

The ALAN LEE /JO ABBOTT JAZZ QUARTET

MUSIC OF JOHN LEWIS



The
ALAN LEE/JO ABBOTT
JAZZ QUARTET
presents

Music of John Lewis

The decision to begin performing the music of John Lewis is one that was not taken lightly. First up, there is the concern with the jazz police, whose reaction will no doubt be to regard the playing of many of John's compositions, and in this particular instrumentation, with that derogatory term, "covers" (although people who perform, let's say, Beethoven string quartets don't seem to attract the same labelling). Also, of course, there is the terrifying prospect of having our versions of these and other pieces compared with those of the Modern Jazz Quartet (MJQ).

Nevertheless, our intense interest, love and respect for John Lewis' music has allowed us to overcome these objections on the grounds that this is music which we love to play, music that we (and others) have never heard the MJQ perform "live", (and never will), and music which was composed specifically for our instrumentation and which deserves to be performed by whomsoever desires to do so, given the jazz musicians on-going desire for self-expression and to spread joy and happiness whilst doing so.

About John Lewis' music, Gunther Schuller (composer, conductor, author and French hornist), has this to say:

"In a very simple, unspectacular way, he (Lewis) combines the romantic and the classical in a judicious blending. His great melodic gift is very much in evidence. John has that rare ability to create a melody which is thoroughly conventional, immediately hummable, sounds as if one had heard it somewhere before, and yet is in fact absolutely original. Above all, his music has that unassailable quality of rightness, for which there is no substitute."

The pieces John Lewis created for the MJQ provided the group with a framework within which there is ample room for improvisation, and thus the aforementioned self expression. Often though, as with most of the best-written and inspired music, it is the compositions themselves that linger in the ear of the hearer long after the soloists have had their say. The combined influences of European classical music and the essence of the blues in many of his pieces make John Lewis' compositions most satisfying to perform, as is the concept of simultaneous improvisation from the piano and vibraphone very much in the manner of a traditional New Orleans front line going all-out together. Or a Bach two-part invention.

1 BADEN-BADEN

(Ray Brown and Milt Jackson)

Began life as a blowing piece created for a studio session in 1951 for what was then the Milt Jackson Quartet (MJQ). Its original title was "Milt Meets Sid" (Sid was the recording engineer). It was re-named in 1958 by John Lewis with a title closer to the image of the new MJQ.

2 DIGGERS REST

(Brian Brown)

Melbourne tenor-saxophonist Brian Brown composed this in 1959. The influence of John Lewis can be heard in this contrapuntal arrangement, a co-creation from that time with pianist Graham Coyle.

3 ENGLANDS CAROL

(John Lewis)

John's Variation #1 on "God Rest Ye Merrie, Gentlemen". There are several other recorded versions of this piece, with varying instrumentation. This one, for quartet, came first (as the title says).

4 THE GOLDEN STRIKER

(John Lewis)

From the film "No Sun in Venice". Inspired by the clock tower in St. Marks Square, Venice, where a life-sized bronze figure strikes time on the hour. A development of the first theme in "Three Windows".



5 MIRJANA

(John Lewis)

Full title, "Mirjana of my Heart and Soul". Written for John Lewis' wife, Mirjana. The Czech name, Mirjana, means the centre-most point. Nuff said.

6 VALSE SENTIMENTAL

(Peter Tchaikovsky)

A delightful waltz by Tchaikovsky no less. Has nothing to do with jazz, but Jo and I play it because we like it. As John Lewis states, concerning the inclusion of David Raksin's "Serenade" in the album MJQ AT MUSIC INN, "I refuse to be restricted by any formulas".

7 LONELY MOMENTS

(Mary Lou Williams)

An exhilarating piece to play. It is another example of Lewis' influence in the spontaneous improvisations between the piano and vibraphone.

8 THREE WINDOWS

(John Lewis)

Another piece from "No Sun in Venice". Combines three leitmotifs depicting different characters and scenes in the film's story. A jewel in the crown of John Lewis' oeuvre.

9 VERSAILLES

(John Lewis)

Goes by in a hurry. Possibly the most jazz-inspired line of Lewis early trilogy of fugal pieces (the other two are “Vendome” and “Concorde”). The title does not refer to the palace or gardens but to Porte de Versailles, a convention and exhibition centre south of Paris, the fourth largest such centre in Europe. Very busy.

10 TWO DEGREES EAST THREE DEGREES WEST

(John Lewis)

A blues composed by Lewis for a recording session featuring two musicians from the American east coast (Lewis and bassist Percy Heath) and three from the west (Jim Hall, guitar; Bill Perkins, tenor; Chico Hamilton, drums). The 12-bar form was retained but re-harmonized for a Lewis solo album in 1960 (also with Jim Hall).

11 TWO BASS HIT

(John Lewis)

A wonderful showcase for our drummer, Ben Hendry. Originally written in 1947 for Dizzy Gillespie's Big Band when John Lewis was its pianist and arranger.



Alan Lee – vibraharp

Alan is one of Australia's foremost performers on his chosen instrument, the vibraharp. He began his jazz career in the early fifties as a rhythm guitarist, but found his 'voice', the vibraharp, in 1957 and formed his own quartet in 1959. Since that time, Alan has played jazz with most of Australia's leading musicians, and his own small groups have included, at various times, Brian Brown, Keith Hounslow, Tony Gould, Ted Vining, Graham Coyle, Len Barnard, Bob Sedergreen, and

Lucky Oceans, among others.

