

Reminiscing with Roy - Remembering Humph

We have had some very fine jazzmen in this country in the past, but to me none of them have equalled Humph. Maybe some of the others had greater musical ability but Humph to me had something else.

His ability in other fields away from music seemed to me to allow him literally to use music as he wanted to and not being forced to rely solely on music as a means of making a living. One of his recordings was entitled 'I Play As I Please' and he did just that. In any event he was a fine trumpet player, superb bandleader, his jazz broadcasts were an absolute joy to listen to. He had an unparalleled knowledge of jazz and brought it to us with an ease and assurance, which made his programmes so authoritative.

Although Humph moved away from pure trad, to me he never strayed too far into modernism. Mainstream, yes, but always swinging and entertaining. His bands almost always had the finest musicians available; changing every now and then to find new ways to express his music, never content to stay still for long. Recording on his first label 'London Jazz' started in November 1948, then the wonderful Parlophone series started and London Jazz was no longer required. Humph's gift was for making good arrangements and the very first Parlophone - 'Maple Leaf Rag' and 'Memphis Blues' hit us jazzers like something out of the blue, and it is still as exciting now as it was sixty years ago. Humph and I were talking about this issue a few years ago and he remarked that Keith Christie's trombone solo on 'Memphis' still gave him pleasure to listen to. My own efforts in jazz broadcasting were influenced greatly by Humph's much more polished ones, but he did join me for two on my own show. Looking back I realise that I had some nerve in asking the great man to join me but then again fortune favours the brave.

The first programme was an hour long and I sent j Humph a list of questions and the music to go with them, he put the answers on reel-to-reel tape (including telling me I was wrong on one point), which I left in the finished programme. It took about four hours to mix the whole thing but you can't tell that Humph was not in the studio. It fooled at least one senior person in Radio Cornwall who asked, "*When did Humph come to the studio?*" The second show was recorded in Truro a few years later and this was live. I well remember sitting at the control desk, looking at Humph, the supreme jazz broadcaster, in some mental turmoil, thinking "*What do I say, how do I start?*" so I said to Humph "*I feel I like a new boy, talking to the Headmaster*" and away we went. About twenty or more years ago we promoted Humph at Garras Jazz, Falmouth. Ever since then my wife and I were privileged to meet him and the band after the various gigs that brought them to Cornwall. One of these visits backstage caused a humorous incident and in one of his programmes much later he told of this, mentioning me and my radio show and he repeated it later on stage in Truro, which was very good for my ego.

I have been able to be MC introducing Humph on several occasions and this caused a little worry too as I was always aware of Humph's great standing and wanted to do justice to the man.

The great and the mighty have all written and said their praises about him and this article is just from a humble jazzer who first heard his music sixty years ago and was lucky enough to meet him over the last twenty years.

Now THAT is something to reminisce about. R.I.P. Humph.

Roy Stears