



Clarinet & Saxophone

Winter 2023 Volume 48, No 4

Where there's pluck there's brass

THE RAPID GROWTH OF THE SAXOPHONE ORCHESTRA MANCHESTER

The clarinet and disability

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE A PROFESSIONAL DISABLED MUSICIAN?

CASSGB Playday

IMPROV, KLEZMER AND CLASSICAL AT CASSGB'S OCTOBER GATHERING

Smooth soundscapes

KATIA BEAUGAIS ON WHY SHE TAUGHT HERSELF TO CIRCULAR BREATHE – AND HOW YOU CAN, TOO

Masterclass

ANDREW MARRINER TAKES AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT MOZART'S CLARINET CONCERTO

JOSHUA JASWON

His octet comes to town

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Jody Espina inducted into the Savannah Jazz Hall of Fame

Founder of JodyJazz has become the 47th inductee

Founder and President of JodyJazz Inc, Jody Espina, has been recognised for his significant contributions to the Jazz landscape in Savannah, Georgia, with an induction into the Hall of Fame. He will be featured in the new Savannah Jazz and History Hall of Fame Exhibit located in the Savannah History Museum. The induction took place during the recent Savannah Jazz Festival where Jody was congratulated on stage by the honourable Mayor Van Johnson. Espina founded JodyJazz Inc. in New York City in 2000 and moved it to Savannah in 2008. It is now one of the leading manufacturers of saxophone and clarinet mouthpieces for Jazz. Espina also performs internationally and more locally in many Savannah venues, and with the Savannah Jazz Orchestra.



Thornbury Clarinet Choir Playday

Peter Fielding reports from an enjoyable and educational day under the baton of Shea Lolin

On 14 October, around 30 clarinetists gathered for a very enjoyable day of playing with conductor/director Shea Lolin, a very experienced conductor of wind orchestras large and small. Lolin brought repertoire to suit all tastes. He tested our technical ability with works such as *Blackwood Breeze* by Kerion Anderson (arranged himself for clarinet choir) and the still-challenging old favourite, *Dance Macabre* by Saint-Saëns. Our interpretative powers were challenged by *After the Underworlds* by Gavin Bryars and *Journey of a Leaf* by Itaru Sakai; and last, but not least, a very skilful arrangement of the first movement of Saint-Saëns' Clarinet Sonata brought out our ability to accompany our volunteer soloists: Adele Gordon and Robert Watson, both of whom played beautifully.

Lolin interspersed the playing with a mine of useful information about the music, the composers, the clarinet and ensemble-playing in general. I found him a very clear conductor and a good communicator who gave myself and the other members of the Thornbury Clarinet Choir a rewarding, if tiring, day. Thank you to CASSGB for giving its support to this venture.



Mars Williams 1955 – 2023

*Psychedelic Furs and The Waitresses
Saxophonist has passed away*

Mars Williams, saxophonist of New Wave bands The Psychedelic Furs and The Waitresses, has passed away aged 68 after being diagnosed with cancer a year ago. His family and friends made a statement on the GoFundMe page they set up to help support his treatment: "As it became clear in late summer that his treatment options were coming to an end, he chose to spend six weeks of the time he had left living as he had since he was a teenager – out on the road performing night after night. Those last performances with the Psychedelic Furs will live on with all of the other incredible contributions that Mars has made as a person, and as a musician, and that boundless energy will continue to inspire."



The Clarinet, orchestras and disability

What is there still to do to make music-making accessible for disabled players? 'Neurospicy' clarinetist Kat Browning investigates instruments and the orchestral world and asks, is 'disabled professional musician' a contradiction in terms?

Let's think about the instruments we hold in our hands for a moment, how old they are and how they are designed. The industrial boom in the 19th century meant there was access to new materials, and technologies ignited inventors' imaginations with new possibilities.

The 1840s was particularly fruitful in the world of single reeds, with the saxophone being a 'happy accident' for Adolphe Sax in the early 1840s, while he was trying to refine the intonation of a bass clarinet. (He patented a range of eight saxophones in 1846.) During the 1840s, the clarinet was also revised time and time again, with the advent of the 13-key Müller system, leading to the Albert and Boehm systems. However, this continuous development in 19th-century Europe has slowed since, and while the odd extra key has been added here and there, the fundamental blueprints have not changed all that much in almost 200 years.

But if you think about it, one of the biggest professional contexts in which we're used to seeing clarinets, the orchestra, has been around for even longer. The first formal orchestra started when composer Claudio Monteverdi specified the instruments he wanted for his 1607 opera, *Orfeo*, rather than writing instrumental lines for indeterminate players as was the custom at the time. This was highly influential, and Monteverdi's orchestra still looks a lot like what we have come to expect of an orchestra today. But the 17th century was a long time ago.

