

Not too many musicians can claim 65 years as a professional, but that is something saxophonist Tommy Whittle must be proud of - and he is still active. The amiable and quietly-spoken Scot, who left his home country at age 16 to pursue a career in music, has been one of the class acts in British jazz, appreciated by the fans without ever becoming a household name. Soon after leaving his teen years behind he joined the great Ted Heath band to replace Ronnie Scott on tenor sax. Since then he has been a bandleader, important member of the BBC Show Band and BBC Big Band, spent many hours as a studio session player, and has been much in demand as a soloist at clubs and concert venues in this country and overseas. I well remember my first visit to Banbury Jazz Club, where Tommy gave a top performance

with the John Patrick Trio and also just a few years ago when he was again the star attraction. Now aged 81 but looking and sounding years younger he was in fine form at a recent concert where he shared the stage with his wife, singer Barbara Jay, and Buckinghamshire's Martin Hart trio. His playing style shows the influences of Lester Young and Stan Getz, rather than the more robust sounds of Coleman Hawkins, for example, and he offered a fairly predictable, but never the less satisfying programme of familiar tunes together with a few less well known items such as Michel Legrand's 'Watch What Happens' and 'Sugar' by American saxophonist Stanley Turrentine; this latter number was played with more 'edge' than on the recording Whittle made some 15 years ago. There was a good selection of items linked to Duke Ellington with Barbara providing a superb vocal part to 'Satin Doll'. A high spot was a joyous coupling together of the Bossa Novas 'Desafinado' and 'Girl From Ipanema' and some great up-tempo work on 'How High The Moon' and 'Lester Leaps In'. Pianist Ken McCarthy had the audience

Jazz Notes

with Mick Day

enthralled by his swinging improvisations on the latter. Tommy's warm sounds on ballads provided a contrast and Barbara delivered a treat with 'Stompin, At The Savoy'. This is a number which in my view can often be played too fast and I was pleased to hear this rendition taken at about the right pace: indeed Tommy confessed that he preferred to play it faster but he was always overruled by 'she who must be obeyed'. The evening drew to a close with a swinging 'Take The A Train', but the audience demanded more and were rewarded with a tremendous 'Now's The Time', one of Dizzy Gillespie's classic compositions. This month Jay and Whittle are taking time out to visit South Africa. Barbara admitted to me, however, that they would be working during their stay. I wonder if they have a bit of energy to pass in my direction!

In the current edition of one of the national jazz magazines, journalists, organisers and other pundits are asked for their tips on up and coming musicians. Alex Webb from London's Barbican recommends Midlands' trumpeter Bryan Corbett (who has been around for a while now!) and also young trumpeter and singer Sue Richardson. He notes she has a big-toned and melodic style of playing. I go along

with his view on Sue's trumpet and flugel horn work,

based on my hearing of her recent album 'Emergence'

(Splash Point SPR006CD). She treats the listener to 14 tracks, on half of which Sue also provides the vocals. In contrast to her instrumental sounds her voice a times has a brittle touch, but despite this she clearly has much to offer and is a talented musician. Her composing skills are well to the fore (all but two

of the numbers are

from her pen) although a couple more standard tunes might have given a better balance to the disc. That said, this is overall a good album with excellent support from the backing quartet, especially Andy Drudy on guitars and pianist Neal Richardson. It gets under way with a lovely version of the Burke/Van Heusen song 'It can happen to you' and that big tone is evident in the title number 'Emergence'. 'I just can't help myself' has an infectious rhythm which is obviously influenced by the time Sue spent in Cuba, 'Old Sam Jones' is something of a fun song with some excellent piano work, and the up tempo 'Spare Ribs' is a great outing for both trumpet and guitar. There is sheer beauty in the mellow sound of the flugel horn in Sue's ballad composition 'Winter' and the other standard tune on the album, 'Dearly beloved', is taken in a relaxed way with some good vocal work. Sue had the privilege of leading a quartet in the opening gig of the recent London Jazz Festival. We now need an enterprising promoter in the Four Shires area to offer Sue a booking. There aren't too many quality female trumpeter/vocalists around.

Banbury's Veritas Wine Bar (01295 224890) is the latest venue in this area to offer jazz. This month sees London based singer Zena James performing on Sunday 20th from 1.30 to 4.00. She is supported by Geoff Castle on keyboard and Mark Hodgson, bass. Castle is a past member of some notable outfits, including Nucleus, Paz and the Ronnie Scott Band. Popular South African singer Esther Miller takes her quintet to Steeple Aston Village Hall (01869 340423) on 19th. The White Swan in Stratford (01789 298607) has an attractive listing for its weekly Sunday evening gigs. Brian Corbett, mentioned above, leads his quintet with special guest star Alan Barnes on 6th; guitarists Luis d'Agostino and Pete Oxley take the 13th slot; Luca Lucian Duo feature on 20th and bass player Tom Hill's Quartet back trumpeter Dick Pearce on 27th. The Stables, Wavendon, (01908 280800) brings singer/pianist Liane Carroll to North Bucks on 22nd, but lovers of Latin music might want to get to the venue on 8th for the Sarah Bennett Bossa trio. Also at The Stables, French violinist Stephan Grappelli is remembered on 25th with Chris Garrick on violin together with John Horler (piano), Alec Dankworth (bass) and Alan Ganley (drums).

