



Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2022 Volume 47, No 3

ARUN GHOSH

Jazz his way



Valedictory

KENNETH MORRIS SIGNS OFF

Tenor titan

IN PRAISE OF BRECKER

Words and music

JOHN CLARE REIMAGINED

Sayers Studies

FREE BASS
CLARINET MUSIC

PLUS:

CASSGB SINGLE REED DAY 2022 | TRIBUTES TO CHRISTOPHER BALL & BERNARD PARRIS
PRACTICE TIPS FOR BUSY LIVES | NEWS | REVIEWS | UPCOMING EVENTS | CLASSIFIEDS

INSIDE

Regulars

- 4 **Special report**
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
Saxophone Day
- 6 **News**
- 11 **Tributes**
Christopher Ball (1936-2022)
Bernard Parris (1923-2022)
- 14 **Single Reed Doctor**
Fiona Berry offers practice tips for people
with busy lives
- 32 **Reviews**
32 Concerts
34 Gear
36 CDs
40 Release round-up
42 Sheet music
- 46 **Diary**
- 50 **Classifieds and membership
update**



PHOTOGRAPHY: EMILE HOLBA

16
Arun Ghosh

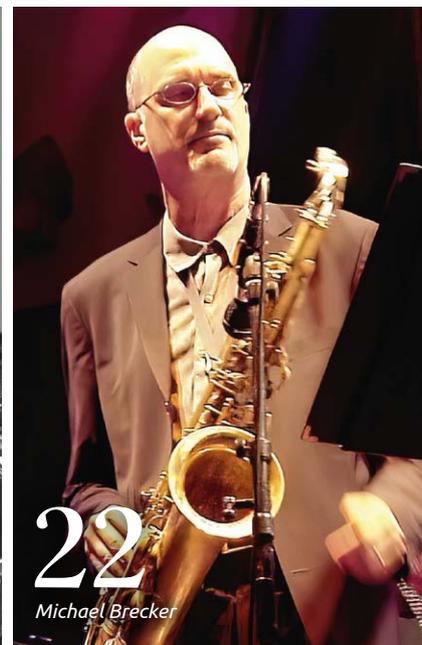
Features

- 16 **Arun Ghosh**
The music of jazz clarinettist Arun Ghosh is known for blending a range of styles that reflect his British-Asian heritage. Guy Passey chats to him about his creative influences, latest album and the health of the British jazz scene
- 20 **Words and music**
Toby Deller hears from clarinettist Kate Romano and composer Julian Philips about a new disc spotlighting the 19th-century English poet and fiddler, John Clare
- 22 **In praise of Brecker**
Kenneth Morris considers the life and legacy of Michael Brecker, 15 years since the untimely passing of the jazz tenorist
- 25 **Free sheet music**
Three studies taken from *Studies for the Symphonic Bass Clarinet (to low C)* by Lenny Sayers, provided with kind permission of Maskarade Publishing
- 29 **Looking back**
At the tender age of 88, this magazine's long-serving jazz writer, Kenneth Morris, has decided the time has finally come to lay down his pen. He reflects on his life in music
- 52 **Redressing the balance**
Lydia Kenny reports on a recent North American Saxophone Alliance mentorship scheme to promote gender equity in the saxophone field



PHOTOGRAPHY: EMIN SCHMIDT-MARTIN

52
Lydia Kenny



22
Michael Brecker



29
Kenneth Morris



PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT VONKMAN

20
Kate Romano

awards round-up

BBC Young Musician category finalists

Alex Buckley (clarinet), Lucas Dick (clarinet) and Thomas Priestley (saxophone) have been named among the five woodwind category finalists in BBC Young Musician 2022. At the time of writing, the category finals have been staged and filmed for broadcast on BBC TV this autumn, but the winners are yet to be announced publicly. One musician from each of the five category finals will progress to the semi-final and compete for three places in the grand final, which is due to take place in October 2022. Below is a little more about three single-reeders who made it through to the woodwind category final.



Alex Buckley, 18, started the clarinet aged nine and studies with Jessie Grimes at the Royal College of Music Junior Department. He has been a member of the National Youth Orchestra for the last two years, appearing twice as principal clarinet.



