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DIGBY FAIRWEATHER photographed by MERLIN DALEMAN. Digby is honoured in the naming of the new venue, Digby's, at the Jazz Centre UK. (See this page and page 7)

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THE JAZZ RAG

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UPFRONT

On page 7 you can read that a new venue at the Jazz Centre UK has been named Digby's, not by his choice to honour the founder of the Jazz Centre. It's an honour richly deserved as the merest glance at his career will show – or should that be careers? As a musician/bandleader he can point to such projects as Velvet, the Jazz Superkings and the Great British Jazz Band in addition to his long-term devotion to his Half Dozen, first formed in 1971 and re-formed years later, and his high-profile spell accompanying George Melly. But Digby would probably point to his work with Stan Barker on Jazz College as one of his major achievements.

So that's career Number 1, busy enough for most people, but Digby has also been a prolific broadcaster and author. For many years his *Jazz: The Essential Companion* (with Ian Carr and Brian Priestley) was exactly that before being absorbed into the *Rough Guide* stable. He wrote an autobiography, *Notes from a Jazz Life*, and edited a biography of Nat Gonella – his devotion to giants of the past is one of his endearing characteristics.

Career Number 3 was as a founder. First of all he founded the Association of British Jazz Musicians before moving on to set up two remarkable institutions: the National Jazz Archive in Loughton Library and finally, 10 years ago, the Jazz Centre UK. In addition to being BBC's Musician of the Year in 1979 and picking up British Jazz Awards for Trumpet, Small Group (the Half Dozen – many times) and Services to British Jazz, Digby has collected awards from non-jazz bodies: Freedom of the City of London and of Southend-on-Sea and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Worshipful Company of Musicians. All this and some 18 years as Patron of the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival in succession to Humphrey Lyttelton.

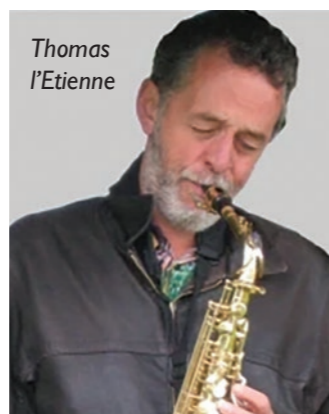
KIRKCUDBRIGHT JAZZ FESTIVAL

Sadly, after nearly 30 years, the 2025 Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival proved to be the last: financial and accommodation problems finally proved too much. The festival has always made much of its attractive setting on the Solway Firth: the initial festival in 1997 was billed as 'Bonnie Galloway's First Festival of Jazz at Kirkcudbright'. But its situation no doubt added to the accommodation problems.

That first festival, organised by Ally Thomson, consisted of one day only with two bands and it was two years before a second festival occurred. This time it was much enlarged and the Brolly Parade and Church Service were in place. Over the next 26 years the scope

of the festival under a series of directors (ultimately Leon McCaig) steadily enlarged, bringing in big bands and, in 2007, the first international bands, the Climax Jazz Band from Canada and the Barfota Jazz Men from Sweden.

In recent years a feature of Kirkcudbright has been assembling a group of jazzmen and then allocating them to bands through the festival. In this respect 2025 finished on a high, with Clint Baker from the United States, Thomas l'Etienne and Uli Wunner from Germany and many British jazzmen, including such names as John Hallam, Tom Kincaid and Spats Langham.



Kirkcudbright had built an enviable reputation for bringing New Orleans jazz, Dixieland and swing to the South West of Scotland – and it will be sorely missed.



PETE LAY MEMORIAL TRADITIONAL JAZZ PARTY

Warner Hotels' jazz weekends were organised for many years by the late Pete Lay, drummer and leader of the Gambit Jazzmen, so it is entirely appropriate that the event at Sinah Warren Coastal Hotel (February 27-March 2) should be renamed the Pete Lay Memorial Traditional Jazz Party. Bands honouring Pete's memory are Trudgeon's Trad Jazz Troubadours, Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band, John Maddocks' Jazzmen, Tenement Jazz Band, Tony Scriven's Sunshine Jazz Band and the San Jacinto Stompers.

www.warnerhotels.co.uk

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY

Camilla George is to headline an All Star Global Concert to mark International Jazz Day on April 30 from Chicago's Lyric Opera. Chicago is the Global Host City for the event, founded in 2011 by Herbie Hancock and presented by UNESCO. Events throughout the city will run from April 1 to May 2. **Information/booking enquiries: (44) 7768 861 566**

SCARBOROUGH JAZZ

Scarborough Jazz Festival has announced approximately half the acts for next September's festival: Rory Ingham's Trombone Assembly, Levitation Orchestra, Shirley Smart Sextet, Benet McLean Quintet, Lady Nade Sings

Nina Simone, Alina Bzhezinska Hip Harp Collective featuring Tony Kofi, 3D Jazz Trio and the Dark Side of the Big Band – Pink Floyd ReWorked.

Meanwhile the jazz club has temporarily located to the Crescent Bar and Lounge while its regular home at the Spa is refurbished. Among acts lined up are Svarc/Hanley/Longhawn (February 18), Al Morrison with the Mark Gordon Trio (March 4) and Benn Clatworthy (18). www.scarboroughspa.co.uk www.scarboroughjazz.co.uk

COUP ON EASTSIDE

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire have pulled off a major coup for their upcoming Eastside Jazz Festival (February 12-13),



a multi-venue continuous music experience over two days. Topping the bill is the great American saxophonist Chris Potter, appearing with the Pablo Held Trio. Also on offer is the Tony Levin drum Prize featuring Jean Toussaint and Arnie Somogyi. The Rebecca Nash Trio, the BBC Big Band and the Dave Sear Sextet are among other acts on the bill, together with the RBC's own Banda Brasileira and Jazz Orchestra playing the music of Miles Davis and Gil Evans' *Porgy and Bess*.

www.bcu.ac.uk/performances

DJANGO IN THE BAY

On the shores of Rutland Water, with a price tag with or without luxury camping, Django in the Bay (May 22-24) offers three days of the best in gypsy jazz. Headliners this year include the Fapy Lapertin and Tcha Limberger Quartet, Sebastien Giniaux and Joris Viquesmel, and the Wawau Adler Trio.

www.djangointhebay.co.uk

AMERSHAM JAZZ

Amersham Jazz Club is now at Wycombe Marsh Royal British Legion, but

continues to provide traditional jazz on a regular weekly basis. Bands lined up are the Golden Eagle Jazz Band (February 11 – also May 20), Jazz Revisited (18), Louisiana Rhythm Kings (25 – also May 6), Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band (March 4 – also May 27), John Maddocks Down Home Jazz (11 – also June 24), New Orleans Jazz Bandits (18), Mark Aston Quintet (25), Dave Moorwood's Rascals of Rhythm (April 8), Savoy Super Six (22) and the Jake Leg Jug Band (29).

www.amershamjazzclub.org.uk

OPERA PLUS

Opera North believes in an eclectic programme in the Howard Assembly Room, part of Leeds Grand Theatre: jazz, folk, world music, song recitals, plus concerts by sections of the company's own orchestra. The Howard is welcoming Spring (hopefully) with a Swing Dance on February 28, consisting of dance class, live music and, finally, a DJ until late. On April 25 the Easy Rollers, led by singer Dani Sicari, bring the sounds of early jazz to the venue.

www.operanorth.co.uk

JAZZ AT LIVERPOOL

The Liverpool International Jazz Festival comes to an impressive conclusion on March 1 with two concerts by Martin Taylor (lunch-time) and the Marius Neset Quartet (evening). The six concerts in the Capstone Theatre on Liverpool Hope University's City Centre campus begin on February 26 with Tim Garland and Geoffrey Keezer, followed by David Holbrook and Julia Hofer, Zoe Rahman and Arun Ghosh, and Robert Mitchell's Little Black Book. Meanwhile fringe events are taking place throughout the city. www.capstone.hope.ac.uk/jazzfestival

LOVE SUPREME

The 2026 Love Supreme Festival at Glynde Place (July 3-5) has yet to announce a Sunday headliner, but the bill is already impressive, with (among others) Moses Boyd, Samara Joy, Ezra Collective, Esperanza Spalding, the Temptations and the Four Tops, Loyle Carner, Maze and Kokoroko.

www.lovesupremefestival.com



Chris Potter

SWANSEA JAZZ AND DINE

Swansea Jazz Club has two Jazz and Dine nights at Langland's Brasseries, the Dave Cottle Trio in each case accompanying Georgia Furlong (February 15) and Iain Mackenzie (March 29). In addition to their other city-wide commitments, the club promotes monthly sessions at the Grand Theatre: Django Chutney (March 18), Joe Webb Trio (April 15) and Matteo Prefumo (May 28).

www.swanseajazzland.co.uk

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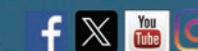
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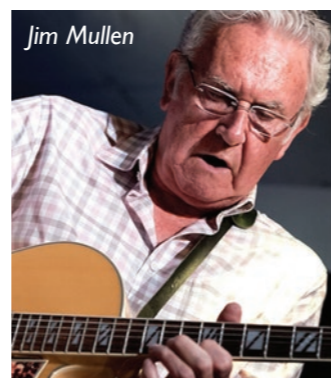
RONNIE SCOTT'S DEVELOPMENTS

Ronnie Scott's brought a new dimension to the club's offering by opening a splendidly refurbished and state-of-the-art purpose-built 140-seat auditorium upstairs on February 6. The range of music available is enormous: jazz, contemporary soul, acoustic R&B, gospel, musical theatre, hip hop, global music, classical performances and (the publicity adds enticingly) more!

On opening night two shows featured the Dana Martin Duo and, a recurrent feature of the new upstairs, the Viva Cuba Late Show. A Gospel Choir is another regular feature, Joe Webb inaugurates a Piano Trio series and (on April 27) even the King's Singers put in an appearance.

Downstairs in the main club the programme continues with such acts booked for February as Jim

Mullen's Volunteers (16), the Nigel Kennedy String Trio (18-20) and Ruby Turner (23-24). March brings Madeline Bell (2-3), Marius Neset (4) and Lee Ritenour (13-15) while April's programme includes such names as Larry Goldings, Peter Bernsten and Bill Stewart (3), Kurt Elling (14-15) and Bill Evans and the Vansband (27-28).
www.ronniescotts.co.uk



Jim Mullen



Binker Golding

(March 4) and Duke Junction (February 15), QOW (March 15) and Paradise Trio (22) are among the Sunday afternoon performers.
www.jazzleeds.org

LEYTONSTONE JAZZ

The Eastside Jazz Club in Leytonstone provides weekly jazz, with the Rob Luft Dahab Days Quartet on February 17. With special guest Art Themen the John Etheridge Quartet follows on Feb. 24, then, in March, the Alice Leggett Sextet (3), Zoe Rahman Trio (10), Jonny Liebeck Quintet (17), Billy Pod Quartet (24) and Ky Osbourne Quartet (31).
www.eastsidejazzclub.co.uk

CONCORDE JAZZ

Eastleigh's Concorde Club has a regular Wednesday jazz feature, with the LP Swing Orchestra performing *Luck Be a Lady* on February 11, followed by the Adrian Cox Trio (18), Paul Higgs with a Miles Centenary concert (25), Simon Spillett Big Band (March 4), Dom Pipkin (11) and the Alex Clarke Quartet playing Phil Woods (25). Sunday afternoon sessions feature the John Maddocks Jazz Band (March 8/April 5) and the Jake Leg Jug Band (March 22).
www.theconcordeclub.com

JAZZLEEDS PROGRAMMES

JazzLeeds run three programmes on a more or less regular basis: Sunday afternoon, Wednesday rush hour and Thursday evening. The Thursday evenings are the star attraction, with the Adrian Cox Trio (February 19), Pocket Ellington (March 12) and Five Way Split (26) lined up at the moment. Rush hour is in the hands of such as Rod Mason (February 18) and John Settle

Quartet (1-7).
www.pizzaexpresslive.com

WAKEFIELD JAZZ

Wakefield Jazz has an enterprising programme lined up, with Rob Luft and the Dan Whieldon Trio (13), Ritmo Caliente (20) and Five Way Split (27) finishing off the February programme. March begins with SHL (6), QOW Trio (13), the Simon Spillett Quartet (20) and Panjumby (27).
www.wakefieldjazz.org

KING PLEASURE IN ACTION

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys have the chance to play UK dates before their next European festival, the Riverboat Jazz Festival on June 26-28. Among their dates in the meantime are Lichfield's Guildhall (March 21), Cornerstone, Didcot (28), the Met, Bury (April 4), the Floral Hall, Hornsea (May 9) and Greystones, Sheffield (15).
Tel. 0121 454 7020

EVERY MONTH AT WILMSLOW

Graham Brook's monthly sessions at the Morley Greeb Club, Wilmslow, continue with the Magic Beans (Zoe Kyoti, Uli Elbrecht and Matt Owens) on February 10, followed by the Jake Leg Jug Band in its five-piece incarnation (March 10) and Alan Barnes and Andy Peate with a trio led by Andrzej Baranek (April 14).
www.grahambrookjazz.co.uk

EAST MIDLANDS GUIDE TO JAZZ

The best guide to jazz in the East Midlands is the mjazz website, crammed with goodies in such places as

Derby, Leicester and Lincoln. Prominent among them are Jazz Steps' monthly three-library bookings at Beeston, West Bridgford and Worksop. Booked in for these are the Nicola Farnon Trio (February 9-11), Djanco (March 9-11) and the Pat McCarthy Trio with Shannon Reilly (April 13-15).

Leicester venues include the International which hosts Dave O'Higgins and Rob Luft Quartet (February 18) and Five Way Split (April 15), Phoenix with Empirical (Feb. 26) and Attenborough Arts Centre with Alan Barnes and Dave Newton (March 14). Lincoln's Blue Room features the Freddie Gavita Quartet (March 14), Chapel Street Arts Centre welcomes Pocket Ellington (March 13) and Bryan Corbett's Instrumental Groove Unit plays the Bonington Theatre, Arnold (March 5). There are many more to be found on mjazz's website.
www.mjazz.co.uk



Freddie Gavita

DIGBY'S OPENS ITS DOORS

The Jazz Centre UK at Southend has opened a new venue, an upgrade on the existing Cultural Centre, a community space for education and a platform for grassroots and seasoned professionals. Appropriately enough, the volunteers at the Jazz Centre have decided to name the venue Digby's, to honour Digby Fairweather who originally set up the centre in the Beecroft Gallery 10 years ago. After his ground-breaking work with

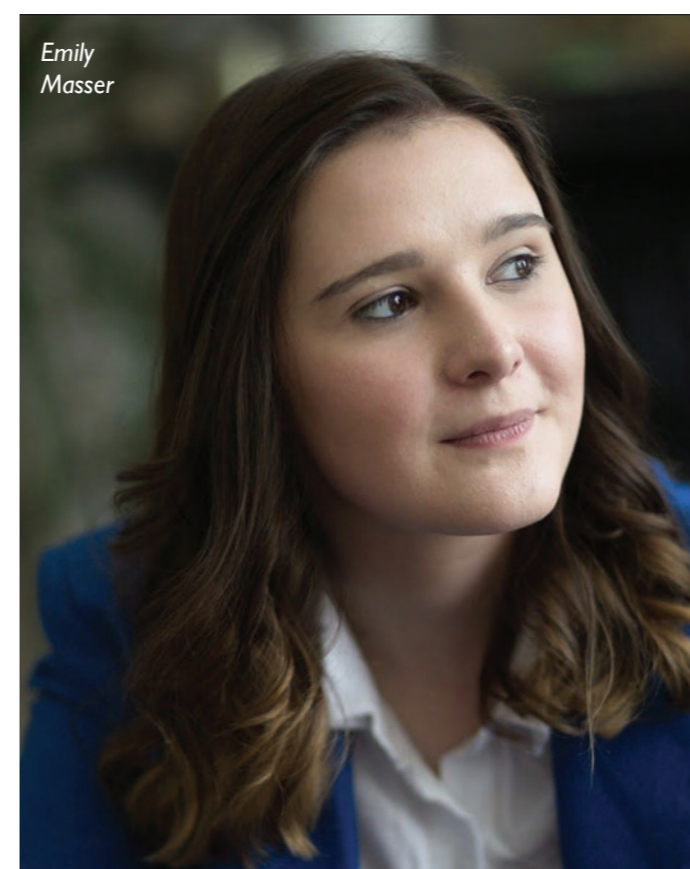
the National Jazz Archive, he has built the jazz centre into an exhibition space, a regular venue for jazz gigs, and a place where jazz enthusiasts of whatever experience and expertise have the opportunity to practise their skills – all this and a knowledgeable newsletter every quarter!

