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THE JAZZ RAG

ISSUE 190 SPRING 2026
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BEYOND THE MAIN STAGE

Spring in the Elgar Room
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Photo by
Gilberto Taddy

Cover pic Star singer CATHERINE RUSSELL whose latest CD, live at Lincoln Center, is now available from Dot Time Records (review page 26)

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The *Jazz Rag* now has its own Facebook page. For news of upcoming festivals, gigs and releases, features from the archives, competitions and who knows what else, be sure to 'like' us. To find the page, simply enter 'The Jazz Rag' in the search bar at the top when logged into Facebook.

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UPFRONT

This issue of *Jazz Rag* has a distinctly retrospective flavour. We have Champion Jack Dupree on a bus in West Yorkshire, Dave Green and his start on a tea-chest bass, the great days of the rhythm clubs, memories of a notable Kenny Ball clarinettist – even a survey of the music before jazz became jazz.

Particularly revelatory are Jim Simpson's memories of the start of the Birmingham Jazz Festival (no blues in the name then, though plenty in the programme) in the days when local councils thrust money in your hand unsolicited and it was possible to give patrons a choice of Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, George Melly with John Chilton's Feetwarmers and Miles Davis – all on the same night!

Sadly the recollection of the great names of the past makes the death of Ken Peplowski all the more poignant. His death occurred in the most shocking, but totally appropriate, way. Having played a superb set, he went to his cabin to rest and was found when he failed to appear for his next performance. Alan Barnes evokes a master-clarinettist who aimed at bringing joy to his audience.

CONCORDE LINE-UP

The Concorde Club in Eastleigh has only the occasional departure from its Wednesday night for jazz and swing and the next one is the appearance by the Syd Lawrence Orchestra on April 16, with Noe Lang, Alan Barnes and the Paul Edie Trio and *Portrait in Evans* on April 27. In between it's Wednesday business as usual, with Simon Thorpe and Liz Fletcher's *Jivin' Miss Daisy* on April 22, followed by a regular series of May concerts: Chuck Red and Nat Steele (6), the Gaz Hughes Trio (13), Pete Cater (20) and the Gabrielle Stravelli Quartet (27). June kicks off with King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys (3) and also features the Fraser Smith Quartet (17) and the Harlem Jazz Orchestra (24) before the month ends with a Victory Garden Party with the Swing Unlimited Big Band (28).

www.theconcordeclub.com

SPA JAZZ

Jazz concerts in the refurbished Boston Spa Village Hall continue with Andy Henderson's Aire Valley Jazz Band (April 18) and the Tessa Smith Swing Band (May 9). A crowded June programme features Georgina Jackson (6), Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band (13) and Kate Peters and Derrick Harris (27).

www.jazzinthespa.co.uk

SUNDAY IN THE GREEN WITH GRAHAM

Graham Brook's Tuesday nights at Morley Green Club in Wilmslow are expanding to the occasional Sunday afternoon in deference to those patrons who prefer an earlier finish. The first of these features club favourite Alex Clarke on April 26. The regular

Tuesdays continue monthly with Alan Barnes, Andy Peate and a trio led by Andrzej Baranek (April 14), Kyran Matthews and Grant Russell (May 12) and Trefor Owen's Guitar Night (June 9).

www.grahambrookjazz.co.uk

SUNDAY AFTERNOONS IN LEEDS

JazzLeeds will soon be heavily involved in their jazz festival, but before that Billy Marrows' Grande Familia appears at Seven Arts (April 16). Their Sunday afternoon programme is especially good at this time, with appearances by the Jeremy Sassoon Quartet (April 12), the Gaz Hughes Trio (19), the Nils Kavanagh Trio (May 3), Adam Fairhall and Johnny Hunter with the music of Mary Lou Williams (10) and the Eddie Gripper Trio (June 14).

www.jazzleeds.org.uk

STABLES PROGRAMME

The Stables at Milton Keynes welcomes the UK Blues Awards, hosted by Paul Jones, on April 8. Other jazz and blues events include the Neil Cowley Trio (14), the Cinelli Brothers (24), the Horler-Mason Sextet with *Blakey and Beyond* (May 20), Ray Gelato and the Giants (June 7) and the Pete Roth Trio with Bill Bruford (19). Sunday sessions in the Mancini Forum feature the Marvin Muoneke Quartet (April 19) and Jazz Samba (May 17).

www.stables.org

EAST LONDON JAZZ

East Side Jazz Club's claim to be East London's premier jazz club is borne out by the number of top musicians making their way to Leytonstone on Tuesday evenings: the Vaughan Hawthorne-



Nelson Quartet (April 14), the Sam Braysheer Quartet (21) and the David Preston Mu 4Tet (28). May brings the Niklas Lukassen Quartet (5), Alan Barnes with *Works of Art* (12), the Bradley Allen/Tom Ollendorff Quartet with *Schofield, Metheny and Martino* (19) and the Brad Hodge Quartet with Tony Kofi (26). Iain Ballamy and Gareth Williams appear on June 2, followed by the Julian Siegel Quartet (9), Sam Glaser Septet (16), Eddie Gripper Trio (23) and Adam Glasser Quartet (30).

www.eastsidejazzclub.co.uk

LIBRARIES JAZZ

The main feature on mjazz's listing of jazz in the East Midlands is Jazz Steps' excellent three libraries programme at Beeston, West Bridgford and Worksop: Pat McCarthy and Shannon Reilly (April 13-15), Ben Martin Quartet (May 11-13) and Sharp Little Bones featuring Tony Kofi (June 8-10). Also from Jazz Steps are two concerts at Nottingham's Bonington Theatre: Tommaso Starace Quartet (April 30) and Phil Robson/Jed Levy Quartet (May 21). There is a group of Leicester concerts at different venues: Five Way Split

(International, April 15), Andrew McCormack (Attenborough Arts Centre, April 30), Dennis Rollins Quintet (Y Theatre, May 14) and Vimala Rowe Quartet (Phoenix, May 28). Dennis Rollins is bringing another group, the Velocity Trio, to Chapel Street Arts Centre, Derby, on May 29.

www.mjazz.co.uk

LATE NIGHT AT THE ALBERT HALL

The Royal Albert Hall's Late Night Jazz programme in the Elgar Room has an extremely busy time in May and June, mostly on Thursday nights. After Orchard's appearance on April 9, Elysia Biro appears on May 1, followed by Rosie Turton and Miryam Solomon (7), the Christopher White Collective (14), cctrl (21) and Gabrielle Stravelli (28). June continues with a weekly programme: Summer Pearl (4), Audrey Poone (11), ABNA (18), Nadine Khouri (25) and RCM Juniors (July 2).

Meanwhile, in the main auditorium, Joe Bonnamassa plays two concerts on May 6 and 7 and Jeff Goldblum and the Mildred Snitzer Orchestra appear on June 30.

www.royalalberthall.com

PIZZA EXPRESS LIVE

Pizza Express Live is mainly responsible for music events at the Pizza Express in Soho, with a double header on April 11: Martin Speake's Charukesi (lunch) and the Linley Hamilton Quartet (evening). James Morton's Groove Den follows on April 12, then Jeremy Sassoon (25-26), with the Art Themen Organ Trio at lunch-time on 26, Five Way Split (27) and Noe Levy and Paul Edis with the music of Bill Evans (30). May kicks off (2) with another double header, Chuck Redd and Nat Steele (lunch) and the Gaz Hughes Trio (evening). Also in May are Mark Lockheart and Marvin Muoneke with *Coltrane and Hartman on Impulse!* (5), Blue Harlem (10 - lunch), Eric Marienthal (14-16) and Pete Cater's Great Drum Show (17).

Also at other Pizza Express venues, Errol Linton plays Holborn (April 18), as does Sharp Little Bones with Tony Kofi (May 5) and the Alessio Menconi/Nigel Price Duo can be heard at Chelsea on April 13.

www.pizzaexpresslive.com

WAKEFIELD GIGS

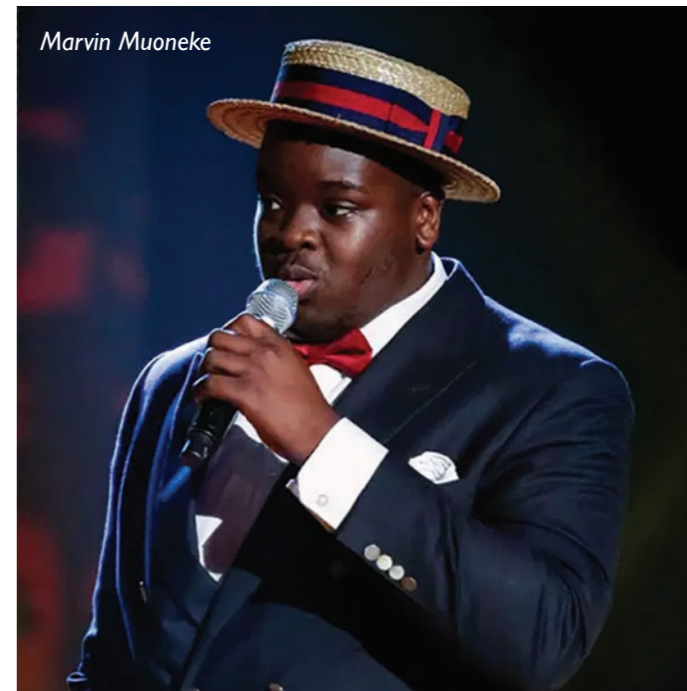
Wakefield Jazz is hosting the Quintessential Jazz Sextet (April 24) and the Wakefield Big Band (May 29).

www.wakefieldjazz.org

RONNIE SCOTT'S NEW ERA

The upcoming programme at Ronnie Scott's highlights the new Ronnie Scott's Upstairs, with a varied schedule including the occasional classical concert. Downstairs the main concert programme proceeds with Kurt Elling and Super Blue (April 14-15), Bireli Lagrene (16), Shai Maestro Quartet (17), and Bill Evans and the Vansband (27-28). May begins with the Ivo Neame Trio with Walter Smith III (1), Sunday Brunch with Ian Shaw and Jean Toussaint (2), Courtney Pine looking back over 40 years (7-8), Elaine Delmar (10), Avishai Cohen Quartet (11-13), Yellowjackets (22-23) and Chris Potter (28). June highlight is Billy Cobham with the Guy Barker Big Band (8-11).

www.ronniescotts.co.uk

**PEGGY'S SKYLIGHT**

Peggy's Skylight in Nottingham has a particularly appealing April programme, including the Art Themen Organ Trio (11), Jeremy Sassoon with an album launch (15), Jasper Holby's 3 Elements (16), Djanco (19), Sharp Little Bones (23), Tipitina (24), Georgina Cecile (25) and the Bryan

Corbett Quintet (30). May gets off to a good start, with two nights of Kyle Eastwood (1-2), followed by Ritmo Caliente (9), Nicola Farnon Trio (10), Dennis Rollins and Tony Kofi playing Brookmeyer and Mulligan (16), the Moscow Drug Club (29) and the Jazz Defenders (30).

www.peggysskylight.co.uk



One missing piece in Catherine Russell's recorded canon, a format often requested by friends, fans & followers – a live recording has thankfully arrived! The recording captures Catherine Russell doing what she does best: celebrating iconic jazz artists and their traditions with spontaneity, panache and depth of feeling.

Release Date: April 24th

San Francisco's rising star vocalist Noa Levy joins Award-Winning pianist Paul Edis and his Trio, for a beautiful exploration of the original music by the legendary Bill Evans. This tribute places the human voice at its centre allowing Evans' harmonic language to carry stories of love, loss, parenthood and emotional vulnerability.

Release Date: Out Now!

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Mornington Lockett

JAZZ AT WATERMILL

Watermill Jazz at Dorking continues at Betchworth Park Golf Club with Phil Hughes' Toots Thielemans tribute (April 14) and the Laura Jurd Quartet (28). Already booked for May and June are Ben Crossland All Star Band (May 5), Giacomo Smith (19), London Jazz Orchestra (June 2) Arild Andersen & Rob Luft and Daniel Sommer Trio (9) Derek Nash Acoustic Quartet plus special guest Martin Shaw (23).

www.ticketsource.co.uk/watermilljazz

HOWARD ASSEMBLY ROOM

Opera North's Howard Assembly Room in Leeds has a regular jazz and swing input and will be promoting Emma Rawicz's INKYRA for the Leeds Jazz Festival on May 24. Before that the HAR stages performances by Talking Spirits, formerly the James Lascelles Quartet (April 23) and the Easy Rollers (25).

www.operanorth.co.uk

AT THE JAZZ CENTRE

The Jazz Centre UK at Southend-on-Sea now boasts a new venue, Digby's, which will host a special 10th anniversary concert on June 20 with the Simon Spillet Big Band. Before that Jazz 825 is promoting Catherine Lima (April 11) and Martin Speake's Charukesi (May 9) and Spike's Place has booked Simon Bates and Derek Nash for May 30. The remaining weeks are filled with the centre's own events: Dave Browning's Chosen Four (April 18), Steve Waterman (25), Dave Jago Band (May 2), Chris Corcoran (16) and Alison Rayner Quartet (23).

www.thejazzcentreuk.co.uk

AMERSHAM AT HIGH WYCOMBE

Amersham Jazz Club, now at Wycombe Marsh Royal British Legion, has a regular weekly programme of top traditional bands. The Andrew Clancy Jazz Band and friends (April 8) is

followed by the Excelsior Vintage Jazz Band (15), the Savoy Super Six (22) and the Jake Leg Jug Band (29). May brings the Louisiana Rhythm Kings (6), Bob Dwyer's Bix and Pieces (13), the Golden Eagle Jazz Band (20) and Sarah Spencer's Transatlantic Band (27). The Mississippi Dreamboats kick off June (3), then Dave Browning's Jazz Cats (10), the San Jacinto Jazz Band (17) and John Maddocks Down Home Jazz (24).

www.amershamjazzclub.org.uk

HOME AT THE CRESCENT

Now firmly settled in at the Crescent Bar and Lounge, Scarborough jazz offers a Jam Night on April 4, followed by two sessions accompanied by the Mark Gordon Trio or Quartet: Mike Hall (15) and Jack Pearce (22). The month ends with Ben Crosland's Quartet (29).

www.scarboroughjazz.co.uk

SWANSEA JAZZLAND

Swansea Jazz Club, founded in 1949, is still going strong at four venues. The main one is Swigg with the Alessio Menconi/Nigel Price Quartet (April 8), Giulia Marro (15), Jam Session (May 6 – also June 10), Li Harding Band (13) and Coen Moeler (June 3). Two major concerts at the Grand Theatre feature the Joe Webb Trio (April 15) and Mornington Lockett's All Star Quartet (May 20).

www.swanseajazzland.co.uk

IMBER COURT

Imber Court at East Molesey in Surrey provides quality jazz nights on Sundays every month. Next up is the Dave Newton Trio on April 12.

www.imercourt.com

KING PLEASURE IN MAY AND JUNE

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys are playing Floral Hall, Hornsea (May 9) and Greystones, Sheffield (15), followed by the Concorde Club (June 3) and Riverboat Jazz Festival, Silkeborg, Denmark (26-28). Later festivals include Upton Blues Festival (July 19), Y Not Festival (August 2) and Newbury Retro Festival (8).

Tel.: 0121 454 7020

70 YEARS OF COLCHESTER

This year Colchester Jazz Club at Marks Tey Parish Hall celebrates 70 years of existence, with the programme showing no sign of slowing down. The Jake Leg Jug Band appears on April 12, followed by John Maddocks Jazzmen (19), Jools and the Jazzaholics (26), the Pete Rudeforth Jazz Band (May 3), Dave Browning's Jazz Cats (10) and the East Coast Wanderers (17).

www.colchesterjazzclub.co.uk

JAZZ - REX HARRIS

DR. IAN BROWN who describes himself as Jazz Rag's 'most northern subscriber in the British Isles' (Lairg in Sutherland), mounts an articulate defence of Rex Harris' book...

I have a first edition (1952) of Rex Harris' book and I am surprised that it has so enraged Ron Simpson (RS). I did not know that it had run to several editions and so, in jazz terms, it was clearly a best-seller and must have pleased more than it offended. It strikes me as concise, articulate and knowledgeable; many of its conclusions are deliberately provocative.

