

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

Jazz at the Blue Lamp

(performers in reverse order)

Joseph Long, Ian Milne, Peter Collins, Gordon Cooper,
Adam Auchie, Imogene Newland

Sunday 21st May 2017

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Sunday afternoon's Jazz at the Blue Lamp featuring performers who are teachers or pupils of NESMS was a special treat. I am reviewing the performers in reverse order because although every one was special, the two who played in the second half were absolutely phenomenal.

Joseph Long and Ian Milne come from quite different sectors of the jazz piano spectrum. Joseph Long is a uniquely talented classically trained piano virtuoso while Ian Milne, also a brilliant piano technician is a lifelong jazz-man whose knowledge of the jazz piano repertoire and all its diverse styles is second to none. Both performers gave us something for us to treasure in their performances.

George Gershwin developed his talent as a composer and song plugger in America's Tin Pan Alley but before his early death he had become a composer of piano classics and opera. Was he a jazz-man? You will find different opinions on that. Some jazz purists would say no but Porgy and Bess or Rhapsody in Blue are admired by many jazz enthusiasts and so many of Gershwin's individual tunes are top of the list among what are regarded as jazz standards. We heard several of these today. When he composed Rhapsody in Blue, Gershwin was bringing his strongly jazz influenced musical background into the world of classical music, the world of the piano concerto. I myself had the honour of knowing a gentleman, Dr Paul Peck, who played violin in the Paul Whiteman orchestra in the very first performance of Rhapsody in Blue. Dr Peck also appeared in the orchestra in the film 'King of Jazz' in which you can see Gershwin playing part of the piece. If you google Gershwin, King of Jazz you will see a very strange performance indeed but it is worth a look.

Joseph Long decided to play his own version of the piece in which he combined the piano and orchestral parts in a single seamless performance. I cannot think of any words that can describe what we saw as well as heard from Joseph in the Blue Lamp on Sunday. I expected the piano to explode or at least burst into flames by the end of Joseph's performance. Was this jazz or was it classical. Whatever it was, it was terrific. What else can I say except wow! Oh wow!

Ian Milne said that his name is not an exciting jazz performers name. Well Ian, it is now! Bill Evans is not an exciting name either but in the world of jazz piano, Bill Evans is surely an exciting name. Ian Milne's performance was a delight not just for his playing but for the fascinating stories he told us about the backgrounds to some of the pieces he played. The question of names came up before his first piece 'Fly Me To The Moon' which had originally been a slow waltz before Frank Sinatra asked its composer to change it into an up tempo piece in 4\4 time.

The composer's original name was Edward Chester Babcock before he changed it to Jimmy Van Heusen – named after a shirt he was wearing at the time. The rest is history!

All the pieces that Ian played really swung and that according to a friend, Sandy MacDonald, who is a real jazz enthusiast is the fundamental acid test of a jazz musician. Ian passed the test with all colours flying. He played a couple of George Shearing classics, a delightful version of 'Somewhere' from West Side Story with absolutely delicious chords. 'Someone to Watch Over Me' was another Gershwin classic in the style of the late Muncie Angus, an amazing jazz pianist from Aberdeen's past. There was a Gaelic Air of unknown title transformed by jazz chording and finally a glorious up-tempo version of 'Autumn Leaves'.

The last player in the first half of the concert was a fascinating young player who gave us a whole bouquet of short jazz piano pieces. This was Peter Collins. His generous set included 'Take The A Train' and his best piece, a slow number called, I think, 'So Long'.

Gordon Cooper's set included 'A Child is Born', 'The Continental' and a song entitled 'Blame it on my Youth'. Gordon sang as well as played this piece, something I absolutely cannot do. His playing was clean and clear, relaxing to listen to and he has a very attractive singing voice.

Young Adam Auchie gave a fine performance of several great jazz standards including 'I Got Rhythm' (Gershwin again) and 'September in the Rain' with splendid tempo changes. I felt that Adam really got into the spirit of his music. Sandy MacDonald would have said, "Now you has jazz – because this young man's playing really swung!"

First off was another really talented pianist Imogene Newland. She played 'Georgia On My Mind' by the great Hoagy Carmichael another creator of numerous jazz standards along with 'Over the Rainbow' and 'Little Girl Blue'. Her arrangements were all the work of the great Oscar Peterson the great Canadian classically trained jazz pianist. Duke Ellington dubbed him "the Maharaja of the keyboard". Well, you don't get better than that and Imogene captured the full range of his wonderfully ornamental keyboard work to perfection. Well done Imogene!

I only decided to come to the jazz afternoon at the last moment because I was preparing to psych myself up to drive out to Stonehaven for the Stonehaven Chorus Concert in the evening. I hate driving out that road. I'm so glad I came to the jazz afternoon. I cannot remember when I have enjoyed a concert so much. Thank you NESMS!