The Welcome 2012 Return of the IAJRC UK Mini-Conference

By Horace Meunier Harris

This prestigious event ran annually for five years from 2003, until the organisers decided they required a well earned rest and hung up their boots, metaphorically speaking. It was hoped that other members would come forward to take over, but this did not happen.

However, this year, after a five year break, those same organisers, having been approached by so many who were missing the "get together", bravely decided to test the water again. Happily they met with a good response and the UK Mini-Conference duly took place on 27th and 28th October at the customary venue, The Holiday Inn South, at Reading, Berkshire, some thirty miles west of London.

Who are these valiant souls? The indefatigable Derek Coller and the irrepressible George Hulme. Both have an impressive jazz reputation. Derek for many years edited a discographical magazine called The Discophile and is the author of several books of quality, namely Jess Stacy: The Quiet Man Of Jazz, and Clarinet Marmalade: The Life And Music Of Tony Parenti, while hot off the press this year has come Strictly A Musician: Dave Cary.

George also produced and edited more than a hundred issues of the discographical magazine called Matrix. He also had a book published, Mel Tormé: A Chronicle Of His Recordings, while currently he is arranging with co-author Bert Whyatt the publication of another book, Bobby Hackett: His Life In Music. George is also the producer of many fine reissue CDs for Jasmine Records. By my definition Derek and George both have substantial and enviable jazz pedigrees. The team is rounded up by sound man Roy Belson, who supplied the equipment and controlled the amplification with professional competence.

The 2009 Members’ Directory lists 84 names in the UK and they were duly circulated with the details of the event. 22 attended, plus six wives/partners. A very good ratio. From overseas came Jim and Dawn Gallert from Michigan, who told us and showed us much about the impressive Detroit Jazz Festival, while welcome regular visitor, Dr Michael Arie, flew in from Vienna, Austria.

The program opened with Trevor Bannister talking about the avant garde English pianist, composer and band leader Michael Garrick, a noted modernist much influenced by the fusion of poetry with jazz. It was a thoughtful presentation, well illustrated musically. I was taken by a 1971 recording called Children’s Chorus, by a small group with Garrick on pipe organ and featuring the singing of a Junior School choir. Illuminating.

He was followed by Brian Peerless, telling the story of Dobell’s jazz record shop at 77, Charing Cross Road, London, known to all U.K. jazz lovers and to a legion of visiting jazz musicians from the USA. Brian modestly described himself as "the Saturday boy", working there from 1962 until it closed thirty years later. He described how Doug Dobell gradually took over his father's long established antiquarian book selling business, ultimately expanding next door, opening a branch and creating his "77" record label, with many fine issues to his credit. Brian passed round many interesting photos and played a number of recorded conversations with Doug, who died 25 years ago. It was an entrancing wallow in nostalgia and it is to be hoped that Brian will convert it to an absorbing article for the IAJRC Journal.

Then came Chris Hillman and a talk describing the gestation and evolution of Paramount Serenaders, the title of his latest book, favourably reviewed in the June 2012 issue of the Journal. He played a number of Paramount classics, featuring Tommy Ladnier onwards, plus the voices of Ida Cox, Ma Rainey and others. We were impressed by the clarity of the reproduction of these obscure items from the mid to late twenties.

The program continued with a presentation by Malcolm Walker, a name familiar to all readers as co-editor of the erudite column entitled Discographical
Forum in every issue of the Journal. His subject was Wardell Gray, whom Malcolm described as his all time favourite jazz musician. He concentrated on Gray's time with big bands, featuring many fine recordings by the orchestras of Earl Hines, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Louis Bellson and Gerald Wilson. An enjoyable session.

After dinner it was time to turn down the lights, for a film show by Alf Keiles, Britain's answer to Mark Cantor. He featured the big bands of Stan Kenton, Charlie Barnet, Ralph Flanagan, Tony Pastor, Lucky Millinder and Billy Eckstine, plus a New Jersey TV Network big band featuring Benny Golson. These were interspersed with a hilarious Spike Jones item and two groups playing at the 100 Club in London. It was now late and for those brave enough he continued with a varied program including Fats Waller, Keely Smith with Louis Prima, Paul Anka, Doc Severinson and Ella Fitzgerald. An historic item from 1978 was a big band in Durban, South Africa, racially integrated for the first time. I was captivated by two piano duets, one by Billy Taylor - Buddy Greco, the other Oscar Peterson - Andre Prévin. I was unaware that Greco was such a good pianist, nor that Billy Eckstine played valve trombone!

On Sunday morning Michael Arie presented Charlie Ventura and Five Lessons in Bop For The People, with talking and playing by Ventura, assisted by Roy Kral and Jackie Cain. These were from transcriptions and RCA Victor recordings in 1949 and made a worthwhile introduction to the rationale of the bop movement, once so revolutionary and now part of history.

Arnie Chadwick from Manchester followed, with a learned dissertation entitled Transcriptions For The Collector. He spoke eloquently and seriously about the early history of recording and the need for transcriptions at radio stations. It was an erudite talk, done without notes and minus the requirement for audio examples.

Finally, Nigel Haslewood, who runs a business called Sadman Records (but personally belies its name), praised the trumpet playing and especially the arranging talents of Sy Oliver. He illustrated his talk with enthusiasm, utilising a number of fine examples by Jimmie, Tommy Dorsey and Sy's own orchestra, setting many a foot tapping.

Finally it was time for luncheon and then fond farewells, with our collective praises ringing in the ears of our joint organisers.

Note from Derek Coller: The sum of £32.00 was raised by a raffle and this sum will be passed to the charity Cancer Research.

More event photographs: