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ISSUE 187 AUTUMN 2025
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Merlin Daleman*



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RBC Salsa Orchestra
Mon 6 Oct, 6.30pm

Arnie Somogyi Quartet
Thu 9 Oct, 1.05pm

Jason Palmer with Mark Edwards, Matt Holmes & Gideon Tazelaar
Thu 16 Oct, 6.30pm support, 7.30pm main show

Michael Janisch, Mark Turner & Ziv Ravitz
Thu 16 Oct, 6.30pm support, 7.30pm main show

A Laugh Supreme
Fri 17 Oct, 7pm
Featuring stand-up comedy from Alex Milner, Maria Shehata and Hassan Al-Habib, and live music from The Aidan Pope Quartet

Tim Berne's Capatosta
Thu 23 Oct, 6.30pm support, 7.30pm main show. With Gregg Belisle-Chi & Tom Rainey

Jazz Senior Student Platforms
Thu 30 Oct, 1.05pm

RBC Repertory Big Band & Solihull Music Service Jazz Orchestra
Mon 3 Nov, 6.30pm

Jazz Senior Student Platforms
Thu 6 Nov, 1.05pm

Paul Dunmall Invites: Steve Swell with James Owston & Mark Sanders
Thu 6 Nov, 6.30pm support, 7.30pm main show

To Mike Gibbs, in Celebration
Thu 13 Nov, 6.30pm

A Laugh Supreme
Fri 14 Nov, 7pm
Featuring stand-up comedy from Alex Milner, Frances Keaton and Jacob Nussey, and live music from The Aidan Pope Quartet

Banda Brasiliera
Fri 14 Nov, 8pm, Hockley Social Club

Jazz Senior Student Platforms
Thu 27 Nov, 1.05pm

Big Band Monday: Banda Brasiliera with Support from Sandbach School Jazz Band
Mon 1 Dec, 6.30pm support, 7.15pm main show

Paul Dunmall invites Nikki Yeoh with Dave Sear, Josh Vadiveloo and Miles Levin

Thu 4 Dec, 6.30pm support, 7.30pm main show

Jazz Gala
Thu 11 Dec, 6.30pm, Eastside Jazz Club & Boults Bar

Birmingham City University

Photo by Merlin Daleman



ART THEMEN pictured by Merlin Daleman at this year's Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival (see pages 8, 22-23)

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THE JAZZ RAG
PO BOX 944, Birmingham, B1 6 8UT, England
Tel: 0121 454 7020
Fax: 0121 454 9996
Email: jazzrag@bigbearmusic.com
Web: www.jazzrag.com

Publisher / Editor: Jim Simpson
News / Features: Ron Simpson
Reviews Editor: Lucy Stone
International Editor: Yue Yang
Commercial Director: Tim Jennings
Subscriptions & Accounts: Lucy Stone
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UPFRONT

In part motivated by the closure of Kansas Smitty's Joe Stilgoe is organising a campaign on behalf of UK jazz which he sees as being in crisis at the grassroots level. He has submitted an open letter to Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, backed by such people as Claire Martin, Guy Barker, Ian Shaw and Sally Greene.

In his letter he states, 'Every time a jazz club closes, it rips the soul out of the community. These places are where musicians cut their teeth, audiences fall in love with the music and communities come together.' Stilgoe points to various reasons for his campaign, notably the funding gap (jazz receives 2% of Arts Council grants as against 49% for opera) and the economic contribution that jazz makes (music venues bring in £500 million while operating on margins of less than 0.5%).

Stilgoe is looking for fair access to arts funding, recognition of jazz within national cultural policy and support for grassroots venues. Anyone interested in the progress of his campaign should contact Stuart.Bennett@Deacon.Communities.com.

NIGEL PRICE ON TOUR

The Nigel Price Trio is embarking on a mammoth 46-date tour of UK Grassroots Jazz venues from September to December, all funded by the Music Venue Trust's revolutionary Liveline Fund. Liveline as created by Music Venue Trust and live music advocates Save Our Scene to distribute funding directly to grassroots venues, with revenue raised by contributions from arena and stadium ticket sales.

Nigel Price, who is one of the hardest working musicians on the jazz scene, found the whole tour in jeopardy when his application for an Arts Council grant was turned down. He commented that 'to be the first recipient of Liveline support on the jazz scene is not just an honour – right now it feels like nothing short of a miracle.'

The tour features the Nigel Price Trio (Ross Stanley and Joel Barford), with guest guitarists on some dates. The legendary Lorne Lofsky fulfils a long-held wish to play in Scotland, with dates in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee (November 11-14) before venturing into England. Alessio Menconi is flying in for three dates from November 3 to 5, including an album recording at the Bull's Head, Barnes, on November 5, and Czech guitarist Libor Smoldas joins the trio from October 20-22, playing dates in the London area.

The album launch is scheduled for the Pizza Express on October 5 and *Jazz Rag* readers will be able to read our review in *Jazz Rag* 188. nigelthejazzer.com



Nigel Price *nigelthejazzer.com*

PEGGY'S IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

Peggy's Skylight in Nottingham has its usual packed five nights a week programme of jazz, folk, blues and the rest in the coming months. Among the bands booked are Djanco featuring Andy Aitchison (October 5), Arnie Somogyi and Mark Edwards' Ellington Piano Project (9), James Morton's Groove Den (17), Mr. and Mrs. Jones (18/ also November 9), Charlie Wood Trio (25), Matt Rattcliffe's Unity (30), Jeremy Sassoon (November 1), Nicols Farnon (2), Nigel Price Organ Trio (8), Peggy's House Band plus Alan Barnes with the music of Charlie Parker (15) and the Bryan Corbett Quintet (27).

www.peggyskylight.co.uk

JIVE ACES CELEBRATE

The Jive Aces have a major Christmas show on December 21 at the Shaw Theatre. The Not Quite Christmas Show consists of 11 hours, with five bands, three DJs and one huge dance floor. Top of the bill of artists in support of the Jive Aces is Laurie London, famed for his chart hit, *He's Got the Whole World in his Hands*.

And, on February 28, a similarly lengthy celebration is planned for the Assembly Hall, Worthing, the Big Jive All Dayer, with the Jive Aces supported by the Jets, King Joe and the Atlantics and many more in an extravaganza running for 11 hours from 1.00 pm.

www.jiveaces.com

WAKEFIELD JAZZ

Wakefield Jazz continues with Ben Crosland's Threeway (October 10), Bob Haddred Quintet (17), Boplicity (24), Nigel Price Organ Trio (31), Jeremy Sassoon (November 7), the Nicki Allan Quintet (14), Greg Abate (21) and Zoe Gilby (28).

www.wakefieldjazz.org

WINTER JAZZ AT SAND BAY AND SINAH WARREN

Pete and Heather Lay are driving the Winter blues away at the Winter Jazz Party at Sand Bay Holiday Village near Weston-super-Mare from January 30 to February 2, 2026. Bands playing are the Sunset Café Stompers, John Shillito's Rivera Ramblers,

New Orleans Jazz Bandits, Mississippi Dreamboats, Jools and the Jazzaholics and Pete Lay's Festival Band.

Next up in Pete's festivals for Warner Hotels is at Sinah Warren Coastal Hotel in Hampshire (February 27-March 2), with, again, six bands: the Gambit Jazzmen, John Maddocks Jazzmen, Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band, Trudgeon's Trad Jazz Troubadours, Tenement Jazz Band and Tony Scriven Sunshine Band.

Email: petegambit@gmail.com

JAZZ IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

The Mjazz website lists jazz gigs in the East Midlands, including the excellent venture by which Jazz Steps put jazz into three

libraries (Beeston, Worksop and West Bridgford) on a monthly basis. Lined up for the next three months are Stuart McCallum (October 13-15), Zoe Gilby (November 10-12) and the Belper Jazz Co. with Dennis Rollins (December 8-10). Other appearances include two by Alan Barnes: as part of Pocket Ellington with the likes of Dave Green (Bonington Theatre, Nottingham, October 9) and guesting with the Wendy Kirkland Trio at the Olde House, Chesterfield (Oct. 16). On November 20 Wendy's guest is Nigel Price. Also appearing at the Bonington Theatre are the Kim Cypher Quintet (Nov. 20) and among other tempting gigs are the Vasilis Xenopoulos/Paul Edis Quartet (Blue Room, Nov. 8) and the Brandon Allen Quartet (Phoenix Arts Centre, Nov. 13). www.mjazz.co.uk

HOWARD ASSEMBLY ROOM

Opera North promotes a whole range of events in the Howard Assembly Room, attached to the Grand Theatre, Leeds. Alongside operas, classical recitals and exotic world music, they are prepared

to chance their arm with some off-the-wall jazz. The Ancient Infinity Orchestra (October 9) boast a lineup that, in addition to an orthodox string quartet, runs, among other things, to mandolin, congas and an assortment of bells and shakers. More orthodox jazz comes from two young stars with their trios: Tom Ollendorff (Oct. 19) and Fergus McCreadie (November 16). www.operanorth.co.uk

JAZZ AT IMBER COURT

Jazz at Imber Court Sports and Leisure Centre has a couple of all-star joint-leader quintets lined up: Brandon Allen and Freddie Gavita (October 12) and Mark Nightingale and James Davison (November 16). www.allaboutweybridge.co.uk

ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Jazz appears regularly at the Royal Albert Hall in the form of Late Night Jazz in the Elgar Room. Dreamscapes appear on October 2, the Arshid Azarina Trio (23) and KYRA (30). A glut of gigs appears in mid-November, with Joseph Tawardros (14), Gray by Silver (15) and Olivia Murphy,

Andrew Woodhead and Lewis Daniel (16). Roelle Oloro (20) precedes Billy Marrows' Grande Familia Sextet (December 4). In the main auditorium Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra play two dates: November 21 and 22. www.royalalberthall.com

JAZZ AT THE STABLES

The Stables in Wavendon offers an assorted programme of everything from Shakespeare to brass bands, but jazz always plays a key role. For instance, for six Sundays from October 26, there is a course entitled *Jazz Experience for Beginners*, this to go with courses on various instruments. Sunday morning is also the time for Mark Crooks Organ Quartet (Oct. 19). Stage 2 at the Stables has two jazz gigs in October: Tad Newton's Jazz Friends (4) and Dom Pipkin (9). Meanwhile the main Jim Marshall Auditorium hosts Ruby Turner (Oct. 10), Nearly Dan (11), Gordon Giltrap and John Etheridge (25), the Syd Lawrence Orchestra (November 2), the Ronnie Scott's Story (12) and the Clare Teal 5 (29). www.stables.org



Zoe Gilby

JAZZ AT MORLEY GREEN

Graham Brook's monthly promotions come up with a fine duo on October 14, with Bruce Adams and Dave Newton, follow on with Sheila Waterfield accompanied by an excellent quartet led by Mike Smith (November 11) and welcome in Christmas a bit early with Lucy Lockwood's Early Christmas Show (December 9).

www.grahambrookjazz.co.uk

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carlgorham.com/music



Gwilym Simcock



CONCORDE WEDNESDAYS

Wednesday is the regular jazz night at Eastleigh's Concorde Club, with the Tom Smith Big Band on October 8. These are followed by Tommy Smith and Gwilym Simcock (15) and Mark Skelton's Blackhawk Quintet with the music of Shelly Manne (22) before Dave Newton breaks the sequence with an appearance

in the Moldy Fig wine bar (28). November brings Gabriel Latchin playing Gershwin (5), Pete Long with *Ella and Duke* (12), *Swingin' at the Sands* with the Rat Pack (19) and the Clare Teal 5 (26). www.theconcordeclub.com

RONNIE SCOTT'S

Ronnie Scott's in Soho has its own range of ensembles, including the Ronnie Scott's Jazz Orchestra which can be heard,

among other dates, on October 6. Other bookings in October include Espen Eriksen Trio plus Andy Sheppard (11), Antonio Forcione (13), Aaron Parks Little Big (14), Polly Gibbons (18), the Vincent Herring Soul Jazz Septet (19) and an extended set of dates (28-November 2) for Stacey Kent, with lunch-time appearances on a couple of days to supplement the evening performances.

November brings Christian McBride, Benny Green and Gregory Hutchinson *Remembering Ray Brown* (4), Kandace Springs (5-6), the Count Basie Orchestra with guest Gunhild Carling (10-11), Tim Garland Lighthouse Trio (12), Daniel Casimir Big Band (22) and the Bugge Wesseltoft Trio (26).

www.ronniescotts.co.uk

KAYPEES' DATES

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys are appearing at Evesham Town Hall (November 22), Huntingdon Hall, Worcester (December 19) and A Cappella, Cardiff (20). Tel. 0121 454 7020

WATERMILL JAZZ

Watermill Jazz, at Betchworth Park Golf Club in Dorking, moves into October with Georgia Cecile (7) and Gwilym Simcock and Tommy Smith (14). After the Mark Crooks Quartet (21) Nigel Price's three-month tour lands at Betchworth Park (28). Bookings for November include the Jakob Kilmik Quintet with Mark Lockheart (4), the Alison Rayner Quintet (18) and, celebrating Christmas early, the Syd Lawrence Orchestra (25). The club then closes for December. www.ticketsource.co.uk/watermilljazz

UPCOMING AT PIZZA EXPRESS LIVE

The Pizza Express Live banner covers various London venues, most notably the Soho branch of the pizza chain. There, over the next couple of months, it's possible to see, among others, the Tom Smith Big Band (lunch) and the Nigel Price Organ Trio with their album launch (evening) on the same day (October 5). Also to be heard in October are Mark Nightingale and Callum Au (14), Down for the Count All Stars (19), Chris Ingham's

REBOP Quintet (23), the Liane Carroll Trio (24/25), the Gareth Lockrane Big Band (26 – lunch) and Gordon Giltrap and John Etheridge (28/29). James Morton's Groove Den gets November off to a rousing start (1), followed by Pete Allen (4), Callum Au and TrombaFonics (5), Kim Cypher (10), Joe Webb Trio (14), Dave O'Higgins with *Take the Coltrane* (19), the Eddie Henderson Quartet (20) and Brigitte Beraha's Lucid Dreamers (24).

Meanwhile the Pizza Express in Holborn hosts *Jazz Up the 80s* with the Jay Rayner Sextet (Oct. 21/Nov. 16), Derek Nash's Funk Experience (Nov. 11) and John Altman's All Star Quartet (25). And the Pheasantry welcomes Blue Harlem (Oct. 24), the Jive Aces (Nov. 14), Salena Jones (15) and Nina Kristofferson Sings Jazz (20).

www.pizzaexpresslive.com

JAZZ CENTRE UK

The Jazz Centre UK at Beecroft Gallery, Southend, promotes jazz on two or three Saturdays a month. The Julian Marc Stringle Quartet appears on October 18, followed in November by John Petters Hot Three (1), Pete Rudeforth Jazz Band (15) and Howl Quartet (22). The remaining Saturdays are filled with promotions by Jazz 825 and Spike's Place. Jazz 825 has Catherine Lima and Zak Barrett with the music of Stan Getz (Oct. 11) and the Harper Trio (Nov.

8) and Spike's Place the Matt Wates Quartet (Oct. 25) and the Alan Barnes Quartet (Nov. 29). Meanwhile Spike's Place also operates at the Bardwell Social Club, Brentwood, and Club Langley, Beckenham, with the Simon Bates Quartet and Steve Waterman playing both clubs: Oct. 2 and 7 (Bates) and 9 and 14 (Waterman). Al Nicholls plays Brentwood (21) and Dave O'Higgins and Alan Barnes visit Beckenham (23).

www.thejazzcentreuk.co.uk
www.spikesplace.co.uk

JAZZLEEDS PROGRAMME

JazzLeeds provides Rush Hour Jazz most Wednesdays at 6.00 in addition to its programmes of jazz on Thursday evening and Sunday afternoon. Upcoming Thursdays feature the Jean Toussaint Quintet (October 9), the Nigel Price Organ Trio (30), Greg Abate with the Gaz Hughes Trio (Nov. 13) and the Misha Mullov-Abbado Group (27). Sundays pay tribute to Cal Tjader in Ritmo Caliente! (Oct. 12), followed by the Yorkshire Gypsy Swing Collective (19), the Gabriel Latchin Trio play Gershwin (November 9) and Zoe Gilby (16).

www.jazzleeds.org.uk

JOHN KEEN R.I.P.

We at *Jazz Rag* were very sorry to hear of the death of John Keen a month short of his 90th birthday, taken ill while practising his trumpet.



Alan Musson

Having played with the Max Collie Rhythm Aces and Colin Kingwell's Jazz Bandits, he spent many years with the Crouch End All Stars and the West London Rhythm Kings. His lead playing was always incisive and in recent years various recordings of the Crouch End All Stars were issued on CD and reviewed in this publication.