It is difficult to see why RS thinks that the book attempts to be a comprehensive account of jazz when it makes no such claim. In fact, it is a slim paperback of selective and cogent criticism. I find that many of Harris's conclusions are amusing (e.g. 'Bop' evokes about the same amount of emotional pleasure as a Euclid theorem') and perceptive (e.g. Benny Carter lacks 'the essential warmth and drive of the true jazzman'). I, too, have never found anything memorable in Carter's bland phrasing and tone although he is often the subject of adulation.

Harris apparently listened to some ragtime when he was eight years old in 1912. Imagine the impact this must have had, in England, at that time. Surely Harris's fervent championing of the early jazzmen does not make him 'narrow-minded' nor does it render his conclusions 'absurd' as RS suggests. However, it must be asked whether RS might be veering in that direction.

MIKE VERNON

NORMAN DARWEN pays tribute to the legendary founder of Blue Horizon Records.



Michael William Hugh Vernon MBE, better known as Mike Vernon, died on 2nd March 2026 at the age of 81. If he had done nothing more than produce John Mayall's seminal 1966 Decca album *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton*, his fame would have been assured in the blues world and far beyond – but he did indeed do much, much more.

Mike was born in Harrow, Middlesex, on 20th November 1944. In the 60s he began working for Decca Records, and together with his friend Neil Slaven, he founded the initially mimeographed magazine *R&B Monthly*. In 1965, advertisements appeared in the magazine for records – including one 45 by Howling Wolf's guitarist Hubert Sumlin recorded in England – on an initially mail-order, limited-edition label associated with the magazine called Blue Horizon. The label's first album was the London-recorded *The Flying Eagle* by Doctor Ross. Soon Mike also added the Purdah (for UK blues 45s) and Outasite (for American blues and R&B 45s) subsidiary labels.

In 1967 Mike and Blue Horizon signed a distribution deal with CBS, and hitting the heights with the Peter Green-led Fleetwood Mac, followed by other leading UK blues outfits such as Chicken Shack, and one-man band Duster

Bennett. The label went on to issue much more: new recordings of American bluesmen like Johnny Shines, Furry Lewis, Joe Calicott, Bukka White and others, blues pianists Champion Jack Dupree, Eddie Boyd, Curtis Jones, and Otis Spann – all teamed with UK musicians – and reissues of swamp blues like Lightnin' Slim, Lonesome Sundown and Lazy Lester.

Besides album releases, the label also issued many 45s – Fleetwood Mac's *Albatross* was a chart-topping hit in 1968, also reaching No. 2 in 1973. On these releases Mike acted most frequently as producer, though he would also engineer, write sleeve notes, take photos, and occasionally add backing vocals or percussion. At the same time, Mike was also producing albums for Decca, including early work by such important UK blues bands as Savoy Brown and Ten Years After.

In 1971, Blue Horizon released Mike's own album *Bring It Back Home*; around the same time they also issued *Making Waves* by Dutch rock band Focus, showing how Mike could work outside blues parameters (five years earlier, he had produced David Bowie's first album). Also in '71, Mike and his brother Richard opened the very successful Chipping Norton Recording Studios, recording location of many pop hits. He was a member

of The Olympic Runners and later sang incognito with Rocky Sharpe & The Replays; in the same decade he produced the great Freddie King – 1974's *Burglar* was recorded at Chipping Norton.

In the late 80s Mike was again involved with Blue Horizon as the label was resurrected and issued albums by such respected UK bluesers such as Bob Pearce and Big Joe Louis. In the 90s he did work with the labels Code Blue and Indigo, where he again produced Jimmy Witherspoon, an association going way back. In 2006 Mike was involved in reissues of vintage Blue Horizon material, and he came out of retirement some years later to produce Dani Wilde and Oli Brown, then Sari Schorr and Laurence Jones in 2016. Recently Mike had been fronting his own band, recording himself and having fun by all accounts. He deserved it, having shaped so much of today's blues sound – and so many hits.

I only met Mike once, interviewing him for an hour or so in his car outside London's Ain't Nothin' But... club in very early 1992, to discuss some of his upcoming releases – though inevitably his past achievements came up too. He didn't seem to mind; he was very friendly, very polite, very generous and very knowledgeable, and these admirable qualities have been highlighted in everything I have ever read about him. I mentioned to him I'd interviewed Jamaican bluesman Errol Dixon (whom Mike worked with at Decca in the 60s) the week before and intended to meet up with him again soon. Mike was excited – he'd not seen Errol for years and impressed on me to remember him to Errol. He pressed me again on this as I left, much later. As with everyone we discussed, Mike still had that real enthusiasm for their music.

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SO WHEN DID IT BEGIN TO GO WRONG?

Master-bassist DAVE GREEN answers the questions

Where were you born/brought up?

I was a war baby born in Edgware, Middlesex on 5th March 1942. My dad was in the army and my mum lived in a ground floor maisonette at 40 Brampton Road, Kingsbury. I distinctly remember at the age of two my mum putting me in the cupboard under the stairs to protect me from The V1 bombs, known as doodlebugs, that were falling on London in the Summer of 1944. My sister Evelyn was born in October that year and after the war in 1947 we all moved up to the brand-new prefab estate in Pilgrims Way, Wembley Park. We moved into number 22 and it just so happened that Mr and Mrs Watts with their young son Charlie, he was nine months older than me, and his little sister Linda moved into number 23.

What was your first encounter with jazz? And when?

My mum was an avid radio listener, it was on all day, so I remember hearing from a very early age programmes such as *Music While You Work*, which was on every weekday morning featuring a different band every day, and the daily request programme *Housewives Choice* which began in 1946. Glenn Miller was a favourite of the housewives so I first heard the Miller band from around the age of four.

What was the first band you heard?

That was the beginning. After that as I grew older I discovered Benny Goodman. I loved the quartet with Lionel Hampton and especially the sextet with Charlie Christian. Later as a young teenager a school friend of mine, John Evers, played me his collection of Bob Crosby's Bobcats records.

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

The first record that I bought was *Barrelhouse* by the Jess Stacy trio with Israel Crosby bass and Gene Krupa drums recorded in 1935 when the



Photo by
Merlin Daleman

bassist was just 16, it features the first bass solo that I ever heard on record. On the other side of the 78 was *Honky Tonk Train Blues* by Meade Lux Lewis.

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

After Primary school I attended Tylers Croft Secondary Modern, now known as Kingsbury High School. I had a wonderful music teacher Mr Perkins, who encouraged my enthusiasm for jazz. Together with a few school friends we formed a skiffle group. Brian Humphreys and Alan Austin played guitars, Jim Snowden was on washboard and I played tea chest bass, we called ourselves the Zodiacs. We played at school events and we even managed to play a few interval spots in local church halls opposite bands with real musicians playing real instruments. That's where I met Harvey Weston who was playing double bass with a band called the Zephyrs. After school I was doing an evening paper round from a local shop in Kingsbury and saving my hard earned wages of 10 shillings a week. Eventually I saved enough to buy my first bass from Harvey for £15.

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

After *Barrelhouse* my early teens were spent on listening to as many bass players on records as I could. I bought an EP of Louis Armstrong at the Crescendo recorded in 1955 featuring Arvell Shaw playing *Blues for Bass*, and I remember buying an EP of the Curtis Counce Quintet because I wanted to hear some modern jazz and because I liked the cover. I loved all these records and still do. When I was 16 I was introduced to the famous 1940 Duke Ellington Jimmy Blanton duet recordings which were reissued on an HMV EP in the 50s. Blanton played with Duke Ellington's Orchestra for just 2 years from 1939 - 1941, before TB struck him down but in that short time he completely transformed the history of jazz bass playing. He was the first great innovator of the bass and spiritually and emotionally he remains my biggest influence.

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

For a couple of years before I turned pro in July 1963 I was

playing with drummer Peter Prince's trio at various jazz pubs in the Ilford/Redbridge area on the outskirts of London, gaining invaluable experience as part of the 'local rhythm section' backing up visiting guest stars such as Kathy Stobart, Ronnie Ross, Don Rendell, Dick Morrissey and Joe Temperley.

One particular gig stands out in my mind when in 1962 I was on stage with trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, tenorist Stan Robinson and Eddie Harvey playing piano.

It was as a result of the experience I got playing with these established name musicians and the encouragement I received that I decided that I would take the first opportunity that came along to take the plunge and give up the day job.

My chance came in the summer of '63 when I accepted an offer of a six week gig in the south of France from vibraphonist Peter Shade.

What were the earliest bands you played with? What subsequent bandstands out for you? Charlie Watts and I joined the



A teenaged Dave Green
and Brian Humphreys

Brian 'Joe' Jones Seven in the spring of 1958. We couldn't believe our luck when we actually passed the audition at the Welsh Harp pub in West Hendon. I suppose the reason might have been that nobody else turned up for it.

The band stayed together for about eighteen months and in that time Charlie and I learnt on the job. Brian Jones led the band from the front on trumpet. He was a natural band leader and nurtured Charlie and I along. I've got fond memories of the fun times Charlie and I had playing with the band.

It's almost impossible for me to choose a single subsequent band over any other that I've played with over the years. I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to play with so many great musicians here in the UK and from Europe and the US. There is however one band that I must single out and that is the Humphrey Lyttelton band. I played with Humphrey for eighteen years from 1965 - 1983 and he was the ultimate natural leader who led from the front. He was a superb trumpet player in the Louis tradition but with an immediately recognisable style and sound of his own. Of course he was also a great broadcaster, humourist and raconteur. I had a great affection

for the man and I was honoured to be in his band.

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

The most unusual gig, and the funniest, that I ever played was at the BBC Jazz Society in White City which was founded and run by its secretary Jack Sudic. The line up of the band was Dave Lee (the man who

launched Jazz FM in 1990) on piano, the great Tony Crombie on drums, myself on bass and the special guest was that wonderful character and blues 'shouter' Beryl Bryden. What a combination!

The evening began in a conventional manner with a couple of trio tunes then Dave Lee introduced Beryl who sang a few blues numbers. At

that point Beryl decided to introduce her washboard to the proceedings, this was like a red rag to a bull for Tony. I can't remember what tune we were playing ... my memory of it has been erased but what followed the vocal chorus will be forever seared on my brain. Tony's sense of theatre took over the performance and somehow he instigated four bar breaks with drums and washboard. These not only had to be heard but also had to be seen to be believed. It was the funniest musical happening on stage that I've ever witnessed.

If you could invite three musicians, preferably from before your time, for dinner, who would you be sitting down with? Jimmy Blanton, Clifford Brown and Dave Tough.

I would be in heaven sitting round a table with these three giants of the music. I'm sure the conversation between them over dinner would be enthralling and I would be a very happy listener. Probably my only contribution would be to insist on an apple strudel for dessert.



Dave Green
and Coleman
Hawkins

KEN PELOWSKI

BORN 23 MAY 1959; DIED 2 FEBRUARY 2026

A tribute by ALAN BARNES

Ken Peplowski, arguably the greatest jazz clarinetist of his generation, tragically died this February onboard the jazz cruise in the Gulf of Mexico. He had only just finished a blistering set with his fellow clarinetists Anat Cohen and Paquito D'Rivera. A post on Facebook of his solo on *A Night In Tunisia* from that performance shows him still at the top of his game: Swinging inventive lines, driving energy, a beautiful sound and effortless command of the instrument are all very much in evidence.

Have a look on YouTube at Ken playing *Tiger Rag* with guitarist Frank Vignola or his appearance in Bern in 1993 playing *China Boy* to appreciate what an incredible ability he had on the clarinet. He was also instantly recognisable on tenor saxophone, where he exhibited a darker tone but with the same harmonic awareness and precision of thought. Ken was also one of the most humorous and well liked musicians on the scene. He was definitely not of the 'gloom school' and could really reach an audience and bring out the best in those around him. His on stage routines with Marty Grosz were hilarious and he had a daily call every day from vibist Terry Gibbs (now over 100 years old) to swap gags.

Ken was born in Garfield Heights, Ohio. His father was 'a very conservative cop' which Ken always credited as a major factor in his own development into 'a very liberal liberal'. Ken was given a clarinet which he took to immediately and soon had enough ability to join the 'The Harmony Kings' a polka band initiated by his father. Ken's elder brother Ted was on trumpet and there was some intense rivalry and a sense that their father, a failed musician, was living out his own vicarious musical dreams. Ken was performing at professional level by the age of 11. Despite this his parents were discouraging about his professional chances: 'They would say I'll never make it.' He later pointed out the similarity of the

role of the clarinet in polka music and traditional jazz: both involve improvising around arpeggios.

Entirely self taught as a jazz musician, Ken studied for two years at Cleveland High with a classical teacher but was soon branching out into the jazz world. He was heard at the Cleveland jazz Festival by trombonist Buddy Morrow who ran the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and was subsequently offered the lead alto chair in the band. This required incredible discipline, but he was given a clarinet feature every night with the rhythm section.

During this period Ken took some lessons off Sonny Stitt who was on the same tour as the Dorsey band. Ken had a book called something like *2000 Great American Standards* and Stitt asked him to open it anywhere and call a key. He had such a tremendous command that he could play anything required. His teaching method was playing phrases at his student and making him play them back, which must have been daunting to say the least.

Ken used to love telling the story of how, one night, a young and well known altoist tried out blowing the master saxophonist in a swaggering and disrespectful way. Stitt responded with a solo 'so great that the whole theatre rose to its feet. The other guy was in his car before he'd finished'.

After two years touring Buddy gave Ken a lecture about 'not being a big fish in a small pool' and persuaded him to move to New York.

There was a wave of superb musicians that descended on that City around the late 70's early 80's that liked older songs and styles: Scott Hamilton, Warren Vache, Harry Allen, Howard Alden and Ken himself. He played a lot of traditional and swing gigs at venues such as Eddie Condon's and Jimmy Ryan's



which he loved doing but felt he eventually became 'tarred with that particular brush'. He always performed more contemporary music with his own bands and played with musicians across a wide stylist range from dixieland to avant-garde. He could read and transpose the most difficult music at sight and was always open to playing any music that was brought along by another player on the gig. He reminded me of Dick Morrissey in that he was never controlling about repertoire and was always happy to play anything suggested

He had a raft of interesting lead sheets in his case and would pull out unusual gems like Harold Arlen's *Last Night When We Were Young*, Duke Ellington's *Single Petal Of A Rose* or Count Basie's *Evening*.

He was invited many many times to play Benny Goodman tributes and had indeed been part of one of the great clarinetists last bands, being im-pressed by his ability to shape a band and get great results from the players. Goodman he felt was a 'complicated guy who was so

wrapped up in music that it was sometimes to the detriment of everything else.' Ken didn't get much solo space in this ensemble but found that Benny, like Sonny Stitt had a real focus to his playing, a great sense of time, and could lift a band by the quality his own playing.

The move to New York was a huge success and led to a 10 year period of recording for Concord Records with whom he signed in 1987. Subsequently he recorded for many other labels including Arbors, Nagel-Heyer and Jazzology. He played with veterans like Max Kaminsky, Buck Clayton and Jimmy McPartland and recorded with so many great musicians: Hank Jones, Howard Alden, Marty Grosz, Ruby Braff, Kenny Davern, Leon Redbone, Mel Torme and Peggy Lee. He produced a staggering 70 albums as leader or co-leader. He also played on several movie sound tracks including *Sweet and Lowdown*. He frequently played at New York clubs Birdland, Mezzrow and Smalls and became an international touring star, appearing all over the world.

I was fortunate enough to tour with him in the UK, make four albums and play some Jazz parties including Blackpool and Topeka.

In the studio he was a first take enthusiast-two at the most. Feel, energy and soul were more important to him than absolute clinical accuracy. As in his live playing, he was happy to play anything placed in front of him and would constantly come up with material and ideas to inspire everyone.

Ken was in his own words 'a news freak'. He and Houston Person would read all the quality newspapers in the UK and in discussions of politics I was always the least well informed.

Some classic bits of Ken's humour:

Playing late at a jazz party he would start with 'We'd like to thank to thank the promoter for entrusting us with the all-important twenty-third set.'

Once at the Concorde Club, Eastleigh, we were playing some

arrange-ments and half way through a tune Ken whispered to me, 'Introduce the next one'. Turning the page as I announced I was confronted by a huge obscene drawing which reduced me to uncontrollable laughter and I was unable to continue. 'Come on, share the joke' shouted Ken which didn't help.

