

Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2015 Volume 40, No 3



Five Sax
ClarinetFest 2015
SaxOpen
Tubby Hayes'
Legacy

Inside

Regulars

- 2 **Editor's Notes** Richard Edwards
- 2 **Clarinet & Saxophone Society Details**
- 4 **News**
- 30 **Reviews**
 - 30 Accessory
 - 32 CD
 - 37 Concert
 - 39 Instrument
 - 40 Music
- 43 **Diary** Details of concerts, courses and playdays
- 50 **Letters to the Editor**
- 52 **Classifieds**
- 52 **Index of Advertisers**
- 55 **New Members**

Features

- 5 **John McCaw** Tributes
- 6 **Stan Sulzmann** Feature plus guide to improving your sense of time, William Upton
- 12 **Who Are Our Readers?** Art historian Clive Ashwin talks to Stephanie Reeve
- 14 **The Long Shadow of the Little Giant** The life, work and legacy of Tubby Hayes, Kenneth Morris
- 16 **Trinity College London Woodwind Syllabus 2015 - 2016** Saxophone grade two, Stephanie Reeve
- 20 **XVII World Saxophone Congress 'SaxOpen'** Full report from Richard Ingham and Nicola Pennill
- 26 **International Clarinet Association Clarinetfest** Susan Moss reports from Madrid
- 28 **Five Sax** Kenneth Morris introduces this group taking the world by storm
- 56 **Debussy and the Bass Clarinet** Helen Paskins



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William Upton

STAN SULZMANN

With the UK producing a steady supply of exciting young jazz musicians, it can feel like anybody who hasn't accumulated a stack of Mercury Prize nominations by the time they're 35 has missed the boat. The career of saxophonist Stan Sulzmann, now in his mid-sixties, is an excellent reminder that we shouldn't be so quick to knock the maturing process. Having spent decades building a career as one of the most versatile and sympathetic sidemen around, over the last few decades the gently-spoken giant from Islington has been receiving ever-increasing critical acclaim for his work as a band leader with his groups Neon, the Stan Sulzmann Quartet and the Stan Sulzmann Big Band, and as ever-present saxophonic foil to flugel hornist and composer Kenny Wheeler. Even so, beyond the dedicated UK jazz community, Stan remains one of the most under-exposed musicians in Europe, his big-toned but delicately phrased playing deserving of the widest possible audience. Ironically, he is also probably one of the most heard saxophonists in the world. He is the saxophonist playing the familiar intro to every episode of the television series *Poirot*.

"Practice", Stan says somewhat ruefully as I interrupt his evening session for our interview. "It's a strange thing we do in a vain attempt to try and get better." This sounds particularly modest coming from a musician who exemplifies better than most what time spent honing a particular skill can do. When I put to him that his career as an improviser has followed a more gradual trajectory than most, he's happy to agree. "It's taken me a long while to get to what I'm doing now, but it wasn't by choice", he tells me. "I was always trying – I always had bands and invested my time and money – but I went through long periods where I played a lot of commercial music, not because I wanted to but because I brought up a family, so I wasn't in the main picture of the jazz scene." The secret to his post-millennial purple patch, he tells me, has

been the shedding of some of the less glamorous aspects of his playing portfolio. "I don't double like I used to, and the session scene has gone, so my time is focused on trying to develop my improvisational skills, trying to play the saxophone better, and writing more. I'm much more focused now. It's taken me a long while to get to that, and it's not been an easy ride. I hear things I did 30, 40 years ago and think, 'Oh my God, that's just dreadful!' I just think I'm a better player now."

Stan's introduction to music making came early. His father was a semi-professional accordionist and pianist working in London before and during the war, performing for the coach outings to the seaside that were a staple of British pub culture. "My Dad loved George Shearing", Stan tells me, adding that not many people know that the popular jazz pianist was also an accordionist, (as was another stalwart of the post-war UK jazz scene, Stan Tracey). "So we listened to jazz standards on Radio Luxembourg and Voice of America, which was an American armed forces station, and could get pretty crackly." Even today it's easy to hear this background in popular tunes and jazz standards in Stan's own playing and writing, which remains rooted in melody.

Stan's father was also instrumental in his decision to take up the saxophone. "Dad always thought I could do like he did and make good money as a semi-pro musician, something that doesn't exist in the same way today. You got yourself a safe job and then played in the evening, making extra money. He took me to the Selmer shop on Charing Cross Road, and traded in his accordion and bought me a lovely Selmer Super Action tenor. Every Sunday I went for lessons with a chap called Terry Porter, who I'm still in touch with. It used to take me about two hours to get there on two trains and a bus, which I did for two or three years, until we moved back to London in 1964 to some flats near the Wimbledon tennis courts."

