
Scratching the Surface

Steve Voce recalls jazz clubs with atmospheres of jubilation

Lionel Blair appeared on BBC Radio Four with Fi Glover on 29 January and said of Humphrey Lyttelton "You should always speak good of the dead. He's dead. Good."

Reading what was written for him in *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue* Humph had spoken the scriptwriter's running jokes about Mr Blair. They were just that – jokes. Mr Blair had never heard them. "I swear to you," he told Glover, "I never heard one programme."

I don't know if Mr Blair has done anything in his lifetime that is worth remembering. I do know that I had trouble cramming the achievements of Humphrey Lyttelton into an obituary that took up a page and a half of a newspaper.

Maybe the BBC or someone could apologise to Humph's family.

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I suppose it's reactionary of me to fondly remember jazz clubs as places that we used to visit regularly to hear great music, get loaded and meet friends and musicians. At the time, when I used to go to such places two or three times a week, it seemed a great way to live and on balance I have few regrets.

The Manchester Sports Guild (MSG), the Club 43, the Cavern, the Mardi Gras and the 100 Club were wonderful places to hear everyone from Sister Rosetta Tharpe to Tubby Hayes, from Mark Murphy to Rex Stewart, from Sonny Rollins to Humphrey Lyttelton. They were run by people who loved the music and the audience always felt fulfilled and was not ripped off. These places had atmospheres of jubilation, far more attractive than the comparatively subdued ambience of the old Ronnie Scott Club, where admission for me was usually gained after a dour metaphorical wrestle with Pete King on the door.

The people that ran those clubs – Ernie Garside, Jack Swinnerton, Les Jenkins, Roger Horton and Jimmy Ireland – worked what looked like suicidal miracles and survived – the World's Greatest Jazz band at the 100 Club, Maynard Ferguson, Rollins, Zoot and Al at the Club 43, Muddy Waters at the Mardi Gras and the unbelievable parade of giants at the MSG – this was definitely the keynote of a bygone era.

These melancholy thoughts have been

brought on by the news that a new Club 43 has opened in Manchester and that the Scott Club in London is to feature an Ashton-less NYJO playing Mike Gibbs compositions (it would be nice to have Mike Gibbs playing Mike Gibbs compositions).

The new Club 43 is not at 43 Port Street, as the original club was, but at the strangely named and very large Radisson Edwardian Manchester hotel. For some time in the years between, to the outrage of, I think, the *Daily Mirror*, the Club 43 became a gay club with no jazz connections. Ernie Garside didn't register the club's name then, but the new proprietors now have, and so it belongs to them. The list of attractions has been published but there's no one there that I've heard of until during May when the admirable Dave Newton appears with his

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trio. In the old days all you got for your couple of quid was the music and Wilson's beer. Now "a Cajun influenced buffet-style supper will be served at 7.30pm. The supper includes a selection of Cajun dishes, salads and corn bread. Desserts will be served during the interval... Tickets for Club 43, including supper, are just £19.95."

Returning to Internet radio, I note that Brian Harvey, who plays banjo music to the atmosphere, claims that he has "80,000 to 100,000 listeners every month." It must be very difficult for him counting them all one by one. How does he do it? Beats me. I know how he feels because I have to look after the two million people who read this column every month. But times are hard at Mr Harvey's radio back alley. "Record companies have cut down on the number of review CDs they send out...Consequently we are short of tracks to play. We would welcome therefore receiving loan copies from listeners of any new CDs..."

Maybe the record companies think Mr



Rex Stewart, one among the unbelievable parade of giants at the MSG

Harvey has only 40 listeners a month. Even then, I can't see how he would count even 40. Surely they don't all write in? Incidentally, I don't *really* have two million readers every month. At my last count it's only 1,750,000.

It is amazing how strong banjo music over the continents appears to be. I belong to a Dixieland discussion group that I joined because I thought it would be about Jack Teagarden and Eddie Condon but nearly all the talk is by people who belong in banjo bands. Or should that be trad bands?

There's a fine line between trad and Mickey Mouse bands. At one time the latter used to be groups like the Firehouse Five Plus Two, but today the terms appear interchangeable. It seems no musicians make much money these days. I don't suppose it'll matter much longer for all the grey-haired enthusiasts for the music are coming to the end of their strumming across this mortal coil. Me too, which is probably why I don't recognise most of the names of those appearing at the Scott Club or the Club 43.

The grey-haired enthusiasts reckon that they rubbed shoulders with the jazz giants during the last century and that giants are no more. I've been listening to the music from Tom Baron's *Swinging Jazz* party of 2001. The 24 musicians were chosen with considerable skill and I'd be quite happy to listen to their musical output for the rest of my life. Randy Sandke, a creative and thoughtful musician, used great imagination in organising most of the sets. He's a powerful trumpeter with a good range.

Dan Barrett is a man of similar talents and like Sandke is a particularly gifted arranger. He played trumpet as well as trombone at the Blackpool bash and his Hackett-like skills are astonishing. He could have made his name on the horn instead of trombone. I think Roy Williams and Barrett first met on this gig, and Roy's playing was summed up when Barrett told the audience "I was doing real good, then he came into my life." The Barneses, John and Alan were also on good form. Two of my favourite bassists, Dave Green and Michael Moore, the latter now one of Brubeck's pillars, of course, were backing and the ubiquitous Steve

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