

## **Adventures En Route to A Jazz Education - How Larry Stabbins Changed My World**

My first experience of live jazz was at the Philharmonic Pub in Liverpool.

The Phil, as it was known, was and still is situated on the corner of Hope Street and Hardman Street, diagonally across the road from the Philharmonic Concert Hall and a stone's throw from what was then Liverpool College of Art. This was where John Lennon learnt to rock and roll, while next door to the Hall, the Everyman Theatre was making waves in regional theatre.

Among the red brick Georgian terraces of Hope Street in an era where the pubs shut at half past ten, there also lurked various basement clubs, like the Casablanca, where actors, poets and bands hung out once they'd come off stage or done a gig.

This was Liverpool bohemia writ large.

The Phil, or the Philharmonic Dining Rooms to give it its formal name, was built between 1898 and 1900, said by some local legends to have been at the behest of a local millionaire wanting somewhere to house his actress mistress. It consists of a large bar in a 'foyer' area, with two rooms, the Brahms and Liszt flanking a large central room called the Grande.

As classy as the Victoriana of the Phil was, both inside and out, it was a big part of the late 1970s, early 1980s Liverpool. This was despite, and perhaps because of, its award winning marble toilets.

On Monday and Tuesday nights, in the Grande Room of the Phil, there was jazz on, featuring the likes of Harold Salisbury's Free Parking and other groups I'd never heard of.

As the name suggests, the Grande was a big room with chairs laid out and a makeshift stage area at one end of the room in front of a fireplace, where the bands played.

A couple of my mates from youth club started going down some nights, and I started going with them.

I was intrigued, as much by the names as anything, and other than seeing Glenn Miller and Louis Armstrong on old black and white films on the telly, I knew nothing about jazz.

As an artform, jazz seemed to keep its distance, with a cliched and easily satirised image of bearded men in suits blowing into saxophones and trumpets like their lives depended on it, using their instruments like weapons to keep the mainstream at bay.

But these were the early days of Channel 4, when on a Friday night you could watch two hour concerts in full by a cryptic but still cool looking Miles Davis. This was the period when he'd spend most of the show with his back on the audience, barely touching his trumpet while his band played a funky stew that was neither rock or jazz, but some weird hybrid which, flattened out on the small screen, didn't seem to make much sense.

This was the sort of electric fusion that you'd get at the Phil on Monday and Tuesday nights, played by what looked to my teenage self like middle aged men with moustaches wielding electric keyboards and fret-less basses which under-scored sunny saxophone riffs that matched the sun shining through the Phil's big windows perfectly.

In a Liverpool where a post-punk wave of pseudo-psychedelic bands like Echo and the Bunnymen and the Teardrop Explodes were all the rage with the hip kids, the jazz gigs at the Phil didn't seem to fit at all.

You couldn't read about the likes of Harold Salisbury's Free Parking and other acts that played the Phil in the then all pervasive, all powerful music papers at the time, and while I heard mention of people like Miles and Stanley Clarke and Weather Report, I had no frame of reference and no context for it at all.

The only place you could read about the jazz at the Phil was in a column in a local free-sheet called Merseymart.

As the name suggests, Merseymart was a local version of Exchange and Mart, and was largely made up of pages of classified ads from people selling fridge freezers and other domestic goods, which, in a pre internet, pre Gumtree age, was the only way of doing these things.

The only things other than the ads I remember were a series of short comic stories written in Scouse dialogue, and the jazz column.

The column was written by a man called Alan Graham, who I recognised from his by-line photo as presumably being the promoter who stood up at the end of the second set of the jazz gigs at the Phil to introduce each member of the band in turn. After that, while the band did their encore, a large wooden tray would be passed around to collect money like you would do in church.

As he introduced each member of the band, Alan Graham would give a brief sound-bite of appreciation, using phrases to describe the likes of Harold Salisbury, who played soprano sax and flute, as 'a real musician's musician' and such-like. Then he'd announce the name of the band who'd be playing next week.

Phrases like 'a real musician's musician' cropped up in Alan Graham's Merseymart column as well, and he used it with such frequency at the Phil that, as a bunch of under-age scallies with no knowledge of jazz, we thought it was hilarious.

But something stuck, and even though Merseymart was desperately uncool, it was a lifeline, and I started looking forward to it plopping through our letterbox every Wednesday afternoon.