Lucas Dick, 15, is also a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He started playing clarinet aged eight and studies with Michael Whight at the Junior Royal Academy of Music.



Thomas Priestley, 18, comes from Mytholmroyd in West Yorkshire and has studied saxophone with Jim Muirhead at Chetham's School of Music since age 10. Having recently completed his A Levels, he is about to start studying a BSc in Music, Sound and Technology at City, University of London.

Sean Megaw wins RCS Alan McAuley Jazz Award



Sean Megaw

Edinburgh-born saxophonist Sean Megaw has been awarded the 2022 Alan McAuley Jazz Award, one of three annual awards presented at the end of the academic year to jazz students at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

With a cash prize of \$5,000, the Alan McAuley Jazz Award is designed to help career development and finance recording, promotion and touring. The award is given at the discretion of the head of jazz and special external assessors to a musician or group of musicians in their final year of study. Megaw, who graduated with first-class honours, plans to use the

money to record and release his first album.

Tommy Smith, head of jazz at the RCS, said: 'Sean is a worthy winner who, like the other two winners, is being rewarded for hard work, diligence and creativity. Previous winners have included the pianist Fergus McCreadie and saxophonist Matt Carmichael, who have both gone on to sign prestigious recording deals and to represent Scotland and the RCS across Europe. I'm confident that Sean will go on to be a great advert for our course.'

Northern Reeds awarded June Emerson Launchpad Prize

Reed quintet Northern Reeds has been announced as joint winner of the 2022 June Emerson Wind Music Launchpad Prize. First awarded in 2019, the Launchpad Prize offers a range of practical support to a final-year wind ensemble at a UK music college to help launch them onto the professional circuit. The prize package includes: a substantial June Emerson Wind Music (JEW) voucher; dedicated space on the JEW website; publicity at any time through the shop's online media channels; unlimited free advertising flyers in JEW music orders; exclusive access to the JEW shop with use of all music and facilities; and complimentary copies of any existing and future Emerson Edition publications for their instrumental line-up.

Northern Reeds consists of recent Royal Northern College of Music graduates Hannah Seymour (oboe), Nathan Holroyd (saxophone), Chris Hardy (clarinet), Beth Machell (bass clarinet) and Alice Wriglesworth (bassoon). Founded in 2009, the group has commissioned new works for reed quintet by RNCM composers and recently won the 2022 RNCM Fewkes Chamber Prize. In 2020, the group had the opportunity to work alongside professional Dutch wind quintet Calefax in judging the Calefax Composers Competition.

Northern Reeds shares the 2022 Launchpad Prize with Vulcan Brass from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.



Northern Reeds

Arun Ghosh

The music of jazz clarinetist and composer Arun Ghosh is known for blending a range of styles that reflect his British-Asian heritage. Guy Passey chats to him about his creative influences, latest album and thoughts on the health of the British jazz scene

Guy Passey: Can I start by asking about the latest album, *Secluded In Light* – where it came from, what influenced it and what sort of processes you were going through when working on it?

Arun Ghosh: *Secluded in Light* is my fifth studio album on camoci records. I started the process at the start of 2020, recording some drums with a collection of new music I'd written, and just making some guides and backing tracks – then the first lockdown hit in March. I had a huge amount of work cancelled, and so I made the decision to carry on working on this album.

These were the days before testing, before we knew anything about Covid. We just knew rumours that it was a respiratory illness and could affect lungs, strength, and so on. Often when I'm doing a studio album, I make the backing tracks first, then add the horns and the clarinet comes over the top, whereas with this, it became so important for me to record the clarinet, because I didn't want to get ill and not be able to play. So that was a huge motivation, which actually was really good for the course of the album as it really got me moving. As soon as I'd put down a lot of the clarinet things, I started to feel where the pieces wanted to go, because I make a lot of the backing tracks myself. On the final album mix itself, I play clarinet, harmonium, keyboards, bass, guitars and percussion, while other musicians added tabla, alto sax, tenor sax, bass clarinet and drums.

