

Clarinet & Saxophone

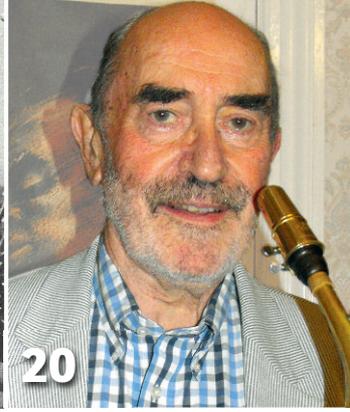
Winter 2013 Volume 38, No 4

What Is It About
The Selmer Mark VI?

Musician's
Dystonia:
A Silent Plague



Also: What's on & where to go,
news, reviews and much more



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MUSICIAN'S DYSTONIA A SILENT PLAGUE



Trifarious

Imagine rising to the summit of your profession, and then having it all taken away by a condition that appears to have no cure. Once one of this country's top soprano saxophonists, Tim Redpath found himself sitting at the back of concerts in which he would once have been starring. Having myself suffered from a neck problem that briefly threatened my career, I approached Tim with huge sympathy, and found myself inspired by a story which has a remarkable and happy ending.

We all know the story of Django Reinhardt, whose meteoric career as a banjo-guitarist seemed prematurely over when he was badly injured in a fire in his gypsy caravan. Reinhardt suffered crippling injuries to the fourth and fifth fingers of his left hand. Despite doctors' warnings that he would never perform again Reinhardt took up the guitar and devised a unique playing style with which he emerged as the most revered jazz guitarist of all time.

Tim Redpath's encounter with career-threatening adversity lacks some of the more colourful elements of Reinhardt's tale. He grew up in the South of England in a house

that wasn't ravaged by fire, cut his teeth in youth music festivals rather than gloomy *bals musette* of working class Paris, and he wasn't struck by injury until his mid-40s, by which time he was already a well established orchestral and chamber musician.

Nevertheless, his cautionary tale has a great deal to say about musical society in Britain.

Musicians are notoriously bad at looking after their health. Their instruments are typically in better working shape than their bodies, which sometimes isn't saying much, and they're often more attuned to the needs of their car than their own wellbeing. "If your car hesitates once on the way to a gig, you

worry about whether you're going to get there", Tim tells me. "If it happens twice you take it to a garage first thing the next day. But as a musician you just put up with all the aches and pains we associate with the profession, never considering that some of these might be the warning signs of something more serious."

For the last four years Tim has been dealing with dystonia, a neurological condition of which there is limited understanding and strictly speaking no cure, which makes his story of recovery remarkable. Dystonia is a clinical syndrome in which involuntary muscle contractions produce twisting and repetitive movements or contorted postures; it can affect the whole body, half of the body, or specific muscle groups.

Mercifully, dystonia is rare, affecting only 0.000127% of the population. Rare, that is, until you look at professional musicians, of