This move gave Stan the opportunity to kick-start his music career at the age of

15, playing top 10 hits with Mike Rabin's Demons, resident band at the Wimbledon Palais, which at the time was a big part of the London music scene. The Beatles had played there a year earlier, and were followed by the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, The Who, The Kinks, and a host of American R'n'B stars. A year later he became a regular performer at The Flamingo, a nightclub in Soho synonymous with blues bands led by the likes of Georgie Fame, Graham Bond and John Mayall, also notorious for mods, gang culture, and sexual scandals (the Profumo affair is a notable part of its popular mythology).

This all sounds like some musical education, but one that doesn't seem to have involved much jazz. For this, Stan tells me, he turned to the nascent National Youth Jazz Orchestra, then called the London Youth Jazz Orchestra. "My Dad saw an article on LYJO in the paper, and I went along to the second rehearsal and stayed with it. I'd never met any other people that liked jazz or played the same instruments, so that was a really good time."

Many readers will be familiar with the characteristic NYJO sound of the last few decades, a signature blend of brash virtuosity, slick technique, and testosterone-fuelled breakneck tempos. I asked Stan if it had a distinctive sound from the start. "Yeah, its distinction was that we weren't very good!" he laughs. "There was no similarity with what the band sounds like these days, in any shape or form. I mean, I could read music, but I'd always read straight, study book material, and I wasn't any good at syncopated reading. The brass section, love them to death, was sort of non-existent in the way that nobody had any chops. The rhythm section was good and there were a few people that could play, but it wasn't what you would call a band. But it was fantastic fun, and I learnt to read a bit there."

Playing in LYJO also opened up the opportunity of a lifetime for Stan, courtesy of the fixers who would regularly call the band looking for

Combined Master Saxophonists Series with a book and re-issued CD – 7

The Life, Work and Legacy of Tubby Hayes

It is now some 42 years since Edward Brian Hayes, known to his colleagues and fans as Tubby died following heart surgery in a London hospital. Born on January 30th 1935, also in London, and in the words of his current biographer Simon Spillett and *Melody Maker* mid-'60s columnist Bob Dawbarn, 'was a man who emerged from an ordinary background to do truly extraordinary things' and who 'bestrides British jazz like a colossus'. Late this spring and more or less simultaneously, Equinox Publishing Limited and Real Gone Records produced material more than adequately displaying the talents of our subject tenor saxophonist. Consequently this article attempts to bring a little oxygen of publicity to their efforts and hopefully introduce Tubbs' legacy to an even wider audience.

But first a potted biography of this master musician, who not only developed into a world class improviser on the tenor, but became very proficient indeed on all the saxes plus flute and vibraphone and was, in addition, an excellent arranger. His father, a violinist and dance band leader, gave Tubby a solid grounding in music from age eight via violin lessons and by the age of 12 Tubby had persuaded Dad to divvy up for a tenor saxophone. With a remarkable talent for self-learning (as far as wind instruments were concerned), an extremely good ear and Dad's instruction in musical theory at the piano keyboard, Tubby was playing his tenor for money by the time he left full-time schooling. From 1951 to 1973 Tubby delivered his take on modern jazz initially via a 'kiddie band' of teenagers through the lower ranks of professional groups to his own small and big-bands plus co-operative ventures with Ronnie Scott and others, all the way garnering plaudits, awards and international acceptance for his fluidity of technique and awe-inspiring improvised solos. Fortunately much of his recorded work has been captured to CD, and thus also to streaming services such as Spotify and YouTube, so that both his personal development (in both style and sound) can be explored and his sheer creativeness, as a player and arranger,

enjoyed despite the passage of more than four decades. The following 'bullets' underscore just a few of his achievements:

- ❖ called from the audience to deputise for missing Ellington tenorist Paul Gonsalves at a Royal Festival Hall concert. He did so well the 'Duke' invited him to play for the second house.
- ❖ made the first American Federation of Musicians/Musicians Union approved US/UK jazz musician 'swap', subsequently revisiting many times (at US request).
- ❖ co-led the enormously popular Jazz Couriers with Ronnie Scott.
- ❖ played a wide range of jazz festivals including Antibes, Lugano, Vienna and Berlin. Toured in US, Norway and Sweden.
- ❖ was a prolific 'session' musician/arranger in many genres.
- ❖ became an equally proficient 'sessioneer'/jazz improviser on flute and vibraphone.

Tubby was a ferocious hard worker all his life, almost certainly contributing to his premature death.