DOCTORATE FOR ALAN MUSSON

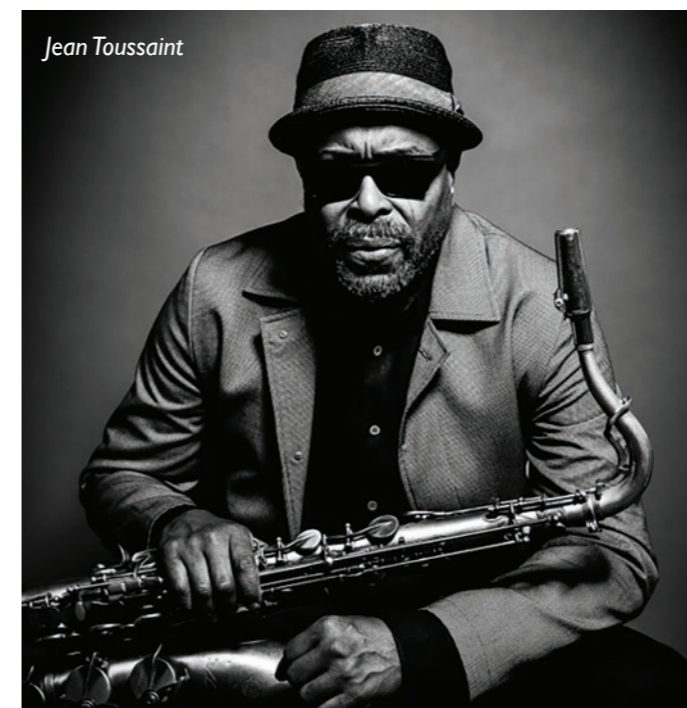
Over several years, radio producer and presenter, Alan Musson has provided numerous CD reviews for *Jazz Rag*. At a ceremony at Symphony Hall on 23 July 2025 he was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Birmingham City University for his thesis 'Documenting the Midland Youth Jazz Orchestra 1968-1980 through radio-style production'.

By focussing on the development of the youth jazz orchestra Alan explored ways to make the practice of radio documentary a developed and sophisticated research method. His thesis deployed approaches from

oral history and other fields in developing a core concept of 'ethnomusicking'.

Throughout his period of research Alan received support from his Director of Studies, Prof. Tim Wall and Supervisor Dr. Pedro Cravinho who are both members of the Jazz Studies cluster at Birmingham City University which provides research leadership in jazz regionally, nationally and internationally. The Faculty of Arts, Design and Media Archive at BCU is home to several significant jazz collections including the National Jazz Archive satellite collection, all of which are available for inspection by the public by appointment.

Alan commented, 'I was particularly pleased to develop my twin passions of radio and jazz into a meaningful body of work, the seeds to which were sewn in childhood. I'm indebted to my supervisors, for not only guiding me through the last six years of research but also in spotting and developing my skills'.

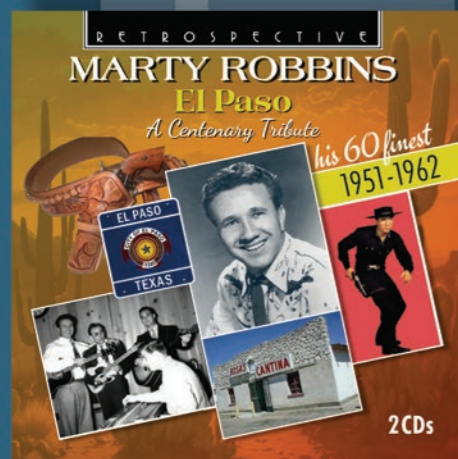


Jean Toussaint

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R E T R O S P E C T I V E

SO WHERE DID IT START TO GO WRONG?

ART THEMEN is the first guest in our new series

Where were you born/brought up?

I was born in Oldham, a small cotton spinning town on the outskirts of Manchester; the son of a general practitioner; so I guess we were reasonably comfortably off. Following the early death of my father, we moved to a rather less salubrious part of Salford where my mother took over a fish and chip shop. I don't wish to overdo the Monty Python poor Yorkshireman, (or in my case, Lancastrian) sketch, but I remember a molten metal processing plant not far from the front door; with blackened church spires and little stick like figures rushing to and from work, just like in a Lowry painting.

What was your first encounter with jazz? And when?

Given my advanced age, it's hardly surprising that my interest in the music was inspired by the traditional jazz boom in the 50s, spearheaded by the three B's: Chris Barber, Kenny Ball and Acker Bilk. This was roundabout 1954 and by then the family had moved to Manchester, which had a very active Trad scene.

What was the first band you heard?

It's difficult to remember the first band I listened to as, unlike today, jazz was more popular than pop music, so I was constantly exposed to 'An unholy row' both on the radio and in concert halls. ('An unholy row' is the title of a book by my friend Dave Gelly named after the description of his father's opinion on our beloved music). The real epiphany, however, was the historic occasion when Louis Armstrong came over with his All Stars and played at Belle Vue, a concert venue just outside Manchester. In sharp contrast to my somewhat failing memory today where I can hardly remember what I had for breakfast, I've got instant recall of the band members, Edmond Hall clarinet, Trummy Young on trombone, Billy Kyle on piano, Arvell Shaw bass, the drummer Barratt Deems and of course Louis himself. A never to be forgotten event followed fairly shortly afterwards by the equally impressive Sidney Bechet.



Art with Tom Hill at the 41st Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival

Photo by Merlin Daleman

What was the first record that you bought/had bought for you?

By now the Jazz police will have me down as an irrevocably committed mouldy fig but I have no shame in telling you that my first record was by the Chris Barber Band playing *Bobby Shaftoe*. I remember slavishly learning Monty Sunshine's clarinet solo, even down to the blooper on the first crotchet of the seventh bar - there was no ironing out mistakes by clever recording engineers in those innocent days.

Who/what inspired you to take up your first instrument? And what was it?

Indulgent uncles and other relatives seemed to think I had some kind of facility for playing children's tin whistles etc., so my mother decided to allow me to buy a clarinet. This is a story I've trotted out before so apologies to those who have already heard it. I've previously alluded to the family's straitened circumstances, so the clarinet was a cheap simple system which now has largely been superseded by the more modern Boehm. Not only that, but I didn't have a teacher and had a rather tatty instruction book. Page 3 of the book was missing so, not knowing any better, I put the mouthpiece on upside down. This is not conducive to producing anything other than shrill squeaks therefore, somewhat disillusioned, I gave up after about a month. Some four years later I

got a Boehm system and a teacher patiently explained that the reed lies underneath rather on top of the mouthpiece! Moral: make sure your child has a teacher when taking up a musical instrument.

Who were your early influences? Do you still feel the same about them as you did back then?

My first big influence was the New Orleans clarinet player George Lewis who had a vibrato wider than the Grand Canyon, and whose instrumental technique was the very opposite of Michael Brecker's. His emotional rendering of *Burgundy Street Blues* however should be required listening for all. I've also previously mentioned Edmond Hall, whose piercing clarinet tone and innate swing still impresses me. Thereafter I was significantly influenced by Danny Moss who was the featured tenor saxist with the John Dankworth Big band. I went to hear him accompanied by my rather glamorous Irish cousin and, when the handsome Danny winked at her, its effect on the lady was more than enough to convince me that my future lay, not with the clarinet but the tenor saxophone. Consequently, my later influences are the usual saxophone suspects: Charlie Parker, who for me reinvented jazz, Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins et al. In no particular order, Michael Brecker, Don Weller, Johnny Griffin, Jerry Bergonzi, Chris Potter - the list is endless. I love them all and feel the

same way about them now as I did in the past.

For me the colossus who stands out is Sonny Rollins. I first met him as a member of Stan Tracey's quartet when he was headlining the Jazz Yatra, a festival of music held in Bombay, combining Indian classical and jazz in 1971. He previously played with Stan at Ronnie Scott's on a number of occasions and was clearly impressed by him. When I met Sonny again a couple of years later outside his dressing room door, he greeted me warmly and even remembered my name, which as I'm sure you can imagine, was a heart stopping moment for me on meeting my hero. I mention this not as an immodest namedrop but to illustrate the measure of the man and how he seems to have an almost mystical approach to jazz music and life in general. This probably explains his longevity - he's recently passed his 95th birthday.

At what point did you begin to consider that you might become a professional musician?

At the age of 18 I began to study medicine in Cambridge which fortunately at the time was a hotbed of jazz, notable alumni being the pianist Colin Purbrook and the blues saxophonist Dick Heckstall Smith. Without question, the ringleader was Lionel Grigson, a strong personality who seemed to have sprung from the womb

with an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz. He had a major influence on us all and although one might think there was a conflict in choosing between a career in medicine and music, the two simply seemed quite naturally to coexist. On the medical side, my colleagues were very understanding and willing to swap emergency duties with me (I would always pay them back) and musically I suppose I cut corners by concentrating on playing rather than composing. It's a compromise of course and I do regret not having had a formal music education. I did try however to do a music course during my third year but, being a bit of a numpty, my medical tutor, probably wisely, advised me not to take any shortcuts.

What were the earliest bands you played with? What subsequent bands stand out for you?

Having finally got a decent instrument (and a teacher), I kicked off playing in trad bands at school. This initially went down rather badly and I was gated for playing 'the devil's music' during the lunch hour. Sanity prevailed, however, and we won the naysayers over, and by the sixth form were actually playing concerts in the school. Manchester in the 50s did have

a very active modern scene and anybody touring the UK from America came 'Oop North' to play there. My saxophone technique was still in its infancy however; so I didn't dare to get involved but, immodesty alert, by the age of 18, I scraped into the Saints Jazz Band, at the time Manchester's premier trad outfit.

On arriving in London in 1961, my good friend Dick Heckstall Smith got me to join him in Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated. This was the result of Graham Bond, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker leaving the band to form the Graham Bond organisation, a precursor of Cream. Phil Seaman - unquestionably Britain's finest drummer - replaced Ginger; and I think Danny Thompson was on bass - a bunch of rather strange bedfellows, playing music that was irreverent and anarchic - a melange of Muddy Waters meets Charlie Mingus. After stints with the bands of Michael Garrick and Graham Collier I was fortunate enough to play for nearly 20 years with Stan Tracey in all his various groups. It's no surprise to learn that in those early days for me, the quartet stood out above all the others. It's difficult to describe why that experience remains so memorable but, without wishing to overdo the

purple prose, I think Stan had the ability to create the conditions for spontaneity.

What was the most unusual gig you ever played and why?

I can think of two examples. The first concerns Stan Tracey's Tentacles band. Stan had successfully embraced Avant Garde music, notably with Keith Tippett and Mike Osborne, but decided to form a larger 10-piece band. For some, no names no pack drill, this presented the opportunity to play as many demi-semiquavers from the first beat of the first bar till the end of the gig. To some listeners this represented a modern version of jazz music but to others, one cannot help but feel that the overall effect was, from time to time, that of a zoo burning down. The band was not to last, as Stan became increasingly disillusioned by all that unbridled anarchy. On the last gig he played *God save the Queen* on the piano for the entire final set - and nobody noticed.

The next concerns a week the quartet did at Ronnie Scott's opposite Dizzy Gillespie. Apart from Stan, we were all somewhat in awe of Dizzy, but towards the end of the week bassist Dave Green, who is an avid collector

of musical ephemera, decided to show his latest acquisition to the great man. It was a 78-disc featuring Charlie Parker playing *Romance without finance*. Dizzy, presented with the disc looked at it, muttered 'Romance without finance, pause, what a nuisance,' and for whatever reason broke the disc in half. Dave and I were astounded but not as much as drummer Bryan Spring who within seconds had Dizzy up against the wall by the lapels. For the whole of the last set he fixed Dizzy with an intense evil eye gaze which I'm sure must have been very disturbing. It's with some reluctance I relate this story but perhaps it's a reminder that from time to time our idols may have feet of clay.

If you could invite three musicians, preferably from before your time, for dinner, who would you be sitting down with?

My guests over the years haven't changed. They have to be Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker. If I'm allowed a gate-crasher; I have a nostalgic soft spot for the unique and quirky Thelonious Monk.

TUBA VETERAN DIES

Robert 'Bob' Rann, Revered Tubaist and Lifelong Champion of Traditional Jazz, Dies at 88

[Huntington Beach, CA – August 8, 2025] — Robert 'Bob' Rann, renowned tubaist and a foundational figure in the traditional jazz revival movement, passed away peacefully on August 1, 2025, at the age of 88. A gifted musician, tireless performer, and joyful presence onstage and off, Rann's career spanned more than six decades, touching audiences around the world.

Born in 1936, Bob's journey in jazz began during his college years at Purdue University, where he joined the Original Salty Dogs Jazz Band. Formed in the mid-1950s, the band quickly gained a reputation as one of the premier collegiate traditional jazz ensembles in the country. Bob's tuba work provided the band's booming heartbeat, and he played alongside respected names

like Frank Chace, Jim Snyder, Jack Lord, Birch Smith, and Dick Karner.

In 1956, Bob was invited to join the iconic Turk Murphy Jazz Band in San Francisco. Performing with Murphy—a central figure in the West Coast Dixieland revival—placed Bob among the genre's elite. He shared the stage with jazz greats such as Bob Helm, Don Ewell, Dick Lammi, and Don Kinch, performing in some of the city's most storied venues and helping carry on the New Orleans tradition through the post-war years.

Perhaps Bob's longest and most beloved musical role was with the South Frisco Jazz Band, which he joined in 1966. Over the next five decades, Bob became the rhythmic foundation of the

ensemble, performing weekly at the famed Pizza Palace in Huntington Beach and appearing on more than a dozen albums. His tuba lines underpinned fan-favorite recordings like *Hot Tamale Man*, *Jones Law Blues* (featuring Bob Helm), *Broken Promises*, and *Got Everything*. South Frisco also appeared on video in *Live from the Crazy Horse Saloon*, further documenting the band's onstage energy and Bob's driving tuba.

With South Frisco, Bob performed at major traditional jazz festivals across the United States—from Sacramento to Seaside, Del Mar to Spokane—and took part in world tours that included performances in Europe and Japan, as well as a memorable nine-day jazz cruise from Seattle to Acapulco in 1995. Whether

on stage at a world-class venue or jamming in a pizza parlor, Bob brought boundless heart and impeccable swing to every performance.

Known for his humor as much as his musicianship, Bob once stole the show—literally—during a live TV appearance on the Howard Miller Show in Chicago. A wardrobe malfunction during rehearsal (and his quick-witted excuse: 'some woman took my pants and didn't bring them back') had the audience in stitches, and became part of family lore.

In honor of Bob Rann, jazz fans everywhere are encouraged to turn up a favorite South Frisco record, raise a glass, and remember the man who kept the beat swinging for generations.

DAME CLEO LAINE (1927-2025)

DIGBY FAIRWEATHER offers a personal reminiscence of the great British singer, followed by tributes from singers VAL WISEMAN and SHEILA WATERFIELD.



I think the first time I saw Cleo Laine in person was probably the year when her journey to international stardom was just beginning with a tour of Australia in 1972. I'd seen, heard and admired her on TV (regularly on the satirical TV show *That was the week that* hosted by David Frost). And what was to be a lifetime's devotion was sealed in 1964 after I'd heard her recorded masterpiece with husband John Dankworth called *Shakespeare and all that jazz*, a collection which achieved a five-star review in America's *Downbeat* and which remains a classic recording to this day. But that was before I saw her in person. And in 1972, on the stage of the Towngate Theatre Basildon Cleo Laine seemed to me a personification of Aphrodite; the Greek goddess of beauty unexpectedly returned to earth in a suburban new town

It would be years before we met in person however, and during lunchtime record recitals which I hosted from 1973-6 in the lecture theatre of Southend Central Library (now the theatre of The Jazz Centre UK) I and my audiences listened to her in wonder. Our favourite for replays was the Grammy-awarded album *Cleo Laine Live at Carnegie Hall* recorded in 1973 and illustrating

all the (apparently) newly acquired talents of the woman we already knew to be Britain's greatest jazz singer. 'Now is the time for America, I'm sure,' she had told a reporter at the time. 'If I had come earlier, ten years ago maybe, psychologically and vocally I wouldn't have been prepared.' But now she was, and her all-music recital, encompassing everyone from Bessie Smith and Duke Ellington to Sondheim and Sandy Wilson, was notable for what Gil Evans would have called 'sound innovations'; first, her unified vocal scat with Dankworth's (apparently ad-lib) alto solos - a trademark familiar enough in the public ear and eye to earn them a skilful and very funny parody by the Two Ronnies, Corbett and Barker some years later. No less sensational was her hugely extended upper register in an open-voiced triple coloratura, allowing her a four-octave vocal range recalling the Peruvian singer Yma Sumac, and set free for our marvellings on tracks like the supersonic *Riding High* and hilarious *Control Yourself*. The (now very battered) 12" LP is with me sixty years later and I come back to it often to listen again.

