

SUMMER 2017 EDITION OF THE JAZZ CENTRE UK NEWS



Welcome to edition 4 of the quarterly newsletter of THE JAZZ CENTRE UK– July 2017

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"THE JAZZ CENTRE (UK)" is open on Saturdays
(10 am-4:30) at the Beecroft Art
Gallery, Victoria Avenue,
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Sir Michael Parkinson
Dan Morgenstern
Jools Holland
Simon Spillett
Paul Jones
Sir Van Morrison
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OUR PURPOSE: TO PROMOTE, PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE THE VIBRANT CULTURE OF JAZZ MUSIC IN THE UK AND BEYOND.

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TJC(UK) COMES TO THE VILLAGE GREEN FESTIVAL JULY 8 2017

THE JAZZ CENTRE UK TAKES THE VILLAGE GREEN!

The 'Village Green Festival' 2017 is a multi-art form and music festival, produced by Metal Culture in the picturesque grounds of a beautiful Victorian park in Chalkwell, Southend on Sea. It regularly attracts over 20,000 festival goers and this year Colette Bailey, Metal's Director, approached The Jazz Centre (UK) to see if the two organizations could collaborate on a 'Jazz Day' "It's a wonderful Festival" Colette said. **"We have all sorts of different stages, green spaces, rose gardens, cricket pitches, pathways and marketplaces, a pot-pourri of international music acts, theatre, spoken word, poetry, lindy-hop/ fox trot lessons and displays, outdoor arts, circus and cabaret, vintage acts, musical theatre, visual arts, comedy, improvisation, film, workshops and games.** Only six years ago Village Green Festival was a small scale celebration of the arts and music of Southend. But it's got a lot bigger now as I said. And this year we want **a jazz café – with live music** – and an exhibition of some of the fantastic things that The Jazz Centre (UK) keeps in its collections!"

So the Trustees put their heads together and came up with a unanimous yes. "We want in" they said and nominated two members of the Board – Mick Foster and Digby – to come up with ideas. In turn the two of them met with Colette at the Centre to discuss what should be on show - including posters, vinyl record sleeves, pictures and memorabilia of the great tap-dancer Will Gaines (who lived in Southend for many years), journals old and new, and – said Colette – "how about a celebration of 'Women in Jazz'?"

Mick and Digby loved the idea and so, at the Village Green, **there will be a showcase of jazz's greatest women icons from Valaida Snow, Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mary Lou Williams right up to Barbara Thompson, Annie Whitehead and Britain's newest emergent trumpet-star Laura Jurd.** So what about showcases? "Focal Point Gallery will supply them" said Colette and Joe Hill of FCP came up trumps.

"I'd like some live music too" Colette added. "In all the styles if we can!" So over the weeks to come the services were engaged of some of Britain's finest jazz musicians. "It's strange how so many marvellous players actually live in the Southend area" observes Fairweather. "It's a bit like a latter-day Harlem!" So from the locale came **bass-player ROGER CURPHEY**, the internationally-acclaimed trumpeter **STEVE FISHWICK**, **saxophonist MICK FOSTER**, **singer CLARE FOSTER** (no relation!) and her partner **SHANTI JAYASINHA doubling up the trumpets.** From further afield came British Jazz Award winner **DOMINIC ASHWORTH (guitar)** and – late of Humphrey Lyttelton's legendary band – the marvellous **KAREN SHARP on tenor saxophone.** **There'll be non-stop music (out of any rain!) from 12-7pm in the beautiful Chalkwell House in the park's centre** and the Jazz Centre exhibition just next door in the house's museum area, specially repainted 'kind of blue' for the occasion.

"I think one of the good things about Village Green" says Colette " - is the calibre of acts and the diversity of performances we attract now. We've had Wilko Johnson, Sam Duckworth, Stereo MCs, The Asylums, Youth Club, Tiggs Da Author, The Skints, Ballet Black, the Royal Opera House and, local boy, Phill Jupitus jumping on stage with the Blockheads. But I think this is our **biggest jazz event so far.** And we're very happy to be collaborating with The Jazz Centre (UK)!"

Art Napoleon

OPENING CELEBRATION OF TJC'S JAZZ HERITAGE MUSEUM—OCT 7

The Jazz Centre UK takes its next giant leap forward in Autumn 2017 with the **opening of the Centre's 'Jazz Heritage Museum' on Saturday October 7th, 2017**. Occupying a space of about 750 square feet and open to the public from Tuesday to Saturday every week the Museum will put on show many of the Centre's most valuable collections including the Humphrey Lyttelton Archives (his Victorian work-desk, his trumpet and tenor horn, his 'This is Your Life' book and eight decades of his public and private correspondence); Sir John Dankworth's first-ever piano, the trumpets of Louis Armstrong, Nat Gonella and Alex Welsh, the tenor-saxophone of British giant Jimmy Skidmore and choice selections from the Centre's mammoth collection of historic journals, posters, letters and memorabilia.



"I think this is a marvellous new development" says CEO Digby Fairweather " – and I couldn't be more excited. I think many of my fellow-musicians are too - as quite a lot of them felt that the evidences of their lifetime's work might end up in a skip. Which in fact is what was going to happen to the Lyttelton collections! But fortunately Stephen – Humph's son – got in touch just in time; Southend Borough Council came up with a van and some helping hands and we drove up to the Forest of Dene, met Stephen and collected everything". Fairweather looks thoughtful for a minute. "I think" he says after a pause " – that there's absolutely no doubt that our jazz culture needs a helping hand like this one. Of course jazz can't die – it's a self expressive artform like painting, or dancing, or writing – anything that involves the expression of the human spirit. But with the rise of the so-called 'music industry' jazz – which has always been something of a 'peasant economy', at least since the 60s – has had a very rough time of it. And there's a grave danger that its heritage could be in some danger if it's not consciously preserved and celebrated too by people who care....."