We were once playing a gig where we started on two clarinets. Ken had, unbeknownst to me, loosened all my ligatures so the reeds would fall off. Realising a problem with the clarinet, I quickly grabbed my alto, breathed in and nearly inhaled my reed. My coughing and Ken's laughter stopped the band.

His quips could be taken the wrong way. Great drummer Aaron Kimmel was a little crestfallen to have Ken ask 'Can I ask you a musical question?', 'Sure', 'Can you play better?'. In Ken's own words ' He looked like he was going to burst into tears. I had to say "No no I like you" I always hurt the ones I love.'



Similarly Robert Fowler joined us when we recorded a larger band. One track only needed one tenor so Robert was to play. Ken said 'You better use my microphone because we've had yours switched off all day.' He took it quite well!

Ken's health was not good in the last few years. He had a severe case of COVID during the 2020 pandemic and was diagnosed in 2021 with multiple myeloma which made it difficult for him to

work for the next three years. His come back was very much helped by Smalls and Mezzrow owner Spike Wilner offering to sponsor a live recording at the latter club.

Ken Peplowski never once coasted or gave less than his very best even when gravely ill. His clarinet playing will set the standard to which others aspire for years to come.

CHARLIE WOOD YOUR LOVE IS MY HOME



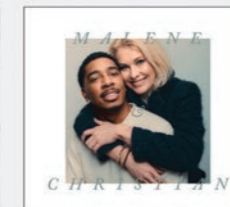
OTHER NEW RELEASES



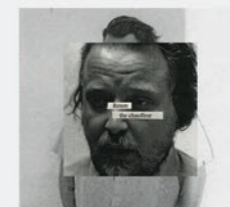
Charlie Wood
YOUR LOVE IS MY HOME
VINYL: STULP 25091 / CD: STUCD 25092
Charlie Wood (voc, p, org), Robin Aspland (p), Daniel Franck (b), Laurence Cottle (b), Ian Thomas (d), Cornelia Nilsson (d), Ayoe Angelica (choir), Sophie Ziedoy (choir), Villads Littauer Bendixen (vl), Lara Biancalana (vlc), James McMillan (tp)



Jan Harbeck Quartet
CONVERSATION
VINYL: STULP 26021 / CD: STUCD 26022
Jan Harbeck (ts), Henrik Gunde (p), Eske Nørrelykke (b), Anders Holm (d)



Malene Mortensen & Christian Sands
MALENE & CHRISTIAN
VINYL: STULP 25081 / CD: STUCD 25082
Malene Mortensen (voc), Christian Sands (p), Thomas Ovesen (b), Rasmus Kihlberg (d) Guests: Villads Littauer Bendixen (vl), Lara Biancalana (vlc), Mathias Heise (harm), Benny Benack III (tp), Gabor Bolla (ts), Eiel Lazo (perc)



REXEN
THE CHAUFFEUR
VINYL: STULP 25101 / CD: STUCD 25102
Michael Rexen (voc, g, keys), Silas Tinglef (g, d, perc), Anders (AC) Christensen (b, p), Sasha Agronov (vcl), Henry Arthur Gibbs (voc), Maria Jagd (v), Mette Lindberg (voc)



Sinne Egg & Jacob Christoffersen
SHIKIORI
VINYL: STULP 25031 / CD: STUCD 25032
Sinne Egg (voc), Jacob Christoffersen (piano, keys)

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ANDY COOPER

A personal reminiscence by IAN BATEMAN

One of the most special things that you can experience as a professional jazz musician is to be in the company of great players. If those players are a lot of fun to be with too then that is extra special. Life on the road with Andy Cooper had those qualities in abundance.

His musical credentials spoke for themselves. He was already playing with the top bands around before he found fame with the great Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen. It was Kenny's band and let's not doubt that he was one of the greatest jazz trumpet players ever to come out of the UK, but on that stage Andy Cooper was also a star of the show with his compelling rapport with the audience.

He had a few enduring 'favourites' in the show such as *Old Man Mose* and of course *I Wanna Be Like You (King of the Swingers)*, which was so popular that it had to be performed every concert. The

pure jazzers would sometimes sneer at these musical choices, but we all knew that Andy had the chops to excel at anything you cared to asked him to play. He was a great jazz musician, but first and foremost an entertainer. Regular appearances with Kenny on network TV favourites such as *The Morecambe and Wise Show* and *Saturday Night at the Mill* made him a familiar face all over the land.

Away from the Kenny Ball band, Andy played with and was greatly admired by many top jazz artists. The depts who appeared on the Top 8 bandstand over the years was a veritable who's who of top jazz and recording artists. He was particularly close both professionally and personally to Dutch vibraphone maestro Frits Landesbergen and Australian clarinet supremo Andy Firth – endorsements don't come much better than that.

Towards the end of his career, Andy started his own band packed out with top European jazz players. Andy Cooper's Euro Top 8 was born. He ran this band and kept his job with Kenny for many years, playing to full concert halls across Europe. I had a lot to thank Andy for personally: he was instrumental in bringing me under Kenny's radar when he needed a dep trombonist, which in turn brought me to the attention of Acker Bilk, whose band I eventually joined in 2003. However, it wasn't too long before I got the call from Andy to join the Top 8 too, which of course I accepted immediately.

The Top 8 was Andy's dream band and his infectious enthusiasm for that band rubbed off on all of us. The band swung like the proverbial clappers and we had some great times together and some great laughs.

My association with Andy goes back as far as the 1970s when as a teenager I would go and see the Kenny Ball band whenever they came to my town, playing in a support band at the age of 16 on one memorable occasion. Although my career went off at a tangent, it was nonetheless a great honour for me to come under his wing eventually some 25 years later and regard him as a very close and dear friend.

He left the band and things would never be the same for us. Suddenly he wasn't there, he was on the plane home and he was done with it. In the years that followed, Andy's health began to suffer and the 3 B's gradually faded away, along with the Top 8, but we all stayed in touch and kept laughing.

Our jazz family is now a sadder bunch without him, but a smile is never far away – all you have to do is reminisce. RIP mate.

SUIT YOURSELF!

JUDITH OWEN talks to RON SIMPSON

Suit Yourself, Judith Owen's 15th album, is well named: her stylistic range encompasses rock, pop, classical, jazz, blues and musical theatre and, if jazz and blues predominate on the album, there are plenty of hints of other musics. Judith herself is adamant about the variety of styles:

'You don't want to get sucked in to what style people put you in. I pride myself on being someone who can rearrange the mood of a song.'

So a song like *Shall We Dance?* comes out as intimate, rather sexy in the Owen treatment.

Judith Owen's background was almost a guarantee of her eclectic approach to song. Born in London into a musical Welsh family, her early days found her backstage at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, where her father sang for 35 years. At the same time she busied herself rummaging through his record collection, finding gems by what she calls 'unapologetic' women singers of the 40s and 50s: Pearl Bailey, Blossom Dearie, Dinah Washington, Peggy Lee and two who she was horrified to find her contemporaries hadn't heard of, Nellie Lutcher and Julia Lee. The influence on her own singing (and, in many cases, her piano playing) is obvious. When I remark that this seems an unusually wide-ranging collection for an opera singer, she insists that I look up Johnny Adams, a New Orleans-based singer whom her father also introduced her to, and his album, *Room with a View of the Blues*.

To my shame I hadn't heard of the gospel and rhythm and blues singer who died in 1998 having recorded with the likes of Dr. John, Aaron Neville and Harry Connick. But Judith's enthusiasm for his work finds a link in her love affair with New Orleans where she moved in the late 1990s with her husband Harry Shearer, having spent much of the 90s criss-crossing the Atlantic.

Judith's regard for stars of a previous era bubbles out with

her enthusiasm for recording in the same studio as Frank Sinatra used with the piano that Nat 'King' Cole played. As for her own career she enjoyed critical acclaim over many years, but made a crucial breakthrough in public popularity with *Come on and Get It*, an album full of what she calls 'joy and escapism' released in 2022. The world-wide acclaim for the album included, besides two homecoming performances at the New Orleans Jazz Fest, a packed show hosted by Jazz FM at London's Jazz Cafe.

It was around this time that she emerged from behind the piano, fronted the band and had the power to lead the band and really be free:

'Standing up and being that front person, being able to be larger than life. The joy that came from that completely changed me.'

As it happens, she partially reverts on *Suit Yourself*, playing piano on maybe half the tracks, but the instrumentalists, whether Judith is at the piano or out front, are as polished as the singing. Judith takes obvious pride in the musicians on *Suit Yourself*, pointing to the presence of Joe Bonnamassa on one track, though it's the backing musicians who show up more regularly who particularly impress me: the piano (not Judith, she assures me) on *Blue Skies*, the poised trumpet on a Latin-tinged *If I Were a Bell*, the sax and guitar on *To Your Door*. Most of all, on two tracks we have the mighty Judith Owen Big Band, including a thrilling take on *Moanin'*.

Judith's phrasing throughout is immaculate, with a welcome freedom in her scat singing, and her choice of repertoire provides contrasts all the way through the album. Judith Owen the songwriter is less in evidence than on some earlier ones as she prefers to dig into the repertoire of Aretha Franklin, for instance, whose *Evil Gal Blues* is an undoubted highlight, or Etta James, cited by Judith for *Since I Fell For You* – I would have associated it with the



composer, Buddy Johnson, and his sister Ella, but no matter – it's the performance that matters. Far and away the longest track on the album, it gave Judith some worrying moments:

'We did all the tracks in one take – no overdubs or anything – and, when we came to do *Since I Fell for You*, it was the last of all. I'd been singing all day and my voice sounded rough. I thought I sounded awful, but, when we came to play it back, it turned out to be just right for the song.'

As I spoke to Judith, she was in London to promote the album, but was about to start a European tour in Paris. British fans have no reason to despair, however: she returns on June 1 to play Bush Hall in London, followed by a Cardiff gig, before setting off to the Continent again, a highlight being opening for Elvis Costello in Umbria. Then it's back to her American touring. Looking at her crowded date-sheet, one name stood out, more than such events as the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. On September 12 Judith appears in New Orleans in Groove to Good – A Celebration of Music and Community. Seems typical somehow!

When you ask Judith about the state of America at the moment her disgust, especially at the ICE killings, is obvious. Her initial response is one word – 'terrible' – but even here her optimism shows through:

'We live in New Orleans which doesn't feel like America and we can concentrate on making music and spreading joy. And, if you're fortunate enough to do the thing you love and people want to hear you, then you almost have a duty to carry on doing it for as long as you can.'

And that is just what she intends to do!

Suit Yourself is released on April 24. Judith Owen may be heard at Bush Hall, London, on June 1.



JUDITH OWEN

Suit Yourself

New Album, Out 24th April

Album Includes:
Joe Bonamassa, Davell Crawford & The J.O. Big Band

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JAZZ FESTIVALS TO JULY

CHANGE OF MONTH

Instead of the customary May date, **Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues Festival** in the picturesque setting of Clitheroe has switched this year to a more compact festival weekend (June 5-7), centred on St. Mary's Centre and with, for one year only, no fringe events. Artists lined up for this year include the Olivia Cuttill Quintet, James Morton's Groove Den with Dennis Rollins, the Swing Commanders, Veronneau and the Maisie Riley Quintet. www.rvjazzandblues.co.uk



Olivia Cuttill

THREE ANNIVERSARIES

Conspicuous among the varied programme at **Swanage Jazz Festival** (July 10-12) are celebrations of three significant jazz anniversaries: Miles Davis' 100th birthday is celebrated by the Steve Waterman Octet and by Andy Urquhart's Electric Miles. John Coltrane's 100th is reflected in Mark Lockheart and Marvin Muoneke's recreation of *Coltrane and Hartman on Impulse!*. Stan Tracey's *Under Milk Wood* is recreated by Clark Tracey's Sextet.

The festival, in Sandpit Field and the Mowlem Theatre, features its usual wide spread of talents, including the Nigel Price Trio, Jo Harrop and trio, the Alan Barnes Quartet, Greg Abate, Steely Jazz, the John Etheridge/Christian Garrick Duo and Alex Clarke's Out of the Woods Quartet. www.swanagejazzfestival.co.uk



Clark Tracey

BRICK LANE JAZZ FESTIVAL

(APRIL 23-26)
Brick Lane has a remarkable line-up of the more contemporary styles of jazz, with the more familiar names the NYJO Big Band, Tomorrow's Warriors, Bad Influence and Gaby D'Annunzio. www.bricklanejazzfestival.com

CHELTENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL

(APRIL 29-MAY 4)
Cheltenham Jazz Festival has its usual impressive bill, with a sample of the acts on offer James Morrison, Joshua Redman, the Puppini Sisters, Van Morrison, Courtney Pine, Bill Frisell, Giacomo Smith, Alice Zawadzki, the Easy Rollers and Theon Cross. www.cheltenhamfestivals.org

MANTON BAY MANOUCHE

The **Django in the Bay Festival** (May 22-24) combines the best in Hot Club jazz with luxury tented accommodation on the shores of Rutland Water at the Hide at Manton Bay. The music is in the capable hands of Fapy Lapertin and Tcha Limberger, Dom Vink's Parisien Trio, Sebastien Giniaux and Joris Viquesnel, the Elias Price Sextet, the Wawau Adler Trio and the Simba Baumgartner Trio. www.djangointhebay.co.uk



Fapy Lafertin

MANCHESTER JAZZ FESTIVAL

(MAY 15-24)
Manchester Jazz Festival has a regular programme of free events and a photographic exhibition of Women in Jazz, plus concerts by the likes of the Andy Sheppard Trio, Olivia Cuttill, Yellowjackets, Tony Kofi and Denys Baptiste, China Moses and Tom Cawley. www.manchesterjazz.com

LEEDS JAZZ FESTIVAL

(MAY 21-26)
Beginning at JazzLeeds' home base, Seven Arts, the Festival also uses such venues as the Howard Assembly Room, the City Varieties and the Clothworkers Hall. Appearing this year, among many others, are Ian Shaw with songs of Sondheim, Ancient Infinity Orchestra, Jo Harrop and Hannah Horton, Emma Rawicz and Jazz Sabbath. www.leedsjazzfestival.com

SIDMOUTH INTERNATIONAL JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(MAY 22-25)
Covering a wide range of musics, with a base for its activities in Blackmore Gardens, Sidmouth hosts such artists as Jools Holland, Emeli Sande, Macy Gray, Joe Stilgoe, Ronnie Scott's Gospel Choir and James Morton's Groove Den. www.sidmouthjazz.com

SWALEDALE FESTIVAL

(MAY 23-JUNE 6)
Based around Richmond, home to Britain's oldest theatre, the Swaledale Festivals offers 75 events in 15 days: walks, talks, classical concerts, folk music, brass bands and a touch of jazz, plus a day learning the art of dry stone walling. Jazz and jazz-inclined events feature Clare Teal, Jonny Bruce and the Ladies of Midnight Blue. www.swalefest.org

CROSS THE TRACKS

(MAY 24)
For a one-day festival Cross the Tracks boasts an amazing line-up in the fields of jazz, funk, soul and hip hop. A sample of names comes up with corto.alto, Little Simz, the Womack Sisters, Joy Crookes and the Outlook Orchestra. www.xthetracks.com

HIGHWORTH JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JUNE 6)
For one day Highworth's historic High Street plays host for the third year running to a variety of styles of jazz: Snowboy, Tony Kofi's Organisation, Vimala Rowe, Ray Gelato, Three Bop, Tad Newton and many others. www.highworthjazzfestival.com

IFORD MANOR JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JUNE 18-21)
Claire Martin curates a jazz festival in the historic surrounds of Iford Manor, with Trish Clowes and Ross Stanley, the Vanessa Haynes Duo, Snowboy and the Latin Section and the Maddie Mason Duo. www.ifordmanor.com

UPTON JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JUNE 26-28)
Upton fills the town with the sounds of traditional and mainstream jazz, with the likes of Alan Barnes and Robert Fowler, Craig Milverton, John Hallam, Joy Parke, Moscow Drug Club, T.J. Johnson, Tad Newton and many others, plus a clutch of youth bands. www.uptonjazz.co.uk

SUMMER JAZZ WEEKEND: LANGSTONE CLIFF HOTEL

(JULY 3-5)
The four sessions of jazz between Friday evening and Sunday lunch-time at the Langstone Cliff Hotel at Dawlish Warren feature music by the Langstone Chosen Five, the North Coast Buskers, Washington Whirligig and Kevin Grenfell's Jazz Falcons. www.langstone-hotel.co.uk

