

Fryer-Barnhart- Something Special

About a year ago, the committee of the BJC discovered that the club was becoming quite profitable due to increased attendances and we decided to get a few "high quality" bands whilst holding ticket prices the same as for regular events so to give something back to the members who have contributed to the club's success. The biggest band so far has been the hugely popular Fryer-Barnhart International All-Stars who attended our club on 20th May. This band has wowed audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and it was their only gig in the south-west this year (unfortunately as a group they will not be appearing at the Bude Jazz Festival although most of the individual musicians will be).

What a performance they gave! All numbers, many with standing ovations, were greeted enthusiastically by the audience. All musicians were in fine form from the rapid fingers of Jeffery Barnhart on keyboard to the flowing trombone work of Jim Fryer (complete with missing moustache which had come off after 20 years!). Their jokey rapport between numbers was most amusing! George Huxley on reeds was excellent, especially on his soprano sax where he held the audience spellbound. Gordon Whitworth's Louis Armstrong inspired trumpet work was at it's most forceful and his voice perfectly suited to jazz. The irrepressible Annie Hawkins was a delight, her consistent broad smile captivating as she plucked the instrument in true slap bass style. Nick Ward is probably the best trad jazz drummer in the country, and it showed this night! His style never repetitive or boring and on banjo was Geoff Over from London who slipped into Brian Mellor's chair with ease with some great banjo breaks throughout. (Brian is finding it difficult on a cruise ship in the Med - hard to take I'm sure!). So onto the music.

To a capacity audience the band struck up with a familiar number the name of which eludes me! Then came the Pete Bocage/Armand Piron classic from 1923 Papa's Gone, Goodbye with the vocal by Jeff followed by Percy Venable's Sunset Café Stomp made famous by Louis Armstrong's Hot Five in 1926. Needless to say Gordon's trumpet shone in this one and his vocal straight from the era too. George then picked up his soprano for the first time and Jim taking the vocal on Earl Hines' composition You Can Depend On Me. For the next number George retained his soprano with Clarence Williams' classic Wild Cat Blues which he recorded with his Blue Five and became Sidney Bechet's recording debut in 1923. Much of George Huxley's work is based on Sidney Bechet, so his wailing soprano was most Bechet-like. Richard Whiting's 1920 composition The Japanese Sandman heralded the end of the first set when they took a well earned break whilst Graeme and Gill commenced (hurriedly I might add) selling raffle tickets to a capacity audience. They just about completed their task by the time the band returned to the stage.

1919 Rag was a New Orleans marching number (based on an old French march) and it was this that the band began the second set in real stomping style. The band then turned to Duke Ellington for the next piece Saratoga Swing which featured a real "slapping" solo from Annie Hawkins. Next up was Viper Mad written by Sidney Bechet and Clarence Williams. (A Viper is twenties slang for those persons who

partake in the “dreaded weed”). The vocal on this one was by Jim Fryer who also picked up his trumpet to have a “duel” with Gordon Whitworth each attempting to outdo the other. Result? An honourable draw! The front line then abandoned the stage leaving the rhythm section to perform a novelty piece in Hello My Honey which featured Jeff with the vocal. Gordon then gave a superb vocal on Hustlin’ and Bustlin’ for Baby which also featured a lovely solo from George on Alto Sax. Jeff then returned with a terrific vocal on Hoagy Carmichael’s classic number Jubilee. It featured a great solo from Gordon and an extended drum solo from Nick in which he astounded many by performing the melody line along with an incessant beat on bass drum and an array of sounds on cymbals and shells. Wonderful. That number, followed by a standing ovation from many, completed the second set and the band deservedly went to whet their whistles once more.

Once the rather large raffle was called (with the crowd, there was little chance of me winning - Jim Fryer either as he only had one ticket!), the band took to the stage for the final time. They began with Mel Stitzel’s most famous composition The Chant (made famous in jazz circles by Jelly Roll Morton’s recording of the piece in 1926). The long awaited Brolly Parade then took place to the strains of Paul Barbarin’s Bourbon Street Parade, and my there was plenty, their colour filled the room. Next came the haunting and emotional Pete Kelly’s Blues where Annie came to the fore with a fine bowed bass solo matched only by Gordon’s mournful trumpet. Next came Back In Your Own Backyard, then came a piece with a name that eludes me as it was in French! I am afraid that this language is unknown by me! Needless to say, it being in French, it had to be a number from the Sidney Bechet stable during his final years which he spent in that country. Also needless to say, it was a cue for George Huxley to return with his Soprano Sax. This was to be his Piece de Resistance for the evening, the evocative melody hushing the audience. Backed only by Jeff on piano, George’s wailing instrument was one of the highlights of the evening. Superb. This was followed by an amusing piece which featured both Gordon and Jeff vocalising called Nagasaki (where the women wicky wacky woo!). A real fast paced piece which had the dancers wearing themselves out. The immortal Spencer Williams’ jazz standard Basin Street Blues was followed by the final number for this fantastic evening, Jelly Roll Morton’s classic Black Bottom Stomp. A rip roaring finale after which the audience stood and applauded enthusiastically. They had just witnessed one of the best, if not *the* best band this club had ever booked. So many happy faces leaving at the end of the evening enquired about the possibility of them returning. I believe Jim has that in hand and hopefully they will be back in May next year. I will keep you informed. Thanks Fryer-Barnhart, you were fantastic. See you around the gigs

Paul