In his column, Alan Graham's wrote about jazz in a way I couldn't read anywhere else.

It wasn't necessarily great writing in the way I thought the stuff I was reading in NME and Sounds was, but it was informative, and he clearly knew his stuff.

He also gave you listings at the end, telling you what jazz was on at the Phil and elsewhere – like Chauffeur's, another basement club on Hope Street, which I went to once – over the next couple of weeks.

This was more than any other paper was doing.

Not just in the NME and Sounds, which were all about hyping up non-existent regional post-punk scenes, but locally as well.

I don't remember ever reading about jazz in the Liverpool Echo, which was the city's 'proper' newspaper, and maybe they were reviewed in the Daily Post, which was the Echo's morning equivalent, but we never got that, so I don't know.

And any local music fanzines, like the similarly named Mersey Sound – a serious sense of place and being at the centre of your own universe was always a matter of pride in Liverpool – might have had the occasional jazz column down the side of an interview with the latest next big thing, but that was your lot.

Anything that did appear seemed to be written, not from informed insider knowledge by fans steeped in the music the way all the post-punk indie-pop scenesters were. It was more written from the point of view of a curious onlooker, who quite liked the novelty of hearing something different to a bunch of boys with bad haircuts playing guitars, but who, like me and my mates at the Phil, had no frame of reference and didn't really get it.

It was the same in the clubs.

There were 'jazz nights', but these were usually retro-styled party bands doing covers of 1940s style dance-floor stompers for the cool kids who had maybe seen the same Glenn Miller and Louis Armstrong movies as I had.

Things, however, were changing.

Punk and post-punk had briefly opened up a window where in terms of influences, anything went.

Dub reggae, funk and now even jazz was being thrown into a mix which would later sire Hip Hop, and which we now took for granted.

James Blood Ulmer released a record on Rough Trade, London's ultimate DIY label, and bands like the Pop Group were name-checking the likes of Don Cherry and Ornette Coleman, and mixing up John Coltrane and Roland Kirk in a Bristol club called the Dug Out.

It was from here which would eventually spring Massive Attack, Don Cherry's step-daughter Neneh Cherry, and, eventually, Portishead.

When the Pop Group split into various offshoots, I went to see Rip, Rig and Panic, who named themselves after a Roland Kirk number, and who produced a manic stew of free jazz skronk and piano work-outs, some of which included vocals from Neneh Cherry.

I went to see them at a club called the Warehouse, and it was a revelation, although someone who knows about these things said that, compared to Don Cherry and the rest, they had no chops.

Another Pop Group offshoot, Pigbag, took a horn-led riff called Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag into the charts.

Within a year or so, what would soon be called the style press had picked up on another trend.

In London, a new jazz dance scene had started happening at a place called the Wag Club, and more and more bands were incorporating jazz and latin rhythms into their sound in a way that would eventually form a part of what would become known as World Music.

There was the likes of Dave Bitelli's Onward International, and Rough Trade released the first single by a band called Weekend.

This was a trio that featured vocalist Alison Statton from Young Marble Giants, who sang with guitarists Spike and Simon Booth, along with a low key horn section from people like trumpeter Harry Beckett and a saxophone player called Larry Stabbins.

I knew Harry Beckett's name because he'd played on Robert Wyatt's version of Caimanara, a single that was released on Rough Trade, and which was compiled along with Wyatt's other Rough Trade singles on his Nothing Can stop us album.

Weekend's sound on their first single, The View From Her Room, was a wispy sort of cool that leant towards a nouvelle vague image of coffee bars and French cigarettes. After the abrasive clatter of early records on Rough Trade, Weekend's chic pastoral approximations of bossa nova beats and Astrid Gilberto style understatement was tastefully infectious.

Weekend only made one studio album, La Variete, which featured Larry Stabbins quite a lot.

In keeping with the 'idea' of jazz as a style, Weekend also released a live album, which was recorded at Ronnie Scott's and, as well as Stabbins, featured a pianist called Keith Tippett.

The Face magazine ran features on this alleged new scene, and, fired up by my adventures at the Phil, I decided I wanted more than what the Merseymart could offer.

One of my mates who I went to the Phil with seemed to know about jazz.

He played saxophone in the school band, and his family had a piano in the front room.

He also had loads of cassettes, on which he'd taped snatches of records he'd got from the library – Woody Herman, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker – all these exotic sounding names of people who might never be pop stars, but who sure as hell were musicians musicians.