LOVE SUPREME JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JULY 3-5)
Glynde Place is the venue for this prestigious festival which features, alongside the likes of Sister Sledge, the Temptations and the Four Tops, such jazz stars as Samara Joy, Esperanza Spalding, Courtney Pine, Moses Boyd, Joe Webb, Bill Frisell and Joe Lovano. www.lovesupremefestival.com

DEREHAM BLUES FESTIVAL

(JULY 1-5)
The well-established blues festival in Norfolk features Will Wilde at the opening concert in Dereham

Memorial Hall at the start of a festival where all other events, with 50 bands, are free admission. www.derehambluesfestival.org.uk

BUXTON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

(JULY 9-26)
Under its new Director, Wesley Stephenson, the Jazz Weekender (9-12) follows the same pattern as in recent years, with Laura Jurd, Andrew McCormack, Zoe Gilby, Courtney Pine, Darius Brubeck and a quintet of Noe Levy, Alan Barnes and the Paul Edis Trio among the attractions. Later in the Festival the Easy Rollers, Fergus McCreadie and the Gaz Hughes Trio are among those on the bill. www.buxtonfestival.co.uk

MOSTLY JAZZ, FUNK AND SOUL FESTIVAL

(JULY 10-12)
On the bill for the successful festival in Moseley Park are Soul II Soul, Jaden Ngonga, the Dan Casimir Big Band, Fabio and Grooverider and Jordan Rakei. www.mostlyjazz.co.uk

BURTON AGNES JAZZ FESTIVAL

(JULY 10-12)
Burton Agnes has yet to announce its headliners, but as usual they will cover a wide spectrum of jazz, to go with the charming Elizabethan surroundings and the provision (with hot showers!) for camping for tents, caravans and motorhomes. www.burtonagnes.com

VINTAGE FOR VICTORY

(JULY 11-12)
The vintage gathering in Whitchurch, Cardiff, offers three stages, three dance floors, a fun fair and stalls of all descriptions, together with music from (among others) the Swing Commanders, the Revolutionaires, Jive Aces and Si Cranston and his Band. www.vintageforvictory.co.uk

EDINBURGH JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

(JULY 17-26)
The full Edinburgh programme will be announced in late April, but five concerts at Queens Hall have been confirmed: Tuba Skinny, Jarron Paxton, Davina and the Vagabonds, Afrobeat Party and a tribute to the late Scottish pianist, Brian Kellock. www.ejbf.com

NEW TO WHITLEY BAY

The format of the **Mike Durham International Jazz Party** (November 6-8), aka the Whitley Bay Jazz Festival, at Newcastle's Village Hotel remains constant, but each year brings new elements to keep things fresh, the subjects of the concerts, of course, but also a few new faces to join the 30-odd jazz stars led by Colin Hancock and Michael McQuaid. This year the festival turns to Continental Europe, with two from Germany, reedman Laurin Habert and bassist Malte Tonisson, and one from France, pianist Matthieu Meyer. www.whitleybayjazzfest.com

Michael McQuaid



SEPTEMBER JOYS AT BUDE

Bude Jazz Festival (September 1-4) continues into its 37th year with a fine selection of the best in British traditional jazz, all against a background of the beautiful scenery of the Cornish Riviera. This year such familiar names as Alex Clarke, Amy Roberts, John Hallam, Craig Milverton, the Bateman Brothers, Pete Allen, Kevin Grenfell and the Jake Leg Jug Band are all appearing, together with some names less well known to us at *Jazz Rag*: the Fugue and Groove Trio, the Garden of Joy Jazz Band, Three Good Men and, of course, Men Behaving Tradly. www.budejazzfestival.info

Alex Clarke



BIRMINGHAM THEN AND NOW

JIM SIMPSON, director of the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival for all its time (and, incidentally, Editor of this magazine), reflects on the changes between the first festival and the 42nd, due to take place from July 24th to August 2nd.

In the 1980s I was becoming increasingly disillusioned by what purported to be jazz which so far as I could tell bore no resemblance to what I knew as jazz. It was the beginning of what's become a malaise now which has spread so that people use the jazz word to describe music which both musicians and fans cannot recognise as jazz.

So I decided to put together an all-star jam session to demonstrate what I believe to be hot jazz. I stole the idea from Eddie Condon's New York concerts of having two front lines with one rhythm section so you not only had trumpet players swapping fours, you also had two front lines swapping choruses. I think I had the best 12 jazz players around at that time, with the front lines headed by Humphrey Lyttelton and Digby Fairweather and an all-star rhythm section. The full line-up was Humph, Digby, Roy Williams, Roy Crimmins, Dick Morrissey, Bruce Turner, Randy Colville, Dave Shepherd, Mick Pyne, Jim Douglas, Harvey Weston and Johnny Richardson.

Mitchells and Butler's, a national brewer based in Birmingham, provided sponsorship and we put the concert on at the open-air theatre in Cannon Hill Park in front of a sell-out crowd of 800-plus people. We recorded a live album on Richard Branson's

Manor Mobile and won the *Sunday Times* Jazz Album Of The Year. At breakfast the next morning – we'd all stopped over at the Holiday Inn – I was taken aside by Humphrey Lyttelton, Malcolm Powell of Mitchells and Butler's and Stephen Carter of Holiday Inn – and they said, 'That was very good. We want you to do a festival next year.' Stephen said, 'I'll give you hotel rooms', Malcolm said, 'I'll provide the funding' and Humph said, 'I'll give you all the support I can.'

So the next year the festival went ahead, six days with maybe 30 gigs. Before it started I had a phone call from a member of Birmingham City Council who said, 'I hear you're doing a jazz festival. Come and see me.' I went along and he said, 'That sounds interesting. Would you like some financial support?' And he gave me £5,000 without me asking – I didn't realise then that you could get money for a jazz festival – and that £5,000 must be worth £15,000 or £20,000 today. The next year it went up significantly and kept rising for many years until it started to reduce and about ten years ago it was settled at £15,000. Now, of course, we get no funding at all from the council.

The festival has changed dramatically, slowly and steadily, but still dramatically, because,



Nomy Rosenberg at the 2009 Festival

Photo by Merlin Daleman

quite simply, there aren't the big box office names around any more. We had most of the great names of jazz in those early days – the Count Basie Orchestra, Dizzy Gillespie Big Band, Maynard Ferguson Big Band, Miles Davis, the only ever UK appearance of the Illinois Jacquet Big Band which was broadcast live on BBC Radio 2 from the Grand Hotel. When it comes to the blues, we had the Blues Brothers Band from the film, minus Ackroyd and Belushi, appearing six times over three years at the Alexandra Theatre – every show a sell-out. Then we had Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, B.B. King, Albert King and Freddie King. On one night – at the same time – we had the Buddy Guy/Junior Wells Band selling out the Town Hall, George Melly selling out the Grand Hotel and Miles Davis not selling out the NEC.

When the touring attractions started drying up, I decided we had to make the music itself the attraction, so we removed any barriers to people enjoying it by presenting a mostly free festival. For instance, out of last year's 179 shows, 166 were free admission.

A new generation of audience has grown up not knowing who the Count Basie Orchestra, for instance, was, so we adopted a policy of setting out to interrupt people's daily lives with entertaining music. We still did our evening shows in bars, restaurants, libraries, museums and theatres, but we also moved into department stores, shopping centres and even an optician's – we even put musicians on the Metro tram to Wolverhampton and back. The idea is that a lot of new people will hear the music, pick up a free festival programme

and go to other gigs. We also have an army of volunteers without whom the festival couldn't function. They get everywhere, thrusting the festival programme (which is really a 64-page booklet) into people's hands, so we hope that, if people respond to what they hear, they'll come along to listen and catch the bug. Now it's quite common to get 70,000 people or more at the festival.

What is really great is that we now attract some terrific younger bands with their own original takes on proper jazz and blues which sit comfortably with those remaining stars of the golden years of British jazz: Digby Fairweather, Dave Green, Art Themen, Simon Spillett, Bruce Adams, Alan Barnes, Dave Newton, Steve Brown and that finest of all British jazz singers, Val Wiseman – sometimes with her show-stopping *Lady Sings the Blues* nod to Billie Holiday.

King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys, now celebrating their 40th year on the road, are a regular top drawer, closely followed by the always impressive New Orleans stylists, Tipitina. Groups coming to

the fore in recent years who have made their mark on the Festival include Edinburgh's Tenement Jazz Band, Django Chutney from Brighton, Warren James' Hit Parade Heroes, Florence Joelle, The Hot Club of Halifax, Jump, Jive and Wail and, most recently, the outrageous Sax Pistols.

Increasingly the blues fraternity has built on Birmingham's reputation as the UK Home of the Blues with a veritable array of terrific bands carrying the flag for the blues. A number of these come from the Continent, from Germany, France, Scandinavia and the Netherlands, but the new wave seems to be mostly from Spain and Italy. These bands play the blues or jazz as we know it with great musicianship and high entertainment value. This year we have two Spanish bands, last year's sensation The Swing Cats and first-timers La Voodoo Jazz Band, plus ever-popular returnees Ben Tourey from France, Andres Roots from Estonia, Stacey Michart and B.D. Lenz from the States, plus a first visit from the Japanese/American Miho Hazama.

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Digby Fairweather and Dusko Goykovic at the 1989 Festival

Photo by Merlin Daleman

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RAGTIME AND NEAR-JAZZ ON RECORD BEFORE 1917

By Scott Yanow

On February 26, 1917, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded the first all-out jazz recordings: *Livery Stable Blues* and *Dixie Jass Band One-Step* (later retitled *Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step*). However, this was far from the first jazz ever performed. At that time it was already 22 years since cornetist Buddy Bolden had formed his first jazz group in New Orleans but unfortunately there were no recording studios in the Southern part of the United States and one can only speculate about what jazz of that era really sounded like. It leads one to ask 'Were there any hints of jazz on record during 1895-1916? And what about ragtime?'

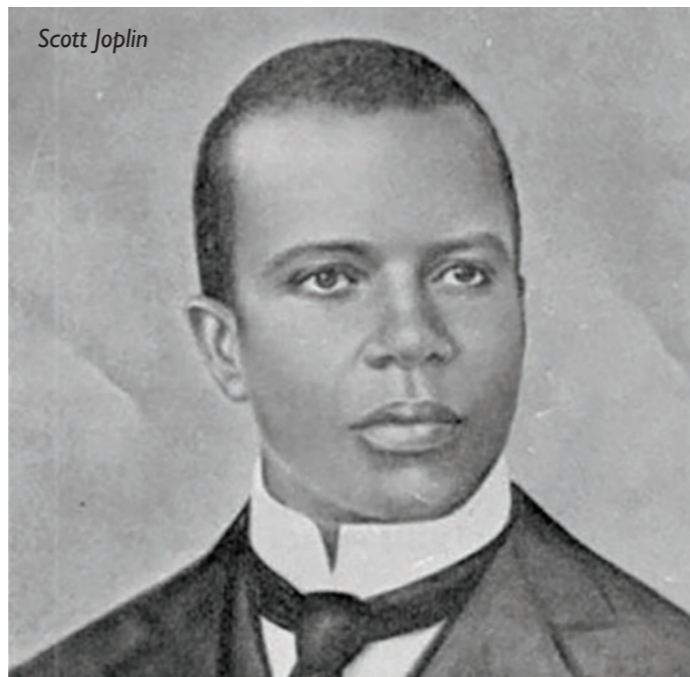
While some music history books state that ragtime was a predecessor of jazz or an early form of the music, ragtime (originally based in the Midwest) actually developed independently during the same period as early New Orleans jazz. Ragtime caught on big during 1899-1900 with the publication of the sheet music of Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*. During 1900-15, before jazz even had its name, ragtime was at the height of its popularity. Unfortunately, none of its major composers (including Joplin, James Scott, Tom Turpin, and Joseph Lamb), all of whom were pianists, were recorded during the ragtime era although Lamb did get to record in the late 1950s and Joplin and Scott made some piano rolls that hint at their playing.

Many of the recordings of the 1895-1916 era are difficult to sit through for they include racist 'comedy' routines, operatic singing, overly sentimental vocal ballads, and routine dance music. However, there are exceptions. There were instrumental recordings by brass bands that played marches, excerpts of classical music, popular selections, and occasionally orchestrated versions of ragtime. Issler's Orchestra recorded *Electric Light Quadrille* in 1889, a fascinating performance (now 137 years

old) that includes a speaker in the middle announcing that the electric light bulb is going to be demonstrated later that week! Probably of greatest interest to jazz collectors are the recordings that showcase virtuoso soloists, particularly those of the rather incredible trombonist Arthur Pryor (his version of *Blue Bells Of Scotland* from 1901 sounds impossible to play on the trumpet much less the trombone) and cornetist Herbert L. Clarke. In addition, the recordings of the Six Brown Brothers, a group consisting of six saxophonists, contain such ragtime pieces as *That Moaning Saxophone Rag*, *Dill Pickles*, and *Down Home Rag*.

Although ragtime is often thought of as a music that is mostly played by pianists, solo piano records before 1910 are rare. With the primitive recording equipment of the time, the piano was difficult to record, as were the guitar, string bass, and most of the drum set. In contrast, the banjo recorded quite well. Vess Ossman (1868-1923), Olly Oakley from England (1877-1943), and Fred Van Eps (1878-1960) were among the brilliant banjoists who made scores of records, including quite a few ragtime-oriented pieces. While they were not improvisers, their outstanding playing still sounds impressive today.

After 1910 there were more solo piano recordings although they were still not all that common. British pianist Melville Gideon's *Ragtime improvisation on Rubinstein's Melody In F* (1912) showed great potential in its title but the results are no great thrill. Better are the recordings of Mike Bernard (including *Everybody Two-Step*, *That Peculiar Rag*, and *Tantalizing Tingles*) from 1912-13, Roy Spangler's *Red Onion Rag* and *Cannon Ball Rag*, and Felix Arndt's 1914 solos *From Soup To Nuts*, *Desecration Rag* (A Classic Nightmare), and his hit *Nola*. Lost to history are unreleased recordings from the great stride pianist Lucky Roberts in 1916



Scott Joplin

Other enjoyable ragtime-oriented recordings from the early period include John Phillip Sousa's initial waxing of *At A Georgia Camp Meeting* (1898), the United States Marine Band's *You Got To Play Ragtime* (1899) and *Maple Leaf Rag* (1906), the Columbia Orchestra's *Creole Belles* (1901), xylophonist Chris Chapman's version of *St. Louis Rag* (1906), a rare piano solo from Emilio Murillo (1909's *High Life Rag*), Charles A. Prince's Orchestra's *Porcupine Rag* (1910), and Conway's Band's *Hungarian Rag* (1913). A long-lost cylinder apparently featured clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman in 1903 playing *Maple Leaf Rag* in Minneapolis with a six-piece band.

While ragtime was documented in piecemeal and almost random fashion, jazz is more difficult to find although there are some surprising hints. In 1904 in London, the American James I. Lent recorded what was probably the first ever drum solo, *The Ragtime Drummer*. He would record that number again in 1908, 1912 and 1916 and he always sounded as if he were improvising. In 1911 Gene Greene 'The Ragtime King' became the first scat-singer to

be documented on *King Of The Bungaloes*. He would record that piece five times during 1911-17. Marion Harris (1897-1944), an early jazz singer, had a relaxed style and a pleasing voice that contrasted with nearly all of the other singers who were recorded that early. They tended to shout as much as sing, as if they were trying to be heard in a large theatre. In 1916 her recording of *I Ain't Got Nobody* (originally titled *I Ain't Got Nobody Much*) certainly borders on jazz. Incidentally, her final recording, 1934's *Singin' The Blues*, was the earliest released example of vocalese with her lyrics written to the solos of Frank Trumbauer and Bix Beiderbecke.

Some of the early jazz standards were recorded before 1917 by nonjazz groups. Prince's Band cut *High Society* (1911), *That's A Plenty* (1914), W.C. Handy's *Memphis Blues* (1914), and *St. Louis Blues* (1915). The Victor Military Band also recorded *Memphis Blues* (nine days before Prince's group) and *Ballin' The Jack* (1914), Dan Quinn sang *Oh Didn't He Ramble* in 1902, and Pete Hampton in London recorded *Bill Bailey* in 1904. *Alexander's Ragtime Band* was a big hit in 1911-12 and recorded numerous times while Sophie Tucker first recorded

Some Of These Days in 1911 although that version is pretty straight compared to her later jazz-oriented renditions.

