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THE SHAKE KEANE STORY

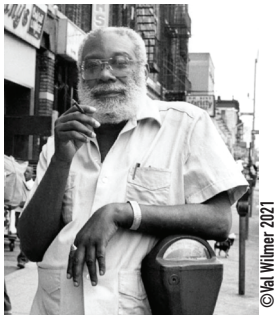
+ FULL REVIEWS:

RIFF: THE SHAKE KEANE STORY
THE SONGS OF DUNCAN LAMONT



IN THIS ISSUE • THE JAZZ CENTRE REOPENS • MICHAEL HOROVITZ • ROY DECARAVA: JAZZ PHOTOGRAPHY
• LOCKDOWN JAZZ ON FILM • DESERT ISLAND JAZZ DISCS • AUGUST WILSON: BLUES PLAYWRIGHT

Centrepiece



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The Jazz Centre UK is open from Wednesday to Sunday 11am - 5pm.
You can find us at The Beecroft Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend on Sea SS2 6EX. Tel: 01702 215169.

OUR MISSION —

TO PROMOTE, PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE THE CULTURE OF JAZZ MUSIC IN ALL ITS FORMS

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Welcome to Centrepiece: Mark Kass CEO

There are so many quotes out there I could adopt that highlights what we've all been through over the past 18 months; Dylan, Bowie, Clapton, Taylor Swift (bet she never thought she's get a mention in a jazz mag!) have all sung about "change" but these words of Miles Davis I think sum up The Jazz Centre UK's last 500 days or so in a nutshell. . .

"Bebop was about change, about evolution. It wasn't about standing still and becoming safe. If anybody wants to keep creating they have to be about change."

Jazz is only just a little over hundred years old. It hasn't just changed; it's gone through continuous revolution to evolve as one of the most exciting musical genres around. Our new heritage displays in the Centre seek to highlight —decade-by-decade— these revolutions and the important moments in time that shaped this transformation as it happened and still continues to do so today.

Our exciting new *Jazz at the 100 Club* exhibition and our *UK Jazz Greats* exhibits reflect the incredible diversity of our music across the years and in this bumper edition of *Centrepiece*, we highlight our own determination to represent jazz in ALL its forms.

Probably our most exciting output from the 100 Club exhibition, is the publication of *Ace of Clubs*, a fascinating, exciting and often revealing insight into the world of jazz seen through the eyes of one of the UK's iconic grassroots music venues and edited our very own Digby Fairweather, who performed countless gigs there over the years. Incredibly, today's 100 Club evolved from a host of genre-crossing revolutions from jazz, to punk, ska, rock, indie and dance laying the foundations for some of the world's most successful bands.

Ace of Clubs tells some great front-of-house and behind-the-scenes tales told by those that played there and as all sales of this innovative tome raise much-needed funds for The Jazz Centre UK, itself a grassroots venue, I of course urge you to buy a copy —or two— either online or from our retail store at the Centre!

Over the last few months, we've gone hell-for-leather to re-position The Jazz Centre UK as the national cultural centre for jazz and although we've embarked on what I hope will be a never-ending journey, I really have to thank everyone involved who have gone above-and-beyond to get the Centre open, and then after our rather badly timed recent flood, re-opened. A particularly big shout-out has to go to Hannah Mumford our exhibition curator for the huge challenges, trials and tribulations bestowed upon her over the last nine months!

The changes we've made wouldn't have happened of course without financial support from personal donations and corporate philanthropy, from our

principal funders The Heritage Lottery Fund and Southend Borough Council and the huge in-kind investment made not only by our team of dedicated volunteers but many of our suppliers who have all delivered far more than we ever expected. Thank you!

In the last couple of months, our commitment to promoting the equality, diversity and inclusivity of jazz in the UK

has enabled us to attract some more headline Patrons keen to support our work. I am truly grateful to award-winning jazz pianist Zoe Rahman, to Jazz FM presenter Chris Philips and to international jazz performer, broadcaster and prolific songwriter Jamie Cullum for joining us in support of The JCUK's embarkation on a journey of change.



Hannah Mumford and a view of her newly designed, and refurbished Jazz Centre UK.

Above all, the most exciting thing for me personally, is to be able to finally, physically welcome new and established jazz fans, young and old into the Centre here in Southend-on-Sea.

After lots of tortuous back-office admin, strategising, to-and-fro schlepping of fixtures and fittings, and exhausting politics, and tongue-biting tact and diplomacy, I might now finally get to sit down, talk jazz, listen to, and host some great live music, and to meet some of the incredibly loyal volunteers, supporters and partners that have stuck with us through these somewhat weird, difficult, yet opportunistic times. A big thank you again to those I have already met, and a huge welcome and thanks to those I have yet to have the honour!

I really hope you enjoy this edition's insightful articles on jazz in film, in print, in art and of course in recorded music covering a cross-section of almost all the elements of the wonderful culture that is jazz, and whatever your jazz is, do get in touch if you'd like to contribute somehow.

Welcome back to The Jazz Centre UK!

Mark

A Tribute to Ron Mathewson

Acoustic & Electric Bass Musician Feb 1944 - Dec 2020

Ron Mathewson was one of the country's foremost bass players, brilliant, inventive and always in high demand, he played with some of the world's finest musicians.

Ron began learning the piano at an early age but switched to double bass when he was 15, gaining experience with the Scottish Country Dance Band at home in Lerwick before moving to Germany at the age of 17 to join Ken Ramage's Dixielanders. In 1962 he came to London to play with the Clyde Valley Stompers and Pete Kerr's Scottish All Stars prior to joining the Alex Welsh Band in 1964. After leaving Alex Welsh he then had a brief spell with the musically very different John Stevens Septet, later re-joining Alex Welsh for a third time.

By 1966 he had begun his association with Tubby Hayes, playing and recording with his various groups and big band. One of these recordings, *Mexican Green*, is an album he once said was a favourite out of his recordings. Listening to it again as I write this, the combination of Ron, Mike Pyne and Tony Levin driving behind Tubby's fluent tenor is wonderful. His partnership with Tubby lasted until the latter's untimely death in 1973. Ron joined up with Ronnie Scott in 1977 and remained until 1992, playing globally in all his various bands and recording with them, notably on *Serious Gold*.

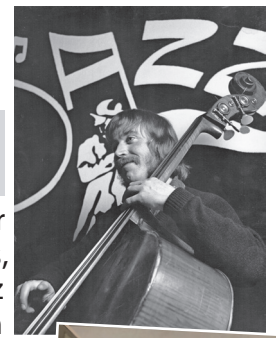
In the late sixties he joined the Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band, recording over a dozen albums with them. His stunning technique and musical innovation made him much sought after by visiting musicians and over the years he accompanied and recorded with many, including Stan Getz, Ben Webster, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, Philly Joe Jones, and Dexter Gordon.

I was lucky enough to hear him many times in the 1960s, a vibrant time on the jazz scene. Ron was associated with many of the fine musicians of that era and beyond, including Dick Morrissey, Tony Coe, Ian Carr, Gordon Beck, Stan Tracey, Ronnie Ross, Stan Sulzman, and Alan Skidmore, fronting a few outfits of his own along the way.

Ron recorded and toured the world with Rolling Stones' drummer and Jazz Centre UK Patron Charlie Watts as part of the world famous Charlie Watts' Orchestra, was a founder member of Paz, one of UK's ethereal Latin jazz bands that went on to influence local Latin and acid jazz man Snowboy. He recorded on the Neal Ardley tribute album to Mike Taylor, local piano genius, often referred to as "the Syd Barrett of jazz," who sadly committed suicide off the coast of Southend in 1969.

Ron's career ended prematurely in 2007 following an accident and sadly he fell victim to coronavirus late last year and died on 3rd December 2020. He leaves behind a legacy of recordings and memorabilia which are now on display at The Jazz Centre and for those who had the pleasure of hearing him during his long and illustrious career, memories of a wonderful, world-class yet remarkably unknown musician.

Sue Coello



George Webb's Pianola

The latest acquisition of The Jazz Centre is a magnificent pianola donated by Penny Ham the daughter of the legendary George Webb. Apart from harking back to the early years of the 20th century, and the very birth of jazz, George's pianola is an object of beauty in and of itself, beautifully crafted in oak and in perfect working condition. Indeed he improved on the original manual method of operation by connecting it to an external motor eliminating the need for the pianist. Included with the pianola are two boxes of the perforated paper rolls containing many of the hit songs of the early jazz years.