Digby has also made the centre an important part of the Southend scene and the opening event saw the Mayor

of Southend, Cllr. Nigel Folkard, host an evening in aid of his two charities, @southendinsight and Southend Hospital, with music provided by Debbie Binns and Heather Simmons. The next charity event at Digby's will be on April 4, when an all-star band plays *From Dixieland to Swing* in aid of @softpowerededucation which provides education for children in Uganda.
www.thejazzcentreuk.co.uk



Digby Fairweather



Emily Masser

Mellow Baku (8), Pat McCarthy Quartet with Shannon Reilly (15), Daniel Casimir Big Band (18), Remi Harris Hot Club Trio (20) and the Euro Jazz All Star Quintet featuring Joe Magnarelli (21).
www.peggyskylight.co.uk

SPA DAYS

Boston Spa Village Hall is the venue for Emma Fisk with Hot Club du Nord (February 14), Stuart Garside with the Nola Big Band (March 14) and Jump, Jive and Wail (28).
www.jazzinthespa.co.uk

STABLES PROGRAMME

The Stables at Wavendon have a crowded programme of jazz around the turn of the month. Chris Ingham plays Steely Jazz (February 19), *Swingin' at the Cotton Club* follows (22), then the Marius Neset Quartet (27), iG4 with Jim Mullen (March 1) and the Glenn Miller Orchestra under Ray McVay (6). Later the Stables hosts Hejira (March 31) and Neil Cowley (April 14).
www.stables.org

JAZZ AT IMBER COURT

The monthly jazz sessions at Imber Court feature the Art Themen Organ Trio (March 8), the Dave Newton Trio (April 12) and the Art Themen Quartet (May 10).
www.imbercourt.com

COLCHESTER JAZZ

Colchester Jazz Club at Marks Tey Parish Hall provides jazz every week except for March 1 when all is suspended because

of the Sinah Warren Jazz Party. Bands booked are Jazz Incorporated (February 15), the Golden Eagle Jazz Band (22), Paula Jackman's Jazz Masters (March 8), Swish Jazz Band (15), Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band (22), New Orleans Wanderers (29), Uptown Gang (April 5), Jake Leg Jug Band (12) and John Maddocks' Jazzmen (19).
www.colchesterjazzclub.co.uk

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NORTH SEA JAZZ

On July 16, 1976, the first North Sea Jazz Festival opened its doors, with the likes of Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Getz on the bill. The numbers were pretty impressive: six venues, 300 musicians and 9,000 visitors. Now the festival has grown to a prodigious 1,300 musicians playing 13 stages in front of an audience of 90,000.

Celebrating the 50th anniversary North Sea Jazz has pulled out all the stops in drawing up an all-star line-up: Cassandra Wilson, Charles Lloyd Sextet, Hiromi's Sonicwonder, Esperanza Spalding, Joshua Redman, Diana Krall, Bill Frisell, the Sun Ra Arkestra and many more. And there is half a year to go till the Festival at Rotterdam's Ahoy Centre on Jul 10-12.
www.northseajazz.com

SO WHEN DID IT BEGIN TO GO WRONG?

Multi-award-winning saxophonist, clarinetist and composer ALAN BARNES answers the questions.



Photo by
Merlin Daleman

Where were you born/brought up?

I was born in Sinderland Road Maternity Home, Broadheath, Altrincham on 23rd July 1959. It was originally a fever hospital from 1911 and, of course, is no longer there (Sainsbury's now I think). I lived on the Broomwood council estate with my parents and brother then we moved to Timperley when I was about 8 years old, when they could afford a mortgage. Quite a few years later, drummer Steve Brown grew up a couple of streets away. I went to Altrincham Grammar School which subsequently had John Squire and Ian Brown of the Stone Roses as pupils.

What was your first encounter with jazz? And when?

Jazz was actually very much on the mainstream media in those days, as it should be now. The radio programme *Two Way Family Favourites* was a big part of every Sunday lunchtime: a request

programme sending messages of hope between couples separated by military postings. I still can't hear the melody of *With A Song In My Heart* without smelling roast dinner. There were lots of great singers on the show featuring big band and orchestral arrangements of standards. I now realise that most tunes I know seeped in during that period. Kenny Ball, Acker Bilk and Terry Lightfoot would all turn up on programmes like *The Morecambe and Wise Show* which had musical interludes.

What was the first band you heard?

It's hard to remember exactly which was the first one, but I would manage to get into the Malt Shovels pub in Altrincham, which featured eight jazz sessions a week. The landlord Laurie Renton would turn a blind eye and I got to hear the Martinique Jazz band on Saturday nights. Frank, the clarinetist was very friendly and it was the first time

I'd ever heard a trumpet played with plunger and growl effects. It was a really hot band. Alan Butler, who had been a tenor player, led a sophisticated quartet from the vibes playing MJQ arrangements, impressively without any music. It was mainstream night on Tuesdays and Charlie's Banjo Kings on Sunday. Amazingly, the Alan Hare Big Band also played a night at the Moss Trooper pub a short bike ride away.

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

Again hard to remember specifically but my older brother Steve borrowed lots of LPs from his friend Kit Green who had an extensive record collection of unusual things. John McLaughlin and Carlos Santana's *Love Devotion Surrender* had long brilliant guitar solos. Frank Zappa's *The Grand Wazzoo* featured a huge jazz Rock Orchestra led by the 'Funky Emperor' at war against an ensemble of night club crooners and cheesy instrumentalists. Hilarious and brilliant at the same time. Another of his friends, Chris Cobb, was an accomplished finger-picking stylist on the acoustic guitar and he had lots of records by people like 'Mississippi' John Hurt. My brother acquired a guitar but wasn't that interested. Eventually I managed to pick out the tune from *Tales of the Riverbank* on it. I bought an Acker Bilk record *Acker Pye* and Kenny Ball *Fleet Street Lightening* both of which are great. On my 15th birthday, my mum and dad bought me my first saxophone for £200, the Selmer Mark VI that I still play today. This transaction was observed by an old musician hanging around the Stock and Chapman shop and he obviously thought I was a spoiled brat. 'Now you've got that, you'd better get some Johnny Hodges records,' he advised sarcastically. Soon after, I bought a Verve double album of Hodges small bands made during his sojourn away from the Duke Ellington band in the early 50's and I loved it. Trivia note: The selection was made by Dennis Munday, then

working for Norman Grantz who later managed the band I was in with drummer Steve White, The Jazz Renegades.

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

When I was 11 some promotional material came through the letter box from Readers Digest World Records, featuring a thin floppy single that you placed on top of an album and played. It was Acker Bilk playing *Stranger on the Shore* and I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard. Mantovani playing *Charmaine* was on the other side so things could have gone decidedly differently. Later in life, I toured with Acker's band when I was with Humph. He was delightful, very funny and played great. He's instantly recognisable in two notes. How many players have achieved that? He told us about an act he'd seen in Australia: Col. E. Flower and his Musical Veg. The Humph band were taken by this and we purchased an enormous carrot from a Yorkshire farm and drilled it out, putting holes in roughly the right places. With a clarinet mouthpiece forced in the top I managed to play the first 8 bars of Acker's theme tune as part of his birthday celebrations. This was reported in the Sun newspaper under the heading 'Al's beat and two veg.' Martin Taylor and I played the tune on our duo record and we presented a copy to Acker at a Scottish jazz Festival and as a result, a few scotches were taken. I don't know if he ever listened to it. I don't remember much more about the evening but the next morning is etched on my memory.

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

Acker Bilk and Johnny Hodges as mentioned. I started buying records by the cover especially if they had a saxophone on the front. A twofer of Sonny Rollins including the incredible *Saxophone Colossus* and John



Alan with Bruce Adams

Photo by
Merlin Daleman

Coltrane's *Giant Steps* which at first I thought sounded like an alto. One day my dad came home with an Art Pepper album *Discoveries* and I was really taken with everything about his clean articulation, clear sound and hip feel. I think all these players sound even better to me now than they did at the time. It was a golden age.

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

I didn't know what I wanted to do. Jazz was my main interest but it never crossed my mind you could get paid for playing until I was involved as a school boy in a show *Demolition Man* at the Royal Exchange Theatre. They gave me several pounds for the gigs and a Newcastle Brown at rehearsals. I was going to study English at Sheffield University but a guitarist friend Rick said, 'You don't want to do that, do you?'. He followed up by giving an old prospectus for the jazz course at Leeds. I wrote to them, auditioned and got in playing Jimmy Dorsey's *Finger Buster* on alto sax, and a bit of *Body and Soul* on the clarinet. The aural test was writing out the counter melody from TV's *The Onedin Line*. I'm amazed I got in because I had a tenor mouthpiece on my alto with an alto reed. I had to push the mouthpiece on as far as possible to get up to pitch and it stopped

the octave key moving. I also featured some of the loudest reed squeaks ever heard. Going to Leeds was like the moment in the Wizard of Oz where everything goes into colour. It was music all day. There were so many gigs in cities in those days and I worked all the time with local jazz bands. I even had a lengthy stint at Sheffield Embassy ball room playing waltzes, quick-steps, foxtrots and the dreaded pops.

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

My first band was called Geoff Hayes's Hot Heights and mainly played in Geoff's cellar which had lots of reel to reel tapes, home brew apparatus, a dart board, a drum kit, double bass and a piano. We occasionally played at the Golden Lion in Frodsham but the beer was considered not as good as Geoff's own efforts. They were very kind to me and suggested I play the tune on my solo with some ornamentation. Geoff was an Ice Cream chemist and his aged father on piano had earned his living on the halls as a hypnotist. They played in the Condon style, rather well. I remember when trumpeter Geoff Lowe's son John sat in playing clarinet then switched to baritone for some hot ensemble work- it sounded so exciting. Geoff Hayes had an ancient

soprano with two octave keys. I asked for a blow on it one night and was horrified to see a family of white lice living on the reed under the cap. Geoff grabbed it off me, played some wailing oriental scales and said, 'This drives them crazy!'

I've been in all manner of bands starting with Pasadena Roof Orchestra which was my first experience of being constantly on the road. The Tommy Chase Quartet was a heady experience. He was once described in Time Out as 'The Bullet-Headed Bishop of Industrial Pop'. The Jazz Renegades was fun, travelling as far as Japan. Humph of course, The Stan Tracey Big Band. My long associations with David Newton, Bruce Adams and Mark Nightingale all mean a lot to me and I'm very proud to have them all in my octet.

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

I once turned down a gig at Wickes playing clarinet on decorating stilts. I remember opening the first MacDonalds in

Oxford Street with Bob Taylors Full Frontal Rhythm Boys in the early 80's. Bob bought a Happy Mac Shake which he emptied down the grid and refilled the container with vodka. He placed it in the plant pot in front of the store and a passing toddler got the shock of his life when he took a pull on the straw. He was no trouble for the rest of the afternoon.

If you could invite three musicians, preferably from before your time, for dinner, who would you be sitting down with? Let's go with Jelly Roll Morton for starters. If you've heard his reminiscences for the library of Congress you get some idea how entertaining he could be. Add Sun-Ra if we can get him to time travel from Saturn and put Billy Strayhorn between them to keep things on an even keel. I'd make sure there was a piano nearby as well.



Alan with Dave Green

Photo by
Merlin Daleman

CHRIS BARBER AND THE SHAPING OF BRITISH TRAD JAZZ IN THE 1950S

ANDREW LIDDLE on the long career of the man who transformed traditional jazz in this country.

Chris Barber holds a distinctive and enduring position in the story of British jazz. While the post-war revival of traditional jazz involved many committed musicians, Barber's role extended far beyond simply performing to appreciative audiences. More than anyone else, he created the practical and cultural conditions in which the music could flourish. As trombonist, bassist, bandleader, organiser, promoter and tireless advocate, his influence on British trad jazz in the 1950s was profound. Without his intervention, the revival would almost certainly still have taken place, but it would have been narrower in reach and far less embedded in popular culture.

In the years following the Second World War, Britain's jazz scene was fragmented. Swing remained popular, modern jazz was beginning to assert itself, and yet there persisted a strong attraction to early New Orleans and Chicago styles. For many younger musicians and listeners, traditional jazz offered qualities that modernism often did not: spontaneity, collective improvisation, rhythmic momentum and an emotional, foot-tapping immediacy. Barber, born in 1930 and immersed in jazz from his teens, was ideally placed to channel this enthusiasm into something organised, purposeful and durable.

From the outset, he distinguished himself from more doctrinaire revivalists. Where some treated traditional jazz as a fixed historical artefact, Barber understood it as a living form — grounded in tradition but capable of growth and adaptation. His early groups, leading to the formation of the Chris Barber Jazz Band in 1953, combined historical awareness with vitality and openness, communicating directly with youthful audiences hungry for energy and authenticity.

A key element of Barber's impact was his insistence on professionalism. At a time when much British jazz was played by enthusiastic amateurs in pubs and

clubs, Barber ran his band as a disciplined working unit. Rehearsals were regular; arrangements carefully shaped yet flexible, and performances held to consistent standards. This approach helped strip traditional jazz of its lingering 'lowlife' reputation and reframe it as a serious, contemporary musical practice capable of commanding respect.

Barber was also, crucially, a developer of talent. Most famously, it was within his band that Lonnie Donegan launched the skiffle craze. The recording of *Rock Island Line*, made during a Barber session in 1954 (though recorded earlier), triggered a cultural shift whose consequences extended far beyond jazz. Although skiffle was distinct from trad, its rise was inseparable from Barber's willingness to allow stylistic overlap and creative latitude within his band. It is worth recalling that both John Lennon and Paul McCartney began their musical lives in skiffle groups — a lineage that can be traced directly back to Barber's openness.

This attitude set him apart from purists. Though deeply rooted in the New Orleans tradition, Barber refused to impose rigid boundaries between jazz, blues and folk-derived forms. His music absorbed and reflected broader currents in post-war Britain, where audiences sought energy, release and shared experience amid continued austerity. Barber's jazz was communal, physical and accessible.

A sometimes under-appreciated dimension of his achievement was his partnership with the singer Otilie Patterson. Joining the Chris Barber Jazz Band in the mid-1950s, she brought a voice of remarkable depth, control and emotional gravity. Drawing directly from blues traditions — but never simply imitating them — her husky timbre and measured phrasing conveyed pain, irony and resilience with striking authority. At a time when female jazz vocalists were often expected to soften the music or function as decoration, Patterson sang with uncompromising blues

feeling and emotional earthiness. Barber recognised her power and gave it space. Through recordings and relentless touring, she became one of the most compelling blues voices in post-war Britain, and arguably the finest and most expressive singer within British trad jazz.

Barber's most far-reaching influence, however, lay beyond the bandstand. As a promoter and organiser, he helped build and sustain the trad jazz boom itself. He organised tours, selected venues carefully, and ensured musicians could earn a living while developing audiences over time. His relentless schedule took jazz onto television and into clubs, concert halls and dance halls across the country. This grassroots expansion was central to trad jazz's rapid rise in the mid-to-late 1950s and its brief but genuine presence in the pop mainstream.

Equally significant was Barber's commitment to reconnecting British jazz with its African-American roots. At a time when segregation and commercial barriers limited opportunities for Black American musicians, Barber actively promoted blues and jazz artists in Britain. His work with figures such as Big Bill Broonzy, and later Muddy Waters, exposed British audiences to living, breathing musicians previously known only through records. These encounters had a profound effect on both audiences and performers, grounding British jazz and blues in emotional reality rather than romantic abstraction.

Highbrow jazz critics have often dismissed Barber as musically conservative, particularly as bebop and modern jazz acquired intellectual prestige. Yet this criticism misses the point. Barber did not reject modern forms; he insisted instead that traditional jazz possessed its own integrity and contemporary relevance. His vision of progress — rooted in continuity, collective expression and rhythmic drive — offered a legitimate alternative to the notion that harmonic complexity



alone equated to artistic advancement. In any case, the commercial success of his work forced the music establishment to take trad jazz seriously.

By the end of the 1950s, the trad boom was already ebbing, displaced first by skiffle's evolution into rock and roll and then, in the 1960s, by beat music, which effectively ended trad's place in the pop charts. Yet Barber's influence endured. Many rock musicians later acknowledged the impact of the Black American artists Barber had brought to Britain, and the pathways he helped open.

Chris Barber's contribution to 1950s British trad jazz cannot be measured solely by recordings or stylistic innovation. His lasting achievement and that of a handful of others was to transform traditional jazz from a revivalist niche into a national movement, while maintaining its connection to African-American origins and working-class audiences. His legacy survives in the many trad jazz clubs that still exist today, even if their numbers were sharply reduced by the Covid lockdown.