The Long Shadow of the Little Giant published by Equinox Publishing Limited is sub-titled 'The Life, Work and Legacy of Tubby Hayes' and very expertly written by another enormously gifted UK jazz tenor saxophonist, Simon Spillett (born Chesham, Bucks, 1974). Indeed I would go so far as to say that this book is the finest piece of biographical writing I've come across in many a year. Bearing in mind that Simon was born in 1974 he clearly had to depend entirely upon sources for his splendid 377 page opus; but what a magnificent exhibition of information mining has he made of the task. 10 years of effort encapsulated in acknowledgements to literally hundreds of personal interviews, 29 pages of detailed source notes (annotated in the text) many of which in themselves make extremely interesting reading, and 22 pages devoted to a select discography. As Simon points out the rather less than permanent content of record company catalogues make the availability of many of Tubby's re-issues a little uncertain. However the listings permit serious collectors to help nail versions in the second-hand market. But it is the body

text that makes this tome hard to put down. I can do no better than quote what I suspect to be Equinox's Series Editor's (Alyn Shipton) 'back-cover' commentary:

'Spillett painstakingly outlines a career that alternated professional success and personal downfall. Using credible eye-witness recollection, drawn from conversations with Hayes's family, partners, friends and musical colleagues, unique access to Hayes's own tape, photographic and personal archives, and extensive contemporary research material, Spillett has reconstructed the trajectory of his subject's life both candidly and respectfully. Hayes's meteoric musical rise from boy wonder to youthfully mature virtuoso, from saxophonist to multi-instrumentalist and composer is faithfully documented, as is his struggle for relevance as rock, pop and the avant-garde took over the musical landscape in the 1960s. For the first time, the opaque world of his inconsistent and troubled personal life is recounted in full. His unsettled childhood, his battles with addiction and ill-health and his difficult personal relationships are all exposed, and the confused accounts of his final days are unravelled and made clear as never before. The book also traces Hayes's path through one of the most vibrant periods of history, beginning in the austerity of post-World War Two London, through the 'never had it so good' 1950s, the 'Swinging Sixties' and into the privations of the 'State of Emergency' early Seventies, and outlines the cultural and musical developments of the times which underpinned the life of arguably the UK's finest ever jazz musician.'

In other words Simon firmly places the biography in context making it, in my humble opinion, an important contribution to both the socio-political and non-classical music history of Tubby's lifetime. Simon takes us through virtually all 38 years of his existence and work activity in chronological order. There is, of course, much detailed information on Tubby's individual performances, his technique and his approach to different music styles, tempi and group make-up – indeed plenty for

Susan Moss reports on The International Clarinet Association, July 2015

ClarinetFest Madrid



Capriccio Clarinet Orchestra

After only two years, the ICA ClarinetFest was back in Europe! A bonus for Europeans in terms of travel, not necessarily so for the rest of the world. Madrid in July is notoriously hot, and when I learnt that even the Spanish government retreats to the hills in July, and friends started talking about Dampits, I started to worry. As it turned out, a brief thunderstorm and a regular breeze made the temperature bearable even when it was 42°C, and of course a great deal of time was spent in the air-conditioned Conde Duque Cultural Centre listening to concerts.

The 2015 ClarinetFest was organised by the Spanish Clarinet Association (ADEC) and bore the title 'Antonio Romero and his time'. 2015 is the bicentenary of this Spanish clarinetist's birth. As usual there were three concerts running simultaneously throughout the day which made for difficult choices. After supporting other British artists and friends, it's very easy to choose players whom one has heard before and enjoyed, so I made the effort to hear some new players this year, the most outstanding of which was Céleste Zewald from the Netherlands playing Keuris, Martinu and Babin. On the friends' list, József Balogh was a must-see and not for the first time, József completely stole the show with a virtuoso display of his own compositions, with improvisation, in both jazz and gypsy styles.

Every year there are more and more bass clarinet concerts and Harry Sparnaay pointed out that in the early days of the ClarinetFest he was the only



Conde Duque Cultural Centre

bass clarinetist performing, a lone player, looked upon as slightly crazy. Regular bass players Rocco Parisi and Sarah Watts didn't disappoint. Rocco gave a varied programme of Arvo Pärt, Mangani and a Latin medley of his own. Sarah, together with bassoonist Laurence Perkins, performed a beautiful, gentle piece by David Bennett Thomas called *EBB*.

Clarinet choirs were well represented as usual with groups from the Netherlands, Istanbul, Austria, Berlin, Thailand, Mexico, Great Britain and of course, Spain. There were other ensembles that had been put together especially for the festival, some with minimal rehearsal, all with an international cast of players.