Were the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's recordings the earliest jazz ever on record? There are four other possible candidates although two can be quickly eliminated. James Reese Europe and his Society Orchestra recorded four numbers on December 29, 1913 and four others on February 10, 1914. While half are of classical themes, the other four have some jazzlike qualities. Two from the earlier date (*Too Much Mustard* and *Down Home Rag*) find Europe leading a group consisting of trumpet, clarinet, three violinists, two pianists, drums, and no less than five banjos and/or mandolins. While his band has plenty of spirit and the banjo playing sounds spontaneous, one can think of this as rather ragged ragtime. The second date drops the banjos and has the band playing hot versions of *Castle House Rag* and *Castle Walk* which sound very much worked out in advance although they swing in their own way. Some

have claimed that this African-American group was performing jazz but it sounds more like ragtime to this listener.

Wilbur Sweatman, who gained some fame for playing three clarinets at once (unfortunately he never recorded that feat), was the composer of *Down Home Rag* which he recorded in December 1916 with what was billed as the Emerson String Trio although the backup group actually consisted of C-melody sax, violin and piano. While the number would be adopted by jazz groups, he mostly sticks to the melody.

Pianist and musical director W.G. 'Gus' Haenschen (1889-1980) used the pseudonym of Carl Fenton to record some interesting dance band sides in the mid-1920s, a few of which (particularly 1927's *Delirium*) were quite adventurous. Less known is that in 1916 he recorded six numbers. Four were with a 'banjo orchestra' including *Maple Leaf Rag*. Of greatest interest are two pieces, *Sunset Medley* and *Country Club Medley*, that are duets with drummer T.T. Schiffer. That music, which

contains some improvising, falls between ragtime and jazz and could be considered early examples of the latter. The most intriguing example of 'pre jazz' is the hardest to dismiss. The comedy vocal team of Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlan (as Collins and Harlan) was quite popular during 1903-26. While they sang some ragtime-oriented pieces, they were essentially the type of act often heard in vaudeville. However, on November 8, 1916, they recorded a number called *That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland*, the earliest recording to mention jazz. Collins and Harlan sing, joke and talk with excitement about seeing a 'jas' band. Twice during the performance, an unidentified dixielandish group jams for 16 bars. While the ensemble uses some typical effects, they do improvise together and sound like a jazz group of the time. This was recorded three months before the Original Dixieland Jazz Band waxed *Livery Stable Blues*. *That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland* was not released until April 1917, a month after the ODJB's debut recording, so even if one

considers it to be jazz, *Livery Stable Blues* is still the first jazz recording to be released. Despite its dated comedy, *That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland* is well worth searching for.

Many of these recordings have made available by Archeophone (www.archeophone.com), the premiere label involved in releasing pre-1920 music. Among their releases that are most relevant to this article are Europe's Society Orchestra, W.G. 'Gus' Haenschen's *The Missing Link*, *Real Ragtime*, and *Stomp And Swerve*. Other CDs that should be acquired are Arthur Pryor, *Trombone Soloist* (Crystal Records), Herbert L. Clarke, *Cornet Soloist* (Crystal Records), and *Cakewalks, Rags & Blues - Military Style* (Renovation).

Scott Yanow can be reached for liner notes (he has written 1,005), bios, press releases and other interesting assignments at scottyanowjazz@yahoo.com.

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CHARLIE WOOD

CHARLIE WOOD has recently released the CD, *Your Love is My Home* on Stunt Records. RON SIMPSON took the opportunity of finding out more about the singer/pianist.

You were born in Memphis and then moved temporarily to New Orleans. What influence did these cities and their music have on you?

I was incredibly lucky to have grown up in Memphis, Tennessee, surrounded by all these great blues, R&B and jazz musicians and immersed in that cross-pollination of styles and cultures, and also incredibly lucky to grow up in a very musical family. All five of us could sing and play at least one instrument, and my mum and dad took us three kids out to hear a lot of music, everything from the clubs in Beale Street to the Memphis Symphony. New Orleans had this mythic allure for me, musically and otherwise. I'm really glad I got to spend some time down there and it definitely informed my piano playing - and my outlook on life as well - but Memphis will always be my musical DNA.

You began with the blues. Which blues singer(s) most influenced you?

Oh man, it's hard to say because there are so many I love. I used to listen to loads of Howlin' Wolf & John Lee Hooker, but I don't think I sound much like either of them. I love B.B. King and Bobby Bland. I love Otis Redding and Sam and Dave and all those guys on Stax & Malaco who brought so much blues into R&B music. I love Mose Allison and the way he brought Delta Blues into modern jazz, and of course his pithy, wry, incredibly concise lyrics. And Ray Charles, oh man - the way he played and sang was just the epitome of musical hipness to me, just casual unshowy excellence, completely relaxed & in the moment, just so moving and so joyful.

I guess you were a fixture on Beale Street in the 1990s (and 2000s?). How would you describe the scene at this time?

I reckon that was the second heyday of Beale Street really. There were live bands everywhere all the time, so you not only got to play a lot, but you got to listen a lot too, as well as

hang out with all your buddies between sets and after hours. I played seven nights a week for years. It was great.

People knew I was going to be there every night, so musicians would sometimes drop by unexpectedly and sit in, especially guys with a Memphis connection. And when I say musicians, I'm talking about people like BB King, Isaac Hayes, Georgie Fame, George Coleman, Kirk Whalum - some very heavy cats came and sat in with my trio. It was a real thrill and a fantastic musical education.

How has your music developed over the years?

For me, it's about synthesis: finding ways to incorporate the different styles and approaches I like into something that fits together and works organically as a whole, so that I can express ideas and feelings in a way that's distinctly my own and feels natural to me.

Which singers do you especially admire?

Besides the ones I already mentioned, I'd have to add in Aretha Franklin, and Stevie Wonder, and Chet Baker, and Sam Cooke, and Billie Holiday, and Marvin Gaye, and Frank Sinatra - how long have you got?

You are now in England and married to Jacqui Dankworth. Has she been an influence on you musically?

Jacqui's been a huge influence on me musically. She's certainly a vocalist I admire as well: her beautiful tone, her tireless dedication to her craft, her ability to remain totally herself across so many different styles, how she connects with an audience in a way that's really entertaining and polished but also very genuine. Jacqui's got an incredible voice and she's a consummate professional, so that's a daily inspiration for me. Jacqui has also enabled me to expand my musical horizons and work in a lot of styles and formats I just wouldn't have attempted otherwise - bigband + strings, string quartet,



classical crossover stuff - so that's been a real education for me, fascinating & challenging and a lot of fun.

I seem to recall an album on which you two collaborated. Do you work together much? What style/format are most of your gigs now?

Jacqui and I made a duo record together called *Just You, Just Me* which I think is a really great album. We work together a lot, either as a vocal duo or with me as Jacqui's pianist & MD. The line-ups vary a great deal, from orchestral and big band to quartet/quintet to just the two of us sometimes.

Can you give me a bit more detail on your meeting with the Stunt people?

I was at Jazz Ahead in Bremen and heard that Peter and Søren from Stunt/Sundance were there. We'd never met before, but I had worked on a recent recording project Stunt had put together in the UK which went really well, so I thought I'd approach them about us doing an album together. They're just delightful people and we got in really well together. We realised we have some musical friends in common

in Denmark, had really similar tastes in music, as well as a shared taste for Scotch whiskey, so we hung out and did a bit of informal tasting that evening, you know, and before you knew it we had put together a plan to make this record.

I guess the trio referred to in that conversation was Robin Aspland, Daniel Franck and Ian Thomas. The 'extras' on the CD add to the effect. What prompted the addition of strings, etc.?

There were actually two different rhythm sections on this record. We had Laurence Cottle (bass) and Ian Thomas (drums) in the UK sessions, where Robin Aspland played a lot of the piano (I did some as well). Those three guys are so brilliant individually and just impeccable as a trio, so I felt really lucky to be working with them and we had a great time. Then I went and did some sessions in Copenhagen with Daniel Franck (bass) and Cornelia Nilsson (drums) and me on piano and voice. I'd never played with Daniel or Cornelia before so I didn't know how that would feel as a trio, but man, they're amazing players and we got together instantly and effortlessly. Søren and Peter

really liked the result and wanted to kind of 'push the boat out' on this one, so they asked me to write some string and vocal accompaniment for a few of the songs and we got these wonderful musicians in to record those. I think it's a great sounding record.

There are a whole lot of ballads and slow tempo songs on the CD. What prompted this?

Yeah, that's true isn't it? It wasn't by design, actually. This record is definitely about songs and singing, rather than being one of those 'check THIS out' impressive-soloists-playing-impressive-solos sort of jazz records. I think singers always like ballads because it gives us space and time to stretch out and really get into the lyric and the atmosphere of a song, so that probably influenced the songlist. Or maybe I'm just slowing down in my old age? It has to happen sometime, eh?

The choice of songs is really interesting, from classics onwards. Only two of your own - was this a

deliberate policy? How did you choose the songs?

Again, nothing deliberate really. Just the three of us saying, 'How about this, how about that?' Kind of like a do-it-yourself jukebox I guess - think if a song you'd like to hear and play it. We tried a few things that we didn't end up using, but most of it felt and sounded great really quickly.

You speak out on your lack of concern for labels, but dare I ask - what next?

I'm always writing, so I've got a backlog of songs I'd like to record, but I've also got two albums worth of organ trio stuff recorded - one recorded in the UK and one in the US - and another organ trio session coming up in Spain, so maybe I'll release a trio record from a trio of countries. Also, I've been working with a wonderful guitarist called Giorgio Serci and his trio. We've done some great gigs and some recording as well, so I'm hoping we'll have an album from that pretty soon. A little bit of everything, really.

Your Love is My Home is reviewed on page 24.

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TRAD JAZZ AND THE RHYTHM CLUBS: THE SOUNDTRACK TO POST-WAR BRITAIN

ANDREW LIDDLE's memories of the post-war jazz scene

The smoke hangs low over a Soho night, curling in the harsh glow of neon signs that flicker on wet pavement. From the doorway of a basement club somewhere between Wardour Street and Old Compton Street spills the blare of brass, the thud of drums and the clatter of piano keys. It is a background scene from the 1959 film *Look Back in Anger*, directed by Tony Richardson, and it makes London's post-war jazz world almost tangible.

In the contemporary films of the period set in this part of London we glimpse restless young men in crumpled suits leaning at the bar, women with scarlet lipstick jiving to the music, taxis idling outside while the rhythm rolls out into the street. Jazz provides the soundtrack: raw, brassy and thrilling, and it is impossible not to be caught up in it.

In the rubble and rationing of post-war Britain a new mood music, full of restless energy, is rising. It is a world away from the polished swing of the pre-war dance bands or the elegant orchestrations of the BBC Light Programme. It's raucous and joyful, reaching back across the Atlantic to the earliest strains of New Orleans jazz.

British musicians and listeners alike were in the process of rediscovering the music of Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton et al and, in doing so, creating a revival that was both nostalgic and entirely new.

My own introduction to this heady experience came indirectly and at an early age. My father was secretary of the Halifax Rhythm Club - based in an upstairs room of the White Swan - after his demobilisation from the RAF until the late 1950s, when it finally folded. Once a month the committee would gather at our house, bearing before them their precious 78-rpm records in cardboard sleeves, rather like modern-day pizza deliverers. Soon my bedroom would fill with the booming strains of

Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke or, my favourite, Bunk Johnson.

Those evenings undoubtedly gave me my love of jazz. But they also stimulated a fascination with something I could never quite experience myself: the early jazz clubs and the fervour that brought people to them. Fortunately, until relatively recently, plenty of older enthusiasts were around to give vivid impressions of their first fine careless rapture.

When I began attending jazz sessions in the late-1960s, most of them took place in pubs rather than dedicated clubs. The atmosphere to me was joyously exciting, but I always suspected - and indeed was often told - that something of the original electricity had faded. The earlier scene was louder, edgier, altogether less respectable. (In his fervent puff piece, *Trad Mad*, the broadcaster Brian Matthew advised my generation that it was altogether safer to experience jazz on radio and television than experience it first-hand.) Yet in its way I suspect it must have had the sort of innocence and wonder akin to first love.

In the immediate post-war years live bands were not always easy to find in the provinces. That was one reason rhythm clubs flourished. Their original purpose was simply to play records collectively in the absence of musicians. Members gathered to listen, enthuse and learn. Some came for the sheer energy of the music and the chance to dance. Others belonged to a more scholarly tribe of enthusiasts who collected rare records and studied the early masters with near-academic devotion. They must have been a curious mixture, part dance hall, part jazz church.

The spiritual centre lay in Soho, where clubs proliferated in basements and back rooms across the district. The Feldman Club in central London, which evolved into the London Jazz



Club and later the Humphrey Lyttelton Club, hosted countless moments of early British jazz history, much before *Bad Penny Blues*, recorded by Humphrey Lyttelton, reached the Top Twenty in 1958.

The first big revivalist hit, it is often said to have sparked the 'trad boom' experienced by my generation. Some months later, of course, the Chris Barber Band's *Petite Fleur*, actually recorded in 1956, sold more than two million copies. Acker Bilk, Kenny Ball and Terry Lightfoot were among the many performers who followed into the pop charts.

One of the most celebrated venues was Club Eleven in Great Windmill Street, founded in 1948. Though now remembered largely for its association with bebop, its turbulent atmosphere captured the excitement of the revival years. It eventually closed after a police raid uncovered drugs on the premises. When the Flamingo Club opened in Leicester Square in 1953, some 1,500 people reportedly queued for admission and police were called to keep order. Nearby were venues such as Cy Laurie's Club, and the 51 Club in Great Newport Street. Audiences packed these places so tightly that latecomers often stood in the street, straining to hear the music through open doors.

The 100 Club, which had once carried the Feldman name, rose to new prominence in the mid-1960s. Audiences there witnessed countless American blues artists brought to Britain by Chris Barber. Their presence electrified British listeners and offered local musicians an unfiltered education in swing, blues phrasing and improvisation.

Fortunately, the vitality of the period is captured on film as well as record. The 1956 short, *Momma Don't Allow*, transports viewers straight into a north London jazz club, the legendary Fishmongers' Arms in Wood Green, where Otilie Patterson singing the blues with Barber's band plays to a packed and exuberant crowd. The camera roams among dancers and drinkers, capturing the sweaty immediacy of a trad session better than any written description.

Meanwhile the restless mood of *Look Back in Anger*, though not a jazz film as such, echoed the emotional climate in which the music flourished. Its trumpet-playing anti-hero Jimmy Porter is angry and impatient, questioning and hungry for new forms of expression. A few years later *It's Trad, Dad!* presented a more stylised version of the same world for a teenage audience, bringing together many of the leading British bands of the day.

Alongside the widely known figures stood the fiercely authentic wing of the revival led by Ken Colyer. After travelling to the Crescent City in search of the music's roots, he returned determined to reproduce its collective improvisation as faithfully as possible. His work with the Crane River Jazz Band became hugely influential among younger enthusiasts, establishing a purist New Orleans' style that contrasted with the slightly more popular approach of other British bands. Musicians such as the Christie Brothers formed part of this wider network of revivalists who helped spread the music through clubs and dance halls across Britain.

If Soho was the movement's visible heart, the revival spread far beyond London. Rhythm clubs appeared in towns and cities across Britain, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and Liverpool among them. Industrial Britain proved fertile ground for jazz enthusiasm as young people who spent their days in dreary factories or offices found a sense of freedom and fellowship in the new music.

Regional bands began to emerge in the late-1940s as rhythm clubs gradually evolved into jazz clubs. One of the earliest and finest was the Yorkshire Jazz Band from Leeds, which recorded in London in 1949. Liverpool produced the exuberant Merseyside Jazz Band, while other towns sustained lively local scenes.

In Northern Ireland, jazz clubs flourished through the 1950s and beyond. Sammy Huston's jazz club became a focal point of Belfast jazz, with the Embankment Six frequently in residence. Scotland had its own vigorous revival. In Edinburgh the clarinettist Sandy Brown helped establish the Stud Club in the Crown Bar on Lothian Street, a gathering place for students and musicians alike. Brown and the trumpeter Al Fairweather became leading figures in what enthusiasts fondly remembered as the city's 'Stompermania'.