In the mid-1950s, Britain was searching for new musical forms. Chris Barber was one of those who found one and handed it to the country. He did not simply revive traditional jazz — he made it exciting, liberating and, for a generation of young people, genuinely intoxicating.

SCARBOROUGH JAZZ FESTIVAL

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JIMMY YANCEY – CHICAGO POET

More than just a boogie woogie pianist, JIMMY YANCEY seldom gets the praise he deserves. ANDREW LITTLE sets the record straight.

The first Jimmy Yancey recording I ever heard was *At the Window Blues*, and it stopped me in my tracks. From the opening bars, the lyrical tenderness and emotional profundity were entirely different from anything I had encountered before. It felt as though he were speaking directly to me.

At fifteen, I knew immediately that this was the man for me, musically speaking, for life. Other boogie pianists often excite at first hearing, but the effect can be short-lived: one CD is usually enough to be going on with. Yancey is different. His playing is so inventive and meditative that I never tire of listening, and each return brings something new. His reflective pieces, in particular, seem to change their meaning depending on my own mood, revealing new depths over time as I grow older.

James Edward Yancey was born in Chicago in 1898 and died there in 1951. His life spans the formative period in African-American music, bridging the rural blues traditions of the late nineteenth century and the urban styles that emerged during the Great Migration north. His music reflects a profound identification with the city that shaped him and with the slow, spacious Chicago blues style that bears his imprint.

Whilst Chicago was becoming a hotbed of jazz, absorbing Southern musical forms and reshaping them, Yancey seems to have participated in this process in his own quiet way. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he was never a touring artist and spent almost his entire adult life in the city, rooted in a local world of steady work as a groundsman and of playing at rent parties.

Largely self-taught, his playing absorbed ragtime, blues, spirituals, and popular song, but he transformed these influences into something uniquely personal. What emerged was a style that resists neat classification and

seems to exist slightly outside the linear narratives of jazz history.

Although Yancey is now synonymous with early boogie-woogie, his approach differs profoundly from the more famous exponents of the style, forming his own brand of reflective boogie. Pianists such as Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis, and Pete Johnson favour speed, drive, and rhythmic insistence. Yancey's tempos, by contrast, are often slow and unhurried. His left hand avoids the mechanical repetition of the four-note habanera, favouring instead a gently rocking bass with subtle hesitations, irregular accents, and broken patterns.

Like many Chicago musicians of his time, he performed at rent parties—informal gatherings held in private homes to raise money for rent, where neighbours crowded into small rooms and musicians were paid in food, drink, and small change. Yancey's variation of boogie tempo, lyrical phrasing and sensitivity to mood were said to have been perfect for these occasions: encouraging dancing without drowning out conversation. His ability as an accompanist must have encouraged, and indeed inspired, others to sing the blues.

Remarkably, Yancey did not record until 1939, when he was already in his forties and had been playing for decades. His first recordings were made for the small Solo Art label, largely as a result of the growing interest in boogie-woogie sparked by younger pianists who openly acknowledged his influence. Even then, only a handful of sides were issued at the time; much of what he recorded remained unreleased until after his death.

This late and fragmentary entry into the recording world seems entirely characteristic. Later sessions for Bluebird and other labels, including recordings with his wife Estelle 'Mama' Yancey, preserved more of his art, but sales were modest. It has largely



been through posthumous reissues - LPs and later CD collections assembling his complete recorded works - that his reputation has steadily grown.

On the surface, Yancey's music can sound simple and, yes, he often confines himself to a basic three-chord structure, consistently avoiding harmonic excess or overt technical display. Yet this simplicity is deceptive. Within these narrow limits, he achieves extraordinary beauty and expressiveness. There is genuine blues feeling in every note he plays: joy, anguish, tenderness, and powerful, unforced emotion. Pieces such as *Slow and Easy Blues*, *Four O'Clock Blues*, *How Long Blues*, and *LaSalle Street Breakdown* unfold at their own pace; *Slow and Easy Blues*, in particular, seems quietly to characterise both man and style.

Although he has his loveable mannerisms - familiar musical phrases that recur from one piece to another - he transforms each into something unforgettable. Harmonically,

Yancey stretches and reshapes the twelve-bar blues form, extending phrases or leaving them unresolved. He never builds toward climaxes but will terminate with quirky abruptness.

As the pianist Art Hodes observed, it is almost impossible to capture the sheer beauty, expressiveness and invention of Yancey's playing. And this was coming from one of the musicians who came closest to achieving that elusive style in tribute. Anyone who has tried to play Yancey's music with conviction quickly realises how true this is. The notes themselves are easy enough; the feeling is not.

Among his best-known compositions, *Yancey Special* stands as a masterpiece of the blues piano repertoire. Its mid-tempo boogie rhythm and lyrical right-hand lines are the quintessence of his mature style. It brought his name to wider attention thanks to Bob Crosby's big-band recording in the late 1930s, which translated its

restrained power into a swinging orchestral context.

Central to Yancey's recorded legacy is *Mama*, whose contribution cannot be overstated. She possessed a superb blues voice: warm, grainy, and deeply expressive, with an unaffected authority that perfectly matched her husband's understated piano. Her singing carries the same sincere blend of joy and sorrow, and together they created a perfect whole. After his death in 1951, *Mama* continued to perform and record, ensuring that his music was not forgotten.

Despite his seminal importance, Yancey lived a quiet, unassuming life. For many years he worked as a groundskeeper at Comiskey Park, home of the Chicago White Sox. He seldom left the city, nor did he cultivate a public persona. His influence spread instead through personal contact, informal gatherings, and the deep impression he made on fellow musicians. This modesty may partly explain why Yancey remains underrepresented in

blues histories. Bearing in mind the vast number of biographies devoted to jazz figures, it is astonishing that no full-length biography appears to exist.

Among musicians themselves, however, Yancey's stature was never in doubt. Many of the great boogie-woogie pianists openly acknowledged him as the central figure and their primary inspiration, recognising him as a great originator, from whom their own faster, more extrovert approaches developed. In this sense, Yancey stands as a musician's musician: less celebrated in print, perhaps, but acknowledged by many of his peers as the main man.

In Britain, I occasionally hear echoes of Yancey in the playing of George Webb, although his style is generally more energetic and overtly boogie-based. The resemblance lies less in surface detail than in an underlying respect for space, atmosphere, and unforced swing. As Art Hodes suggested, many have come near, but Yancey himself remains essentially inimitable.

To me, Jimmy Yancey is a great soul: a tender heart, a poet at the piano. I sometimes think of him as akin to John Clare, the so-called peasant poet—another man who lived a life of toil, created art of rare poignancy, and stirred deep emotion while more virtuosic contemporaries

merely dazzled. Both men are reflective, humane, and quietly profound.

Sixty years on, his piano still gently thrills, still speaks directly, still moves intimately.



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WHO WAS FREDDIE MIRFIELD?

RON SIMPSON embarks on a (largely unsuccessful) quest to find out more about the man he remembers entertaining audiences at the Grand, Old Hill, in the Black Country, in the early 1950s.

If you look at the records of British jazz in the 1940s and 1950s one name that keeps recurring in different guises is Freddie Mirfield. Some of us who remember the crazy band – Freddie Mirfield and the Garbage Men – in 1950s variety were a little surprised to find that Freddie's band won a *Melody Maker* Dixieland Jazz Band competition in the late 1940s. Rumours of various illustrious jazzers starting their career with Freddie were borne out by Lake's reissue of *Good Old Wagon Blues* on Volume 10 of its *Jazz at a Tangent* series – *Jazz Rarities*, one track for each band – with a front line of Freddy Randall, Dennis Croker and Johnny Dankworth, plus Sam Dowell on tenor sax! This seems to have been Freddie Mirfield's only released recording, with *Miss Annabelle Lee* on the B side, though apparently two more sides were cut, but not released. Even more oddly, these tracks went out under the name of 'Freddie Mirfield and his Garbage Men', though he used other more savoury titles at other times. You can catch *Miss Annabelle Lee* on Youtube, neat solos from the front-liners, Freddie Mirfield inconspicuous on drums.

Born in 1908, Freddie Mirfield died in Southend on 1974. Now and again the Freddie Mirfield Band/Orchestra/Garbage Men appear through the mists of time as, for instance, an appearance in the early Goons film, *Let's Go Crazy*, or an unexpected variety appearance as Freddie Mirfield's Harmonica Orchestra in 1947 – something like Morton Frazer's Harmonica Gang, perhaps. Nowhere, except in *Let's Go Crazy*, is there much to connect with the manic jazz band that entranced audiences at the Grand, Old Hill, an unassuming variety theatre, later to be converted to the Plaza Ballroom. And sadly all I can recall is the trombone slide knocking off the hat of the musician in front – no question it was not Dennis Croker, any more than Messrs. Randall and Dankworth were still plying their trade with Mirfield!

The fact that he died in Southend prompts a message to the Sage of Southend, Digby Fairweather. His



reply would surely tell us about Freddie Mirfield, the jazzier, or even the drummer behind the Garbage Men:

'I met Freddie Mirfield, I think it would have been around 1965. I'd joined my first "real" band – it actually had an electric keyboard and a P.A. system – and saxophonist Mike Neal (who I still see at the Sands 60 years later) was the leader. His group was called The Mel Lewis Band because Mike had heard vaguely of the great American drummer of the same name and thought it sounded hip! We also moonlighted as The Machine, playing soul music: Redding, Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd and so on.

'One night we were playing at Southend Kursaal for a function and there was a very smart MC complete with scarlet coat and all the trimmings. I was playing very well then and some time during the evening he buttonholed me and said, "You sound just like Freddy Randall." – one of my biggest heroes. Then he shook my hand and said, "I'm Freddie Mirfield." Of course I knew him straight away as the one-time leader of the Garbage Men which had both Freddy R and John Dankworth in the band along with Dennis Croker on trombone, a wonderful Dixieland player who knew the ropes. So we got on very well and Freddie

(M) told me he was about to open some kind of showroom/garage with Kenny Ball at Rettendon a week later. So my (very patient) mother and I drove over a week or so later to find it – but no such luck!

No such luck in the pursuit of Freddie Mirfield and the Garbage

Men either! But Digby did pass us on to Tony Compton, jazz accordionist and great friend of Freddie Mirfield, whose memories chimed with Digby's when he told us that Freddie gave up the band in his later years to become a toastmaster – very popular at the Masonics, apparently.



Not the elusive Mr Mirfield, but the other Freddy - Randall

Tony was 19 when he first met Freddie. One day he received a call to say that the accordion player had gone sick at Selsey Bill holiday resort and could he step in as the band had another week to play. He went, the band was Freddie Mirfield's and the two of them gelled immediately.

It's interesting that Tony is full of reminiscences of Freddie and his wife Patsy, but all he can remember of the band is that it was 'a five or six piece band'. Similarly Freddie's drumming seems not to have made much impression, though he mentions that he 'could blow a tune on a trombone' in addition to his work on his main instrument.

Patsy, though, was a different matter. A skilled needlewoman who worked for Christian Dior, she made Tony's sister's wedding dress, but also took a main part in his favourite anecdote of the Garbage Men. At one point in the act she was supposed to burst through a harp (with rubber strings, of course), but one night something went wrong and she was catapulted into the orchestra pit. The audience loved it and,

needless to say, a mattress went into the pit and the routine went into the act.

In his later years Freddie moved to Southend, but before that he had an elegant top floor flat 'just at the back of Harrod's'. Tony often drove him back after gigs and on one memorable occasion, as the night wore on, Freddie remarked, 'You'd better be going home if you don't want to find your car stolen.' Inevitably that was what had happened, with his accordion on the back seat! Apparently the policeman at the local station showed little interest until Freddie told him there was a valuable musical instrument involved.

Tony is full of details about Freddie, 'a tall elegant man with a pencil moustache, well spoken, with a dark brown voice, the very image of your West End musician' – but not quite what you expect of a man who presided over one of the crazier comedy bands, on a par with Sid Millward and the Nitwits (who, incidentally, once offered Tony Compton a job) and Dr. Crock's Crackpots. Not only that, but Tony assures me

that Freddie knew the master of the genre, Spike Jones – he was actually billed as Britain's answer to Spike Jones in a variety bill. For some reason that time he was billed as 'Freddie Mirfield's Band', an innocent-sounding name for a master of mayhem.

Tony was with Freddie Mirfield when he died in hospital in Southend of lung cancer ('The last few days he was like a vegetable') after a lifetime of heavy smoking. Sadly Patsy followed a year later, never having smoked, of the same disease.

Oddly Tony has no idea of Freddie's career before he suddenly burst on the scene in his mid-30s: 'so far as I knew, he'd always led his own band.' Similarly, photographs of the tall elegant man with the pencil moustache are conspicuous by their absence, so we're left with no more than vague memories of the joys of Freddie Mirfield and the Garbage Men.

So what is left when memories fail? Artificial intelligence is the answer! Not in the case of the elusive Freddie Mirfield. A

thorough search confirms much that we had already established and throws up the added information that he once led the band on the *Caronia*, but nothing else.

So what do we have?

A complete blank until, at the age of 36, he recorded with some very promising young British jazzers.

Just over a decade of success, leading various bands at West End ballrooms, holiday camps and ocean liners, plus topping the bill at less than glamorous theatres.

Playing hotel gigs in London, ringing Tony Compton to play accordion whenever he was required.

At least a further decade, retired from music, making a success of being a toastmaster.

It's a disappointing summary of 66 years. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who can fill in any of the gaps (especially that irritating hiatus in the 1930s). Email jazzrag@bigbearmusic.com.

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Marius Neset

everyone will be able to get to most, if not all, of the events in both the main Festival and the Fringe. The Fringe will include mainly locally-based (North West) artists who are making exciting and creative music.'

Interestingly enough Neil is a busy and successful musician, but not in the field of jazz. He claims his music is difficult to pin down, so what effect does this have on his work as a jazz festival organiser? Clearly he is very well informed about the jazz scene without (it seems) allegiance to any particular school of jazz.

'I've composed and recorded quite a body of music over the years that I think has formed its own style (my style) which is difficult to pin down in terms of genre. The music I've made has emerged really from two things. First, my beginnings as a classical guitarist who decided to mainly play his own music, rather than other composer's pieces. Secondly, I've always been most interested in music that is not so easily categorised as being in any particular genre, and my musical interests and tastes are very wide, and that has seeped into my own output. My own music touches on jazz in a way, at times, mainly because I really love interesting and elegant chord progressions, but there is not usually a great deal of improvisation involved and I certainly wouldn't classify myself as a jazz player *per se*.

'I think, though, that's why my programming of the Festival is fairly broad stylistically. I'm not a

hardcore jazz person with regard to the canon of what is considered to be important so, for instance, in "jazz" I am happy to embrace (in fact really enjoy) things like 70s fusion recordings by people like Jan Hammer or Jean Luc Ponty or even, say, Steely Dan; music that some jazz aficionados could possibly be sniffy about. So when programming the Festival I'm really organising a series of concerts for someone like me; someone who is basically into adventurous (but not necessarily "avant garde") music-making.

'My focus for programming the Festival is on contemporary instrumental jazz and I'm particularly interested in offering a mix of international artists whose work often crosses into various genres, including fusions with rock, electronic music, world music, classical music and other styles. For instance, since the start we have worked with the arts organisation Milap each year to jointly present a concert in the Festival that fuses aspects of Indian classical music with jazz. Ultimately I want the programme to be both accessible and challenging and I want it to appeal to an audience that reaches beyond the jazz crowd. The festival really is for anyone who is interested in creative music-making.'

His enthusiasm is infectious. Asked to list memorable gigs from previous years, he immediately comes up with a list of over 20 names, but what about this year? Two concerts on the final day feature the Marius Neset Quartet



Martin Taylor

'LIJF was established in 2013 by Liverpool Hope University at the Capstone Theatre and has run every year since (except in 2021). This next 2026 incarnation will be its 13th. The Capstone Theatre opened its doors in 2010 and I have been responsible for programming and managing the venue from the beginning. Whilst there was a local grassroots jazz scene in Liverpool (which has continued to grow over the years and is now quite vibrant), at the time of the Capstone Theatre's opening, jazz as a genre was quite under-represented in the Liverpool live scene. One of our first concerts was by Courtney Pine. The success of this concert led us to the idea of establishing Liverpool's first ever jazz festival (LIJF). I decided from the start that LIJF would focus on programming accessible but contemporary,

predominantly instrumental jazz by artists operating at an international level. It was decided that the Festival would place its emphasis on musical creativity, innovation and excellence.