But who they were, where had they come from, and in what order they had appeared on whatever scene they were part of, I had no idea.

I was clamouring for context, and my mate also had various books published by the Observer, which were wonderful little pocket guides of various worldly artefacts, whether it was birds, cathedrals or manned spaceflight.

For the anally retentive, the Observer's books were a pre-Wikipedia fact-checkers delight.

And I remember flicking through the Observer's Book of Jazz, which on each page had little biographies of everyone from Duke Ellington through to Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane and beyond.

And I remember going through it while my mate was playing one of his low attention span cassette tapes and not really getting anything, and being so frustrated because I wanted to know, but didn't know where to find out these things.

Only Merseymart, the Observer's Book of Jazz and now the Face seemed to have a clue.

“I WANT A JAZZ EDUCATION!” I screamed. “HOW DO I GET A JAZZ EDUCATION?”

And my mate looked at me like I'd flipped, lent me a couple of tapes – one of which turned out to be Return to Forever by Chick Corea - and packed me off on what was the beginning of a quest for a jazz education that I've probably been on ever since.

At my nights at the Phil, inbetween Harold Salisbury's Free Parking and all the rest, I'd started noticing some of the posters on the wall.

In those days posters was the way you found out about things, whether they were fly-posted onto makeshift red-brick would-be billboards in the cooler parts of town, or else on the walls of record shops like Probe.

Probe was the meeting place for all the local scenesters, and was a stone's throw from Matthew Street, where the Beatles had made an old jazz club called the Cavern world famous in the sixties, and where another club called Eric's had done something similar with the new wave of cartoon post-punk styled bands.

Eric's also had a jazz night, and before he started putting stuff on at the Phil, Alan Graham – who worked in an insurance office by day - had promoted jazz at the Cavern in the pre Merseybeat era.

But in those days posters were everywhere, and the Phil being a jazz pub, at least on Mondays and Tuesdays, there were posters for other like-minded stuff that was happening around town.

George Melly seemed to be a regular on the posters, as did a band called Supercharge.

But there were others, mainly for gigs at a place called the Bradford Hotel, which was a dark looking old-school hotel on the business end of the city centre, and which I knew from getting the bus from outside, because it was quite near the careers office.

And these posters for gigs at the Bradford Hotel, were for exotic sounding artists like Dudu Pukwana, John Stevens, and other names that weren't in the Observer's Book of Jazz.

Unless you were a regular at these nights at the Bradford Hotel, this was probably the only way of finding out about them, because there was nowhere to read about them, even though jazz, or an approximation of it in all its black polo necked glory, was now the style mags favourite.

I never took a chance on Dudu Pukwana or John Stevens, but after all those Monday and Tuesday nights at the Phil, and still hungry for a jazz education, it was inevitable I would move on to the hard stuff.

That came when I saw a poster for a show at the Bradford Hotel by the Larry Stabbins Quintet.

This was brilliant.

After Weekend had come to an end, Simon Booth and Larry Stabbins had formed a new outfit called Working Week.

This had come not only on the back of the jazz dance wave, but on a wave of protest that had grown up in the wake of Thatcherism, and which was given voice by music that was both oppositional and multi-cultural in its range of influences.

Working Week's first single was dedicated to the people of Chile, and was called Venceremos.

As well as Simon Booth and Larry Stabbins, Venceremos also featured Harry Beckett on trumpet and flugel horn, trombonist Annie Whitehead, Onward International clarinettist Dave Bitelli and pianist Kim Burton.

Vocals were split between Chilean singer Claudia Figueroa. Robert Wyatt and Tracey Thorn of Everything But the Girl.

Everything But the Girl were one of the bands who'd picked up on the whole nouveau jazz thing, and had released a version of Cole Porter's Night and Day played so it sounded like they were on the Parisian Left Bank circa '68 by way of a bed-sit in Hull.

Venceremos was swas released on Paladin Records, a Virgin backed jazz imprint run by jazz DJ Paul Murphy, and was so cool that it was released as a 'jazz dance special 12" edition' as well as the more regular '7" bossa version.'

The second Working Week single, Storm of Light, featured vocalist Julie Tippetts, the creative and personal partner of pianist Keith Tippett.

The Face loved both records, and Working Week were everywhere.

