

True Blue

Review of the Dennis Armstrong's Bristol Blue Five plus 1 gig of 23rd October

As soon as I found out that Dennis Armstrong's Bristol Blue Five + 1 was based on the bands of the bands of the pioneering jazz musician Clarence Williams, I knew I was in for a treat and I certainly wasn't disappointed. The band gelled well together and really swung despite having no drums to drive the beat along. In fact, you hardly noticed they were missing.

They began with a number from the pen of Tin Pan Alley's Irving Berlin called *Blue Skies* followed by that old standard (probably the most played number at the BJC) Will Tyers *Panama*. Then came a rarely heard number written by Lil Hardin from the Hot Five days called *Two Deuces* before Dennis gave us the first vocal of the evening singing the Andy Razaf lyrics to Ada Rubin's *Fair and Square*. Next up was a number taken from the repertoire of Johnny Dodds' Black Bottom Stompers written by the irrepressible Fats Waller called *Come on and Stomp, Stomp, Stomp* before Dennis returned with a vocal on a number that Clarence Williams



wrote along with Lucy Fletcher called *Sugar Blues*. The final number for the set was another Lil Hardin composition as performed by Johnny Dodds' New Orleans Bootblacks, called *Flat Foot*.

To open the second set, the band stomped off with the old 1918 ODJB classic written by their reedsman Larry Shields called *Clarinet Marmalade*. A broly parade was then announced to the strains of Porter Steele's famous *High Society*, then Dennis announced another one to the tune of Francis Meyers' *Bugle Boy March*, but this time around, no brollies were forthcoming. Next up was a number from Abbie Brunies Halfway House Orchestra band book called *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*. A 1926 composition from stride pianist James P. Johnson followed on called *If I Could Be With You* before a clarinet solo by Phil Wall on pioneering pianist Jimmy Blythe's little known piece *Bohunkus Blues*. Next came the old Turner Layton number *After You've Gone* before the set closed out with the King Oliver inspired *Mandy Lee Blues* from 1923.

As the third set began, trombonist Tom Whittingham laid aside his instrument to pick up the washboard as the band played another Jimmy Blythe composition *East Coast Trot*. Back to the bandbook of King Oliver for the next piece, *Alphonse Picou's* Chattanooga Stomp before another Lil Hardin / New Orleans Bootblacks collaboration with a number called *I Can't Say*. Next up was a Clarence Williams Blue Five original, the oft played *Cake Walking Babies From Home* with the vocal by Dennis. Then a change of style as the band took on J. Russel Robinson's classic *Singin' the Blues* before the band took on Dave Dreyer's *There's a Rainbow round my Shoulder*. Tom then returned with his washboard as the band played Junie Cobb's amusingly titled *Piggly Wiggly* (named after a chain of stores in America's deep south said to be the world's first supermarket). The final number for the evening's entertainment came with Sidney Bechet's classic and moving composition *Dans les rues d'Antibes*.

A terrific gig by the Dennis Armstrong Blue Five plus One playing some of the classic jazz numbers from the twenties and thirties that were associated with the bands and former bandsmen of pianist-com-

poser-jug player-music publisher Clarence Williams whose music has stood the test of time. I hop this band will return to the Bude Jazz Club in the not too distant future.

See you around the gigs...

Paul