He pauses again for a minute, then continues. "I suppose you could say" he says " - that after the Beatles all those years ago pop music overturned jazz as a popular culture within a couple of years – or less. Pop's economy grew and it did, in fact become an 'industry'. And as we know an industry can be a very powerful and uncaring thing, and today it's taken the natural resilience of jazz to allow the music to survive – and in fact to flourish. It's also become a lot more formalized which I think is a good thing. Every year hundreds of young and brilliant jazz musicians emerge from our best music colleges – the Royal Academy, Guildhall and Trinity in London alone! But where they go from there is rather a different question – for another time perhaps"

He pauses and walks to a bay of shelves holding CDs. "See these? They're all by major British musicians from Humph to Michael Garrick. But all those people – many of them artists of very high calibre – have had to record their own music on their own labels, like Humph's Calligraph. They can't get a deal with a major label in a thousand years and haven't been able for the best part of the last thirty years. And none of the music you see on these shelves – on these 'little labels' - is kept formally by any London institution like the BBC or the National Sound Archive; that is unless the musician has bothered to deposit it with them.

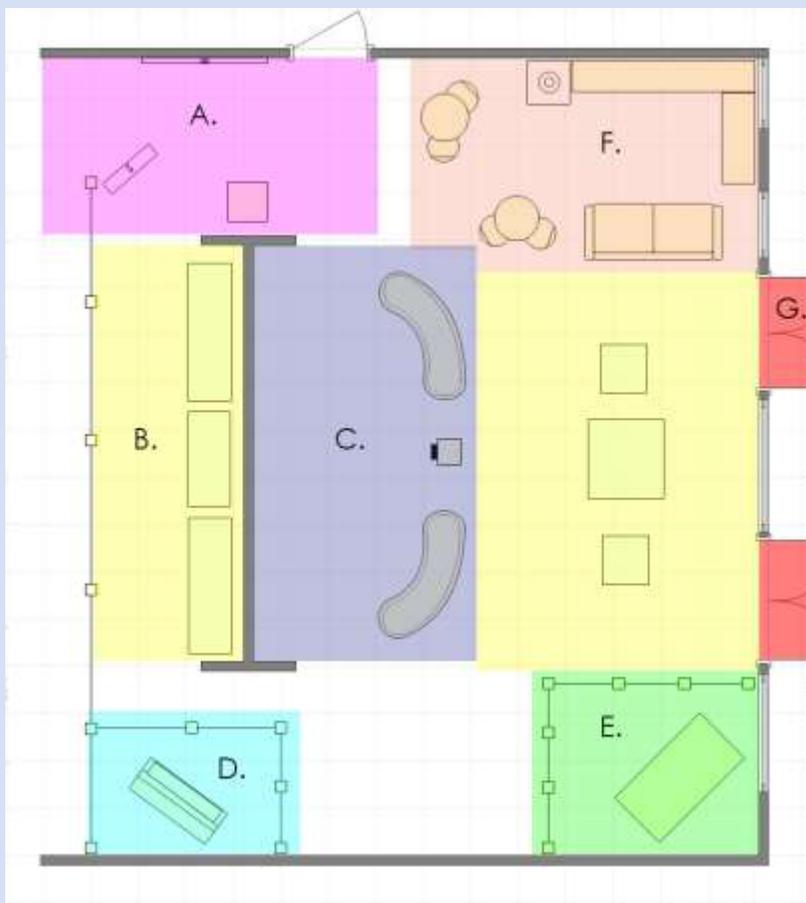
GRAND OPENING OF TJC'S JAZZ HERITAGE MUSEUM (Cont'd)

So if you think about the last forty-five years of progressive pop culture then if that doesn't represent a 'cultural black hole' - what does? That's why our Sound Archive opening in late November is so important too. Of course we'll have Louis, Coltrane, Ella – all the greats too, British and American. But this particular section is a very special need indeed I feel”.

So how about the Jazz Centre's Heritage Museum? Fairweather looks brighter. “As I said it's a great opportunity – not only for us but for musicians anywhere who care about their own culture. And I'm delighted that our new department isn't just a set of museum showcases – important though they are. We'll have a little jazz café where people can come and take a book down from the shelves, have a read and enjoy a coffee. We'll have a projector showing jazz movies and clips on the 'big screen' all day. A different exhibition every few weeks, lots of jazz art around the walls and wonderful celebrations of everyone from Louis Armstrong to Laura Jurd. I can't think of a nicer place for people to meet, enjoy the sights – and the music. And the fact that we are the first people in the UK to do this – well, I have to take my hat off to our friends at Southend Borough Council, my unbeatable team of Trustees my wonderful volunteers – and all the people to come and see us every week. It's great!”

He allows himself a smile.

Art Napoleon



AREA PLAN

- A. Entrance
- B. Exhibit Areas
- C. Cinema Area
- D. Sir John Dankworth Corner
- E. Humphrey Lyttelton Corner
- F. Reading/Coffee Lounge
- G. Fire Exits

The Simon Spillett Column

Wanted: Jazz Loving Millionaire. No previous experience needed.