Which is why, when I saw a poster for the Larry Stabbins Quintet, I thought I'd go along and hear some light latin based jazz dance bossa nova with a campaigning political edge.

I couldn't be more wrong.

Because, in the dark and tiny basement of the Bradford Hotel, the Larry Stabbins Quintet blared out one of the most intense displays of free jazz I have ever heard.

As I remember it, of the other four people tucked into the corner of the room on the same level as the small audience sat on the fixed benches around the bar, there was a drummer, a percussionist, a bassist and one other, either a trumpeter or a second sax player.

At least two of these were dressed in extravagant African robes, and with hats that could have been poached from Sun Ra's Arkestra.

Again, as I remember it, the sound the Larry Stabbins Quintet made at such close proximity was a relentless barrage of horns and drums that seemed to stomp all over my expected notions of right-on latin work-outs.

It was like nothing I had ever heard before, and after a few minutes I remember my jaw dropping in shock at exactly how wrong I'd got it.

By the end of all this I was both exhausted and elated.

My jazz education had just moved up a grade.

Except, the next day, none of the papers were raving about what I'd just witnessed.

There were no reviews, not even in Merseymart, and nor were there any howls of outrage at such a glorious cacophony.

I had no idea who the rest of the Larry Stabbins Quintet were, and I still don't.

I suspect one of them may have been Louis Moholo, but only because I've got an album by Stabbins and Moholo with Keith Tippett that was recorded around the same time as I saw the Larry Stabbins Quintet, and I couldn't swear to it.

Neither, as it turned out much much later, could Larry Stabbins.

I'd started thinking about this when I saw Stabbins play with Jerry Dammers' Spatial AKA Orchestra, and after I'd started listening in earnest to that generation of British based jazz players who I'd first discovered through listening to Weekend.

Keith Tippett had become particular favourite, and I'd seen him play a few times – in Edinburgh with Andy Sheppard, in Glasgow with Raymond MacDonald and George Burt, and, later, in London with Julie Tippetts, first at the Vortex, then at Cafe Oto with a much younger biggish band.

I could pick up records too by Harry Beckett and Annie Whitehead, even though Paladin had long gone.

But other than the Working Week records, Larry Stabbins didn't seem to have the same profile.

As part of my jazz education, I contacted Larry Stabbins on social media, and asked him if he remembered playing the Bradford Hotel in Liverpool in 1984 with the Larry Stabbins Quintet, and if so, who were the rest of the band, and was it ever recorded or released?

To his credit, after 18 months, after I'd completely forgotten about sending my random request, Larry got back to me.

He said that the woman who'd been the secretary of the jazz club who'd put the gig on had ended up becoming his wife, and that they'd both been racking their brains to try and remember who was in the band.

Larry suggested a few names it might have been, and I suggested a few others, but neither myself, Larry or the promoter who became his wife could come up with anything definitive.

Now, I still have every message from my brief correspondence with Larry Stabbins, and I can access it in an instant.

But what a shame that there's no record of that gig by the Larry Stabbins Quintet at the Bradford Hotel in Liverpool.

Not only is there no recording, but because there is no archive, and no review of it written down anywhere, not in the Face or NME, and possibly not even a listing in Merseymart, that gig has been wiped from the annals.

And it's the same for all those names on the posters for the Bradford Hotel on the wall of the Phil, and even for all those gigs by Harold Salisbury's Free Parking at the Phil itself.

It's like they never happened.

I only went along to one other Bradford Hotel gig.

That was to see Harry Beckett perform his Pictures of You album, which was either about to be or just had been released on Paladin Records.

The gig was in a different room, which was upstairs, and was much brighter.

The room was also big enough to accommodate a local youth jazz orchestra, who accompanied Harry Beckett on the performance, fleshing out his compositions' already lovely musical reflections.

By this time I'd picked up a copy of a magazine in WH Smiths called The Wire.

I'd seen the Wire before, but had never bought a copy, because I'd never heard of anyone who was in it.

But this particular copy had a picture of Annie Whitehead on the cover, and inside there were pieces on Whitehead, on Harry Beckett, and on Paladin Records as well.

And I thought, at last, here's something that isn't the Observer's Book of Jazz, but is about things that are happening now.

It seemed to be doing it differently than the Face were doing it, this magazine called the Wire.

It wasn't written by curious onlookers, but by people who seemed to know what they were talking about in the way that Alan Graham did.