Although there have been plenty of slight variations to the orchestral ensemble, the fundamental structure has remained. It is a 'mothership' of sorts, the real group (or job) that those studying music, especially at conservatoires, are conditioned to aim for. And of course, the orchestral canon has given rise to some of the best music of all time, but it leaves little room for individualism, and less room for the accommodation of disabilities that require an individual treatment or approach.

Perhaps an experienced professional would commission custom models of instruments, and the aspiring professional knows to get their instruments 'set up' correctly. In my 15 plus years of teaching, though, I have seen that beginners struggle to find the right instrument for them based on existing designs. An even smaller subset of these players may not fit the designs of instruments due to their mobility or cognitive challenges. It is therefore no surprise that many of this subgroup have been put off even attempting lessons, let alone purchasing an instrument. According to Ofsted's 2012 report, between 2008 and 2011, only 14% of school-age students were engaged in the learning of a musical instrument. In contrast, just 6% of students with a disability learned a musical instrument. This, coupled with the usual reasons that young people give up learning (the pressures of secondary school, social pressures, etc) will only be compounded by the fact that there just isn't much professional representation for those in the disabled community.

The first one-handed clarinet, a fully chromatic instrument with a range from low E to high F. Designed by Peter Worrell.



Music is both my profession and creative outlet. It's the means by which I can interpret how I'm experiencing the world. I made a conscious choice that from the compositional process onwards it was going to be informed by what I see as the big crises of our time.



Joshua Jaswon Octet: Andrej Ugoľjew, Johannes Mann, Anna Serierse, Jan Kaiser, Joshua Jaswon, Sidney Werner, Aarón Castrillo, Marc Doffey

It's a soggy Wednesday evening in Soho, central London. The streets are oddly quiet, removed of the usual overflows of after-work drinkers outside the district's many watering holes. I've braved the rain to attend the album launch of *Polar Waters*, the second release from the Joshua Jaswon Octet, at PizzaExpress Jazz Club on Dean Street. With some time to kill, I grab a drink and take the opportunity to catch up on the day's news, which is dominated by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's announcement that he is ditching key net-zero policies ahead of the next election. It's an apt prelude to the evening, as the music Jaswon wrote for his octet's new album was inspired by contemporary poetry addressing several environmental issues.

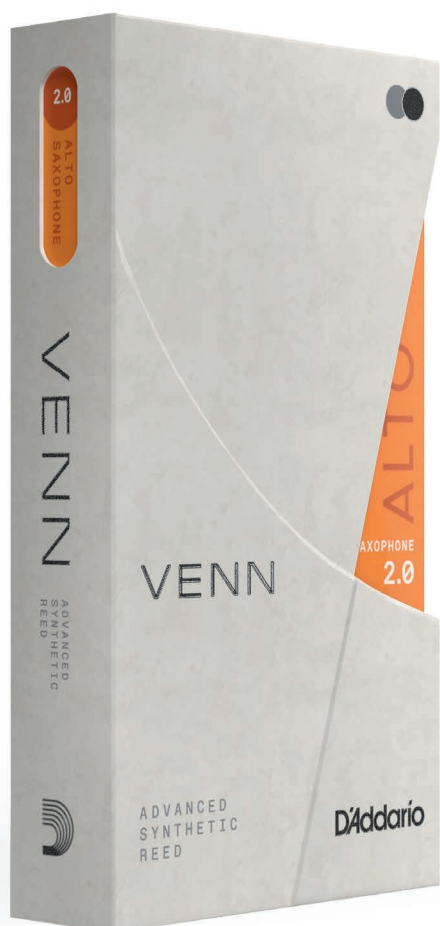
You would think this would be an open-goal for the London-born saxophonist and composer – a chance to remind the sold-out audience why the themes that inspired his compositions are more important than ever. But as the gig progresses in the dimly lit basement (the jazz-club décor somewhat at odds with the hordes of pizzas being served throughout), Jaswon doesn't mention today's headlines, nor even the context behind his music. The compositions are also overwhelmingly joyful; if, unlike me, you hadn't swotted up beforehand, you might not grasp the deep concerns for the natural world that lie behind the music and lyrics sung by Dutch jazz singer Anna Serierse. There is no sense of angst or soapbox – which, as Jaswon reveals, is exactly how he wants it. More on this later.