Greetings Jazz Friends. Having received some surprising (and unexpected) flak for the contents of my last contribution to the JCUK newsletter – criticism which I think rather misinterpreted the tenor of my words – I thought this time I'd write about something

less likely to stir up the critical hornet's nest. Well, a *little* less likely...

As I'm sure some readers will be aware, I've spent a great deal of my time over the past dozen or so years chasing down rare British jazz recordings, trying to ensure that music that is both culturally and historically valuable doesn't end up gathering dust under someone's bed, or languishing unheard in a tape vault. (The results of some of this work can be heard on the Acrobat label's 'Played in Britain' series which includes recordings by Tubby Hayes, Joe Harriott, Tony Lee and others).

While it's perhaps understandable for tapes made at gigs by a fans or the musicians themselves to lay forgotten for years, how do we account for a major label simply ignoring the gold nugget it has stashed away in its archive? At present, I'm actively pursuing the release of what would have been Tubby Hayes final studio album, recorded in 1969. At the time it was taped, the label to whom Hayes was signed – Fontana – simply sat on it, instead favouring the release of his more commercial *The Orchestra* LP, on which he played Bacharach and The Beatles, among others. Ironically, over forty five years later, the giant global concern that currently owns the right to these immensely valuable sessions has exactly the same attitude: *it's British jazz so it won't sell*.

Of course, we can all argue the toss that major music and media companies get enough revenue from their pop artists (and back catalogue) to underwrite the poor sales which may be expected from a jazz release, but to my mind the real nub of the issue isn't fiscal – it's genre-defined.

Just take the recent hoo-hah over the release of a newly expanded CD of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*. Make no mistake, by no means am I equating Hayes's musical impact with that of Lennon and McCartney and co (he was, after all, part of a minority art form, much as it pains me to admit it), but surely as a document of a certain time and place - a vibrant souvenir from a period in which the UK was bursting with creative talent of all stripes - an unissued Hayes studio album deserves to be afforded a little more respect? Imagine, for example, that someone unearthed two hours of previously unreleased Beatles material in pristine sound quality? Today's music execs would probably have the same orgasmic reaction as all those screaming teenage girls once experienced at the merest sight of a Beetle. Or think of the fuss there'd be if we discovered an unheard work by, say, Malcolm Arnold or Benjamin Britten.

But for a British *jazz* artist? Even one who indisputably elevated his nation's musical stature in the eyes of the world and who has a place within the UK's cultural history as deserved as many a popular or classical artist? Zilch.

There is only one real antidote to this gloomy prospect, and it's one that, ironically enough, even polar opposites like Hayes and The Beatles might have agreed upon: people power. No, I'm not calling for a hoard of disgruntled jazz fans to storm the offices of the Universal Music Group (now there's a mental image for you) but, as with many pet projects these days, the idea of crowd-funding might just turn the trick. As I write, there are rumblings of a fan-fuelled campaign to license the unissued Hayes material and release it commercially. Tubby's name still has a hefty amount of pulling power so the notion isn't as far-fetched as it might sound. And if that fails? Perhaps, as Ronnie Scott used to ruefully muse, there really *is* a jazz loving millionaire out there who'd like to plough a little back into the music they love so much. If you chance upon just such an individual, well, you know where to point them.

Simon Spillett

The Poetry Page by Adrian Green

Adrian, a Southend resident and Artistic Director of the Southend Jazz Club, is also a Trustee of the Jazz Centre. For this issue Adrian has chosen to include poems by Phil Craddock and David Cooke. Phil Craddock is a pianist, poet and composer. His lyric is from *Peace*, an album of his work with singer Lea Lyle released last year. David Cooke is a poet and co-editor of *The High Window*, an on-line poetry magazine. His work has been published widely in the UK

In His Own Sweet Way

When he played, it was light and shade
Like the trees in a California mountain glade
It was cool, like a swimming pool
It was in his own sweet way.

It had wit, it could bite and spit
It could purr like a pussycat then throw a fit
It could chew, but it all pulled through
It was in his own sweet way.

A kick of classical, a punch of funk
A sip of Garner and a slug of Monk
Then he and Desmond had a knock-about
And hit home the winner called 'Time Out'.

It was here, it was out of sight
It was Miro and Henry Moore and Frank Lloyd Wright
It was Dave, it was off the stave
It was in his own sweet way.

Phil Craddock

String Bass

Some like to dominate,
others caress
a voluptuous rhythm
on pliant strings.

This pulse drives life
through wanton counterpoint,
the heart and harmony
of things.

Adrian Green

Sonny

Praised to the skies
by a musicologist
when all
he had done
was play the blues
he took time off
to clear his head.
Without
a padded loft
or a tumbledown
woodshed
in the Lower
East Side
of crowded
Manhattan
he blew his sax
come rain or shine
way up on the Bridge.

David Cooke

Mingus

Never willing
to accept his place
or stroke
the violoncello politely
for a bow-tied
maestro,
only the bass
could match
his ego.
Swaying, possessed,
like a holy roller,
he goaded
his band,
and slapped
the strings
to imprecation,
whoop
and holler.

David Cooke

Art Napoleon interviews Harry (Sweets) Edison) Part 2

AN:I wanted to ask you about JATP, because listening back to the records, it sounds like a real trumpeter's hurdle race, I mean I hear Roy and Charlie Shavers busting their chops at the top in the finales. Was it testing? I mean did he actually ask that you do that every night?

