

2014'S TOP TRUMPET

A professional jazz trumpeter for 30 years, **STEVE WATERMAN** has built his reputation steadily over that time and was rewarded by the **British Jazz Award** last year. He discussed his career with **RON SIMPSON**.



It strikes me that Steve Waterman is very much the model of a modern jazz musician. His first interest was big bands and a couple of generations ago he might have found a niche in a series of increasingly well-known aggregations until he ventured into the financial minefield of his own big band or as featured soloist. Nowadays the picture is completely different. He puts out various bands under his own name, most often these days a quartet or quintet based on his Mainstem CD, *Buddy Bolden Blew It*. However, this is a tiny part of his output (and, one suspects, not a very large part of his income). In addition, he plays in other people's bands in a variety of styles, composes sometimes very ambitious pieces, regularly brings out highly regarded (and often themed) CDs with all-star bands, has a productive relationship with a trumpet manufacturer, maintains a comprehensive education programme – books, courses, regular teaching jobs – and, in the past, spent much time in the orchestra pit for shows such as *Miss Saigon*.

When I talked to him, he had just arrived in Birmingham to play a gig at the Red Lion in the Jewellery Quarter with Threeway, Ben Crosland's band that also includes pianist Steve Lodder, and which tends now to be a trio plus one, with Jim Hart or, more recently, Lewis Wright added on vibes. Steve has been playing for 10 years with Threeway and his involvement with various of Ben's bands goes back even further. He describes the music as 'chamber jazz' playing mainly Ben's compositions, but also a few by the two Steves. A visit to the Red Lion's upstairs room that evening to get a flavour of Threeway's music confirms Steve's assessment: interesting and distinctive compositions, with subtle interplay rather than dynamic solos, a controlled and lyrical feel to the music.

This is all very different from Steve's early influences in jazz:

'I started playing trumpet because of my dad's big band record collection – I was brought up on Harry James and Bunny

Berigan. At that time my aspirations were to play in a big band, but after a time I gradually discovered Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and got into more modern jazz. I'd always had an ambition to be playing jazz. I was brought up near Bournemouth and for some years, from the age of 16 to about 20, I used to play the summer season with the Vic Allen Show Band at Rockley Sands Holiday Camp, near Poole. Colin Bryant who played sax and clarinet and Terry Shade, the pianist, were into jazz. I had never improvised in my life, but they encouraged me and helped me out when I got in trouble.'

From there Steve moved on to Trinity College of Music in 1980, studying classical trumpet for the very good reason that there was no jazz course. There was, however, plenty of jazz:

'Simon Purcell, who had just left Trinity, was coming in to do the Jazz Society, and there were players there like Martin Speake and Mark Lockheart – we had John Paricelli coming in to play with the Jazz Society, so it was fantastic for me to have a chance to play some small group jazz. And, to be fair to Trinity, they had a big band under the direction of Bobby Lamb, and that met regularly, with rehearsals each week – and, of course, I was working with the classical stuff, orchestral concerts and so on.'

In career terms, however, Steve never played 'the classical stuff'. He never wanted to and he took no time after leaving Trinity to get himself noticed in jazz and big band circles:

'When I was just finishing Trinity I got involved with the European Community Jazz Orchestra, partly through Bobby Lamb who was one of its directors. In doing that I met Michael Garrick, Graham Collier and others in the jazz world – and after that I worked quite regularly.'

Oddly enough, I don't remember

the word 'eclectic' occurring in our conversation, though Steve did once remark, 'I like the variety' (true enough!). When I asked him when he developed a distinctive voice as a trumpeter, he first of all talked about the variety of styles he has been at home in, from mainstream to contemporary, then, when asked for influences, mentioned musicians who directly affected his general musical awareness (Garrick, Collier, John Surman) rather than trumpeters he tried to emulate. Significantly, once he started on trumpeters, the list was long: Kenny Wheeler and Woody Shaw initially, then most of the great names of the early 1950s, including the sadly short-lived and now somewhat neglected Booker Little. But so many influences means no one huge influence – eclecticism again:

'I don't think I ever followed one particular person – I took little bits I liked from everyone and gradually developed my own style and personality from that.'

It's not always easy to get a solid perspective on Steve's varied career and I was somewhat surprised – and impressed – by his answer to a question about what he has been most proud of:

'In terms of performance one of the real highlights for me was going to Havana and playing the Havana Jazz Festival with a Cuban big band. About 15 years ago I wrote a conga concerto which was originally for Robin Jones. Sadly he couldn't come to Havana to perform it, so I got to perform it with an all-star Cuban big band, musicians from Irakere, Afro-Cuban All-Stars, Buena Vista Social Club, a 30-piece big band put together for the festival. It was an amazing experience to work with such fantastic musicians.'