George Webb's Dixielanders. Members: Art Streatfield, Buddy Vallis, Eddie Harvey, George Webb, Owen Bryce, Reg Rigden, Roy Wykes, Wally Fawkes.

George was the founder of the British post-war jazz revival, his Dixielanders began playing at the Red Barn, Barnehurst in 1942, quickly acquiring a dedicated following. At the end of the war the band began regular recording and appearances on radio. Their rough and ready, stomping two-beat style recreated the early jazz of King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong, a world away from the contemporary smooth British swing and dance bands.

The Dixielanders disbanded in January 1948 and George joined Humphrey Lyttelton's band from 1948 to 1951. He reformed the Dixielanders in 1952, but this was short-lived, and he then concentrated on running a jazz club or acting as an agent and manager for musicians.

In the 1960s he returned to playing more frequently and toured Europe as a soloist. Another version of the Dixielanders operated from 1973 to 1974, following which he ran a pub in Stansted. From the 1980s he occasionally reassembled his band for festivals and special appearances. He died in March 2010.



Ace of Clubs: A Celebration of the 100 Club

Ace of Clubs tells the story of one of the worlds most venerable music clubs in the words of those who were there. As Jools Holland says in the foreword, "The club has been home to all sorts of generations of outsider and underground music, whether its folk, blues, jazz reggae, rockabilly, boogie woogie or punk. This music is outside the mainstream but known to the insiders as the greatest music ever made and the foundations of everything we hear on the radio today".

Its earliest manifestation was The Feldman Swing Club. It began life in 1942, and it was the only club which featured jazz exclusively, until its demise in 1954. 100 Oxford Street was subsequently used by The London Jazz Club and the Humphrey Lyttelton Club. Eventually the premises settled on the name 100 Club and has been a live venue ever since. A wide variety of musicians have appeared there: Americans from Louis Armstrong, to Ruby Braff to Archie Shepp; everyone of note on the British jazz scene; to the Rolling Stones, The Clash, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Hugh Masekela, Toots and the Maytals, Paul McCartney . . . the list is almost endless. Edited by The Jazz Centre's own Digby Fairweather, *Ace of Clubs* tells the true story of the 100 Club, warts and all.

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ RECORDING ARTIST, BROADCASTER & AUTHOR

Digby Fairweather

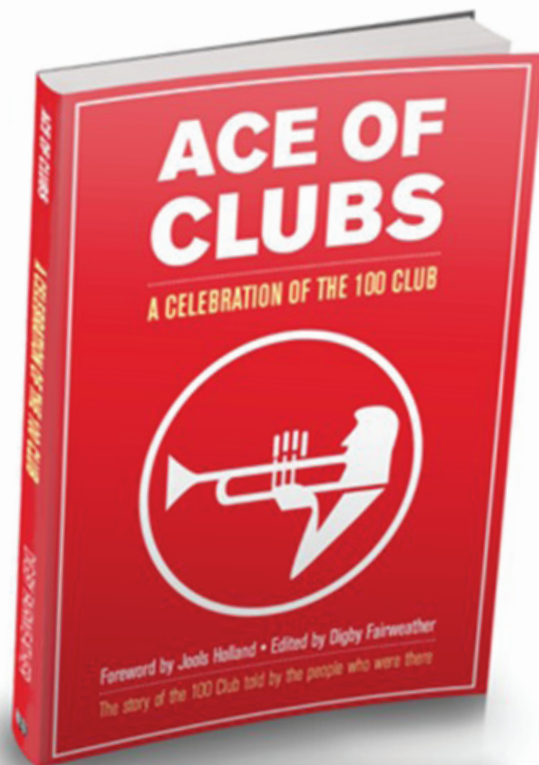
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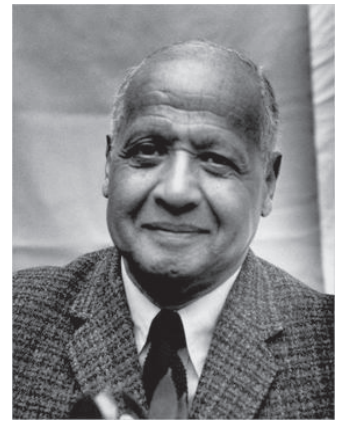
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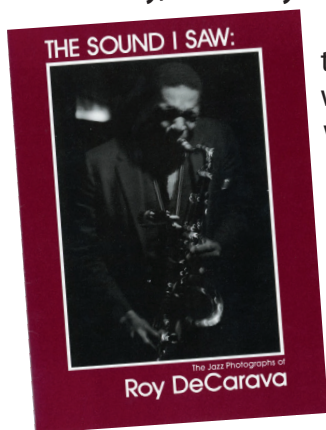
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Roy DeCarava: The Sound I Saw

First recognized for his images of daily life in Harlem (the subject of *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*, his 1955 collaboration with Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes), and portraits of musicians like Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday, it is remarkable that Roy DeCarava's work went largely unpublished, *The Sound I Saw* printed only eight years before his death in 2009. Writing about his own photographs in the forward Carava suggests: 'Their significance is relative and will depend on who you are and what you are. They will mean different things to different people, which is as it should be and was so intended.'



Accordingly, the photographic image is a 'text' that can be 'read', our reading of any photograph based on the sense we make of it by way of the reader's experience, age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality etc.

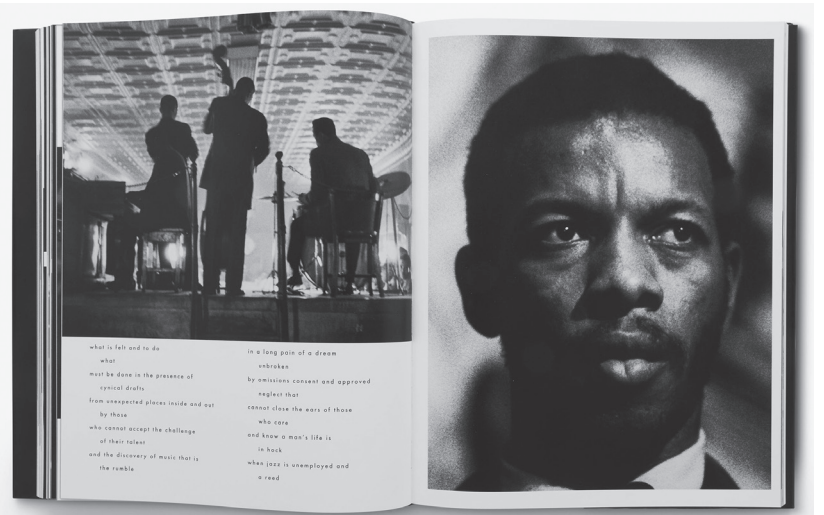


Photographs are discursive, their readings dependent on what we bring to them when we read them. And if, like me, you love photography and jazz, Roy DeCarava's *The Sound I Saw*, a book conceived, designed, written and made by hand as a prototype by master photographer Roy DeCarava in the early 1960s, unpublished for nearly half a

century, but published eventually — and beautifully — for the first time by Phaidon Press in 2001, is a book that ticks both boxes. Published in large format, the photographs are not printed with borders, the only white space used graphically for DeCarava's poetic commentary. As I write this, the fourth essay on jazz and photography, I realise that I have previously referred to some books in this canon as being described pejoratively as 'coffee-table books'. It's a horrible term, the phrase 'coffee-table book' as offensive as seeing for example Miles Davis' *Blue in Green* on some dinner-jazz sampler. Miles never ever simply played background mood music any more than any of these photographers produced decorative style accessories.

I'm speculating here, but can't help wondering whether DeCarava's stylistic approach to photography and jazz, his grainy, rich-toned and often de-focused images was simply too radical for the period. Certainly, DeCarava is stylistically very different from three photographers I've written about already in this series; he doesn't use powerful artificial lighting to create the sharp-focus moodiness of Herman Leonard; he doesn't capitalise on his subjects' physical sex appeal by drenching them in the natural light that the Californian sunshine offered William

Claxton; and they are a world away from the up-close intimacy of the musician in the recording studio achieved by Lee Friedlander's album cover colour photographs or the social documentary approach seen in his or Claxton's New Orleans photographs. And whilst Francis Paudras in his collaboration with Herman Leonard in *The Eye of Jazz* combines the graphic and the photographic, *The Sound I Saw* is bolder, DeCarava breaking up the continuity of candid monochromatic portraits and the urban landscapes of Harlem with often abstract imagery and poetic text that goes well beyond captioning or dating. Indeed, there is no contents or index page identifying subject, location or time at all in the book, important because rather than simply being a set of pictures of recognisable names in jazz, *The Sound I Saw* is a representation of a jazz-culture that DeCarava witnessed during a particular period. It's probably only jazzers of a certain age who will recognise the first and last images in the book as being of Coleman Hawkins, but by not identifying subject-matter with names or places DeCarava presents jazz as a stream of 196 soulful images interspersed with his own evocative poetry. In this book, which probably has more photographs of the people of Harlem than musicians, jazz is presented as 'a story . . . ideas and incidents related being expressed as a stream of images as seen and felt through the eyes of a jazz musician on a stage.'