HE:No, no, he just would announce the Jazz at the Philharmonic and you would play what you wanted to play, you know. We would get together backstage and would decide what we would open the show with and everybody would decide what kind of a solo, how fast, what the tempo was. He wasn't demanding at all because if you love to play you're going to give all that you have while you're out there playing and performing and it was fun, you know.

AN:Once you had left Basie and you were doing a great many different things, but also I tend to think of you at the time as being very busy in the studios.

HE:I know that I wasn't equipped. I'd never had a lesson on the trumpet, I wasn't a good reader but I was in the section with some great musicians, Manny Klein, Conrad Gozzo, great, great, musicians. They had been playing in the movies out there, MGM, most of them were staff musicians so they had been taught to learn what they conveyed to me free, so I felt very fortunate and we all became very, very close friends and musically, I think it was quite a venture, you know. But I always got me a little jazz job around the weekends at some place, I never just depended on that because when your playing in the studios, you're under direction, you have to

play what they want you to play unless you got a solo, there was not too many times you would get to play unless a singer would come in and most of the time a singer would suggest that I play behind him because I had played behind Billie Holiday on all of her records, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan. I finally became one of the trumpeter's of Frank Sinatra.

AN:Were you close to him?

HE:Yes, yes, we are still great friends, still the best of friends. When he makes a record now or he goes out on a tour, I always get a call but I'm usually busy because he doesn't tour too much anymore and he doesn't make too many recordings anymore but at that time he recorded like twice a month. He would make an album, you know, with the late great Nelson Riddle or Gordon Jenkins or....., well my favourite was Nelson Riddle.

AN:Is there a special art of backing a singer?

HE:It is, you have to give way to the singer you know, because they are the one your accompanying and you can't play behind a singer like you play a solo. Playing with him I didn't have any music, Nelson would have five trumpets and Frank said one night just let Sweets put on some earphones and play where he feels like it, so that's what I did for quite a few years.

AN:But I always thought of that as your second voice because it was unmistakably you, I mean, you had devices that nobody else played and still today, if you play a certain phrase on the horn, people would say Sweets in the same way they would say Louis.



Art Napoleon Interviews Harry (Sweets) Edison) Part 2

HE: Oh you're so kind. Well, in my era around New York, all the musicians tried to have an identified sound that when you heard them on record there was no mistaking it was Coleman Hawkins, he had a sound that you would say, well that's Coleman Hawkins, and Billie Holliday, there's no mistake when you hear her on a record, that's Billie Holliday. Louis Armstrong, who was my idol, he had a definite sound that could be identified by. So many, Lester Young, who I think was one of the greatest exponents of the tenor saxophone who ever lived. He was very influential to a lot of tenor players, more than Coleman Hawkins. All the musicians strived to have a definite sound that they could be identified by because we didn't want to be imitators, everybody wanted to be an originator and in those days the cliché was that they would rather be the world's worst originator than be the world's greatest imitator because you never sound like the original sound, you would always be second to the original, so everybody tried to have a sound that they could be identified by, like Dizzie Gillespie, he came out with a sound of his own and a style of his own and before that, there was Roy Eldridge. There were so many, so many great trumpet players, so many great musicians in those days and I feel blessed that I lived in those days when I was associated with all the greatest musicians, the pioneers.

AN: Is it perhaps because, also, people like yourself, masters like yourself, had to develop what you did in the market place? I mean presumably by night you would be rubbing shoulders with other great players and you would have to forge something of your own. Does that not happen so much now, do you think, for youngsters?

HE: Well, I don't think so. It doesn't happen now because if you hear an alto player now, he's imitating Charlie Parker, if you hear a tenor player, most of them are imitating Coltrane, John Coltrane. They played like somebody else at one time but they finally formed an idea of their own. When I first heard Dizzy, he played just like Roy Eldridge back in the thirties but you know, he finally developed a style of his own and he started thinking for himself, you know there's only going to be one Roy Eldridge, and he started playing what he wanted to play you know, his ideas became Dizzy's not Roy Eldridge's.

HE: And then too, in New York in my era, there were a lot of places where you could go jam every night, little places where you worked until four o'clock and after four o'clock, you would go to a place where everybody would take their horn out of their cases and just jam. That's sort of like a laboratory to a scientist, he's trying to find something, and in those places that we used to go, you finally found yourself, what you would want to play and who you would like to, you know, not imitate down to the point that you would be just like him because everybody has to have an idol, we all loved Louis Armstrong and if anybody is going to play a decent solo on the trumpet, he's got to play something that Louis Armstrong has played. To me, he was the greatest trumpet player. He taught us how to swing on the trumpet because before him, trumpet was used as an instrument in the band to march by, and he made it an instrument that can be made to sound good, that can be played in any kind of direction you want it to be played.

AN: There's a record he made, of 'Kiss to Build a Dream On' when he comes out and plays four crotchets at the top of the solo and it's just right in the bar. You could do that too.



Art Napoleon interviews Harry (Sweets) Edison)/ 2

HE:You know, I have been lucky in my life, I would say, because what little contribution I have made to this, well, jazz is one of the oldest forms of art and culture that we have in America, Blues, Spirituals and Jazz Music and what little contribution I am making, I have tried to make to that artform, I appreciate when a person says well I could do that and I could sound like that, but no one will ever sound like Louis Armstrong.

AN:Or like Sweets I think. Just one final thing: if you were talking to a young trumpet player, say an eighteen year old, who had just finished schooling, what would be the piece of advice that you would give him on the way to become a great jazz man, like yourself.