'There are six main concerts taking place at the Capstone Theatre throughout the Festival's four days (February 26 – March 1). These are concerts by Tim Garland and Geoffrey Keezer; David Helbock and Julia Hofer; Zoe Rahman and Arun Ghosh; Robert Mitchell's Little Black Book; Martin Taylor and Marius Neset Quartet. Alongside this core of main concerts, there is a Fringe Festival being organised and run by Parr Jazz, a local jazz promoter, and this will take place in venues across the City with Fringe concerts and events organised to fit around the Capstone's main programme. This means that

and Martin Taylor playing solo, an event that must be of particular interest to Neil as a guitarist. Clearly he is looking forward to both these events:

'Marius is returning to us after playing at the Festival just a couple of years ago at what was, in my view, the best jazz concert we've ever staged at the Capstone. The band was explosive. Individually they are obviously all virtuosos but it was the interplay that was so impressive. The musicianship as a band was at such another level that they all seemed to be telepathically connected. They really need to be seen live to appreciate the experience - the recordings, whilst great, really don't give you the full picture of the power of that band. Marius is a genius and his work cuts across so many styles and incorporates so many musical ideas compositionally. The music is exciting and usually very active with interesting off-kilter propulsive grooves, but then it can go into very atmospheric phases too. I'm so pleased that he is returning for this forthcoming Festival. If one were to only see one of these concerts that is the one I would recommend.

'Martin really is an extremely impressive musician - really one of the greats, lauded by other wonderful musicians such as Pat Metheny. We are very fortunate to have him play. This will be the second time he has been to the Capstone - the first was many years ago as part of a duo with folk musician Martin Simpson. I'm really looking forward to the concert. He has a gentleness of approach, a tastefulness and a level of understatement, that I really admire. Rather like Pat Metheny's solo playing or someone like Philip Catherine, who I was overjoyed to have perform at the Festival a few years ago, his playing isn't about showing off but is always in service to the music. It's a lovely concert to present on a Sunday afternoon too.'

The Capstone Theatre is very conveniently placed for Liverpool Hope University students. How does this affect the audience for LIJF? Is it predominantly a student audience?

'All the concerts staged as part of the Capstone's artistic programme throughout the year, including LIJF, offer free tickets for our own

students. The Capstone Theatre is located within Liverpool Hope's Creative Campus where subjects such as Music, Musical Theatre, Drama, Dance and Fine Art are taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level, so bringing in such stellar artists allows a wonderful opportunity for our students to see some great concerts and often talk to the artists afterwards.

'But broadly speaking our audience is drawn from far and wide, especially LIJF where people often travel from other countries to attend the Festival. There is also quite a familial atmosphere with many "regulars" returning to attend several concerts throughout the year, and it has been very encouraging to see friendly faces at our events (including at some of our electronic music concerts or storytelling shows - not just jazz). The last couple of years, post-pandemic, have seen very sizeable increases in audience numbers for LIJF, so there is clearly a strong appetite for live music.'

So we have a situation where students are ideally placed to attend and where audiences from

further afield have continued to grow - an ideal situation, but one question remains. Does Neil himself play at the Festival?

'It's a good question. Basically, the answer is no. At times I have played in the Capstone Theatre either solo or with one project or another. It is a great space to play in, a lovely intimate space. However, I have avoided, and continue to avoid, programming myself as part of LIJF though because I don't, in my heart of hearts, consider what I do to be sufficiently jazzy for it to sit within the programmes I put together. Perhaps the right project will come around at some point where a concert from me would be "appropriate" but in the meantime I'm happy to champion and present the work of some of the great artists that have played, and are about to grace the stage next month.'

For full details and box office please visit www.thecapstonetheatre.com/jazzfestival

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SCOTT YANOW reports from the Roaring 20s.



Miles Davis

1926 was right in the middle of the roaring twenties. Electric recording was quickly replacing the primitive acoustic technology and, with the improvement of the recording quality, lots of classic jazz was being recorded. Louis Armstrong's series of Hot Five recordings (with the great clarinetist Johnny Dodds and trombonist Kid Ory) included *Heebie Jeebies* which helped popularize scat-singing and the virtuosic *Cornet Chop Suey*. Jelly Roll Morton made some of his finest recordings with his Red Hot Peppers. Duke Ellington's *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* from later in the year found him establishing the Ellington jungle style with cornetist Bubber Miley. Making their recording debuts that year were Bing Crosby, Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller, the latter two with Ben Pollack's band. Other top jazz artists who made notable recordings in 1926 included Clarence Williams, Jimmy Blythe, the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, Red Nichols, the Original Memphis Five, Ethel Waters, Ida Cox, Bessie Smith, the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks, Luis Russell, the California Ramblers, Paul Whiteman, Oscar Celestin, the Halfway House Orchestra, the New Orleans Owls, King Oliver's Dixie Syncopators, Isham Jones, Fess Williams, Erskine Tate, Freddie Keppard, the Savoy Bearcats, Joe Venuti, Annette Hanshaw and Fats Waller (mostly on organ).

However all of that is quite irrelevant to this article which celebrates the centennial of the jazz greats who happened to be born in 1926, none of whom

contributed anything to the jazz scene of the 1920s or even the '30s. Those who were born in 1926 grew up listening to the big bands of the Swing era, had to find a way to eventually escape from the potentially dominant influences of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie to develop their own sounds, and in most cases made their mark in the 1950s and '60s. None are still alive. However four survive from earlier times: 104-year old trumpeter Ray Anthony (class of 1922), singer Annette Warren (also class of 1922) who is 103, and a pair of 101-year olds from the class of 1924: altoist-bandleader Marshall Allen (who is still active leading the Sun Ra Arkestra) and vibraphonist Terry Gibbs.

The 27-piece mythical Class Of 1926 big band consists of four trumpeters, three trombonists, two alto-saxophonists, four tenors but no baritonist, a vibraphonist who doubles on mellophone, two guitarists, three pianists, an organist, three bassists, two drummers, and two singers.

Those from 1926 who did not make the cut despite their obvious talent include trumpeters Roger Guerin, Bernie Glow, and Buddy Childers, trombonists George Masso, Milt Bernhart, and Melba Liston (also notable as an arranger), clarinetists Bill Smith and Cy Laurie, altoists Pony Poindexter and Ernie Henry, tenor-saxophonists Don Rendell, Herbie Steward, and Tommy Whittle, guitarist Elek Bacsik, pianists Chris Anderson and Stan

Tracey, organist Lou Bennett, bassists Monty Budwig and Jimmy Woode, drummer Dave Bailey, and singers Tony Bennett (a lover of jazz rather than a jazz singer), Jeri Southern, and Bill Henderson. Obviously a second bandstand is needed!

Here are the 27 members of what would have been a truly remarkable band:

Miles Davis (1926-1991)

An innovator with his own sound no matter what the setting, a masterful talent scout, a consistently influential force up to the present time, a larger-than-life personality, and one of the few jazz musicians to constantly evolve and reinvent himself, the trumpeter was a pioneer not only in cool-toned jazz but hard bop, modal music, post-bop (his 1960s quintet), and a few types of fusion.

Johnny Coles (1926-1997)

A fine hard bop trumpeter, Coles worked with James Moody, Gil Evans and both Duke Ellington (1971-74) and the Count Basie Orchestras (when the latter was led by Thad Jones) but was at his best during his few months with the Charles Mingus Sextet in 1964.

Ray Copeland (1926-1984)

The trumpeter had a wide range and was able to play lead in big bands while also offering high-quality solos. He is best remembered for his work with Randy Weston and especially Thelonious Monk (in 1954, 1957 and 1967).

Johnny Windhurst (1926-1981)

Completing the trumpet section is the only member of the band who performed regularly with trad and Dixieland groups. Windhurst worked with Sidney Bechet when he was 18 and had associations with Edmond Hall, Eddie Condon, Jack Teagarden, and Barbara Lea.

Jimmy Cleveland (1926-2008)

One of the most fluent bop-oriented trombonists of the 1950s, Cleveland worked with Lionel Hampton during 1950-53, led small group dates, and appeared on quite a few excellent

records during 1953-60 including with Art Farmer, Dizzy Gillespie, Quincy Jones, Joe Newman, Oscar Pettiford, and Maynard Ferguson. After that period he was mostly heard anonymously in the sections of big bands.

Urbie Green (1926-2018)

A very technically skilled trombonist who often worked in the studios, Green toured with Woody Herman and Benny Goodman, appeared on over 250 albums, and led over 20, excelling in everything from bop and swing to Dixieland.

Frank Rosolino (1926-1978)

One should forget Rosolino's horrible final act when looking at his career. Until then he was a good-humored trombonist and occasional singer who was one of the stars of Stan Kenton's orchestra before becoming an important figure in West Coast jazz including a long period with Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse All-Stars.

Bud Shank (1926-2009)

The altoist, who doubled on flute, worked with Stan Kenton, recorded pioneering Brazilian jazz with guitarist Laurindo Almeida during 1953-54 that predated bossa-nova, was on a countless number of West Coast jazz sessions in the 1950s, worked in the studios in the 1960s, and was a member of the LA Four during 1974-82. Since the 1926 band lacks a baritonist, the versatile Shank could always fill in.



Bud Shank

Photo by Daniel Shen

Lou Donaldson (1926-2024)

'Sweet Papa Lou' was inspired on alto-sax by Charlie Parker but had his own soulful sound and style. Always a bluesy bebopper even in soul jazz settings, Donaldson's long series of recordings for Blue Note (whether leading quartets, all-star sessions, or organ groups) made him well-known as did his hit *Alligator Boogaloo*. Active until 2017, Donaldson enjoyed making humorous remarks about the avant-garde and fusion that could not help make one chuckle.

John Coltrane (1926-1967)

Ranking with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis as one of jazz's most significant innovators, Coltrane on tenor and soprano during 1955-67 created enough new ideas (ranging from introducing a passionate tone on his instruments and improvising sheets of sound to essentially breaking the sound barrier during his final two years) to fill several lifetimes.

Jimmy Heath (1926-2020)

As a tenor-saxophonist who also played alto, soprano and flute at various times in his career in addition to being a well-respected arranger and composer, Heath was always a very valuable musician to have around.

Billy Mitchell (1926-2001)

A significant part of the Detroit jazz scene of the early-to-mid 1950s, Mitchell came to prominence with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band (taking a blazing solo at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival on *Cool Breeze*), had two stints with the Count Basie Orchestra, and co-led a group with trombonist Al Grey that featured vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson.

Bobby Jaspar (1926-1963)

Equally skilled on tenor and flute, Jaspar (who was from Belgium) helped to introduce bebop to Europe with the Bop Shots in the late 1940s. He was married to Blossom Dearie during 1954-57, spent a few years in the U.S., worked with Miles Davis, J.J. Johnson, Chet Baker and Donald Byrd among others, and had a quintet with guitarist Rene Thomas before his early death from a heart attack.

Don Elliott (1926-1984)

Jazz's second great mellophonist (preceded by Dudley Fosdick in the 1920s), Elliott was also an

excellent vibraphonist (his main instrument in the 1926 band), trumpeter, and singer. While his main work through the years was in the studios (including being a pioneer with multitrack recording and composing jingles for advertising and film scores), Elliott led at least 16 jazz albums in the 1950s on his various instruments in addition to making many dates as a sideman.

Bucky Pizzarelli (1926-2020)

A tasteful swing guitarist who gave the impression that he could play with anyone, Pizzarelli worked with Benny Goodman, George Barnes and Joe Venuti, was a staff musician for NBC for many years, and was the father of John Pizzarelli.

Jimmy Gourley (1926-2008)

Because he permanently lived in France starting in 1951, few probably realize that Gourley was an American originally from St. Louis. A very skilled cool-toned bop guitarist who was inspired by Lee Konitz, Gourley was always in great demand, working with top French jazz musicians and such Americans passing through France as Clifford Brown, Stan Getz, Bob Brookmeyer, Bud Powell, Lester Young, Lucky Thompson, and Zoot Sims.

Randy Weston (1926-2018)

As a pianist (inspired by Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk), composer (including *Hi-Fly* and *Little Niles*), bandleader, educator (often talking about the African connection to the formation of jazz), and physically (he was 6'8"), Weston was a giant.

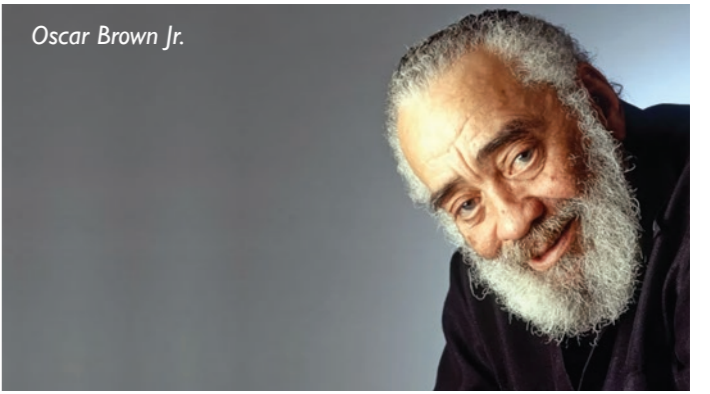
Russ Freeman (1926-2002)

The definitive 'cool jazz' pianist, Freeman's performances and recordings with Chet Baker, Shelly Manne, Art Pepper, Shorty Rogers, and Benny Goodman through the mid-1960s preceded years as a studio musician and musical director for others.

Claude Williamson (1926-2016)

The pianist began with Charlie Barnet's bebop orchestra during 1947-49 (including his feature *Claude Reigns*), before working with the Lighthouse All-Stars, Pete Rugolo, June Christy, Bud Shank, and throughout the West Coast jazz scene of the 1950s. He was less active after 1962 but recorded quite a bit during 1977-78, and occasionally

Oscar Brown Jr.



up until 1996 in his unchanged Bud Powell-inspired style.

Jack McDuff (1926-2001)

A bit of a late bloomer, McDuff was originally a bassist but in 1960 he made his recording debut as an organist. While his most significant groups were in the 60s including a band with the young guitarist George Benson (Pat Martino would be his successor) and tenor-saxophonist Red Holloway, McDuff kept the groove going during the relatively lean 1970s and was still one of the organ's top players in the 1990s.

Ray Brown (1926-2002)

Throughout his career, whether it was his long association with Oscar Peterson, his work with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band and the L.A. Four, or his own trios (which at times featured pianists Gene Harris, Benny Green, and Geoff Keezer), Ray Brown showed the world what an acoustic bass should sound like.

Curtis Counce (1926-1963)

An excellent bassist who started out with Johnny Otis in 1945 and Lester Young the following year, Counce worked with Shorty Rogers, Teddy Charles and the Stan Kenton Orchestra (1956) but is most notable for the four hard bop albums that he led for the Contemporary label during 1956-58.

Jymie Merritt (1926-2020)

While he worked with B.B. King, Chet Baker, Max Roach, and Lee Morgan, Merritt will always be best known for being the supportive bassist with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers during 1957-62.

Stan Levey (1926-2005)

A bit unheralded, Levey was one of the first and very best bebop drummers, working with Dizzy Gillespie as early as 1942, appearing on over 1,000 recordings (including classic sides with Gillespie and

Charlie Parker), driving Stan Kenton's greatest band (1952-53), uplifting sessions with the top West Coast jazz musicians, and working as a studio musician before he retired from music altogether in 1973 to become a photographer.

Sonny Payne (1926-1979)

Since the Class of 1926 is a big band, Payne would be the perfect drummer for the group since he was not only Count Basie's drummer during 1954-64 but also worked with the orchestras of Erskine Hawkins and Harry James.

Oscar Brown Jr. (1926-2005)

Not just a singer but a masterful lyricist (*Dat Dere*, *Work Song*, *Afro Blue*, *Jeannine*, and *All Blues*), playwright, actor, television host of *Jazz Scene USA*, and civil rights activist, Brown was a genius in his own way and put on performances that were both entertaining and thought-provoking.

Julie London (1926-2000)

An actress who was at first reluctant to sing in public, her first album resulted in a big hit in 1955, *Cry Me A River*. While her albums became as famous for her glamorous photos as for her singing, London had an appealing quality to her quietly sensuous and vulnerable voice that resulted in a series of lightly swinging albums that are still cherished.

Just imagine what the Class Of 1926 Big Band would have sounded like around 1960.

Scott Yanow was not born in 1926 but has long enjoyed the music of each of these artists. He can be reached for liner notes (he has written 1,005), bios, press releases and other interesting assignments at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

REVISITING JAZZ

RON SIMPSON takes another look at a seminal jazz book.