Graphic and photographic, Roy DeCarava's *The Sound I Saw* emphasises page layout, design and text. The prose is as important as the imagery.

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Big Bands Swinging Alone

A talk by Michael Deakin



In January 2020 Michael Deakin gave a presentation on the Second World War V-Discs. The success of that meeting inspired The Jazz Centre to invite Michael back for a second presentation the following June. The theme was to be the separated development of Big Bands in Britain and USA during the “no visa” period from 1933 – 1946. The virus crisis intervened, but the invite still stands for when we are able to re-open. Michael has given us a taster as to the content of his talk.

In 1933 Duke Ellington toured UK with great success, saying that he hoped to make it an annual tour.

In 1934, the Great Depression hit USA. This, combined with the impact of “talkies” meant that professional registrations with the American Federation of Musicians dropped by 80%. The AFM responded by opposing all applications for visas from UK musicians wishing to tour USA. The UK Musicians Union responded in kind, and there was no further exchange of musicians until 1950.

As a result, Big Bands developed completely separately in UK and USA. They had Ellington, Basie, many more. We had Roy Fox, Ambrose and Henry Hall. Musical shows were recast for London and Broadway. Although both countries had access to sheet music, there was no exchange of live music for 17 years.

British Big Band Swing developed music for dancing, stage shows and powerful showbiz moguls; US Big Band Swing developed music for radio, global films and showing off.

This is a remarkable tale of transpositions and covers, enlivened by fourteen year-olds who started 60-year careers, and oddballs such as “Geraldo’s Navy”.

DeCarava’s fine-art approach also challenges conventional realist notions of the medium in which images need to be sharply focussed and ‘correctly’ exposed. To some photographic eyes these images



may well look like mistakes, things like form, shape and movement rendered as graphic blurred traces. Whilst there are images of Miles looking moody, Monk enigmatic and Satchmo smiling as he runs through Harlem where DeCarava was born, many of his photographs, rich in a sense of time and place don’t even include musicians: it is two themes of Harlem and jazz, interwoven and inseparable, that are the ostensible subject of the book.



Like William Klein’s photographs from the same period, DeCarava’s images are grainy and high contrast, an effect perhaps achieved by push-processing fast film like Tri-X 400 ASA. I suspect too



Monochromatic light and shadows, framing that challenges conventional notions of composition, DeCarava’s photographs eloquently convey a sense of time and place; the places that jazz was made beyond the clubs and venues.

that DeCarava’s sense of movement and atmosphere may also have been achieved by using such film on the much smaller and versatile single-lens reflex camera that evolved through the 1950s when these images were produced. There is a seemingly casual quality to DeCarava’s framing, his compositions often sharing more with a fine art canvas than with photo-reportage. If ever you wanted to exemplify the difference between what a photograph is of and what it might be about, *The Sound I Saw* would be a good place to start.

Mick Gawthorp



The Jazz Bug

Mick Gawthorp

Like many of the generation born in the early 1950s, the soundtrack of my secondary schooling was enhanced by the release of two Beatles albums per year between 1963 and 1968. It started with the innocent pop naiveté of tunes like *Love Me Do* and ended with avant-garde musique concrete of *Revolution Number 9*. Musically, being a teenager in the 1960s was like winning the lottery. We had the beat-boom, the rhythm 'n' blues boom, the soul explosion, psychedelia and Dylan. In my head, I danced like they did on Ready Steady Go to Tamla Motown and Stax records. I also thought I knew what most adults and 'straights' did not as I developed my sense of 'otherness' through my (often aberrant) decoding of Dylan lyrics. And in the kinetic paroxysm that was the 1960s I also discovered jazz. There were a number of contributing factors, some of which I'm sure will ring bells for many senior citizens at The Jazz Centre, who, if they are anything like yours truly spend more and more time wondering how we got here.

A huge influence I remember with particular affection were Willis Conover's Voice of America broadcasts which I was able to receive via a shortwave radio signal on a faux- futuristic plastic-cased crystal-set given to me by my dad, whose own tastes in jazz lent towards piano stylists like Errol Garner, Teddy Wilson



Positively space-age! A crystal-set with one ear piece that received music from another world.

and the big-bands of the Count and the Duke. Minimalistic and simplistic, the set came with just one ear-piece and a copper-wire that I sometimes needed to hook up ritualistically to the metal bed-frame. From this one ear-piece I heard music which —at least to my adolescent years— simply had no precedent. It was jazz, but unlike any jazz I'd heard previously.

Conover had a sonorous baritone voice and his economic and slow delivery made his discourse all the easier to follow. I discovered these broadcasts during the peak of the Cold War when Voice of America was considered by some to be western or Yankee propaganda, the music gratefully received by jazz-loving listeners in Eastern Bloc countries for whom English was definitely not a first or preferred language. I definitely didn't realise this at the time and have only subsequently learned that Conover's work for Voice of America amounted, in the view of the State Department which ran the network, to being a tacit endorsement of international capitalism and the free market system. As Richard Williams has written 'It made him a particular



hero among listeners behind the Iron Curtain, to whom the sound of jazz symbolised the free world and all its social and material benefits. His precise enunciation of song titles and musicians' names helped him communicate with those whose command of English was limited or non-existent. Conover's unhurried delivery and soothing mellow tone was easy to follow. Even for me. Furthermore, what made Conover's programmes all the more appealing was that he would segue between the traditional and the avant-garde more or less along the lines of Miles Davis's advice to anyone who wanted to learn about the music. 'If you want to know the history of jazz there are four words; Louis Armstrong (and) Charlie Parker.' Whilst I couldn't claim to fully understand something like for example Ornette Coleman's *Ramblin'*, it seemed then so unlike anything else that the allure of such an outsider approach was appealing in itself. Like millions of others who had been moved by the groove of Brubeck's *Take Five*, particularly Paul Desmond's crystalline tone and his ability to gracefully shift between moods euphoric and melancholic, Ornette's plaintive alto evoked a radically different mood. This was definitely not music for sophisticated swingers in their space-age bachelor pads.

Writing decades later about the kind of character who fantasises about being such a jazz-loving outsider, Donald Fagen —whose later *Nightfly* album cover also cleverly reconstructs the kind of persona I'd imagined Willis Conover to resemble— summarises the aspirant jazzier Deacon Blues' position thus: '... that shape is my shape, there where I used to stand.' Writing now as a pensioner and as —according to my psychographic cluster



Donald Fagen (who also mentions Brubeck).

group— a ‘silver surfer’ with disposable income, I have often thought of investigating whether it would be possible to buy such a crystal-set, but considered it pointless as the ghost of Willis Conover would be forever lost in the ether, my listening compromised by years of audiophile quality, my hearing impaired by all the hair that seems now to grow in my ears!



Another deciding factor in getting jazz was my first visit with my dad to the legendary Dobell's Record Shop on Charing Cross Road. My dad died very young and it wasn't until many years upon hearing some music again that I remembered them as being pieces

he had introduced me to: George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*; Ella Fitzgerald singing George Gershwin or Cole Porter's songbook; Neal Hefti's tunes like *Li'L Darlin'* on Count Basie albums; it was the realisation that what made the Duke Ellington orchestra exceptional was not just the arrangements or the instrumentation but rather the collective voices of people like Johnny Hodges, Paul Gonsalves, Russell Procope and Cat Anderson playing their parts distinctively and characteristically on those arrangements that made the sound of the Duke Ellington Orchestra what it was.