Latin music and percussionist Robin Jones have been key elements in Steve's music at different times. Straight out of college, playing at Ronnie Scott's

in a band called Cayenne, he was heard by Robin Jones and ended up playing in King Salsa, Jones' band. 'This will completely change the way you think about jazz', said Robin about Latin music – and so it has proved. Steve still plays with Heads South, a band led by pianist John Harriman and playing Latin jazz from all over the world.

Steve describes himself – very quietly – as 'quietly ambitious' and it's obvious that his music has benefitted from both the quietness and the ambition. He is very ready to give credit to others, but also to assimilate and use other people's ideas. This is evident in his important relationships with Mainstem Records and Geneva Trumpets. These have both played a part in his increasingly prolific work as composer/arranger:

'I've really enjoyed all the albums I've put out. A lot of that is down to David Hays of Mainstem: he's come up with a lot of the ideas for the albums. He's been quite a figure for fixing the personnel and the music. Each of those projects has been really good fun and given me the chance to work with many different musicians.'

David often likes to combine small and larger ensembles on the same album. On *Our Delight*, dedicated to the music of Tadd Dameron and Herbie Hancock, the band is actually billed as 'Steve Waterman – Duo to Tentet'. *Night Lights*, the music of Gerry Mulligan and Chick Corea, is split between quintet and 10-piece band. Steve's composing has become increasingly ambitious; even so, his current major work, recently completed, comes as something of a surprise, a Concerto for Jazz Trumpet – and this is where Geneva Trumpets play a part in determining the nature of the work. It's a full-length work, clocking in at about 25 minutes in three movements, and it's scored for trumpet and brass band. Why brass band? Apart from the fact that the best of brass bands offer fine technique and a glorious sound, there's the Geneva connection: the manufacturers sponsor several brass bands and Steve hopes to be premiering his concerto with one of the best: the Brighthouse and Rastrick. Steve has re-cast various themes that



he has composed over the last 20 years into concerto form, with a dialogue between trumpet improvisations and the brass band accompaniments. This is not his first work for brass band: the slow movement is, in fact, a re-working of a piece he previously wrote for another of the best: the Black Dyke Mills Band. Clearly his relationship with Geneva Trumpets is more than just a simple sponsorship-cum-advertising angle:

'I met Tim Oldroyd about 10 years ago. He had just started Geneva Trumpets and was looking for people to endorse his instrument. I spent a day with him and learned so much about trumpets that day. Previously I'd just picked up a trumpet and played it. He kept asking me what I liked about the trumpet I was playing and how it could be improved, taking it to bits, trying different valves, different tubes and pipes. There has been a Steve Waterman trumpet and flugel horn line, but mainly Geneva believe in customising to meet individuals' needs: trumpeters can go to them and try various parts and put together a trumpet that suits them.'

North Yorkshire-based Geneva Instruments, in fact, emphasise the importance of personal service for their customers and are racking up an impressive list of artists who endorse the brand, including Gerard Presencer and Rory Simmonds. Most relevant to Steve's latest composition, Tim

Oldroyd sought out advice from leading players in the brass band movement and now supplies such leading instrumentalists and bands as the Brighthouse and Rastrick.

Steve's work as a composer/arranger ties in with the final major element in his musical landscape. Many jazz musicians have important roles in music education; few are as varied and committed in their education work as Steve Waterman. Professor of Jazz Trumpet at Trinity, he also regularly teaches or runs bands at the Purcell School, the Royal Welsh College, the Royal Northern College of Music and Christ Church University in Canterbury. And his enjoyment of the work is palpable:

'Most of the students I work with in colleges are aiming to do it professionally so the standard is extremely high and they're very keen and work very hard. The Purcell School has been wonderful as well, with younger students, some as young as 11 or 12. One of the lovely things is that they haven't got wide experience of jazz so you see their jaws drop the first time they hear Clifford Brown. And it's fantastic for me having all these charts I've written for recording and performing projects because I can use them so much in teaching.'

Steve's education work extends beyond his regular commitments

in colleges, universities and schools. His book, co-written with John O'Neill, *The Jazz Method for Trumpet*, is published by Schott. And, with Alan Barnes, a regular collaborator ('I play in his band, he plays in mine') he runs an annual Big Band Jazz Weekend in Bridgend in April:

'Every year for 10 years we've been doing a big band course with the idea of getting people together from all over the country who are interested in playing in a big band, playing my arrangements, Alan's arrangements and various other things. It's aimed mainly at semi-pros and the standard tends to be quite high so we can always put a pretty good band together and plenty of people have been coming regularly for the last 10 years.'

So what next for Steve Waterman? Basically, more of the same. He has ideas for a couple more CDs, but needs to refine and develop them with David Hays. Music education clearly matters a great deal to him and is far more than a way of remaining solvent between gigs. I guess composition is a major focus of his musical ambition – and, for the moment, we can all look forward to hearing the Brighthouse and Rastrick Band essaying the accompaniment to his Concerto for Jazz Trumpet!

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