Nearly 70 years ago I bought what we then thought of as a seminal jazz book, *Jazz* by Rex Harris, for the princely sum of 3 shillings and sixpence (17 ½ pence for junior readers). It was a difficult time to write such a book: the fifth edition (1957) contained five prefaces, mainly dealing with the changes in the way long playing records were dealt with – between 1952 (first publication) and 1957 the record industry went through wholesale changes. Even in 1957 Harris finds himself frequently referring to records that were then unobtainable in the UK – and, of course, in live performance, the Musicians Union ban on American bands was still in place in 1952 and only just lifted in 1957.

In terms of developments in jazz Harris faced a time of constant change. The bebop revolution was firmly established: in fact two of the most influential musicians of their generation, Charlie Parker and Clifford Brown, were dead by the time of the 5th edition. The music of the previous jazz generation was still finding new ways of entertaining: every year between 1952 and 1957 (and a fair bit on either side) Norman Granz took his Jazz at the Philharmonic package on the road to Europe in the Spring and around the States in Autumn, whilst Paul Gonsalves' epic 27 choruses on *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* at Newport reminded us that the big band era wasn't quite done yet – Count Basie's 16 men swinging offered the same reminder. Over these years Mingus introduced us to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Brubeck went to college and Billie Holiday and Lester Young stirred up memories on *The Sound of Jazz*.

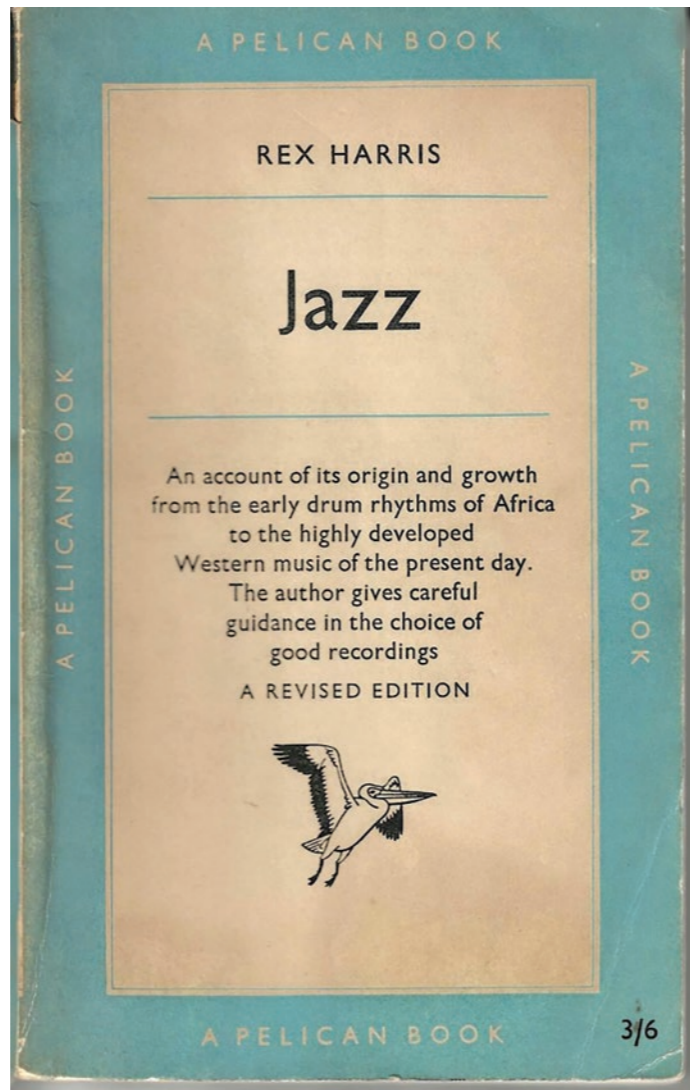
So Rex Harris had plenty to keep up with and falling behind post-1952 developments is eminently forgivable. Certainly the current readers commenting on the book on Amazon are extremely tolerant. One reminds us of Harris' supremely crass aside, 'The tenor-saxophonist Coleman Hawkins possessed great powers of improvisation which, had they been canalised into a different medium of expression, e.g. the clarinet, might well have secured

him a permanent place in jazz.' But all end up with four or five stars which, when you read the book 70 years on, is – to put it mildly – astonishing.

Let us take the Coleman Hawkins claim that proves not to be a sign of animus against Hawk, but part of a general philosophy. The Wolverines, we are told, let themselves down by including a tenor saxophone in their front line; Benny Carter, while 'a wonderful technician', is inferior to Tommy Ladnier as 'a jazz immortal' – incidentally, the 'who is best' attitude is particularly irritating in a lengthy debate on who was the King of New Orleans cornet players after Buddy Bolden disappeared into the asylum. As for clarinetists, Harris asserts, with total confidence, that 'any critic or enthusiast of clarinet playing' would choose as the greatest jazz clarinet player one of four: Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone, Sidney Bechet and Big Eye Louis Nelson. Incidentally he passes speedily over Bechet's long love affair with the soprano sax and Bruce Turner's role in the praised Lyttelton band: his regard for Humph must have been stretched by 1957 and disappeared by the following year.

And it's not only saxes he disapproves of: Lionel Hampton is, I think, the only vibes player mentioned, in a passing reference to 'that hybrid instrument which is totally unsuitable for jazz – the vibraphone.' Benny Goodman is praised for including black players in his band, but little else.

Perhaps the first jolt the reader gets is in Harris' scholarly dissertation on jazz's origins on the West Coast of Africa, the cruel enforcement of the Slave Code in the States and the origins of classic jazz. He quotes 'smell of magnolia, sweet and fresh' and 'smell of burnin' flesh', then adds a footnote: 'Quotation from Strange Fruit, Josh White.' Of course the song was written by Lewis Allen (Abel Meeropol) and performed by Billie Holiday in a landmark recording of 1939. So naturally you turn to the index to find Billie Holiday – no mention – and it gradually dawns



on you that virtually the only singers mentioned are Neva Raphaello and Ottilie Patterson – Ella gets a namecheck in a paragraph about Chick Webb, Sarah, Anita O'Day and Mel Torme no mention.

So what is Rex Harris' philosophy? Conveniently he states his credo:

'Jazz – the traditional jazz – still very much alive as long as it was played by men steeped in the virile tradition of New Orleans (his italics) ...was weakened as soon as the influence of European classical orthodoxy was felt.'

So you can guess where he places Ellington:

'Improvisation and freedom of expression were to play little part in Ellington's jazz.' What about those 27 choruses?

Basie fares a little better (he made 'a great success of swing'), but he is lumbered with the absurd statement that there is no such thing as Kansas City style. According to Harris, Benny Moten developed the riff, Count Basie took over his band and John Hammond discovered Basie, so everyone assumed that this was Kansas City style – there were no other bands to compare it to. No? What about the Blue Devils, Jay McShann, Harlan Leonard, etc.?

To be fair, Harris makes no excuse for trotting out his prejudices in the bluntest terms. He states clearly that the Swing Era is 'worthless'. His account of Louis Armstrong, one of his three great individualists (along with Bechet and Morton), draws a curtain across most of the 1930s: 'real jazz was neglected for a long time.' He is equally damning about the popular songs

of that era. Writing about early 'songs of courtship', he avoids the term 'love songs' because that suggests 'Tin Pan Alley slush' and he never misses a chance to have a go at George Gershwin, quoting Constant Lambert, 'the Blues have a certain austerity that places them far above the sweet nothings of George Gershwin.' A final unnecessary chapter on *The Influence of Jazz on Modern Composers* gives Harris the chance to put *Rhapsody in Blue* in its place: it's 'easy to listen to, titillates the senses and gives an impression that much is being said, musically speaking.'

The Original Dixieland Jazz Band is another regular target (with their 'tin cans and paper hats') which leads to an amusing faux pas, always the danger when one writes with such an assumption of superiority. Harris can't resist a further jibe at their tricks, including playing the trombone with their feet and then three pages later, writing approvingly of Muggsy Spanier's Ragtimers (an opinion with which I heartily concur), he writes, 'No better trombonist could have been chosen than Georg Brunis', one of whose favourite tricks was...playing the trombone with his feet!

An inevitable casualty of the date when the book was written comes in the Renaissance chapter in the part where Harris gives a brief run-down on the best British bands. It does seem odd that Len Beadle's Imperial Jazz Band should get a paragraph when elsewhere in the book the likes of Roy Eldridge, Art Tatum and Charlie Shavers don't, but it does no good to sneer at his judgment of British bands of his day. Oddly enough, one of the few things I remember from earlier readings is the reference to John Haim's Jelly Roll Kings, a highly promising, unrecorded band whose leader died in 1949 at the age of 19.

What I do object to comes near the end of the chapter: 'Those professional bands who have tried find that concessions have to be made to the funny hat legacy of the twenties. Nevertheless Joe Daniels, Harry Gold, Sid Phillips and Freddy Randall are to be congratulated in their efforts to popularize jazz.' 'Funny hat legacy' – what absurd nonsense!

Rex Harris 'combined a professional career of consulting optician with that of a jazz authority.' I suppose that page upon page on the origins and influences of jazz may have been enough to turn you into an 'authority' back in the day. Of course these were the days of the war between the traditionalists and the modernists and maybe Jazz could be viewed as a battle cry for the traditionalists, except that he not only takes issue with the beboppers by totally ignoring them, he also slams the modern influences he can hear in Sidney de Paris, Ed Hall and Red Allen – jazz for him was never the same once that Fletcher Henderson got going! Then he can affirm that jazz has 'reached a final and definitive form'.

Now there is one final objection to my increasingly bad-tempered account of Rex Harris' *Jazz*. How long has jazz existed? 110 years, 120? The last 70 of them are outside Harris' remit and have contained some marvellous music alongside what I struggle to recognise as jazz. If I were to write a 2025 version of *Jazz*, would it contain as many absurdities to the reader in 2095? Quite possibly, though mercifully jazz covers such a wide field that such an attempt is impossible, but there is a difference. Harris was writing to cover the whole field of jazz (it's not called *New Orleans Jazz*) and, by leaving out much of the best of jazz, intends 'to help dispel the prevalent misconceptions regarding the word "jazz"'. Let's hope that any future chronicler (and I think it was Alyn Supton's history that was billed as the final attempt to get all jazz between two covers) is not quite so narrow-minded and a bit more prepared to listen.

Jazz Rag would be delighted to receive any contribution from readers on the subject of memories revisited, whether they be memories of a recording, a concert, a book or anything that made an impact (or the reverse). And, if anyone would like to defend Rex Harris, that, too, would be most welcome.

Please send any contributions to Jazz Rag, P.O. Box 944, Birmingham, B16 8UT, or email jazzrag@bigbearmusic.com.

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RED NORVO THE SECRET SESSION



Red Norvo had taste. 'Mr Swing' also had a problem. In late 1942, Norvo knew that the United States' involvement in WWII would soon deplete his septet of key musicians and there was the small matter of the American Federation of Musicians strike which had effectively, and without exception, shuttered all the recording studios.

Red Norvo was not a man, or indeed a musician, to follow the rules and he persuaded a studio engineer to let them in on the sly. In the dead of night, the band 'gained access' to the equipment and began to play. 'Red Norvo: The Secret Session' is the result. More than 60 years after the clandestine operation, the previously unheard album is now available on CD and digital formats as part of the 'Legends' series.



RELEASE DATE:
30TH JANUARY, 2026

info@dottimerecords.com




EDDIE 'TAN TAN' THORNTON (1931 – 2025)

NORMAN DARWEN recalls the great Jamaican trumpeter.

The versatile Jamaican trumpeter Eddie 'Tan Tan' Thornton, who credited Clifford Brown as his major influence, died in London on 10th December. He was 94 years old.

Eddie was born in Spanish Town, Jamaica on 19th October 1931 and educated at Alpha Boys School in Kingston, which many of the island's leading musicians attended, among them Joe Harriott, Dizzy Reece, and Bertie King. The slightly older trombonist Don Drummond was a good friend and they worked together in The Roy Coburn Band in the early 50s, playing music by Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and others – they were the

first band to play live on radio in Jamaica. Eddie moved from there to the Eric Deans Band, another very highly respected outfit, and an early employer of guitarist Ernest Ranglin.

Eddie came to Europe in 1954; he initially worked mainly in Germany with other Caribbean jazz musicians, though he was living in England. In 1964, thanks to saxophonist Mick Eve, he joined the popular Georgie Fame & the Blue Flames in the UK (he had on occasion guested with them previously) and appeared on many of their records. Through their residency at London's Flamingo Club, he came to know many of the top musicians in 'swinging London', including Eric Clapton

and Jimi Hendrix, and he played on The Beatles' *Got To Get You Into My Life*. He also recorded with The Rolling Stones in 1967, and he was certainly part of the 'swinging 60s scene', working with bands such as The Animals and The Small Faces. He went on to work with acts as diverse as Bob Marley, reggae band Aswad, The Skatalites (mainly in the UK), Gary Crosby's Jazz Jamaica and Ska Cubano.

He recorded his own self-produced album in the early 80s with reggae band The Cimarrons, and continued to play on many recording sessions and shows, whether jazz, pop, ska or reggae. Only ill-health over the last couple of years finally slowed him down.



Photo by Wendy Collings

THE 36TH BUDE JAZZ FESTIVAL, 2025



Jake Leg Jug Band playing in the Methodist Church

The 36th Bude Jazz Festival was held from 26th August to 29th August 2025. It was another successful festival, and the Committee are finalising arrangements for the festival in 2026.

The format was similar to recent years with all the venues in walking distance of each other, two or three gigs at each venue per day, and staggered intervals so that festival goers could move around without encountering breaks. Most of venues were the same as in recent years and included the Falcon Hotel, the Ivor Potter Hall in the Parkhouse Centre, the Methodist Church,

the Carriers Inn, and 'Upstairs Social'. The bar and catering at the Parkhouse centre, by 'Outside Inn', were again very well received.

The festival included the usual parade and prizes were given for the best adult and children's brollies. Arrangements for the parade were altered in 2025 following a review of marshalling, and so a different route was adopted going along the Wharf, past the Castle to stop by the river for judging of the brollies. From there the parade returned via the Wharf to finish at the Brendon Arms. The new route received favourable comments.



The Parade leaving the Castle grounds

Other features included a strolling band playing at various locations around the town on two days, busking sessions outside the Falcon every morning, and dance lessons each day, led this year by the Swingsters, Mike and Mel.

Although the roots of the festival are in traditional jazz, this coming year there will also be bands playing gypsy, mainstream, swing, jump/jive, big band, skiffle, boogie-woogie as well as various eras of traditional jazz.

For those who might not know Bude it is an attractive seaside resort on the Atlantic coast of

Cornwall; the sea can be seen (or heard!) from some of the venues. There are wide sandy beaches and a sea pool. In between gigs there are lovely walks, over the downs, along the coast, or up the canal. Historic features include the breakwater, the storm tower, the canal sea lock (the only one in England), and the Castle Heritage centre/museum. There is plenty to do besides the jazz.

The 37th Bude Jazz Festival will run from Tuesday 1st September to Friday 4th September 2026.

PETER DANIEL

CD REVIEWS



RED NORVO
THE SECRET SESSION

Dot Time DT 8023: 45.20

1942 was a time of change for jazz. The Second World War had just started and the Swing Era was fading away in a mixture of conscriptions and the beginning of bebop. The record industry was in a state of stasis because of James Petrillo's stand-off with the record companies. In the career of Red Norvo he had broken up his big band and was about to switch from xylophone to vibraphone.

It was in this situation that Norvo inveigled himself into the studios with his new septet and recorded this 'secret session' which has only just come to light thanks to the late trombonist Eddie Bert. It shows Norvo finding new ways to be modernistic whilst at the same time showing his fluency, dexterity and innovation on the xylophone.

The opening two tracks, *One Note Jive* and *Speculatin'*, show Norvo hinting towards bebop in riff tunes that display the gruff and abrupt trombone of Bert to good effect, with sudden shifts in dynamics. On the other hand *Russian Lullaby*, later on the CD, finds another way forward with two minutes of elaborately orchestrated exploration of the melody before Norvo lightens the mood. Perhaps the most avant garde for the time is *Optical Illusion*, half-hints of melody and riff in an arrangement that makes you wish that Jerry Roche of Dot Time had been able, by some miracle, to identify the arrangers more precisely than his generalised list.

One of those arrangers is Shorty Rogers who also contributes lyrical trumpet to tunes such as *Rose Room*. Aaron Sachs is always evocative on clarinet and makes his mark on alto sax on songs such as *I May Be Wrong*. The pianist, who may or may not be Hank Kahout, impresses with his pointed economical style and Clyde Lombardi and Specs Powell complete the line-up, Powell splendid on a spirited *Bugle Call Rag*.

This is a remarkable 'in between' issue – a time when there were different answers to the question, 'What now?' – but above all it's an opportunity to admire the artistry of Norvo, racing away gloriously on the album's closer, *Liza*.