Brexit to Berlin

A couple of days earlier, Jaswon spoke to me on Zoom from his flat in Berlin, where he moved following the 2016 Brexit referendum. I already knew this, as his website biography rather brazenly opens with a line saying he decided to leave London following the "disastrous consequences" of the UK's decision to leave the EU. "I was extremely disappointed", he says. "I was very anxious and worried about what this showed about the potential direction the country was heading. Everything about it seemed negative to me, particularly in terms of a closing up of people's perspectives and possibilities. Bear in mind, before that moment I was one hundred per cent a Londoner. I thought London is the best city in the world, I never want to leave, this is my home. But the referendum just clicked something in me that thought: actually, I don't have to stay here, I have a choice whether I want to be a direct part of this or not. So this made me want to move, and started looking into different ways of doing that and how best it could contribute to my career as a musician."

For a young musician, a tried-and-tested way of establishing yourself in a new city is to study at the local conservatoire or university. Jaswon already had a jazz bachelor's to his name from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, so decided to audition for the two-year European Jazz Masters (EJAM) – a joint degree programme offered by five of Europe's leading conservatoire jazz departments in Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris and Trondheim. Applicants audition at the school they want to be their 'home' institution – which, in Jaswon's case, was the Jazz Institute Berlin (a joint jazz department covering Berlin's two major conservatoires: the University of the Arts and Hans Eisler School of Music). Students spend their first and fourth semesters at their home institute while the second and third take place at two different schools in the programme, which means each student will have studied at three of the five schools over the two years.

Jaswon is keen to talk about his third semester at the Paris Conservatoire – or, as its officially known, the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. "From a woodwind perspective, those few months in Paris were ➡



D'ADDARIO VENN REEDS

Bb clarinet £31.90, alto saxophone

£31.90, tenor saxophone £34.90

Available from daddario.com

It has been exciting few years in the reed market with the development of more synthetic reeds available for players and D'Addario is pushing forward its innovative VENN reeds. This is a new line of synthetic reeds that claim to combine the stability and longevity of plastic with the sound and feel of cane. They are available for clarinet and saxophone in various strengths, and I have been testing them for the past few months on both instruments to see how they do in various playing environments.

First up I tested the VENN reeds for the Bb clarinet and was immediately impressed with the response. Quick and instant, the VENN reed has the sharp response you would get from the "good" cane reed. In a box of 10, I tend to average about 6 that have good response and what you get with the VENN is that good responsive reed that you hope for. It is instant and consistent across the different registers.

The reed produces a rounded sound, a little on the brighter side for me, which I liked for some show work, but after some experimentation, I found the VENN to work best when paired with the D'Addario reserve mouthpiece. It didn't seem to have the best relationship with the Vandoren BD5 but the M30 and B45 worked well and were a close second to the D'Addario reserve.

gear

GEAR REVIEW

Moving over to the saxophone reeds, the consistency and responsiveness is also present on both the alto and tenor reeds. What was more prevalent in the saxophone line is the how close the sound is to the cane. The VENN reeds capture the warm and full sound we are most familiar with from the D'Addario Organic Reserve reeds. If you are unfamiliar with the organic series, make sure to try them out.

Across all the reeds, I did find them to be ever so slightly stronger than suggested on the reed chart so it might be worth taking that into consideration – however don't worry too much as this is where D'Addario is really upping its game with the introduction of the VENN alternate strength programme. When trying new reeds, it's usually a hit-and-miss game and we just try different strengths until we find the right one. This can be an expensive experiment and put people off – especially students – from trialling plastic reeds. The return programme removes that worry and makes trying these reeds more accessible. D'Addario states that if you find the reed you purchased is either too hard or too soft, you can complete an online form and, after providing proof of purchase, you can receive a new strength of VENN completely free of charge. There's no requirement to ship back the VENN reed you purchased either.

Another thing to note is the feeling of the reed. The VENN is an advanced synthetic reed constructed of polymer fibers, resin, and natural cane elements. Unlike other synthetic reeds, the VENN design is based on reverse-engineering the internal structures of cane itself. D'Addario states "To mimic the organic structure of cane, we layered different strengths of polymer fibers with resin and organic reed elements to make up the reed blank." To their credit, the VENN is the most realistic-feeling plastic reed I have come across. The polymer fibres and the natural cane elements does make the reed feel closer to the feel of an organic cane reed. As with all plastic reed, it's a plug-and-play without the need to wet the reed, a habit that will take a while to stop. In addition to this, you can adjust the VENN reeds like cane reeds and even do some light sanding to help. Personally, I don't tend to do too much adjusting with reeds, life is too short, but if you need to, you can try sanding. However D'Addario does state: "While typical cane reed modifications may be helpful for VENN, musicians should anticipate differences in how the reed responds to changes made by hand," so proceed with caution.

As with most reeds, there is a lifetime on the VENN reeds and D'Addario expect them to last between three and six months. Whilst I have been playing these for a few months, I am not noticing any changes or diminishing in performance. Overall, the VENN reeds are a great addition to the exciting plastic reed market and well worth exploring if you haven't yet ventured into plastic.

Berdel Efe Gulsen