So really, making this album was just something I did in my spare time over those months. Whenever I got a chance, I'd be working at night in the studio, piecing it together and continuing to write new tunes. Because of the change of pace that came into our lives, a lot of the more up-tempo tunes that were previously the backbone of the album started to feel inappropriate. So I started shelving those and moved into more of a down-tempo, mid-tempo, reflective kind of thing, which is why *Secluded in Light* has that feeling of reflection.

It was also around this time, in May 2020, that my father passed away. I was obviously very affected by grief and thinking about life and death, memories and my cultural background. My dad came from a village in West Bengal, India, and we grew up in the north-west England. A lot of significant people in my life sadly passed away around that time too, and so *Secluded in Light* became an album that was in some ways about life and death, mortality, and those kinds of pushes and pulls. So these kinds of themes became infused in the record.



Kenneth Morris considers the life and legacy of Michael Brecker, 15 years since the untimely passing of the jazz tenorist

In praise of Brecker

My trusty *All Music Guide to Jazz* 4th edition classifies Michael Brecker as a practitioner of three styles: crossover jazz, contemporary jazz and fusion. Many agree that he was an exceptionally gifted tenor saxophonist (plus flautist and EWI player) who had far too short a professional career of less than 40 years. Born in Philadelphia on 23 March 1949, he sadly passed away on 13 January 2007 after more than two years' struggle against myelodysplastic syndrome.

In a previous piece for *Clarinet & Saxophone*, I extracted a paragraph from Berendt and Huesmann's *The Jazz Book* (2009), which provides a compact, eloquent picture of Brecker's musical style:

'Michael Brecker exerted a great influence on tenor playing in jazz-rock with his very fast lines shooting up into the flageolet register ... he linked acoustic to electric playing to become a fiery, harmonically flexible post-bop stylist, infusing the Coltrane legacy with the motor elan and impact of rock-

oriented styles. Brecker called his music "electric-bebop" ... becoming one of the few tenorists in the tonal sphere whose development of the Coltrane tradition was so original that they formed an unmistakably individual style of their own. That's why Brecker's sound – crystal clear, metallicly cutting, and yet full of radiant power dynamically rising and falling – has become a determining colour in post-modern jazz tenor playing.'

I was inspired to take another look at Brecker's life and legacy after reading Bill Milkowski's superb, 374-page biography *Ode to a Tenor Titan: The Life and Times and Music of Michael Brecker*, released in late 2021. Milkowski's *Ode* includes a novel and valuable appendix devoted to 20-odd Brecker testimonials from professional musicians, including Chris Potter, Dave Sanborn, Joshua Redman, Dave Liebman, Joe Lovano and Branford Marsalis. Whether colleague or competitor, all give the saxophonist high praise. His recorded output was still quite phenomenal; Wikipedia has an article devoted to his complete discography featuring some 900 record appearances.

Does Brecker's upbringing have any relevance to his enormous talents? Well,

it can be of no hinderance to have a family littered with both distant and close relatives involved in music-making or a music-related business: paternal and maternal grandfathers (singer and violinist); father's cousin (Broadway production director); great uncle (founder of the Roseland Ballroom chain); father (jazz fan and semi-pro pianist); sister (pro singer); and elder brother Randy (a pro jazz trumpet player and introducer of his brother to the NYC jazz scene). Plus, his family living room was also permanently equipped with a piano, Hammond organ, double bass, vibes and drum kit!

Brecker started playing clarinet aged six, with his dad introducing him to jazz records at home and taking him to watch pro big bands and jazz combos locally. He moved to alto sax in his eighth grade (second year at junior high school) and made tenor his principal horn in his sophomore year (second year at senior high school). In June 1967, he graduated from the Cheltenham Township High School and spent a five-week holiday period at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, studying with saxophone guru Joe Viola (whose three-volume method *The Technique of the Saxophone* is still in the Berklee curriculum).

