and be brutally honest, with yourself and with your audience.

It would be harsh to say this album is not honest. There's genuine affection here for a much-loved father, grandfather and blues legend. But no one digs really deep, the sound is too clean and the whole thing feels a bit thin. You're safer sticking with Eddie himself.

STUART MAXWELL

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LIVE REVIEWS

ALAN BARNES:
BLOWIN' THE BLUES
AWAY

PIANO SMITHFIELD, PART
OF EFG LONDON JAZZ
FESTIVAL, NOVEMBER 13,
2023

I've heard Alan Barnes and Bruce Adams together many times, but seldom in such blistering form. Perhaps the small room (75 seated, low ceilinged, all but sold out) focussed the sound; certainly the rhythm section (Robin Aspland, Jeremy Brown and Ian Thomas) played with a ferocity and precision that lifted the two front-liners; possibly the programme had something to do with it.

Promoter John Billett had suggested to Alan that the 1959 Horace Silver album, *Blowin' the Blues Away*, could serve as an inspiration and about half of the ten numbers were Silver's. This gave a cohesion to the whole thing, a hard-bop quintet in top form.

Not that Alan and Bruce were limited by the suggested parameters. In the second half two of the loveliest numbers

came from an older tradition. *Morning Glory* was beautifully lyrical, with Alan backing Bruce's trumpet lead by unleashing his hidden Johnny Hodges, but also affectionately witty, Bruce quoting *Time's a Wasting* and finishing in a flurry of half valving in tribute to Rex Stewart. *Skylark* was, simply, magical, Bruce on flugel gloriously broad-toned, Alan echoing him in the opening phrases of his solo.

The non-Silver opening had promised an evening of rare excitement, Bruce launching instantly into a muted spectacular on *Mr. T C*, Alan zipping effortlessly through *Cannonball*, both delivering crisp precision, Robin Aspland building his solos to a climax and then some more, Jeremy Brown and Ian Thomas driving the band with unrelenting power.

A set of three Silver pieces took us to the interval. Ian Thomas excelled on *St. Vitus Dance* before *Peace* descended, played with a poise and delicacy that belied the attack of the surrounding pieces, *Blowin' the Blues Away* exemplifying the crisp ensemble playing, Bruce playing a favourite trick of setting up a cheesy quotation, then drifting off it.

The second half, aside from the excursions into Ellington and

Carmichael, continued as before, *Quick Silver* exploding with high-speed pinpoint accuracy and finally, *Sister Sadie*, with Aspland adding chorus after chorus to his solo with no loss of drive or freshness.

John Billett reckoned the idea behind the whole thing was to keep a smile on everyone's face – and that it certainly did, with power and finesse, wit and

emotion, perfectly combined. It was one of 13 shows with major British talent that he promoted at Piano Smithfield during the London Jazz Festival and the thought occurred to me that, of all the shows with big American names at major venues during the festival, none was likely to top this for musicianship, invention and bravado.

RON SIMPSON



BENN CLATWORTHY,
ALEX HUTTON,
SIMON THORPE,
MATT HOME

RUISLIP JAZZ CLUB,
WEDNESDAY OCTOBER
18TH, 2023

We flew from the start. Benn Clatworthy pops over here all too infrequently from his Los Angeles home and he brought the swagger and assurance that life in America seems to instil in people. It was class, exciting and brilliant.

It helped that the band were up to job. Alex Hutton is Clatworthy's go-to piano partner when he tours and he's always been a bit more adventurous than most of his contemporaries. Shoeless and not entirely kempt, he leans earnestly over the piano and tries to get it to do anything it wasn't expecting to do. The result is

fresh, melodic and tasteful, with a persistent edge of tension.

Matt Home at the drums was understated, focused on time and groove, while still responding to the cascades of nuance and dynamic in Clatworthy's solos. Simon Thorpe brought his rich, melodious tone and seemingly limitless capacity for harmonic invention to everything. For once, bass solos were interesting.

Benn Clatworthy, lean and wizened but exuding cool charm, played tenor and soprano, sometimes dipping between the two on the same number. He set each tune up deftly and then dug deeper and deeper, allowing us to stay with him as he expanded the territory into regions we don't often hear explored in provincial UK jazz clubs.

The players having worked together in various combinations

over the years, they gelled into a band almost instantly, giving Clatworthy the platform he needed from which to soar.

We heard Kahn and Brown's *You Stepped Out Of A Dream*, Duke Ellington's *I Didn't Know About You*, and Clatworthy's own *Benny's Lament* and *Calypso Trisha*. The second set drifted down a gorgeous romantic byway with a timeless and sultry *I Want To Talk About You*.

Players like Benn Clatworthy remind us what jazz makes possible. What he showed us in the shabby little Ruislip club room was that jazz is the most expressive musical art form on the planet, because it comes from the very depths of the individual, and it happens entirely in the moment.

You can trace his influences to Coltrane and Rollins, but that's too easy. They're influences and no

more. He has dedicated his playing almost literally to finding his own voice as an instrumentalist, looking for ways to make his saxophone speak and sing.


We heard standards stretch and grow as he pushed his prodigious technique ever further, ably accompanied by Alex Hutton and the band. And in between, Clatworthy's stream-of-consciousness ramblings only enriched the mood.

'We're going off the programme now,' he said in his Borough-meets-West-Coast drawl. 'I've been off the programme a while now, actually. Yeah. Old habits die hard.' It was a wry and poignant reflection on a jazzman's journey.

STUART MAXWELL


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