And even though the NME released a jazz compilation called Night People as part of its series of mail order only cassettes, they still didn't really write about it the way the Wire did, which took both itself and its subjects seriously.

Much later on, I discovered that there'd been another magazine in the 1970s called Impetus, which was doing something similar with that generation of British based players.

There were interviews in Impetus with Keith Tippett and articles on Henry Cow and even This Heat, and through finding all that, and through that copy of the Wire with Annie Whitehead on the cover, and through going to see Larry Stabbins and Harry Beckett, my jazz education was getting better, and I began to be able to start joining the dots between all these things.

And somewhere in the midst of all this, I heard John Coltrane's A Love Supreme for the first time in the bedroom of a tatty student flat with the lights off while my senses were heightened by a Class C narcotic in a deeply self-conscious fashion, as if I'd stumbled on the musical holy grail.

Not long after that I read what P.J. O'Rourke said about smoking marijuana, which was something along the lines of how he briefly understood modern jazz and then fell asleep, but at least he was writing about it.

Fast forward now a couple of years, and I'm living in Edinburgh, just across the road from the Queen's Hall.

And that's great, because every Friday night there's a jazz gig in there, and with your dole card it's only four quid to get in.

I'm a bit cautious at first, because my jazz education's reached something of an impasse since I moved away.

The first Queens Hall show I went to was by a sax player called Charlie Rouse, who I knew nothing about, and if I'm honest I still don't, although I remember reading somewhere that he played with Thelonius Monk.

And it was nice, because there were tables in the middle of the hall, and if you went with the atmosphere while you were sitting there, you could imagine it's the sort of jazz club you always imagined jazz clubs should be like.

The next jazz gig at the Queens Hall I went to was by Courtney Pine.

It was very different to the Charlie Rouse show, because Courtney Pine is 22, and the papers and the Sunday magazines are talking him up as the next big thing, and suddenly there's a new new wave of jazz musicians coming up on the back of him.

At that time, Courtney Pine was dressing like he seemed to think a jazz saxophonist should dress, in a big retro styled suit, like he was looking to Charlie Parker or John Coltrane from pictures in the magazines the same way his music was trying to do for his records.

And there was a lot of hype about Courtney Pine's first album, *Journey to the Urge Within*, some of which sounded great live when he played it, even though it was quite smooth.

There was a track on the album I liked called *Children of the Ghetto*, which I realised much later had been written and released by the Liverpool soul band, *The Real Thing*.

Courtney Pine started off well at the Queens Hall, and everyone wanted him to do well, because they'd probably read about this new wave jazz revival type thing, and they liked all the media hype, because that's what the media are good at when it suits them.

But for me at least, about half way through the night, Courtney Pine seemed to run out of ideas, and I got a bit bored, even though I didn't understand why.

A few weeks later, I went back to the Queens Hall, this time to see Wayne Shorter.

As soon as Wayne Shorter started playing, I understood why I got bored watching Courtney Pine.

It was because, like me, Courtney Pine was still getting his jazz education, and, maybe like Rip, Rig and Panic, he had no chops yet.

Sure, he could play, and he had the confidence and the attitude and the hype, all of that, but he wasn't quite ready yet to take on the world, or at least the Queens Hall bit of it, in the way that Wayne Shorter did.

But again, there didn't seem to be anywhere I could read about any of this that I was aware of, certainly not in Scotland.

There would be the occasional piece in the paper on Loose Tubes, or whatever new kids on the block were riding the wave of this media hyped up new jazz revival, but that was all.

There were plenty of Queens Hall shows I missed, by Dollar Brand or Carla Bley, and they'd be interviewed for the Herald or the Scotsman by great writers like Rob Adams, who's still doing it today, or Kenny Mathieson, both of whom helped with my jazz education.

I went to see Art Blakey late incarnation of the Jazz Messengers, and stupidly went to the toilet during his drum solo.

There were others I saw, like Marilyn Crispell with – I think – Lol Coxhill playing solo as support, and then later there was Keith Tippett and Andy Sheppard, and Stan Tracey's Hexad, and James Blood Ulmer playing with a trio.

In 1988 there was a mini season that opened with Don Cherry's Nu, which featured Brazilian percussionist Nana Vasconcelas in the band, and which seemed to be a step on from all that World Music which had opened out a few years before.