RON SIMPSON



PAUL WHITEMAN ORCHESTRA

WHISPERING: THE HITS COLLECTION, VOL. 1, 1920-27

Acrobat, ACFC D752170:56/69:39/69:19/71:22/70:03 5 CDs

Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra occupy a curious and instructive position in the history of recorded American music. Listening to Whiteman today, particularly these technically polished recordings from the 1920s, we undoubtedly find an attractive form of syncopated music - jazz as under-stood by many of his contemporaries. It is not, however, jazz as it is now conventionally understood, but rather a carefully mediated, orchestral reimagining of it. The big man, himself, famously spoke of 'making a lady out of jazz'.

Whiteman's ensembles were large, disciplined, and superbly arranged, drawing on classical orchestration as much as popular dance music. Recordings such

as the imperishable *Whispering*, which fairly rolls and rags and romps along, the tender-hearted *April Showers*, the enigmatic *Journey's End* and scores of others, display a smoothness and structural clarity that set them apart from the rougher, improvisation-driven jazz emerging from New Orleans and Chicago. The presence of classically trained musicians, and arrangers like Ferde Grofé - praised for his genius by Gershwin for orchestrating *Rhapsody in Blue* - gives these sides a breadth of colour and sense of architectural balance rare in early popular recordings.

At their best, Whiteman's records function as fascinating hybrids. They preserve the syncopated vitality of jazz rhythms while tempering them with lush strings, carefully scored brass, and an almost symphonic concern for form. This approach made jazz palatable to young and not-so-young audiences and helped legitimise it within Jazz Age mainstream culture, an achievement that should not be dismissed but often was by later purists.

Yes, these same qualities do undoubtedly render the music somewhat constrained and lacking what, to borrow a phrase from Durkheim, we might call 'collective effervescence'. For listeners attuned to the raw expressiveness of Louis Armstrong or the blues-inflected intensity of smaller jazz groups, they may sound over-civilised, even bloodless, their emotional range carefully managed rather than exploratory.

Nevertheless, as this superbly-got up 5-CD collection proves, it is as absurd to dismiss him as out-side the canon as it was for his contemporaries to hail him, as they were encouraged to do, as the 'King of Jazz'.

This first volume, featuring well in excess of a hundred of Whiteman's recorded hits, including 23 number ones, documents a pivotal moment when jazz was being negotiated, translated, and contested within American culture. They reward modern listeners not as pure jazz statements, but as elegant, historically revealing artefacts of

musical ambition and cultural mediation. Volume two will dust off a similar number of hits. The man's output was prodigious and, in that alone, it might be argued he did as much as anybody to usher in the Jazz Age.

ANDREW LIDDLE



PAUL WHITEMAN ORCHESTRA

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES, THE HITS COLLECTION, VOL. 2, 1928-54

Acrobat, ACRC D 7522, 5 CDs, 70.05/71.06/67.48/68.25/69.11

Possibly the greatest blow to Paul Whiteman's posthumous reputation came as a result of his being billed as the 'King of Jazz'. He wasn't, of course, but it has meant he tends to be judged as leader of a jazz band rather than, as Scott Yanow put it, someone who 'expertly mixed together occasional jazz pieces with semi-classical works, sweet and hot vocals, novelties, waltzes and first-class dance music.'

And at that he was the best – and the most popular: at the end of the second CD we are still on 1929, the second of the years of this collection. Volume 1 begins in waltz time, Whiteman's band excelling in little bridge passages, counter melodies, etc., in elaborate arrangements. This, of course, has the effect of slowing the momentum on the hot pieces like *You Took Advantage of Me*, but what a sax section! *Bing sings Ol' Man River*, not with the richness of Paul Robeson (who also recorded it with Whiteman), but with a rhythmic flexibility that moves it nearer to jazz – a fine saxophone solo (Trumbauer?) helps, too. *Mississippi Mud* is a romp with The Rhythm Boys, Bix unmistakably laying down the melody. Mysteriously, the hottest

record Whiteman ever made (in 1928), *San*, is missing from the CD.

CD 2 continues much the same way, with perky versions of songs such as *Makin' Whoopie* and *Let's Do It*, full of clever vocal choruses, smart key changes and brief solos from the best white jazzers of the time (plus attractive oddities such as bassoon solos) juxtaposed with a solemn version of *Silent Night* (bells and all) and the first part of Roy Bargy's assault on Gershwin's Piano Concerto. CD 3 is chock-full of great songs, some getting better treatment than others, *After You've Gone*, for example, Crosby vocal, lots of solos and breaks, a touch of Venuti and Lang, or a peppy instrumental version of *Nobody's Sweetheart*. A novelty from *King of Jazz* teams the Rhythm Boys with Lang, Mildred Bailey comes on the scene with *Sleepy Time Down South* and the CD ends with a semi-classical piece that I have always liked: Ferde Grofe's *On the Trail*.

CD 4 brings an excellent new singer, the knowing Ramona Davies, who tends to more sophisticated numbers such as *You're an Old Smoothie*; the orchestra is beginning to catch up with the burgeoning Swing Era (1933), a much smoother rhythm, though Whiteman keeps his taste for unusual instruments, marimba this time. By halfway through CD 5 we've reached 1936 and the hits have started to dry up, though nobody could have predicted the last in Whiteman's continuous run: *I'se a Muggin'*, two sides of the Three Ts (Jack and Charlie Teagarden, Frank Trumbauer) having fun and, above all, bringing a bit of jazz to the proceedings. The final three tracks (from 1942, 1943 and 1954) come as a real surprise: accompanying Billie Holiday on *Trav'lin' Light*, Jack Teagarden and Johnny Mercer romping through the Hoagy Carmichael gem, *The Old Music Master*, and finally a remake of Whiteman's very first record, *Whispering*, swanee whistle and all.

RON SIMPSON



FRASER SMITH QUARTET

LIFE LINE!

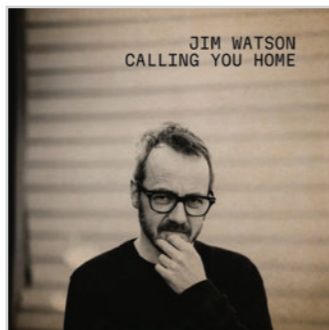
FSQ 0120: 66.34

This sparkling release by Fraser Smith and his all-star quartet (Rob Barron, Simon Reed, Steve Brown) is, in part, a tribute to his tenor sax idols. Ten of the twelve tracks are originals, three of them putting down markers to Smith's musical antecedents: *Fathead* and *Like Forrest* are real swingers, *Jacquet Jump* rather different, beginning with Reed's bass figure setting the rhythmic pattern, then joined by Brown and eventually Smith and Barron, Smith increasingly dynamic – definitely a favourite track!

Garth Cartwright's note opines that *The Shaker* will become a favourite. Well, maybe so, but there are a number of songs that certainly deserve picking up by other musicians: *Jacquet Jump*, *Hinx Thinks*, to name but two. Even so I think I would have enjoyed the album even more with one or two more non-originals. The two here are both gems. In *The Man I Love* Smith thins down his customary robust tone and sticks fairly close to the melody, Barron decorates the whole thing eloquently, Brown is the soul of subtlety, Reed solos beautifully. *My One and Only Love* is even better, Smith playing a *cappella* throughout and allowing the glorious melody to speak for itself, embellishing with winning delicacy.

For all that the general tone of the album is set in the opener, *Red Haze*. Smith's swing-to-bebop tenor lays down the parameters, Barron backs him with insistent chords and solos imaginatively, Brown's incisive drums snap into breaks. And so it goes on...

RON SIMPSON



JIM WATSON

CALLING YOU HOME

ECN MUSIC/IJWR 01 CD 51:12

This is a solo piano set from Jim Watson, whose experience began in the jazz world and now straddles both jazz (he frequently works with Guy Barker, and plenty of others) and pop musicians such as Sting, Gary Barlow, Cat Stevens and many more. The material here stays firmly on the jazz side, but the repertoire also reflects the breadth of his approach.

First off then, let's consider his treatment of Paul Simon's *Old Friends* and *The Weight* by The Band. Jim stretches out on the former, which is the set's longest track running to over six minutes, and his playing is thoughtful and reflective, as befits the song. The latter track melds the original melody with some blues- and gospel-styled playing, creating a wonderful version with very strong hints of 60s soul-jazz (there's also a slighter tinge of this on Jim's own *Terzetto*).

His 'jazz' covers include a lovely *The Nearness Of You* with some original touches, a quiet *Round Midnight* which also keeps the flavour of Thelonious Monk, and the standard *Body And Soul*. The fine set finale is *Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered*, surprisingly with stride piano influences.

His original material is varied, from the up tempo *Darkstar Sky* with its myriad influences to *The Vow* and the title track where Jim's playing is extremely lyrical and with maybe just a hint of melancholy. All in all, a rather fine introduction to a talented pianist.

NORMAN DARWEN



KASPER RIETKIRK

THE HAPPY WORRIER

ECN Music/ Kasper Rietkirk Records KRRCD001 59:43

Dutch-born Kasper Rietkirk plays alto and soprano saxes here, with a small combo consisting of guitarist John Parricelli, bass player Tom Herbert and drummer Jonah Evans. The opener sets the tone for this set perfectly, a slow, reflective, blues-tinted number with Kasper's sax adding to the wide-open feel – for some reason it made me think (fleeting) of late 60s Fleetwood Mac in a mellow in-instrumental mood. The title, *Lost In Glow*, describes it perfectly. The blues is also a strong element in *Blueberry Pancake*.

On the sleeve Kasper mentions The Brubeck Living Legacy, which presented him with its inaugural award, providing him with the opportunity to make this set. It is rather fitting, given that one of his strongest early influences was Paul Desmond, whose approach is certainly in evidence here on several numbers – this is, for much of the time, quiet, contemplative music, deeply personal, delicate and intimate – though *Tea Lights* has a catchy, funky groove! *Scream For Silence* is a feature for the word-less vocals of singer Rebecka Edlund, present in two very different versions, and in keeping with the remaining ten tracks.

There is also a marked melancholy to the overall album. Kasper attributes this to the passing of Martin Hummel in January 2025. He notes that Martin, whose Ubuntu Records would have released this album, guided me from the very start of this process until his later days.

This set is a fitting tribute to him, too.

NORMAN DARWEN



MARK WINKLER

HOLD ON

Café Pacific Records CPCD 50.0 6031

50.00

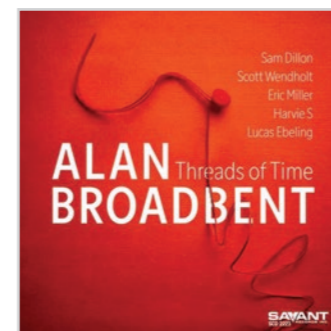
Mark Winkler, a gifted and celebrated vocalist and lyricist returns with his 22nd album, *Hold On*. It includes several original songs lyricised by him with music by (mostly) pianist, Greg Gordon Smith along with four standards. These include well known chestnuts, *If I Were A Bell* and *It Was A Very Good Year*, Billy Joel's *Vienna* and a lesser-known gem – *A Little Taste*, composed by longtime Ellington altoist, Johnny Hodges with Dave Frishberg's witty and irreverent words.

An all star cast of 18 LA's finest players circulate and pepper this disc with elan providing the listener with a rich variety of sounds, concepts and influences. Among these are top West Coast saxist, Bob Sheppard's sparkling solo on the opening track, *Hold On*. Veteran session guitarist, Grant Geissman accompaniment adds understated verve to Frishberg's lyric on *A Little Taste* as does Eric Reed's piano. Similarly, Reed and trumpeter, Brian Swartz solos contribute emphatically to the leader's moving lyric on *I Dream Of You*. The final track of the date shines subtly with its 1940s torch song ambience somewhat reminiscent of Billie Holiday or Johnny Hartman melancholic quality and delivery of the time.

Winkler has a storied history of embracing and collaborating with great 'signature' players who delight in enhancing and shaping his journey effectively. They do so while equally exploring their own efforts to

the full as well. *Hold On* is a winning and wonderful result of this alchemy and will provide listeners with a refreshing blend and unlimited overview of what jazz singing encompasses today.

FRANK GRIFFITH



ALAN BROADBENT

THREADS OF TIME

Savant SCD 2223: 51.19

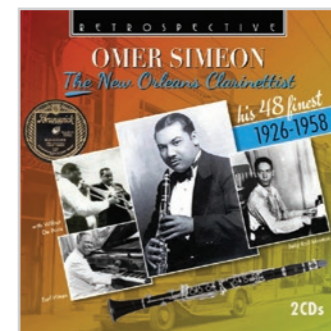
Threads of Time consists of eight songs by pianist Alan Broadbent, composed over a period of 40 years and now arranged for what he calls 'the classic jazz format' of a sextet. The arrangements neatly combine smartly arranged passages with plenty of solo opportunities for his band of New Yorkers.

Three of the songs are dedicated to great jazz figures and, as early as the second track, *Clifford Notes*, there are fine solos all round, with drummer Lucas Ebeling and trombonist Eric Miller excelling. Later we have *This One's for Bud* (cool trumpeter Scott Wendholt and forceful tenor saxist Sam Dillon making their mark, together with the admirable Miller and a remarkable bass solo from Harvie S) and *Sonny's Skip*, an enterprising little tune dedicated to Sonny Clark, that gives the band the chance to surprise us with a series of breaks. *Journey Home* is another track where the band has every chance to shine, though throughout the CD Broadbent sensibly keeps solos to modest length.

Broadbent gives himself a fair amount of solo space, in addition to his skilful arranging, but is best served by two tracks that bring a touch of solemnity into the mix. *Covenant* reflects his commitment to staying true to himself and features meditative piano, plus another stunning bass solo from

Harvie S. Then *Prelude to Peace* sets a mood of reconciliation of all the conflicts we experience. Not in any way showy, *Threads of Time* is a highly accomplished retrospective on Broadbent's composing career.

RON SIMPSON



OMER SIMEON

THE NEW ORLEANS CLARINETTIST

Retrospective RTS 4433: 2 CDs, 77.57/78.45

After his debut with Jelly Roll Morton in 1926 and a flurry of New Orleans bands in the 1920s, Omer Simeon spent most of the rest of his career with Earl Hines, Jimmy Lunceford (under-represented here: see Retrospective's Lunceford collection) and Wilbur de Paris, though he played studio sessions with other bands. This (together with his early death in 1959) may have contributed to his comparative neglect: only in de Paris' seven-piece did he get the solo space. Incidentally, Simeon only led trios and quartets in the studio.

Yet he was an outstanding clarinetist – and no mean performer on any saxophone – and it seems to me was enjoying an Indian summer at the time of his death. With de Paris (America's answer to Chris Barber) he played a splendid mix of classical, popular old-time and New Orleans tunes in smart arrangements that were full of surprises, but gave plenty of solo space. De Paris' arrangement of Rachmaninov's *Prelude in C sharp minor* gave Simeon the chance to show off his mature clarinet skills; *Flow Gently, Sweet Afton* sounded like a gentle (what else?) version of *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* in Simeon's liquid tones; and Henry Busse's Paul Whiteman feature *Hot Lips* benefitted from an extended solo from trumpeter

Sidney de Paris – on tuba!

In 1954 Simeon took Sammy Price and Zutty Singleton into the studio for some remarkable rare trio recordings. Four of six tracks show another side to Simeon, being his compositions with strangely exotic names – and sometimes strangely exotic progressions. All three play beautifully, with Zutty's drumming firing songs like *Lagniappe*.

There's no room for more than a quick survey of pre-1950 Omer Simeon. His ability to adjust to a leader's demands and offer a complementary voice is there with Morton (nice bass clarinet on *Someday Sweetheart*) and by 1929 he's keeping up with legendary trumpeters Jabbo Smith and Reuben Reeves and playing a lot more flamboyantly. A single track from Fletcher Henderson finds him and fellow clarinetist Buster Bailey holding their own against Roy Eldridge and co. Another remarkable trio session from 1945 teams him with James P. Johnson and Pops Foster and there are three glorious, badly recorded tracks from Kid Ory's Creole Jazz Band, including the beautiful *Blues for Jimmie*.

And there's so much more on this wonderful album.

RON SIMPSON



TOM SMITH

A YEAR IN THE LIFE

Fay Moose Records FMR001 CD 70.29

Altoist Smith is a relatively new presence on the London jazz scene. A past finalist in the BBC Young Jazz Musician contest and not to be confused with Scots saxophonist, Tommy Smith, this Smith favours the contemporary, Kenny Garrett a possible influence, and tends to associate with others of his immediate academic generation

who think much as he does. Thus I've heard him play alto with fellow free-thinkers in the Misha Mullov-Abbado Sextet and baritone and bass-clarinet in the similarly-inclined Emma Rawicz Jazz Orchestra, admittedly while covering successive recent Swanage Jazz Festivals.