To my great regret (and after much thought) I can't be sure when I met Cleo for the first time.

But I seem to remember that it was when she came to a BBC studio in Portland Place, London to record an interview with me, probably in 1992, for Radio 2's *Jazz Parade*. At that point, aware that I was approaching a one-to-one meeting with a superstar (and possibly a potential diva!), I'd produced five pages of typed questions with which to greet my guest in case the conversation should flag. It didn't and inevitably the matter of that extraordinary vocal register came up. I heard my friend Annie Ross doing it,' said my guest cheerily, 'and I thought "I'd like to do that too." And I did it Digby!' How she really did it I would find out later, but for now her irresistible grin and total lack of *grandeur* were enough to make me her slave for life; a situation enhanced when, while leaving, she picked up my five pages of questions. 'Did you really do all these for me, Digby?', she said laughing again and popping my papers into her handbag to take home.

By the mid-1980s I'd already become close friends with John Dankworth, a true kindred spirit, and on my early visits to The Old Rectory, his home in Wavendon, we'd talked about the need for a research archive to celebrate jazz in Britain, perhaps

at Wavendon itself. That part of our dream didn't happen, but in 1990, two years after the National Jazz Archive opened its doors in Loughton Central Library, I was delighted to join his annual jazz course held at Silsoe College Bedfordshire to teach trumpet. Regularly fielding premier-league teams of tutors including Don Rendell, Bill Le Sage, Malcolm Earle Smith and singer Lee Gibson for teaching duties, John and Cleo seldom appeared in person until the students' concert held, back then, on Friday night in the refurbished barn in the grounds of their home. On this day, however, tutors and students alike had been summoned into Silsoe's main hall as Cleo herself was due to present a one-to-one vocal master class for a good-humoured middle-aged attendee who had offered £100 for the privilege. In came my heroine and seated opposite him on the stage offered a down to earth, humorous explanation of how she approached a song: how to embellish it without losing what Alec Wilder called 'the adoration of the melody' and, in the process happily swapping vocal lines with her student for a duo on Fields and McHugh's *I can't give you anything but love*.

By the end of the 90s I had both seen and heard the Dankworth-Laine musical juggernaut far more regularly and every time it was memorable. On one occasion introducing their Generation Band live from Ronnie Scott's Birmingham, for *Jazz Notes* I was amazed to hear Cleo open with *Thank your lucky stars*, a long-lost song written by Arthur Schwartz and Frank Loesser from the eponymous 1942 MGM movie starring Eddie Cantor, Dennis Morgan and Jean Leslie. It's a fine song too - but sadly forgotten eighty years later - and it reminded me of Cleo's tales of 'bunking-in' to the cinema back in her teens and picking up songs along the way. I'd also heard and seen her with John's quartet at the Birmingham Jazz Festival a few years earlier and reconnected with the power of her on-stage beauty and presence

as she sang her husband's tenderly erotic song *Thieving Boy*. For less than a second mid-performance, her deep green eyes met mine; an accidental moment which nevertheless fostered, in my simple (and single) heart, feelings that were temporarily hard to dismiss. But everyone owns the rights to at least one romantic dream.

As John Fordham has written (in his fine *Guardian* obituary to Cleo): 'Laine's onstage glamour would give way to a far worldlier and down to earth magnetism as soon as the spotlight was off'. That's exactly right and I would add 'personal accessibility' to John's accolade. This was evident in every one of her visits - both with and without husband John - to talk to audiences at the National Jazz Archive; numerous favours from 1988 (when we opened) for which she never asked for any fee. On one such occasion, to launch her 1990 autobiography *Cleo*, she took endless time to talk to everyone while signing books afterwards, delighting everyone with her capacity to listen and to relate naturally to people who up to the moment of meeting her had been star-struck fans, but who left feeling they had made a friend. It was hard to equate this down to earth approachable woman with her roles as Britain's greatest jazz singer; able to perform on equal terms on and off the record with fellow-stars as diverse as Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, Sarah Vaughan Mel Tormé and Dudley Moore, nor as an actress equally capable of stopping the show in musicals like Sandy Wilson's hilarious *Valmouth*, Kern's *Showboat* or - at the other end of the scale - playing the title role in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

Later on I would see her regularly at the open-air lunchtime concerts too; always held on Sundays in The Rectory's beautiful gardens. John would play too and although Cleo wouldn't sing we would chat and catch up on gossip and news of the day. But time passed; the lunchtime concerts were replaced by a Sunday lunchtime series of chatty interviews hosted by John and called *Jazz Matters*, and it belongs in British jazz legend that on 10th February 2010 at the end of a concert by the Dankworth

family to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Stables Theatre she would announce to a house-full audience that Sir John Dankworth had passed away earlier in the day. For the last two weeks of his life, Cleo told me, he had believed himself to be on board ship; perhaps reverting somehow to the youthful years when he had joined 'Geraldo's Navy' to play dance music on a voyage to New York before accelerating up Forty Second Street with other young men (including Ronnie Scott) to hear Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and all the flaming youths of the bebop generation. Soon after I wrote to Cleo to ask how she was getting on - and (perhaps) 'rattling around' - in the Old Rectory and had a letter back in her big generous handwriting, less than two months later. 'At the moment', she wrote, 'I'm really OK I wouldn't let on to Alec or Jacqui if I wasn't - I think they might have hard moments to contend with too. Me, I girdle my loins! Quite honestly there are so many invitations to jazz award functions, fundraisers + taking JD's place with the boys (well not quite his place) but you know what I mean. John was going to do a few gigs without me. But when he was so ill he had to cancel and they asked me to cover for him. Also he was patron to so many musical places and events I'm now being asked to continue his positions. So there's not much time to "rattle around!" I go to *Jazz Matters* every Sunday if I'm home - introduce the guest speaker etc - not as good as JD. I can't wear hats like him or tell long drawn out stories, but I'm learning to. I hope you are in good health and happy. Spring has sprung in the garden. My magnolia is heaven. Love, Cleo'.

Three years later later, for some reason, I found myself outside 18 Hollywood Way Waltham Forest (not that far from the National Jazz Archive) and found an eccentric blue plaque on the wall of the house. 'Johnny Dankworth,' it read, 'saxiphinist and bandleader was born here 20th September 1927.' As 'Johnny' was now 'the late Sir John' (and never to my knowledge had blown a 'saxiphine') I rang Cleo and together we arranged an appointment to visit the owners, and suggest that an update and edit to their plaque might be a good idea. The meeting went well and on 10th May 2013, a new

one was installed on the wall of Hollywood Way; Jacqui climbing a ladder to make sure it was secure and with Cleo (now using a stick for walking), son Alec, the NJA's devoted archivist David Nathan and a handful of friends all present for the ceremony. Afterwards we found a local restaurant and Cleo and I sat opposite each other. 'Do you have a single recording that you like best?' I asked her and she thought for a moment or two. 'Well,' she said. 'I thought the duo set of *Porgy and Bess* with Ray Charles was pretty good.' But while I was digesting this miracle of understatement she paused and added, 'No: I think my favourite of all is *Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day* (Shakespeare's Sonnet 18) - from *Shakespeare and All that Jazz*.' Almost fifty years from its recording, and all its triumphant successors, this was the recording she still liked best of all and I play it regularly to this day.

As her letter proved Cleo loved the Spring (one of the songs she returned to regularly on record was Arthur Young's *It was a Lover and his Lass* with its concluding line 'Sweet lovers love the Spring') and around this time Jacqui arranged a party at The Old Rectory to welcome the season. By this time Cleo was in a wheelchair and amongst the starry guest list I remember Maureen Lipman, Lorna Dallas and Laurie Holloway. Amid the party I essayed a cornet recreation of Bunny Berigan's *I can't get started* with Laurie and then (no doubt fortified by a little in the way of vodka) perched on the arm of my co-hostess' chair to suggest that we sing a duet on *Teach me tonight* which we did: Cleo improvising gentle scat beneath my hopeful attempt at an in-tune lead. It was a memory I shan't forget. But I would see her again that year when - with Alec and Jacqui - she came back to the National Jazz Archive to sing (once again for free) at our 25th Anniversary, pottering hand in hand with me to our generous hospitality table, and later joining Jacqui (with Alec and the Ronnie Scott house band) to essay a funky blues and harmony duet on the Jimmy Van Heusen/Johnny Mercer classic *I thought about you*.

By then Cleo was looking older and my occasional affectionate letters to her in later years were

kindly read to her by Jacqui but remained unanswered. In 2018 however artist Duncan Shoosmith won the popular TV 'Portrait of the Artist of the Year' competition. Duncan had come to The Jazz Centre UK to research the project with me and after that visited Wavendon and Cleo to pencil-sketch his subject. Along with a great deal of Dankworth memorabilia the portrait hangs in our Centre now - the word came through that Cleo felt it looked 'too stern' - but I'm glad it's there alongside John's first piano and after its unveiling, by beautiful Jacqui, she headlined at a concert for us with husband Charlie Wood). We also have a copy of Cleo's *Southend* recording (made for the TV serial *Compact* (1962-5) when all the cast paid an on-screen day-trip to Southend-on-Sea).

I would see her just one more time. In February 2023 my band, Digby's Half Dozen, played the Stables Theatre Wavendon and it occurred to me to make my way through the now overgrown bushes around the Old Rectory before the sound-check and knock at the door. The door opened; I asked if I might visit my old friend Cleo Laine and the answer was yes. In I went and there she was; comfortable and happy enough, it seemed, on a *chaise-longue* with records and a TV nearby. 'Are you playing at the Theatre tonight?' she asked. 'I might pop over later - and it was only a brief shake of the head from a nearby carer that finalised the impossibility. 'I'm afraid John's not here,' she continued, movingly giving in to the last beliefs of the man she would call 'her husband and best friend', 'but he's on the ships now'. We talked some more and then I said: 'Can I give you a kiss before I go?' My wish was granted.

Cleo died in a care home on 24th July and a few nights later Jacqui called me. 'I'm broken hearted,' she said, 'but mum was so frail and the quality of her life had declined so much in the last year. She is free now - probably up there having a glass and a laugh with Dad. She's gone home to him.'

I hope so.

VAL WISEMAN

She dazzled us over the decades with an astonishing vocal technique which took the whole concept of jazz singing to the next level. Cleo Laine was fearless. She developed an individual style that was instantly recognisable. Her delivery was flawless; every performance a veritable masterclass for singers, musicians and actors alike, drawn to her rich and diverse creative energy.

It's certainly interesting to note the driving force which forged her prolific career. Clementine Dinah Hitching was born in Southall, Middlesex in 1927. Her parents were Alex Campbell, a Jamaican World War One veteran and Minnie Hitching, a farmer's daughter from Swindon. Cleo recalls singing and dancing lessons and performing at an early age, with her father teaching her all the 'old songs.' Very keen to perform for a living, after an early appearance with her siblings in the 1940s film *Thief of Bagdad*, some years passed and dozens of auditions followed before her talent was recognised. One of these was a 'try out' with the Johnny Dankworth Seven in 1951. The bandleader was looking for a vocalist and remarked, 'I think she's got something!' He offered her the job for £6 per week. She held out for £7 and an incredible journey began for the newly christened Cleo Laine.

These must have been heady days, with tours and a trip to America to appear at the Newport Jazz Festival and in New York's famous Birdland, all captured on a handy home movie camera. With her rich contralto voice and improvisational skills, John set about developing her four octave range with highly complex arrangements, using her voice as a musical instrument in keys she had never tried before. It was the start of a series of musical collaborations which elevated both their careers on the world stage and forged a partnership which lasted for over 50 years. They married in 1958. 'I guess he married me because he wanted a cheap singer,' she quipped. 'But what he got was an expensive wife!'

The theatre also beckoned Cleo. In 1958 she successfully auditioned for the part of Delia in the Jamaican play *Flesh To A Tiger* at the Royal Court Theatre. Directed by Tony Richardson, who was unaware of her musical career, it led to a string of stage appearances in the UK, notably her stunning portrayal of Julie in the 1971 production of *Show Boat* at the Adelphi Theatre. She would later headline in America in several award winning productions including *The Merry Widow*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* and *Into The Woods*.

Across the musical genres, Cleo had a top ten hit with *You'll Answer To Me* in 1961 and broke new ground when she and John released their album *Shakespeare and All That Jazz* in 1964; a series of sonnets set to music, to critical acclaim. A tour of Australia in 1972 and regular appearances in America served to acknowledge her as Britain's first Lady of Jazz, earning several Grammy nominations and finally the award itself for the live recording of a sell out concert at Carnegie Hall in 1986. The first British artist to win a Grammy as best female jazz vocalist, she received two dozen red roses from Ella Fitzgerald with a card inscribed; 'Congratulations, gal – it's about time!'

Cleo's prolific output of recorded work included several collaborations with legendary figures such as Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Mel Tormé. Her charismatic stage presence can still be viewed in numerous television appearances, many with John's big band, or singing a duet with Millicent Martin on the satirical show *That Was The Week That Was*, sharing some witty scat choruses with Dudley Moore, plus a memorable guest spot on *The Muppet Show*. Her performance of *He Was Beautiful*, delivering her own lyrics to the haunting Cavatina by Stanley Myers with guitarist John Williams, is stunning and let's not forget her role in Alan Plater's musical play *Last of the Blonde Bombshells*, shown on the BBC in 2000 alongside a star studded cast headed by Judy Dench!



Awarded an OBE in 1979 for services to music, Cleo was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1997. However, it's impossible to separate her considerable achievements from those of her husband, whose own distinguished career had earned him numerous awards and a knighthood in 2006 for services to music. Theirs was a true partnership. Together, they realised their vision to establish an arts centre where people could appreciate all forms of music through performance and education. They converted the old stable block in the grounds of their home at Wavendon and The Stables opened its doors in 1970. It was an immediate success, with 47 concerts given in the first year. It was certainly the place to be seen and heard and the Dankworths were always warm and welcoming, especially to fellow performers. Sometimes you would spot them in the audience if they were at home! I remember arriving very early for the launch of the theatre when it was rebuilt in 2000. Attended by many celebrities from the world of theatre and music, they all made a beeline for the buffet. Somewhat overwhelmed I held

back, until Cleo noticed. 'Here,' she called over, pointing at the food. 'Come and get something to eat. You were here first, you must be starving!'

Loved and respected by their audiences and colleagues, it was a full house on February 6th 2010 when Cleo was joined on stage by their two children, bassist Alec and vocalist Jacqui Dankworth, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of The Stables. At the end of the show, she simply announced that John had passed away earlier that day. 'We'll miss him,' she said. 'We were joined at the hip.'

Cleo's passing on July 24th this year is not the end of the story. She has been an amazing role model, admired by so many of us. Her incredible abilities have truly been an inspiration. The Stables, the vision she shared with her husband John, continues to thrive as a world class centre for music and education, whilst the Dankworth dynasty lives on through their gifted family.

SHEILA WATERFIELD

When I first saw Cleo sing, I would have been about 14 years old, it was a truly mesmerizing experience. I was instantly taken with her vocal versatility, her deep rich lows to soaring highs, her scat singing and improvisation, her vocal delivery, every note she sang was charged with feeling, whether an upbeat tune or ballad. Her interpretation of a song was a masterclass - each line delivered with such careful attention to its emotional weight. The way she approached a song really showed off her deep understanding of jazz as an art form, knowing how to let the emotion of the song breathe whilst keeping her voice pristine.

What set Cleo apart as a performer was her intuitive connection with her audience. She didn't just sing songs, she brought them to life. When she took to the stage she was fully in the moment. Her body language, facial expressions and the way she physically engaged with the music made her one of the most charismatic and compelling performers of her time.

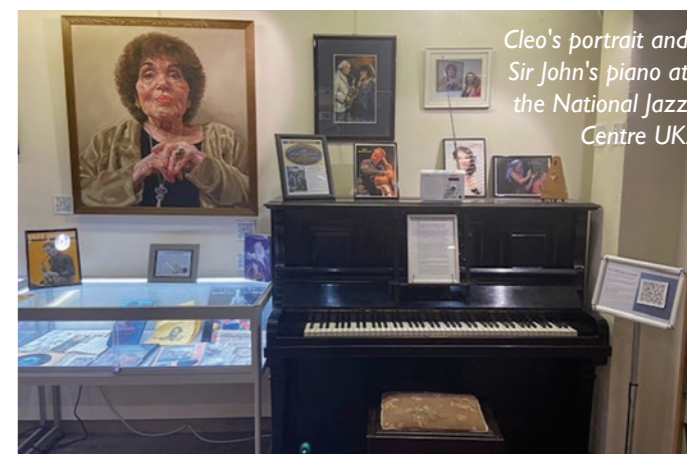
Through her performances and recordings, she helped jazz reach a broader audience across the world. Her versatility allowed her to perform in a variety of settings, from the intimate jazz clubs of the UK to the grandeur of international concert halls. As an ambassador for jazz, she made the genre accessible to new audiences, demonstrating its adaptability and global appeal.

