

Panama Pleases Plenty

Review of the Panama Jazz Kings gig of 19th July

The Panama Jazz Kings played before a large audience on Sunday 19th at the Falcon and it certainly brought out the best in them. Their performance was assured and very danceable yet laid back and smooth rather than frenetic and the number of hoofers on the floor throughout the evening thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Gordon Hunt and the boys played a varied repertoire from swinging jazz to slow blues, from parade marches to spirituals and Cajun music and even a bit of Rock 'n' Roll thrown in for good measure.



They began with a stomping version of Harry Godwin's *My Memphis Baby* followed by Joe Howard's 1909 composition *I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now?* It was then turn for a parade number (too early for the brolliers as none were forthcoming!) when the band struck up with a number so loved by New Orleans Parade Bands, Roland Seitz's *Salutation March*. It was an a typical funeral march with a slow beginning before swinging out halfway

through. A real dirge up next with a real slow rendition of Bert Leighton's classic *Frankie and Johnny*. A terrific number but I felt they did it a tad too slow. It was then the turn of banjo player Mike Cox to give us a vocal. Mike was a last minute replacement for regular plucker Malc Hurrell whose car had broken down in Swindon and he was unable to make the gig. He sang a number called *Mama Inez* although it was, as Mike informed us, known by a different name in Creole patois, and in that language he sung the lyrics. Percy Wenrich's composition *Silver Bell* came next before the first set was signed off with Con Conrad's *Lonesome and Sorry*

Onto the second set which began with a piece called *You Can't Be True Dear* before a broolly parade was announced to the strains of Billy Hill's *Old Spinning Wheel* and this time the brollies were out in force! Then came one of my favourite numbers, Spencer and Clarence Williams' *West Indies Blues*, a classic from 1923 from the New Orleans band of Armand Piron. This was followed by the old standard from Stephen Foster that he wrote way back in 1851, *Way Down Upon the Swanee River* (originally titled *Old Folks at Home*). Another number with two titles came next when the boys played *When We Walk Through the Streets of the City* (which has a more common name in Red River Valley) The second set then closed out with Neil Moret's 1901 ragtime piece *Hiawatha Rag*.

The third set began with Irving Berlin's 1911 famous jazz standard *Alexander's Ragtime Band* before Gordon and Co played three numbers forever associated with one of the pioneers of New Orleans jazz, Bunk Johnson. Firstly was a composition based on the traditional O Tannenbaum called *Maryland, My Maryland* to which lyrics were added in 1861 and in 1939 became the state song of the US state of Maryland. Then came Louis Armstrong's *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate* that Bunk recorded in 1945. Whereas Bunk's version was fast paced, Gordon and the band played it real slow. Then finally the famous hymn loved by jazzers everywhere, *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*. The band then turned to a Joe "King" Oliver composition called *Snag It* and played it real bluesy with a great vocal from Mike Cox. The penultimate number for the evening was the Jimmy Davis/Charles Mitchell 1940 piece *You Are My Sunshine* before the band signed off with Kid Thomas Valentine's

Kid Thomas Boogie. Played in a bouncing Rock 'n' Roll style which had all the members of the Bude Jive Club upon the dance floor.

This was certainly a great gig and the Panama played their socks off for the dancers and the dancers in return showed their appreciation by giving the band a long and well deserved ovation. They'll be back!