

It's Manna from Savannah!

Review of the Savannah Jazz Band gig of 18th January

I can honestly say that this was one of the best gigs the Bude Jazz Club has put on for quite a while. It had everything. A brilliant band, capacity audience and terrific atmosphere coupled with excellent danceable music and plenty of dancers there to strut their stuff. What an evening! The Savannah (or Savanagh if the advertising sign in the Falcon is to be believed!) were on top form. I have always admired the cornet work of Bill Smith and he certainly didn't disappoint and his couple of blues numbers on harmonica were a delight. Sam Ellis on trombone ripped the place apart and Rod Chambers on clarinet, tenor and alto saxes was on top form. The rhythm section drove the band along relentlessly with drummer and leader John Meehan never missing a beat, Tony Pollitt's bass playing assured and solid and Louis Lince on metal banjo playing some lovely melodic breaks. As a group they played tight and forceful that had everyone rocking to the beat all evening long.

The music began with a stomping version of *Down in Honky Tonk Town* before the boys hit out with the spiritual *Lord, Lord, Lord* with Rod supplying the vocal. Then came the Jimmy Butterfield 1910 piece *When You and I Were Young Maggie* followed by an even earlier piece ragtime pianist Joe Jordan's *That Teasin' Rag*. A rarely heard number came next with Maceo Pinkard's *Storyville Blues* which was followed by Johnny Mercer's composition *While We Danced at the Mardi Gras*. The set closed out with a real rhythm and bluesy number, *My Babe*. This one really rocked and featured Bill Smith not only with the vocal but playing a terrific blues harmonica as well. Great stuff!

During the first break our treasurer Brian Leonard presented a cheque of £187 to Dave and Maria Sturt, representing the charity The Little Rays of Sunshine Club for Children with special needs.. This money was raised from the Christmas Dinner Raffle which was held in early December.

So onto set two which began with a song of which I know nothing except it was Danish! Rod then returned with a vocal on the Latin tinged *Tipitipitin* after which a broolly parade was called for to the strains of the oft played parade number Paul Barbarin's *Bourbon Street Parade*. The band then turned to the band book of Duke Ellington with a Barney Bigard composition the beautiful *Saratoga Swing* (named after the town of Saratoga Springs in New York). This was followed by a number from 1925 called *Driftin' and Dreamin'*. Next was a number synonymous with a New Orleans funeral as the coffin is borne to the cemetery, *Just a Little While to Stay Here*. Incidentally, it was the first number played at Roy Stears' funeral just two days before as his coffin was led into the church. The final number was Jimmy Blythe's composition *East Coast Trot* which featured an excellent drum solo by the leader of the Savannah, John Meehan. What a really good jazz drummer he is.

After the raffle prizes were given away to almost everybody but me, the band returned with the old Dick Winfree and Phil Boutelje classic *China Boy*, a staple of traditional jazz it seems at it is played so often. Then came one of my favourite pieces W.C. Handy's composition that he wrote in 1920, *Aunt Hagar's Blues* (or to give it its correct title, *Aunt Hagar's Children Blues* as blacks in the south of America often called themselves Aunt Hagar's Children, Hagar being the handmaiden to Abraham's wife in the bible). A complete change of tone next with the risqué *It's Tight Like That* with the much cleaned up lyrics sung by Bill Smith. It was then time for Rod Chambers to take centre stage, not only with the vocal but with extended solos on clarinet and tenor sax on *You Belong to Me*. Bill Smith then pulled his harmonica out once more to give us another rip-roaring blues number with *Nothing Blues*. The band, and the dancers, really rocked and swayed and despite it being winter, the sweat was evident on Bill's face at the end! The final piece was the band's usual signing off number, *Going Home* and the members of the band were called one by one they got great applause from the capacity crowd. Can't wait for the next visit of this most excellent band.

See you around the gigs...

Paul