

Jazz and Dr Johnson

Chris' most ambitious project to date is the album "Boswell's London Journal", a suite of 15 tunes co-composed by Chris Hodgkins and Eddie Harvey (who also did the arrangements). James Boswell, best known as the biographer of Dr Samuel Johnson, kept a daily diary between the years 1762 and 1763. This account of a very different London to today, as seen through the eyes of a 22 year old Scot, provides the inspiration for the album.

"Boswell's London Journal" includes a piece entitled London, evoking Boswell's arrival at Highgate Hill and his first view of the capital city. The Meeting commemorates Boswell's not entirely successful first encounter with Dr Johnson on 16 May 1763. Friendship flourished however, and "High Exultation" documents the evening of 25 June 1763 on which Boswell and Dr Johnson wine, dine and discuss such things as ghosts, poetry, fathers and sons, and going abroad; Boswell retiring home "in high exultation". "Greenwich Excursion" was inspired by Boswell and Johnson's boat trip down the Thames to Greenwich; "Most Miserably Melancholy" charts one of the author's recurring bouts of depression. Boswell's London Journal offers an emotionally charged landscape that amply illustrates the human condition, from the low and the vulgar to profound conversations with Samuel Johnson; the real-life incidents in the London Journal offered the composers a wealth of rich material for the album's 15 original tunes.

The album has been turned into a show Jazz and Dr Johnson. Sue Sheridan has written the script. The evening consists of movements from a jazz suite interspersed with readings by the actress Susan Sheridan, who had tailored various anecdotes and quotes from James Boswell's journal that chronicled Johnson's life. Very sadly Sue Sheridan passed away on the 8th August 2015. Sue and Max's daughter Emily Stride understudied for Sue at the premier of *Jazz and Dr Johnson* at Dr Johnson's House in Gough Square and Chris and the band are delighted that Emily is taking on the role of narrator for *Jazz and Dr Johnson*.

Emily is an accomplished actress with a string of successes to her name. Theatre includes: The Father (Wyndham's Theatre, West End), Dial M For Murder (Vienna's English Theatre), Birdsong (UK and Ireland No 1 Tour), Volcano (UK No 1 Tour and Vaudeville Theatre, West End), The Tempest, Twelfth Night, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Comedy of Errors (Rainbow Shakespeare Company repertory), Arcadia (Hong Kong Arts Centre), Romeo and Juliet, A Christmas Carol (Hong Kong Tour). Television and Film includes: The Night Manager (BBC), The Worst Witch (ITV), The Moomins (CBBC), Seven Devils (Independent Feature), Red Kingdom Rising (Independent Feature), Me and Mine (Film and Video Umbrella). BBC Radio includes: The Forsythe Chronicles, Evasion Tango, Letters to Peter Pan.



Emily Stride

Reviews

On the premier of Jazz and Dr Johnson at Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, London:
"A beautifully conceived suite, beautifully executed and so marvellous to hear it".
James Hogg, October 2010

Dr Johnson's House sits quietly behind the bustle of Fleet Street like a haven of calm, just the place for the live premier of Chris Hodgkins Quartet's set of themes, co-written with Eddie Harvey, linked to events in Boswell's Life of Johnson. Anchored by Alison Rayner's purposeful bass lines, with guitarist

Max Brittain and the saxophonist Diane McLoughlin alongside trumpeter Hodgkins, this was chamber jazz, tuneful and clever, with light-touch narration by actress Susan Sheridan. Performing on high in the garret, alongside mementoes from the likes of David Garrick and Boswell himself, the audience close at hand, the quartet was jaunty and solemn by turn, each player interlocking craftily, with McLoughlin holding the reins while Hodgkins let rip. Tailor made for the literary festival circuit, this project deserves to do well. Peter Vacher, Jazz UK, December/January 2010/11.

Jazz and Dr Johnson at Scarborough Literature Festival

Jazz and Dr Johnson This event was part of the Scarborough Literature Festival and proved an interesting link between jazz and literature. The evening consisted of movements from a jazz suite interspersed with readings by the actress Susan Sheridan, who had tailored various anecdotes and quotes from James Boswell's journal that chronicled Johnson's life.

"Susan Sheridan read her parts in a conversational manner, employing a slight Scots accent for James Boswell and giving a slightly booming quality for Johnson's ponderous tones. If her voice sounded familiar, this may be from hearing her on Radio Four, or on several audio books. She has also voiced cartoon characters on TV and played a character in the Walt Disney film *The Black Cauldron*.

"The jazz was ably played by The Chris Hodgkins Quartet. Chris had co-written the suite with Eddie Harvey with the exception of two movements, one by accomplished guitarist Max Brittain, and the other by saxophonist Diane McLoughlin. Without piano or drums, the music had an 'open', fleet and lively quality, revealing the double bass to be the pivotal driver of the group. Alison Rayner's bass playing was strong and interesting throughout. Despite the eighteenth century source of the readings, the music was very much of the moment. We heard a bluesy number on which Chris Hodgkins used a plunger mute to great effect, several tunes were given a lithe, bouncy tempo and the final surprise was a calypso. Whether there was enough jazz for the jazz fans, or enough Dr Johnson for his fans, the audience seemed very pleased either way.

Dick Armstrong, 6th April 2011.

You can hear *Jazz and Dr Johnson* with Sue Sheridan live at Scarborough Literature Festival by clicking on the links below:

[Jazz and Dr Johnson Part one Scarborough Literature Festival 2011](#)

[Jazz and Dr Johnson Part two Scarborough Literature Festival 2011](#)