HE:Try to be an originator, have an idol but just don't copy him right down to the point where you can't think for yourself.

LATEST ADDITION TO OUR ART GALLERY



TJC has recently acquired a gorgeous watercolour print entitled "Rehearsing Davenport Blues" by artist Ben Denison. The print commemorates the recording of 'Davenport Blues' by Bix Beiderbecke and his Rhythm Jugglers gathered at the Gennett Recording Studio in Richmond, Indiana. The Band consisted of Bix, cornet; Tommy Dorsey, trombone; Howdy Quicksell, banjo; Don Murray, clarinet; Paul Mertz, piano; and Tommy Gargano, drums. This, and other jazz art will be available for view at our new Heritage Museum.

SIR JOHN DANKWORTH'S PIANO

So how did Britain's first jazz Knight, Sir John Dankworth's first piano—one of The Jazz Centre UK's most prized possessions—find its way to us from 18 Hollywood Way, Woodford Green where young 'Johnny' Dankworth was born in 1927? Here's the story.

The old upright piano was probably built in the early years of the twentieth century by J.C.Browne, 154 Brecnock Road, Camden Road London, and it's possible that Sir John's mother—a dedicated singer and choir mistress with several relations who were professional musicians—may have bought it new, or nearly so. "As far back as I can recall" wrote Sir John in his autobiography 'Jazz in Revolution (Constable, 1998)' " - I was expected to look over her shoulder at the piano music-stand and keep my end up. I struggled manfully to sight-read unfamiliar notes, coupling them with unfamiliar words which were often nowhere near the notes at the bottom of the page" (Such early and tough training may begin to explain why—later on—Sir John could write a complete score by torchlight at the back of the band-bus or correct a part by reading it upside-down on a musician's stand!).

Over the years to come—long after Sir John and Dame Cleo would have stipulated (at the very least) a Steinway Grand in their contracts in concert halls all around the world—the piano stayed patiently in their home at The Old Rectory in Wavendon, the pretty village near Milton Keynes. But finally its long-term lodgings came to an end. The Wavendon Foundation couldn't find new ones, so finally it was rescued by daughter Jacqui. "I had it at home for a while" she says " - and actually used to play it when I was younger". But then she passed it on to brother Alec who kept it for a while; "before" as he says " - we hauled it over the road to give it to my neighbour.



And in due time he put it on E-bay".

That's how it came to the attention of The Jazz Centre (UK) when CEO Digby Fairweather had a call from Terry Cheney, the editor of Britain's invaluable monthly 'Jazz Guide'. "Sir John Dankworth's first piano is on E-bay" he said and: "fine" said Fairweather " - but surely we could never afford it?"

"I think you might" said Cheney " - the starting bid is £5.00!"

So the deal was sealed at the reasonable settlement of £10.00 (" - tho' the transportation was another two hundred and something pounds!" admits Fairweather) and in due course the piano was trundled into the basement space of the Centre; testing, in the process, the weight-bearing strength of the department's disabled lift, "suitably designed" observes Fairweather ruefully " - by the Stannah company who also make stair-lifts for the elderly!". There it stayed for some time until it had been played—or rather jangled—by everyone from visiting school-children to the fine American pianist Mike Greensill who dropped in one day to visit and proved (in Maxine Sullivan's words) that he could 'beat sense into any box!'.



SIR JOHN DANKWORTH'S PIANO

Finally though it was decided that—at least for now—the piano should remain silent (though there's talk of a Crowdfunding project to restore it to playing life again). But meantime it has been beautifully refurbished by the Centre's restorer Tim Basket. And along with the Humphrey Lyttelton collections, Louis Armstrong's very own trumpet and endless other priceless artefacts—it will be on view the Jazz Centre's brand-new Heritage Museum which opens to the public on Saturday September 9th.

"The nicest things" says Fairweather " - begin in the strangest places"

Art Napoleon.

⋮

PETER VACHER COLLECTIONS DONATED TO TJC

STOP PRESS

The Jazz Centre UK is proud to announce that it has received the full collections of the eminent author, critic and commentator PETER VACHER. The Vacher collections include a unique alphabetical catalogue of writings, reference sources and letters from a formidable list of major jazz artists as well as Peter's own prolific writings for the national and jazz press.

Digby Fairweather (CEO/TJCUK) says: " this is a simply wonderful acquisition. I've known Peter for many decades and I think for most of us he belongs with the late Max Jones as the latter-day 'father' of jazz writing. At TJCUK his collections will be both indexed and added as a priority to our digitization programme which will see all such specialist collections going on line as a priority and which gets under way later this year.

Peter Vacher says: "*it's so pleasing to know that all my materials have been welcomed by The Jazz Centre UK and to know that they will be kept together – and celebrated! –and disseminated via digitization in the future. I'm eternally grateful to The Jazz Centre for its understanding and commitment*".



LADY DAY AND THE COMMUNISTS

By Ron Simpson

I suppose you could say that any African-American in the entertainment industry up to quite recent times was involved in political action on a daily basis, especially if his/her career took him/her to the Deep South, but until the 1950s overt political statements within jazz were rare. In fact Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* was unique in the power and directness of its attack on racism:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root.
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging on the poplar trees.

Oddly, the two people, apart from Lady Day herself, most responsible for the impact of a song dubbed the *Marseillaise* of the underprivileged South were neither black, nor Southerners, but politically active left wing Jews from the New York area, born within a year of each other in the early years of the 20th century.

