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THE JAZZ RAG

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BIRMINGHAM JAZZ
AND BLUES FESTIVAL 2025



Photo by
Merlin Daleman



Scarborough Jazz Festival

26-28 September 2025

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 The Project * Emma Holcroft Quintet feat. Cliff Ray
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Emma Rawicz 1 2023 © ACT_Gregor Hohenberg

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Merlin Daleman



The 41st Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival in full swing, with NANNA CARLING appearing with the TENEMENT JAZZ BAND. Look for a profile of Nanna in *Jazz Rag* 187. (photo Merlin Daleman)

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THE JAZZ RAG

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UPFRONT

The recent financial difficulties of the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival highlight the precarious nature of the jazz festival scene. Birmingham is currently enjoying its 41st incarnation and on a recent Go Fund Me appeal stated that this could be the last edition.

Such a fate has already befallen Wigan International Jazz Festival which cancelled plans for a 40th Festival because of fears that it would drive Music Continuum into bankruptcy. Ian Darrington, founder of the Festival back in 1986, said, 'Sponsorship falling away has had a big impact,' but also pointed to declining numbers and the failure of the council to 'recognise the significant standing of the Festival as it used to.'

These words could equally be applied to Birmingham. From a peak of £85,000, the Council's contribution had dropped to £15,000 before the expense of the Commonwealth Games added to historic debts and forced the council to remove sponsorship as from 2024. The future of Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival hangs in the balance.

RONNIE SCOTT’S PROGRAMME

Ronnie Scott’s in Soho has an intriguing programme in the upcoming months, in addition to many performances by the club’s homegrown outfits (Blues Explosion, Big Band, etc.). The Mike Stern Band is there on July 28-29, followed by a real mix in August: Ruby Turner (4-5, 11-12), Veronica Swift (9), Denny Ilett’s Electric Lady Big Band (22-23), Philip Lassiter (29) and Binker Golding (30). Curtis Stigers has an extended run on September 7-11 before *Mel Torme at 100* (13-15), with Iain Mackenzie and the Callum Au Big Band. Single sessions include Ian Shaw (20), Judy Carmichael (28-lunch) and Janette Mason (29). Espen Eriksen features Andy Sheppard on October 11, followed by Aaron Parks’ Little Big (14), Polly Gibbons (18) and Vincent Herring’s Soul Jazz Septet (19) before the month settles in for a week of Stacey Kent, a mix of lunch-times and evenings (28-November 2).



Tony Kofi



Elaine Delmar

Ronnie’s have also introduced Saturday Brunch, with Ian Shaw chatting to Paul Gambaccini (August 9) and joined by Claire Martin (September 6). www.ronniescotts.co.uk

JAZZ CENTRE GOES FROM DIXIELAND TO SWING

From Dixieland to Swing is the title of a Jazz Centre UK concert on October 4, with the Great British

Jazz Band at the Beecroft Gallery in Southend. To make a day of it, it is preceded by Ray Pallett’s *Music Maestro* Please, a history of British dance bands. The regular Saturday dates feature monthly gigs by Jazz 825 and Spike’s Place, the remaining weeks filled with the Jazz Centre’s own promotions. Jazz 825 offers Mick Foster Plays Surman (August 9) and the Ted Porter Quartet (September 13) while Spike’s comes up with Elaine Delmar (August 30) and the Ted Beament Trio (27). Meanwhile the Jazz Centre schedules the Chris Kibble Trio (August 2), No Good Woman and the Kingsnakes (16), Steely Jazz (23), Alison Neale playing Art Pepper (September 6) and Colin Hickman’s Blue Room 7 (20). www.thejazzcentreuk.co.uk

EAST SIDE JAZZ CLUB

The weekly programme at Leytonstone’s East Side Jazz Club contains a vivid mix of style over the next two months. The Richard Fairhurst Trio appears on August 5, followed by a trio of Mark Lockheart, Huw V. Williams and Jay Davis (12), the Hannes

Riepke Quartet (19) and the Jean Toussaint Quintet (26). QCBA Play Blue Note on September 2, then the Derek Nash Organ Trio (9), before Alina Bzhezhsinska is joined by electronics whiz Tulshi and guest Tony Kofi (16). The month ends with Andy Sheppard’s Quartets (23). www.eastsidejazzclub.co.uk

MORLEY GREEN

Graham Brook’s monthly Tuesday Jazz and Swing at Morley Green Club, Wilmslow, continues with the Frank Griffith Nonet (August 12), Alex Clarke and Alan Barnes with Andrzej Baranek Trio (September 9) and a marvellous duo gig with Bruce Adams and Dave Newton (October 14). www.grahambrookjazz.co.uk

JAZZ AT THE STABLES

After a fairly quiet summer, the jazz content steps up at the Stables in September. Instrumental courses resume and there are some appealing shows in the Jim Marshall Auditorium. Shakatak appear on September 12, followed by the Pasadena Roof Orchestra (16) and a particularly meaty evening of jazz,



Dennis Rollins

Pocket Ellington (with Tony Kofi, Alan Barnes and Joe Webb among others – 30), October begins with a couple of treats in Stage 2: Tad Newton’s Jazz Friends (4) and Dom Pipkin (9). www.stables.org

PEGGY’S JAZZ

Peggy’s Skylight in Nottingham offers plenty of variety not only between jazz, funk and soul, but within different types of jazz. A sample of the next six weeks or so comes up with Django (July 27), Jazz Heritage celebrating Art Blakey (30), Andres Via (August 2), the Chris Bowden Quintet (7), Almanaque (9), Laura Anglada (13), Jota P and Diangana (15), Mellow Baku (17), Straight 8 Big

Band with Dennis Rollins (27), Dennis again with Mr. and Mrs. Jones (30) *100 Years of Oscar Peterson* with Dean Stockdale (31), Enrique Thompson with Bryan Corbett (September 4) and Shear Brass celebrating George Shearing with James Pearson (6) – quite a mix! www.peggyskylight.co.uk

MJAZZ IN EAST MIDLANDS

Mjazz is the centre for East Midlands, publicising a wide range of different organisations. Prime among them is the splendid initiative to take jazz into the libraries at Beeston, Worksop and West Bridgford on successive nights. Lined up on the current

programme are the Wendy Kirkland Trio (September 15-17), Stuart McCallum (October 13-15) and Zoe Gilby (November 10-12). Regular concerts at the Bonington Theatre, Arnold, highlight Nicolas Meier’s World Group (September 11), Pocket Ellington with Alan Barnes, Dave Green, etc. (October 9), Hugh Pascall Quintet (23) and the Edgar Macias Quintet with the music of the Buena Vista Social Club (November 11).

The Phoenix Arts Centre is home for John Etheridge’s Blue Spirit Trio (September 25) and the Brandon Allen Quartet (November 13); the Y Theatre, Leicester hosts the Arun Ghosh Quintet (September 11) and the Chapel Street Arts Centre features Hejira with the songs of Joni Mitchell (September 26). And, for the scholarly end of the market, there are seven monthly workshops on *The Feeling of Jazz*, commencing September 14. www.mjazz.co.uk

SPIKE’S CLUBS

As well as promoting monthly gigs at the Jazz Centre UK Spike’s Place operates clubs at

Beckenham and Brentwood. Both have a programme of quality quartets led by (at Beckenham) Mark Cecil (August 7), Derek Nash (14) and Lily Dior (28) and (at Brentwood) by Mark Crooks (August 5), Matt Wates (12) and Derek Nash (19). www.spikesplace.co.uk

NEW HOME FOR SCARBOROUGH JAZZ

Scarborough Jazz Club has now shifted to the Spa pub in Victoria Road and has an August programme of the Maranello Trio (6) and Chris Coull Quartet (20), plus two featured artists with the regular trio led by Mark Gordon: Joel Purnell (13) and John Settle (27). www.scarboroughjazz.co.uk

AT THE WATERMILL

The weekly programme at Watermill Jazz, Betchworth Park Golf Club, continues over the Summer with Clark Tracey’s Jazz Champions (July 29). August begins with Georgio Serci and Paul Booth (5), the Misha Mullova-Abbado Group (12), Mark Nightingale and Callum Au with *The Sound of Jay and Kai*

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Mark Nightingale

(19) and French horn virtuoso Jim Rattigan with his quintet (26). September kicks off with Gillian Margot and Geoffrey Keezer (2). www.watermilljazz.co.uk

SCOTT HAMILTON BACK AT PIZZA EXPRESS

The undoubted highlight of the jazz programme at Pizza Express in Soho is the appearance of Scott Hamilton (August 22-27), 40 years after he first played there. A crowded programme has plenty of other highlights, with August alone including appearances by Shakatak (1-2), Dave O'Higgins' Biggish Band (3 – lunch), Paul Higgs' Pavane (in what sounds like an interesting cross-over performance – 3 -evening), Andres Vial Trio (4), Olivia Cuttall Quintet (5), Alex Clarke and Allison Neale (12),



Scott Hamilton

Omar Puente Charanga Jazz Sextet (13), Laura Anglade (14), Gary Crosby Quintet with *The Real McCoy* (17) the Clare Teal 5 (20) and the Pete Cater Big Band (31).

September features a reunion between Claire Martin and Liane Carroll (4), Polly Gibbons (6 – lunch), the Simon Spillet Big Band (14 – lunch), Steely Jazz with Chris Ingham (17), Judy Niemark (22) and the James Davison/Callum Au Quintet (24).

Pizza Express Live's sister venues are less active, but also have some interesting shows, Dom Pipkin (August 15) at the Piano Lounge in Covent Garden, for instance. The Pizza Express in Holborn features Creedence Clearwater Revival, but finds time for jazz acts: Down for the Count (September 18) and Simply Dan in four performances of Steely Dan songs (September 27-28). Meanwhile the Pheasantry features such jazz singers as Nine Kristofferson (August 23) and Hannah Brine (September 13). www.pizzaexpresslive.com

CONCORDE LINE-UP

The Concorde Club in Eastleigh plays host to the Derek Nash Quartet on July 30, followed by the Tom Waters Band (August 6) and Salena Jones and her Band (20). A packed September brings in Rainey's Revue with Richard Exall (3), Tony Jacobs and Martin Litton with *A Touch of Stardust* (10), Dom Pipkin (17) and Chris Ingham with *Steely Jazz* (24). October sees the Emily Masser

Quintet (1), the Tom Smith Big Band (8), near-namesake Tommy Smith with Gwilym Simcock (15) and Matt Skelton's Blackhawk Quintet in a tribute to Shelly Manne (22). The following Tuesday (28) comes a change of venue to the Moldy Fig Wine Bar with Derek Nash bringing an all-star quartet: Dave Newton, Geoff Gascoyne and Sebastiaan de Krom.

www.theconcordeclub.com

JAM AT HIGHAMS PARK

Jazz at Highams Park presents Jam Sessions with a featured artist as a regular Sunday event: James Wade-Sired (August 3), Jim Mullen (17) and Tim Whitehead (31). Meanwhile Saturday concerts feature the Nigel Price Organ Trio (August 9) and the Phil Robson Trio (September 6). www.highamsparkjazzclub.com

WAKEFIELD RESUMES

Its future apparently secure, Wakefield Jazz resumes after the Summer break on September 26, with the New York Brass Band. Following on in October are 4 in 1 (3, Ben Crosland's Threeway (10), Bob Haddrell (17), Boplicity (24) and the Nigel Price Organ Trio (31). www.wakefieldjazz.org

HUGH AND MARION'S

Hugh and Marion's Eltham Jazz Club, run by Georgia Mancio and Dave Ohm, features drummer Tristan Banks on August 14, with a top-class quartet, as indeed are the next two dates: Robbie Robson (September 11) and Rachael Calladine (25). www.elthamjazzclub.com

JAZZLEEDS' PROGRAMME

JazzLeeds has an ambitious programme of evening concerts, Rush Hour Jazz on a Wednesday evening and Sunday afternoon jazz, not to mention the occasional jam session. Olivia Cuttall's quintet (August 28) and the Ancient Infinity Orchestra (30) are followed by a gap in the evening concerts until two exciting dates in October: Jean Toussaint Quintet (9) and the Nigel Price Organ Trio (30). The Rush Hour Jazz features such names as Emily Brown (August 6) and Mike Hall (September 17) while Sunday afternoons are in the company of such as Abtuse (August 3), Boba Swing

(September 14), Rod Mason's Elements (October 5) and the Gypsy Swing Collective (19). www.jazzleeds.org.uk

LATE NIGHTS WITH ELGAR

The Royal Albert Hall's Late Night Jazz in the Elgar Room resumes with Dreamscapes on October 2, with the Arshid Azarine Trio (23) and KYRA (30) to follow in October. Then there is a mini-festival from November 14-17: Joseph Tawandros (14), Gray by Silver (15) and Olivia Murphy, Andrew Woodhead and Lewis Daniel (17). www.royalalberthall.com

JAZZ IN THE HOWARD

After an intriguing Night in Havana on August 22, Opera North's Howard Assembly Room has three orthodox jazz events in its Autumn programme: Courtney Pine with Song (September 20), the Tom Ollendorff Trio (October 19) and the Fergus McCreadie Trio (November 16). www.operanorth.co.uk

IMBER COURT JAZZ

Jazz at Imber Court Sports and Leisure Centre, East Molesey, has a series of excellent small groups lined up: *Soul Train* sees Leon Greening and friends remembering Bobby Timmons (August 10); Matt Skelton's Blackhawk Quintet pay tribute to Shelly Manne (September 14); Brandon Allen and Freddie Gavita head up a quintet (October 12); and then it's the turn of Mark Nightingale and James Davison (November 16). www.allaboutweybridge.co.uk



Polly Gibbons

I GET A KICK OUT OF...

JIM SIMPSON answers the questions.

What track or album turned you on to jazz?

In 1948, when I was 10 years old, Pee Wee Hunt's recording of *12th Street Rag* hit number one on the charts. It went on to sell 3 million copies - one of them to me and naturally received a lot of radio play. Subsequently, I discovered Louis Armstrong's *Hot Fire*.

What was the first jazz gig you went to?

When I was fourteen, I used to sneak into the upstairs room of The Old Crown in Digbeth - reputedly Birmingham's oldest pub - to listen to Pete Vicary's South Side Jazzmen. Wearing shorts, I believed I managed to be inconspicuous, until decades later the drummer, Ron Burnett, told me that the band had a good laugh about the kid hiding at the back of the room.

What is your favourite jazz album and why?

The Atomic Mr Basie, because it is the definition of Big Band swing, followed by Jimmy Rushing's

Little Jimmy and the Big Brass and Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Sing *a Song of Basie*.

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

Louis Armstrong and the All Stars at Embassy Sportsdrome in Birmingham on May 17th 1956.

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

Lady Sings the Blues with Val Wiseman, who I believe to be the UK's finest ever jazz singer handling those Billie Holiday classics with aplomb - in the company of our finest jazzers - Bruce Adams, Alan Barnes, Ian Bateman, Dave Newton, Dave Green and Steve Brown

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

Louis In London - the previously unreleased Louis Armstrong 1968 live album issued on Verve



If you could meet one jazz musician, living or dead, who would it be and why? Louis Armstrong, because I just can't get enough of that man's music... or because I want to know what mouthpiece he used.

Apart from being editor of *Jazz Rag*, JIM SIMPSON is a former trumpeter with an astonishing career in

jazz and blues. Notable achievements, apart from being Black Sabbath's first manager, are creating the American Blues Legends tours of the 1970s, organising British Jazz Awards and, especially, being the director of 41 Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festivals.

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THEMES AND PERSONALITIES

Mike Durham’s Classic Jazz Party (October 31-November 2) returns to the Village Hotel, Newcastle, and once again its themes stirred RON SIMPSON’s memory and imagination.



The Mike Durham Classic Jazz Party is a succession of sessions by some 30-plus top British, Continental and American players on themes chosen and arranged by the musicians. Some of these are fairly predictable (and none the worse for that!), but one of the joys of the jazz party comes when you try to delve a bit deeper into the themes chosen.

For instance, top of the list this year is Willard Robison’s Orchestra. Every jazz fan knows the work of Willard Robison, even if in some cases we don’t know it’s his! *Old Folks* is a gently nostalgic song coupled to an evocative melody and a favourite of many jazzmen, but to be honest I find *A Cottage for Sale* even more moving, the state of the overgrown cottage representing the failure of a relationship, all beautifully understated.

So we know Willard Robison from maybe four or five songs composed in the 1920s and 1930s, but what about his orchestra? He formed The Deep River Orchestra in 1917 and was discovered by Paul Whiteman, but for many years his territory was the Deep South – he was born in Missouri. I was fascinated to discover how prolific he was in the 1920s. In 1926-27 he arranged a series of his songs under the title *American Suite*, just two years after George Gershwin had re-named his *American Rhapsody* as *Rhapsody in Blue* on the advice of brother Ira. Most striking of all, as the 20s turned into the 30s, he took William Grant Still on board as an arranger on fairly

severe terms. Now Still was one of the great figures of the Harlem Renaissance, having worked with, among others, W.C. Handy and Fletcher Henderson and was about to have a huge success with his *First Symphony*. And this is the man Robison tied to a contract to arrange for his radio show!

