

The 7th IAJRC UK Mini-Conference

By Horace Meunier Harris

This highly worthwhile event duly took place on the weekend of 9th - 10th November, 2013, at the customary excellent venue, the Holiday Inn South, Reading, in Berkshire, not far from London. The format was the familiar one of previous years and the organisers were the usual highly competent pair, Derek Coller and George Hulme, abetted by sound man, Roy Belson. As previously, Michael Arie flew in from Vienna, Austria. We were also delighted that former IAJRC President, Perry Huntoon from Chicago, graced us with his presence, following a motoring holiday in Northern France.

Twenty eight members attended, plus several wives/partners and visitors. One such was Mark Berresford, the publisher and editor of *VJM's Jazz & Blues Mart*, which he informed us is currently the world's oldest continually published jazz and blues magazine, now in its sixtieth year of publication. I well remember the redoubtable Trevor Benwell founding it in 1953.



Roy Belson, George Hulme and IAJRC Secretary, Perry Huntoon

The first speaker was Martin Colvill, who described and played "Interesting 78s". These were well chosen, ranging from Busse's Buzzards in 1925 to Joe Rushton's California Ramblers in 1945. He included singer Teddy Grace, a favourite of mine, and Ted Lewis's *Dip Your Brush in the Sunshine*, with a young Benny Goodman swinging like mad. Sound quality throughout was excellent.

There followed moving tributes to three stalwart members lost to us in 2013, concentrating upon their sterling contributions to jazz. Derek Coller spoke about discographer Bert Whyatt, responsible, amongst many other quality productions, for the IAJRC publication, *The Jump Records Story*, co-authored with Sonny McGown. Arnie Chadwick described in detail the work over many years in the sound field of Tony Adkins, much of them in Cardiff for The British Broadcasting Corporation. Tony recorded many live jazz sessions, with a recorder permanently installed at the Manchester Free Trade Hall, recording Miles Davis, Errol Garner, George Lewis and many more. These would otherwise have been lost to posterity. He was also a substantial contributor to the IAJRC's vaults. Brian Peerless told us a lot about Ken Vail's work as a graphic artist, plus the painstaking compilation of his many jazz publications, particularly his highly detailed books describing in diary form the day to day careers of Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday. These three contributions, all enhanced by appropriate recorded music, more than adequately honoured our late friends and colleagues. We were very fortunate to have with us Bert's widow, Beryl, Bert's son, Chris and Tony's wife, Jeanie.

There followed a presentation by Tony Shoppee devoted to the life and career of trumpeter Emmett Berry. He played many worthwhile examples and, making the point that so much of

Berry's recorded work was done with a mute, concentrated upon his open playing, with a gorgeous tone.

Then came Chris Hillman, with a talk entitled "Chicago Piano", playing examples by Clarence M. Jones, Jimmy Blythe, Will Ezell, Roosevelt Sykes, Jabo Williams, Black Bob, Blind John Davis and Big Maceo Merryweather. These are all featured in his latest excellent book, *Paramount Piano - Chicago, 1923 - 1932*.

After dinner we were treated as usual to a feast of jazz films, presented by Alf Keiles, who is Britain's very competent answer to the redoubtable Mark Cantor. The main section comprised music from the movies, featuring Harry James, Artie Shaw, Jimmy Dorsey and more. One intriguing item was Carmen Miranda singing with Benny Goodman and his Orchestra. Not to be forgotten was the unusual jam session by band-leaders which terminated the 1941 film, *Syncope*. Alf provided a discographical query in Tommy Dorsey's version of "Well Git It", from *Dubarry Was a Lady*. Surprisingly there were two pianists present, swapping choruses!

The next morning commenced with a session presented by Nigel Haslewood of Sadman Records, with the intriguing title, "My Name is Johnson". (His idea came from the 1974 spoof western film by Mel Brooks called "Blazing Saddles", where everyone in a Wild West town has the last name Johnson). Who were we to expect? Bunk? James P.? Even Robert Johnson? Instead we were entertained by musicians mostly from the forties: Buddy Johnson (piano), Lem Johnson (tenor), Clarence Johnson (piano), Eddie Johnson (tenor). Nigel even put together the names of fourteen musicians from the period whom he termed "The Johnson Orchestra"!

He was followed by Malcolm Walker (a name familiar to you as co-compiler of the regular column in the Journal, *Discographical Forum*). His subject was bop drummer and arranger, Tiny Kahn, who had the misfortune to die aged only 29. It was an educational talk but the musical illustrations were a little too advanced for my ancient ears.

Finally, and in contrast, Roy Belson was released from his extremely competent sound amplification duties,



Malcolm Walker and Tony Shoppee

in order to present "British Small Jazz Groups of the 1940s and 1950s". For me it was the perfect antidote, as I grew up with the music of the musicians he featured: George Chisholm, Lew Davis, Harry Parry, Buddy Featherstonhaugh, Joe Daniels, Harry Gold, Vic Lewis, Jack Parnell, Harry Hayes and more. A delightful wallow in nostalgia.

A raffle was held and £77 raised for The British Legion, as this was the closest weekend to the remembrance of 1918 Armistice Day. We then adjourned for lunch and the opportunity to praise and thank again our conscientious organisers, before saying our farewells. Many expressions of hope were voiced for another get together next year. Throughout, a separate room did steady business disposing of members' books and records. Above all it was as always a great opportunity to keep alive the friendships brought about by our mutual love of jazz.