Abel Meeropol was a teacher, poet and Communist activist who wrote under the name 'Lewis Allen', taken from the names of his stillborn children. In 1937, appalled by images of lynchings, he wrote *Bitter Fruit*, a poem which he later set to music as *Strange Fruit*. Billie Holiday claimed that she wrote the music with her accompanist and her arranger, but it had already been sung by Meeropol's wife at rallies and black singer Laura Duncan at Madison Square Garden – not that the song had wide currency before Billie took it up.

First, though, she had to be introduced to it – and then it needed the proper setting. That's where Barney Josephson came in. After a varied business career, in 1938 he founded the club that put his political principles into practice: Cafe Society in Greenwich Village. Totally integrated at a time when the Cotton Club was strictly for whites slumming it in Harlem, it boasted the provocative slogan: 'The Wrong Place for the Right People'. Billie Holiday was the star at Cafe Society in 1939 and Josephson made sure that *Strange Fruit* got the setting it needed: last song of Billie's act, lights dimmed, no table service, no encores – this was not typical night club entertainment.



LADY DAY AND THE COMMUNISTS (Cont'd)

The impact was enormous, although, coincidentally, it took another New York Jew, Milt Gabler, like Josephson the son of immigrants, to take the risk of recording the song on his Commodore label after Billie's own record company turned it down. Gabler, though sympathetic to left-wing causes, had an illustrious career in the mainstream record industry; Josephson and Meeropol, however, remained strictly non-establishment during their long and productive lives.

Cafe Society was such a success that Barney Josephson added Cafe Society Uptown, but in 1947 his brother Leon was found guilty of being a Communist by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the ensuing campaign by right-wing columnists hit Cafe Society so hard that Josephson sold up. His business dwindled, but not his interest in jazz. Until four years before his death in 1988 he was putting on the likes of Nellie Lutcher, Teddy Wilson and Mary Lou Williams at his remaining restaurant, the Cookery.

Abel Meeropol had his successes as a writer, but the most remarkable event of his life had nothing to do with songs or poems. In 1953 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, also New York Jews, were executed as Communist spies. Two little boys were left orphans. With a minimum of upheaval they were adopted by the Meeropols. The boys took the name of their 'incredibly soft-hearted' adoptive father and Robert and Michael Meeropol both became college professors, deeply involved in social issues. That seems like an appropriate tribute to the man who wrote *Strange Fruit*.

RON SIMPSON

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Dead Man's Blues—Book review by Phil Waterhouse

Jazz, gangsters, crime and Louis Armstrong . . . this time its Chicago!

Crime writer Ray Celestin has followed up his award-winning New Orleans novel, **'The Axeman's Jazz'**, (see the last issue of the newsletter for a review), with an equally enthralling tale of crime and jazz set in 1920s Chicago. The two Pinkerton agents from the first novel again are central characters, and once again they elicit the help of Louis Armstrong in their investigation of a missing wealthy young society woman last seen in Chicago's black Bronzeville district.

'Dead Man's Blues' is structured around a common crime writing device; separate storylines which intertwine and eventually resolve into a common solution. Here there are two further plotlines. The second involves a police photographer investigating the gruesome murder of a gangster dumped in a back alley. The third has crime boss Al Capone hiring a rum-runner acquaintance to find out who poisoned his batch of champagne which nearly killed a group of influential politicians and businessmen he was entertaining. Al Capone himself plays an important role in the book, He both knew and was on friendly terms with Louis Armstrong. They meet in one memorable scene.

It would be very much a cliché to say that the city of Chicago in the novel is a character in its own right. Nonetheless the cliché definitely holds good. Celestin paints an unforgettable picture of Chicago's south side, populated by the black migration north in the years around the first world war. The book actually opens with Armstrong's journey to Chicago in 1922, called by King Oliver to join his band and to boost the growing popularity of jazz in the 1920s.

The development of jazz in Chicago of the late '20s against a background of racial segregation and prejudice is compelling, and not just the night club scene or the jam session with members of Paul Whiteman's orchestra. A chapter is devoted to the innovative recording of Armstrong's Hot Five discs. In fact Celestin claims that the "structure of this book copies the structure of Armstrong's recording of 'West End Blues'".

Chicago supplied the meat for all America, and his depiction of the stockyards, the meatpacking industry and the rivalry of the different immigrant nationalities is the best since Upton Sinclair's **'The Jungle'**. The industry by-product pollution of Chicago's rivers, lake and canals, is described in vivid detail. The offal-clogged canals then become a natural choice for the dumping of dead bodies.

This book has it all; political corruption, big time gangster rivalry, Prohibition and bootlegging, and the world's most innovative jazz. He even throws in one of the greatest fights for the heavyweight championship of the world, Dempsey versus Tunney (albeit, for poetic license, a year later than it actually took place).

You like a good crime novel? You love jazz? You can't do any better than read Ray Celestin's **'Dead Man's Blues'**. And there is a promise of a third and a fourth sequel. Next up is New York.

Addendum.

Why not augment your reading pleasure with Armstrong's magisterial **'West End Blues'** in the background. On You Tube;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WPCBieSESI>

And Jelly Roll Morton's version of **'Dead Man's Blues'**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0JBNj2urb8>

Phil W

We are honoured that the great DAN MORGENSTERN has joined our list of distinguished Patrons. Dan wrote for Britain's 'Jazz Journal' (1958-61) and thereafter rose to be editor of America's greatest jazz magazines including 'Metronome' (1961) 'Jazz' (1962-3) and 'Downbeat' from 1967-71. In 1976 he was appointed Director of the Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies – now, thanks to him, the world's largest collection of jazz documents, recordings and memorabilia, and the role model for our own Jazz Centre (UK)!