Quietly running alongside the non-stop music was a series of lectures, masterclasses and the Young Artist Competition. I managed to get to the



Capriccio Clarinet Orchestra

lecture by Nicholas Cox on the emotional background to the Brahms Op. 120 sonatas. As all the lectures were only 30 minutes each, Nick did a marvellous job in the time allowed, of conveying Brahms' frame of mind in the early 1890s. On the one hand, he had lost many friends and thought he might lose Clara Schumann too. On the other, meeting Richard Mühlfeld removed a creative block that brought him out of retirement. The talk referred in particular to the 'dark' first movement of the F minor sonata, and was thoroughly absorbing to listen to.

Much of the music on offer was written in the 21st century, literally hundreds of pieces from around the world but if you scanned the programme carefully there was Brahms, Mozart, Weber and Poulenc to be heard. The most duplicated piece always seems to be Ponchielli's *Il Convegno*, but then the whole festival is a *convegno*. I would like to pay tribute to the house accompanist Pablo Puig who must have appeared in more concerts than anybody else. He was highly accomplished, totally unflappable and breezed through even the most difficult accompaniments, such as the Howells Sonata, as though it was a walk in the park.

At the end of the festival, all clarinetted out, the place to go was the Prado Museum with its collections of Goya, Velasquez, Titian and Rubens, and no clarinets! There will be more reviews of the ICA ClarinetFest 2015 concerts in the next issue of *Clarinet & Saxophone*.

The 2016 ICA ClarinetFest will be held in Lawrence, Kansas, USA, 3-7 August. ■

ACCESSORY REVIEWS

New – Lightweight Cases from Reed & Squeak

As a result of a last-minute phone call from Steve Morris from a company called Reed and Squeak (the name had me in giggles for a while) I recently showed an ultra lightweight double clarinet case during a lecture on innovative clarinet products at the 2015 Clarinet Convention in Cardiff.

After the mirth about the name had subsided I got on with looking at the case they had sent and found it was no laughing matter – it is a serious bit of kit and they have clearly done a great job of sourcing a company to manufacture these to their specific designs. I am pleased to say they are completely made in Britain, a proud and honourable boast for any company in this highly competitive market.

The materials used to make the cases are high quality and the cases themselves are very versatile.

The lightness is a huge advantage and a double case with clarinets and accessories weighs less than four kilos. Dimensions: length 43cm, height 27cm, depth 14cm - colour black.

There is ample room for music (full sized scores not just A4 – I found that a bonus as many opera parts are bigger

than A4) and accessories in an outside pocket and two internal zipper pockets, one with a see-through plastic window to enable fast location of pencils, pens, screwdrivers, painkillers etc.

The cases come with several padded inserts with Velcro attached to customise the case as one sees fit. I like this idea because sometimes I like to pack extra barrels and mouthpieces and other bits of equipment in the case itself – so being able to change the configuration is an advantage.

I found it to be really good for my work – as currently I am alternating between playing Eb clarinet and the standard Bb and A pair.

Two Eb clarinets fit beautifully into the case (I take a spare in case of emergencies) and on other days when I do not require Ebs, I remove them and put my pair of Leblanc Opus clarinets in. All the instruments easily fit into the double case and it can be fitted with straps to turn it into a rucksack (I'm told that new versions are being designed to have even more comfortable straps but the ones supplied on this case were perfectly comfortable enough).

Reed and Squeak actually have a triple case in production (as we squeak – oops, sorry) and numerous other very innovative designs including an incredibly light bass clarinet case.

For me, having had serious neck injury and with constant pain caused by herniated cervical discs, having a case



Plenty of pockets and see through space

this light is an enormous improvement on any case I have used so far. Unlike cases with moulded internal designs for the specific clarinets, the open padded spaces can be used to take a single Bb in two halves with an Eb as well as other combinations such as Bb & C clarinet – which for me in the opera is a great improvement on having to carry different cases around because in many normal cases one cannot fit a C clarinet into the Bb or A space. For doublers with flute the case can easily be adapted using the removable inserts to enable a multitude of configurations.

So, all in all this is a contender for me to rival all the other case manufacturers. There are also leather and hard cover cases on sale from the website <http://reedandsqueak.com> and they also offer instruments and other accessories for sale.

A bespoke case service is also available for special made to order cases in lightweight materials or leather and the cost begins at £250, upwards depending on design and materials used.

Reed and Squeak claim that these cases offer even more protection than most rigid cases because the material used internally absorbs the shock of impact whereas many cases have hard surfaces inside which in the event of a major impact could bend keys. I can see the logic of this and it is virtually impossible, without sacrificing comfort from a weight point of view, to fully protect instruments from extreme damage, such as being run over by a bus – but barring that I think these cases offer plenty of protection. There are some cases on the market that may withstand such a tragedy by bus but



Double case for clarinets as backpack



Double case using shoulder strap