Any visit to London was exciting but Dobell's was a revelation and will certainly have played a formative role in my ongoing struggle with record-collecting. That was the first of many subsequent trips to Dobell's and as a 16 year-old with more time than money it was worth hitch-hiking to London just to be there. It's difficult to convey how transformative an experience this was but going down those steps to the dark and smoke-filled basement where there were racks of second-hand records was a revelation. I remember there being a few self-contained listening-booths where poor people like me could play both sides of any number of records before deciding whether I could either afford or buy the disc. There were even ashtrays in the booths! Even with the doors shut these booths were big enough to accommodate two skinny teenagers but I can only imagine what a hell-hole this basement would have seemed to a non-smoker who didn't like jazz. If you could afford the record it would be put into the Dobell's Records paper-bag which was for me one of the most iconic graphic designs of the 20th Century; high contrast black

and white lith-film, the design was based upon what a jazz-fiend's record collection would look like stacked up with only the spine visible. I can't remember specifically what records were featured (apart from maybe Mingus's *Black Saint and Sinner Lady*, Oliver Nelson's *Blues and the Abstract Truth* and Stan Tracey's *Jazz Suite*) but I fantasised about maybe one day owning such a collection. OK, I could have passed on the swing and the mainstream but I remember labels like Impulse, Blue Note, Contemporary, Folkways, Esquire and others which would enable me to navigate my course through a dizzy array of genres and styles. Maybe like Fantasy Football today in which the player selects a dream-team, the Dobell's record bag served as my fantasy collection. Certainly, I carried that bag with as much signifying pride as I wore my Ben Sherman shirt with.

Apart from the aforementioned Willis Conover's radio programmes and the well-appointed city record-library in Coventry there seemed little else available. In 1967 the BBC recognised that in order to target the kind of teenage audiences who were listening to the offshore pirate radio stations, public-service broadcasting would need an overhaul. So in 1967 the BBC introduced Radios One, Two, Three and Four. Apart from Humphrey Lyttleton the only jazz programme that the BBC offered back then was Charles Fox's *Jazz Today* which I think was broadcast early on a Tuesday evening on what was then the Third Programme. Like Willis Conover, Fox could be eclectic and was not totally averse to playing the New Jazz. For example, taking the soprano as a thematic link, a classic Sidney Bechet track might be followed by something from *The Straight Horn* of Steve Lacy, listeners like me learning that new music does not just happen but rather evolves from history and tradition.

Finally, as anyone familiar with The Jazz Centre's spectacular resource of books written on the subject can see, nowadays there is no shortage of literature written by or about the people who played, produced, photographed, chronicled and promoted it. Way back in the late 60s —at least



continued on p.10

The Songs of Duncan Lamont

Sadly, the multi-talented Duncan Lamont passed away last year at the age of 87 after a long and distinguished career, both as a wonderful tenor player and a prolific songwriter with a vast catalogue of work to his name. He was a fine composer and a thoughtful, clever lyricist—a rare bird these days—and universally admired. Natalie Cole, Elaine Page, Cleo Laine and Blossom Dearie are among the many who recorded his songs. In addition, as an accomplished jazz musician he was also much sought after for both studio work and as a touring musician backing the likes of Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Peggy Lee—listening to Duncan’s playing here you can understand why.

This compilation has been put together by singer Esther Bennett, who helped create The Duncan Lamont Songbook with Duncan, touring jazz clubs and theatres together for the past ten years and although this cd has been released to showcase his songwriting, it also highlights what a wonderful musician he was.

I Told You So and *Stark Reality* feature some lyrical tenor from Duncan, ably accompanied by Duncan’s long-time friends, pianist Simon Wallace and lovely vocalist Sarah Moule. These are ‘end of the affair’

numbers, ideal for a pensive mood, to be savoured in a dim light with a glass of wine.

Esther Bennett takes the vocals on *Pretty People* and *There Ain’t Nothing Like The Blues*, the former a chippy little commentary on the breakdown of a relationship, the latter a very downbeat blues, to which Ms Bennett’s edgy vocals are perfectly suited. John Crawford on piano, Simon Little on bass and Mark Fletcher on drums complement Ms Bennett’s vocals and Duncan’s expressive tenor beautifully.

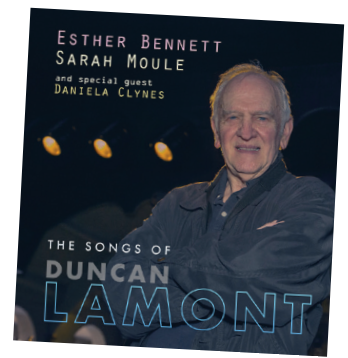
For *A Great Day in Harlem* Sarah Moule and Esther Bennett are joined by Daniela Clynes to harmonise on a roll call of some of the jazz heroes who lined up for that iconic photograph by Art Kane in 1958. This number features Simon Wallace on piano again and Duncan Lamont Jr with some full-bodied, bluesy tenor supporting the ladies.

All in all, a very enjoyable cd which would make a melodic addition to anyone’s collection.

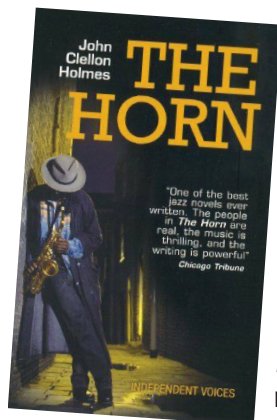
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Available to buy at:

<https://estherbennett.bandcamp.com/album/the-songs-of-duncan-lamont>



in my provincial library— there wasn’t much at all. But there was the Jazz Book Club which I discovered through the pages of *Jazz Journal*. I discovered it quite late, my first title being Paul Oliver’s *Conversation With the Blues* which I read, re-read and plundered for source material for bad line drawings for O level Art. Oliver’s photograph of the blind former medicine show guitarist Bo Carter holding his National Steel resonator guitar is poignant and tragic, Carter never living long enough to see just how big the blues got and how far his music travelled by way of the British rhythm ‘n’ blues explosion that my generation enjoyed through John Mayall, Eric Clapton, Peter Green et al. Some of the other books had quite lofty sounding titles: for example, *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid* originally written in 1938 by Winthrop Sargeant. Although



there was a printing of Robert Reisner’s *Bird Lives*, many of the others were written years before the modernists had made their mark. Nevertheless, Mezz Mezzrow’s *Really the Blues* from 1947 offered a spectacular insight into the deviant world of jazz, dope and ‘hip’ or ‘jive-talk’. In addition to being a first-hand account of a white kid who fell in love with black culture, *Really the Blues* is a book about race, drugs, language, exploitation and

music. The book comes with an appendix which serves as a translation of the ‘jive’ section, a ‘hipster’ language musicians were using to describe anyone who was ‘in the know’ about an emerging culture, mostly black, which revolved around jazz. Appropriated and celebrated by beat luminaries like Allen

Ginsberg who described the book as ‘an epiphany’ and Jack Kerouac whose ‘spontaneous bop prosody’ was heavily influenced by the pace and rhythms of jazz, such writing also found its way into another Jazz Book Club title *The Horn*. Set in 1954 and written by John Clellon Holmes who would go on to write another classic of jazz and beat literature *Go*, *The Horn* deals with the last twenty four hours in the life of Edgar Pool, a legendary forerunner of bop, a character clearly based on Lester Young. Thus, in addition to Nat Hentoff’s *Hear me Talkin’ To Ya* and his extremely ubiquitous sleeve notes, most of the knowledge I’d acquired about jazz was formed by such aforementioned sources. It was a time well before I’d learned what words like ‘transgressive’ or ‘dissonant’ meant. Back then, in the early days of learning about jazz I probably thought that ‘modal’ was what Twiggy did for a living.

Riff: The Shake Keane Story

by Philip Nanton

'Shake Keane' always struck me as a particularly fine name for a jazz musician —so expressive of the music's movement and energy. Its two sharp syllables are in stark contrast to the name his parents gave him on the Caribbean island of St Vincent in 1927: Ellsworth McGranahan Keane. For the (disputed) origins of 'Shake', I'll leave you to read *Riff: The Shake Keane Story*, a short but absorbing biography of the trumpeter who made his mark in jazz as part of the trailblazing Joe Harriott Quintet, in the first half of the sixties.

The achievements of that group were significant: they can claim to have made the first breakthrough into free form group playing, in parallel with but independently of Ornette Coleman in the US. In Shake Keane, Joe Harriott found a partner whose wide-ranging and disciplined musical education gave him the resources to move away from jazz improvisation based on chord sequences, towards a more spontaneous, personal approach. Harriott wanted a player who could 'overshadow' him —his way of saying 'improvise a counterpoint'— and Keane was equal to the task. He also became a regular collaborator with Michael Garrick, in his poetry and jazz presentations, where his ability to improvise freely made him an ideal accompanist to the writers who participated in this briefly popular fusion of music and literature.