In this issue of the TJC Newsletter, we continue with Part 2 of Dan Morgenstern's "Louis"

"Louis" - An Excerpt from "Living with Jazz" by Dan Morgenstern (2004/Part 2)

Throughout his long career, Armstrong has taken care of business to a degree matched by few, if any, in his profession. "The music comes first" is one of his golden rules, and he lives by it.

"Now, I never professed to be a saint," he says "but I've always tried to do my work to the extent that I can have a ball when I finish. I don't know", he laughed "if I'll have a ball too long after I finish for the next engagement – but I'll have a better chance anyway. There are very few gigs that I've ever missed."

Until this day, Armstrong doesn't table-hop with his admirers during intermissions. "I never go to the tables – I never did believe in that. If they want to see me, they can come to the dressing room."

Not that the trumpeter doesn't like to socialise. He loves it, and people love to be around him. So much so that the mere act of going out in public, even if the aim is only to relax and enjoy himself can become problematic.

"When I go out to some joint – well, I won't call them joints; they are 'lounges' now – I seem to know everyone that frequents them," he said. "I can't even drink my drink for shaking hands. And right where we sit, that's where we stay, with the table crowded with our disciples and our cats. Now, if some people want to say 'hello', I can't get over there. That's another reason why I don't go to tables during my intermission. If you go to one table, you've got to go to the next one, and then, where's your intermission?"

"And don't start that autograph thing...I was going to my doctor's the other day (he's on Fifty-fifth Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues) from my dentist (who's on fifty-fourth and fifth), so we go to Fifty-fifth and walk straight down, and on Sixth Avenue there are about twenty kids with two sisters. One turns round, does a double take, and says 'There is Satchmo!'. And there I was, autographing and autographing, and finally the two sisters come right up, look at me and say 'Love that man'. Naturally, some people have gathered to see what's happening, and now *they* have me scribbling, writing on shopping bags, anything that's handy. And you can't say no. Who wants to say no?"

Certainly not Armstrong. And that, he said, "is one reason why you don't see me out so much. If I go to the World's Fair and take that walk, I don't get to see anything. None of the exhibits. I go to a ball game (he loves baseball, and people start jumping over seats. 'You've got to autograph this for my little boy. He's your fan. He loves your "Hello, Dolly". Okay, you've got to do it. When I went to Freedomland – I was just a visitor there – I went just to see things for myself, like a kid would, you know? But I didn't get a chance.

"The night I went to see the first Liston-Clay fight, at a movie theatre in Flushing, the people were so busy getting my autograph they didn't even see the fight. I didn't either. And after they turned on the lights, they had a line from here to around the corner for autographs. It's wonderful – to an extent. They say when they stop asking for autographs, you're in trouble. I wonder how it would feel to know that they'd stopped? Do you think I'd be lonesome for it?"

Lest anyone doubt Armstrong's sincerity in asking this, let it be said that it simply does not occur to him that people would not stop even if he were to retire. He sees himself as a performer whose popularity is based in what he does, not as a celebrity whose popularity whose popularity is synonymous with who he is. His fame has never gone to his head; perhaps this is one of the secrets of his fame. And he has not become blasé.

"I went to see Hello, Dolly'...the whole show was for Lucille and me. I went on stage just to take a bow with Carol Channing, and you'd have thought the walls would come in...It's wonderful – but nobody lasts forever. But after fifty-two years of playing, I had a wonderful experience for a man who came up from New Orleans selling newspapers and who just wanted to blow the horn... The people put me in my seat, and I'll never let them down. And there's no problem: they love music, and I love music, too."

Armstrong's love of music as a form of communication between artist and audience is expressed in his attitude toward playing music "right."

"If a cat can play a beautiful lead nowadays, he's in business," he said. "He doesn't have to stand on his head – just play pretty. That's what bands need: a trumpet man with a tone who can phrase pretty. Anybody can stand up and squeal out a high note, and things like that. But when a cat can play a beautiful lead, he's in business at all times. You don't have to worry about his age." Though he is one of the greatest improvisers jazz has known, a man who, when he just "plays that lead," puts his own indelible stamp on every note, the lead is what he believes in.

"That's the first thing Joe Oliver told me when he listened to me play," Armstrong remembered. "He used to come around the honky-tonks where I was playing in the early teens. 'Where's that lead?' I'd play eight bars and I was gone...

... clarinet things; nothing but figurations and things like that. Like what the cats called bop later; that was just figuration to us in the early days. Running all over a horn. Joe would say, 'Where's the lead?', and I'd say, 'what lead?' 'You play some lead on that horn, let the people know what you're playing'.

Speaking of Oliver, his first idol, and the man who gave him his start in what was to become the big time, Armstrong remembered others from those early days. "We lost a lot of good boys who will always be remembered when a story comes up about music," he recalled. "Like Sidney Bechet. You know, way back in New Orleans, just he and I and a drummer would advertise the fights from the back of a furniture wagon – we had some good sounds. He did a lot for music, but in his way. He was very much loved in France. Oh, I'll always remember Bechet, Big Eye Louis Nelson, George Bacquet, Freddie Keppard, King Oliver...I loved those boys. All soul musicians. And it was something nice for a kid to listen to."