While Archie Semple and Alex Welsh drew inspiration from Chicago-style groups such as the Climax Jazz Band and the Nova Scotia Jazz Band championed the New Orleans' tradition north of

the border. Glasgow, of course, produced its own powerhouse in the Clyde Valley Stompers, formed in 1952 and led from 1954 by Ian Menzies. For two decades they filled dance halls and clubs across Scotland.

Perhaps the most powerful stimulus - and ultimate validation - came from the plethora of visiting American musicians. Throughout the decade many of the great figures of the earlier jazz era toured Europe and Britain. For traditionalists, visits by veterans of the New Orleans' style itself, Kid Ory and Jimmy Dodds, not least, represented a living link to the music's earliest roots and gave British musicians not merely inspiration but a direct musical lineage.

By the early 1960s, as is well known and personally lamented, the trad boom had begun to fade as new musical fashions emerged. Skiffle, rhythm and blues and, above all, rock 'n' roll had all conspired to draw younger audiences in fresh directions. Yet the revival left a lasting mark. Lonnie Donegan,

once part of Chris Barber's group, turned skiffle briefly into a national craze and inspired countless teenagers to pick up guitars - among them future members of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.

Looking back now, the early rhythm clubs seem an improbable yet vital early chapter in Britain's cultural history. In smoky Soho basements - physically and metaphorically underground - in drab church halls and suburban parlour, they created a nationwide network of listeners and musicians united by enthusiasm for a life-changing music that had begun thousands of miles away on the banks of the Mississippi.

For a young listener who experienced, albeit tangentially and vicariously, the delights of the humble Halifax Rhythm Club, the revivalist jazz they played has stayed with me for life and remains one of the most potent musical sounds ever created.

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CD REVIEWS



TONY BENNETT

I LEFT MY HEART... 1950-62

Retrospective Records RTS
4438:2 CDs, 79.47/79.24

In the last *Jazz Rag* Scott Yanow omitted Tony Bennett from his centenary big band on the grounds that he was 'a lover of jazz, not a jazz singer' – and this collection of 12 years of his work tends to prove the point. After placing his landmark 1962 recording, *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*, at the start of proceedings, the Retrospective collection begins with ten tracks, mostly with Percy Faith's Orchestra, from 1950 to 1954, with the singer at that time more inclined to the semi-operatic Italian style, with the occasional novelty song thrown in.

As Scott said, Bennett loved jazz and many of the best tracks on CD1 team him with jazzers. A 1954 session with Chuck Wayne and Charles Panely's septet contains good guitar work from Wayne and also finds Bennett digging back into the Great American Songbook. A 1957 *Let's Face the Music and Dance* teams him with the Ralph Sharon Octet (including the splendid Candido) and Ralph Burns came up with a fine arrangement of *I Cover the Waterfront* from 1958, but the main attraction for *Jazz Rag* readers comes with the session with the Count Basie Orchestra (Sharon on piano), 11 tracks across both CDs.

Unfortunately many of the tracks are short (four below 2 minutes) and the Basie band has limited opportunities to shine (though Basie himself puts in an appearance and solos on *Jeepers Creepers*). Bennett works

hard on his jazz inflections, but I actually found him more relaxed on four great songs with Ralph Sharon the lone accompanist – perfect versions of such Songbook favourites as *I'm Thru with Love* and *Bewitched* – and a session with Ralph Burns' Orchestra from 1962, with a superb solo from Zoot Sims on *Close Your Eyes*.

One of Bennett's strengths at this stage of his career was the ability to fit in with different styles, but it does mean that the *Jazz Rag* reader will find by no means the majority of tracks to his taste.

RON SIMPSON



GEORGIE AULD

LET'S JUMP: SELECTED
RECORDINGS 1944 - 1951Acrobat ADDCD3575 2 CDs:
73:171 70:57

The opener, *Pick-Up Boys*, is credited to the Auld-Hawkins-Webster Saxtet, and given the dates mentioned in the title of this collection and the fact that Hawkins and Webster are of course Coleman and Ben, it's no surprise that it is strongly swing-inflected, but surely those are elements of bebop creeping in? Canadian-born alto and tenor saxman/bandleader Georgie Auld may not have quite as formidable a reputation as those two masters, but as this collection demonstrates, neither is he out of his depth with such figures as Dizzy Gillespie, Errol Garner, Sarah Vaughan, or Gerry Mulligan who are just a few among many greats who crop up; but then again, by the time he made these recordings, he had already worked with Bunny Berigan, Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman.

These recordings, all with Georgie as big band leader, except for the 1951 sides with his quintet, come from small but respected labels: Apollo, Musicraft, Guild, Discovery and Roost. He can turn in as convincing a big band version of *Lover Man* (with Patti Powers on vocal) as he can the nascent R'n'B styling of *Route 66*, sung by Georgie himself, or the hard-driving jump approach of *Air Mail Special* – and surely *Vox Bop* needs no further explanation?

As a snapshot of a classy, adaptable musician in the 40s, this collection is certainly worthwhile and instructive. And given the two excellent, though different versions of *Taps Miller* included here, it is no surprise to learn he went on to work with Count Basie.

NORMAN DARWEN



CHARLIE WOOD

YOUR LOVE IS MY HOME

Stunt Records STUCD 25092:
45.40

Charlie Wood's latest CD is a tribute to his versatility, consisting of ten fine songs of very different origin, and his restraint as a vocalist. *Stardust*, for example, the great Hoagy Carmichael melody, begins with a dramatic opening, but soon finds a gentle and poignant mood, with Robin Aspland in sympathetic support of Wood's caressing vocal. On the other hand whereas Amy Winehouse's *Love is a Losing Game* loses the edgy tone of the original with Villads Lttauer Bendixen and Lara Biancalana added on strings.

Your Love is My Home was recorded with two different trios in the UK and Denmark and Charlie Wood sets out his stall at the start with Jimmy

Rowles/Norma Winstone's *A Timeless Place*, negotiating the awkward intervals effectively and expressing the lyrics in a style that owes something to his background in the blues. This which also shows in his distinctive treatment of Paul Simon's *Still Crazy after All These Years*, one of several tracks to feature Wood on both piano and organ.

Two Wood originals include *Home* which movingly expresses the sentiment in the album title and *Love Can't Love Alone*, a ballad which again features Wood on piano and organ, plus the vocal background of Ayoe Angelica and Sophie Ziedoy, who also appear on possibly the most relaxed track on the CD, Wood's good-humoured take on Sam Cooke's *You Send Me*.

With a preponderance of ballads, Wood's warm voice and regard for a lyric make this a most satisfying album.

RON SIMPSON

NOA LEVY AND THE
PAUL EDIS TRIO

PORTRAIT IN EVANS

Dot Time DT 9168: 47.13

Readers will have noticed the appearance of Noa Levy and the Paul Edis Trio with Alan Barnes on the gig list and perhaps wondered what it's about – and here's the answer. Tel Aviv-born, California-based singer Levy and Paul Levy from the North East of England have collaborated on adding lyrics to Bill Evans compositions and produced a remarkably accomplished album.

The first thing that strikes you is that this is a genuine collaboration, nothing of the singer-plus-accompanist. For instance, on the opener, *Peri's Scope*, after Levy nails with

apparent ease the jumps and twists of Evans' melody, Edis, bassist Adam King and drummer Joel Barford all solo at length before Levy returns. Then again, the synergy of Levy and Edis is apparent throughout, interlocking or echoing each other.

Alan Barnes only appears on three tracks, playing alto sax, clarinet and bass clarinet, his most memorable contribution the otherworldly clarinet on *Time Remembered*. Barford is as incisive as ever and King is a revelation, frequently soloing to great effect. As for Edis, he seems equally at home in many styles, including a touch of Bach at the start of *We Will Meet Again*.

Noa Levy impresses with her ability to switch from the upfront dynamics of *Peri's Scope* to the soulful *Only Child* or the melodic *Waltz for Debby*, but for my money the stand-out track is *Nardis*, with its Middle Eastern flavour and interplay of vocal and piano.

RON SIMPSON



VARIOUS

GREAT JAZZ RED HOT
JAZZ - THE SINGERS

Upbeat CD349 70:53

In an age of 'shrinkflation,' where so much is stealthily diminished in quality and quantity, the CD remains a rare constant. Upbeat continues to be commendably generous with its offerings, imaginative in conception and impeccable in taste.

This glorious 24-track compilation brings together a distinguished and varied roster of male vocalists, from Fats Waller to Frank Sinatra,

from Louis Armstrong to Nat 'King' Cole, and from Jelly Roll Morton to Bing Crosby.

Though billed as red hot, the guiding principle behind the selection is more personal than categorical. Compiler John Petters readily admits the vocals may not all deliver unalloyed mellifluousness, yet insists they embody jazz's essential qualities: phrasing, timing, and improvisation.

Drummer extraordinaire and a veritable encyclopaedia of jazz, Petters needs no instruction in what raises the pulses. You might say rhythm is his business. Unsurprisingly, the unifying thread here is swing: each track invites the listener to breathe, stretch, swing and sway.

Rhythm keeps its own counsel, refusing discipline from the moment Fats Waller gets into his exuberant stride in 1936 - Swing's *annus mirabilis* - hamming it up outrageously on *The Curse of an Aching Heart*, a pre-war waltz, hereafter a jazz tune.

The seasoned aficionado will know everything that follows, but relish the opportunity to revisit such moments as Armstrong and the Mills Brothers scating, harmonising and playing off each other on *Lazy Bones*. Elsewhere Jelly Roll's haunting *Mamie's Blues* idiosyncratically breaks time, pushing and pulling the tempo, and Cab Calloway relates his sad tale of *Minnie, the Moocher*, the red hot hoochie-coocher, perhaps the greatest call and response tune on the bandstand. Hi-de-hi!

This is the stuff, the real deal, that makes you want to spring to your feet, get out on the street, swagger up Beale, boogie on down Basin, grab a shoeshine before turning into Big Joe's diner to dig the Happy Cat Hit Parade and drink rum cola. If you don't know jive talk better first listen to Slim Gaillard's *Jumpin at the Record Shop*. Make with the Frim-Fram sauce. It's an education.

ANDREW LIDDLE

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Jim Simpson with Ron Simpson
Foreword by Jasper Carrott



TINA CARR
MOON OVER MILDMAY
Ty 0002 CD 46:56

London-based vocalist Tina grew up with a love of jazz but has only indulged this over the last few years. You might guess her long-standing affection for the music, but probably not that her direct involvement is only recent. She has a distinctive, seemingly effortless swing, exemplified by the opener, *I Didn't Know What Time It Was*, or a delicate but certainly assured approach to balladry, as on Duke Ellington's *Sound Of Love*. She also knows how to pick the right musicians – trumpeter Miguel Morodi excels on the latter, but do also note Matt Robinson's intimate piano work and Rod Oughton's beautifully subtle drumming here too. But throughout, all the musicians give the strong impression of having been hand-picked to suit the particular needs of each individual number.

Those titles also suggest that Tina tends to delve a little deeper when looking for appropriate songs. Try the lightly swinging version of Billy Strayhorn's *A Flower Is A Lovely Thing* or Hoagy Carmichael's *I Get Along Without You Very Well*, sung oh-so stoically. Then again, she pays tribute both to her London background and to Annie Ross - a definite influence - with Tony Kinsey's sardonic *The Ass's Song*. The opening number is later reprised with just Tom Ollendorf's sophisticated guitar accompaniment, preceding the late-night, Billie Holiday-tinged title track – 'Mildmay' refers to a working men's club of which Tina is a member.

So, a seemingly personal album, but also firmly in the tradition of the great female jazz singers. Rather nice...

NORMAN DARWEN



THE ESSENTIAL RAY BRYANT
TRIO & SOLO ALBUMS 1956-59

Acrobat ADDCD3585 72.03 / 71.18

These four Bryant albums, recorded for Epic, Prestige, New Jazz and Signature in the 1950s, with his hit single *Little Susie* as the final track on CD2, re-focus our attention on one of the finest proponents of modern jazz piano. Bryant (1931-2011) was an early starter and first performed with an array of mainstream and modernist giants, seemingly at ease in either camp. Later in his career he worked with his own trio and came to Europe, appearing often in the UK. One recalls hearing him close to, incisive, often hinting at stride or using blues patterns, his harmonic awareness quite heightened.

Listening to this fascinating collection is to hear again a feeling for keyboard exploration that always intrigues. If Oscar Peterson had the greatest pianistic engine of his day, Bryant's can seem like a pared-down version of that great man's tumultuous attack. CD1 opens with Bryant's familiar *Cubano Chart*, a catchy piece which became popular with his peers before he tackles *Off Shore* a thoughtfully lyrical original, this neatly emphasising his compositional range. Thereafter his choices encompass standards, others of his originals and familiar bebop staples, his sidemen often including top drummers Jo Jones and Kenny Clarke, while later sessions used his brother Tommy Bryant on bass. CD2 kicks off with a solo set, the invention consistently satisfying. Likeable, sometimes jaunty, often exhilarating, but always rewarding, Bryant's piano jazz deserves your attention. Well done, Acrobat.

PETER VACHER



CATHERINE RUSSELL
LIVE @ JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Dot Time DT9179: 40.43

On her latest live CD Catherine Russell proves herself a great band singer and has a fine band to back her. For her session at Lincoln Center Russell came up with a set of what the notes describe as 'gourmet little known jazz, blues and swing tunes' – which is no less than the truth. I had only heard of *Old Man River* and *Everybody Loves My Baby*. These two get highly distinctive treatment, the solemn Kern anthem taken at pace, Russell biting chunks out of the lyric, the band pitching more and more towards Dixieland, while the Spencer Williams classic sees Russell accompanied by Russell Hall's bass and special guest, tap dancer Michela Marino Lerman.

Russell has a cracking front-line in support on the other ten tracks: Jon-Erik Kellso on trumpet, John Allred on trombone and Evan Arntzen on tenor sax and clarinet, the only one I was unfamiliar with, but a meaty presence on tenor. All these get plenty of solos and produce a hefty ensemble sound. *You Ain't Livin' Right*, with Russell smartly pointing the Blanche Calloway vocal, has a sort of territory band feel to it, with those neat little key changes. *I Like Pie, I Like Cake* is another gem, with band vocal and tap dancer added. It's always a treat to come across a new Alex Hill song and *Long About Midnight* conjures up the spirit of Harlem.

Matt Munisteri is in the guitar chair, Domo Branch works overtime on drums and the only disappointment is the Lincoln Center piano (or is it recording balance?) which doesn't help Ben Paterson. But no wonder the album ends with Catherine Russell bursting into laughter!

RON SIMPSON



BO DIDDLEY
FOUR CLASSIC ALBUMS PLUS

Avid Entertainment AMSC1485 2 CDs: 63:46/ 70:12

Yes, this is Bo Diddley, Chicago Bluesman? Successful Rock 'n' roller? Rhythm And Bluesman? The answer of course, is that he was all of these – plus...

The four albums reissued here are *Bo Diddley In The Spotlight*, *Bo Diddley, Bo Diddley & Company*, and *Bo Diddley's A Twister*, recorded for Chess Records between 1959 and 1962 with some of the Windy City's finest session players (and there's one bonus track). The music includes all those aforementioned genres, plus some proto-soul and doo-wop tinges (*Love Me*) and even calypso with *Limber* (really *Limbo*).

A significant number of tracks draw from the verbal urban jousting of *The Dozens*, though cleaned up, and the famed Bo Diddley beat doesn't really turn up until *Craw-Dad* (track eight), though there are frequent recurrences after that. Bo's guitar work throughout is original, unlike anyone else around at that time and subsequently very influential. Listen to *I Can Tell* with its definite sixties blues sound (no surprise it has been covered many times since), or the instrumentals *Diddling* or *Give Me A Break*. Or try the Howlin' Wolf-tinged *Who May Your Lover Be* or the cold war-themed *Mr. Khrushchev*. No need to worry about the *Twister* album either – Bo just does his own thing and if the audience want to twist away, that's fine.

All the music here justifies Bo's legendary status. It was indeed, and still is, some legend.