Keane had come to Britain in 1952, without much thought of a musical career. His primary interest was literature; already a published poet in St Vincent, he arrived with an introduction to the BBC World Service, and soon began contributing to its Caribbean Voices programme. His musical ability gave him another source of income, playing in a variety of commercial settings, from highlife and pop to cabaret work.

He eventually began a literature degree course in London, but completed only two years: jazz took over and became his profession. His literary ambitions seem to have waned, and curiously he rarely, if ever, offered his own



work in the poetry and jazz context, and indeed did little in Britain to promote his literary output.

Riff holds the two sides of Shake Keane in careful balance. On the music side, there is a good account of the Harriott group's formation, and an atmospheric view of the London jazz scene of the period. It was bass player Coleridge Goode who introduced Keane to the flugelhorn, which he now took up as his main instrument. Philip Nanton admits, though, that he is a jazz fan rather than a music critic, and is a pity that the group's records, which are the only evidence of these men's talents that most readers will ever have, are not given closer scrutiny. Their club and concert performances over a relatively brief life —4/5 years—might have yielded more in the way of review material and fans' recollections.

The author is more comfortable with the verbal side of Keane, though, and the poetry is given several chapters of reflection,

quotation and analysis. Religious and philosophical themes in his early poetry are thoughtfully discussed, placing his poetry in the context of his own culture and other Caribbean poets; in the later work, more playful and linguistically uninhibited, a jazz-like quality is quite convincingly identified —reinforced by the fact that Keane explicitly saw his writing in this way.

The Harriott group's date sheet was getting very sparse by the mid-sixties, the blues/rock explosion having reduced them to about one gig a week. They were not the first to find that playing adventurous jazz is hardly a path to fame and fortune, and Keane decided that an offer of steady work abroad was more attractive; he left the group, to live and play in Germany for bandleader Kurt Edelhagen — later joining the Clarke/Boland Big Band, among others. He recorded some seventeen LPs on the continent, but this period is only lightly surveyed in *Riff*.

It's something of a problem for this biography that its subject did not leave much evidence about his private feelings and reflections on key decisions and events in his life —no journal, and few letters. Those most intimately connected to him —the three women who married him, and others who didn't— offer a few insights, but much has to be surmised. This is noticeable in a central, defining episode that was to follow . . .

If emigration to Britain was the first great turning point in Keane's life, then his return to St Vincent was the second. In London in

continued on p.18

Michael Horovitz 4 April 1935 – 7 July 2021

When Michael Horovitz died at the age of 86 on 7th July this year, both *Jazzwise* and *The Poetry Society* were quick to acknowledge his achievements and influence both in the poetry and the music worlds. Born in Frankfurt, but brought to England at the age of 2 in 1937 to escape the holocaust, he established *New Departures* magazine while a student at Oxford. This became the vehicle for publishing many of the American 'Beat' poets in England, and promoting poetry and music crossover events such as 'Live New Departures', Jazz Poetry Super Jams and the Poetry Olympics festivals.

He came to prominence at the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall, which he had helped organise and which featured the American poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg as well as many of the British poets working in the oral tradition at that time.

Influenced significantly by the work (and legend) of William Blake, as well as the oral and improvisational tradition of the American beat poets, music, especially jazz, was never far away from his performance. He worked with jazz luminaries such as Stan Tracey, Bobby Wellins, Joe Harriott, fusion musicians such as Dick Heckstall-Smith and later pop musicians Daman Albarn, Graham Coxon and Paul Weller, with whom he recorded an album *Bankbusted Nuclear Detergent Blues* from the Jazz Poetry SuperJams and issued by Gearbox Records in 2013.

At any time during his readings or performances with his William Blake Klezmatrix Band, which included trombonist Annie Whitehead, he would play his "anglo-saxophone", a sort of home-made instrument, being a cross between a eunuch flute and a kazoo, held together with gaffer tape and a 'secret ingredient'.



Annie Whitehead and Michael Horovitz performing at the 100 Club.

He published 12 poetry collections and edited a number of anthologies, notably *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain* (1969) and *Grandchildren of Albion: An Illustrated Anthology of Voices and Visions of Younger Poets in Britain* (1992). However, he was passionate in his belief that the current development of poetry had much in common with the heritage of jazz development from its traditional roots through the stream of consciousness experimentation of bop in the '40s and '50s. Writing in *Afterwords*, the postscript essay in the *Children of Albion*

anthology, he states "Just as jazz is not a Music but a way of playing, so is this new oral poetry another way of speaking, delivering one's own brief in one's own indestructibly personal way —tho it speak faster than intellection, forgetful of self."

He goes on to note the line of descent for both poetry and jazz is intermingled through the poetry of work-shouts, gospel hymns and blues singers, through that of Louis Armstrong, Vachel Lindsay, Auden etc to Mingus, Patchen or LeRoi Jones.

This heritage is embodied in his own practice. He notes that Jeremy Hooker reviewed the first performance of *Blues for the Hitchhiking Dead*, written by Horovitz with Pete Brown, poet and Cream lyricist, and performed by them with The New Departures Quintet (Stan Tracey, Bobby Wellins, Jeff Clyne, Laurie Morgan and Les Condon) saying:

"The word danced off the page, where it has lain crucified for too long, and blended with the music in such a way that the result was neither poetry nor jazz, but jazzpoetry."

Regarded as a mentor and enabler by many younger poets, Michael Horovitz had a reputation for being approachable and supportive, giving aspiring poet/performers the breaks that would help their careers. Attila the Stockbroker (John Baine) writing his tribute in *The Morning Star* recounts how he and fellow performance poet Seething Wells gatecrashed one of the Poetry Olympics events in 1981, only to be given a 5-minute spot on stage and an appearance on the subsequent LP of the event, which he credited as one of his first breaks in a career which endures to the present.

Having met Michael when appearing at The Essex Poetry Festival in 2008, I can confirm that this reputation is entirely justified. As a writer, performer, editor, enabler and seminal integrator of creative expressions, especially jazz and poetry, his like occurs but once in a generation. His influence will remain with those musicians and writers whose paths he crossed in life.

Adrian Green
July 2021

Why did I buy this?

Not being able to get out of the house and hear some live music is one of the most painful by-products of the lockdown. Some compensation has come from our record collection, listening to old favourites, or unearthing music that you had not listened to in years. Jazz Centre volunteer Glyn Morgan used the time to re-examine his collection, evoking memories of past purchases.

During the lockdown I thought it would be a good idea to rearrange my record/playing equipment and have it all checked out and re-position all my recordings which includes over 600 cassettes, more than 500 discs and a couple of yards of LPs —each group containing a mix of jazz, classical music and many comedy recordings.

As I started this mammoth sort-out, I found myself asking 'why did I buy this or when did I buy that'. It soon became obvious that they were falling into overlaps of 'hymns ancient and modern' —this I thought has the makings of an article for the new magazine *Centrepiece*.



Top: The Benny Goodman Sextet. **Above right:** Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie.



Just before I was called up to the RAF in 1946, I went up to the giant HMV record store in Oxford Street. About this time I was enjoying listening to the Goodman small groups as well as his big band so, lo and behold, I purchased a trio recording. Goodman, by the way, was one of the first bands to employ Afro-American musicians. But, they were not allowed to play in the white big bands. Goodman got around this by terming them as 'cabaret' artists, who were allowed to mix. So, Benny formed his famous small groups from trios to sextets; my first purchase was *After You've Gone* with Gene Krupa (drums) and Teddy Wilson, piano. A lot of big bands had small groups, but they never quite made the impact of the Goodman groups —they really did swing! Just listen to any one of them.

Walking past some other record booths, I heard a quite strange sound. This turned out to be 'the new

boy on the block', Dizzy Gillespie and his sextet. The title was as strange as the sound and constituted the 'vocal'. This record was the legendary sextet playing *Oop Bop Sh'Bam* sung by Alice Roberts. All I can say about Alice is that she either had a terrible sore throat or it was a cover name for a musician not contracted to HMV to record at that time —probably the latter, but I'll leave you to work that out. Anyway, it was so intriguing that I bought it. So, there I started a pattern —one from the swing era and another playing 'things to come'.

