

The Seven Stars Shine On

Review of the Richard Leach Seven Stars of Jazz gig of 1st July 2007

The BJC welcomed back Richard Leach's Seven Stars of Jazz on Sunday 1st July and seven stars they were awarded too. Their music was based on the repertoire of the great Alex Welsh band of the 50s, from 20s style to swing, and swing they did. Richard is a trombonist of the highest calibre and with Gordon Whitworth on trumpet and Chris Pearce on reeds making up the front line, how could they fail to entertain?

The first number the band played summed up the evening, George & Ira Gershwin's S'Wonderful followed by a number from the Fats Waller stable, Just Squeeze Me. Gordon Whitworth's voice came to the fore with Paul Dresser's 1915 classic My Gal Sal and demonstrated why his vocals are much appreciated as he has a voice so suited to jazz. A number from 1924 next with the Spencer Williams and Jack Palmer piece Everybody Loves My Baby. These last two numbers also showed the prowess of the band's drummer Graham Smith, who as usual drove the rhythm section along. We here at the BJC are fortunate to have Graham regularly appearing here with a variety of bands! Sam Coslow's Just One More Chance came next and Gordon's trumpet was to the fore here showing why he too is one of the most sought after musicians around. The band then turned to the book of Earl Hines for A Monday Date before Richard supplied the vocal on the McKinney's Cotton Pickers influenced I Want a Little Girl. The band signed off the first set with King Oliver's Dippermouth Blues. Gordon's use of the mute on this one was superb, so Oliver-like.

Walter Donaldson's 1924 piece Oh Baby introduced the second set before the band slowed things down with one of my favourites the Fred Meinken/Dave Ringle classic, the haunting Wabash Blues. This was followed by Victor Young's Sweet Sue, Just You before the band gave us a fine rendition of Hoagy Carmichael's famous New Orleans. Mike Graver on piano played some terrific breaks all night, but he had a chance to shine when the front line left the stage allowing him to give a fine solo backed by just the rest of the rhythm section with Girl of My Dreams. The long awaited broly parade finally came around to the strains of the old oft-played standard Bourbon Street Parade before the final number of the second set, another Hoagy Carmichael number, Riverboat Shuffle. (Originally called Free Wheeling, the name was changed when Hoagy offered it to the Wolverines with Bix Beiderbecke to record in 1924).

Not only did the band have a great night, but so too did their "WAG's" as they proceeded to clean up with the raffle prizes! Needless to say, 'twas not my night! Still, I had the final session to enjoy and they band was soon on stage with Dapper Dan where Gordon and Richard supplied a vocal duet. Next up was Richard Whiting's Sleepy Time Gal then the front line stepped off stage onto the dance floor accompanied by banjo and bass, to give a true to life (almost!) version of Kid Ory's classic composition Muskrat Ramble in true Hot Five style. Without amplification, this acoustic performance was as close as one can get to the original 1926 recording and it was wonderful. Chris Pearce then gave us a great solo on his curved Soprano with I'm in the Market For You before Gordon took up the vocal duties once more with the old Henry Creamer/Turner Layton classic from 1922, Way Down Yonder in New Orleans. It has been a while since I have heard this next number, the immortal blues piece St James Infirmary. Richard's trombone work on this was exemplary and the vocal tremendous too. To me, the highlight of the evening. Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, as this gig did with the ageless Jean Schwartz 1906 number Chinatown, My Chinatown.

So a superb evening sadly came to an end and everyone there I am sure appreciated the wide selection of numbers and styles from the days of Alex Welsh. The Seven Stars of Jazz will linger in my mind for some time to come. I hope to catch up with them at the Festival in August.

See you around the gigs...

Paul