Michael Brecker (saxophone) and Randy Brecker (trumpet) performing as The Brecker Brothers



concert

CONCERT REVIEWS

GEYSER (WORLD PREMIERE)

BBC Proms

Marius Neset (saxophones)

London Sinfonietta

Geoffrey Paterson (conductor)

Royal Albert Hall, London

3 September 2022

Strings drip microtones – staccato notes form fragmented phrases, augmented by off-beat, in-tune percussion. This extended introduction expands with single notes from the piano and a repeated, more condensed motif by the violins. The soprano saxophone quietly trills its entrance. *Geyser*, a new concertante work for saxophone and chamber group, may begin with a subtle role for its starring instrument, but Marius Neset's latest piece soon unfolds into a dazzling and dexterous display.

The work – a BBC commission – received its premiere at this year's BBC Proms (Prom 63).

Performed by the Norwegian composer-saxophonist and his quintet

– Ivo Neame (piano), Jim Hart (percussion), Conor Chaplin (double bass) and Anton Eger (drums) – with the London Sinfonietta,

Geyser balances euphoric, racing melodies with pared-back rhythmic sections and nonchalant retrospection that creeps into despair. The varied moods reflect Neset's own feelings during the writing process. Wanting to move away from the pain of the pandemic, Neset set out to compose something joyful – inspired, as the name suggests, by the erupting hot springs in Scandinavia. But as he was putting the finishing touches to this upbeat romp, Russia invaded Ukraine. Neset found himself drawn to a bleaker style, and the unstable harmonies and structures can be attributed to this second phase of composition.

The irregular shifts between darkness and light are undercut with a compelling use of cross-rhythms. The first movement, 'Waterfall', ends with an expansive and leisurely saxophone melody that evolves into a thrilling car chase between ensemble and soloist. Neset improvises around a straight 4/4 theme, while the accompaniment moves into triple time. I notice my neighbour is tapping to an entirely different beat to mine, and I wonder how conductor Geoffrey Paterson is maintaining on-stage order. Part of the challenge comes from the mixture of through-composed and improvised parts; although the London Sinfonietta contributed to the development of the score, theirs is a traditional orchestral role while the quintet enjoys greater freedom.

Resting on his haunches, Neset would spring into action, always delivering sublime solos

Some of the melodic material – such as the piano theme in 'On Fire', later taken up by soprano saxophone – is unashamedly nostalgic: the cliched theme gradually develops into a show-stopping saxophone solo. Hearing this in isolation, you could be forgiven for thinking this is 1992, not 2022 (it reminded me, not in a negative way, of a petrol-station CD purchased around that time). This isn't a dig at Neset – the old-school style is intended and submerged into a contemporary soundscape. These moments – and the cheesy lines in 'Under the Surface' – make *Geyser*, in BBC Radio 3 presenter Tom Service's words, 'irresistible'. It was the perfect piece for a late-night unbuttoned Saturday Prom.

When he wasn't playing, Neset had a curious habit of crouching next to his music stand. It was as though, as he waited for his entrance to 'Out of Sight', he was taking a literal interpretation of the title. Resting on his haunches, Neset would spring into action, always delivering sublime solos. He also contributed block percussion and tambourine in improvised passages.

Idiomatic writing for clarinet and flute – often used in duet with saxophone – prevents *Geyser* from feeling like 'jazz group plus classical orchestra' (despite the layout on stage: quintet on one side, ensemble on the other). The tensions between musical styles are well managed – this is Neset's third work for the format following 2015's *Snowmelt* and 2019's *Viaduct*. Switching between soprano and tenor throughout the 65-minute work, Neset allowed plenty of opportunity for his collaborators to shine, particularly in 'Meeting Magma', where a thick texture comprising competing polyrhythms serves to build tension for the final saxophonic eruption.

Geyser has an obvious narrative arc – in the programme note, Neset writes, 'I want to tell a story – that's what it's all about'. (Incidentally, the geological



phenomenon has been on another single-reed composer's mind too: Mark Simpson's *Geysir* – featuring bubbling clarinet solos – premiered at this year's Aldeburgh Festival, where Simpson was artist in residence. As Neset, propelled by strings, brought the music to its conclusion in 'Outbreak', there was an atmosphere of joyful, temporary release – of the hot spring – but also of the political pressure cooker in which we are living.

Claire Jackson

Prom 63 – Marius Neset and the London Sinfonietta – is available to listen on BBC Sounds until 10 October 2022.