I must say I still went on collecting Benny Goodman, both small groups and his big bands —the latter I'll mention in a future issue. However, I was also so intrigued by Gillespie's big band that I think I bought most of his records, but my favourite has always been *Manteca* a Latin based rhythm with the famous Chano Pozo on conga drums with Dizzy shouting 'Manteca' several times to encourage the band. Exciting stuff believe me.

I walked out of Doug Dobell's record shop in Charing Cross Road all those years ago saying 'I don't think this will really catch on'. How short sighted! I dug out a case of 78rpm 10 inch shellacs the other day and there were all the discs of Gillespie, Charlie

Parker, Miles Davis, Johnny Dankworth Seven (a great band) and the wild Woody Herman band —now that was a truly great orchestra.

The young players had all cottoned on to the sounds of Be-Bop as had the arrangers such as Neil Hefti and of course Ralph Burns. The difference between these new bands and those of pre-war was that the new guys played mainly for listening, unlike those of pre-war which were chiefly

dance bands. I've got most of them now on disc.

Neil Hefti went on to arrange for the revival of the great Count Basie which I had the thrill of seeing and listening to at the Festival Hall. During the interval one could hear all the English players, who had come to hear this marvellous band, approaching anyone who walked by and saying 'want to buy a trumpet, or saxophone, or I'm sure your son would like to play drums.' Only joking of course, but that's how they must have felt.

Remember, it was thousands of young teenagers who, in those days 40'/50s, bought all these great records. I hope they are still listening to them as my friends and I still are.

Keep listening

Glyn

Lockdown Listening _1

Things We Like by Jack Bruce (Polydor -2343 033 -1970).

Jazz Centre Trustee Gary Evans writes for Centrepiece about an old favourite album re-discovered during lockdown.

I found my way to jazz from the rock bands of the late 1960s. Two particular favourites were Cream and Colosseum. My interest was also sparked by reading the *Melody Maker* and following one of its senior reviewers, Richard Williams who had very catholic tastes in music, including jazz. As there was no internet then, the *Melody Maker* was a vital source of information. I discovered that several members of Cream and Colosseum played in the Graham Bond Organisation in the mid-1960s before they found rock fame. They were Jack Bruce (bass), Dick Heckstall-Smith (saxophones) and Jon Hiseman (drums). John McLaughlin (guitar) was also a member.

In the summer of 1968, just a few months before Cream's farewell concert at the Royal Albert Hall, Jack Bruce took a week out and recorded *Things We Like* at IBC studios in London. It was the first record he made in his own name although it was not released until 1970, following the more rock-focused *Songs for a Tailor* (1969).

Things We Like was something of a revelation to me. It convinced me that jazz musicians generally displayed much greater technical ability than their rock counterparts and that they produced music that was just more interesting. I am wary of putting music into categories but I suppose *Things We Like* has to class as 'free' jazz.

The album has seven tracks ranging from the racy opener, *Over the Cliff* to the lovely ballad *Born to be Blue* written by Mel Tormé and Robert Wells in 1946. McLaughlin ups the pace on *HCKHH Blues* which, I think, has some similarities with the longer, improvised pieces that Cream were playing at the time (listen to *Spoonful* on their *Wheels of Fire* album). Jack Bruce plays acoustic bass throughout with just McLaughlin on an electric instrument. In 1969, McLaughlin travelled to America to join Tony Williams' band Lifetime and then famously joined Miles Davis playing on the seminal *Bitches Brew*.

I don't think you will find *Things We Like* in any 'best ever' album lists but I enjoy it as much today as I did fifty years ago. Like all really good music, it doesn't age. More importantly, it was one of the first jazz albums that I bought and so it started my journey into the world of jazz.



Lockdown Listening _2

Naked by Annie Whitehead (FCZ 1995)

Centrepiece editor Phil Waterhouse is more than pleasantly surprised by a CD from his collection that he had forgotten he owned.

Annie Whitehead's album *Naked* is usually reviewed under the rubric as jazz-funk, a jazz style I have not generally favoured. Being completely blown away by the opening track, I was instantly converted.

To Dudu, dedicated to South African alto saxist Dudu Pukwana, is an exuberant ten minutes of pure township-inspired joy. In the 1980s Annie toured with South African Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath and clearly soaked up the sounds.

I first encountered jazz from South Africa at the Roundhouse at a Brotherhood of Breath gig. From then on whenever Chris or other band members, especially Dudu Pukwana, appeared in London, at the Africa Centre, or my local pub The Pegasus in Green Lanes, I was there. But back to the album.

Annie's trombone sound is warm and melodic, though she can growl with the best of them when required, track two, *Platform One* a good example. Three tracks were inspired by space travel; *Hubble*, *Interspace Gal*, *Tranquility Base* were all penned by Annie and are suitably atmospheric. Annie's trombone is especially mellow on all three.

Jennifer Maidman on guitar and synthesiser, and Jasper Van't Hof —last heard by this writer on Archie Shepp's wonderful album *Mama Rose*— both contribute top-class solos, again on *Platform One*. Dudley Phillips on bass, superb on *To Dudu*, and Liam Genockey on drums and percussion round off the personnel.

The album is the perfect antidote to any lockdown blues; a veritable musical vaccine.

Converted by *Naked*, a visit to Amazon ensued, and dropping through my letter-box this morning came a second helping of Annie; her last album *The Gathering*. This one features Robert Wyatt. Can't wait.

Things We Like is available on Amazon; price £15.96, used from £12.87, download for £6.99. The full album is also available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NOV6Qe5i-g&list=PL8a8cutYP7fotaSfrbv0rKv_CNbANLS4A.

Naked is available on Amazon, priced £25. The first track on the album, *To Dudu* can be heard on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzUg-XOVPXw>. Best buy is a download £7 from Bandcamp: <https://anniewhitehead.bandcamp.com/album/naked>





Lockdown Jazz on Film

Deprived of live music during the lockdowns we jazz lovers have only the compensation of our record collection, the few radio programmes, and a couple on BBC 4, that they deem fit to broadcast. But then we have that enduring source of wonderment to be explored —the internet, and specifically YouTube. For you dear readers, Centrepiece has stayed up late trawling said YouTube to find the best in jazz documentaries and performances. Here are some recommendations, from the glorious variety of jazz history. Just copy and paste, and enjoy as they say in the movies.

First up something of a rarity; **Bud Powell**, *Inner Exile*. A French documentary by Robert Mugnerot. It includes rare footage of Bud Powell in France, Sweden and at Antibes with Charles Mingus and Eric Dolphy. Mentored by Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell became one of the greatest of all be-bop pianists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q78h2XvjEc8&t=193s>

Maintaining the great jazz pianist theme, why not indulge in Canada's finest, **Oscar Peterson**. There are several to choose from. The first film shown at The Jazz Centre in our new Media Centre, to a packed house, was the documentary *Music In the Key of Oscar*. I quote IMDb; "This riveting music documentary traces the history of piano legend Oscar Peterson, from his early days as Montreal's teenage boogie-woogie sensation through his meteoric rise to international celebrity. Over 100 minutes of classic and contemporary performances, rare film footage, in-depth interviews with a cast of jazz legends".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRJYcLWNXfc>

Alternatively there is **Oscar Peterson** with **Count Basie** and **Joe Pass** *Words and Music*, which includes the famous Basie-Peterson piano duet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HAZP7nWo6A>

Another bow to great jazz pianists, Britain's own **Stan Tracey**. Centrepiece has found footage of Stan, with his son Clark Tracey on drums, saxophonist Bobby Wellins and bassist Andy Cleyndert, with Philip Madoc as narrator, performing one the best-loved jazz compositions, *Under Milk Wood*. A perfect amalgam of jazz and poetry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KO2fuHVS2tE>

Moving on to something a bit more avant-garde, why not spend an hour or two with the **Art Ensemble of Chicago**. Try a unique performance of Chicago's finest together with another piano maestro, **Cecil Taylor**, performing in Paris 1984. If just the one blast of Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future is not enough, have a second helping; live in Hamburg 1991.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u1NTIOv9m8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll-4mbFekYc>

For those of a more traditional, New Orleans bent, you could do worse than tap the foot along to the Britain's 3 B's. **Acker Bilk**, *Jazz for Traddies*, **Kenny Ball**'s *Jazzmen at Cannizarro Park, Wimbledon 1995*, and *The Big Chris Barber Band at the Jazzwoche Burghausen 2005*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COTnhNhcHbc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smGQAZ6jyAU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpvsQSOPuxc>