NORMAN DARWEN



DAVE WILSON QUARTET
WHEN EVEN GOES EAST
Dave Wilson Music 003 2025. 62.45

Bronxville, NY born and raised and now resident in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, saxophonist Dave Wilson's eighth CD, *When Even Goes East* shines in its jazz treatments of a broad span of repertoire. Wilson's tenor and soprano are equally demonstrated over an equal mix of 1960 classics and his distinctive originals.

These include *Wichita Lineman* (Jimmy Webb) *The Fool On The Hill* (Lennon/McCartney) *Eyes Of The World* (Grateful Dead) and Jackson Browne's *These Days*. If this wasn't enough, Wilson also slipped in a 1993 Webb song, *Adios* (penned for Linda Ronstadt, apparently) from his 1993 album *Suspending Disbelief*. His passionate delivery of the lyric on tenor sax scores indeed.

Of equal delight are Wilson's originals, all of which are varied in style and feel/groove but distinctive to his vision and sound. Three standout tracks, *When Even Goes East*, *Let's Go* and *Intergalactic Sunset* wholly confirm the strengths and winning facets of what the overall CD stands for.

Wilson's fine quartet features fellow Pennsylvanians Jesse Green, piano, Evan Gregor on bass and the drums of Daniel Gonzalez. On four of the tracks the band is augmented by renowned percussionist, Lenny Castro (Earth Wind and Fire, Joe Sample, Eric Clapton, et al) to deliver an extra coat of rhythmic shade, colour and spark. The group fully rises to the occasion underscoring the leader's melodic sensibilities with their cohesive interplay and flexibility. Resulting in a greater than the sum of its parts product with distinctive individualism wedded with a united vision.

FRANK GRIFFITH



ALYN SHIPTON'S NEW ORLEANS FRIENDS
THE OXFORD CONCERT
BCLB 003: 38.01

The May 2024 concert by Alyn Shipton and his traditional New Orleans-style ensemble, with eminent guest Tom Sancton, cried out to be recorded - and there could be no more fitting setting than the inspiring surroundings and pitch-perfect acoustics of St Giles', Oxford. The church has been on the jazz circuit for over a decade, but few concerts there can have matched this one.

A leading modern exponent of the New Orleans clarinet style, Sancton brings a direct and personal connection to the music's origins. Having grown up in the Crescent City, he was encouraged by the legendary George Lewis, whose influence is heard throughout the evening's repertoire of spirituals (*Just a Closer Walk, Precious Lord, The Old Rugged Cross*), blues, and early jazz standards. Undoubtedly, we catch it most on the transporting *Over the Waves*.

Sancton's long musical relationship with Shipton fittingly began in Oxford, back in 1972, and a shared history is evident in the ensemble's instinctive cohesion. Alan Gresty's cornet warmly carries the melodic lead, while Sancton weaves a silver chain of sound, underscored by Shipton's assured bass lines, Simon Picton's resonant banjo, and Trevor Richards driving on drums. The much-travelled Martin Litton combines a raggy rhythmic subtlety with a stylistic authenticity that is deeply rooted and vibrantly alive.

You might call it an all-star band, except there is no grandstanding. Together they create a sound that is gloriously rich, deeply affecting, and exhilarating. This is the Jazz

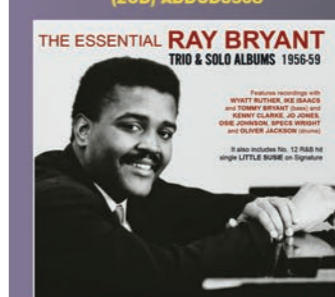
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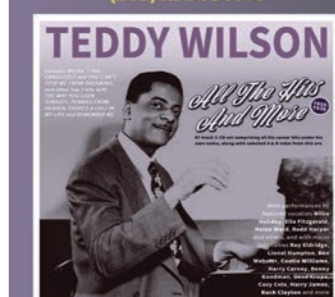
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Selected Recordings 1944-51 (2CD) ADDCD3575

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at Vespers communal school of impassioned spiritualising - perfected in Europe by the great Göta River Jazzmen, and bred-in-the-bone in New Orleans.

The set ventures across the big river to take us out with Kid Thomas's pulse-raising *Algiers Strut*, the band full-on, Richards cutting loose and the 'congregation' roaring its approval. If this doesn't get you, you're in the wrong church.

ANDREW LIDDLE



GENE AMMONS

MEET THE BOSS - THE SINGLES & ALBUMS COLLECTION 1950-53

Acrobat ADDCD3580 72.14 / 72.13

The son of the acclaimed boogie-woogie pianist Albert Ammons, tenor-saxophonist Gene Ammons (1925-1974) fell prey early on to the bopper's scourge of heroin addiction. This landed him in jail twice and but despite this he enjoyed considerable commercial success in his relatively short career. Having apprenticed in the Billy Eckstine and Woody Herman bands, he then led a two-tenor band with Sonny Stitt and made a name for himself as big-toned bustling player who could also handle ballads with surprising sensitivity. Combining the influence of both Lester Young and Ben Webster, his direct approach and swinging attack made him a star with the jukebox crowd, his bands always staffed by excellent sidemen. All of this is evident here, Acrobat's double CD compilation a welcome reminder of Ammons' prowess, as illustrated on his impactful sextet recorded (with little subtlety) by Chess with trombonist Mathew Gee impressive or in his many collaborations with Stitt.

Nick-named 'Jug' and cast as the 'Boss Tenor', hence this collection's title, Ammons was everything that his soubriquet suggests, an imposing figure who could hold an audience and keep the ideas flowing. Just to hear *Blues Up and Down* (even if oddly curtailed) alongside Stitt is to relish his bluesy penchant for swing. A vital element in fostering the Chicago tenor style as enhanced by later players like Johnny Griffin and Clifford Jordan, Ammons' punchy fusion of bop and black gospel influences was also crucial in popularising soul jazz in the 1960s. A 48-track feast for jazz tenor fans, the sound restoration variable but adequate.

PETER VACHER



LOREN SCHOENBERG AND HIS JAZZ ORCHESTRA

SO MANY MEMORIES

Turtle Bay TBF25003CD 61.02

Bandleader and tenor-saxophonist Loren Schoenberg, now 67, is described in Will Friedwald's lengthy booklet essay as 'musician, educator, historian, producer and conductor', this without mentioning his Grammy Awards for liner note writing and his status as the Founding Director and Senior Scholar at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem. Our man Digby Fairweather described him as 'one of jazz's most gifted polymaths' and he's right. As a young player Schoenberg often worked alongside the surviving giants of the swing era and his New York-based big bands usually comprised the best of the local mainstainers, his 1985 ensemble so successful that Benny Goodman - Schoenberg was his archivist - fronted it for his final hurrah.

This special 2024 recording is the outcome of Schoenberg's particular interest in exhuming and performing swing era arranger Eddie Sauter's previously unheard

arrangements for the 1936-39 band of Red Norvo which also featured vocal star Mildred Bailey (then Norvo's wife). Once these charts became available, Schoenberg enlisted a Juilliard student big band to play them for this recording with Kate Kortum taking on Bailey's role and mallet specialist Warren Wolf simulating Norvo himself. Sauter who gained later fame as Goodman's arranger allowed for Norvo's use of the xylophone as his principal instrument, the ensemble dynamics adjusted accordingly. The student musicians handle Sauter's often quite demanding charts brilliantly and Wolf excels throughout with Ms Kortum exuding a warm and cheery vocal style. The music is everything you might expect from Sauter, enterprising and varied, the student soloists spot on. Recommended.

PETER VACHER



DAVE SLONAKER BIG BAND

SHIFTY PARADIGMS

Origin Records 82944, 63.19

Dave Slonaker is a new name to me and, I suspect, to many readers. He is a film and TV orchestrator, arranger, composer and leader of the Dave Slonaker Big Band which he formed in 2012 as a vehicle for his jazz compositions and arrangements. He gained a Grammy nomination in 2013 for Best Large Jazz Ensemble. In addition, his music has been performed by the likes of Clark Terry, and the Woody Herman and Count Basie Jazz Orchestras. For many years he worked as a freelance trombonist and was an instructor at the State University of New York.

This Los Angeles based Big Band includes a galaxy of talent in

its ranks, including saxophonist Bob Sheppard, trombonist, Bill Reichenbach, trumpeters Wayne Bergeron and Ron Stout and Peter Erskine at the drums. Somewhat unusually for a conventional big band, a percussionist is included in the line up. This is the third album by the band and seven of the eight tracks are Slonaker compositions and arrangements. The opening track *Dash Cam* is inspired by the leader's adventures on Los Angeles freeways. There follows the only 'standard' composition *Bye Bye Blues*, a 1925 tune recorded by Ambrose and his orchestra in 1930.

Key to the success of this album is its accessibility. The programme is dynamic and always swinging. The compositions are imaginative and yet stylistically diverse. With some of the top session players in Hollywood, the listener can be confident in the quality and creativity of the music. The soloists, too numerous to mention individually, give the music added excitement.

Anyone who enjoys contemporary big band music can't fail to enjoy this collection of superior themes played by a band of A-list musicians.

ALAN MUSSON



BOB BROOKMEYER

THE BROOKMEYER BANDS: EARLY YEARS 1954-56

Acrobat ADDCD3579 2 CDs, 72.27/73.32

The American value-trombonist first came to prominence with the Gerry Mulligan quartet between 1954 and 1957. He later resumed his association with Mulligan, working in his Concert Jazz Band. In subsequent

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years he established himself as a composer and arranger, often utilizing contemporary classical writing techniques in his work.

Brookmeyer released his first album *Bob Brookmeyer Quartet* was released in 1954. This new collection includes that album together with other early albums as leader, co-leader or featured performer, including *Bob Brookmeyer featuring Al Cohn* (1954), *Bob Brookmeyer plays Bob Brookmeyer And Some Others* (1955), *The Bob Brookmeyer Quintet* (1954), *Teddy Charles New Direction Quartet featuring Bob Brookmeyer* (1954) and *The Dual Role of Bob Brookmeyer* (1955) all brought together on this 32-track 2-CD collection. Perhaps appropriately, the first track is *Revelation*, a Mulligan composition. Across the two disks we are treated to a selection of Brookmeyer original compositions together with wide variety of familiar songs including *Skylark*, *Lover Man*, *Isn't it Romantic*, *What is There to Say*, and *They say it's Wonderful*. Accompanying musicians include Red Mitchell, Jimmy Rowles, Buddy Clark, Mel Lewis and Jimmy Raney.

Brookmeyer always had a distinctive style of playing and his compositional style was equally unique. Sadly, he died in 2011, and it is perhaps only most the well-informed or diehard jazz fans who remember the man and his music. It is therefore good to have this reminder of his work and which may serve as an introduction to listeners new to his work.

ALAN MUSSON



PATRISHA THOMSON

YOUR LOVE

Self-produced: 48:37

Apparently Patrisa Thomson has been teamed up with pianist Steve Rawlins in California for some 20 years. Perhaps we could have guessed that from the maturity of her singing a wide variety of material and the swinging sympathy of Rawlins' accompaniments.

A further piece of information tells us that, on hearing Basie's *One O'Clock Jump* at age 12, she resolved to aim at spreading the same joy. That's the spirit of the stunning opener, *Robbin's Nest*, with her bright voice leaping through the well-known tune, scatting with humour and melody, and Rickey Woodard and Ira Nepus making the most of one of their three tracks. A similar mood is there for *Doodlin'*, Thomson and guest vocalist Will Collyer duetting with a due sense of fun. *Fascinating Rhythm* is another treat, beginning with the seldom heard verse and ending up with Thomson scatting along with bassist Jennifer Leitham and guitarist Larry Koonse, and so is *Basin Street Blues*, with the singer echoing the sound of Nepus' muted trombone.

But this is only part of Thomson's artistry. Her bounce and sense of fun are infectious but she also finds the solemnity of the Brazilian

Like a Lover, with harp and cello in the accompaniment, unlocks the warmth of *You Must Believe in Spring*, with Rawlins the only instrumentalist, and duets in fine style with Valerie Monroe and Patrick Barnitt.

RON SIMPSON



ABBEY LINCOLN

EARLY YEARS – THE ALBUMS COLLECTION 1957-1961

Acrobat ACTRCD9179, 3 CDs, 219.00

You don't hear the name Abbey Lincoln mentioned in the same breath as Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughan. Indeed, you don't really hear it mentioned at all any more, which makes this reissue set most welcome and timely. Born Anna Marie Wooldridge in 1950, she adopted her stage name under the guidance of her manager, Bob Russell. He suggested that a blend of Westminster Abbey and Abraham Lincoln might imbue some gravitas.

She served her time as a respected club singer and cut her first album, under the supervision of Russell, in 1957. *A Story Of A Girl In Love* positioned her as something of a torch singer, comprising mostly string-drenched standards.

Martin's accomplished blues licks come to the fore on the cool, focussed cover of *Georgia On My Mind*, drawing on Ray Charles of course, and underlining his fondness for piano players. Even here though his playing is richly melodic, one of Martin's trademarks – lend an ear also to *I Won't Last A Day Without You*, a number originally by The Carpenters that I never expected to look forward to hearing again. Jerome Kern's *I'm Old Fashioned* is a long-standing number in Martin's

A move to New York imparted a radically different direction. She met (and eventually married) Max Roach, who took a dim view of the somewhat conventional way she had been presented. He took on the management duties and set up a session with Sonny Rollins, Wynton Kelly, Kenny Dorham and Paul Chambers. With jazz aristocracy behind her, the real Abbey Lincoln rapidly emerged.

The album *That's Him* is a lost gem, showcasing a woman who is perfectly at home with the cream of the musical crop. The unaccompanied *Tender As A Rose*, and *Don't Explain*, which features Kelly on bass, are stand-out takes, raw and real.

If you happened to pick up this collection at your favourite record store, you might first be drawn by the list of accompanists. As well as the luminaries listed above, you have Stanley and Tommy Turrentine, Eric Dolphy, Booker Little, Philly Joe Jones and Benny Golson, among many others. Make no mistake: these are Abbey Lincoln albums. She just happens to have great sidemen.

As no particular fan of singers, I can reassure you that you will not be disappointed by this collection. The best vocalists know when to get out of the way, and also know how to take ownership of a song. Abbey Lincoln's timing and phrasing simply add to the mix of the swinging players she's working with, bringing a touch of real class.

Almost more importantly, these recordings capture a warm and bold personality. She may not quite have the star quality of an Ella or a Sarah, but you feel as though you'd like Abbey Lincoln if you met her. And I bet she was great live.

STUART MAXWELL

repertoire; he has recorded this previously, and it has long been a piano players' favourite. Once or twice here though I did wonder if Martin has taken something from John Coltrane's version...

Beautifully recorded, interesting material, imaginative treatments and virtuoso playing. Jazz guitar that is anything but standard, and each track, and the album, is strongly recommended.

NORMAN DARWEN

FIVE-WAY SPLIT

MODUS OPERANDI

PETER VACHER profiles Five Way Split and reviews their current CD, *Modus Operandi*

This band of brothers came together regularly to keep in musical trim during the lockdown summer of 2020. They found that they shared the same liking for the hard bop style and soon began coming in with original compositions to work on. Once Boris's curfew had been lifted they resolved to stick together and have continued to do so ever since. While each man enjoys other affiliations, this is the one that seems to matter the most to them. Right now this all-for-one and one-for-all collective is on the road playing clubs and concerts up and down the country, having had a highly successful recent SRO appearance at Ronnie Scott's.

So, let's tell you who they are: Quentin Collins, trumpet and flugelhorn, Vasilis Xenopoulos, tenor and soprano saxophones, Rob Barron, piano, Matyas Hofecker, bass, and Matt Home, drums. Even those with only a passing interest in our modern jazz scene will recognise that these are names with which to conjure: top cats all the way. Much like Art Blakey and the Messengers, they have honed their materiel by on-the-gig iteration, so much so that it becomes second-nature to them to play. This of course is what the great bands used to do: Blakey, Silver, Adderley etc.

Their first CD *All The Way* came out on Ubuntu and earned considerable acclaim. *Modus Operandi*, its successor, recorded a year or so ago, was due to appear

on the same label only for the tragic death of Martin Hummel, Ubuntu's owner, to cause the band to look inwards, hence FWS Records. So, nine meaty tracks, all originals bar two familiar songs, these both arranged brilliantly by Barron who contributes two pieces of his own, as does Xenopoulos, while Collins has three.