This doesn’t quite fit with the image of Robison as a gentle soul steeped in rural melancholy, but what is strange is how little we can find about him from the late 1930s onwards. Recording sessions and radio shows, once regular features of his life, seem to have dried up. Alec Wilder, in his definitive account of the American popular song, referred to the number of people who tried to help him, but also mentioned his ‘almost euphoric’ life. He summed up his place in the song-writing pantheon:

‘Generally his songs were known only to a few singers and lovers of the off-beat and the non-urban songs. He had a special flair for gentleness and children, the lost and the religious.’

He, in fact, had such an affinity for the religious that, after his death in Peekskill, New York, in 1968 it was found he had composed 150 spirituals!

The legacy of Willard Robison is preserved in a wonderful 1962 album by his old buddy Jack Teagarden, *Think Well of Me*, but more recently Matt Munisteri, recording an album of his songs, was able to refer to Robison’s work as ‘lost’. One of the most

enigmatic figures on the fringes of jazz, Willard Robison will get a new lease of life at Whitley Bay.

And at the opposite end of the scale there is *Drumnastics*, the music of Joe Daniels, a good drummer whose ability was overshadowed for the purist by his talent for showy effects. I can remember my father having a 78 (title now forgotten) by Joe Daniels and his Hot Shots in *Drumnastics*. In fact, the South African-born Daniels served his apprenticeship with some of the best in British dance music in the 1920s, working with Fred Elizalde before moving on to Harry Roy, also not one to avoid showmanship!

Daniels grew up in a different time and could point to the fact that the Prince of Wales liked to take over from him on drums. Eventually the Hot Shots came to an end in 1951 and Daniels formed a band more suited to the earnest attitudes of the day, but he never became fully respectable, playing his residencies at Butlin’s and releasing a record as ‘Washboard Joe and the Scrubbers’. Now who, one asks oneself, will take the role of the unrepentant populist at Whitley Bay?

Another band that is the stuff of legend is the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra. I am often surprised at the quality of Jimmy Dorsey’s playing, especially on clarinet or baritone sax, but Tommy had the

big hit, *I’m Getting Sentimental Over You*. Christened ‘The Sentimental Gentleman of Swing’, he did everything in his power to contradict it. The first Dorsey Brothers Orchestra made it till 1935 when Tommy stormed off stage and never came back.

This produced a problem for the film makers when they were working on one of the first of the musical biography movies. *The Fabulous Dorseys* (1947) cast the two brothers as themselves and one imagined that Tommy’s explosions were kept under wraps. A final unlikely conclusion to the tale of the Dorseys came in 1953 when Tommy invited Jimmy to join his band, re-christened ‘The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra’. Sadly both brothers were to die in their 50s within four years. One odd brush with fame came in 1955 when a very sick Charlie Parker settled down to watch Tommy Dorsey on television – and died.

Finally a confession: though there are plenty of big names in the concert themes (King Oliver, Bechet/Spanier), there are several that are completely unknown to me – Thelma Terry and her Play Boys, Nick Lucas – The Crooning Troubadour, Jimmy’s Joys – the music of Jimmy (Joy) Maloney...

Where do they find them all?

www.whitleybayjazzfest.com



SCARBOROUGH JAZZ FESTIVAL

Scarborough Jazz Festival prospered for years under the benign stewardship of Mike Gordon, three days packed with jazz in the elegance of the Spa Complex, approximately six concerts a day in neat little hour and a quarter segments. If you were to think of the unique features of Scarborough, apart from the North Sea lapping against the steps, it would probably be the mix: of established stars and up-and-comers, of the great tradition and contemporary experiment, of meditative and swinging. Then you might come up with the drollest compere around, Alan Barnes, and the quality of the all-day jazz around the Spa complex.

This is the second year when Mark Gordon has taken over from his father and, if there is a change, it’s towards the young and unknown. I suppose we ought to cite Emily Masser and Alex Clarke in this category – they may well be the youngest co-leaders at the Festival – but they have both made such tremendous strides lately that they almost come in the ‘established stars’ category. Alex has excelled with her own quartet as well as guesting with any manner of other bands (in a huge variety of styles, let it be said) and the match-up with Emily who garnered golden reviews on her recent CD, seemed almost inevitable. Emma



Rawicz, similarly youthful and talented and equally established, is bringing her orchestra to the festival in what should be another exciting session.

Simon Spillett’s Big Band with the music of Tubby Hayes brings the Festival to a resounding finale. What can one say about this band? For a start, take a look at the sax section: Sammy Mayne, Pete Long, Alex Garnett, Simon Allen and Alan Barnes – and there’s a certain Mr. Spillett to join in as required! Big names are scattered throughout

the brass and there’s a tight rhythm section behind it all: Rob Barron, Alec Dankworth and Pete Cater. As a finale you couldn’t do better, with Joe Stilgoe and Giacomo Smith’s The Entertainers immediately before! Joe and Giacomo are, of course, well skilled in the art of entertainment and the band has plenty of reminders of Giacomo’s days with Kansas Smitty’s.

Alan, of course, provides a different view of the jazz scene each time, this year

concentrating on the music of Art Pepper with an all-star quintet with young trumpet star James Davison and a fine rhythm section of Robin Aspland, Jeremy Brown and Steve Brown. Such well-known names as Gaz Hughes and Dean Stockdale are more than welcome, with Dean bringing a major show celebrating 100 years of Oscar Peterson. But, apart from these familiar names, what about the less well known?

Alexia Gardner has just formed her quintet and is making waves in the North East, Ritmo Caliente! is the brainchild of Scarborough Jazz regular John Settle and is a tribute to Cal Tjader complete with timbales, congas and bongos. The Jazz Dynamos re-fashion the songs of the Police, Bowie and Dolly Parton to give a new jazz perspective and Billy Marrows’ Grande Familia melds folk, funk, Brazilian and classical music.

All in all it sounds like an excursion into exciting new talent, but Mark, like his father previously, knows how to balance the experimental with the familiar.

R.S.

www.scarboroughjazzfestival.co.uk



Photo by
Merlin Daleman

JAZZ FESTIVALS FROM AUGUST

EALING JAZZ FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 2/3)
Brand New Heavies and Hot 8 Brass Band top the bill, with such artists as Georgia Cecile and Florence Joelle in support.
www.ealingsummerfestivals.com

BRECON JAZZ FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 8-10)
Under new directors Brecon Jazz Festival maintains the traditions of 40 years, with many town centre venues and a line-up including Hejira, Cleveland Watkiss, Ruby Turner and Soweto Kinch.
www.breconjazzfestival2025.co.uk

PERSHORE JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY

(AUGUST 9)
Sixteen top musicians play classic jazz through a summer's afternoon.
www.visitpershire.co.uk

WE OUT HERE FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 14-17)
In picturesque surroundings at Wimborne St. Giles a huge list of performers includes such names as Nubian Twist, Hermeto Pascoal and Marysia Osu.
www.weoutherefestival.com

RYE INTERNATIONAL JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 21-25)
Mostly in St. Mary's Church, the Rye festival features the likes of Ruby Turner, Courtney Pine and Ian Shaw, Polly Gibbons and James Pearson.
www.ryejazz.com

FISHGUARD JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 21-25)
Organised by Aberjazz in a variety of venues including Theatr Gwaun, the Fishguard festival ranges from *Seven Steps* (a Miles Davis tribute) to the Cinelli Brothers. Other bands and musicians booked include Dale Storr, Ma Bessie's Speakeasy with Julia Titus, and the Jay Azzolini Quartet.
www.aberjazz.com

BUDE JAZZ FESTIVAL

(AUGUST 26-29)
With traditional jazz spread throughout the town, a few names from the list of artists are Trevor Whiting's *Bechet to Bird* and Alan Barnes/John Hallam, both with the Craig Milverton Trio, Jake Leg Jug Band, Tad Newton's Jazz Friends and Pete Allen's Big Jazz Band.
www.budejazzfestival.info

NEWCASTLE JAZZ FESTIVAL

(SEPTEMBER 20)
Live Theatre is the venue for an afternoon and evening of music from Nauta and the groups of Noel Dennis, Joe Steels and Ant Law.
www.newcastlejazzfestival.co.uk

ISLE OF WIGHT JAZZ WEEKEND

(SEPTEMBER 24-28)
Headliners in a variety of venues include Liane Carroll, Clark Tracey's Jazz Champions, Sax Appeal, Nigel Price Organ Trio and the Clare Teal 5.
www.iwjazzweekend.co.uk

BRIGHTON JAZZ FESTIVAL

(SEPTEMBER 26-29)
Together with a host of supporting events, the main attractions are four ticketed double-header concerts in Horatio's Bar at the end of the pier.
www.brightonjazzfestival.co.uk

CALLANDER JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(OCTOBER 2-5)
Artists lined up for the Callander festival include the Tenement Jazz Band, the Revolutionaires, Gary Cain Band and Pat Fulgoni's Blues Experience.
www.callanderjazzandblues.com

SHREWSBURY DJANGO FESTIVAL

(OCTOBER 10-12)
Main concerts this year are in St. Mary's Church, with Martin Taylor, Paulus Schafer, the London Django Collective and Joachim Stephan among the artists booked.
www.shrewsburydjangofest.co.uk

MARSDEN JAZZ FESTIVAL

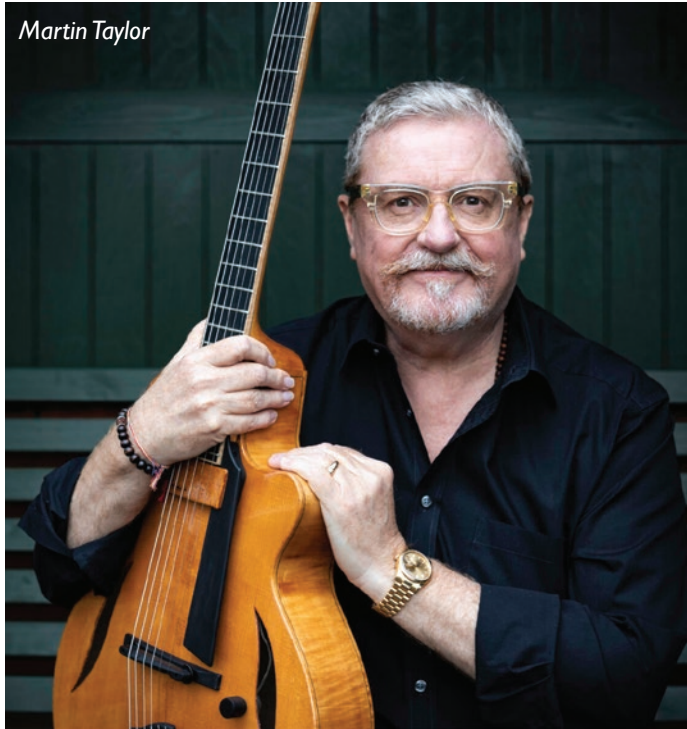
(OCTOBER 10-12)
Concerts are held in Marsden Mechanics and throughout this picturesque Pennine town. Artists lined up for the Mechanics include Zoe Gilby and Andy Champion, the Rob Luft Quartet and Threeway with special guest Rob Luft.
www.marsdenjazzfestival.com

EFG LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL

(NOVEMBER 14-23)
With all London's major concert venues at its disposal, the EFG London Jazz Festival has an undeniable advantage and by November the line-up will be awesome. At the moment Kurt Elling and the Yellowjackets, Hermeto Pascoal, Dee Dee Bridgwater and – making her concert comeback - Tanita Tikaram grab the attention.
www.efglondonjazzfestival.org.uk



Dee Dee Bridgwater



Martin Taylor

BRIAN KELLOCK

BRUCE ADAMS remembers a great Scots pianist.

This is a really tough one for me. First of all, I don't think Brian realised exactly how good he was how much he was loved by the jazz community. Especially in Scotland.

When I first met Brian forty years ago, it was at the Edinburgh Jazz Festival. Back then, the big Festivals in Britain like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham and Brecon all had decent budgets which enabled them to bring over big names who invariably were accompanied by British musicians. The top pianist in Edinburgh at that time was Alec Shaw who'd toured with countless visiting Americans and really set the standard in Scotland. A pianist would be required to cover gigs with Benny Waters, Buddy Tate, Scott Hamilton, Warren Vache, Roy Williams, Danny Moss, Harry Sweets Edison, Doc Cheetham.

There were no parts to read off of. Tunes were just called and you just had to get on with it. It could be tough even for an experienced pianist. Brian arrived as a twenty three year old complete with an

extensive repertoire, and played all the required styles like he'd spent a lifetime studying them. It was quite remarkable.

I got to share the stage with some great pianists in Edinburgh. People like Ray Bryant, Dave McKenna and Dick Hyman. My best gigs were always with Brian. He was truly world class. My biggest regret is that we never got to record together. I imagine I'm not the only one saying that.

Prior to Covid, I toured in Scotland with saxophonist Stewart Forbes in a tribute to Charlie Parker.

We were lucky to have Brian on piano. Little did we know that we were going to spend the next couple of years in limbo.

When they started to lift Covid lockdown, the same band got booked for a streaming gig at the Glasgow Jazz Festival. We were so pleased to get to play with each other. The organiser asked if Brian and I could do a duo set as well. Bearing in mind we had just



Brian Kellock

played a set of up tempo be bop standards. I asked Brian if he had any ideas, and he said *Come to Me My Melancholy Baby*. That was Brian, he had a grasp of so many genres in jazz. We cobbled a set together in five minutes and did it in one take. It was a joy to do, and did wonders for my sanity.

Last year at the Leith Jazz Festival we played a duo gig at the Shore Bar in Leith. All I can say is that it just freewheeled. It was just so

easy, and that was the last time I saw Brian. I never expected that to be my last memory.

Brian's talent could easily have had him as a headliner at the world's top jazz clubs. He chose to remain in Scotland, which was the world's loss and Scotland's gain.

RONALD ATKINS 1936-2025

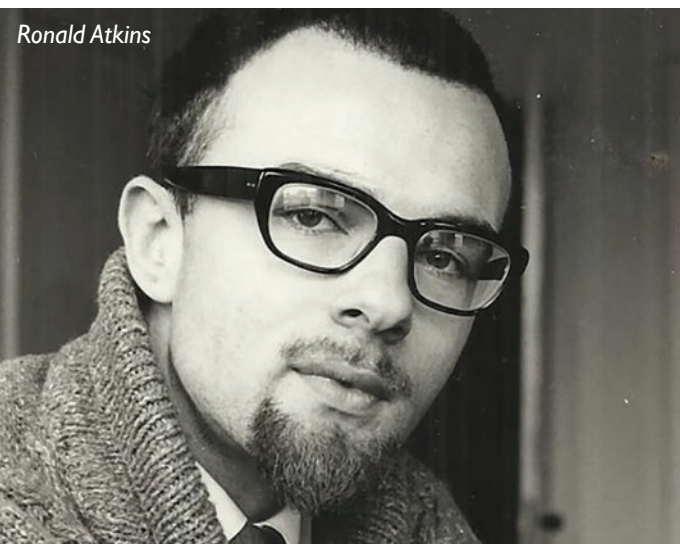
The death of Ronald Atkins deprives us of the last of that coterie of jazz writers who, in the 1950s, revolutionised the art in Great Britain. In the words of John Fordham in his excellent obituary for Atkins in *The Guardian*, he likes of Charles Fox, Albert McCarthy, Alun Morgan and, of course, Ronald Atkins 'disliked PR-hyped personality-centred writing, preferring a more precise objective method dealing simply with what had been played and why these sounds worked artistically – or did not.'

From 1960 to the 1990s Atkins led a double life as the *Guardian's* jazz writer and a civil servant; apparently his civil service colleagues were completely oblivious to his secondary career. But his life before that had more than its share of the exotic. Born in Istanbul – his father was the South African-born businessman Ralph

Rosenberg – he and his moved to South Africa and then to Britain in those desperate times for Jews in Europe.

After Stowe School, he completed his National Service, worked briefly as a librarian and spent three years in the marketing and promotion department at Esquire before settling into the civil service.

Atkins contributed to many books, notably Albert McCarthy's celebrated *Jazz on Record* in 1968, and edited *Jazz – The Ultimate Guide* in 1986. John Fordham's obituary suggests a life on the fringe of great events, from the peregrinations of his early childhood to his aunt becoming a key operative of S.O.E. during the war. What he certainly was, apart from a distinguished writer on jazz, was a notable member of CAMRA, particularly active after his retirement from *The Guardian*



Ronald Atkins

and able to point to the *Collins Gem Beer Guide* among his many publications.

We can do no better than refer the reader to John Fordham's obituary. Fordham was in a unique

position to appreciate Ronald Atkins' achievements, having been invited in 1978 (after another late jazz night with the civil service looming the next morning) to share the duties as *The Guardian* jazz writer with him.