Even after her passing, the indelible mark Cleo Laine leaves on the world of jazz will continue to inspire vocalists and musicians and influence the genre for generations.

In celebrating Cleo Laine's life and work, we honour not just the voice that captivated audiences worldwide, but the Artist who pushed jazz to new heights. Her legacy is a testament to the power of music to transcend time, space and genre. As her voice continues to inspire and uplift, we remember Cleo Laine not just as a jazz singer, but as a true visionary whose contribution to the world of music will never be forgotten.



Digby joins the celebrations for the unveiling of the Sir John Dankworth plaque



Cleo's portrait and Sir John's piano at the National Jazz Centre UK.

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A NEW STAR FROM A LONG LINE

RON SIMPSON puts the questions to Swedish soprano saxist/singer NANNA CARLING.

It's the first Saturday of the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival and the word is, 'You must hear Nanna Carling', so that's why, together with many others equipped with folding chairs and picnics, I'm at Winterbourne House in Edgbaston for an open-air performance. Before the rains came, there was evidence of a remarkable talent, fitting in perfectly with the New Orleans style of the Tenement Jazz Band and regaling us with stylishly in-period vocals through a megaphone. A hasty conversation before the skies cleared and the jazz resumed secured me a copy of Nanna's recent CD with her Swing Band, *Melodies for Two*. And this is where the surprises began! The CD consists of originals by Nanna in a band setting very different from the Tenement. So, I wondered, which is the 'real' Nanna Carling?

'I'm very rooted in the tradition of jazz music, my biggest heroes being Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet and Fats Waller. But I'm now on a track of composing my original songs in the style of the late 40s/50s swing era. It's in more of a "revival" swing style. There's definitely a difference in my live performances, with high energy and the element of improvisation that jazz in itself calls for, and when I'm in a recording studio where I can leave room for a more intimate sound. I love both of those expressions and they are both naturally part of me, if that makes sense. Sometimes the trad jazz audience is used to a certain sound and repertoire and I'm trying, with huge respect for the tradition, to introduce new songs and ideas and so far it's been well received! In concerts with my band I play with the concept of "originals and classics". You get to both hear tunes like "Basin street blues" and my own compositions like "Moonlady" and "Since that day", it's a fun blend of music both for the listener and the musicians.'

The Carlings are a Swedish jazz dynasty. Internationally we are most familiar with the astonishing multi-instrumentalist Gunhild Carling, soon to guest with the Count Basie Orchestra at Ronnie



Scott's. It seems to me that there are at least two Carling Family bands.

'It's a good way to describe it! My father, Max Carling, is the older brother of Gunhild and they have played together since they were kids together with their parents and siblings under the name "Carling Family". Me and my sisters Petronella (trombone) and Linnea Carling (banjo) have our own band together with our good friend Sigrid Abrahamsson (bass) called "The Carling Sisters". We started our first "sister band" already when I was only 12 years old and haven't stopped since. The original Carling is my grandfather Hans "Cooling" Carling who started his first jazz band in the 60s called "Coolings Jazzmen". He also composed music of all kinds and was the one that taught me how to write my first blues and standards. My father is also a huge inspiration in my composing, he has his own chamber orchestra where I got to play around with a classical sound at a very early age.

'They say it takes a village to bring up a child. And it really does, it's not just credited to one person in the family for why I'm on the path I am today. The beauty of being raised in a musical household is that we had all the instruments at home and you could at any time just pick it up and play. So that's also why I do not only play the saxophone but also clarinet, piano, flute, drums etc. It was very vital so that when someone in the family couldn't make it to a gig someone else could jump in

and take their part. Since I also was more or less raised "on the road" constantly touring I'm very used to that lifestyle, it fits me well and I don't think I would want to do anything else. Also starting our first band we were very encouraged to find out our own sounds and inspirations, which was easy since we had all the records at home. It was the best jazz education!

'Outside the family, on record Armstrong, Bechet and Fats are huge but also Billie Holiday of course. The first record that just blew me away was Bunny Berigan's "I can't get started" from 1937. I almost fell out of my chair at nine years old. Starting out, me and my sisters played a lot of Jelly Roll Morton since his compositions are so much fun to play, with many parts and breaks and more focus on ensemble rather than improvisation that we weren't too experienced in just yet.'

It sounds an amazing upbringing, with Bunny Berigan and Jelly Roll Morton as models and all the instruments to hand. It prompts me to ask whether Nanna as always been a soprano saxist - or maybe she had some other role with the Carling Family Band:

'I started out as a piano player actually! My first tour with the "Carling Family" and also later the "Carling Big Band" I played piano. In the first band of my own I sang, both with and without kazoo behind the piano but gradually started playing one or two song songs per set on the saxophone.

It became my main thing around age 15 and I started my own band, leading on the soprano at age 19! It's not so easy to pin point my very first band, since I've played with my sisters all my life in some rendition, but I would say it's the band we put together before a concert at "Stockamöllan Jazz festival" in the year 2011. I was 12, my sisters 8 and 5 years old. I was pretty confident in our product and called the organisers and asked for a gig. They put us on the big stage to play for 35 minutes. The problem - we only knew four tunes! So we played those four songs over and over for 35 minutes, and the audience loved it. I think that was the starting point for me at least, I can't speak for my sisters, to where I knew jazz was the thing I wanted to do. I've also dabbled in disco and showtunes, joining a cabaret at the age of 16 (I had to fake my age because it was a 18 year old limit to participate in the show). Later, when studying jazz at college, I was in a bunch of different projects even trying out the freer sides of jazz. These days I love to join bands as a solo player like I did this summer with the Tenement Jazz Band. It's one of the beautiful things about jazz music, you can always play together even though you don't even speak the same language!

The thought of a band of three sisters (total age 25!) taking the stage at a jazz festival - and even contacting the organisers for a gig - is delightful, but also a sign of the 'can do' attitude which it seems goes along with widespread musical knowledge in the Carling

family. So Nanna's aunt Gunhild relocated to the States and you wonder whether Nanna will end up doing the same. She has experience there already.

'Gunhild sometimes invites me over to do tours with her and it's always such a fun experience. The American audiences are so welcoming and Gunhild is of course a wonderful player. But beyond that, it's the family reunion I look forward to mostly going over. Me and Gunhild have always been great friends, since I was a baby even, and she's a huge inspiration in my life and career. I can always reach out to Gunhild about any of my worries in life and she's the best supporter to have!'

So what of the immediate future? What does it hold for Nanna?

'I'm mostly based in the Scandi area and sometimes go to France and the Netherlands. It was my first time in the UK this summer. Bringing my music to new audiences is such a privilege and I'm very blessed in that sense. My aspiration is to bring my music worldwide and to tour all over the place. Even though I've done



Nanna at Birmingham with the Tenement Jazz Band

Photo by Merlin Daleman

music for many years at this point, I'm still relative new on the scene under my own name and with my original music, which leaves room for constant expansion and bigger and better things. This is what makes everything so exciting right now! I also feel like there's a wonderful community built around

traditional jazz right now, mostly in Europe with great cats coming from Paris, Berlin and London and I want to be part of that movement pushing jazz further both musically and commercially.'

Nanna was invited to the UK by the Tenement Jazz Band to

join them in Edinburgh. Her first time in the UK made quite an impression, both in Edinburgh and in Birmingham and there's no doubt we'll see her back before long, whether soloing with a British band or bringing over her own Swing Band.

October highlights

Thu 9

Ancient Infinity Orchestra

14-member jazz ensemble launching their second album

Sat 11

Cate Le Bon

Multi-disciplinary artist, producer and architect of sound

Sun 19

Tom Ollendorff Trio

One of the most exciting international jazz scene talents

opera
north



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CARL GORHAM AND GEORGE SHEARING

CARL GORHAM's second album of songs associated with GEORGE SHEARING, *Extraordinary Journey*, has just been released. The unusual feature of this is that Carl is the great-nephew of Shearing. RON SIMPSON investigates the relationship.



George Shearing

First of all, can you tell me something of your relationship with your great-uncle, please? Was he always someone who you and your family looked up to? Was he a frequent visitor?

Ever since I can remember I've known the story of great uncle George, this family legend, the amazing blind pianist who started off playing in a London pub doing requests and ended up performing at the White House for three different US Presidents. His music was always played at home – I could hum *Lullaby of Birdland* at Primary School – and we'd go to his gigs when he was over in London and meet him backstage (I remember being in a queue at the Victoria Palace Theatre with my parents to say hello and my mum whispering that we were in front of Cleo Laine and John Dankworth which is ironic because Alec Dankworth now plays with Shear Brass!). I've lots of other memories too - being in the audience for George's episode of *This is Your Life* with Michael Aspel; Trixie, George's first wife, coming to visit us at home in Sussex with his daughter Wendy and telling

incredible stories about life on the road....

My Mum, his niece, was the closest to George. Her dad, (George's brother-in-law) who worked at the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square was instrumental in helping George make that key move to the USA in 1946. My Mum and Dad used to visit George and Ellie, his second wife, in New York and in the Cotswolds too, where the Shearings bought a summer home late in life. The last time I saw him myself, I was trying to get a TV documentary about him off the ground (still an ambition) and met him at his London hotel.

What are your favourite Shearing albums? When did you decide to do the Shear Brass project?

The first album of his I remember listening to was the 'Best of...'. LP. Being an aspiring drummer, I loved the drum breaks on *Jumpin with Symphony Sid* but I adored the whole thing – it was so melodic and really swung. The Nat King Cole album is another favourite – a perfect lesson in piano accompaniment. *Shearing on Stage!* is brilliant as

well. It really captures the energy and invention of the live shows.

I'd wanted to make this TV doc about him for years but for various reasons it never quite happened. 'Shear Brass' was originally formed to record new versions of his music to use as part of a fresh pitch to broadcasters. However, the recordings turned out so well that Ubuntu Music decided to put them out as an album in 2023. It got some great reviews, and we did some live dates at the time of its release which were also well received, so without really planning it, the band suddenly had a life of its own. We went back in the studio last year and the result of that is our second album, 'Extraordinary Journey' – out September 26th.

It seems to me that you have good, but sporadic, experience as a drummer. Is this correct? Which of your many activities would you put on your passport (if we still have to)?

In terms of my own evolution, I was originally going to be a drummer (I was backing cabaret artists in nightclubs in the school holidays at the age of 14 in the 1970s when you were allowed to do such things!) I wanted to go to Berklee College of Music in Boston, but I couldn't get the necessary financial backing and ended up taking a different path, studying English at Oxford and getting involved in comedy writing and performing. I never stopped playing music, recording various TV themes, incidental music and soundtracks plus doing the occasional tour, it's just that the writing took the lead for a number of years. Now with Shear Brass things have come full circle again. I've always regarded myself as a writer AND musician and never felt the need to define myself as doing just one thing. The two worlds, to me, are closely related anyway. Writing is a lot about rhythm and form and finding music in the words.

Your first Shear Brass CD was a triumph. Was it in any way similar to *Extraordinary Journey*?

All Shearing albums, I think must in some way reflect his many influences – popular song / Cool Jazz / Latin / Bebop etc. So, there is definitely a link between our first and second albums – they both have a certain variety, a spread of material. I think we've just pushed it a bit further this time - increased that variety, used a greater range of sounds and styles.

It seems to me that *Extraordinary Journey* is full of surprises. We begin with 'little big band' sounds on Bop, Look and Listen before the glorious sentiment of *I'll See You in My Dreams*, then before we're finished encounter two James Pearson tributes, memories of associations with Peggy Lee and Mel Torme, a real echo of Shearing in *September in the Rain* and - most remarkably - two original lyrics by yourself. Was this variety part of the original concept?

Absolutely! It was an attempt to do justice to a performer and composer for whom constantly evolving and embracing new musical elements were very important. The variety was a way as well of describing in musical terms his own amazing geographical journey – from pub pianist in South London to West End Dance Band musician; from hipster in late 1940s New York clubs to the internationally popular collaborator with star vocalists such as Peggy Lee and Nat Cole.

How would you define it as a tribute to George Shearing?

It's a tribute in that it tries to do justice to an incredibly rich legacy whilst providing something new as well. That's the challenge – to somehow keep the essence whilst bringing something fresh and interesting to

the table. It's a difficult balancing act. As Simon Spillett says in his album cover notes for *Extraordinary Journey*, reimagined versions of classics often end up going so far away from the original they're unrecognisable - which rather defeats the point!

The line-up seems hand-picked - your hand or someone else's? Pete Long and Alistair White are tremendous, and I enjoy the interplay of James Pearson and Anthony Kerr.

Our trumpet player Jason McDermid, the Shear Brass MD and man behind the arrangements made the original suggestions – people such as Pete, Alistair and Anthony. James Pearson is someone I came across at Ronnie Scott's Upstairs. He was playing with Andy Davies and Jo Harrop, and I took my daughter Romy along to see their show. It was an amazing night where Romy ended up on stage singing *Lullaby of Birdland* and we all went for a drink afterwards (Romy actually sang *Lullaby* on the first SB album and sings two other songs on our latest, too). As well as being a lovely individual, James seemed the

perfect person for the Shearing seat - a brilliant technical pianist, and a wonderfully subtle, tasteful musician.

Looking at your website, there seem to be few live performances - we'll just miss the launch at Ronnie's. Is this because of your other commitments or the band's other commitments or - which would be great - are you planning to add further dates?

We've previously just done shows as and where it was feasible, bearing in mind the economics of taking a largish band out and the sought-after nature of the musicians involved. We're definitely planning to add more and more dates now as the original live set we did has evolved into a proper theatre show with a big screen featuring some unique restored family photos and special archive material. We're very excited to have now teamed up with Gabbie Sills Productions and, as well as the upcoming album launch show at Ronnie Scott's, we're already booked in for several new shows at the beginning of next year.

SHEAR BRASS

EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY



UPCOMING SHOWS

Sat 24th January 2026 – Cheltenham, Bacon Theatre

Friday 30th January 2026 – Chichester Festival Theatre, Minerva Theatre

Friday 6th Feb 2026 – Southampton Mayflower Studios

Details – carlgorham.com/music

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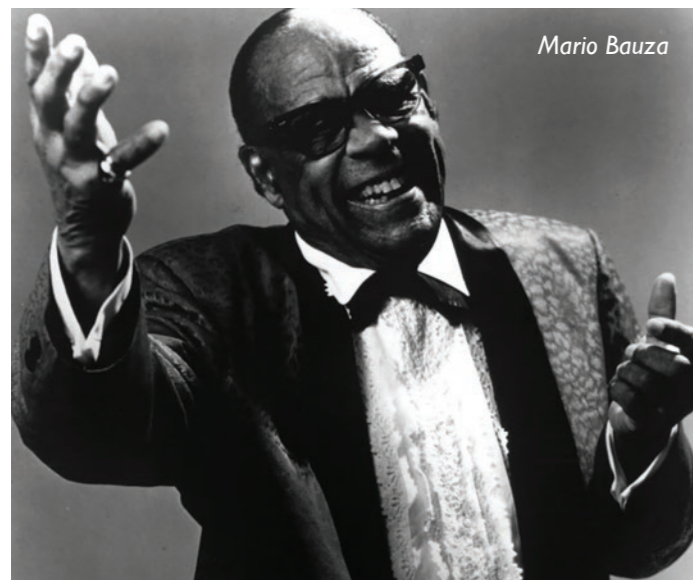
JAZZ FROM CUBA

By SCOTT YANOW

An island nation that is 780 miles long and at its widest 119 miles wide, Cuba is the home for nearly 11 million people. It has long made a huge impact (particularly considering its size) on music including jazz. In the 1950s and earlier under various dictatorships, Cuban musicians were able to find employment playing for tourists in many lavish ballrooms and in the streets. After Fidel Castro took control in 1959, the ballrooms closed but the impressive musical education system resulted in the training of a countless number of talented musicians, many of whom found creative ways to defect and move to the U.S. and Europe. The steady influx of top-notch Cuban musicians continues today.