He's thus something of a reeds all-rounder but a composer too, his new, well-presented big band album having already earned acclaim elsewhere. It comprises nine of his impressive pieces cast as 'a celebration of London's thriving jazz scene', the soloists identified item by item. While the album includes no less than five black & white solo images of Smith himself plus alto, there's a dearth of info about the composer's programmatic intentions. Shame! His web-site is similarly short on pertinent details but suffice it to say that these pieces are played with admirable vigour by a company of players melding a younger cohort with established older hands like Graeme Blevins, Alex Garnett, Tom Walsh,

Freddie Gavita and Trevor Mires among others. The title track has a deceptively lyrical start, drummer Luke Tomlinson building momentum before altoists Sam Glaser and Smith himself kick in fervently, the writing striking and multi-layered much in the manner of Maria Schneider. *Speedboat in Trouble* (who knew?) conveys a sense of imminent rescue, with its speeding sax ensemble, Smith, trumpeter Alistair Martin and trombonist Mires well heard. *Saviour Suzanne* is a delight, the main motif elegantly voiced, this underlining Smith's compositional range, Blevins vibrant on alto. *Breathe* is altogether more solemn, the opening chords complemented by Jamie McCredie's pleading guitar. Smith has already fronted this brilliant ensemble at Ronnie Scott's, spotlighting both its textural variety and the interaction of its soloists, this an ideal introduction to his values as both instrumentalist and writer. Where next, one wonders?

PETER VACHER



VARIOUS

TILL WE MEET AGAIN: THE SONGS OF RICHARD WHITING

Retrospective RTR 4435: 78.57

Perhaps the greatest tribute to songwriters of the era of the Great American Songbook is the number of quality composers and lyricists who tend to get forgotten in a maze of Gershwin, Porter, Berlin and the rest. One such is Richard Whiting, a fine composer who died sadly early in 1938 and is now as often as not thought of as the father of singer Margaret Whiting, but who wrote hits with such lyricists as Johnny Mercer, Leo Robin and Buddy deSylva.

This is, of course, not a jazz album as such, but contains enough jazz to hold the interest, plus any number of fine tracks such as Johnny Marvin's *Breezin' Along with the Breeze*, bright perky vocal accompanied by ukulele and assorted instrumental imitations. The track following that unites two unique performers: the totally distinctive Annette Hanshaw and Willard Robison with his Deep Rover Orchestra sounding a lot like Paul Whiteman of the time (1928).

The jazz highspots of the album are both supplied by Billie Holiday. *Miss Brown to You* comes from 1935, early in her career, when she was confined to one memorable chorus (Teddy Wilson also excelling) and *He's Funny that Way* from 1944 with the Eddie Heywood Trio finds her totally in charge. Other treats for jazz lovers are Les Paul's accompaniment to Dick Haymes on *My Future Just Passed*, Cab Calloway demonstrating that *Eadie Was a Lady*, Bing with Jimmy Dorsey on *Too Marvellous for Words*, Margaret Whiting and Bob

Hope (with Billy May) enjoying the by play of *Ain't We Got Fun* and (slightly disappointing) Jack Teagarden singing about *Tulip Time in Holland* with an all-star Condon group. Oh! And there's Shirley Temple *On the Good Ship Lollipop!*

RON SIMPSON



ASAF HARRIS

I THOUGHT I WAS READY

In collaboration with ECN, no number, 34.43

Asaf Harris, Israeli-born, but relocated to Brooklyn, is apparently much involved in film music. His jazz playing on tenor sax is heavily tinged with Middle Eastern influences and this fairly short CD goes through a confusing mix of styles before leaving us with the sumptuous *FCB*, the only track featuring Onn Yosef Kadosh on oud. The sound of Kadosh's oud mingling with the separate lines of Harris, pianist Guy Moskvovich and the rest is mesmerising – a glorious finale.

I must admit that my enthusiasm for this album took a while to grow and parts remain merely confusing for me. The opening track, the title song, takes us round and round in circles and the second track, *I Don't Know What's Inside* (but it's got to be good...) follows a similar course until the piano breaks out with an incisive solo, revealing Moskvovich to be a superb player. So, too, I guess, is Harris, but his unearthly tone on the mysterious *Langa Grove* left me still undecided.

I was converted by *Climbing Down*. Once again it was Moskvovich who first impresses, with a swinging piano solo backed by explosive drumming from David Sirkis, but the ever-versatile Harris makes his mark, too. His questing tenor on *Routes* confirmed my favourable

impression, with bassist Omri Ever Hadani contributing a defining solo.

I think Asaf Harris is an instrumentalist/composer I must hold fire on, but his next album should be interesting, especially if he makes more use of Onn Yosef Kadosh.

RON SIMPSON



MATTHEW KILNER

THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

MRK 25CD: 41.19

There is a growing tendency among Scots players to wish to commemorate their native land in music, whether with folk song elements or descriptive melodies, but few do it as well as Matthew Kilner on *The Space in Between*. The six tracks give enough space to grow from gentle melody to a fierce climax (and, maybe, back down again) and all are 'inspired by Aberdeen and its people in some way.'

Harry the Heron introduces us to Kilner's direct tenor sax and the individual talents of Paul Harrison (piano), Ewan Hastie (bass) and Alyn Cosker (drums), but the best is yet to come. *Ask or Tell* begins with a repeated bluesy piano figure beneath Kilner's tenor and builds, via an excellent solo from Hastie, to an intense climax with shades of rhythm and blues. Harrison, incidentally, displays a great understanding with Kilner throughout the CD, backing his every move subtly and imaginatively.

Kilner is a good composer, too, *Freehearted* almost Ellingtonian and *The Lighthouse* the highlight of the album, with guest Paul Towndrow's alto merging with Kilner's tenor in a beautiful haunting melody. *Haar* is the most descriptive piece on the album, the sea fog swirling round the isolated-sounding

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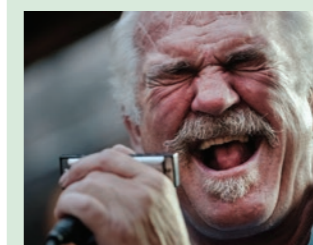


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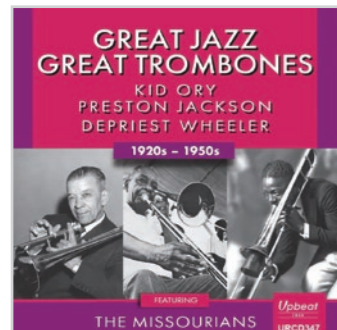
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tenor before the quartet intrudes dramatically over a long piece, with Cosker's drums to the fore. The title track rounds off the album in more abstract form.

RON SIMPSON



KID ORY/PRESTON JACKSON/DEPRIEST WHEELER

GREAT JAZZ - GREAT TROMBONES 1920s- 1950s

Upbeat Jazz URCD347 72:02

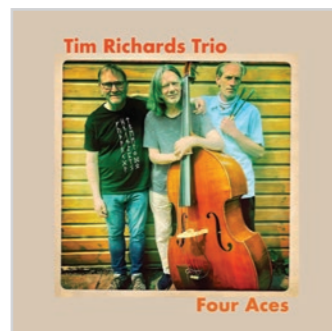
There is no arguing with this CD title. Revival trombonist Big Bill Bissonette and his Jazz Crusade label were responsible for the original release (and the informative notes) of this now remastered set, and he knew what he was doing. Kid Ory's lovely, lively set is from a New Year's Eve radio show in the early 50s (at San Francisco's Club Hangover?), with people like trumpeter Teddy Buckner, clarinetist Joe Darensbourg and pianist Lloyd Glenn in the band, and material that combines the familiar (*Ballin' The Jack, The Bucket's Got A Hole In It*) and the less-recorded *I'm With You Where You Are*. It's great fun, and yes, great jazz.

New Orleans born Preston Jackson was an exciting player and is represented here with six tracks from July 1926, with Shirley Clay on cornet and a small combo. It is excellent jazz of the time, and blues lovers who might have clocked Lloyd Glenn with Ory should note that female blues singer Elzadie Robinson is on *Houston Bound*.

DePriest Wheeler is here with *The Missourians* from 1925, with strong hints of why Cab Calloway picked the band up wholesale to back him at The Cotton Club a few years later. As Mr. Bissonette noted, in one stroke the band gained a reliable job even through the Great Depression, but the world may have lost some wonderful

instrumental jazz in return as they henceforth generally just provided backing for the leader's vocals. Bill really raves about them, but he certainly backs up his opinion with these five top-notch tracks.

NORMAN DARWEN



TIM RICHARDS TRIO

FOUR ACES

Future Music FMR CD730-0925: 55.00

London-based pianist Richards has been an enduring presence on the jazz scene since the early 1980s. Most of us fear a visit to the dentist, but for Richards one such visit proved to be life changing as it was in the dentist's waiting room that he first encountered a piano. Early influences included fellow pianist Thelonious Monk and blues artist Otis Spann. Even today he is probably remembered for the band Spirit Level, featuring saxophonist Paul Dunmall and trumpeter Dave Holdsworth and which led to the formation of Great Spirit, a nine-piece group and later in 2012 the six-piece Hextet.

Throughout his career the trio format has remained important to him, with the first trio album being released in 1998. This is Richards' fourth trio album and the first to feature Alex Keen on bass and Daniel Howard at the drums. The trio enables Richards to explore a range of styles and is also a vehicle for his own compositions.

The album opens with the title track, a Richards composition and is followed by another original *Metaphysics*, followed by *Atlantis* from the pen of McCoy Tyner, who I sense to be a major influence on Richards' playing, alongside the likes of Keith Jarrett and Dave Brubeck. Only one of the twelve tracks here exceeds six minutes and this provides a fine variety of music. Alongside Jobim's *Wave*, we get to hear *Sonara*, a delightful lesser-

known piece from pianist Hampton Hawes, as well as the more familiar *Solar* from Miles Davis and *Lover Man*. The album is completed with two further enticing Richards originals. The recording quality is exemplary with both the bassist and drummer being very well represented. Booklet notes from the esteemed Ian Mann complete a most enjoyable set.

ALAN MUSSON



THE HIGH SOCIETY NEW ORLEANS JAZZ BAND

LIVE AT BIRDLAND

TBR26006CD, 50.00

It's tough for young people these days. Probably the first jazz they'll hear is some smug graduates of Berklee or somewhere, playing ever-so-clever funk in 13/8 time.

As the proud possessor of a bus pass, I was privileged to be introduced to jazz by John Chilton's Feetwarmers, backing the irrepressible George Melly. It was more of an education than you'd get in a thousand years at college. Lesson one was that, from the first note, everyone in the theatre was tapping their feet. That's all that matters. The rest is just decoration.

Here's an idea: if your child wants to study any form of popular music (yes, Snarky Puppy, you're a pop group), give them this CD. If they don't immediately love it, it could save you a fortune. No true musician could resist this.

It's nothing special, this recording. No one's redefining the landscape of musical improvisation. There's no clever integration of classical themes with Scandinavian minimalism. It's just a bunch of fine musicians playing music they love.

Mind you, Josh Dunn plays a pretty mind-blowing banjo solo on *Shreveport Stomp*. Yes, 'banjo'

and 'mind-blowing' in the same sentence. Take that, Ronnie Scott.

The main thing is, this is a clarion call to remember what jazz is. And that there wouldn't be any ever-so-clever funk without Johnny Dodds. It's a glorious snapshot of the High Society band's Thursday night residency at Birdland and it swings and bounces like a bulb in a Bourbon Street bordello.

Say what you like about Woody Allen, he knows his jazz and the group includes some of his regular sidemen. Collectively and individually, they ensure that the thread that connects Ambrose Akinmusire with Louis Armstrong and Freddie Keppard is robust and unbroken.

Birdland, of course, was one of the places where jazz tried to turn away from its roots. It speaks volumes that those roots are putting forth fresh, tasty shoots in one of the hothouses of bebop. It's a reminder that trad, Dixieland, revivalist, prohibition, or whatever the hell they call it these days, was as reviled as punk and hip-hop in its day, and that it's still as urgent and exciting as it ever was.

STUART MAXWELL



CHRIS HODGKINS AND LENORE RAPHAEL

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

Bell CD523: 37.20

I imagine that trumpeter Chris Hodgkins name and music will be familiar to many readers as a stalwart of the British jazz scene. One of his most recent affiliations has been with the Pete Allen Band, itself a long-standing fixture in the UK and beyond. Lenore Raphael may be less well-known. A swinging mainstream pianist with influences ranging from Oscar Peterson to Bud Powell and Bill Evans, all deployed in the creation of a style of her own.

She has amassed a dozen or so CDs in her discography and is an award-winning composer. She has performed and recorded with Clark Terry, Warren Vache, Howard Alden and Harry Allen and more.

This duo collaboration goes back at least 10 years and for this release perform a series of eleven jazz standards, which although well-known, are now perhaps somewhat neglected tunes. The album opens with the Earl Hines composition *Rosetta*; this is a swinging, exuberant opener and sets the scene for what is to come, with *Exactly Like You*. Variety is displayed with a solo piano interpretation of *Prelude to a Kiss* from the pen of Duke Ellington, this being one of several solo piano pieces here. Other familiar themes include *It's Only a Paper Moon*, *Sweet Lorraine* and *Lady Be Good*. The set concludes with *Heartbeat Blues* which is credited to Hodgkins and Raphael.

One might think that a duo recording of such a familiar repertoire would have its limitations. However, this is a thoroughly engaging and

entertaining release, which is topped off with informative notes detailing the provenance of the tunes.

ALAN MUSSON



SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS

Avid AMSC1472, 2 CDs, 135.00

This is one of those releases that doesn't need a review. You're getting more than two hours of Sister Rosetta Tharpe at a ludicrously affordable price. Just buy it and get happy.

If you're a connoisseur, then I should let you know that this

compilation, from the impeccable people at Avid Entertainment, brings together recordings from the 1950s and early 1960s, when she was being 'discovered' by European audiences.

The first featured album, *Gospel Train*, was recorded in 1956, with groovy, full-band accompaniment. The Harmonizing Four add backing vocals on some tracks. It's a straightahead collection of Sister Rosetta's arrangements and compositions.

On *The Gospel Truth*, recorded in 1959, you're transported straight to a revivalist meeting. Sister Rosetta is joined by the Sally Jenkins Singers and a congregation of impassioned worshippers at the Church of God in Christ in New York. We also get our first real taste of Rosetta's raw, rocking guitar style on her solo rendition of *Didn't It Rain*. Even the rough and ready recording can't dim the blazing light of her infectious fervour.

Disc two contains 1960's *Sister Rosetta Tharpe*, which features the Gospel Tabernacle Choir and Players, and another *Gospel Truth*, this time a greatest hits

collection from 1962. It includes her iconic, guitar-toting take on *This Train*. Surely a God-fearing woman shouldn't play like that. It's magnificent.

Sister Rosetta's effortless vocals keep you enthralled across two full-length CDs. The great gospel singers learned their craft young, and Rosetta's was refined with years on the road with her evangelist mother. By the time of these recordings, she'd paid her dues in New York's clubland as well, so her righteous fire is spiced with a distinctly secular swing and swagger.

By the end of it all, you're exhausted and exhilarated. Mind you, that happens if you only listen to one track, especially *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*. If you have a belief, there are many ways to proclaim it. History tells us that inquisitions and impositions don't really reach people's hearts, but atheists stand no chance when Sister Rosetta is testifying. In one soaring call, she goes direct to your soul and saves it.

STUART MAXWELL

42ND BIRMINGHAM JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL

Fresh off winning the 2025 Birmingham Award for "Best Festival," the Birmingham Jazz & Blues Festival is gearing up for its 42nd consecutive celebration, taking place **24 July - 2 August 2026**.

Last year's festival brought the region to life with **179 performances** across Birmingham, Sandwell, Solihull, Wolverhampton and Sutton Coldfield, with most events completely **free to attend**.

In 2026, expect another unforgettable programme of world-class jazz, blues and related music, popping up in venues of every kind - **bars, restaurants, shops, libraries, art galleries, museums, and even aboard a canal boat**.

If you're looking for the city's most entertaining, energetic and accessible music experience, **don't miss the Birmingham Jazz & Blues Festival!**

For more information about the festival, or to get involved, call Jim Simpson at **0121 454 7020** or email jim@bigbearmusic.com

BIRMINGHAM THROUGH THE YEARS

On July 24th this year (through to August 2nd) Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival celebrates its 42nd incarnation. Here are some memories of years past.