MEMORIES OF LADY SINGS THE BLUES

On July 26th, as part of the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival, what may be the final performance of *Lady Sings the Blues* takes place at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall. On these pages JIM SIMPSON spells out the story, DIGBY FAIRWEATHER reminisces about the show and ALAN BARNES recalls taking over from Al Gay.

It's a sad sad story that we may - after forty years – be saying goodbye to *Lady Sings the Blues*. I feel it very deeply because I was honoured to play trumpet from the very earliest days of the show, sharing the stage with great musicians and the incomparable Val Wiseman. It was Jim Simpson who was first to spot that Val was indeed a world-class singer in need of powerful promotion and he framed her talents perfectly in the show that over the years we came to abbreviate in our diaries as 'LSTB'. Jim commissioned arrangements – many of them from my old friend, trombonist Pete Strange – and the result was a perfect chronological portrait of Billie from her earliest and happiest days through to her sadder post-war years and inevitable decline in the 1950s. Nobody could have done it better than Val. Her style was (and is!) her own, but she could uncannily bring Billie to life without resorting to any direct imitation of her stylistic trademarks. It's fortunate that we recorded the show both in-studio and live and (while I'm opposed to hyperbole) I'm happy to assent to Benny Green's assertion in the liner note to our studio album 'that here and there come moments when what is happening might even be a shade better than what was being played all those years ago'. Thank you Benny. And thank you Jim and Val. It was a pleasure and a privilege.

DIGBY FAIRWEATHER

Lady Sings The Blues - Extract from "Don't Worry 'Bout The Bear"

In 1986 I booked Eggy Ley's Hotshots to play in the Birmingham Jazz Festival. Eggy had a fine swinging little combo with excellent musicians – Eggy himself and guitarist Paul Sealey included – and their singer was Val Wiseman, now based near London and in the process of making a comeback. Naturally I was more than intrigued and checked out their first gig, at the White Swan in Harborne.

It took me about 20 minutes to realise that here, in a small pub in a neat Birmingham suburb, I was listening to Britain's finest female jazz singer, with the possible exception of Scot Annie Ross. Her intonation, sense of time and diction were impeccable, but that was only the beginning. The way she got hold of a song and made it completely her own with such absolute conviction was a very rare quality. There were influences of Peggy Lee, Anita O'Day and, particularly, Billie Holiday, but through it all you could clearly hear the voice of Val Wiseman. She was drinking

lager at a fairly decent rate and I realised it wouldn't be too long before she went to the toilet. I positioned myself accordingly. When she emerged, again she didn't notice me until I told her I had only three words to say to her, 'Billie, Anita and Peggy.' That seemed to capture her attention. 'My favourite singers!', she replied.



Eggy Ley's Hotshots were to play several shows over three days of the festival, so Val and I, who clearly had a lot to talk about, hung out whenever we could. Before the end of the festival I had convinced her – well, almost – that we should work together and form a band of the best available players to properly present the wonderful, but neglected, repertoire of Billie Holiday. My first port of call, as so often during our long and utterly fruitful relationship, was Digby Fairweather. He got it immediately and took about two seconds flat to agree to be the bandleader. We recruited Humphrey Lyttelton's trombone player Pete Strange, an inspirational arranger and one of the nicest of God's creatures, to write the arrangements for a conscientiously selected 35 songs from the vast Billie Holiday repertoire. The material was fairly evenly distributed between the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, though we decided to avoid the hackneyed over-dramatic songs that formed many people's total experience of Billie Holiday. Hugely respected as trumpet player, journalist, author and arranger, Ken Rattenbury was

invited to supply additional arrangements which he did with alacrity, expressing his delight at the prospect of hearing his arrangements played by these top musicians.

The next step was to kidnap the great Midlands jazz pianist Roy Fisher whose other life focussed on poetry at which, I was told, he was something of a dab hand. A week's woodshedding and we had identified the keys and tempos, added a few more titles and dropped a couple – and then the package, and the responsibility, was handed over to Peter Strange and Ken Rattenbury.

It is always a particular pleasure to be able to build a band from scratch, inviting not only the best and most appropriate musicians around, but also a bunch of my favourite people. But there was more. I spent many a happy evening balancing the choices and considering the individual musical preferences of the guys and how comfortable they might be playing together. Hence a certain similarity to the earlier, remarkable Alex Welsh Band



might be noted in the final line-up: Digby with Roy Williams (trombone), Al Gay (tenor saxophone and clarinet), Brian Lemon (piano), Jim Douglas (guitar), Len Skeat (double bass) and Eddie Taylor (drums). This was the stellar line-up fronted by the self-taught West Bromwich girl, Val Wiseman – some responsibility then, but to this day I am convinced that no other singer I know, or have heard of, could have handled this difficult repertoire with such style, accuracy and aplomb.

Lady Sings the Blues: A Celebration of the Music of Billie Holiday, gave its first performance in the 500-capacity Adrian Boulton Hall in Birmingham Conservatoire as a main feature of the next year's festival. It was a complete sell-out, attracted a bunch of media attention and was immediately re-booked for the following year. Then the offers of gigs started to come in. Firstly

a four-day tour in Scotland, including a performance in Carnegie Hall – the one in Dunfermline, Andrew Carnegie's birthplace. Overnight we had a working band on our hands, without doubt one of the UK's finest regular jazz swing bands of our time.

We went into the residential Black Barn Studios in Ripley, Surrey, to cut the first album. We took our time and did it properly, and subsequently we got Europe-wide distribution on Big Bear Records, resulting in picking up dates in Holland, Germany, Belgium and France along with television and radio appearances. A few months later Eddie Taylor was headhunted by George Melly for John Chilton's Feetwarmers, to be replaced by the effervescent Bobby Worth, formerly a star of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra, and this line-up remained pretty much constant for many years.

I was delighted to be asked to join the *Lady Sings the Blues* show after Al Gay had decided to retire. Al was a great tenor and clarinet player, very much in the mainstream: warm toned and understated but always swinging. On the couple of times I'd played with him in my early years he'd been most encouraging and I can still see him looking relaxed with his signature glasses chain and in one of his comfy cardigans.

He had a lugubrious sense of humour: 'You haven't asked how I am' - 'How are you Al?' - "Don't ask!"

On the times I asked him to come back and deputise for me, he'd string me along with elaborate excuses before always saying yes; 'When I tell you I haven't touched a clarinet for six weeks' or claiming an incurable cold.

I was very pleased to have a chance to play tenor (I'm usually on alto and baritone) and even reproduce a couple of Lester Young solos. His playing was so beautiful and strong that his improvisations have become a part of the compositions and it feels great playing his perfect phrases. Similarly there were some Benny Goodman bits to do on the clarinet which were a joy. There were plenty chances to stretch out and be myself as well but these giants had set the bar rather high. 'Being cut from beyond the grave' as drummer Jake Hanna once put it.

I've always loved the Billie Holiday small bands with Teddy Wilson on piano and the pick of whichever horn players were in town, often from the Basie and Ellington bands. It's only recently that I've realised just how close to perfection and profound they are.

The band was full of old friends. Len Skeat on double bass and Brian Dee on piano were members at that time of the quintet that I had and still have with Bruce Adams and which Bobby Worth joined later on drums. I spoke to Brian the other week and we had a couple of hours reminiscing. I think he may be the only surviving member of the large group of jazz musicians famously photographed in Trafalgar Square in the 1960's. The rhythm section was completed by the rhythmic guitar of Jim Douglas.

I first met Digby in Blackpool, having won a jazz competition along with trumpeter Paul Lacey for which the prize was to play two tunes with him and Danny Moss. He was very good about it and we've become good friends. He is always generous and I've lost count of the times a book, film or CD that has come up in a phone conversation arrives in a parcel a few days later. His trumpet and cornet stylings were perfect to lead the ensemble.

Trombonist Roy Williams is a phenomenal musician, sadly no longer active. He had that rare skill of making everyone around him sound better and, gifted with a great ear, his solos were always superb.

Val Wiseman gets very very close to the timbre and spirit of Billie Holiday and has a way of putting the songs across with real feeling, in her own way but always referencing Billie.

A high spot of each show for me was the chance to accompany Val and solo in a quartet setting on the tune *Lover Man*.

I think the trip that sticks most in my mind was the one night in Tunisia. I'd forgotten my socks and Jim Simpson and I wandered around the souk trying to find a pair. We eventually found a stall owner who rummaged around and came up with the largest socks I've ever seen. Too big to hang up at Christmas. 'Any chance you have some that might go inside the shoes?' asked Jim.

Next morning after lengthy and hilarious negotiations I purchased a wrist watch off a street trader for fifteen dinars. Only on the plane home with Bobby Worth wearing his newly purchased fez did I notice that the second hand was painted on: irrelevant really as the watch had stopped working never to go again.

ALAN BARNES



Al Gay in disguise



Brian Lemon



Len Skeat

THE SINGER

VAL WISEMAN is the jazz singer considered by many to be the finest the UK has produced. During the early sixties while still a teenager, Val sang with the greatest of British bands at the tail end of the 'trad boom' before moving into semi-retirement as the decade drew to a close. Making a dramatic comeback at the 1986 Birmingham Jazz Festival, Val Wiseman found a hungry audience, eager to hear this unique entertainer in a variety of formats. With her own quartet Val performs extensively, touring in Europe and Scandinavia and has featured with American instrumental giants including Yank Lawson, Bob Wilber, Wild Bill Davison, Nat Pierce and Bill Perkins. In July 1987 Val Wiseman secured the title role in the Festival production of *Lady Sings The Blues*.

● Press reaction reflects her welcome return to the centre spotlight:-

"Val Wiseman started to sing, and the night was made. It was an unforgettable show." *The Voice*

"A reverent, but ever-cheerful, brilliantly conceived and executed tribute to a great lady of jazz... The evening, without any doubt belonged to Val Wiseman. Believe me, this lady sings the blues, and then some. And that band! Superb, sympathetic, swinging, so compatible with the overall conception of this most respectful tribute." *Crescendo International*

"I cannot think of a British singer who could have done these particular songs in this style better. I could happily see it all again tomorrow." *The Jazz Rag*

"Ms Wiseman emerged as an authentic jazz singer in her own right." *Jazz News*

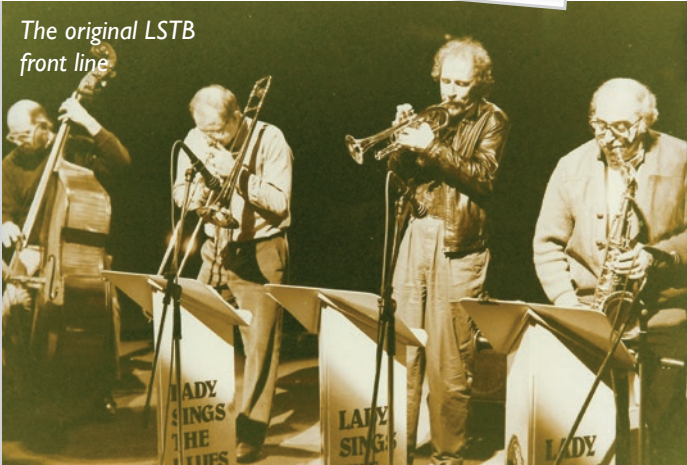
"Ms Wiseman... justified the enthusiastic reports." *Birmingham Post*

"Exceptionally gifted - so much style." *Crescendo International*

● Val Wise

● Legendary U.S. pianist Nat Pierce took over the piano chair for a U.K. performance of *Lady Sings The Blues*. Nat, pictured with Val during a break in rehearsal, has the distinction of having regularly depped in times of illness for pianist-bandleaders Count Basie, Stan Kenton and Claude Thornhill. (Photograph by, and reproduced with kind permission of, *The Evening Mail*).

Published for Big Bear Music by IBT Publications with the assistance of...



The original LSTB front line

Daily Post

Monday, May 4, 1998

The magic spells of Billie Holliday are cast again

JAZZ

Lady Sings the Blues

King's Gap Hotel, Hoylake

IN THE unlikely venue of a Wirral hotel function room, Val Wiseman and her brilliant cohorts recreated the music of the legendary Billie Holliday for a spellbound audience - including some of us who thought we'd seen and heard it all before.

A stunning three hours of top-class entertainment awaited those who made the trip to Hoylake's King's Gap Hotel, a place fast becoming a leading jazz venue.

The Lady Sings the Blues Band hit the stage swinging, so to speak, with a stunning Swing Brothers Swing It, which set the theme for the rest of the evening.

I have heard Val & Co give their show several times over the last few years but never with the verve and impact which this newly revamped programme carried.

□ LADY SINGS BILLIE: Val Wiseman was superb

Picture: TED BAKER

By Tony Davis

absent Digby Fairweather was the man who has long been acclaimed as Britain's top man on the instrument, the great Kenny Baker. He scintillated on Me, Myself and I and after playing a fine section part throughout the first set, burst out after the interval, notably with some exciting Kletzmer-style horn on Comes

Love. All seven musicians excelled themselves, young reed man Alan Barnes - a Cheshire lad - delighting his parents who made the trip to see him and trombonist Roy Williams - formerly from Manchester and now recognised as Europe's finest, giving his all. A curtain-raising set by Wirral's

own first-rate Parade Jazz Band included some fine jazz classics such as Louis Armstrong's Knee Drops, here featuring the superb trumpet of Billy Edwards and a couple of vocals by Dave Renton, veteran trombonist of many local outfits. In two weeks time, Dave Shepherd brings his Benny Goodman style Quintet to the King's Gap. I for one, couldn't miss it.

Jazz Journal International

December 1990 Vol 43 No. 12

Scotland's Independent Newspaper

THE HERALD

Tuesday, December 10, 1996

Music

Lady Sings the Blues, Bourbon Street, Glasgow

Rob Adams

FROM Abba to Zappa, tribute bands' uniforms hang on a shaky nail, with accusations ranging from neophilia and a lack of originality to simply getting their ambitions mixed up with their capabilities. Jazz festivals, particularly, are replete with mixed-grade exaltations to departed geniuses, but whatever your feelings on the concept, you can't accuse this Billie Holiday tribute of grave-robbing because the music is too alive. In trombonist Roy Williams, trumpeter Digby Fairweather, and Alan Barnes (here playing the tenor saxophone and clarinet cards of an improbably proficient multi-reeds and wind instrument deck), you have a front line that plays with spirit, invention, precision, and good old jazz sassiness, qualities matched and allowed to flourish by an impeccable rhythm section.

Having this bunch around her must make Val Wiseman's unenviable job that bit easier. Wiseman, wisely, doesn't assume Holiday's personality - she simply sings her songs and shares the introductions (nothing too involved, there's too much music to get through) with the gleefully articulate Fairweather. She has a pleasantly light voice, and although perhaps more at ease on the phase when Holiday was, on the singer in the band" rather than the focus of attention, she has a genuine feeling for classics such as *Miss Brown To You*, *What A Little Moonlight Can Do*, and *I Cried For You*.

The latter was one of several new arrangements introduced in situ, a practice that, given the show's 10 years on the road, enhances the sense of a living tradition and keeps the musicians on their mettle, although there was no evidence that they were ever likely to stray.

REVIEWS

The Herald, Tuesday, December 10, 1996

ARTS

VAL WISEMAN
LADY SINGS THE BLUES
(a) *Eeny Meeny Miny Mo; What Shall I Say; One, Two, Button Your Shoe; I'll Never Be The Same; How Could You?; Am I Blue?; What A Little Moonlight Can Do; Miss Brown To You; On The Sentimental Side; It's Easy To Blame The Weather; He's Funny That Way; If Dreams Come True; Lover Man; Just One Of Those Things; (b) Easy Living; You Can Depend On Me; Don't Explain; Riffin' The Scotch.* (66.02)
Val Wiseman (v); Digby Fairweather (t/c/f.); Roy Williams (tb); Al Gay (t/c/f.); Brian Lemon (p); Jim Douglas (g); Len Skeat (d); Eddie Taylor (d). 8"ham Feb 20-22 1990. (Big Bear Records BEAR 33)

The flame that serves as a memory to Billie Holiday continues to burn brightly. Val Wiseman's feeling and understanding of pre-war Lady Day recordings are diligently supported by a coterie of British Musicians. It may have been February 1990 but the freshness and zest which pervades the LP selections help to support a possible theory that Val and the septet have an undiluted affection for Billie's outings with Teddy Wilson et al. No-one is foolhardy enough to attempt copying and Ms. Wiseman's slightly breathy timbre and dic-

tion, are a little removed from the Lady's idiosyncratic delivery. I'll Never Be The Same, Am I Blue? She's Funny That Way and If Dreams Come True are among the expertly executed songs, together with romping versions of *What A Little Moonlight and Just One Of Those Things*. Williams and Lemon are outstanding and I like Gay's Bud Freeman-cum-Al Cohn sound on tenor sax. Pete Stränge arranged most of the tracks and if Val Wiseman can produce another album of similar quality backed by the same or an equally distinguished personnel we can expect a treat. Ray Harrison

The (b) tracks above represent a bonus only available on the CD version and very worthwhile they are. Neither *Easy Living* nor *Don't Explain* are easy numbers to sing, especially since the title of the CD and the choice of repertoire invite odious comparisons with the original, but Val does a first class job on both. Indeed she invests the entire performance with her own personality and added to the skills and experience of this collection of top-rate British jazzmen the result could hardly be less than first class. CD reproduction is excellent. Eddie Cook

Crescendo

ALBUMS

'Lady Sings The Blues'
(a celebration of the music of Billie Holiday)
(LP: Big Bear 33)

Eeny Meeny Miny Moi What Shall I Say?!
One, Two, Button Your Shoe! I'll Never be the Same! How Could You? Am I Blue?!
What a Little Moonlight Can Do! Miss Brown to You! On the Sentimental Side! It's Easy to Blame the Weather! He's Funny that Way! If Dreams Come True! Lover Man! Just One of those Things

Val Wiseman (vocal), Digby Fairweather (trumpet, cornet, flugelhorn), Roy Williams (trombone), Al Gay (tenor sax, clarinet), Brian Lemon (piano), Jim Douglas (guitar), Len Skeat (bass), Eddie Taylor (drums)

This outstanding collection has a nicely-



judged title and an even more explicit bye-line. For that is exactly what this grand album is all about: the musical times of the great Billie Holiday. But in no way is this delicious package concerned with impersonations of the original versions of these songs - let's face it, who could sound, or even interpret like the inimitable Lady Day? Val Wiseman is quite simply and sensibly performer in her own right, with her own highly personal style. She sings all 14 songs here - material mostly from the 1930s - Billie's greatest times - and interprets them with consummate ease, style and sympathy: her phrasing relaxed and poised, intonation blameless, her vocal timbre, so well suited to the idiom. There is a tonal presence all of its own. There is a happy surface-sound to her work which belies the full subtlety of her approach to, understanding of, and high regard for the Holiday *oeuvre*. Her overt enjoyment in just singing illuminates and ignites every track: she is without doubt one of the finest female jazz singers ever to have surfaced in the UK.