Cuban music has generally featured danceable polyrhythms that are more complex than American swing. The birth of Afro-Cuban jazz is often cited as when Dizzy Gillespie met Chano Pozo in 1947 but Machito (with Mario Bauza's jazz-oriented arrangements) preceded that and there were hints of the upcoming fusion as early as the late 1920s.

This article lists loosely in chronological order 30 major Cuban musicians who had a strong impact on jazz. Not included are the Afro-Cuban jazz innovators who were not born in Cuba including Tito Puente, Cal Tjader, Ray Barretto, Willie Bobo, and Charlie and Eddie Palmieri.



Mario Bauza

An exception is made in the case of Machito who was born in Florida but grew up in Cuba. This list could easily be several times longer but certainly the music of these 30 giants deserves to be explored.

Don Azpiazu (1893-1943) Among the very first to introduce Cuban music to the United States, Azpiazu with his Havana Casino Orchestra (which used maracas, claves, bongos, and timbales) came to the U.S. in 1930, appearing on Broadway. He had a giant hit with *The Peanut Vendor* introduced *Green Eyes*, and popularized *Mama Inez*.

Ernesto Lecuona (1896-1963) A major Cuban composer, Lecuona wrote over 600 songs including *Malaguena*, and *The Breeze And I*.

Alberto Socarras (1908-87) The first jazz flute soloist on record, Socarras recorded with Clarence Williams during 1927-29. He was also a studio musician who played alto, soprano and clarinet in addition to flute, worked with several swing era big bands, had his own Latin group in the 1950s, and was a classical soloist and a flute teacher.

Machito (1909-84) Born in Tampa as Francisco Grillo but raised in Cuba, the singer (who also played maracas) moved to New York City in 1937



Bebo Valdes

and founded the Afro-Cubans in 1940. His Cuban big band with his brother-in-law Mario Bauza as the musical director during 1941-75, set the pace in combining Afro-Cuban rhythms with jazz improvisations, inspiring Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Kenton and the entire Cubop movement. Through the years Machito's orchestra occasionally recorded with jazz greats including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Cannonball Adderley.

Arsenio Rodriguez (1911-70) A master of the tres (a guitar with three pairs of double strings), Rodriguez wrote over 200 songs and helped revolutionize Cuban music by augmenting the standard septeto instrumentation (trumpet, guitar, tres, bass, bongos, maracas, and claves) with a second trumpet, conga and piano, inventing the conjunto.

Mario Bauza (1911-93) A brilliant musician who, while originally a saxophonist, taught himself to play the trumpet in two weeks, Bauza's arrangements for Machito's Afro-Cubans (starting with *Tanga* in 1943) helped start Afro-Cuban jazz. Machito's musical director for decades and the leader of his own big band late in life, Bauza's main importance could be in the three introductions that he made. He introduced Ella Fitzgerald to Chick Webb in 1934, Dizzy Gillespie to Cab Calloway in 1939, and Chano Pozo to Gillespie in 1947.

Anselmo Sacasas (1912-98) The pianist and bandleader, who teamed up with singer Miguelito Valdés in the Orquesta

Casino de la Playa, was playing his own jazz arrangements by the late 1930s, making him an unheralded pioneer in Latin jazz. After 1940, he mostly worked in New York, Miami and Puerto Rico.

Jose 'Chombo' Silva (1913-95) A top Cuban tenor-saxophonist called "the Latin Lester Young" by Cal Tjader, Silva was originally a violinist. Among those who he worked with were Tjader, Machito, Johnny Pacheco, Ray Barretto, Mongo Santamaria and Charlie Palmieri, recording with Paquito D'Rivera in 1993.

Chano Pozo (1915-48) A fiery personality who in Cuba was well known for his songwriting, dancing, and conga playing, Pozo is best remembered for being in the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra during 1947-48 where he co-composed *Manteca* and *Tin Tin Deo* and was showcased on *Cubana Be* and *Cubana Bop*.

Perez Prado (1916-89) Damaso Perez Prado was a pianist, bandleader, composer and arranger who popularized the mambo in the 1950s with such hits as *Mambo No. 5*, *Cherry Pink (and Apple Blossom White)*, *Patricia*, and *Mambo No. 8*, becoming a household name in the U.S.

Mongo Santamaria (1917-2003) A world famous conga player, Santamaria moved to New York in 1950, worked with Tito Puente (1951-57) and Cal Tjader (1958-61), composed *Blue*, made Herbie Hancock's *Watermelon Man* famous, and led a wide variety of his own groups starting in 1961.

Cachao (1918-2008) Israel 'Cachao' Lopez was a brilliant bassist (as were 35 of his relatives!) who, with his brother pianist Orestes invented the mambo rhythm in 1938, more than a decade before it was popularized by Perez Prado. A busy freelancer whose descargas (Cuban jam sessions) caught on in the late 1950s, Cachao was in obscurity in the U.S. when actor Andy Garcia produced a 1993 documentary that resulted in his rediscovery.

Bebo Valdes (1918-2013) The father of Chucho Valdes, Bebo was a major pianist, composer and arranger in Cuba in the 1940s and '50s, recording for Norman Granz in 1952 and often working as a musical director for nightclub shows. He defected from Cuba in 1960, worked in Mexico and Spain, settled in Sweden in 1963, and was rediscovered in 1994, resulting in a prolific final period as a quietly inventive pianist.

Ruben Gonzalez (1919-2003) A major pianist in Cuba since the 1940s, Gonzalez was retired when Ry Cooder visited Cuba in the 1990s. Gonzalez, the most jazz-oriented of the performers in what became the Buena Vista Social Club, made his recording debut as a leader when he was 77 and had a busy final decade.

Frank Emilio Flynn (1921-2001) A highly-rated pianist from the 1940s on who often performed with visiting Americans in the 1950s (including Sarah Vaughan and Zoot Sims), Flynn stayed in Castro's Cuba where he was a fixture on radio and television, leading Quinteto Cubana de Musica Moderna, an important big band that was a predecessor of Irakere. He recorded in the 1980s with Jane Bunnett's *Spirits Of Havana* and performed at Lincoln Center in 1998.

Candido (1921-2020) Considered the first percussionist to play multiple congas, Candido Camero was busy for 80 years, working with Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Taylor, George Shearing, Stan Kenton and most of the who's who of jazz and Latin music.

Chico O'Farrill (1921-2001) One of the most important arrangers and composers in what was called Cubop, O'Farrill moved to New York in 1948, ghosted some charts for Gil Fuller, arranged for Benny Goodman's short-lived bop orchestra, wrote for Stan Kenton, Dizzy Gillespie, and Machito (the *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite*), led a series of dazzling sessions for Verve during 1951-54, and worked in the Mexico City studios for eight years before returning to New York. He led a notable big band during his last six years that was eventually later taken over by his son Arturo O'Farrill.

Armando Peraza (1924-2014) Self-taught on congas and bongos, Peraza arrived in New York in 1949 and within two days was recording with Machito and Charlie Parker. He was in demand for the next 65 years including working with Slim Gaillard, Cal Tjader, Carlos Santana and countless others in addition to being George Shearing's regular 'surprise guest.'

Chucho Valdes (1941) One of the world's top jazz pianists and an important goodwill ambassador for Cuba, Valdes (the son of Bebo Valdes) made his recording debut in 1957, was part of La Orquesta Cubana de Musica Moderna during 1967-73, and in 1973 took the nucleus to form the premiere Cuban jazz group Irakere. Valdes, who led Irakere until 1998, has performed often in the U.S., founded the Havana International Jazz Festival (which has been going since 1980), and is still playing at the peak of his powers.

Paquito D'Rivera (1948) A superb alto-saxophonist and clarinetist, D'Rivera (along with Chucho Valdes and Arturo Sandoval) was a member of La Orquesta Cubana de Musica Moderna and a star with Irakere. Since defecting in 1980, he has been one of jazz's giants, recording many rewarding albums.

Arturo Sandoval (1949) One of the world's greatest trumpeters, Sandoval was a major soloist with Irakere. With the help of Dizzy Gillespie, he defected from Cuba in 1990 and has since recorded plenty of gems ranging from straight ahead



Arturo Sandoval

bop to Afro-Cuban jazz. Sandoval was profiled fairly accurately by Andy Garcia in the 2000 movie *For Love Or Country*.

Emiliano Salvador (1951-92) A significant Cuban pianist who was inspired at times by Thelonious Monk and Bill Evans, Salvador was an influential force in Cuba although relatively little known outside of his homeland.

Hilario Duran (1953) The pianist worked with Arturo Sandoval in the 1980s in Cuba, was an important part of Jane Bunnett's 1990 album *Spirits Of Havana*, and moved to Toronto where he has led a steady stream of worthy albums.

Gonzalo Rubalcaba (1963) After 12 years of classical piano study and extensive work in Cuba and on tours, Rubalcaba met bassist Charlie Haden in 1986 who sang his praises and helped him to gain worldwide fame. Rubalcaba recorded extensively for Blue Note in the 1990s and has been a major musical force for 40 years.

Omar Sosa (1965) Yet another brilliant Cuban pianist, Sosa left Cuba in the 1990s, eventually settling in Spain. One of the first Cuban jazz artists to experiment with hip hop rhythms, Sosa has recorded a long series of albums in different contexts for his Ota label.

Orlando 'Maraca' Valle (1966) A superior flutist, Valle worked early on with Emiliano Salvador, Frank Flynn and Irakere (1988-94). He has led his own groups since then, appearing on over 80 albums.

Pedrito Martinez (1973) The percussionist and singer started playing professionally when he was 11, was discovered

by Jane Bunnett in 1996, and in 1998 moved to New York City. Martinez has since been on over 50 albums and has been leading his own influential groups since 2005.

Roberto Fonseca (1975) After making three early albums in Cuba and touring the world with the Buena Vista Social Club in the early 2000s, the talented pianist has led at least eight albums for such labels as Enja, Jazz Village, Impulse, and Mack Avenue.

Harold Lopez-Nussa (1983) Part of a very musical family, pianist Lopez-Nussa worked with the Cuban National Symphony Orchestra when he was 20 but has primarily played jazz ever since, leading ten albums since 2007. Unlike most of the musicians in this survey, he still lives in Cuba.

Alfredo Rodriguez (1985) The son of the identically named pianist-singer Alfredo Rodriguez (who recorded with Dizzy Gillespie), the younger pianist played at the 2006 Montreux Jazz Festival where he met Quincy Jones who helped him eventually move to the U.S. A superior jazz pianist, Rodriguez has thus far led six albums for the Mack Avenue label.

Scott Yanow, whose 12 books include one called Afro-Cuban Jazz, recently penned his 1000th set of liner notes. He can be reached for liner notes, bios, press releases, reviews, and other interesting assignments at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU!

RON SIMPSON talks to the man who rejoices in the name of entertainer, WARREN JAMES.



Ask Warren James how many groups he is involved with and the evasive answer is, 'Probably several'. As well as being a key member of Jake Leg's Jug Band, playing banjo and guitar, and a regular with Baby Jools' Jazzaholics, he is the man responsible for something like ten shows, ranging from skiffle to rockabilly to Hit Parade Heroes. On these he works with a core of musicians (bassist Jim Swinnerton and drummer/washboard player Baby Jools), switching hats from skiffle to country blues, with others he can bolt on as required. Essentially Warren, Jim and Jools go out under the banner of skiffle group, Lonnie Donegan tribute show, Hit Parade Heroes and the Lonesome Travellers, his 20s style blues band. So pervasive has the trio become that an audience member at a jazz club opined, 'Everywhere we go we see you, Jools and Jim backing everyone. You're turning into the jazz world's Wrecking Crew.'

On the Saturday we had a chat it was Jake Leg's Jug Band at the Village Hall in East Leake, a pleasantly rural location not too far from Nottingham. The band was playing a fund-raiser for Christmas celebrations, some 60-plus people seated at tables, a warm audience presided over

by a generous and welcoming organiser.

The Jake Leg Jug Band has undergone many transformations, mostly caused (Warren suggests, tongue in cheek) by his arrival on the scene:

'One of the criticisms of the Jake Leg Jug Band is people at jazz clubs say, "Every time you come you bring different people" and we had to point out that's what jug bands did. They were never the same line-up; it was whoever they could get. When I joined this band there were seven solid members; when I arrived, I drove them all out, once a proper banjo player arrived, it scared them all away. That's the joke anyway. Now there are Duncan Wilcox and me!'

The band for this particular gig was a five-piece and it's a sign of the Jakes' flexibility that it was a purely brass front-line (apart from Richard Leach's occasional forays on jug!) when the likes of saxist/clarinetist Phil Shotton are frequent guests – and, of course, Alex Clarke actually joined the band for a spell.

Novelty songs, gospel songs and jazz classic by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Fats

Waller go down well with the East Leake audience, Warren and Duncan's voices contrasting, but blending well.

So we started at the beginning of Warren's career (if you can call it such with a child of eight!):

'I started as a kid entertainer in the social clubs round Liverpool at the age of eight. I was no musician then. My grandmother was my agent. I was lucky: I grew up in the 80s and all the stars who'd come up in the 50s and 60s were coming into their prime and they had TV shows. My grandmother had my picture made up and she would take it round the clubs and say, "My grandson's an entertainer. Will you book him?". And then she'd say, "How

much? I have to teach him the value of entertainment." She would put a five-pound note and five coins on the table and say to me, "This is yours and the two pound coins are mine." Of course she gave it me back as pocket money! She'd take me to holiday camps and she'd have a word with the entertainment manager and get me a spot.

'My act was about 15-20 minutes: *Shine On Harvest Moon*, the Laurel and Hardy dance routine from *Way Out West* and I'd do *Chesapeake Bay* with the straw hat and the little sidestep. I'd tell silly jokes about my grand-dad. It was strange. In those days we all had to put make up on and I remember my grandmother showing me how to put make-up on and telling me, "Don't tell the kids



at school." I'd be sitting in the dressing room getting made up and next to me there'd be a 19 year old girl who was appearing as a stripper later on, putting her tassels on! No one thought anything about it!

'When I was 14, I had an agent in Wigan and I'd go on the bus without telling my mum – she didn't know where I was half the time. I was under age and the agent drilled it into me to give the wrong date of birth.

'I got my first banjo when I was 12. There was a DJ on Radio Merseyside, Billy Mahesssr, who played the banjo. He had been a folk singer and used to play the old wartime songs. I loved the sound of the banjo, then my grandfather got a CD player and one of the albums was *Hits of the 60s*. And one of the tracks was Lonnie Donegan's *Have a Drink on Me* and there was this banjo sound and the voice! (Warren imitates both!)

'When I was a kid, it was as though my voice would never break. I've always had a high voice and people used to say, "You remind me of Lonnie Donegan". Then, when I heard *Have a Drink on Me*, I thought, "I see what they mean." It's the nasal quality of the voice.

'So I got a five-string banjo for Christmas and an old chap (probably about 50!) taught me how to claw-hammer, Appalachian-style, and I was fine playing old-time songs like *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. It was a useful prop, but nobody was that interested. Then somebody said to me, "If you take the fifth string out and tune it like a guitar, you can play jazz on it." So I did – and I still struggled to get work!'

You feel Warren may be exaggerating when he says nobody was interested because at the age of 15 he was leading a three-piece band in Warrington, playing rockabilly and blues. Then, in 2002, aged 18, he got an offer from Paul Leegan to join his skiffle group as lead guitarist. The only problem was Paul was based in Coventry and Warren didn't drive. So Paul came up with a helpful suggestion: Warren could stay with him in his spare room for a year and join the band. With the impetuosity of youth

Warren agreed and it worked out well, with him spending 10 successful years with the band.

Another influence was Roger Dean, an actor who was steeped in variety: the list of performers he appeared with is a rare mix of talents and generations, beginning with Arthur Worsley and Reg Dixon and moving on to the rather more modern Wayne Sleep and Su Pollard. Roger had conceived the idea of a theatre show, *The Johnny Cash Story*, and, when Warren contacted him about his failure to include an electric guitar in the backing band, he got the job, one gig at a time. The show involved acting as well as music and Warren learnt the art of telling stories from Roger.

In 2012-2013 Warren was working in sales for *Acoustic* magazine and every September there was an Acoustic Guitar Show at Olympia where there were plenty of solo performers, one man with a guitar (including a certain Ed Sheeran), and Warren thought, 'I could do that.' So he contacted his old friend Paul Leegan who by now had stopped performing and asked him to fix some dates for him. He filled his diary with pub gigs and Warren was away, happily singing the Everly Brothers, Eddie Cochran, Johnny Cash and the rest as a solo turn.

From that developed a whole range of disparate groups and shows:

'We cover everything from 50s rock'n'roll through the 60s (past the 60s is too modern for me) and back to the 1920s and everything in between.

