
One Sweet Letter

COMPELLING READING

I am an 18-year-old lad. My dad is a well known jazz drummer who has played with the likes of Tubby Hayes and many other big name jazzers. Although I am not a huge fan of the music I led the brass section of the Shropshire Youth Jazz Ensemble.

I happened to pick up my dad's copy of your January issue and whilst flicking through the dull, colourless and poorly laid-out mountains of text, I stumbled upon the article entitled "How To Write About Jazz". I was horrified by what you have allowed to be printed. The first sentence was enough to fill my brain up with anger and hate.

I find the article extremely disrespectful to women and cannot believe such an article has been printed. I have never seen anything so rude, disgusting and sickening in my life. Does it really matter what instrument someone is playing? Does it matter on their sex and bra size? Does it matter how they choose to trim their beard? Or even what they choose to drink?

I will be reading each and every issue from now on and will email you, commenting on little details that are wrong with your magazine until I see John Robert Brown's apologies printed.

Max Bolton, Shropshire

NO HALF MEASURES

John Robert Brown's contribution in January JJ must have brought delight to all and it's all so true, so very true. Could you imagine seeing a half-pint beer glass on stage? There was the writer in the Crimea who, seeing the bassist "pizzicato-ing", asked me if he had forgotten to bring his bow. And the Baltic journalist interviewing Steve Waterman, whose first question was "So, playing the trumpet in jazz, that must be quite rare?" Such gems make all the travelling so worthwhile!

George Haslam, by email

TIMELESS STUFF

Further to my piece "How To Write About Jazz" in the January issue, I should mention that the late 50s version of *Milestones*, with Cannonball, also slows down. When it came out, one of my drummer friends spotted it straight away. I'd always blame the bass player, unless the drummer is really terrible. For me it

exploded the myth that Paul Chambers was faultless.

It's amazing though how some rhythm sections maintain fast tempos. That's one of the many reasons I adore the Woody Herman 1964 band. I can't agree with Graham Colombe's opinion about the superiority of Ellington. The Ellington band was invariably an ill-disciplined and out-of-tune band – yes, grainy, interesting, full of character – but not an exemplary ensemble.

On the subject of tempi: For nearly three years I led the saxophone section in the Andy Ross band of *Come Dancing* fame. Many times I saw famous ballroom champions come up to the bandstand to complain that Andy's quicksteps were too fast or too slow, or whatever. Andy would say yes, he'd attend to that. Then he'd turn to the band, mutter "Exactly the same, chaps", and wink to us. We'd set off as before, same tempo. Quite often those same dancers would come by and say "That's much better".

John Robert Brown, Leeds

THE CHARM OF FREE JAZZ

I just wanted to comment on Mark Ramsden's curiously sexist remarks about "charming" the ladies (or rather, not) and free improvisation in his article in the December issue. Speaking as a fairly well travelled free improviser, I've found that pretty well everywhere else in the world (by which I mean most of Northern and Southern Europe, Scandinavia, North America) and even here these days, they'll be a pretty good turn out from both sexes to hear the "screeching and flutter-tongueing multi-phonics". For example I recently did a gig with Sunny Murray in Barcelona where every other woman in the room looked like a super-model. Maybe Mark should get out a bit more – it might even change his smug, arrogant, parochial and ignorant viewpoint on people who choose not to play his kind of jazz (whatever his kind of jazz is)...

Tony Bevan, by email

Mark Ramsden replies: I was delighted to work with the lovely Maggie Nichols, who possessed razor sharp straight chops. She warmed up with Bill Evans's *Twelve Tone Tune*, pitch perfect, utterly incredible. And I've performed with Peter Brotzman who possesses no discernible talent or technique yet makes far more money (a lot of it public) than a crack

fusion virtuoso. "Supermodels" may turn out for a once famous American. Students will watch anything. As for "getting out more", I have played and lived all over the world, performing with musicians far more proficient than bluffers like Sunny Murray.

STEELY SAX

The last page article is a welcome inclusion in JJ and I particularly enjoyed Mark Ramsden's "Extraordinary Renditions" in the December issue. In highlighting Chris Potter's playing with Steely Dan, Mark mentions, appropriately, solos by Phil Woods and Wayne Shorter on other recordings by the band. A further appearance by a genuine jazz saxophonist is that made by Pete Christlieb, who takes a tenor solo on the tune *FM*. The other Dan connection here is that Christlieb partners Warne Marsh on the two-tenor recording ("Apogee" on Warners) also referenced in the article, since it was produced by the Dan's Walter Becker.

A M Goldberg, London

COOTIE CALUMNY

What exactly is the grudge Steve Voce holds against that magnificent trumpeter Cootie Williams? Some years ago he told us authoritatively that Cootie had once got drunk and beaten up Ray Nance. It took a letter from Ray's widow to deflate that malicious rumour. The truth was apparently that Cootie, who was Ray's hero, had felt obliged to slap the younger man to bring him out of a depressive lethargy which was preventing him from performing.

I don't recall Voce apologising for that error and now in his December 2009 column Cootie, who's long dead and unable to defend himself, gets it in the neck again. From his omniscient pinnacle Voce tells us that Cootie venomously hated Rex Stewart for years, played music for money with "little artistic enthusiasm", had "minimal friendships" and didn't know the name of someone in his band. Given the inaccuracy of Voce's earlier attack on Cootie and the lack of references or sources (apart from an anonymous "English writer") why should we believe any of this?

Those like me who observed the intense commitment of Cootie's solos with Duke in the 60s will surely bear witness to Cootie having "artistic enthusiasm" in bucketfuls. Benny Goodman and Earl Hines have also, since their deaths, been regular recipients of Voce's own