Ken Rattenbury

What is happening might even be a shade better than what was being played all those years ago.

Green
recreated vintage jazz ...
It was an unforgettable show ...
one of the few singers who could even ...
the role.
Telegraph
ent, but ever-cheerful, brilliantly ...
and executed tribute to a great lady of ...
The evening, without any doubt belonged ...
Wiseman. Believe me, this lady sings the ...
d then some. And that band! Superb, ...
tic, swinging, so compatible with the ...
reception of this most respectful tribute.
bury, **Crescendo International**

an emerged as an authentic jazz singer ...
right.

singer is in a class of her ...
feeling, vocal accomplishment and ...
ning. The sidemen are outstanding, ...
none say enough.
Freiburg, Germany

the Blues succeeds because Ms ...
no attempt to mimic Lady Day, ...
an considerable vocal assets ... a ...
ened the eyes as well as the ears, ...
the Blues is probably as close as one ...
rating a legend without ...
ing it.
Jazz Rag

Exceptionally gifted - so much style.
Crescendo International

Val Wiseman giving an uncanny reproduction of the Holiday style and sound. Arrangements based on the original records but with solos often surpassing the old masters. Val catches the vulnerability of Holiday. The seemingly straightforward singing of trite lyrics which she twists into heart-breaking short stories of hope, or hope betrayed. Here we have a genuine evocation, heart on sleeve, with the small but urgent voice exposing all the doubts and confusion behind the bright delivery.
Allen Saddler, *The Guardian*

Expertly executed ... a treat.
Jazz Journal International

I cannot think of a British singer who could have done these particular songs in this style better. I could happily see it all again tomorrow.
The Jazz Rag

Lady Sings The Blues gets my vote as the British CD of the year and seems certain of inclusion in the year's Top Twenty jazz CD's, even allowing for the wealth of material released during the last 12 months. Lady Day, herself, would have been proud of the quality of this musical tribute.
Keith Howell, *CD Review*

Ms Wiseman justified the enthusiastic reports.
Joe Seager, *The Birmingham Post*

One of the best swing bands in Britain today, everyone in it is a top name. Lady Sings The Blues is a perfect example of how a well-managed package show can hardly avoid being a success. When I saw the band in Germany, there were people who came back for all three performances.
Dave Gelly, *Jazz FM*



JAZZ

VAL WISEMAN, DIGBY FAIRWEATHER, AL GAY, ROY WILLIAMS, BRIAN LEMON, JIM DOUGLAS, LEN SKEAT, EDDIE TAYLOR

Lady Sings The Blues
(Big Bear Records BEAR CD 33)
TT: 66:05
Price code: 3

★★★

A little gem of a release from this Birmingham-based label, featuring a septet of leading British jazzmen and singer Val Wiseman paying tribute to the memory of the late Billie Holiday, with a selection of the songs Lady Day recorded at the outset of her career.

Trumpeter Digby tells me that the whole ambience of the three days of recording which went into the making of this release at the Black Barn Studios in Surrey was particularly pleasant and relaxed, and this sense of *joie de vivre* is noticeable throughout.

It doesn't take much to have me enthralled over the piano playing of Brian Lemon in any case, but here he really excels himself in following in the footsteps of Teddy Wilson, supported by the dependable Len Skeat on bass, Jim Douglas' guitar and the unobtrusive Eddie Taylor on drums.

Roy Williams' fine trombone, Al Gay's lively tenor and Digby's exuberant trumpet all get plenty of solo space, but the real surprise comes from Val Wiseman who manages to capture the vocal shade of Billie's style, without at any time sounding like a slavish imitation.

The opening *Eeny Meeny Miny Mo, What a Little Moonlight Can Do, One Two Buckle My shoe, and Miss Brown to You* are among the standout items from these eighteen delightful tracks, which have been spinning repeatedly through my player in recent weeks.

At this late stage of the year, I can confidently predict that 'Lady Sings The Blues' already gets my vote as the best British jazz CD of the year, and seems pretty certain of inclusion in the Top Twenty jazz CD's for 1990, even allowing for the wealth of material which has appeared during the last twelve months. Lady Day, herself, would have been proud of the quality of this musical tribute.

CD Review

OUR GUIDE TO OUR PRICES
USING A STAR RATING

PRICE CODES

STAR RATINGS

NOTICE: recommendations only

The Guardian

ARTS

Manchester

Pete Martin

Lady Sings The Blues

ONE OF the more positive aspects of the post-modern era is an increasing interest in the great figures from the jazz past, to the point where the loving recreation of all sorts of styles is now something of a growth industry. The jazz repertoire movement, however, faces an insoluble problem — how can you reproduce the works of individuals whose greatness lay precisely in their uniqueness?

Val Wiseman, in her tribute to Billie Holliday, sensibly makes no attempt to copy her: her voice is softer and huskier, her phrasing less oblique. What was clear at the Royal Exchange, however, was that Ms Wiseman has listened intently to the great Lady Day, and developed a vocal style which allows her to capture much of the spirit of Billie's recordings without submerging her own

individuality. Maintaining this balance is a tricky business, but Ms Wiseman's delivery was undeniably effective, with just enough hints of the original to give a definite character to her interpretations.

The approach worked particularly well on the light-hearted, up-tempo numbers which Billie Holliday recorded early in her career, and which made up much of the first half. The best of these, though, was *What A Little Moonlight Can Do*, early in the second set, which stimulated excellent contributions from the main soloists — trumpeter Digby Fairweather, Al Gay on tenor and clarinet, and the consistently magnificent trombonist Roy Williams.

It is for her slow, aching balance, however, that Billie Holliday will be best remembered, and although these present an immense technical challenge, Val Wiseman rose to the occasion. Most memorable was *He's Funny That Way*, a duet between Ms Wiseman and the pianist Brian Lemon, who does this sort of thing as well as anyone in the world.

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LADY SINGS THE BLUES

BIG BEAR MUSIC

JAZZ FROM CANADA

By SCOTT YANOW

Back in 1989, I attended the Vancouver Jazz Festival in British Columbia, a remarkable ten-day marathon that I still consider my favourite festival ever. I learned two main things during that event. Canadian jazz festivals, of which there are many in the summer, easily top American jazz festivals in their length (most U.S. events last at the most three days) and usually in their quality. And I learned that there are many very talented Canadian jazz artists who are barely known in the U.S, particularly the ones that spend most of their careers playing in their native country. I had never heard of such greats as Jane Bunnett, P. J. Perry and Paul Plimley before that festival despite following jazz very closely.

Despite sharing a very long border with the United States and welcoming American jazz players from the earliest days (including the Original Creole Orchestra with Freddie Keppard in 1914 and Jelly Roll Morton who played in Vancouver in 1919), very little jazz was recorded in Canada prior to the 1940s. Ragtime pianist Harry Thomas, jazz pianist Les Hooper, Millard Thomas' Chicago Novelty Orchestra (recording in Montreal in 1924), and the Gilbert Watson Orchestra are among the few that were documented before the swing era. Even the popular cornetist Trump Davidson (1908-78), who was active by the late 1920s, missed making records during his prime years. Only a single selection by his big band exists from 1937 and he had to wait until 1961 before getting his first opportunity to record in a studio. Many others from the early days missed being recorded altogether.

However from the mid-1940s on, jazz became more popular in Canada (witness the famous 1953 Massey Hall concert featuring Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach) and local musicians had opportunities to perform their music more often than earlier.

The most talented Canadian musicians found fame in the United States, starting with Oscar Peterson. The ones that mostly stayed home, whether it was in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, or in smaller areas, had to be content with gaining a regional following and hopefully spending some of their lives playing the music that they love. The situation has improved through the decades but there are still many world class jazz artists working in Canada who are not well known beyond the country's borders.

Here are 25 Canadian jazz artists, past and present who deserve much more fame. Some are better known than others and all have proved to be world class. I have purposely left off the Canadian musicians who enjoyed much of their success living and working in other countries (mostly the United States) including Oscar Peterson, Maynard Ferguson, Gil Evans, Paul Bley, Lenny Breau, Kenny Wheeler (who lived in England), Ingrid Jensen, Renee Rosnes, Michael Bubl , Bria Skonberg, and Diana Krall. The 25 musicians cover a wide range of styles (there is no one type of 'Canadian jazz') and, needless to say, the list could be several times larger. My apologies go out to the many talents who also deserve to be on this list. The artists are discussed in chronological order by their birthdays.

Phil Nimmons (1923-2024) A skilled clarinetist and a notable arranger, composer, educator, and bandleader, he led his Nimmons 'n Nine band starting in 1953 which, after its expansion, by 1965 was called 'Nimmons 'n' Nine Plus Six.'

Fraser MacPherson (1928-1993) Although his first recordings were on clarinet, MacPherson was a cool-toned tenor-saxophonist who could be thought of as the Canadian Zoot Sims. He always swung as can be heard on his recordings for Concord and the Canadian Sackville label.



Oliver Jones

Photo by
Pierre Arsenault

Moe Koffman (1928-2001) The flutist and alto-saxophonist became famous for his popular *Swinging Shepherd Blues* in 1957. He first recorded in 1948, worked in the U.S. with the big bands of Sonny Dunham and Jimmy Dorsey, became a session musician in Toronto, was a member of Rob McConnell's Boss Brass, and led his own groups for many years.

Ed Bickert (1932-2019) An important straight ahead jazz guitarist by the mid-1950s (working with Phil Nimmons and Moe Koffman), after years of studio work in Toronto, Bickert was a member of Rob McConnell's Boss Brass during 1968-96, was in Paul Desmond's early 1970s quartet, and led ten albums for the Concord label before retiring in 2000.

Oliver Jones (1934 -) Set to turn 91 on Sept. 11, Jones started piano lessons with Daisy Peterson Sweeney (Oscar Peterson's sister) when he was eight. Jones worked in Montreal during 1953-62 and with the Jamaican calypso singer Kenny Hamilton in Puerto Rico during 1964-80. It was not until he was in his mid-forties that the brilliant pianist began to record, showing the influence of Peterson but also playing swinging jazz in his own voice.

Rob McConnell (1935-2010) A very fluent valve trombonist who played swinging bop, McConnell was also a talented arranger-composer. In 1968 he formed the Boss Brass, a big band that originally only had brass instruments and a rhythm section. In 1970 McConnell added saxophones and his Boss Brass (an all-star Canadian big band) became one of the world's top jazz orchestras of the next 30 years.

Sonny Greenwich (1936 -) An adventurous guitarist, Greenwich worked in the mid-1960s with Charles Lloyd and John Handy, performed with Miles Davis at a Toronto concert in 1969, and led his own explorative bands for decades.

Guido Basso (1937-2023) A mellow-toned trumpeter and flugelhornist, Basso worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, performed with the big bands of Ron Collier and Phil Nimmons, and was a member of Rob McConnell's Boss Brass for over twenty years.

Don Thompson (1940-) While best known as a bassist, Thompson also plays piano and vibes. In addition to working with the who's who of Canadian jazz and touring in a duo with George Shearing,

he had associations with many Americans including John Handy (1964-66), Benny Goodman, Paul Desmond, and Jim Hall.

P. J. Perry (1941-) A world-class bebop-oriented altoist who also played tenor in his earlier days, Perry has led quartets on record dates during which he held his own with pianists Mulgrew Miller, Bill Mays, and Kenny Barron.

Terry Clarke (1944-) One of Canada's most in-demand jazz drummers, Clarke was part of John Handy's famous quintet during 1965-67, worked with the Fifth Dimension during 1967-69, and played in Toronto with Rob McConnell's Boss Brass, Ed Bickert, Ruby Braff, Jim Galloway, Sonny Greenwich and Emily Remler. He toured with Jim Hall and Oscar Peterson, spent the 1985-99 period living and playing in New York, and returned to Toronto in 1999 where he was busy for many years.

Paul Plimley (1953-2022) A major force in Canada's avant-garde jazz scene, the pianist often collaborated with bassist Lisle Ellis, founded the New Orchestra Workshop, and always seemed to be in good humour.

Lorne Lofsky (1954 -) A cool-toned guitarist with a swinging style, Lofsky worked with Oscar Peterson in the 1980s and '90s, Ruby Braff, Rob McConnell, Clark Terry, a two-guitar quartet with Ed Bickert, saxophonist Kirk McDonald, Dizzy Gillespie, and most recently with the Canadian Jazz Collective.

Neil Swainson (1955 -) Bassist Swainson uplifts every musical situation in which he finds himself. His endless r sum  includes work with Rob McConnell, Ed Bickert, Tommy Flanagan, Lee Konitz, James Moody, Woody Shaw, and most notably with George Shearing in his duo during 1988-2011.

Jane Bunnett (1956 -) A talented flutist and soprano-saxophonist, Bunnett has been a major force in featuring Cuban musicians (most notably pianist Hilario Duran) on worldwide tours and bringing instruments to Cuba for their schools. Her 1991 album *Spirits Of Havana* is a classic, she collaborated early on with Dewey Redman and Don Pullen, and she currently leads the all-female Afro-Cuban ensemble Maqueque.



Lorne Lofsky



Rob McConnell

Mike Murley (1961 -) An inventive post-bop tenor-saxophonist, Murley was a member of the always-spirited Shuffle Demons (1984-89), the quartet Time Warp, and his own groups in addition to being a busy sideman during the past 40 years.

Reg Schwager (1962-) After spending his first seven years in the Netherlands and New Zealand, the guitarist grew up in Canada. He has worked with Peter Appleyard, Diana Krall, Rob McConnell, Oliver Jones, Mel Torm , Chet Baker and many others in addition to recording 13 albums of his own since 1985.

Susie Arioli (1963 -) An excellent swing singer who often teamed up with guitarist Jordan Officer, Arioli brings fresh life to every standard that she interprets. A bit unusual is that she often plays a snare drum while she sings.

Phil Dwyer (1965-) The inventive tenor-saxophonist worked with Hugh Fraser and David Friesen, freelanced for years in Toronto, and in 2018 became a lawyer in British Columbia while still playing hard bop on the side.

Christine Jensen (1970 -) The younger sister of trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, she is an excellent modern jazz saxophonist who is best known as an arranger-composer who often leads the Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra.

Alex Pangman (1976-) Billed accurately as 'Canada's Sweetheart Of Swing,' Pangman sings early jazz from the 1920s and '30s and has recorded a series of delightful albums of vintage songs.

Angela Verbrugge (1978-) An actress who survived both a car accident and cancer, she has emerged as one of Canada's top jazz singers and a skillful songwriter as can be heard on her first three recordings and her extensive tours.

Rachel Terrien (1987-) An outstanding trumpeter who formerly played with DIVA, Terrien has often performed Afro-Cuban jazz including on her recent eighth album *Mi Hogar II*.

Nikki Yanofsky (1994 -) Considered a child prodigy who headlined at the Montreal Jazz Festival when she was 12, and a national celebrity as a teenager, Yanofsky has steadily grown as an Ella Fitzgerald-inspired jazz singer since then, recording five albums.

Caity Gyorgy (1998 -) A superlative bop and swing vocalist, an inventive scat singer, and a talented songwriter, Gyorgy has thus far recorded four excellent CDs and two Eps.