'The knack is to give every show a title and match everything to that: the musicianship stays the same, all that changes is the costumes, the story and the patter. So there's a story that flows through the whole thing like a theatre show. That gives it an air of professionalism – at least I like to think so.'

Jazz re-entered Warren's life after COVID when Jools rang up to offer him the job of banjo player with the Jazzaholics.



Photo by Merlin Daleman

Despite his initial doubts ('I didn't know any of the tunes') and what he describes as an 'awful' first gig, he's still there and working with Jools on all sorts of other projects, Hit Parade Heroes, for instance:

'Hit Parade Heroes is a title I've had in my head for years. The Hit Parade came before the charts and the show spotlights all the people who were my heroes: Joe Brown, Tommy Steele, Marty Wilde. I tell their stories in between the songs. I worked with Joe Brown and he told me some great stories and I worked with Marty Wilde – once! - and he was the same. It's a story, a song, and so on. We try to start at the beginning and work our way through. It's grown from a couple of pub gigs and I'm told it's successful because it's nostalgic and because I'm not scared of being an entertainer – many people see that as a dirty word.

'I've adapted to being a musician, but I've always been an entertainer. What I enjoy is the variety because I don't really know where I belong.'

And it seems to be working. In the last couple of years Warren has chalked up approximately 250 gigs a year, 100 with the Jakes, maybe 30 with the Jazzaholics and the rest on his own projects. He is apparently ubiquitous, playing pubs, arts centres, village halls, theatres and jazz festivals. Before East Leake he had played a duo gig with Danny Blyth in Coventry – and the following lunch-time his skiffle group was due in Torquay!

When I mention enjoying his skiffle group playing in the open at the Water's Edge during the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival, his response shows his love of communicating with his audience:

'Water's Edge was my perfect set, a real gig. You've got people around you, passers by and you can be spontaneous, you can guarantee that something will happen to comment on.'

www.warrenjamesguitar.com

41ST BIRMINGHAM JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

Lady Sings the Blues



The 41st Birmingham Festival came through the intermittent thunderstorms to reach what amounted to a triumphant climax (ninth night of ten) with what might just be the final appearance of *Lady Sings the Blues*. The concert at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall was widely discussed in *Jazz Rag* and elsewhere as the swansong of the show, with the caveat that Frank Sinatra totted up any number of farewell tours – and there was no guarantee that Val Wiseman wouldn't do the same!

So a jauntily nostalgic *Just One of Those Things* represented the end of an era – or maybe not: the audience had no doubt, the reaction suggesting that any

decision to quit when she is still (remarkably) in her youthful prime and putting over this superb songbook with zest and an appreciation of the emotional subtlety of the lyrics would be premature, to say the least.

The line-up of the *Lady Sings the Blues* band has now completed a total transformation from the debut version in 1987 and, for this possible finale, the Festival assembled an all-star collection. Ian Bateman's gruff attack and nifty slide work on trombone were a major addition and Bruce Adams, Alan Barnes, Dave Newton, Dave Green and Steve Brown need no introduction, the band letting their hair down on their two features, *Back in Your Own Backyard* and

When You're Smiling, both joyful numbers with solos all round.

By the interval Val had charmed the audience with her performance of Holiday classics from the 1930s and 1940s, interspersed with always brief and relevant snippets of biography. *God Bless the Child* was deeply felt, accompanied only by Newton's solo piano, *Me, Myself and I* was bursting with life, meticulously phrased by Val with everyone getting a solo, and *Miss Brown to You* benefited from Val's semi-spoken Billie-like emphasis on key words. But the highlight of the first half was a poignant *What Shall I Say?*.

The second half took off as though turbo-charged, the band prepared

to take risks as they swung into *Tain't Nobody's Business* with exciting solos over Green and Brown's precise pulse. Val mined the independence of the song with little delays in phrasing and then relished the up-tempo *Day Out, Day In*, but by this time every quality number was a highlight.

Alan Barnes' tenor set the tone for a beautifully lyrical, careworn *Lover Man*, with delicate obbligatos. *Comes Love*, with the aid of a splendidly crafted bass solo by Dave Green, bristled with humour and *Good Morning, Heartache*, revealed Val in her bleakest in a stunning performance. Dave Newton exhibited poise and emotional depth as Val gave a superior duo performance to *God Bless the Child*. The greatest treat was still to come, near the end of the show as the original was near the end of Billie's life, her contribution to the celebrated television show, *The Sound of Jazz*. On this she re-created her hit, *Fine and Mellow*, with her old partner Lester Young, in a sparsely phrased version deep with melancholy. Barnes took the Lester Young role, with the other front-liners offering similarly nostalgic solos. Val, as ever, was totally in command of her magical material.

So that was the final curtain down on *Lady Sings the Blues* – or was it?

RON SIMPSON

Photos by Irina Mackie



Alan Barnes and Dave Green relaxing at Sutton Coldfield



Django Chutney

Photo by Jas Sansi



Photo by Merlin Daleman

Honeyboy Hickling Blues Band



Photo by Merlin Daleman

Art Themen Quartet



Photo by Irina Mackie

Dave Green in Lee Longlands furniture store



Hot Club of Halifax

Photo by Merlin Daleman



Tenement Jazz Band

Photo by Merlin Daleman



Photo by Merlin Daleman

Django Chutney

CD REVIEWS



ADRIAN COX

CLUB CROCO

Self-produced, 33.46

Adrian Cox, although still a relative youngster has carved out a successful career as an internationally known musician and is currently working at the top of his game as one of the leading exponents of New Orleans clarinet playing. Over time he has accrued a vast knowledge of the genre and its performers. He started playing at the age of six and by the age of fifteen had left home for a life as a professional musician, having previously started playing gigs from the age of twelve. He now works in the fields of jazz, blues, funk and ska, but with jazz being his main area of endeavour. He cites fellow clarinetist Edmond Hall as his all-time favourite musician.

This latest release sees Cox examining New Orleans themes from the 1920s featuring music from Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver and Louis Armstrong and other over the course of nine tracks. Cox, who also contributes vocals, is accompanied by Alex Gilson double bass and Honey Boulton on guitar and additional vocals. The music includes both relaxed ballads and more upbeat and sprightly pieces. There is something for everyone here. If you enjoy this style of music, I urge you to catch the trio live as they take the music from the album on tour from the end of September, through October and into November both in the UK and Europe. Don't miss the chance to see this charismatic and engaging performer in person.

ALAN MUSSON



NANNA CARLING

MELODIES FOR TWO

Self-produced; no number: 33.08

We can so easily fall into the trap of deciding on an artist's whole output on the basis of one part of their work. So it is with Nanna Carling, recently heard with the Tenement Jazz Band in Edinburgh and Birmingham. We came away with an impression of a swinging soprano saxist and a singer who projected (outstandingly well) 1920s and 1930s melodies through a megaphone.

That may indeed be part of Nanna's appeal (she calls it her New Orleans side), but *Melodies for You* throws up a quite different artist. For a start, she shines as songwriter: all nine tracks are her compositions. When you listen to *This Love of Mine*, you could be taking on board a new addition to The Great American Songbook.

Interlude, a rare instrumental, reveals the strength of the band, presumably Nanna's Swing Band, with the outstanding tenorist Matthias Carlson shining on flute fill-ins, pianist Thierry Maranzani excelling in sort of post-Teddy-Wilson style and drummer Snorre Kirk driving the whole thing incisively. In truth more features for the band would be welcome (with nine tracks in 33 minutes, mostly vocals, there is little space) and this goes for Nanna herself who raises the roof in timeless fashion on *Waikalon Blues*, but is otherwise limited in her instrumental contributions.

So we come to the songs. *I Thought I'd Seen Your Face Before* is the nearest to what I expected, with Nanna riding the ensemble joyously. *Moonlady* and *Summer Turns to Spring* are delicate melodies, Nanna interpreting

them with perfect intonation and a telling sense of mood. On the strength of this, you're safe with Nanna Carling, never mind which Nanna Carling shows up!

RON SIMPSON



STEFAN PASBORG TRIO

DEAR ALEX

Stunt Records STUCD 25112: 40.13

This superb CD is a tribute to the great Danish drummer Alex Riel who died last year and was godfather to fellow-drummer Stefan Pasborg, but it's a tribute that takes a rather unusual and quite delightful form. After Riel's death Pasborg came across a hand-written list of his favourite songs and decided to record some of them with his trio: tenor saxist Fredrik Lundin and pianist Carsten Dahl. The result was a single day's work with mostly first takes that serves as a more effective tribute than anything more elaborate.

The first three songs suggest Alex's love of the sentimental. *Danny Boy* features keening tenor over simple piano chords, *Over the Rainbow* is a particular gem, beginning with tinkling percussion before the tenor makes a deliberately tentative entry, the whole thing beautifully atmospheric. *Smile* brings Pasborg to the fore, his rumbling drums anchoring a delicately harmonised reading. Then suddenly we are into *Idaho*, fun all the way with Pasborg's ebullient drum solos, crazy duets for Lundin and Dahl and a general onset of chaos.

The last four of the ten tracks follow a not dissimilar pattern, with Fats Waller's rowdy *Moppin' and Boppin'* breaking up the more lyrical offerings which end with a mournfully serene *When you wish upon a star*. In the middle are two tracks which might be

classified as abstract. *In Another Way* relates to a 1966 recording by Alex Riel, Pasborg building an extended solo around his mentor's original. Then *Den Milde Dag er Lys og Lang* by Carl Nielsen is a series of spacy meditations over a dense percussion sound – Rune Harder Olesen added to Pasborg. Who ever would have thought of recording the great Danish symphonist alongside Fats Waller, but the whole CD is as idiosyncratic as it is heartfelt.

RON SIMPSON



SONNY ROLLINS

THE PRESTIGE ALBUMS 1953 - 1957

Acrobat ACTRCD 168 3 CDs: 72:53/ 74:02/ 72:43

Tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins should need no introduction, and the music on this three CD collection described generally (and justifiably) over the years as *some of the finest music recorded in the mid-1950s by any label* – or variations of that statement, usually containing also liberal use of the word *classic*. And do remember too that Prestige was not just 'any label'.

As Paul Watts' extensive and detailed notes point out, the advent of the long-playing record (LP) in the 1950s meant it was now possible for jazzmen to stretch out on record. Sonny was certainly a beneficiary of this, and this set comprises eight original ten- and twelve-inch releases: *The Sonny Rollins Quartet*, *Sonny Rollins With The Modern Jazz Quartet*, *Sonny Rollins Quartet Feat. Kenny Dorham*, *Sonny Rollins And Thelonious Monk*, *Work Time*, *Sonny Rollins Plus Four* (with Clifford Brown), *Tenor Madness*, and the aptly titled *Saxophone Colossus*. The recordings are almost but not quite in chronological order, though as near as can be due to the restrictions of compact discs, but everything is here.

The sound is of that of bop and hard bop, and musicians who appear, besides those already mentioned, include John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Clifford Brown, and drummers Art Blakey and Max Roach, which gives an indication of the circles Sonny was moving in. The result is classic modern jazz in the making, and of course highly recommended.

NORMAN DARWEN



ALAN BARNES QUARTET

AFFILIATION

Miles Music MM CD 002: 47.35

Now here's an unexpected treat, the first recording under Alan Barnes' name (1987) issued as a CD for the first time. Two sets of liner notes tell us much about the world nearly 40 years ago and about Alan's reaction to his early work. Benny Green wrote, in some astonishment, that 'Barnes appears...a virtuoso of quite alarming command' and followed up by affirming that Dave Newton's 'obscurity will be short-lived.' Nailed that one, Benny!

As for Alan, he is surprised to find that 'my playing style was pretty much in place by then.' This is certainly true – a few less semi-humorous flourishes, perhaps – although there is a certain surprise at hearing the assurance of his tenor sax playing on his original *Top Flat*. As ever his clarinet feature leaves us asking for more: *Pickles*, delivered with virtuoso ease. The opening two tracks, Dexter Gordon's *Fried Bananas* and the spiky, multi-tempo title track, made me think that perhaps three years with Tommy Chase had over-influenced Alan, but a lyrical and melodically satisfying *You Go to My Head* removes the hardbop tone of the openers: here Dave Newton matches Alan for stylistic delicacy, in contrast to his

aggressive high-speed delivery on, for example, *Affiliation*.

In fact the overall impression is of nonchalant control over a wide range of jazz – and the same goes for the quartet. In addition to Dave Newton (now a long-time associate), Paul Morgan is outstanding on bass, at the heart of so many rhythmic shifts and bringing wit and poise to solos such as on *Alice B*, a perky piece that shows Alan's composing skills at their best. And Mark Taylor, unobtrusive or dynamic by turn, holds down the drum chair on a fascinating new album 38 years on!

RON SIMPSON



JIM SNIDERO

BIRD FEATHERS

Savant SCDE 2224 46.55

My Jazzwise colleague Mike Hobart gave this album three stars from five back in May and suggested the rhythm section needed 'more oomph' and that seems about right to me. The last time we encountered star US altoist Snidero (born 1958) he was playing with strings; here, though, he's in pared down mode, recorded (in October 2024) with just bass (Peter Washington) and drums (Joe Farnsworth). They have made albums together before and clearly know each other well.

Seeking to mark the 40th anniversary of his debut recording as a bandleader, Snidero has gone back to first principles in devoting this album to the musical concepts and repertoire of his greatest hero, Charlie Parker, hence its title. Not that he seeks to evoke Bird's sound or improvisatory model, more that he applies his own coating of paint to some well-established Parker-ian structures. Very much a linear player, with a quite astringent tone and an often angular approach to his phrase-making, he's a tireless improviser; never

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17 Wed - Fougou, Torquay - Organ Trio*
18 Thu - Ashburton Arts Centre - Organ Trio*
19 Fri - Jazz Jurassica, Lyme Regis - Organ Trio
21 Sun - Dalwood Village Hall W/ Craig Milverton & Ashley John Long*
26 Fri Herts - Cowshed Jazz Club, Herts. W/ Mike Gorman/Woody Wood - Organ Trio*
28 Sun - Isle Of Wight Jazz Weekend - Organ Trio

OCTOBER

4 Sat - Shrivensham Jazz Festival - Organ Trio 12pm
5 Sun - Pizza Express, Soho - Organ Trio (IT'S ON! ALBUM LAUNCH)
7 Tue - The Royal Oak, Swindon - Organ Trio*
8 Wed - Swansea Jazz Club - Organ Trio*
9 Thu - Palladino's, Cardiff - Organ Trio*
10 Fri - Tobacco Factory, Bristol - Organ Trio*
11 Sat - The Hive, Shrewsbury Organ Trio*
12 Sun - Black Mountain Jazz, Abergavenny - W/ Rhythm Section*
19 Sun - Norwich Jazz Club - Organ Trio + Alex Gamell*
20 Mon - Parakeet, London - W/ Libor Smoldas/Nigel Price Q1*
21 Tue - Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks - W/ Libor Smoldas/Nigel Price duo*
22 Wed - Twickenham Jazz Club - W/ Libor Smoldas/Nigel Price Q1*
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28 Tue - Watermill Jazz, Dorking - Organ Trio
30 Thu - Jazz Seven, Leeds - Organ Trio
31 Fri - Wakefield Jazz - Organ Trio*

NOVEMBER

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3 Mon - Milford Arms, Isleworth - Alessio Menconi/Nigel Price Q1*
4 Tue - Dawkes Music, Maidenhead - Alessio Menconi/Nigel Price Q1*
5 Wed - Bulls Head, Barnes - Alessio Menconi Duo (Album Recording)
7 Fri - Kidderminster Jazz Club - Organ Trio*
8 Sat - Peggy's Skylight, Nottingham - Organ Trio*
11 Tue - Blackfriars of Bell St, Glasgow - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
12 Wed - Jazz Bar, Edinburgh - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
13 Thu - Blue Lamp, Aberdeen - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
14 Fri - Dundee Jazz Festival - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
15 Sat - Eckford Village Hall - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
16 Sun - Queens Hall, Hexham (3pm) - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
16 Sun - Globe, Newcastle - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price Quartet*
17 Mon - 406 Club, Fulham - Lorne Lofsky/Nigel Price (Quartet Album Recording)*
20 Thu - Chesterfield Jazz Club - W/ Wendy & co*
21 Fri - The Roastery, Cambridge - Organ Trio*
22 Sat - The Verdict, Brighton - Organ Trio*
27 Thu - New Forest Jazz - W/ Rhythm Section*
29 Sat - Magy's Farm, Dromara - Organ Trio*
30 Sun - Arthurs, Dublin - Organ Trio

DECEMBER

7 Sun - Milestones, Lowestoft*
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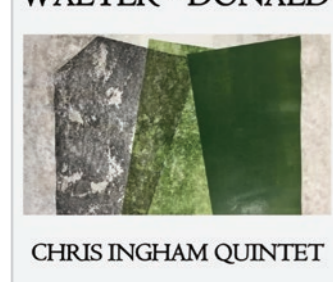
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effusive or apparently short of an idea, more like Konitz in the way he allows these ideas to develop and run. This is especially evident on *These Foolish Things*, which he re-appraises with a knowing eye, much as he does in a masterly reading of *Embraceable You*. His version of *Ornithology* reveals his bebop chops at their best, bass and drums ably keeping pace, with Washington a valuable second voice. Highly creative and certainly accomplished, Snidero's is a top alto-man who has no qualms about leading from the front.