And how can we omit an artist guaranteed to blow away any lockdown blues, the Queen of Electro Swing, from the Netherlands, **Caro Emerald**. If her performances at the *Montreux Jazz Festival*, or the *North Sea Jazz Festival* don't get you jumping around your living room, you had better check your pulse.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdN1030fSMA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOGRxppJLaw>





August Wilson: Blues Playwright

Currently available on Netflix is the 2020 film *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, based on the play by African-American playwright August Wilson. It has garnered almost universal praise with superlatives lavished on the two principal actors, Viola Davis, as Ma Rainey, and Chadwick Boseman as the young trumpeter Levee. But first let's say a few words about August Wilson and set the movie in context.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, set in the 1920s, was part of a ten-part series, the Pittsburgh or Century Cycle, in which Wilson set out to portray the cultural and political experiences of African-Americans in each decade of the 20th century. His inspiration came from what he labelled the four B's; the Argentinian magical-realism writer Jorge Luis Borges; the radical black nationalist writer and activist Amiri Baraka; the collage artist Romare Bearden; and blues music. All four influences are interwoven into Wilson's plays, most importantly blues music. He saw the totality of the black American experience expressed in the blues form. Three of his plays, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *Two Trains Running*, derive from song titles. The subject of the film, Mildred 'Ma' Rainey, was one of the seminal blues singers of the 20th century.

Of Romare Bearden, Wilson said "I try to make my plays the equal of his canvases". His play *The Piano Lesson*, set in the 1930s, was inspired by Bearden's eponymous painting, as was *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1911). It is no coincidence Bearden was also inspired by blues and jazz music.

For Wilson an entire philosophy was at work in the blues; "The ideas and attitudes of the people, the things they sanction. I found in all blues music an encapsulation of Black America's cultural ideas, preserved in the blues". A blues song, he said, can say so much more, and more beautifully, than dialogue. All ten plays in the Century Cycle have blues songs embedded in them, thoroughly integral to the unfolding narrative. After reading all ten plays this writer spent time listening to wonderful performances by blues singers Blind Lemon Jefferson, Son House, Charlie Patton and others completely new to me.

In the film *Ma Rainey* echoed Wilson's sentiment: "White folks don't understand about the blues. They hear it come out but they don't know how it got there. They don't understand that's life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life." And later: "This be an empty world without the blues. I take that emptiness and try to fill it up with something".

So to the movie itself, and the play it is based on. Critic Mark Kermode commented that the film sometimes was a bit "stagey". This is clearly a problem transposing any theatre production onto celluloid. At a basic level stage plays are dialogue driven, and

can only have a limited number of settings. Director George C. Wolfe and writer Ruben Santiago-Hudson created several outside scenes to circumvent these limitations. The film was bookended by two significant scenes, neither in the original play.

The opening sequence was exceptionally effective. Before she began recording Ma Rainey spent years singing in the travelling tent shows, mostly across the southern United States. The film authentically depicts what these shows would have looked like, and meant, to those in the audience.

Another important scene, Ma Rainey's car crash and confrontation with the law, only spoken of in the play, is switched to the street outside the recording studio.

Transforming a dialogue-heavy play into cinema invariably necessitates editing, often cutting down and re-configuring speeches. In *Ma Rainey* the movie this also unfortunately results in deleting some of Wilson's blues songs. To this writer the most



Ma Rainey and her band the Rabbit Foot Minstrels circa 1924 in Chicago, Illinois.

disappointing omission comes following the young trumpeter Levee's heartrending monologue of the rape and lynching of his parents. His speech is the final dialogue of act one which then concludes with Slow Drag, the band's bass player, singing the Rev. Gary Davis' song *Samson and Delilah*: "If I had my way I would tear this old building down"

Writer Samuel Hay put it succinctly: "Wilson . . . has so much faith in music's ability to simplify and illuminate that he has bassist Slow Drag close the scene with an epilogos song".

A central theme of the film is the exploitation of black artists by white businessmen. Ma Rainey recorded hundreds of songs for Paramount Records, the so-called Race Record industry. For every one she received only a flat fee, and had to sign away all royalty rights, which went to the record label owner. The popularity of Ma Rainey meant she had some

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Ma Rainey

by Sterling Allen Brown

I

When Ma Rainey
Comes to town,
Folks from anyplace
Miles aroun',
From Cape Girardeau,
Poplar Bluff,
Flocks in to hear
Ma do her stuff;
Comes flivverin' in,
Or ridin' mules,
Or packed in trains,
Picknickin' fools. . . .
That's what it's like,
Fo' miles on down,
To New Orleans delta
An' Mobile town,
When Ma hits
Anywheres aroun'.

II

Dey comes to hear Ma Rainey from de little river settlements,
From blackbottom cornrows and from lumber camps;
Dey stumble in de hall, jes a-laughin' an' a-cacklin',
Cheerin' lak roarin' water, lak wind in river swamps.

An' some jokers keeps deir laughs a-goin' in de crowded aisles,
An' some folks sits dere waitin' wid deir aches an' miseries,
Till Ma comes out before dem, a-smilin' gold-toofed smiles
An' Long Boy ripples minors on de black an' yellow keys.

III

O Ma Rainey,
Sing yo' song;
Now you's back
Whah you belong,
Git way inside us,
Keep us strong. . . .
O Ma Rainey,
Li'l an' low;
Sing us 'bout de hard luck
Roun' our do';
Sing us 'bout de lonesome road
We mus' go. . . .

IV

I talked to a fellow, an' the fellow say,
"She jes' catch hold of us, somekindaway.
She sang Backwater Blues one day:

'It rained fo' days an' de skies was dark as night,
Trouble taken place in de lowlands at night.

'Thundered an' lightened an' the storm begin to roll
Thousan's of people ain't got no place to go.

'Den I went an' stood upon some high ol' lonesome hill,
An' looked down on the place where I used to live.'

An' den de folks, dey natchally bowed dey heads an' cried,
Bowed dey heavy heads, shet dey moufs up tight an' cried,
An' Ma lef' de stage, an' followed some de folks outside."

Dere wasn't much more de fellow say:
She jes' gits hold of us dataway.



Sterling A. Brown (1901-1989).

Part of the Harlem Renaissance, Stirling Brown was an African American teacher (40 years at Howard University), literary critic, and poet.

His poetry was rooted in African-American folklore and written in black dialect.

Different forms of music inspired his poetry —ballads, worksongs, spirituals, and the blues. Listen to him recite the poem . . .
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0OENWZ9kW4>



Gertrude Ma Rainey (1882-1939).

leverage in how much she was paid, (and even able to demand a bottle of Coke), something hardly ever possible for less successful black artists. She is able to make demands of Sturdyvant the label owner, and for a while refuse to sign away her rights. With her manager on Sturdyvant's side she reluctantly has to concede however.

Ma Rainey is completely aware of that reality: "They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. . . They ain't got what they wanted yet. As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it's just like if I'd been some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain't got no use for me then." From the start Sturdyvant's character is made clear in the play's stage directions: "Sturdyvant is visible in the control room. Preoccupied with money, he is insensitive to black performers and prefers to deal with them at arm's length." His ambition is to make enough money to move into "something respectable. Textile."

Running through the film, and more effectively in the play, is a conflict between Levee, the young trumpeter, and the rest of the band. Levee has written his own modern music and wants the band to play it, not Ma Rainey's old-style jug band stuff. They want to play as Ma Rainey wishes. He even believes, naively, that Sturdyvant will record him and his new songs.

This tension is exacerbated by the frequent comments of the older, and political, pianist Toledo. During the movie he is seen reading the *Chicago Defender*, a radical paper campaigning for black rights, especially against lynching. For black America in the 1920s these were the years of the Harlem Renaissance, the recent mass campaigns of Marcus Garvey, and the writings and activity of intellectuals W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. At one stage Levee even mocks Toledo as thinking he is Booker T. The tension between the two leads eventually to tragedy.

At the time of the recording Chicago was on the cusp of its own, more militant, Chicago Renaissance. Levee's music would reflect that northern, urban reality. This was exactly the same period that Louis Armstrong was redefining, and modernising jazz with his Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings. The tragedy for Levee is that, following his killing of Toledo, Sturdyvant is able to obtain the songs, presumably for next to nothing, and record them in his own interest. This is established in the epilogue scene —film only— of white musicians, led by a Paul Whiteman look-a-like, recording a completely bland version of Levee's music. What the audience has to infer in the play, is openly and unsubtly portrayed in the film.