For more information on Canada's jazz legacy and history, Mark Miller's books (particularly *Jazz In Canada, Such Melodious Racket: The Lost History Of Jazz In Canada 1914-49*, and the *Miller Companion to Jazz in Canada*) are highly recommended.

Scott Yanow can be reached for liner notes (he has now written 996), bios, press releases, reviews and other interesting assignments at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

KENNY BALL RECALLED

DIGBY FAIRWEATHER honours KENNY BALL and shares a few secrets.

There are two books about my friend Kenny Ball who would have been 95 this year. Perhaps there could have been three, but it's too late now.

The first of them, called *Blowing My Own Trumpet* and published in 2004, was, so Kenny said, ghost-written by William Hall. It's a cheerful and detailed tale with more than enough information to make it a highly valuable document of his life story, and written very much in a voice that echoes his own speech patterns. But the book, then and now, seems to me to steer away from the performing challenges- and actual fears - which I know secretly haunted Kenny for most of his career from the mid 1960s on.

It hadn't always been so. Back at the start of his chart-topping days in what's now referred to as the 'Trad Boom' (which ran from 1961 to 1963 when the Beatles arrived), his first album *Invitation to the Ball* had been hailed as an outstanding (and innovative) contribution to Britain's jazz scene; notably by the prominent pianist, composer and critic Steve Race who wrote its liner note.

And as a young trumpet player I knew that Kenny's solo on his first hit, *I love you Samantha* - a fearlessly swaggering sixteen bars of inspiration - set him aside and ahead of every one of his Traditional trumpet contemporaries in Britain. And, in all probability, well beyond too. Guitarist-singer Marty Grosz -who played the Birmingham International Jazz Festival for many years - knew all about it. 'We were on one of our usual gigs - probably in 1960', he told me ' - and all of a sudden seven British guys roared in and asked if they could play. And they blew us off the stand and down the street!'

So how was it that in 1965 Kenny found himself unable to play at all? As reported in *Blowing my own trumpet*, he said: 'The moment of truth came in Perth on our 1965 Australian tour. The place was packed. The song was 'Hello, Dolly!'. I tapped out the beat with my foot, lifted the trumpet to my mouth, blew - and nothing happened! I tried again, and just about managed to get some sort of sound to emerge'. After a starry career (which produced no less than

fourteen world-wide hits with his band, and turned its leader into a handsome household name), this kind of trauma would have sent many trumpet-players into a nervous breakdown and permanent retirement. It also brought cruel remarks from his colleagues including trumpeter Alan Wickham, who bluntly told Kenny: 'I hear you've been playing crap lately' one night at the Hundred Club; London's one time home of Traditional Jazz. But amazingly Kenny seemed to recover and in 1968 for four London concerts (all of which I attended) he warmed up for Louis Armstrong's All Stars playing at his peak; at one point finding Louis, dressed in a towelling robe standing at his side on-stage and proclaiming him 'a genius'.

Having at one point in my own career shared similar problems to Kenny's, I was interested if there was more to the story and on a P&O liner cruise in 2009 (at the behest of my old friend, clarinettist Chris Walker) found myself leading a Dixieland band designed to feature Kenny Ball as guest star. So I was able to spend

more time with my idol; one morning after breakfast I said: 'I enjoyed your autobiography *Blowing my own Trumpet* Kenny' and was surprised to see a frown cross his face. 'I didn't said my friend and I asked him why. "Because if I met the man that book portrayed" he said ' - I wouldn't have liked him'. Inexplicable for me, but perhaps inevitably, I spotted an opportunity. 'Why don't we write another one?' I suggested, and to my delight Kenny agreed.

So back on dry land dates were exchanged and for several weeks I would take the bus to Stansted with a tape recorder (and today's copy of *The Sun*) to visit my hero at his beautiful farmhouse, deliver his newspaper, and record his reminiscences, hoping for a chance to dig more deeply into the problems he had faced. But while he was able to recount the difficulties he was, so it seemed, totally unable to define how or why they had come about. Whatever their source -so it appeared - they hadn't arrived from some deeply entrenched psychological fear or physical problem. His best friend and musical partner trombonist John Bennett would join us for our meetings too (I believed that rather than Kenny alone, reminiscing with his oldest partner would be more liable to ignite stories of their musical past) and John's belief was that it had started in late 1964 when their band had short sets of twenty minutes a night for a protracted period and his partner's lip-trouble was caused by lack of extended playing. But I knew that any trumpeter playing every night would be unlikely to need to practise in the day. And I could also see that Kenny's instrument no longer sat easily and comfortably on his lip but balanced precariously with an upward tilt as he blew with puffed-out cheeks; one of the first of the faults to be avoided by any would-be player.

By now too, I had heard worrying evidence from other musicians of a deeply nervous man in constant private fear



of his musical afflictions. One clue was from the great jazz drummer Eric Delaney (Kenny's close friend) who noted that his one-time sideman back in the 1950s was now incapable of counting in any tune at all, and that his foot tapping attempts to do so bore no relation to the rushed nervous trumpet lead that followed. After repeated attempts to establish a tempo it was finally agreed that Eric (a regular guest at Kenny's birthday party concerts later on) would count in all the tunes on which Kenny played.

I had also noticed this problem and had more practical experience of Kenny's personal fears. On one occasion I had booked him as star guest with my own band at London's Broadgate Arena for a lunchtime concert. But the night before Kenny had rung me to tell me he would have to cancel as he had split a gum while brushing his teeth and the damage would prevent him from playing. 'Please come', I pleaded 'and just sing your hits. I'll handle the trumpet parts behind you'. And Kenny did come but, to my surprise, with his trumpet-case and a bottle of vodka. And once the vodka had kicked in he was on-stage, playing powerfully enough but without the effortless inspiration of his youthful days. On another occasion he had called me one morning while I was at the Birmingham Festival

to ask if I could sub for him at a private party in Kings Langley (hosted by my old friend Richard Harper) and, as I had the evening free, happily agreed and took the train down. When I arrived the band was assembled and checking Kenny's regular programme beginning with his hit *So do I* - now abbreviated by general agreement to 'Sod it'. But once again the trumpet (and the vodka) were there and by the time of the show Kenny was ready to play and joined me on the stand to play from the get-go. On yet another morning I was again called by Kenny to lead his band at a seaside theatre on the south coast. But when I arrived the trumpet (and the vodka) were both present and suitably stimulated, my friend suggested 'I'm fine! Do a set on your own with my rhythm section as special guest'. Which is what happened.

But this massive internal fear - and consequent inability to play sober- was something that nobody wanted to discuss. And after several visits to Stansted - and accumulated cassettes of taped interview material - our conversations sadly came to a halt. We had no publisher; there was already some duplication with what had appeared already in *Blowing my own Trumpet*, and I (most regrettably) had urgent commitments with my own Half Dozen. So our saviour was John Bennett. Handsome, light-

hearted and ever friendly John would later come to the Jazz Centre UK with a comprehensive nine-volume recorded history of the Ball band, as well as his own autobiography; a tale written by an observant star of the jazz scene which on its own deserves publication. But clearly he had both hunted for - and found a publisher (it turned out to be Apex Publishing) and generously pillaged from his own book to complete our project; a book called *Kenny Ball's and John Bennett's Musical Skylarks :A Medley of Memories*; rightly authored by Kenny Ball and John Bennett and with a gracious (and generous) co-billing of 'Foreword by Digby Fairweather'. Published in 2011, just two years before Kenny's death, the book was seldom reviewed and copies are hard to find. But re-arrangement of my taped narratives from Kenny, coupled with (generous) extracts of John's daily diaries over fifty years, had combined to produce what appears to be a friendly chat between the two of them. It's a cozy, frequently humorous and occasionally outrageous read. But the recollections once again steer clear of the secret terrors of a star performer who, over more than fifty years had somehow faced the fears of live performance (notably on television for Morecambe and Wise and later *Saturday Night at the Mill*) as well as major

concerts celebrating the 'Three Bs' of Chris Barber, Acker Bilk and Kenny and overcome them. But the intake of vodka combined with mental pressures and ageing would take their inevitable toll. And after yet another very late telephone call for help I was there for what may have been his last-ever concert. Breathing from an oxygenator in a makeshift dressing room Kenny was barely able to make the stage, swaying beside me as we stood together behind the curtain, and accepting a last vodka from my own glass a second before the curtain went up. He died very soon after at the age of eighty two but none of us will ever know of the private agonies of Kenny Ball.

Perhaps the duty to reproduce all of his hits night after night crushed his creative spirit? Or possibly there was some sort of damage to his embouchure which (strangely) returned to disable him from time to time - most of the trumpeters (right back to Nat Gonella) had answered his call for help. For me, the most probable answer is that mental and physical fatigue - combined with a crushing need to make his every show a success - removed his old creative freedoms and (rather like Alex Welsh) led him inexorably to a bottle of vodka. We'll never know for sure though; jazz is a hard life.

Perhaps the best way to remember him is to listen back to his early work; much of it preserved in the boxed CD set *Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen*; the *Pye jazz albums*. In one of these alone (his second LP simply titled *Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen*) you can hear such incomparable performances as *High Society* (arguably the greatest and most exciting version anywhere on record), a joyful and note-perfect recreation of Armstrong's *Potato Head Blues* and a slow *Blues turning grey over you* (remarkably featuring drummer Ron Bowden); all of these led by a brilliant young trumpet player at the height of his creativity. It's quite a legacy and (in the full sense of the word) an invaluable gift from a man who, in the end - despite his deeply-held fears - gave his life for the music for almost fifty years.



CD REVIEWS



DINAH WASHINGTON

HITS AND CLASSICS:THE SINGLES COLLECTION 1944 - 1962

Acrobat ACQCD7190 4 CDs: 71:40/ 73:49/ 71:25/ 73:18

As the sleeve proclaims, this set offers 58 US pop and R'n'B hits among the 108 tracks included here. Dinah was the self-proclaimed 'Queen Of The Blues, a very fine and still influential jazz singer, and a successful pop singer.This versatility however means she tends to be overlooked these days by fans of classic R'n'B, dismissed as a sell-out by jazz lovers, and forgotten by many pop fans. It is perhaps curious that Ray Charles, who exhibited a very similar kind of versatility, is feted as 'The Genius' whilst Dinah's musical stature is often ignored. Note that Dinah covered country too: Hank Williams' *Cold Cold Heart* in 1951 and Hank Thompson's *I Don't Hurt Anymore* in 1954, although there are earlier precedents too.

The majority of the tracks on the first CD, recorded for Keynote,Apollo and Mercury, are convincing blues and R'n'B performances, albeit sometimes with a jazz slant as was not unusual for the time, and there are a few jazz performances per se – the earliest (blues) songs were written by Leonard Feather, and there is even *Pacific Coast Blues* by Charles Mingus, who plays on some of these sessions.

CD2 covers releases from the years 1949 to 1952 and contains a similar mix of blues (try *Baby Get Lost, Fast Movin' Mama* or the well-known, salacious *Long John*

Blues) and jazz numbers like *Am I Really Sorry* and *I Wanna Be Loved*, which marked Dinah's debut in the pop charts, a sign of things to come. The orchestral pop of *My Heart Cries For You* is one of those performances that sounds incredibly dated to modern ears, even if it did make the R'n'B charts, and bigger arrangements, some with strings, started to come into Dinah's music around this time, as on *Harbour Lights*.

The last two CDs veer much more towards pop, though jazz, blues and ballads are still represented, and rock and roll's influence surfaces occasionally, most obviously with the hit duet with Brook Benton, *A Rockin' Good Way (To Mess Around And Fall In Love)*. Although the final CD leans more towards pop and standards, this educational and generally enjoyable set finishes with 1962's *Soulville*, pointing possibly towards another new direction for Dinah. She died in 1963.

NORMAN DARWEN



ART BLAKEY & THE JAZZ MESSENGERS

CLASSIC ALBUMS: 1960-62

Acrobat Music:ACTRCD9165 3 CDs

For Art Blakey aficionados this is an essential release. It consists of a 3-CD set featuring the albums *Night in Tunisia*, *Meet You at the Jazz Corner of the World Vols. 1 and 2*, *Mosaic* and *Jazz Messengers!!!* This alone gives an indication of how prolific a recording artist Blakey was. There are a variety of line-ups across these releases, but featured performers include Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Curtis Fuller, Wayne Shorter, Bobby Timmons, Cedar Walton and Jymie Merritt. The repertoire includes standards such as *Invitation*, *You Don't Know What Love Is*, and *I Hear a*

Rhapsody together with many lesser-known original themes from band members and others.

There is some spectacular, fiery music on offer here but at times the music is surprisingly intricate. See for example Shorter's *Sincerely Diana*. Blakey had a reputation for employing talented young musicians and this collection provides ample evidence of this. As one might expect, the fire, drama, taste and musical variety associated with the Jazz Messengers is fully displayed. This collection shines a light on the Messengers at a pivotal time and provides both studio and live performances. It's interesting to reflect that at the point when this music was recorded, Blakey had a further 30 year of his career to run.

As always with Acrobat releases, the music is enhanced with a detailed booklet of discographic notes, insights and contemporary images.

ALAN MUSSON



CLIFFORD BROWN & MAX ROACH

LEGENDARY ALBUMS # 1954-56

Acrobat ADDCD3540 77.53 / 72.52

I've lost count of the number of times these classic tracks have been re-released and/ or restored. Even so, for them to be again available in such an inexpensive double-CD format is to be welcomed. Acrobat's approach to these sorts of tasks is well-established: a comprehensive booklet essay by Paul Watts, quoting many other commentators, a packed programme and lengthy playing time, plus generally acceptable sound. We're not talking Mosaic-style production values here.

We set off at the point in 1954 when Max Roach, then emerging as the leading drummer in modern jazz, first encountered the youthful trumpet virtuoso Clifford Brown and proposed they form a quintet while insisting that it should bear both their names, thus The Clifford Brown & Max Roach Quintet. At first their tenor front-line choice was Teddy Edwards, who left early on as his wife was shortly to give birth, so that it is Harold Land who is heard throughout the first three Emarcy albums collected here, to be replaced by Sonny Rollins for the fourth, recorded in February 1956. Of course, the elephant in the room, to quote a cliché, is the knowledge that a mere four months later, on 26 June 1956, Brown and his wife, plus band pianist Richie Powell were to die, killed in a freak car accident. Brown was 25.

While it might to be fanciful to claim that these 27 tracks are comparable to the Armstrong Hot Fives in blazing a stylistic trail that others then followed, there is little doubt that they represent an apogee of hard bop performance. Remember first that this was a working band, playing its trade week in and week out across America, city by city. No wonder Brown's playing became ever-more confident and resourceful: we know from the testimony of colleagues that he was a perfectionist, and dedicated to honing his craft. He seems also to have been a cheerful individual, content to avoid the excesses that hampered others. As trombonist Buster Cooper told me, 'Clifford was a sweet man and it came out of his horn that way.' He was also a composer whose pieces have endured: just to hear the band tackle *Daahoud* and *Joyspring* from the first album and *Swingin'* from the second is to applaud Emarcy's enterprise in recording this band so regularly. Rest assured: no modern jazz collection should be without this 'legendary' music.

PETER VACHER



PETER MCGUINNESS JAZZ ORCHESTRA

MIXED BAG

Summit Records- DCD 834: 68.00

2025, 68 minutes

Arranger/composer and vocalist, Pete McGuinness once again affirms his position in the pantheon of contemporary big band writers with *Mixed Bag*, his fourth CD for the Summit label. He effectively threads his eclectic proclivities into a varied yet overall coherent mix with engaging results. Having heard (and reviewed some of) his previous 3 CDs I can vouch that *Mixed Bag* is his most ambitious and rewarding venture to date.

Over the course of 20 years this NYC based band boasts a loyal host of regulars that clearly know and interpret McGuinness' writing with great alacrity and precision. These include saxists, Dave Pietro, Marc Phaneuf and Tom Christensen; trombonists, Bruce Eidem and Mark Patterson; and stalwart trumpeters, Tony Kadleck, Bud Burridge and Chris Rogers (who contributed his fine composition, *Rebecca* to the collection). The fine piano work of Mike Holober is joined by drummer, Scott Neuman who clearly 'drives the bus' with a sterling hand throughout.

The repertoire includes mix of jazz standards (*Body and Soul*, *Django*, *So In Love* and *Round Midnight*, et al) with four McGuinness originals, all of which differ in style, idiom and feel. One of which, *The Sly Fox*, inspired by the recently departed Bill Holman who was one of the greatest contributors to big band writing. As McGuinness states in his liner note- 'Holman fans may hear my compositional effort on this one as a respectful tip of the

hat to Bill's always clever musical stylings'. Indeed so, as *The Sly Fox* mixes playful rhythmically quirky unisons with fully concerted ensemble spreads that excite and enthrall. The duelling trombone exchanges between Msrs Mark Patterson and Matt Havilland handily capture the felicitous nature of the piece to boot.

With its eclectic mix of styles and tempi, *Mixed Bag* provides a multi-faceted aural experience for big band listeners from all eras of the tradition. Please insure that your next bag of big band CD purchases has this one mixed into it.