PETER VACHER

WALTER · DONALD



CHRIS INGHAM QUINTET

WALTER/DONALD

Downhome Records- DOHO 007 50.00

Pianist, singer and arranger, Chris Ingham's most recent CD for Downhome Records explores the songs of Steely Dan. A group formed and led by Walter Becker and Donald Fagen- hence the title. Ingham's previous CD have covered the music of Hoagy Carmichael, Dudley Moore, and Stan Getz, amongst others and on *Walter/Donald*, 'The Dan' songs are treated in a more creative and personal way from the original versions.

Along with his solid piano playing, Ingham's voice is light and pleasing to the ear with its lack of affectation coupled with wisely avoiding Fagen's higher pitched vocals (he had to transpose the songs down a fourth to suit his voice) and more sardonic delivery.

The fine band includes trumpeter, Paul Higgs whose 'growl' solo on *Haitian Divorce* providing a subtle stylistic reference to Steely Dan's recording of a 1926 Ellington tune, *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* from their 1974 *Pretzel Logic* LP. The

powerfully melodic tenor sax of Harry Greene acquits himself admirably on his solos on *Your Gold Teeth II*, *Black Friday* and *I Got The News*. A funky tonal undercurrent flavoured with a slithery bebop vocabulary.

Renowned sessioneer and arranger/composer, bassist, Geoff Gascoyne's inventive lines on *Haitian Divorce* are just one example of his superb musicianship throughout the CD. He's joined in the 'engine room' by drummer, George Double- a mainstay of the leader's groups from the start. Ingham had the following to say about Double's challenges for the date. 'The drum parts were co-devised by myself and George Double. He had the daunting task to really getting the groove in a jazz context without relying on the Dan backbeat.' He did brilliantly, his brushwork particularly on *I Got The News* is fantastic.

Becker and Fagen along with a changing kaleidoscope scenario of incorporating the top session players of the day effectively imparted a range of jazz influences disguised into pop and rock genres. Chris Ingham's Steely Jazz (as its sometimes referred to) brings this legacy to life in an intimate small group setting. This slice of 'drastic plastic' will appeal to Steely Dan and Jazz fans alike.

FRANK GRIFFITH



SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

THE AMAZING GRACE OF ...

Upbeat URCD 345 66:38

This is the Upbeat label's third CD of Sister Rosetta's material, but don't take that as indicating any drop-off in quality - she was a remarkably consistent performer. Listen to the hot

rocking opener, 1949's *He Arose From The Grave*, with a tight little combo and singers behind her impassioned vocal and guitar, before the slower *Move On Up A Little Higher* showcases her gospel vocals even better, with Sam Price on organ and Marie Knight on piano on a number most associated with Mahalia Jackson. Sister Rosetta carries it off well.

She was one of the big stars of gospel, and some of her 78s were even issued in the UK at the time and she toured here and in Europe in the 50s and 60s. Anyone who saw her appearance on *The Blues & Gospel Train* on Granada TV in 1964 probably still remembers it well - I know I certainly do. In more recent years she has become a feminist icon, and an inspiration to a whole new generation, particularly of female blues singer/ guitarists.

These sides show just why; OK, the biggest hits are not included, but this is unmistakably Rosetta - try *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* or *Look Away Heavenly Land* with Sammy Price boogying away - or any track here. Owners of the previous two sets will want this release, but anyone, owner or not, can buy this with confidence.

NORMAN DARWEN



THE PETE ALLEN JAZZ BAND

NEW ORLEANS WIGGLE - JAZZ MAGIC

Upbeat Jazz: URCD348

Pete Allen, at the age of 70, can now justifiably be considered a veteran on the British Dixieland scene. A multi-instrumentalist who includes in his arsenal clarinet, alto and soprano saxophones and banjo, he is not

averse to contributing vocals too. He formed his own band in 1978, and his recorded work extends to some twenty releases to date.

The latest addition to his extensive catalogue consists of seventeen broad and imaginative selections from the grassroots New Orleans and Chicago eras and music from Duke Ellington and a nod and a few songs which must now be termed 'standards'. For this release, Allen has chosen to expand his customary six-piece band to an eight-piece unit. He restricts himself to playing clarinet and soprano saxophone, plus providing vocals. Chris Hodgkins plays trumpet, Roger Marks is on trombone, Trevor Whiting on a variety of reeds, James Clemas provides piano, Dave Hanratty, bass, Max Brittain, guitar and banjo and Jim Newton, drums.

The album is due for release on 10 October, so you just have time to place your pre-orders.

The joy in this music is palpable and the repertoire includes some quite unexpected items like 'Comes Love', 'My Old Flame' and 'The Gypsy' alongside more familiar items such as 'Dardanella', and 'Sophisticated Lady'. A particular joy is the rendition of 'The Nearness of You' which is a fine feature for Max Brittain.

The good folks at Upbeat Jazz must be commended upon producing another fine addition to their extensive catalogue.

ALAN MUSSON



DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER + BILL CHARLAP

ELEMENTAL

Mack Avenue MAC 1214: 44.00

This album features a curated set of jazz and popular standards in a somewhat

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unusual duo format. Dee Dee's vocals with Charlap's piano are done so as to transform these chestnut songs into quirkily unique personal treatments. Bridgewater's interpretations pushing the envelope experimentally are matched by Charlap's playful and improvised interactive role. As if they are dueting equally as two instrumentalists.

Bridgewater's career began auspiciously- performing and recording with the Thad Jones/ Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra in 1976 she would later perform with Diz, Rollins, Dexter and Max, amongst many other jazz legends in the day. Her ability to interpret lyrics is no doubt informed by her acting roles in Broadway productions *The Wiz* (for which she won a Tony Award in 1975) as well as several other TV and film roles throughout the 70s and 80s. This is abetted and blended equally with her remarkable ability to "instrumentalise" her voice, a good example of which is her vocal "brushwork", in the introduction of Ellington's *I'm Beginning to See The Light*.

Charlap is no stranger to working with vocalists, boasting collaborations with the likes of Diana Krall, Tony Bennett, Carole Sloane and his mother, Sandy Stewart. All of which earns him serious street cred as an accompanist coupled with his percussive strikes and jaunty percolating lines counteracting Bridgewater's gravity defying vocal leaps on Fats Waller's Honeysuckle Rose.

Their eight plus minutes treatment of Cole Porter's *In The Still Of The Night* is a tour de force of improvised grandeur. Introducing this lengthy song form in a slow tempo leading to a medium up tempo with everything and the kitchen sink thrown in along the journey-cumulating into an extended coda and quiet close.

The duo explores across a vast panorama of emotions throughout *Elemental* leaving the listener dazzled and stupefied from the world of improvisation and song at hand here.

FRANK GRIFFITH



GENE AND EUNICE

FROM KO KO MO TO POCO LOCO

Acrobat ADDCD 5552: 2 CDs, 98.00

A word to any young person wanting to get into the music business: never forget it's a business first. The music is just the product.

Cynical? Well, just read Paul Watts' comprehensive liner notes to this two-disc set from Acrobat. It's a litany of exploitation, racism, opportunism and all-round skulduggery, in which the artistes play an almost incidental role.

If you've heard of Gene and Eunice, then this is an excellent set. Pretty much everything of theirs that could be found, including solo sides, is gathered here. Crucially, this includes both versions of their definitive hit *Ko Ko Mo (I Love You So)*. A dispute between labels meant that they recorded two almost identical versions, which fought for the attention of R&B fans just as the music was going into the stratosphere in 1955. It was covered by countless artistes, including the mighty Perry Como, but business shenanigans meant that Gene and Eunice collected few of the spoils. 'Twas ever thus in rock'n'roll.

If you haven't heard of Gene and Eunice, and I confess that I hadn't, then it's probably because they're not that good really, not to modern ears. The music is well-crafted, the singing is well-mannered and it's all very evocative of that period just before rock'n'roll rose up and kicked the world properly in the backside.

You can see why they made an impact back then, and why that impact was fleeting. Where Elvis

and Little Richard still sound fresh and urgent, this remains very much of its time. It grooves and honks in places, but it's too nice to cause any serious trouble.

That said, if you love the pop, doo-wop and R&B of the fifties, this is an essential collection. Paul Watts acknowledges that Gene and Eunice are something of a footnote in the history of our music, but they most certainly should not be written out altogether. This collection ensures their legacy and influence is secure.

It also does us the excellent service of preserving song titles like *Wiggie, Bom Bom Lulu, Doodle Doodle Doo* and *Ah! Ah!* for future generations to enjoy.

STUART MAXWELL



SINNE EEG & JACOB CHRISTOFFERSEN

SHIKIORI

Stunt STUCD25032 58:23

This is quite simply a beautiful album - I can't think of a better way to describe it. Sinne Eeg is a Danish vocalist given to singing high and clear, Jacob a Danish pianist, and the two have been working together since 2008, with this somewhat eclectic set recorded in Shikiori in Japan!

Jacob is a fine jazz pianist, as can be heard on tracks like Billy Strayhorn's *Lush Life* or the more modern sounding *Better Than Anything*, a deservedly popular choice with jazz singers these days. Sinne scats on the latter, bringing to mind Cleo Laine maybe, and making the jazz-themed lyrics rather appropriate.

Sinne's choice of material ranges from Stephen Sondheim/ Leonard Bernstein's *Maria* and George and Ira Gershwin's *But Not For Me* to Annie Lennox's *Cold*.

Note though, as on the first few tracks, that the two work together, complementing and pushing each other rather than either one taking precedence, and the numerous original compositions on this album suit the duo's approach perfectly - and that approach is usually cool and frequently delicate and tender, though they can certainly push the music when they feel it need it. Take a listen to the aforementioned *But Not For Me* where the scat section certainly lifts the song to a whole new level, quickly picked up by Jacob before the two conclude in perfect harmony. Certainly recommended for those more reflective moments.

NORMAN DARWEN



SHEAR BRASS

EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY

Ireton Records IRO1 CD: 43.23

This is an unusually attractive tribute album. Drummer Carl Gorham, George Shearing's great nephew, first formed Shear Brass to re-visit his great-uncle's work in 2013 and this is the second album. What makes it so successful, apart from the all-star line-up, is that Jason McDermid, the talented arranger (and under-featured trumpeter), has taken so many aspects of Shearing's style - and then added Carl Gorham's lyrics to two tracks, charmingly sung by Sarah Moule.

The opener, Shearing's own *Bop, Look and Listen*, gets the 'little big band' treatment that is the fail-safe position for the whole album. James Pearson's perfectly judged solo a hint of things to come. But what's to come is full of surprises: *September in the Rain* recalls the first Shearing quintet, with Anthony Kerr echoing Margie Hyams, and a

couple of piano solos reveal Pearson's commitment to the Shearing sound.

Elsewhere Pete Long revels in the clarinet spot on *I'll See You in My Dreams* and *Caravan* (hints of klezmer) - he then spends most of the album on alto and tenor. Alistair White brings out the smoothest of trombones on *I'll Be Around*, one of McDermid's most appealing arrangements. Gorham's daughter Romy Sipek delivers affecting vocals on *I'll See You* and, most delightfully, recalling Peggy Lee on Cole Porter's magical *Do I Love You?*. And, to round things off, Gorham has the opportunity to shine on Shearing's *Mambo No. 2*.

Extraordinary Journey delivers a perfectly balanced tribute, neither slavish copies nor excessive reinterpretations, and leaves us aware of the variety of Shearing's output.

RON SIMPSON



KING CURTIS

FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid AMSC 1474: 2 CDs, 151.00

Seriously, you want me to review this? It's King Curtis. Just buy it and be glad.

If you insist on some sort of commentary on the music, there are two main things to be said. One is that, as a musician, these are the kinds of recordings that make you want to kick something. You're never going to make anything this good, so you just have to get over it.

The second thing is that it is great to have two sides of this magnificent horn player celebrated in one package. You have the honking, soulful funk and the rich, swinging jazz, all packed neatly onto two CDs

by those geniuses at Avid, who are churning out truly classic albums in bigger quantities than we deserve.

One of the best things they do is recreate the original liner notes, albeit in a font size that makes it vital not to lose your glasses. So here you have two little nuggets from the masterful Nat Hentoff, a solid piece from Tom Wilson and an absolute gem from Joe Muranyi, which begins:

'King Curtis is a personable and good-looking young man...'

I bet Curtis had that framed in the dressing room when he was prepping for the Fillmore West gig.

Be aware that the three jazz albums, *The New Scene of King Curtis*, *Soul Battle*, and *Soul Meeting*, have killer line-ups, including appearances by Paul Chambers, Wynton Kelly, Roy Haynes, George Duvivier and Nat Adderley (under the pseudonym of 'Little Brother', probably for contractual reasons).

They are classic Rudy van Gelder recordings, on one level just routine blowing sessions, on another a sublime opportunity to hear great players relaxing and having fun together.

King Curtis doesn't claim a place among the mainstream jazz horn elite, such as Dexter Gordon or Hank Mobley, but that's because he just can't resist that dam' soul. It's there on the jazz albums in that brassy honk and it pumps from *Have Tenor Sax, Will Travel*, which, even though it's a studio set, takes you straight down to a chitlin' circuit nitespot, with a pause at the Baptist church on the way.

One of the other things that marks Curtis out from his contemporaries is his absolute command of melody. If you liked what he did with *Whiter Shade of Pale*, wait till you hear *Willow Weep for Me*. But make sure you've got someone to dance with that you really shouldn't be dancing with. This is music so full of soul that it's sinful.

STUART MAXWELL



JOHN PETERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL LEGENDS OF HOT JAZZ

SWINGING DOWN MEMORY LANE

Upbeat URCD346 74.02

The good news is John Petters, one of the great, relatively recent 'influencers' and 'facilitators' of British Traditional Jazz, as historian, writer, broadcaster, lecturer, bandleader and, not least, as flamboyant drummer, is working with Liz Biddle's Upbeat label to release the best of his extensive personal collection.

These 16 hot takes, recorded between 1985 and 2009, provide a sampler of a career spanning half a century, and an output of more than 40 CDs, of a drummer of great power and sensitivity with the ability to creatively drive the ensemble and build the tension behind a soloist.

Astride a kit almost as large and well stacked as that of Gene Krupa - revered by him for elevating the jazz drummer from rhythmic accompanist

to a solo voice - Petters is full on throughout in the kindred company of top British and American traditional jazz stars. The impressive list of those he has set the tempo for includes Kenny Davern, Ken Sims, Sammy Rimington, Cuff Billelt, Chez Chesterman, Wally Fawkes, George Chisholm - not to mention Yank Lawson, Wild Bill Davison, Art Hodes and Ken Colyer.

The dynamic tone is set appropriately with *Drummin' Man*, one of Krupa's most propulsive party pieces, and never drops off throughout a nicely balanced programme of timeless generic favourites like *Snag It*, *Dippermouth Blues*, *Runnin' Wild* and *Jazz Me Blues* and a few, Mezzrow's *Revolutionary Blues* for one, we should hear more often.

Petters is the indefatigable duracell dynamo that backlights the stage for other luminaries to burn bright. He's always influential and unifying, 'comping' and co-ordinating, flammng and jamming, sometimes on top of the beat, sometimes behind it - never afraid to unpack the paradiddles, flapdoodles, flapjacks and whatnots of his own devising.

And let it be noted that the person responsible for the production, mixing, equalising and sleeve-note-writing of this beautifully-got-up CD is none other than - the Drummin' Man himself!

ANDREW LIDDLE





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LOOKING BACK TO 2024

As we reach the end of September and this year's Scarborough Jazz Festival comes into view, Mark Gordon has brought out a splendid double album, *Scarborough Jazz Festival: Live Compilation 2024*, to remind us of his first year in charge. Working through the programme session by session, it provides the best part of 2 ¼ hours of jazz, one track each from 17 different groups – and the main impression is of the sheer variety of the Festival.