The next month Cecil Taylor played solo, and the month after that, an Indian group called Peshkar played, who were pretty much Shakti with Larry Coryell playing guitar instead of John McGlaughlin.

My jazz education was coming on fine, but apart from Rob Adams and Kenny Mathieson, but it still felt like there was nowhere I could read about it all.

There was no dedicated jazz or new music publication that I was aware of in Scotland, just as there still isn't one now.

The major record label big bucks backing for things like Paladin Records was long gone by now, and I suppose it was the same for any kind of Scotland wide publication for what was already a niche market, and which simply couldn't survive without the advertising.

That's what's happened to most dedicated music magazines in Scotland, and that's a shame.

Because I don't know if any of those Queens Hall gigs were recorded or reviewed, but if they weren't, and if there's no record of them in the way there isn't of the Larry Stabbins Quintet or any of the other Bradford Hotel gigs, or if there's no kind of academic archive somewhere, then that's those gigs lost forever.

At least I still have the posters for the shows by Don Cherry, Cecil Taylor and Peshkar, and they're works of art in their own right, but if no-one can hear them or read about them, that's a tragedy.

Conversely, it's also a brilliant piece of myth-making, in which, through the lack of any kind of record, may be making the gigs I saw at the Phil, the Bradford Hotel and the Queen's Hall sound better or worse than they actually were.

That's what happens when you write things down.

It's never quite how it was.

But that's okay.

Print the myth.

Fast forward again a few years to the 1990s, and in Edinburgh, in Tollcross, Henry's Cellar Bar has become Kulu's Jazz Cellar, where every weekend the place is packed with a young crowd filling up the tiny dance-floor while a whole array of hip hop acts and jazz funk bands play.

These jazz funk combos aren't like the old guys with moustaches who used to play the Phil.

These are a new breed who've come up from the grassroots of Edinburgh's club scenes, and are playing without any kind of hype.

Kulu, who runs the place, is a long haired guy from Hong Kong, who DJs and loves his jazz with a passion.

Kulu liked the mythology of jazz as well.

That's probably why he started the club in a tiny basement like Henry's.

On the wall of Henry's Kulu put up some of the few reviews the acts who play Henry's have had.

They weren't big profiles or anything, just little reviews in the Evening News of all places, but Kulu liked them a lot.

There were a couple of reviews up on the wall that I'd written, and I was down at Henry's a lot now, because Kulu gave me a gold coloured pass in the shape of a credit card, which meant I could get in any night for free.

Kulu turned to me one night when he was looking at the reviews on the wall. "All the funky writers come to Henry's," he says. "It's like Greenwich Village."

"No, Kulu," I said back. "It's like Lothian Road."

But I got his point.

The reviews mattered to him.

They were an acknowledgement that Kulu and everyone who played at Henry's had made something happen, and that there was a record of it, and by going down there as one of Kulu's 'funky writers', I was bearing witness to it somehow.

Things changed, and I don't know what happened, but I think Kulu maybe fell out with Henry, who the club was named after, and who ran the restaurant upstairs that used the same toilets as the club, and Kulu opened up in a place in the West End that used to be some kind of strip club or something.

I never went there, but it didn't seem to last, and I heard that Kulu moved back to Hong Kong.

The last time I saw Kulu was when for some reason I found myself in Waterstone's flicking through the Time Out guide to Hong Kong, and there was a picture of Kulu in full flow behind the decks at some nightclub or other, one of Hong Kong's top DJs.

Such, it seems, is the power of the press.

Back in Henry's, without Kulu, a more formal set of promotions were set up, and Harry Beckett played there with Raymond MacDonald and George Burt's Quartet.

A few years earlier, there'd been a mad weekend at Theatre Workshop in Stockbridge, with the likes of Derek Bailey and Evan Parker playing.

And for me, that had set the tone for a lot of things to come, especially since the Friday nights at the Queens Hall had dried up.

Much later I started going to GIOFest, which brought the likes of Keith Tippett and Julie Tippetts – who I hadn't heard since Weekend and Working Week – to Glasgow, and by this time things had really started opening out in experimental music, not just in Scotland, but all over.

In Scotland at least, these festivals started getting decent press coverage, or as much as there could be in an increasingly cash strapped print media.

A few weeks ago I passed over a 35 year old poetry magazine called New Departures to Niall Greig Fulton, one of the programmers at Edinburgh International Film Festival.