As with all of Wilson's plays, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* depicts the African-American experience in depth. As a movie watched for just the blues and jazz experience, it is one of the very best of that genre. For now only available on Netflix, and not general release, we at The Jazz Centre can only anticipate its release on DVD. We live in hope.

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the fifties, he had been part of a circle of Caribbean expatriates with political and intellectual ambitions, and the urge to return and contribute to the place of one's origin must have been widely felt. One of that circle had risen to the position of Premier, and in 1973 invited his lifelong friend Shake Keane to take up the position of Director of Culture. This must have offered the musician an extraordinary challenge, and a sense of potential for his mature years; sadly, though, the position lasted only until the next election, when a change of ruling party saw his post —indeed, his entire department— abolished. Riff offers an ambiguous picture of Keane's response; the ex-Premier claims he took it 'in his stride', but his marriage broke down, and he drank, enduring a frustrating period of school teaching and playing a dull local residency, with only occasional visits by musicians of his calibre. His poetry revived, though, and he won a notable literary award for his collection *Once a Week with Water*. Nanton's fine close reading of his poetry from this period finds suggestions of the difficulty Keane found in migration and return.

The final act in Keane's somewhat restless life involved a move to New York, where (without a work permit) he endured a period of poverty and alienation. Val Wilmer, who visited him in Brooklyn, gives a sharply observed picture of a man in an uncomfortable limbo.



Some honest and personal poetry emerged, though, in a collection called *Brooklyn Themes*. He returned to Britain in 1989 for a Joe Harriott memorial tour, though a New York mugging had given him a legacy of dental problems which compromised his playing; Coleridge Goode recalled his playing as 'a pale shadow' of what it once was. A final marriage —his third— in New York gave him a more settled position in the US, but he remained in touch with old friends in Britain. In his last years he made a number of visits to Norway, where he died of stomach cancer in 1997.

Shake Keane emerges from this biography as a complex individual. Physically imposing, he was outgoing and popular amongst the musicians he worked with in Britain. In his personal life, he is portrayed as a more difficult man, who left behind a wife and children, and a mistress and child, when he left for Germany, and who would marry twice more before his death. The wider patterns of his life reflect important shifts in the post-Empire world, though, and the book is an interesting contribution to the developing record of Caribbean immigration; and it takes you back to those brilliant records made by 'the nearest to Diz and Bird the UK ever produced' (Michael Garrick) with a fresh appreciation for some of the rich life experience that lay behind them.

A.S.C.

Desert Island Jazz Discs



Jazz Centre UK volunteer John Wilson chooses his Desert Island Jazz Discs. Second in a regular feature.

When Louis Armstrong was the castaway on Desert Island Discs in the late 60's, he chose five of his own records. More of that later, but this is my pick.



St. Louis Blues — Louis Armstrong and his All Stars

From Louis Armstrong plays W. C. Handy, recorded in 1954. With Trummy Young, Barney Bigard, Billy Kyle, Arvell Shaw, Barrett Deems and Velma Middleton (vocals). A classic album best summed up by these words from the legendary producer George Avakian; 'When I die, I want people to say, "That's the guy that if it hadn't been for him and Louis Armstrong and W. C. Handy, there wouldn't have been a great record"'.
[Read more](#)

Manteca — The Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra with Chano Pozo

Recorded live in 1948 in Pasadena, an early fusion of Latin and Jazz, jointly composed by Dizzy and the Cuban, Chano Pozo, who features on bongos. A dynamic and explosive combination which came to an abrupt end when Pozo was shot dead in New York later that year.
[Read more](#)

My Old Flame — Billie Holiday

I've never grown out of my adolescent infatuation for Billie, and thought I'd heard everything she recorded until recently coming across this 1944 recording on the Commodore label. She was able to take fairly ordinary popular songs and transform them into works of art. This track is just one such example. The backing musicians include Doc Cheatham (trumpet) and Vic Dickenson (trombone).
[Read more](#)

All By Myself — Jimmy Rushing with the Dave Brubeck Quartet

What an unlikely pairing, Rushing and Brubeck, but it turned out to be a match made in heaven. I would happily opt for any of the tracks on this album, but how appropriate *All By Myself* for a castaway!
[Read more](#)

Si Tu Vois Ma Mère — Sydney Bechet

Recorded in France with Claude Luter and his Orchestra. A sentimental choice, "If you see my mother", which evokes memories of good times in Paris, partly because of Woody Allen's choice of this as the recurring theme for *Midnight in Paris*.
[Read more](#)

Minor Swing — Django Reinhardt

Off to France again! Django, one of the great jazz virtuosos, with the Quintet of the Hot Club of France and Stéphane Grappelli. Recorded in 1949/50 for the album *Djangology*.
[Read more](#)

Well You Needn't — Thelonious Monk

Well you needn't ask who's playing! Thelonious Monk —unmistakeably unique and original. On this 1957 recording from "Monk's Music", he's accompanied by the old and the new —Coleman Hawkins and John Coltrane.
[Read more](#)

Chega de Saudade — Andrea Motis

I'm a big fan of the Sant Andreu Jazz Band, a youth jazz band from Barcelona. This track, an Antonio Carlos Jobim number, features one of their stars, Andrea Motis, on trumpet and vocals, with guest Scott Robinson on baritone sax.
[Read more](#)

Finally, If you wondered about Satch on Desert Island Discs. His own recordings which he selected were; *Blueberry Hill*, *Mack the Knife*, *Bess*, *You Is My Woman Now* (with Ella), *Stars Fell On Alabama* (with Jack Teagarden), and *What A Wonderful World*. The records by other artists were; *People* by Barbra Streisand, *Bye Bye Blues* by Guy Lombardo, and *New Orleans* by Bobby Hackett. His luxury object, no surprise, was his trumpet, and his book "to remind me of some of the things I done", was his autobiography *Satchmo*.
[Read more](#)



Congratulations to all at The Jazz Centre UK on your reopening

We have missed you and are looking forward to seeing you all again!

"Never play anything the same way twice"

- Louis Armstrong

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Jazz crept up on me!

I'm the founder of a creative marketing agency called Azzurro and have been in the creative business all of my life. It's odd really, I didn't realise just how much I was influenced by Jazz at a very young age.

I grew up in pubs, as my parents (and several family and friends) were publicans. In those days in London (1970's), there was a definite 'live' performance aspect. We had a three-piece band which played in the pub every Friday and Saturday evening (which I heard but didn't necessarily listen to), it turned out that they played a lot of jazz standards, as well as big band and given their age (old to me at that time) most of the music was fairly vintage.

We also had a regular patron, Mac White, who lived locally in Holborn and played clarinet with the Pasadena Roof Orchestra. He would often break out his liquorice stick and join in a session with the band. So all in all, I listened to quite lot of jazz without even knowing it.

When I first started working in the creative industry, it was centred on Covent Garden and Soho, so again, when going out after work I was often in a jazz environment. We used a bar/restaurant called Palookaville in Covent Garden (James Street I think), which had live music and good food. It was a place where jazz musicians would hang out, often playing an impromptu set on stage. One evening while we were there, Kenny Ball jumped on stage, completely unannounced and gave a great

solo performance while the band was on a break. Not sure that would happen too often now!

We also used the Cross Keys in Endell Street, which once again happened to play live jazz on Friday nights (I still didn't know I was a jazz fan). I remember being invited down to the 100 Club one Sunday evening by a jazz enthusiast friend of my father's (who didn't turn up). I convinced two of my (also young) friends to join me. I'm not sure that they appreciated jazz at all, I think they just thought, 'it's a West End night club, so why not'. That was my one and only visit to the 100 Club, which I regret. I was at Ronnie Scotts on a few occasions and on one, saw George Melly and I believe Digby Fairweather may have been there, although it was after several libations so who knows?

I do have a fairly eclectic taste in music which I seem to have passed on to my daughter, who in her first year of University had a visit from a middle aged electrician in her student accommodation and who hearing music said "is that Frank Sinatra"? Not the usual fare for an eighteen year old!

So, given I seem to have experienced jazz from a very young age, it took me until well into my thirties to realise that I actually liked jazz. Still, with jazz you're never too old, right?

Paul Wilkins, Azzurro Marketing.