On CDI, for instance, we have two tracks from established stars: Elaine Delmar with a subtle reading of *Embraceable You* and Alan Barnes with *A New Life* from his latest Dickensian foray, *Copperfield*. I suppose Fergus McCreadie, blending jazz and Scots folk on *Fairfield Isle*, ranks with the established big names now, but plenty of the others offered surprises, generally pleasant, occasionally less so. The Family Band proved a mystery to me, even after consulting Tom Riviere's website, but *Life's Work* is a beautifully evocative piece, with dramatic drumming and a fine solo from Riviere on bass. Special mention also for Benet



Elaine Delmar

McLean's delicate re-working of 'Round Midnight on violin and James Hudson's Octet backing his vocal on *Pennies from Heaven* with relaxed swing.

Undoubted highlight of CD2 is the final track, part of (I seem to recall) a double-length session with *Big Ben*, Tony Kofi recalling Ben Webster with an all-star band and a string section. The string are in evidence on Ellington's glorious *Come Sunday*, Tony soloing with grace and emotional intensity. Two more contrasting big bands than Tom Smith's and Gareth Lockrane's it would be hard to find and I enjoyed immensely two treatments of popular song: Hattie Whitehead's re-creation of Joni Mitchell's *Coyote* (doubtless the highlight of Hejira's set) and a remarkable reading of the Beatles' lovely *Blackbird* by Fay Claassen with Emma Rawicz's keening sax and Barry Green's sympathetic piano. And I almost forgot Nigel Price's ubiquitous organ trio, as powerful as ever.

Now the question is, 'What of 2025?'

R.S.



Tony Kofi

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HENRY'S BLUESLETTER

MICKEY BAKER: THE WILDEST GUITAR: PART TWO

In Jazz Rag 186 we left Mickey Baker at the peak of his success with his brainchild, Mickey & Sylvia. That was in 1961, the year that it all got a bit too much for Mickey. Despite their success with that smash hit, "Love Is Strange", on the RCA subsidiary Groove label and of their multiple appearances seemingly on every U.S. music TV show, Mickey was getting more disenchanted by the day with life on the road as a touring pop star and in particular with life with Sylvia.

Sylvia Vanderpoel was later to marry All Platinum Records boss Joe Robinson, becoming Sylvia Robinson, enjoying a hit with "Pillow Talk", a song previously turned down by Al Green as being "too risqué" and subsequently setting up rap label Sugar Hill Records. Mickey found her difficult and told me "we would always be fighting. She

Mickey Baker



Photo by Jim Simpson

couldn't get up to do this, couldn't get up to do that. She didn't want to go round and make this whole promotion thing, she was just lazy. I told Joe and he

gave me a written statement that I could stick my foot up her you-know-where at any time I got ready, to keep her on the job.

"Then there was the record company. They were swindling me out of my royalties, which was normal, they swindled everybody out of everything back then. They were crooks, all of them; songs that I had written and recorded were put into BMI under Eddie Haller's name, God rest his soul, he's dead now.

"By 1961 I just got tired of all that nonsense, the publishing firms, the night clubs, the record companies, of Mickey and Joe and Sylvia and all that whole rubbish, so I packed up and left and I have been a bum ever since.

"It had been my mission, actually, from when I first came to New York, I was on my way to Paris. I had figured that I'd arrive in New

York, stay there a while, become a merchant seaman, finally arrive in France and that's where I'd stay for the rest of my life. But I just happened to lose 20 years of my life in New York!

"You see, in the 30s, Josephine Baker was like a Goddess in France, and I used to think of the association of our names, Baker, and she came from St. Louis and me coming from Louisville and I figured there was something in the liaison to make me go to Paris and become a success, which I kinda did, writing all those arrangements for those beautiful French people.

"You gotta remember, I became a very complex person because of all this racism in the United States. Even when I made a lot of money and I was treated like a third rate citizen. I remember being rich, a lot of money like 4 or 5 thousand

dollars a week and I was in Columbus, Georgia, I'll never forget it. I'd gotten off the plane, jumped into a taxi, wearing my hat and my collar turned up. The driver didn't look at me so he didn't realise I was black. I asked him to take me to the coloured section, but I didn't hardly understand a word he was saying 'cos he had this long, drawn-out southern roll.

"I'll not forget that they had chain gangs working on the side of the road and he would explain to me saying 'Those niggers there with them grey suits on, them are the trusties and them niggers over there with them balls on their legs and them stripey suits, them's the dangerous niggers.' He was saying nigger this and nigger that and I realised all of a sudden that this idiot didn't realise that he was talking to a nigger and he takes me to these three beautiful buildings set up on a hill that says The Colony Hotel. I told him I'd changed my mind, to take me back to town where I paid him off and found me a coloured taxi driver and said to take me someplace in the black neighbourhood where I can find a hotel room or a room in somebody's house and somewhere I can eat and it was non-existent.

"Finally, he took me to a place that was one step above being a flat-out and I asked myself what I was doing there with 4 or 5 thousand dollars in my pocket. I'm getting to make all this money but I can't spend it? I don't need this money or the country. To be a bum in a country where you can't buy a sandwich or a glass of water – this put a deep impression into my mind.

"Those Nazi boys, if Hitler could have gotten over to that part of the South, boy, he'd have gotten himself plenty of beautiful specimens, they all have blond hair and steel blue eyes. A man said to me 'I know you boys are not from down here, but listen boy, we don't like this kind of stuff

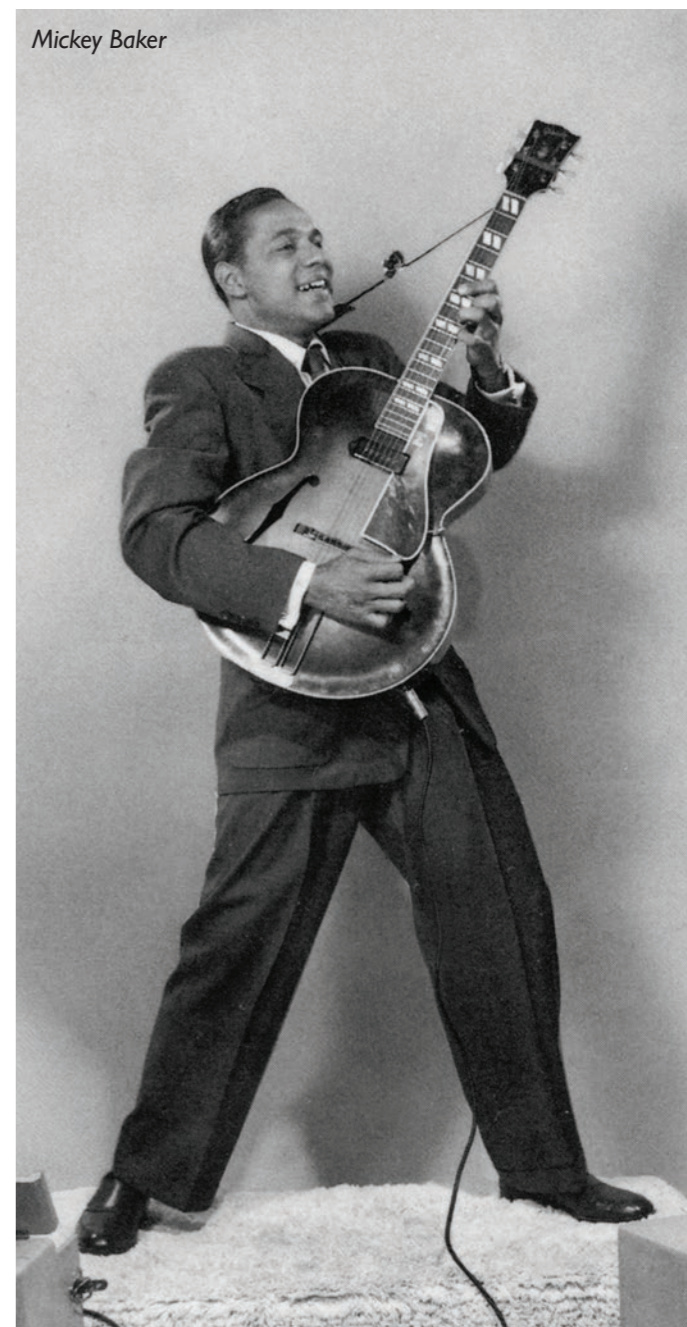
going on down here, you acting up like that, and we don't like what kind of stuff you are bringing here, Rock and Roll music. It's just a lot of noise and mess and really is a disgrace to the country.'

"This experience made my mind up that I never wanted to stay in America under any kind of circumstances. So in 1961 I just packed up and left. But there's another reason. I got so sick of that Mickey and Sylvia nonsense that had eaten me up. I wasn't Mickey Baker anymore, I was Mickey of Mickey and Sylvia. I didn't think that reputation would do me any good over here, I figured well, that's the end of Mickey and Sylvia. I decided to go back to jazz. You heard that tape I played you last night. But then I got here I found that all the jazz cliques were locked up and I couldn't get into anything, so I went back to writing arrangements. What I actually wanted to do, I told Monique [Mickey's wife] that I would like to open a school of music and teach jazz guitar."

I asked Mickey if he knew how many sides he had recorded while he was in New York, and he had no idea. Nor was he even interested. Just from the records in my collection, I can see that he has recorded with LaVern Baker, Willard Harrison, Ike and Tina Turner, Little Richard [pictured], Amos Milburn, Louis Jordan, Memphis Slim, Hank Ballard, Pat Boone, Lionel Hampton, The Coasters, Wynonie Harris, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Chuck Willis, Big Maybelle, Lightnin' Hopkins, Earl Bostic, Connie Francis, Joe Turner, Rosetta Tharpe, The Platters, The Shirelles, Dakota Staton, Jay P. Morgan, Bill Doggett, Roscoe Gordon, Ivory Joe Hunter, Clyde McPhatter, Guy Mitchell, Patti Page, Sammy Price, Piano Red, Milt Buckner – and of course there are so many more.

JIM SIMPSON

Mickey Baker



Little Richard

Photo by Jim Simpson



BOOK REVIEW

RAY BROWN - HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

JAY SWEET

Equinox Publishing hardback, 9781800505353, £32.50

Jay Sweet's Ray Brown biography has not arrived a minute too soon on arguably the most influential and important bassist in Jazz. Published in 2025, 23 years after Brown's passing in 2002 this book will appeal to a wide strata of readers including bassists, jazz fans and historians alike.

Born in Pittsburgh in 1926, Brown would seek his pilgrimage to NYC in at age 19 in 1945 to accompany bop legends, Bird, Diz, Bud and Max. He would later become the charter bassist with Gillespie's big band as well handling the bass chores for Norman Granz' Jazz At The Philharmonic tours that thrived worldwide from 1948 to the late 1950s.

Brown's 16 year association with Oscar Peterson (1949-1965) was particularly notable. One particular highlight being a 5 CD reissue

released in 2025 entitled *Lionel Hampton With Oscar Peterson- Classic Sessions- 1953-54*. (My review of which appears in the July 2025 issue of *The Jazz Rag*). Ray Brown and Buddy Rich appear throughout the five discs as well as guests Buddy DeFranco and Herb Ellis. The first several years with Peterson had Herb Ellis on guitar and he would later be replaced by Ed Thigpen's drums. Along with Brown's deeply pulsating beat and distinctive soloing this would raise the bar significantly in evolving the Peterson trio sound.

After leaving Peterson in 1965, Brown would settle in Los Angeles and embark on being a top call session player. This would include several film scores by Quincy Jones and Lalo Schifrin as well as Quincy's groundbreaking 1986 *Walking In Space* LP. Not to mention four Frank Sinatra LPs. Brown also contributed to several pop singers recordings including James Brown (*Papa's Got A New Bag*), Jose Feliciano, Petula Clark, Aretha Franklin and Steely Dan among many others. He would also play in the studio orchestras of television shows hosted by the likes of The Smothers Brothers, Merv Griffin, Joey Bishop and

Steve Allen. This would include Brown's (presumably) best known and recorded composition, *Gray Waltz*, being the theme song for Allen's television show and bagging a Grammy Award in 1963 for Best Original Jazz Composition.

I found the above aspects of Brown's career to be of particular interest if only for showing his versatility and desire to be involved in such a wide array of the music. Especially in such a fruitful time that when the 'powers that be' wanted/ needed music they employed actual musicians! Fancy that...

Sweet's book devotes an entire chapter to a collective group Brown formed in 1972 called The LA Four. Joined by Bud Shank, Shelly Manne, and Brazilian guitarist, Laurindo Almeida who played with Stan Kenton in the early 1950s. What I found quite interesting was that Laurindo's parts were fully written out bearing a paucity of improvised solos from him. All of which is well described and documented in Sweet's annotations.

New Jersey based bassist, podcaster and educator Jay Sweet, has filled this 300 page tome with an exhaustive feat of research. An amazingly detailed

and comprehensive reportage of personnel, repertoire played and discographical info, which is quite useful in the absence of a discography at the end. Sweets also provides frequent short reviews of Brown's solos and compositions almost as if he's reviewing and documenting Brown's playing and career simultaneously. Clearly a dizzying array of information on any player's career. Perhaps this emphasis might explain the paucity of information on Ray Brown as a person and day to day life which always a welcome component of sharing with the reader the workings and motives of such a distinctive figure.

To be fair, Brown's 7 year marriage to Ella Fitzgerald (1947- 54) is reasonably covered although much less is revealed about their adopted son Ray Brown Jr and virtually nothing of his 48 year marriage to his 2nd wife, Celia, til his death in 2002.

All in all, a fine and well written book that proves the reader with a refreshing, upbeat and extremely well documented timeline of one of the top bassists in jazz history.

FRANK GRIFFITH

LIVE REVIEWS

ABERJAZZ FESTIVAL 2025: SMALL TOWN, BIG SOUND

Fishguard, a quiet coastal village in Pembrokeshire, South Wales, might not be the first place that springs to mind when you think of jazz hotspots. But for five days each summer, it transforms into a vibrant hub of rhythm, soul, and community spirit. Under the inspired leadership of Alice and Paul Stonhold, the Aberjazz Festival has grown from a modest weekend gathering into a full-scale celebration of jazz and blues that rivals far larger events in ambition and atmosphere.

In a post-pandemic landscape where many festivals are still finding their feet, Aberjazz stands out not just for surviving, but for thriving. With 29 main performances, 15 workshops, and 25 fringe events across seven walkable venues, the festival embraces the full spectrum of jazz and blues. From traditional standards to experimental fusions, there's something here for every ear.

I was drawn to Fishguard on the recommendation of a musician friend performing there. The nearly five-hour drive from Manchester gave me pause, but once I escaped the M62/M6 tangle, the journey became part of the adventure. A pre-festival interview with Alice Stonhold, still available on my Mixcloud channel, confirmed I was heading somewhere special.

Attending with my partner, we caught ten performances and one workshop. Though we missed the full Bains Trio tribute to Astor Piazzolla, the remaining duo, Juliette Iglesias on piano and Ianina Pietrantonio on flute, delivered a spirited and intimate set that set the tone for the days ahead.

From there, the festival unfolded like a well-curated mixtape:

- James Chadwick's J4 brought the swinging sounds of the '60s.
- Sharon Clancy wooed with velvet vocals.
- Ma Bessie's Blues Troupe had the crowd dancing in the aisles - undoubtedly the week's breakout act.

- Kevin Lawlor's Cluster Funk fused hip hop with contemporary jazz in a genre-bending set.
- Jay Azzolina's Quartet offered a chilled, introspective vibe.
- Tomas Williams Quintet delivered a stunning homage to Miles Davis.
- Michael Roach's blues workshop deepened our appreciation for the art of jamming.
- Mr Wilson's Second Liners led a joyful parade behind a Welsh dragon.
- Yetii closed our evening with Norwegian jazz tinged with British flair.

Aberjazz makes clever use of its spaces, from the cosy intimacy of Peppers to the grandeur of Ffwrn, St Mary's Church, and a full-scale independent theatre. Twinned with Wexford, Ireland, the festival also embraced Celtic jazz influences, thanks to support from Culture Island.

But what truly sets Aberjazz apart is its community team. A small, well-drilled team of volunteers handled ticketing, seating, and way finding with warmth and precision.

Their presence added a layer of hospitality that's often missing at larger festivals. This 'unpaid added value' makes Aberjazz feel less like an event and more like a shared experience.

Aberjazz isn't just a festival, it's a community celebration wrapped in music. It's the kind of event where you can wander from venue to venue, bump into artists between sets, and feel part of something bigger than the sum of its parts. Whether you're a seasoned jazz aficionado or a curious newcomer, Fishguard offers a welcome that's as warm as its melodies.

STEVE BEWICK

Steve Bewick is a freelance jazz broadcaster. Catch his weekly jazz show on Mixcloud and follow him on Facebook.

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