His quartet has appeared as support act for many visiting jazz stars, and in the late eighties he spent two years playing in Kansas City. Alan played congas, percussion and vibraharp in the pit band for the Melbourne season of the show 'Hair', and his interest in latin hand-drums led him to form a 70-piece Brazillian batucada ensemble which performed in Melbourne and Sydney in the seventies. He also began to combine his interest in European classical music with jazz pieces, resulting in concerts at Victoria's National Gallery and the recording of the LP (now a CD), '**Gallery Concerts 1973**' (Cumquat CQCD-2723). His abiding interest, however, has always been the music of John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Alan sees in the compositions of John Lewis the perfect blending of the most stimulating and attractive elements of the blues, early jazz, be-bop, the classical disciplines of fugue and counterpoint, and the freedom of creation within a structured framework. The John Lewis pieces performed and recorded by this current quartet reflect these same qualities, as do the other compositions incorporated into the group's repertoire.



Jo Abbott – piano

Melbourne based pianist/composer Jo Abbott studied classical piano with Pamela Page (Qld University) and Stephen Savage (Qld Conservatorium) and received her Bachelor of Music from Qld Conservatorium. Following this she worked as a composer, performer and coordinator with the Music for the Heart and Mind series established by Brisbane based composer Rob Davidson ('Topology') and as accompanist and musical director to cabaret performer Annie Lee

specialising in the music of Kurt Weill and Agnes Bernelle. Also an accordionist, Jo has toured nationally and internationally at festivals such as Hong Kong Fringe Festival; Live en Aout (Noumea); Pinnacles Jazz Festival (Brisbane) and performed at venues such as Bennetts Lane Jazz Club; Manchester Lane; Dizzys Jazz Club; The Boite; The Famous Spiegel tent (Melbourne Festival). Jo has studied jazz piano with Steve Sedergreen; Tim Stevens and Bob Sedergreen and has a Postgraduate Diploma in Improvisation (piano) from The Victorian College of the Arts.

Ben Hendry – percussion

A stalwart of the Melbourne jazz and improvised music scene, Ben is one of Melbourne's most sought after drummers. Renowned for his delicate touch at the drums, he has graced the stages in the UK and North America – a drummer who can support and contribute to every type of music, from hilarious comedy acts to driving a jazz group. Given time he also teaches in schools. He relishes the opportunity to play this quartet's intensely colourful and controlled music. Ben has performed throughout Australia and the UK in clubs such as the Basement(syd) and Bennetts Lane(melb),



he has also played at major events and venues like the Sydney Opera House and the Melbourne Concert Hall as well as major festivals like the Wangarata Jazz and Blues Festival, the Melbourne International jazz festival and the Fringe Festivals in Edinburgh, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Ben was a member of the winning ensembles of the Atheneum Awards for musical excellence in 2003 and 2004.



Ivan Rosa – double bass

Ivan Rosa has been active in the Melbourne jazz scene for over 15 years. His solid time keeping and inventive soloing make him a popular studio and on-stage sideman. A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, Ivan has shared the stage with Bob Sedergreen, Barry Duggan, Alan Lee, Gil Askey, Lachlan Davidson, Sonja Horbelt, Andrea

Keller, Maria Mercedes, Tania Doko, Anthony Costanzo and Bob Downe. As well playing many long term residencies around Melbourne (including the Sofatel and Grand Hyatt), Ivan has also performed at Bennett's Lane, Manchester Lane, Chapel Off Chapel, Montsalvat and as part of Melbourne's Umbria Jazz Festival. Ivan is an inspiring and dedicated educator and ensemble director, working in both the private and state school systems.

I am deeply indebted to Jo Abbott for her time, dedication and enthusiasm in learning, transcribing, practicing and performing these wonderful musics. Jo, thank you. Thanks also to Ivan Rosa and Ben Hendry for some of the same reasons. Thanks to Martin Wright for his encouragement and the opportunity to record all this; to Vaughan McAlley for his fine ear and technical expertise; to Ken White for the cover art; and to Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

Alan Lee

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Recorded and edited by Vaughan McAlley
Mastered by Martin Wright

Cover sketch: Ken White

Booklet and photographs: Martin Wright

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- 1 **BADEN-BADEN** (Ray Brown and Milt Jackson) 4'41"
- 2 **DIGGERS REST** (Brian Brown) 4'14"
- 3 **ENGLANDS CAROL** (John Lewis) 6'39"
- 4 **THE GOLDEN STRIKER** (John Lewis) 4'08"
- 5 **MIRJANA** (John Lewis) 10'12"
- 6 **VALE SENTIMENTAL** (Peter Tchaikovsky) 3'12"
- 7 **LONELY MOMENTS** (Mary Lou Williams) 4'08"
- 8 **THREE WINDOWS** (John Lewis) 6'33"
- 9 **VERSAILLES** (John Lewis) 3'13"
- 10 **TWO DEGREES EAST - THREE DEGREES WEST** (John Lewis) 6'06"
- 11 **TWO BASS HIT** (John Lewis) 3'06"



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