FRANK GRIFFITH



TOM LYNE

WELL MIXED BLUE

LISALEO01001 63.05

Canadian-born but now located in Scotland, bassist Lyne is also a sound engineer and here combines with Scottish pianist Dave Milligan in a 12-track programme of his own originals (bar David Sanborn& Marcus Miller's *Run For Cover* played as a bass feature). The Edinburgh-based Milligan is a hugely experienced player and composer, perhaps best known to us Sassenachs as the pianist with trumpeter Colin Steele's recordings. So, no mere pair of novices, rather two accomplished improvisors and friends at play, the presentation, in a minimalist card sleeve indicative of a home-produced article, I would guess, the recorded sound quite perfect To be frank, Lyne is a new name to me but it's Milligan whose voice is the most prominent and how beautifully he plays, Lyne content to play counterpoint or to underpin a theme.

These can range from the sombre ('Sea More' and 'The Bent Peg') to the skittish ('Three Sides Now'), the piano harmonies

always enticing, sometimes intriguing, the reflective mood recalling Keith Jarrett's weightier moments even if there are no great sudden rushes of energy. The title track has a staccato piano opening before Milligan finds his feet with the tune and gets it moving. Other pieces are quite spare, spacious, the playing luminous. Lyne says blue is probably his favourite colour and also 'one of my favourite states of being'. If so, there's nothing at all downbeat about his kind of blue feeling.. Lovely music.

PETER VACHER



ANDREA RINCIARI

SOHO SESSIONS

Andrea Rinciari Recordings ARRCO 01: 37.50

Rinciari is an Italian guitarist who is based in London. His style is rooted in the bebop and straight-ahead tradition. He is a graduate of Trinity Laban Conservatoire. Last year he released *The Takeover* (2025). This is his latest album and features a group that he has worked with extensively. Alex Garnett is on tenor saxophone, Lorenzo Morabito is on bass and Mark Taylor at the drums.

The CD consists of eight tracks. The repertoire includes unhackneyed themes from Coleman Hawkins, Bud Powell, Freddie Redd and Elmo Hope along with several familiar tunes from what is often termed the Great American Songbook. The music is nicely recorded and is the perfect showcase for the musicians.

The set opens with *Bean and the Boys* and sets the tone for this swinging set with guitar and saxophone stating this lesser-known Hawkins' theme in unison, before the guitarist puts in an inspired solo, followed similarly by Garnett, with the whole underpinned by the swinging

bass and drums partnership and topped by a concise drum feature from Taylor.

Throughout the tempo is nicely varied, with *John's Delight* 'loping along nicely. Rinciari's warm tone introduces the up-tempo *Tea for Two* and likewise on *Polka Dots and Moonbeamss*, a solo piece which brings the album to a close nicely after the excitement of many of the other selections.

The recorded sound brings out the best in this music.

ALAN MUSSON



JOHN-PAUL MUIR

HOME NOW

Ubuntu Music UBU0178 40:23

Pianist and composer John-Paul Muir won many awards for his music in his native New Zealand, before he moved to London in 2010 and has generally moved towards jazz and improvised music, away from the classical music for which he was previously best-known. This set combines his interests to create what has been called 'chamber jazz', with an expressive and at times extremely delicate approach.

There are five tracks here, the impressionistic *Sunlight* opening the set with some evocative, considered, single notes on the piano to instantly attract the listener's attention. The first three numbers feature the haunting singing of Brigitte Behara, more than a little reminiscent of Norma Winstone on these quietly thoughtful, reflective compositions with lyrics by Anjali Bhat, whilst George Crowley supplies some rather distinctive bass clarinet playing on the vocal numbers, and tenor sax on the album's final two. Jakub Cywiński and Eric Ford provide upright bass and drums

respectively on three tracks. It goes without saying that all are very experienced musicians.

The fourth number here, the seven and a half minutes long *Balm*, leans more solidly to conventional straight-ahead jazz balladry, with Crowley's fine sax playing strongly to the fore. It becomes even more forceful (relatively speaking) on the final, celebratory, *Overjoyed* with its subtle hint of soul-jazz in the piano work.

Some jazz artists might have alternated the vocal and instrumental pieces, but here the running order does present a coherent picture of the abilities and sensitivities of all concerned, but particularly highlights the different facets of the music of John-Paul Muir. The result is an impressive and enjoyable release.

NORMAN DARWEN



LIONEL HAMPTON WITH OSCAR PETERSON

CLASSIC SESSIONS- 1953-1954

Acrobat- 2025 ACFCD7523

5 CDs- Approx 70 minutes apiece

The ever plentiful vaults of the Acrobat label have produced yet another stupendous reissue of classic LPs onto a 5 CD set. Showcasing small groups co- led by Lionel Hampton and Oscar Peterson along with Ray Brown on bass and drummer, Buddy Rich. One CD adds Buddy DeFranco on clarinet and guitarist, Herb Ellis on another two. All in all, 15 LPs recorded in 1953-1954 on Norman Granz' Clef and Verve labels.

As Paul Watt states in his generous and extensive 20 page liner note- 'the recordings from these sessions

represent a stunning and coherent body of work which captures five of the finest jazz musicians of their era performing in relaxed and happy harmony'. Indeed so, as it includes an equal mix of standards and Hampton tunes, many of which from his earlier Benny Goodman days.

Of particular interest and delight is CD 3 drawn from several 1954 LPs with clarinetist, Buddy DeFranco joining the quartet. Not surprisingly, a few Goodman classics (*Don't Be That Way*, *Flying Home*, *These Foolish Things*, et al) are reinterpreted by DeFranco's more modern bebop language which is evenly matched by Hampton's and Peterson's stylings. I also find (as a clarinetist, myself) that there is a cohesive alchemy between the clarinet and vibes sound. Although it would appear that they are quite disparate instruments to the naked eye, the wood timbre of the clarinet surprisingly resonates winningly with the more metallic quality of the vibraphone.

CD 3 closes with a 17 minute(!) romp on *Flying Home*. Replete with several big band like shout choruses between (a pleasingly grunting) Hamp riffing extensively with DeFranco's serpentine clarinet.

Get your 'jazz hands' on this box set sharpish. A treasure indeed.

FRANK GRIFFITH



ARTURO O'FARRILL AND THE LATIN JAZZ ORCHESTRA

MUNDOAGUA – CELEBRATING CARLA BLEY

Zoho ZM202501 61:54

A few issues back, percussionist Carlos Maldonado talked about his experiences in Latin Jazz, noting that he plays regularly with pianist/ bandleader Arturo O'Farrill, son of Chico. Carlos is

on this set, but the sound may not be quite what you expect.

New York based Arturo presents two large scale, three-part jazz suites – *Mundoagua* (commissioned in 2018 to celebrate 'The Year Of Water') and the Mexican-inspired *Dia De Los Muertos* - sandwiching Carla Bley's final composition before her death in 2023, *Blue Palestine*, commissioned by and dedicated to Arturo – Carla was an early employer. Carla Bley and Latin jazz might not seem that compatible, but Arturo and his band manage to pull this off.

There is plenty of experimentation and dissonance throughout the set, but also passages of Latin jazz. It sounds like a mix that shouldn't work; the opening sequence, *Mundoagua I Glacial*, may seem like - well, OK, maybe it actually is - the antithesis of Latin jazz (and note that *Blue Palestine* contains Middle Eastern and Asian influences), but elsewhere the two co-exist, one takes precedence over the other, they alternate, they achieve effective compromise, finding ways to get along. It might not always be the most comfortable listening, but it is certainly compelling.

This version of the Latin Jazz Orchestra is an international big band – or as Arturo describes it in his extensive notes: 'a United Nations of commentary on Carla's incredible imagination'. They have produced a cerebral and fascinating release.

NORMAN DARWEN



DAVE BASS

TRIO NUEVO VOL. 2

Dave Bass Music 005: 61.38

What is it about J.S. Bach that appeals so to jazz artists? Here Dave Bass, on his highly impressive

new album, has his way with *Journey with Bach*, beginning with a poised version of the famous Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, then handing over to the less familiar Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, improvising on the chords Bach laid down. It's a remarkably ingenious piece, with Bass poised between jazz and Bach, drummer Steve Helfand constantly changing rhythm and Tyler Miles excelling on bowed bass.

Dave Bass has had a varied career, including a stint as Brenda Lee's pianist, but in the 1980s he suffered a wrist injury that put him out of the game for nearly 20 years. Recently he has been working with a trio and Miles and Helfand help him deliver genuine trio performances, interlocking perfectly.

His range of influences covers classical (hints of Bartok on *Heart above My Head*) and Latin, the mix of his own composition with those of Albeniz and Ernesto Lecuona on *Latin Journey* really striking. This follows *Fredo*, with Miles and Helfand playing a prominent part in his attack on Gismonti's melody, and his own *Melquiades*. His variations on bebop classics by the likes of Monk, Bud Powell and Lennie Tristano open them up, with Miles' bass frequently featured, and probably the finest piece is *Lester Left Town*, with Bass' own *Legrand* serving as a prelude to a swinging treatment of Wayne Shorter's piece.

RON SIMPSON



TOBIAS WIKLUND

INNER FLIGHT MUSIC

Stunt Music STUCD 25062: 64.55

Tobias Wiklund is an accomplished cornetist, with an impressive range and the ability to take us through the maziest of runs. Though I must admit that the note's reference to the

inspiration of Louis Armstrong is little in evidence, he achieves a soulful quality that he would probably term 'spiritual' given the fact that so many of the song titles, all originals, relate Man to his position in the cosmos.

Awakening is a striking start, Johan Graden's piano setting up a rhythmic pulse that Wiklund and bass clarinetist Nils Berg build on. Wiklund uses a variety of band members, from a piano-cornet duo on *Ssssh* to the over-elaborate arrangements for the Swedish Wind Orchestra on two extended tracks. On *Don't Speak the Name of Truth*, the minimalist phrasing, with Wiklund and tenor saxist Hanna Paulsberg echoing each other, creates a really attractive effect and he teams up with Nils Berg in the evocative melody *Solens Stralar Ger Mitt Hjarta Vingar* (*The Sun's Rays Give My Heart Wings*).

Drummer Jon Fait and bassist Kansan Zetterberg, both of whom play on eight tracks, display endless skill and variety and Johan Graden impresses in the four tracks he plays on. Wiklund is clearly the moving spirit behind the enterprise and at times I found myself wondering where it was all leading to - a pretentious liner note didn't help. I look forward to his next CD in the hope that his superb technique will be put in the service of something more direct.

RON SIMPSON



JOE 'KING' OLIVER

A CAREER ANTHOLOGY 1923-31

Acrobat Records ACFCD 7520: 5CDs, 73.46/72.44/72.37/74.15/73.14

Although the quality of the tracks is uneven, this is a most

remarkable collection in various ways. For a start, it's a career anthology that lasts a mere eight years: Joe Oliver was probably 42 before his Creole Jazz Band first recorded and his last recording was in 1931 – gum disease, financial mismanagement and changing tastes brought an end to his recording career seven years before his death in 1938.

Secondly the changes in recording quality over those eight years were remarkable, with the coming of electric recording. This and his attempts to keep up with fashion make the Oliver of 1923 and 1930 seem worlds apart: compare *Dippermouth Blues* with the intense two-cornet lead of Oliver and Louis Armstrong and Oliver's memorable three-chorus solo emerging from the fug of the acoustic recordings with the staid niceties of *When You're Smiling*, with Carroll Dickerson's violin solo. To be fair, the other side of this was a distinctly more gritty *St. James Infirmary* as Oliver looked for a style that would sell.

The first 35 tracks of this collection are of Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, all from 1923, the final flowering of collective improvisation. Solos are very rare, though breaks are sufficient for trombonist Honore Dutrey to make a mark (notably on *Snake Rag* and *Riverside Blues*, both recorded twice) as well as those celebrated two-cornet breaks. The evocative theme of *Camp Meeting Blues* later became part of *Creole Love Call*, much to Oliver's indignation.

Oddly enough Oliver seems not to have led another band until 1926, the Dixie Syncopators (among other names), in a totally different style from the Creole Jazz Band, with much more emphasis on arrangements and solos. The years 1924 and 1925 saw a unique duo session with Jelly Roll Morton and tracks accompanying Sippie Wallace and Ida Cox.

The Dixie Syncopators tracks are the great joy of this collection, with Kid Ory and Albert Nicholas in prime form and at the same time Oliver was busy with his muted cornet accompanying such singers as Victoria Spivey and the downhome Sara Martin. One of the delights of these sessions

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organised by Clarence Williams is the occasional presence of the sophisticated blues guitar of Eddie Lang, also part of Williams' Novelty Four.

For a brief spell in 1929 Oliver led what became Luis Russell's band and then Louis Armstrong's. At this time Oliver's gums prevented him from playing, though the band went by his name and – in another link with his old protegee – Louis Metcalf made a decent shot at the cadenza to *West End Blues*. Later in 1929 he re-formed with his nephew Dave Nelson on second trumpet (and co-composer), the redoubtable Jimmy Archey on trombone and the likes of Bobby Holmes, Glyn Paque and Hilton Jefferson as capable of forthright solos as of forming up into a sweet sax section. Assorted in style, this band finished with the undeniably hot *New Orleans Shout*.

And then there were just two sessions from 1931. At the first Oliver was able only to play on one track, a very lively *Stop Crying*, before it all ended with a bizarre solo on *Sugar Blues*.



RON SIMPSON

EMMA SMITH

HAT-TRICK!

www.emmasmithmusic.co.uk
37.30

Multi talented Emma Smith is a class act and no mistake. Voted Parliamentary Jazz Vocalist of the Year, Smith has performed on the international stage over the past decade with telling effect. Singer, songwriter, arranger and broadcaster on BBC Radio 3, her diverse talents have propelled her to the forefront of British jazz and popular music worldwide.

Inspired by her parents and grandfather, all successful jazz musicians, Smith sensibly explored

a broader range of popular music, first touring with her vocal harmony group, The Puppini Sisters and collaborations with the likes of Michael Bublé, the Quincy Jones Orchestra, Jeff Goldblum and Bobby McFerrin. Some critically acclaimed recordings have set the bar high and *Hat-Trick!* her third album, doesn't disappoint.

Opening with a breezy waltz, *Matchmaker, Matchmaker* from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Smith is clearly at ease with this selection of timeless classics and the combined skills of the excellent rhythm section; Samuel Watts on piano, Joe Lee on double bass and Luke Tomlinson on drums. *Saturday Night Is The Loneliest Night Of The Week* swings along nicely with some effective changes and a warm and intimate *Old Cape Cod* is enhanced with a Latin feel and subtle vocal sustains. *Love Is A Tender Trap*, a joyous samba, is served with relish, followed with a jaunty up tempo *Day In Day Out*. Smith's dynamic delivery on *No Moon At All* contrasts with a sensuous rendering of Billy Strayhorn's *Chelsea Bridge* and her distinctive vocals on Cole Porter's *Night And Day* precede an effective reading of Rodgers & Hart's *Where Or When*. Closing on the upbeat Andrews Sisters classic *Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree* is an inspired choice!

Overall, an album packed with creative energy and well crafted vocal skills. With the imminent release of her next album, *Bitter Orange*, Emma Smith's star shines bright, and rightly so.

VAL WISEMAN



SANDRA-MAE LUX

SEASONS IN JAZZ

SML002CD, approximately 46 minutes

There seem to be two ways of singing jazz. There's the Ella way, and the Billie way. Yes, I know

there are lots of other ways, but it's difficult to find them. Sandra-Mae Lux is unlucky that *Seasons In Jazz* has come my way because I'm not a fan of the Ella way that she adopts. But I'll just have to park my prejudice, because this is a labour of love and it's worked pretty well.

You can't fault the ambition. Sandra-Mae Lux has attempted to create a Great American Songbook album using entirely original songs, composed in collaboration with Alan Marriott. She is channelling her inner Loesser, Kern and Mercer to make a creditable bid for a Great Canadian Songbook. Only time will tell whether or not she has succeeded, but if you like Ella in her Cole Porter mood then it makes a nice change from the drear *Every Time We Say Goodbye*.

The sound is lush and the playing impeccable, as you might expect when Rob Barron, Dave Jones, Tristan Maillot and their ilk are in the studio. If you wandered into one of the better coffee shops you might wonder what that was on the muzak, and be mildly surprised that it isn't something from the golden era.

Unfortunately, one of the giveaways might be some of the intonation in the vocals, which, to my admittedly unschooled ear, is occasionally not quite as Ella-ish as you might hope.

Also, lyrically, there's a bit too much Cole Porter smug wordplay for me, but that's his fault. If you're going to evoke his spirit, then toes are going to curl.

In the end, given that I'm a hostile environment to start with, it has to be acknowledged that this is a work of class and honesty. If you like this kind of thing, you should definitely check it out because you'll be a far fairer judge than me and I think you'll enjoy it.

To finish with an undiluted positive, there are two sax instrumental versions of the songs on the album, *Perfect Weather* and *When Autumn Calls*. They reveal Sandra-Mae Lux to be a fluent interpreter of these classic structures, with a gorgeously mellow tone. More please.