"I remember them all, and others that you wouldn't know if I mentioned their names... I heard them all when I was a kid, second-lining in the parades, before I started blowing a horn. Those people moved me. Buddy Petit, Buddy Johnson, Mutt Carey, Jack Carey, Bunk Johnson. I thought that was a wonderful thing when they found Bunk and let him have a little more fun before he died. And he could have cooled it and probably lasted a little longer, but he was so happy and carried away over the things he'd missed even when he was in his prime. Life is a funny thing... He came up on the stand the night I was playing in New Iberia, in 1949, the night before going to New Orleans to be Kings of the Zulu's. He picked up that horn and played for hours. And Kid Ory, He still looks good..." Kid Ory – who alone of all the famous pioneers is still around, who was the trombonist on the famed Hot Five recordings of 1925 – 27, and whom Louis does not in the least begrudge the fact that he is credited with a famous jazz standard that Armstrong claims is his own.

That piece of jazz lore was revealed when Louis was asked if he had written any tunes since his lovely "Someday" from the mid-'40's. "I haven't really had the time," he answered, "but if anything comes to my mind, I just jot it down. I've got a few scripts and little scratches here and there. And there's always a time when you can sum them up and blow them up. You don't know whom to go to now when you do those things".

"Of course, in the early days," he continued, "we had no knowledge of royalties and things like that. I used to take a tune down to Okeh Records and sell it right out, like Fats Waller did. I'd get a little change, so Zutty (Singleton) and I could go somewhere and ball. We were running together at the time. Just give me a little taste now – that was the way we looked at it. I wrote 'Muskrat Ramble' Ory named it, he gets the royalties. I don't talk about it. A whole lot of things like that.....'Sister Kate' (which he wrote and sold to A. J. Piron)".

But Armstrong is stoical about such things. "You can't have everything in life," he reflected. "You can get yourself all riled up, but what good is it? I wasn't brought up to educate myself in that kind of business, like some cats were. There's always another one coming along- like a streetcar. We can't get everything that's coming to us..." Such as a proper reception in one's own hometown, for instance. Louis has steadfastly refused to play New Orleans for the last decade or so – not until it can be done right. But he remembers with some pride his triumphant return to New Orleans in 1931 – nine year after he had left for Chicago to join King Oliver at the Lincoln Gardens.

In New Orleans, he played the Suburban Gardens. Armstrong, with his first big band (the previous ones had been Carroll Dickerson's and Les Hite's), stayed there for a couple of months.

"We were the first band on the radio down there – every night," he said. I did my own announcements – that was the first time, too. Cats were buying radios to dig my program, and, quite naturally, I would dedicate this one to old so-and-so and to places like the Alley, where Bechet came up from the colored waifs home, and the Zulus. I walked down Rampart Street one day, and a cat hollered

from across the way, 'Man, delegate one for me tonight'. That first night, the ovation was something – fifty thousand Negroes were out on the levee listening. The place was right near the levee, so they could hear...." The only sour note of that visit came at the end. It had been planned that the trumpeter would play a giant concert in a big armory – for Negroes only. They came from miles around; some even came in horse-drawn wagons. "But the promoters pulled out on a technicality at the last moment," he recalled. "Seems there were some people in town who didn't want it to come off. So we left at midnight. To this day, there are people who think that I didn't want to play – that I pulled out. How about that?"

In Texas, things were better. "We arrived in Houston the next morning, and there were eight thousand people waiting for us. And they let everybody in. One dollar a head – no taxes. We played through all the states down there. One dance, in Arkansas, I'll never forget. Some little town down there – no roof on the place. Packed with people – and then the rains came. And cats were dancing around with umbrella's, us standing right out there blowing with them. And they were dancing – just as if nothing had happened."

If he had to play standing in the rain today, Louis probably would. He hasn't lost his dedication to his art and craft. And while he likes to reminisce, his eyes are on today and on the future.

"I admire the youngsters and their way of life," he stated, "just the way they feel it. They're vivacious – with the Watusi and things like that. We can do a little of it, but not as long as they can. But it's nice to watch. I'm not going to do everything that they do, but I'm going to stay in there with them". About criticism, Armstrong is again stoical – any quite perceptive. "I say, well, all right; at least they spell my name right. That's more than the other cat got – they didn't mention him. If you perform, you're going to have your ups and downs, but what is said about you, good or bad, is forgotten tomorrow. The public is ready for tomorrow's news. That's how fast our America is."

"I don't try to do the impossible," he said. "You know, we have a lot of greats out there, and they take care of their end of it. I just do the things I like and the things the people like me to do, and I

think there is a lot of room out there for everybody.”

Not that he is taking the backseat yet – and he never will. “There isn't a thing anybody can sing or do with the music that I can't do,” he said. “But I say, there's time to show that. I don't want to be egotistic. I just want to be among them. As long as you're among them, you can do good things...”. And Louis is still among them, though he may say a bit wistfully; “The time will come when I'll just be a musical citizen – I mean, help some youngsters, and grab a little gig here and there. Probably I'll stop travelling so much – that's the main thing. I can always do something in New York, musically. There are a lot of songs, and a lot of things....”

As for now, Armstrong is still out there, on the road, where he has spent so much of the life, bringing happiness to people who can take it home with them while he travels on. And he has no regrets, after fifty-two years of blowing. “It's wonderful,” he sums up at the threshold of sixty-five, “to be around and to see so many things happening with the youngsters. And you're right in there with them. Today. That's happiness – that's nice. I don't regret anything. I still enjoy life and music.



Allegro music