Barron's *Dr. Stol*, has an impactful opening, its perky theme followed by a flugel-led counter-melody, this an object lesson in how to maintain compositional interest. Collins solos first, pushing hard, Vasilis following, the ideas flowing. The title track is by Collins, its punchy riff presaging a jubilant performance and an inventive trumpet solo over stop-time chords. Again it's the intricacy of the theme and its development that impresses, Barron spirited over Hofecker's superb bass line. There's nothing perfunctory here, the jammed finish goes well too. *Soho Soiree* would have earned Blakey's approval, Hofecker's loping bass ensuring swing, Barron crisp and to the point. *Two Little Alphas* is for the tenorist's youngsters and suggests an animated and diverting home relationship while his *Pandora's Box* has Barron in surging form and gives the excellent Home a strong solo opportunity. The two ballads are pleasing, the throttle eased down, with Barron's version of *Sunday in New York* an album highlight.

It's the skill levels and the subtle shifts of emphasis and clever voicings in these pieces that makes this an album to savour. That and the solo playing, of course, the band's evident musical camaraderie and creative urgency their signature characteristic. Do buy the album but make sure to see them live too.



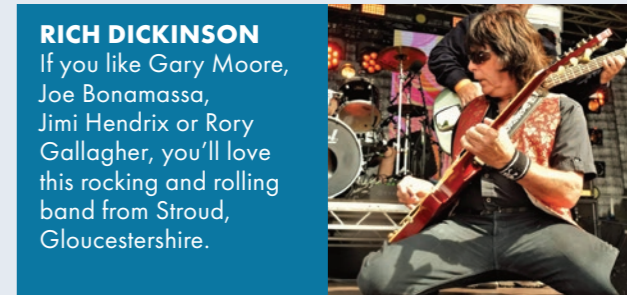
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STANDARDS, VOL. I

Independent; Download 56:13

Available on digital platforms Spotify, Amazon Music and Apple Music, this is exactly what the title promises. Famed British guitarist Martin offers up ten (mostly) jazz standards for solo guitar and what

a treat it is. There are occasional hints of Django Reinhardt, but perhaps not as many as you'd expect given Martin's background. Joe Pass's solo playing is the most obvious influence here, with Martin laying down delicate, intricate lines, sometimes swinging (try *They Can't Take That Away From Me*) or strongly reflective, as on Barbra Streisand's *Why Did I Choose You* (some may know it from Marvin Gaye). He has recorded this song previously with Chet Atkins.

HENRY'S BLUESLETTER



MEMORIES OF CHAMPION JACK DUPREE

ANDREW LIDDLE reminisces.

Champion Jack Dupree got me sacked in 1970. I had been sent by a local Portsmouth paper to review a concert at the Guildhall. The headline act was the pop group the Tremeloes, then riding high with a string of number-one hits. It should have been a straightforward freelance assignment to describe the atmosphere, mention the hits, file the copy.

But when I arrived I discovered that on the undercard, among a group of legendary bluesmen, was one of my piano-playing idols: Champion Jack Dupree, the great New Orleans blues and boogie-woogie pianist, a veritable barrelhouse professor. The enthusiastic piece I wrote was almost entirely about him.

For much of the time the Tremeloes were on stage in the second half, I was backstage interviewing the great man about his joint-rocking set. In my estimation the pop group were merely a passing fashion, while Jack belonged to a different musical universe altogether. I could not pass up the chance to talk to him and tell the world.

The editor did not see it that way and sacked me summarily.

Looking back now, I feel a certain vindication. I was, as they say, on the right side of history. The name Champion Jack Dupree will endure far longer than the chart success of the Tremeloes, because the music he helped shape still reverberates through rock 'n' roll.

But the story does not end there.

A few years later I was back in my native West Riding of Yorkshire, visiting my elderly aunt in Halifax, one wintry afternoon. I had taken a seat upstairs at the front of a bus bound for Mixenden and Ovenden, a bleak district on the edge of the Pennine moors where the town gives way to wind and drystone walls.

As the bus rattled along, an ample figure climbed upstairs and settled heavily into the seat across the aisle.

It was Champion Jack Dupree, but it took me a double if not a treble take to realise that. Yes, there he was larger than life: gold teeth flashing when he smiled, a ring in one ear, and a pair of black-and-white-checked trousers rather like those later

favoured by pub cooks who fancied themselves as chefs.

He clearly had no memory of our earlier meeting, but he greeted me warmly enough. Several passengers had addressed him by name as he came down the aisle, suggesting he was a familiar figure on the route. I suspect his local popularity owed as much to his genial personality and Deep South accent as to his international reputation as a pioneer of New Orleans' piano blues.

I probably laid the adulation on a bit thick, which seemed to amuse him. He had a habit of glancing sideways, as though acknowledging an invisible audience, flashing a crooked grin and quirking an eyebrow whenever he felt he had said something funny.

As I stood to get off the bus he called after me: 'Come by the house sometime ... and bring the pooch and some juice!' The invitation extended not only to me but to my Staffordshire bull terrier, who accompanied me everywhere.

'I don't know where you live,' I said, slightly overwhelmed.

He looked puzzled, shrugged. 'It's the one with the yellor doh.'

As it turned out, there really was only one house on the Ovenden council estate with a poster-bright front door. In those days I doubt there was another in Yorkshire painted quite so flamboyantly.

When I duly visited, Jack and his wife Shirley welcomed both me and my dog with generous good humour. The house was modest and somewhat cluttered. In the living room there was little space for anything besides a stripped-down upright piano, a battered sofa and a couple of easy chairs.

Jack seemed reluctant to play, Shirley urging him not to disturb

the neighbours. Apparently he usually practised only when they were out. Eventually he relented, bearing down on the soft pedal and coaxing a few slow blues from the stained keyboard. I remember noticing how far his little fingers played outward on his big hands, no doubt the mark of a lifetime spent stretching and rolling across wide chords.

We drank the juice I'd brought - bottles of Webster's Pale Ale brewed less than a mile away - while Shirley stroked my dog and Jack reminisced a little about musicians he had known. At the time most of the names meant little to me.

The one question I do recall asking was how it felt to swap Bourbon Street for Mixenden, Mardi Gras Indians for Yorkshire buses, and the humid heat of swampy Louisiana for Halifax wind and rain. The idea amused him. Rolling his eyes theatrically, he improvised a comic blues about life being hard for a poor boy wherever he happened to land.

That's about all I can now remember and, looking back, my greatest regret is that I had with me neither a tape recorder nor a notebook. At that time of my life, I lacked the sense to realise what an opportunity I had been handed. Two decades later I travelled around the country interviewing the surviving singers of the dance-band era for a national music magazine, among them Dame Vera Lynn. By then I had learned how to ask the right questions.

I might perhaps have been able to clear up the mystery of the exact date of his birth, some time between 1908 and 1910 and variously stated. Jack might indeed have had something to say about his father, who came from the Belgian Congo, and his mother of African-American and Cherokee descent, if prompted. He grew up in a city where the music that would later conquer the world was still taking shape

in bars, dance halls and street parades. What would I now give to be able to discuss that with someone who had experienced it at first hand, at the beginning of a life teeming with incident.

After being orphaned as a boy he was sent to the Colored (sic) Waifs' Home, the same institution that had earlier housed a young Louis Armstrong. It was there that he first began teaching himself the piano, hammering out the rolling rhythms that would become his trademark.

He later learned from local musicians such as Willie Hall and 'Tuts' Washington, absorbing a percussive barrelhouse style powerful enough to fill a noisy room without amplification. Among the songs he picked up in those years was the rough street lament about drug addiction, *Junker's Blues*.

That 12-bar blues had an extraordinarily profound afterlife. Its rhythm and structure were adapted, its lyrics bowdlerised, by Fats Domino, into *The Fat Man*, released in 1949 and widely regarded as one of the records that helped launch the rock 'n' roll era. Even now I find it hard to imagine the music that filled the jukeboxes of my youth and still occupies the Proustian recesses of my mind owed so much to the man sitting in that

Ovenden front room before me that day.

Jack's life did indeed take many unexpected turns. For a time he served as a 'spy boy' with the Yellow Pocahontas tribe of the Mardi Gras Indians, one of the secretive neighbourhood societies whose elaborate costumes animate the Crescent City each carnival season. Before long he was playing piano in the rough drinking houses, the barrelhouses, that gave his music its earthy character.

Like many musicians he drifted north in search of work, spending time in Chicago and Indianapolis and encountering performers such as Georgia Tom, Scrapper Blackwell and Leroy Carr. Then came an unlikely diversion. Encouraged by the heavyweight champion Joe Louis, Jack took up boxing and fought more than a hundred bouts, winning Golden Gloves titles and acquiring the nickname 'Champion', which he carried for the rest of his life.

During the Second World War Jack joined the United States Navy as a cook but was captured by Japanese forces and spent two years as a prisoner of war. After Franklin Roosevelt's death in 1945 he wrote *F.D.R. Blues* in tribute.

His biggest commercial success came with *Walkin' the Blues*, recorded with the saxophonist Teddy McRae, in 1955. Later albums, notably *Blues from the Gutter*, in 1958, captured the quintessence of New Orleans barrelhouse piano and influenced young British musicians of the early 1960s, those who would take authentic blues into the popular mainstream of Rock music.

Like many American bluesmen of his generation, Jack eventually found more appreciative audiences in Europe than at home, Britain in particular. In 1959 he performed in London with the British blues pioneer Alexis Korner, and within a year he had settled in Europe, living variously in Switzerland, England, Denmark, Sweden and Germany.

By good fortune, his wanderings happened for two brief moments in time to coincide

with mine. Before long I moved away again, and not long after that Jack did too. His restless travels eventually took him to Copenhagen after he and Shirley separated. I never saw him again.

Yet the memory remains vividly indelible, surreal almost. Even now, when I play his records, I picture that old lime green and orange Leyland bus climbing the hill up to Mixenden with the Pennine wind rattling the windows. On board were millworkers going home, a Staffordshire bull terrier and his master - and, bizarrely, one of the founding figures of New Orleans' piano blues.

And somewhere in Ovenden there's a house which should boast - and maybe one day will - a blue plaque on what was once a yellow door, where a barrelhouse professor was only allowed to play the piano when the neighbours were out.



Champion Jack Dupree with Jim Simpson

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LIVE REVIEW

LIVERPOOL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

FEBRUARY 26-MARCH 1

The six main concerts at the Capstone Theatre over the four days of the Liverpool International Jazz Festival were supported by a Fringe consisting mainly of very long events (stand by for a 'very late' finish), with DJs and live acts. By the time I reached Liverpool on the Sunday, things were winding down on the Fringe with only the Closing Party to come, but in the main festival both concerts at the Capstone were excellent and showed the range of jazz on offer at Liverpool.

The Capstone is on the upper floors of a building on Hope University's Creative Campus in Liverpool City Centre and, with a clean acoustic and a capacity of 240, is ideally suited to jazz. During the Festival (and until April) the foyer is home to a fine selection of William Ellis' jazz portraits, from Clark Terry to Stan Tracey.

Lunch-time at the Capstone was in the hands of Martin Taylor, performing solo, without any gimmicks, just the effects his prodigious technique can get out of a guitar. It was a rather odd concert, but none the worse for that: Martin explained that he would reminisce about the

pieces he played and in the first half did just that in a pleasingly self-deprecating manner; then after the interval cut talking to a minimum, possibly because of his need to cram in an extra song or two. Both halves were very different, but equally impressive.

In the first half it was something of a surprise to discover Martin's friendship with Sasha Distel (who, as Martin pointed out, was a very good jazz guitarist) and Chet Atkins, rather less surprising to hear of his early encouragement by Ronnie Scott. Musical treats included a delicate version of *Why Did I Choose You?* (Ronnie's favourite) and Chet's favourite song, *Sweet Lorraine*. The temperature rose before the interval with a full-blown deconstruction (and reconstruction) of the Carpenters' *I Won't Last a Day Without You*.

The second half brought added momentum with an enormous variety of music, one highlight being *One Day*, composed in memory of his youngest son, a deeply felt Scots lament built like a bagpipe piece on a drone foundation. A song that was originally part of an orchestral suite composed with Guy Barker provided contrast, but for me the most memorable pieces in the second half were superbly accomplished readings of two great songs, Billy Taylor's Civil Rights anthem, *I Wish I Knew*, and a lovely subtle version of *Like Someone in Love*. Of course, it

being Liverpool, Martin slipped in a bit of the Beatles!

In the evening it was the turn of Norwegian saxophonist Marius Neset who I first heard at Southport Jazz Festival maybe ten years ago. He was remarkably original then and hasn't lost any of his ability to surprise. At Liverpool he brought his 'cabaret band', Elliot Galvin on piano and keyboards, Connor Chaplin on bass and Anton Eger on drums, and played two wonderful sets based on excitement, contrast and sheer momentum.

Most of the tracks were taken from his recent CD and – given his sparing introductions and my ignorance of the pieces – I can't quote a single title, but most operated on the basis of change and development, good melodies emerging at various stages, the whole thing building to an exciting climax, often topped off by a wry finale. For example, the opening number began with Neset on soprano sax and Eger backing him with the quietest of hand claps. This gradually involved the whole quartet, then after a piano interlude we finished up with Neset's intense tenor over a dynamic rhythm section – the whole thing maybe fifteen minutes.

Eger was spectacular throughout, dynamic, yet subtle when required, exploiting the various sounds in and around his drum kit; Galvin switched between piano and keyboards at high speed, playing the two

simultaneously, even exploring the inside of the piano and showing his skill on melodica; Chaplin was the still centre of the group, the rock on which their excesses could build. As for Neset himself, he even began one number on piano and engaged in a drum battle with Eger in another.

Any suggestion of gimmickry in all this is instantly removed by the intense conviction of all four – and it wasn't all dynamic attack. Surprisingly, near the end, Chaplin and Eger left the stage to Neset and Galvin for a totally untypical version of what he had originally composed as one movement of a flute concerto. And Neset's gift for melody showed up in his original piano treatment of his wedding march, gradually adding instruments and intensity.

At the end a standing ovation seemed like the only response.

RON SIMPSON



LIVE REVIEW

CLAIRE MARTIN

SOUTHPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL, 1 FEBRUARY 2026

Fans of top quality vocals of were fully pleased, impressed and satisfied at the closing show of the fourth annual Southport Jazz Festival on 1 February 2026 at the spacious and well appointed Grand Hotel. The multifaceted vocalist, Claire Martin delivered a two hour concert of a winning and eclectic mix of jazz, classic standards and 1970s pop songs.

The trio of pianist, Nikki Iles, saxophonist/clarinetist, Karen Sharp and Ewan Hastie's bass

accompanied her with sensitivity and aplomb in equal measure. The slightly unconventional absence of a percussionist was more than made up with Hastie's driving bass along with Iles' relentless rhythmic fluidity of comping and fills. Sharp's seamless verve in her swinging melodic solos, scored highly in lifting the bar of intensity and depth to engage the audience throughout.

Jazz pianist, Kenny Barron's *Sunshower* brought about a welcome change of feel and tempo to the proceedings. Its gentle latin feel suited the lyrics of the late vocalist/lyricist, Tina May, wonderfully. Veterans of an earlier incarnation of Southport Jazz might remember Tina's performance in

2020 at the nearby Clifton Hotel which Martin made mention of as a tribute to her good friend and colleague, Ms May who sadly passed away in March 2022.

Kurt Weill's *Speak Low* featured a nifty arrangement with a back and forth exchange between Martin and Sharp's bass clarinet. Her fluidity and ease on the instrument was clearly evident on her deft improvisational outing in this classic standard of American stage and screen.

Ivan Lins' *Love Dance* was a truly blissful entry with its suspenseful melody gently cooed by Martin over the rich yet subtle moving harmonies shaped with Iles' eloquent and elegant touch.

Martin's stage presence is enhanced by her gently rollicking, swinging gait across the stage. A unity of forces that puts the audience at ease both visually and 'audio-ly'.

All in all a splendid night of jazz and song was had by all present. As usual, full plaudits to the organisers, Jez Murphy, Emma Holcroft and Cliff Ray along with the able team of volunteers – the 'Southimportant' if you will, keeping all matters festival flowing smoothly. One can only look forward to the 5th year bash in January 2027. Bring it on!

FRANK GRIFFITH

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