STUART MAXWELL



JAMIE SHEW

SPICY, CLASSY AND A LITTLE SASSY

Self-released, no number: 41.25

California-based singer Jamie Shew has been praised by Scott Yanow as 'subtle, but creative', but in truth it took me a little time to warm to her. At her best when delivering intelligently phrased, straightforward treatments of ballads, her tendency to worry her notes out of their simplicity can irritate. Or perhaps it's just bad luck that she starts with a funky *Invitation*, a song that does nothing for me.

It's track 5, *Ghost of a Chance*, before I really started to enjoy this. There were compensations before. Jeremy Siskind's fluently forthright piano makes its mark on all tracks; Jamie Shew herself contributes a fine melodica solo to *Comes Love*; *Close Your Eyes*, with drummer Mark Ferber's incessant off beat, is attractive.

But with *Ghost of A Chance* Jamie Shew really hits her stride, her delicate vocal poised on a bed of organ chords by Kait Dunton. A couple of Jamie Shew originals have their appeal, *Letters from You* following a moving and wistful verse with a rather strident chorus. Then the CD ends with attractive versions of four standards, the best of them *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* and *Just Squeeze Me*. *Bewitched* is lovely, an ingenious treatment, with the chorus phrased with moving cynicism before the verse rounds off the song. *Just Squeeze Me* is jaunty, an off-the-wall take with Lyman Medeiros' bass soloing between Shew's coy reading of the lyrics.

RON SIMPSON



GIACOMO SMITH

MANOUCHE

Stunt Records STUCD 25042: 40.44

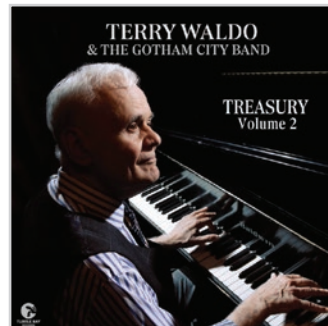
Very few people, when discussing the influence of Django Reinhardt, choose to foreground Hubert Rostaing. He was the clarinettist who took Stephane Grappelli's place when the violinist decided to remain in the UK during the war. One such was Giacomo Smith who was inspired by Rostaing's playing (and, indeed, that of the whole quintet) as a student in Montreal.

Fifteen years later it all comes to fruition, Smith leading an all-star quartet featuring Mozes Rosenberg, the guitar virtuoso in the Manouche tradition. Also on board are rhythm guitarist Remi Oswald and bassist William Brunard. The churning Manouche rhythm is there on most songs, with *After You've Gone* a fine opener, taken at a driving uptempo, with a sort of 'BG Meets Django' effect. Rosenberg, as throughout, announces his presence with aggressive swagger and Smith has a fluency and drive you'd associate with Goodman.

This is not to say that the whole album works to a formula. Smith and Adrian Cox's *Beijinhos* summons up Brazilian rhythms while *Embraceable You* covers all the bases of Rosenberg's lyricism and Smith's *Mr. Tom* even hints at the avant garde. I especially enjoyed *Panique* by Django's great contemporary Matelo Ferret, conjuring up the world of the *bal musette*. But the key sound depends on the dynamics between Smith and Rosenberg, exchanging ideas with a fierce fluency, as in *Festival 48*. A finale, with Smith switching to alto and ripping up *Tiger Rag*, is fun.

Reading through this, I realise that I've given too little attention to the skills of Oswald, rock-solid rhythmic core, and Brunard, with his expert solos, even on bowed bass.

RON SIMPSON



TERRY WALDO & THE GOTHAM CITY BAND

TREASURY, VOLUME 2

Turtle Bay Records TBR 25001CD: 39.44

Terry Waldo is an acknowledged master of ragtime and assorted music and in a long career has led a number of bands, including The Gotham City Band which, in a floating population, numbers such notable traditionalists as Mike Davis, Dan Levinson, Jim Fryer and, occasionally, Colin Hancock.

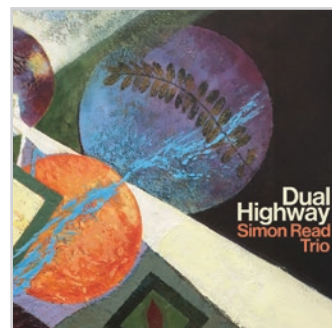
Treasury Volume 2 is a highly attractive CD, if not especially original, delving into the worlds of early blues recordings, ragtime and the repertoire of the likes of King Oliver and Bix Beiderbecke. The recordings were made in 2018 and 2022, but the line-ups tend to circle round a central core. This variety is enhanced by the shortness of the numbers: 11 in 39 minutes is more redolent of the era of 78s and makes for short telling solos, with the exception of *The Smiler*, played by a trio with Jerron Paxton's elegantly old-fashioned banjo up front.

Waldo appears to be a generous leader, passing the amiably gruff vocals around the band (including himself) as well as bringing in a couple of stylish ladies, Veronica Swift on *Guess Who's in Town*, and Molly Ryan on *Get Out and Get Under the Moon*. On this latter number he even vacates the piano chair, giving Mike Lipskin an

opportunity to indulge in a spot of stride piano.

Stand out tracks include *Snake Rag*, with bass saxophonist Jay Rattman providing the ballast and Mike Davis, excellent throughout, delighting in the trumpet breaks, and *Viper Mad*, with Fryer, Davis and clarinetist Evan Arntzen having fun with solo choruses (and, indeed, half-choruses). However, for my money, the best of all is *Original Rags*, the only track credited with an orchestrator (Sam Chess), Paxton banjo again leading the way, with delightfully subtle background interventions initially by Waldo, later with smart voicings from the whole band.

RON SIMPSON



SIMON READ TRIO

DUAL HIGHWAY

Independent Release – no issue number 41:45

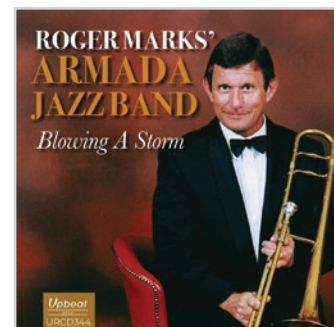
Followers of Duke Ellington may look at the title of this CD, smile to themselves, and assume that the album will contain a healthy helping of the Duke's influence and style. They'd be right too, and they will find further confirmation of their suspicions by looking at the track-listing: *Just A-Sittin' And A-Rockin'* is also here, and the opener, *Kinda Dukish*, sets the tone. The latter first appeared in this form on Duke's 1960 album *Piano In The Background*, but on this trio set, recorded in 2018 but only just released, the instrument is anything but.

Band leader Simon Read plays double bass, whilst Joe Webb – who has been touted as the musician most likely to be 'the bearer of jazz to Generation X and beyond' – supplies the wonderful piano work, and the vastly experienced Gethin Jones is on drums. The result

is a wonderfully swinging set of eight piano-led classics from the masters. Besides the Duke, there is also material courtesy of Oscar Peterson (the sprightly *Noreen's Nocturne*), the masterful jazz trio pianist, Ahmad Jamal, with *Woody 'N You* which also has fine breaks by Simon and Gethin, as of course do other tracks, *You're Driving Me Crazy* with its lovely, old-fashioned, lazy swing, at least until things speed up towards the end, Art Tatum style, and Thelonious Monk and a breakneck *I Want To Be Happy*. George and Ira Gershwin's *I've Got A Crush On You* is primarily known as a vocal number (particularly Frank Sinatra, or maybe Ella Fitzgerald) and here is given a quiet, thoughtful treatment; so too is the aforementioned title track with its blues and gospel inflections.

There are no great surprises here then, but only performances guaranteed to gladden the heart of any jazz lover needing reassurance that the classic jazz piano trio is still in safe hands. On this evidence it most certainly is.

NORMAN DARWEN



ROGER MARKS' ARMADA JAZZBAND

BLOWING A STORM

Upbeat: URCD344 70:47

This splendid Upbeat CD features live recordings from 2006 and 2007 at The Odd Wheel, Wembury, near Plymouth, by Roger Marks' Armada Band.

There is happily no shortage of material from this traditional jazz outfit's 18-year weekly residency here, most of it released on the independent Leap Frog label. But here is another very fine sampler, a well-balanced selection of 13 of the hottest takes, Upbeat's perfect

follow-up to the success in the last two years of their similar compilations, *Sizzling Sessions* and *Best Days*.

The fourth incarnation of a band originally formed in 1984 is arguably the strongest, most entitled to call itself 'all-stars'. It features on trumpet John Shillito, the man who replaced Ken Colyer in the reformed Johnny Bastable's Chosen Six, long-term Liverpoolian member Ken Rennison on clarinet, alto and soprano, and the leader, the former Rod Mason stalwart, on trombone.

This was pretty much the front three from 1998 to 2022, backed here by stalwarts, 'Eddie' Edwards (once of Max Collie's Rhythm Aces) on banjo, Terry Lidiard, drums, and Bob Jarvis, bass.

Authentically New Orleans in style, the band belts out such canonical favourites as *Chimes Blues*, *Fidgety Feet*, *Snake Rag*, those that Kid Ory called 'the good old good ones', that fans never tire of hearing. Whilst caressing such as *Beautiful Dreamer* and *Maria Elena*, Marks constantly reminds us he is very much more than a tailgate rambler and has the warmth and lyricism of the best. His melodic rhythmic lines of accompaniment are as masterly as the stirring solos.

This is a vibrant band on top of its game, living up to its festival reputation as 'the best in the West'. Upbeat continues to fly the flag for British traditional jazz.

ANDREW LIDDLE



MIKE LOVATT'S BRASS PACK

LIVE!

Doyen DOYCD446 79.23

The strap-line for this bright-looking album says it all:

'A Unique 25-Piece Brass Orchestra.' No reeds, just a substantial brass chorale with added rhythm section, plus three percussionists, a harpist and two recognised vocalists! It turns out that this substantial ensemble led by star session trumpeter Lovatt has been busily presenting its concert programme around the country. Indeed, this live recording is from a Birmingham Town Hall appearance last August. Who knew? Not me, for sure.

Ex-NYJO colleagues Lovatt and arranger Colin Skinner both took a shine to Billy May's 1958 *Big Fat Brass* album and this set them off on the path that resulted in the creation of this all-star concert orchestra. While what we can call a jazz spirit imbues its performances and there are excellent jazz solos by trumpeter James Davison and trombonist Andy Wood dotted here and there as well as features for pianist Graham Harvey and Lovatt himself, the Brass Pack is not a conventional jazz big band. Think back to a time, the vinyl era perhaps, when themed albums by the Ted Heath orchestra and others had wide-spread popular appeal and you'll be nearer the mark.

That said, Skinners's charts, seventeen in all, may well allude to past recordings (all explained in the notes), the song choices reflecting a time when Sinatra and Ella reigned supreme, but there's no sense of pastiche or any note-for-note replication. This is not a tribute band. The charts are fresh, cleverly constructed and played with admirable zest throughout by these top players. Drummer Tom Gordon holds the reins well; Matt Ford does his Sinatra vocal thing capably as on Skinner's intriguing re-write of *My Way* while the poised Louise Marshall scores on the soulful *Miss Otis Regrets* and on her pleasingly raucous version of Duke's *I'm Gonna Go Fishin* with lyrics by Peggy Lee and growl trumpet from Danny Marsden,

PETER VACHER



NEAR THE POND

WILD GEESE

Stunt Records STUCD 25012: 43.31

Now and again I come across a CD that I feel is rather outside my range, maybe isn't jazz at all, but is so impressive that it really doesn't matter. Near the Pond are a quartet based in Scandinavia. Three of them, singer Josefine Cronholm, bassist Thommy Andersson (both Swedes) and American cornetist Kirk Knuffke, were on their first album in 2021 and now they are joined by Danish veteran Bent Clausen on vibes and drums. Two viola players and a cellist are added on seven of ten tracks.

Now here we come to the most remarkable part. The CD is devoted to settings by the three original members of the band of translations of poems by the 12th century Japanese poet, Saigyō, very short poems, somewhat mystical and devoted to the natural world.

At times the settings are not really melodic, but there is still plenty to enjoy: the hypnotic, evocative quality of Cronholm's voice, the introspective sound of Knuffke's cornet and the ingenious patterns of Andersson's bass and Clausen's drums – or his vibraphone imitating the melting of ice - plus the mesmeric drone of the strings.

A few of the songs, however, are really memorable. *Winter Deepens in a Mountain Home* by Andersson is a beautiful melody, affectingly sung by Cronholm over a drone from which Knuffke's cornet gradually emerges. And Cronholm is a fine songwriter: *If Only* sets a desolate melody over tinkling vibes and *Time on My Pillow* emerges as a surprisingly jaunty little melody amid the haunting re-creations of Saigyō's sound world.

RON SIMPSON



BAG OF NAILS

BACK TO THE SAME OLD PLACE

Self release, approximately 38 minutes

I have a thing for Greek guitarists. One of the unsung greats of rock guitar is Silver Koulouris of Aphrodite's Child, whose Mediterranean roots made his style unique.

Before Panos Katsikogiannis, guitarist and founder of Bag of Nails, throws his toys out of the pram, I'm only reflecting on the fact that I really liked his guitar playing. Plus, I wanted to show off my limited knowledge of Greek rock'n'roll.

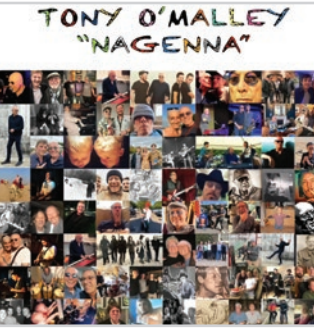
'Don't hesitate to crank it up' they say on the cover of this CD. They also make a point of saying it's recorded entirely live and analog [sic]. All of which points to a love of classic 1970s rock and, sure enough, it drips from every track.

They've kept the vinyl reference to side one and side two for the CD credits, and, best of all, they've devoted most of 'Side Two' to a near-sixteen minute workout called Six Strings. It's magnificent and took me straight back to bands like Man and early Doobie Brothers. Not that it sounded like them, it just came from the same place. Great tone, fluent technique, and shifting, atmospheric dynamics.

The only slight downside to this modern evocation of a golden era is that the lyrics are a bit anachronistic too. Katsikogiannis is a good singer, but there's an American tinge to his vocal style that isn't quite convincing; I'd rather hear him for real, and dealing with more contemporary themes.

Still, it rocks along and the playing is great, with searing authentic Hammond from Thanos Zaheilas and powerhouse drumming from Elias Katis. Is it blues? Not really, but it's fine rock'n'roll and, get over it Panos, I don't think English rockers could play with this fire and jamming sensibility. It must be something in the water.

STUART MAXWELL



TONY O'MALLEY

NAGENNA

Self release, approximately 57:50 minutes

Ah, this takes me back. Not quite to Kokomo, where Tony O'Malley sealed his legend in the 1970s, but to the early 1980s jazz-funk scene. Grover Washington, Richard Tee, Al Jarreau, Frankie Beverley, The Crusaders – that polished funk that

teetered on the edge of lift music but always held its balance thanks to the quality of the playing.

There's a class to this that evokes that time and place. It never gets carried away with itself, but it stays cool and there's some great playing from O'Malley and his impressive roster of guests. They include Kokomo luminaries Neil Hubbard and Frank Collins, as well as Charlotte Churchman, Keith Fairbairn and Jim Hunt.

Still, the album didn't punch me in the face. The songwriting has the hallmark of a man who speaks this language fluently, and there are fresh covers of Bill Withers' *Use Me* and Dylan's *Everything Is Broken*. But it never strays far from that glossy texture that takes away some of the raw power of the performances.

If you really love jazz funk (and back then, I really did), then it's a fine new addition to the oeuvre. Tony O'Malley is one of our great soul singers, a bit rough at the edges now, but still blessed with that effortless class and quality that means you could listen all night. So yes, buy the album and keep him in business, but if you want the best of him, go and see him.

STUART MAXWELL

JOB VACANCY



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LIVE REVIEWS

JAZZ IN THE HILLS

RON SIMPSON REPORTS ON JAZZ AT BUXTON

What is jazz at Buxton? Well, there are two answers to that: the BIF Jazz Weekender runs from July 10th to 13th and then jazz takes its place, along with opera, music recitals and book talks, in the main Buxton International Festival. I caught the final eight events of the Jazz Weekender – from Friday evening onwards – with seven of the events at the Palace Hotel. It should be mentioned that Buxton is an attractive spa town with plenty to see and do (the Fringe, a carnival on the Saturday and, of course, the main Festival) and the Festival does not overload the jazz: an average of three events per day during the Weekender.

Arriving at Friday tea-time, I was just in time to catch organiser Neil Hughes setting off to town with a New Orleans-style marching band: 'looking for something different for Buxton,' as he remarked. This was certainly true of Baiana, the Brazil-inspired group of singer-songwriter Laura Doyle. They offered an infectious blend of (for the most part) Laura's own songs, put over with expressive energy and smart articulation. Doyle stood out from the black-clad band in her bird-of-paradise outfit, but the strength of the performance was the way her singing was backed up by the eight-piece band. Numbers were as likely to finish with a climax of purely instrumental excitement as with a neat little vocal coda. Percussionist Snowboy and drummer Davide Giovannini complemented, and competed with, each other to great effect and the Haggis Horns (trumpet and two saxes, one doubling flute) kept the excitement going.