Before it was a Festival - The Mighty Flea at the jam session that led to the first festival



Dave Newton in attentive mood.

Frank Foster, leader of the Basie Band, with the marquee for the final concert at the Odeon.



Nomy Rosenberg at the height of a brief brilliant career.

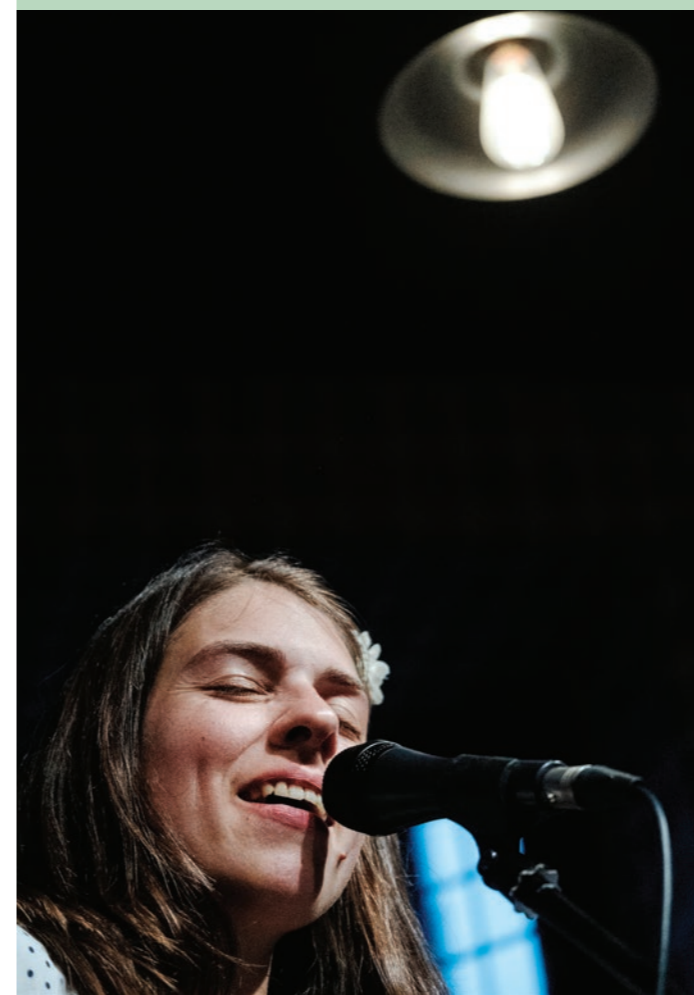


The great Kenny Baker leads an all-star sextet



Bluesman Chick Willis on the prowl near Birmingham Town Hall

Alessandra Perozzo of Italy's Jim Dandies in the spotlight



Spain's Potato Head Jazz Band express solidarity with their one-legged drummer



The Swing Cats from Spain swinging down Broad Street



Piano for four hands with Tipitina

You're Never Alone with a Uke's visit to the Children's Hospital - always a highlight!



HENRY'S BLUESLETTER



DON'T CALL ME FASTFINGERS

It's hard to figure out why Jimmy Dawkins doesn't generally come to mind when folk are talking about the greatest post-60s blues guitar men. He had as good a technique as anyone and far better than most. His soloing was stunning, he played with feeling and imagination, his singing was passionate and I see him as up there with Buddy Guy and Hubert Sumlin.

Maybe the reason he remains largely unsung is because of his relatively calm on and off-stage demeanour. Nobody ever speaks of Dawkins brawling, boozing, and getting into scrapes with the Law, perhaps a musician needs to have something of a wild streak in order to be considered street by some of the blues fraternity.

I worked with Dawkins. He was fine company, extremely wise and knowledgeable, ever helpful and I only saw him get riled when anyone called him Fastfingers. That did it every time! It would have been in reference to his first album under his own name, which Delmark titled *Fast Fingers*, which he considered to be disrespectful to his meaningful playing on the slows, focussing on the admittedly very speedy work on the uptempos.

Interestingly, the album was largely ignored stateside,

although it did pick up a 4 star review in *Downbeat*, but inexplicably, fared far better in Europe, particularly in France where it was awarded the "Grand Prix du Disque" for the Best Blues Album of 1971. It also helped establish Dawkins with European audiences which was to serve him well. It also helped establish Dawkins with European audiences which was to serve him well.

Although Dawkins was the nicest of folk to be around, his deep-rooted and over-developed sense of propriety, of doing things the right way, was the cause of one of the most embarrassing episodes in my life, and there have been many of those. I'd been talking to him for a while about how it would make much more sense for me to come to Chicago to produce the next American Blues Legends album that we could then release and market throughout the tour, than to record in Europe at the tour's end and have to promote it from a standing start.

Who better to turn to, when it came to putting together six of Chicago's then-hottest bluesmen, than Jimmy Dawkins? He came up with an impressive list of suggestions, I gave him my choices, he got their agreements and, secure in the knowledge that I had Dawkins by my side, I flew into O'Hare in a relaxed frame of mind.

HENRY'S BLUESHOUSE

FEBRUARY

3RD RECKLESS & BLUE (DENVER, COLORADO)

10TH THE SHUFFLEPACK

17TH SLIDE BOY ROY

24TH JAMIE THYER & THE WORRIED MEN

MARCH

3RD ALEX VOYSEY BLUES BAND

10TH BLUE 2 THE BONE

17TH HONEYBOY HICKLING BLUES BAND

24TH JAMES OLIVER BAND

31ST RICH DICKINSON'S DRIVING FORCE

Admission Free. Doors 7pm. Band 8pm.
Snobs, 200 Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1SU
For more information contact Jim Simpson on
0121 454 7020 or jim@bigbearmusic.com

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FEBRUARY

6TH THE SHUFFLEPACK

13TH HONEYBOY HICKLING BLUES BAND

20TH THE SHAKEDOWN BROTHERS

27TH CHICKENBONE BLUES BAND

Free Admission. Band on stage 7pm.
West Bromwich Indoor Market, Sandwell Centre
106-108 High Street, West Bromwich B70 7NN
For more information: Contact Jim Simpson on
0121 454 7020 or jim@bigbearmusic.com



Left to right: Billy the Kid Emerson, Jimmy Dawkins, Jim Simpson, Lester Davenport, Little Smokey Smothers, Eddie C Campbell, Good Rockin' Charles, Chico Chism

I settled into a hotel only a stroll away from where we were set to record, Odyssey Sound Studios, at 2120 South Michigan Avenue, the old Chess Recording Studio which was then owned and operated by former Chess recording engineer, Ed Cody. It was also where The Rolling Stones recorded their "2120 South Michigan Avenue" instrumental in June 1964. I was looking forward to a few days with Jim and Amy O'Neal of *Living Blues* and hanging out on the South Side with Jimmy Dawkins. But Dawkins had other ideas.

He had arranged with the guys for me to actually audition them before offering them the contracts. I didn't need to, I knew them all from recordings and by reputation and also trusted implicitly in Jimmy's judgement. Anyway, who the hell was I to consider myself important enough to ask these absolute blues legends to audition for me? Dawkins insisted, telling me that they wouldn't value the gig or take me seriously if I didn't show that I could take care of business.

So I went through a couple of hours of excruciating embarrassment in Buddy Guy's club, nodding approvingly as Eddie C. Campbell, Good Rockin' Charles, Billy The Kid Emerson, Little Smokey Smothers, Lester 'Mad Dog' Davenport and Chico Chism delivered the sort of down home blues session that us European fans can only dream of. I

thanked them properly, we took a few drinks before Dawkins told me, "Don't go getting these boys into bad ways, now". Looking around at that group of hardened South Side blues hooligans, I thought he had to be joking, and from the look in his eye, he certainly was.

We spent the next three days recording what was to be the American Blues Legends 79 album, though truth to tell, it was all rocking along so nicely that we could have finished in just one day, or a little more, but we were having such fun I could find no reason to call a halt.

Dawkins, who had insisted that he was only there to make sure that things worked well, sort of accidentally happened to bring his guitar along and he can be heard sharing guitar duties with Eddie C on the Little Smokey Smothers, Chico Chism and Lessie Davenport features. Veteran Chess Records engineer Ed Cody, kept muttering, "This takes me back, man," which I found immensely gratifying, but I still cannot understand, even to this day, why, with a few very notable exceptions, U.S. record companies at that time didn't record these guys and so many like them while they were playing and singing so brilliantly.

There was a sadly ironic footnote to these sessions. The plan was to take the guys, Eddie C., Good Rockin', Billy The Kid, Lessie Davenport, Chico and Little Smokey

Smothers on the road for a seven weeker through UK and Europe to promote the album, but come departure time some months later I had an anguished, near-tearful phone call from Smokey, pulling out of the tour. The foreman at his day job in Chi Town, where he worked as a labourer in a construction company, had told him at the last minute that if he took off on this tour, his job wouldn't be there when he got back. Poor Smokey, my guess is that his ofay boss was just a malicious bastard who resented Smokey getting any of the recognition he was so much entitled to.

Up stepped Dawkins with an immediate replacement in the shape of the impeccable and soulful bass player and singer, Nolan Struck, who didn't put a foot wrong throughout that memorable tour, but I still feel bad that Smokey couldn't stay on team.

But about James Henry Dawkins, born on October 24th 1936 in Holmes County, Tchula, Mississippi. He was an only child, raised in Pasagoula where his father worked on warships. He remembers from when he was 3 or 4 years old, an uncle, staying with the family, left a beat-up old guitar on his bed, Jimmy pulled it off and started to fool around on it.

His mother bought him his first guitar when he was fifteen and he taught himself to play. Four years later he took The Greyhound to Chicago

to take work outside music, but it wasn't long before he was playing for tips on the street corner of Albany and Roosevelt on The West Side, and later the same year he formed his own band to play The Pink Poodle Club and then The Big Squeeze Club.

Jimmy Dawkins was then firmly on the map as an in-demand guitar man, hired by such guys as Jimmie Rogers, Sonny Thompson, Wild Child Butler, Johnny Young and Walter Horton, playing clubs, radio remotes and recordings.

Dawkins went on to enjoy a hugely productive near 50 year career which saw him record some thirty albums including recording for Vogue and Black & Blue in France. Perhaps the European and Japanese audiences were more appreciative of his terrific, calmly-delivered playing and impeccable though non-dramatic vocals than folks were Stateside. Whatever, following his 1970 European tour in the company of John Lee Hooker, Eddie Taylor and Carey Bell, he became a regular visitor, just as he did in Japan.

In the 1980s he started his own record label, Leric Records, with typical modesty, not to feature himself but to provide a platform for Blues talent that he figured were not properly appreciated - namely Tail Dragger Jones, Queen Sylvia Embry, Little Johnny Christian and Nora Jean Bruso.

Among his fans can be counted Buddy Guy, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eric Clapton and I remember the great Hubert Sumlin taking me aside in a Chicago club to tell me, "You stick with Dawkins, he's the man!"

Jimmy Dawkins, was married to Verdia. They had six children, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He died of undisclosed causes aged 76 in Chicago on April 10 2013.

JIM SIMPSON

LIVE REVIEWS

MIKE DURHAM'S
INTERNATIONAL
CLASSIC JAZZ
PARTY 2025

A personal response by
New York City-based
bass player JEN HODGE.

For many years I had been threatening to show up at Mike Durham's International Classic Jazz Party, held in Newcastle upon Tyne, colloquially referred to as 'Whitley Bay' for the nearby town in which the late Mike Durham originally founded the event. 2025 is the year I finally made good on my threat!

With its world-class roster of musicians specializing in early jazz, many of whom are friends and colleagues of mine, and its reputation for providing these profoundly knowledgeable and outrageously talented characters with the requisite time, space, resources and attentive audiences to present seldom-heard music they deeply love, Whitley Bay would have unquestionably been high on my bucket list anyhow. But for me - a professional double bass player living in New York City, but originally from British Columbia and holding both Canadian and UK citizenship - there was the added significance of getting to experience this music which is so dear to my heart in a region of England where I have deep roots. My grandfather was from County Durham and attended classes at Newcastle University; he and my grandmother, a Yorkshire lass, raised their family in Lancashire; and my mum, their youngest, also studied at Newcastle University, emigrating to Canada after she finished her programme there. I was happy to arrive in town with enough time before the festival kicked off to see some familiar sites from childhood visits (Grainger Market, Black Gate), pick up a nostalgic packet of jelly babies from Marks & Spencer, and take in a Northumbrian folk music session before making my way to the festival site at the Village Hotel to be immersed in historical jazz for the next few days.

The unconventional approach of the Whitley Bay festival is to bring about 30 individual

musicians together and to feature them in different combinations over a total of 32 different themed sets, each focusing on a particular musician, group, composer, geographical area, etc. All performances are programmed consecutively in the same room, so mercifully you never have to choose between two sets you are equally as excited to see. You do, however, sometimes have to choose between catching a set and, say, eating a meal or seeing the light of day, as each set is scheduled to begin immediately as the previous one ends. After the final set wraps up at 11pm each night, everyone relocates to the on-site pub for an open-ended jam session, enthusing about the day's musical riches, and drinking (but not food - pack snacks!).

For me, the first official full set of the festival set the tone for the weekend perfectly. It featured London reed man par excellence David Horniblow leading some of the greatest contemporary practitioners of early jazz - among them Andy Schumm (Chicago), Michael McQuaid (London), TJ Müller (St Louis), David Boeddinghaus (New Orleans), Nick Ball (London) for example - through his transcriptions of the 1924-25 recordings by Oliver Naylor's Seven Aces. Obscure but wonderful repertoire, meticulously prepared, expertly performed, and paired with interesting, intelligent and often downright hilarious banter between tunes - to quote the Gershwins, who could ask for anything more?

Of particular interest to me was the set spotlighting the mighty Thelma Terry, a longtime hero of mine. Ms. Terry was a phenomenally skilled double bassist who worked around Chicago in the 1920s before recording and touring as leader of her own band, Thelma Terry and Her Playboys. Her story is quite heartbreaking and involves her throwing in the towel mid-tour due to the relentless disrespect she experienced as a woman (and a woman in charge) in such an overwhelmingly male field. Leading this set and playing his transcriptions of Ms. Terry's bass parts was London bassist Harry Evans. I'm happy to say that I was very impressed



Harry Evans

Photo by Kaz Rollinson

not only with how Mr. Evans executed this very technically demanding material - indeed he acknowledged to the audience that in all the years he's been performing at Whitley Bay, learning to play in the styles of countless revered bassists of jazz past, these parts were the most virtuosic he had ever tackled - but also with how sensitively he handled the telling of her story. The world is a poorer place due to having lost the talents of Thelma Terry in her prime and it was much more moving than I expected it to be to hear someone who hasn't directly experienced misogyny themselves speak with such compassion and perceptiveness about how grave a loss this truly was.

Another highlight of the weekend for me, this time an admittedly unexpected one, was the Artie Shaw tribute led by Italian clarinetist Lorenzo Baldasso. Of all the material on the program, this repertoire is by far the most frequently performed today, which made me think it would be a good opportunity to seek out a meal. I had planned to stick around only long enough to suss out the talents of the young Mr. Baldasso on a tune or two then duck out. In fact, I stayed until the end. After 20 years of being a working bass player in the worlds of swing dancing and hot jazz, I myself have performed these charts - *Begin the Beguine*, *Nightmare*, etc - dozens of times, and heard them performed countless more. This was by far the best I have heard this material sound in person. Indeed, Mr. Baldasso

proved to be both a virtuosic yet emotional clarinetist and a strong, capable bandleader. Chameleon-like French-American Nicolle Rochelle delivered goosebumps-inducing takes on the vocal numbers, somehow embodying the spirit, sound and style of the original Billie Holiday performances without actually being imitative. Having a full big band comprised entirely of musicians with deep understanding of the subtleties of the swing feel of Shaw's band made for an exquisitely tight and cohesive ensemble effect, but furthermore, the festival's spare use of electronic sound gear truly allowed the group's dynamic playing abilities to shine. It occurred to me while enjoying this set that every other time I've heard (or played) these pieces live, the band has been over-amplified, which, despite best intentions, inevitably alters the way sensitive musicians such as these play and causes dynamic effects to be lost. Hearing a big band of this calibre essentially playing acoustically was revelatory and I will never forget it.

Whitley Bay is an absolute treasure of a festival, and I'm so grateful I was at long last able to make my way there. Bravo and thank you to the team of organizers Patti Durham, Michael McQuaid, Colin Hancock, Jonathan Holmes and Russell Corbett for a brilliant and inspiring party. My friends who participate annually always tell me that each year this festival manages to outdo itself - this makes me very keen to find out what will transpire in 2026.

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