There was a season of Tom's work as a poet and playwright at the Festival, which also took stock of Tom's role as a jazz pianist and fan by curating a concert by Tommy Smith, which featured actor Tam Dean Burn reading Tom's poetry over it.

If anyone knew Tom, you'll know he was as Jazz as it gets, and there are all these stories about Tom in the 60s hanging out with Alex Trocchi and RD Laing and doing the poetry reading with Allen Ginsberg at the Royal Albert Hall, all of that.

In the magazine, as well as reproducing part of Stan Tracey's score for Under Milk Wood, underneath a poem by Tom McGrath was a darkly exposed black and white photograph of McGrath playing the piano.

Next to him, also lost in music, was Lol Coxhill, the bald soprano, as poet and jazz fan Jeff Nuttall described him in his impressionistic biography of the same name, playing his sax.

Where the picture was taken, what the occasion was and what they were playing we'll never know, because to the best of my knowledge, the moment was never captured in words.

Someone said to me once that a jazz record was a contradiction in terms – that once it's played live that should be it.

But I disagree.

I think they need to be preserved.

My favourite radio show is Jazz Record Requests on Radio 3.

At the moment it's presented by Alyn Shipton, with an avuncular warmth reading out requests which occasionally includes ones sent to hi by Robert Wyatt, no less.

Every request Alyn Shipton plays has a story attached to it.

It could be something about a marriage, or an anniversary or just a memory.

And through the music, those memories become real somehow in a way that matters, the same way for Kulu when he was running Henry's those reviews on his wall mattered.

Today, there are national magazines like Jazz Wise, and the Wire has grown out of being solely a jazz magazine to become one of the most expansive publications on music that there is.

While it maintains an international focus, writers from Scotland include David Keenan and, more recently, Stewart Smith.

Above all, the pages of the Wire are enlivened by the ever wise, ever forensic and ever considered Brian Morton, who is now sole editor of the Penguin Guide to Jazz Recordings.

Elsewhere, as well as writing for the Wire, Stewart Smith writes about jazz in both the List magazine and online magazine the Quietus.

Both of these are columns which somehow sit incongruously alongside everything around it, much as Alan Graham's jazz column did in Merseymart thirty-five years ago.

As jazz changes shape, these writers and others are out there with it, documenting, archiving, and, most importantly, bringing the music they write about to vivid life by way of words.

Over the next couple of weeks at the Edinburgh Jazz Festival, I know that Rob Adams will be reviewing for the Herald with a sense of calm and wisdom which similarly brings all this to life.

All of these and others keep the faith in a world where newspaper budgets are being cut just as pages are, while dedicated magazines are on a constant financial knife-edge trying to survive.

But what my extended trip down memory lane is trying to get over, is how important it is for these things to be covered by the press at both a general or a specialist level.

Because if they're not, then, like Chet Baker, they get lost.

But imagine if some of the things I've been talking about didn't get lost.

Imagine a magazine that knew who else was in the the Larry Stabbins Quintet, or that Harold Salisbury's Free Parking were still playing out in Preston and other parts of north west England.

If there was some kind of publication like that, then perhaps Larry Stabbins might not have retired so he could see the world, and perhaps the only pictures of the Bradford Hotel you can find are ones of it boarded up.

And maybe, after Alan Graham passed away in the early 1990s, the Phil might not have stopped its Monday and Tuesday jazz nights and put a quiz night on in its place instead.

Closer to home, imagine what a dedicated and fully resourced jazz and new music publication, whether in print or online, could do in Scotland.

Imagine being able to read about the plethora of activity that's going on, not just at the various jazz festivals, but everywhere else besides.

There are the three gigs a night over at the Jazz Bar, the regular Playtime sessions at the Outhouse, the female fronted Bitches Brew, or the long-standing Click Clack Club, which still keeps the Henry's flame burning.

Imagine a publication that can have a six page in-depth overview of GIOFest, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra's annual gathering of the musical clans, followed by an overview of Tony Bevan's series of Saturday afternoon gigs at the Old Hairdresser's in Glasgow.

Imagine all the gigs that have now been lost or forgotten that could have been captured somehow, and a record of an event preserved.

Imagine all of that sitting alongside the Observer's Book of Jazz and Merseymart, and Impetus and the Wire, and imagine that happening here and now.

Now that's what I call a jazz education.

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