Following this, the late shift was in the safe hands of Butcher's Brew. To be honest I had expected a more Miles-oriented programme, but originals by Ray Butcher and (in rather more whimsical vein) pianist Tim Amann filled the bill

nicely. Butcher is a clean crisp trumpeter, secure when leaping into the upper register, and contributing effective muted trumpet to the atmospheric After Midnight. It may have been me, but, as the clock moved towards midnight, it seemed the music eased back in time and the concluding blues had more than a hint of New Orleans.

The highlights of the weekend came with two lengthy concerts on Saturday, the perfect answer to those (including, occasionally, myself) who complain about the ubiquity of tribute concerts. Art Pepper and Oscar Peterson were born within a month or two of each other in 1925 and thus Alan Barnes' *Works of Art* and Dean Stockdale's *100 Years of Oscar Peterson* were centenary celebrations.

Alan Barnes was in tremendous form and had to support him the subtle skills of trumpeter James Davison and an all-star rhythm team of Robin Aspland, Jeremy Brown and the ever-swinging Steve Brown. Alan's jocularly subversive introductions are well known, but in among the funnies he was splendidly informative about the changes in Pepper's style and the reasons (four prison sentences for drug use).

One thing that merged as a particular joy was Pepper's skill with contrafacts, *Chili Pepper* having fun with *Tea for Two*, Barnes enjoying himself with circular breathing, quotations and the odd squeak. *Miss Who?* turned out to be Georgia Brown, with dialogue between Barnes and Jeremy Brown who also swapped fours wittily with Steve Brown on Pepper's version of *Lover Come Back to Me*. One of the delights of contrafacts is you've got the original to quote from as Barnes did in a series of half-quotes.

The general mood was of exhilaration – sun-drenched California – with Davison's solos building from very little to their moment in the sun and then fading away again, but, as Alan pointed out, things got darker. *The Trip*, with its foreboding alto tone and the ominous effect of Robin Aspland's piano, was in another world from the gentle

beauty of *Patricia* or the lyricism of *You Go to My Head*.

If Alan Barnes' devotion to Art Pepper made him the obvious celebrant of his centenary, the same could be said of Dean Stockdale with Oscar Peterson. Last year at Buxton his quartet did an excellent set of Oscar's works, so that Neil Hughes promptly suggested a more ambitious project this year to be staged in the Pavilion Arts Centre – and the question was, what could they add? Alan Barnes and Mark Armstrong could obviously beef up what were originally quartet or trio performances, but what of the Amika String Quartet? On their first appearance, *Falling in Love with Love*, they added very little, but thereafter clever arrangements integrated them thoroughly with the quartet/sextet, so that the first half closer, *Norman's Nocturne*, began with witty scoring for strings and ended up as a joyous romp all round.

The other guest was Emily Masser who had played the Palace on Friday lunch-time. She sang Elvis Costello's words to Peterson's tune, *When Summer Comes*, in a gently moving performance and then gave us *Tonight* from Peterson's *West Side Story* album. It was all very well planned: more would have suggested adding vocals for the sake of it.

Of course the quartet (or, even, the trio) was at the heart of the action, Stockdale commencing the second half with memories of Peterson/Ray Brown/Barney Kessel in their great hit, *Tenderly*. Thereafter the highlight of the second half was Peterson's *Canadiana Suite*, everything from meditative piano solo to romping riffs and solos – a real delight!

There followed the Emily Rawicz Quartet and, on Sunday, Ivo Neame's Dodeka and the Xhosa Cole Quartet, all great musicians, but pursuing tracks where not all of us could follow them – it was entertaining to pick up the divergent audience views! For me Dodeka hit the spot, not immediately, with not much in support of the meaty sound of brass and saxes, but gradually, with cross rhythms



from all sides and minimalist grooves reminiscent of Steve Reich. Neame, one suspects, takes an intellectual approach to his music (the first two numbers were inspired by Carl Jung and Joseph Conrad and *The OK Corral* - or *Chorale*? - began with a pastiche of that well-known gunslinger J.S. Bach), but, once started, his orchestrations were unstoppable.

For the final concert Georgina Jackson brought her Mighty Mini Big Band for *Sass and Brass*, a tremendous display of energy, dancing, singing and playing trumpet and flugel, culminating in her joining members of the audience for *Stuck in the Middle*. It's very difficult to assess the performance, with its frequently over-popular choices, sometimes in medleys, and encouragement to the audience to wave, clap in time and whatever else, but there were nice moments: *Shiny Stockings*, for example, with good work from Tom Farmer, Karen Sharp and James Pearson.

Whatever, it was a rousing finisher to the Weekender, as sharp a contrast to the Xhosa Cole Quartet as you could find – and that, probably, is what Neil Hughes was aiming for!

HENRY'S BLUESLETTER

MICKEY BAKER – THE WILDEST GUITAR IN CONVERSATION WITH JIM SIMPSON

MacHouston “Mickey” Baker has the kind of background that blues writers dream about. He also has an accurate memory, no false modesty, and is positively the most graphic and colourful raconteur you could ever hope to meet.

To say his upbringing and childhood were insecure would be a gross understatement. How he survived to become a top session player, a successful and internationally-known guitarist and singer – and to reject his popular success it all at its zenith – reads something like a fairy tale.

Mickey Baker, sometime Mickey Guitar Baker, was born to sing in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 15, 1925. I recorded him, went on tours and spent many happy days with him and his wife in his extremely pleasant Place de la Bastille apartment. One time I recorded our conversation.

“My first gig was as a disc jockey at my uncle’s speakeasy in Louisville, I used to play records by Tampa Red, Washboard Sam and they had a guy about at that time name of Doc Clayton.

“I used to hear those blues singers in them days, but I never paid any attention to them – it was just something that was there.

“The hit records back then – what you would really call the pop music of the day – were songs like ‘Listen To The Mocking Bird’. We had gospel too – “Wings Over Jordan” was a very popular radio show at that time, every Sunday they played all the gospel songs. I would go to the Baptist Church and I guess these sounds entered by head without me really listening to them. As a boy I was a street player, we used to have what they call jug bands. One kid played a jug, one guy mashed out all kinds of cans on top of an orange crate, another blows on a kazoo, while still another guy would play bass with us on a tub or something. I think in our case we didn’t have the tub.



“We used to do like scat music type of thing – it really had nothing to do with rhythm and blues.

“In this band, well, I used to carry the tin – I was actually too small to participate in the musical activities, so I just used to run with the orange crate when the cops chased us. The cops would always chase us away and my job was to grab as much money off the ground when we saw the cops coming. I’d say I was about nine or 11 I’d say. There were a lot of street singers around that time, but I wasn’t aware of them. I only started to listen to them when I was about 15. I remember there was a guy there, barefooted in mid-winter and I think it was part of his act to have safety pins stuck in the heel of his foot and a lot of nail polish on his feet to make it look like blood and he would play his guitar and sing but everybody would just look at his feet. He played real old

bottleneck, a broken bottle on his finger, sliding up on the guitar, you could see him on the street at all times. He’d be on Warman Street at six in the morning or in those alleys around there and his favourite was this “Diggin’ In My Potatoes” – I think that’s how I got involved.

“It’s a funny thing about us kids in Louisville, we always laughed at these people, made fun of them, it wasn’t like we were really interested in the Blues, it was just alley music for low life. Religious people would always tell you don’t listen to this music, don’t you go back in that alley because there’s nothing but riff-raff and guttersnipes. Gutter music that good folks don’t allow in the house. That’s where they got the idea for the song, “Mama Don’t Allow That Music Played In Here”, you know?

“Black people have always been divided in two groups, those that were religious

and those that were not and there’s a middle group that were backslidden on both sides, you know.

“I didn’t go to the orphanage, they just sent and taken me because I stayed with my mother until around 11. I was put in Ridgewood Orphanage when I was 11 ½ but once I got there it was OK. They got a brass band and they were pretty good. This was like in the Thirties – between 1935 to around 1940, which was a very bad time in the States as far as people eating and sleeping and going on. Roosevelt and his New Deals and NRA and stuff like that.

“When I was in the orphanage about a year then I became interested in the band and I started playing musical instruments.

“I got to be a pretty good musician, and I learned to read, vaguely, the music for marches like ‘The George Washington’, ‘Stars & Stripes’ and so on.

“Well, I was only thirteen years old, and music didn’t really mean anything to me, it was just something to pass the time away in the orphanage. And then finally when I did get away from that place (after running away 9,000 times they eventually let me go) I lost interest in music altogether.

“I worked as a common labourer, digging ditches an’ working in sewer pipe lining companies, doing all kinds of hard labour work.

“Then I went to New York and became a star dishwasher. I got involved in a lot of other things, and I stopped working altogether and became a sort of pool shark.

“I was just hanging around the pool room shooting, you know, that’s when I think I really gotten interested in music as music. I used to hang around a place on 26th Street where I saw guys like Billy Eckstine, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and all these great musicians of jazz.

“I decided to change my life at 19. And when the New Year came around I went back downtown and started washing dishes again, but I’d decided after having been around those musicians for a couple of years I wanted to become a musician.

“In those days the guitar wasn’t popular at all, it was the trumpet that mattered, and I decided to become a musician. I went to the hock shop to buy this trumpet – I had 14 dollars and fifty cents and I remember I’d saved up the money to buy it with, and I walked in and told them I’d like to buy a trumpet.

He says ‘How much money do you have?’

‘I have 14 dollars fifty.’

‘Oh, the cheapest trumpet I got here’s ‘bout 80 dollars, but you look like a nice boy, so I’ll do you a favour. Here, I’ll sell you this guitar for 14 dollars.’

“This damn guitar was all bashed in the back – it was probably worth about five dollars. Y’know all of a sudden it dawned on me that Charlie Christian was a very popular guitarist, and that was only around 1944.

“I said ‘Charlie Christian, yeah, Charlie Christian – give me the guitar. I’ll play the guitar, what the hell.’ So that’s how I bought my first guitar for 14 dollars, a piece of junk, I was robbed!

“I went home and decided I was going to become a guitar player right away. I went to the music store and I said ‘give me the best guitar book you got.’ And they gave me something written by somebody with some ridiculous name like Hank Snow, 10 Easy Lessons on How To Play Hillbilly Music or something like that nonsense.

“I was walking down 127th Street one day and I saw this guy playing the guitar. He was playing all those beautiful melodic chords and I say ‘It’s beautiful the way you play the guitar. Maybe

you’ll show me how to play some chords like that.’

“I took him up to the house. The guy was starving and so I fed him, and he showed me a couple of things on the guitar. Then I studied under a teacher for a year and a half, and I learned all the standard chords. Then finally I met a guy named Rector Bailey, who in my opinion knew more about the guitar at that time than anybody I’d met in New York – in fact, as far as I was concerned he was a genius.

“In 1949 I decided to go to California with a jazz group. We ran out of money and got stranded in Oakland California and that’s when I really became interested in the blues, that’s when I realised blues was a music where you could make money. It was all a financial thing with me. A lot of people have asked me, ‘In other words, there was no artistic thing involved?’ I can’t say yes or no, all I know is that I was starving to death.”

Mickey returned to New York with a new direction and a new determination. He got himself hired for a stream of session work for Savoy and King Records in 1951. Then he cut “5, 10, 15 Minutes Of Your Love” and “Mama He Treats Your Daughter Mean” with Ruth Brown, both Number One on the charts and Mickey Baker was the hottest ticket in town.

“At the time I was the wildest guitar around and all of a sudden I became the most famous guitar player in New York.

“I made all these records with Nappy Brown, Charles Brown and all of the Browns you can think of, Ruth Brown and Gatemouth Brown, all the Browns and the Blues, and all of them, Ray Charles, Ivory Joe Hunter, Big Joe Turner, Big Maybelle, Big Doggett, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, Little Willie John, Louis Jordan, all of the big rock ‘n roll stars of the day, I made records with them.

“I recorded with the original Drifters. I used to make all of the records at Atlantic, all of the records at Savoy, and in all of the visiting record companies that were coming from California.

“In 1956 I started getting interested in another thing – Mickey & Sylvia. I got this idea that there should be a boy and a girl playing the guitar, performing the thing on stage.

“Sylvia Vanderpool had been a student of mine before I really became interested in making an act with her.

“I said I’ll give up all my record sessions, I made an average salary in those days as a session musician ‘bout \$500 a week, and I used to go out with Mickey & Sylvia and work in these raggedy clubs like in the Philadelphia or in Province Row, or in some Donkey Club to work a weekend for \$500 when Sylvia had to get \$250, I had to get \$250, we had to pay all our expenses and travel and everything and there was actually no money being made at all.

“We used to work with Bo Diddley all the time, and he was always singing this song called ‘Paradise’ – it was a really funny song, and Sylvia kept saying ‘Mickey, if you record that song it’ll become one of the biggest hits that’s ever been written.

“Diddley and me sat down and we took it to pieces, and we made this new song called ‘Love Is Strange’. We were the publishers, the writers and the performers of the song, and that started a whole new trend in the life of Mickey Baker, because this record was a smash hit right away.”

Jim Simpson

To be continued in issue 187.

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LIVE REVIEWS

ALEX HUTTON,
WILL GIBSON, ROB
RICKENBURG, ANDY
BALL

RUISLIP CONSERVATIVE
CLUB, JUNE 4TH 2025

It's 810 years since the signing of the Magna Carta. Which means it's also ten years since pianist Alex Hutton made his album marking the 800th anniversary. To mark the occasion, and because he loves testing staid jazz audiences, he used the first set of this gig to present the album in full.

With Will Gibson on sax, Rob Rickenburg on bass and Andy Ball on drums, he had a fine

trio of adventurous musicians to bring his *Magna Carta Suite* to life.

As a composer, Hutton is a creator of moods, with melodies that move without effort into open spaces of improvisation. His playing is gripping; his whole demeanour, unshoed, bespectacled and almost puzzled, puts question marks in your mind that make every note, every harmony, unexpected. For this suite, he ingested traditional English folk tunes and medieval modes, somehow blending the English bucolic comfortably with the American urban.

Throughout, Will Gibson delivered taut, exploratory lines that made the most of Hutton's

compositions. We waste inventive and intense musicians like him, he was clearly off the leash after endless sessions and commercial gigs. Andy Ball swung and drove things without overwhelming the sound; his cymbals are a concert in their own right.

The quartet went a bit more mainstream in the second set, with a brisk take on *Pick Yourself Up*. But then they drifted off menu again into a version of Jimi Hendrix's *Little Wing*. It wasn't great, mainly because it's not a song that translates easily from its native rock'n'roll territory. Many jazz luminaries have struggled to make it work. Why don't they have a go at *May This Be Love*?

Order was restored with a sublime evocation of Josef Zawinul's *A Remark You Made*, notable for the fact that all four players managed to avoid sounding like the daunting originators of each part. We didn't need Jaco, we had Rob Rickenburg.

Promoter Tony Jameson seems consistently to conjure magic for the first Wednesday gatherings at Ruislip Conservative Club. It's a long way from Minton's, but this was another session that let the musicians fly and explore together.

STUART MAXWELL

TONY O'MALLEY
AND NEIL
RICHARDSON

JOE'S BAR & GRILL,
SUMMERTOWN, OXFORD,
MAY 15, 2025

Is 'slick' always a pejorative word? If it means polished, smart and classy, that's good, isn't it? Tony O'Malley's music is slick, because at times it sails dangerously close to 'smooth', but it saves itself with the quality of the performance.

At Joe's, O'Malley was accompanied by Neil Richardson, whose drumming quietly drove the funk and grooves without ever getting in the way. It was a little masterclass in taste and touch.

Tony O'Malley is one of those musicians who has always been around, writing and performing

at the top of his game, without ever quite making the real big time. He was a founder of Kokomo, the peerless British funk outfit that fed great singers and instrumentalists into the global music scene for the next 20 years.

The evening was funky and souly, a bit jazzy and bluesy, and it was never less than quietly cool. He is a great singer – genuinely, not just in that throwaway sense of 'great' – and he plays mean piano. It sits firmly in that 70s/80s funk scene, with earnest lyrics, soulful arrangements, and foot-tapping grooves.

While you're in it, it's absorbing and impressive. But it doesn't leave you breathless and it doesn't linger too long in the memory. Then again, it's not really about being battered and challenged by uncomfortable music.

In the end, there's nothing quite like hearing a true aristocrat of the music strolling through his back catalogue, playing around with some standards (*Masquerade*, *Lovely Day*, *Georgia*) and introducing new material (from his *Nagenna* album, reviewed elsewhere in this issue).

It was like sipping at a fine red wine (a pokey Montepulciano, thanks). Every now and then, you notice a new flavour in the complex fruit that jolts you out of your pleasant reverie. Yes, it was slick, but it was fun, funky and packed with the ineffable power of an uncompromising pro.

STUART MAXWELL

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