

## **NATIONAL JAZZ ARCHIVE AGM 7.12.19**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

#### **Apologies**

David Goodridge, Helen Walker, Professor Tim Wall

#### **Introduction**

A big welcome to all of you as we approach the end of the 31<sup>st</sup> year since the founding of the National Jazz Archive. It has been another eventful and successful year for the archive. This meeting will one day itself form part of the archive so I should mention for posterity that we have a very important general election coming up in a few days' time.

It is always worth reminding ourselves what an achievement it is for any jazz institution to not only survive for 31 years but to continue to thrive and grow. The Archive holds about 850 different journal titles going back about 90 years. Some of these lasted for just one or two issues. Almost all eventually ceased publication. And yet we have a vibrant growing scene today. I think that says something about the importance of any jazz institution being relevant and responsive to survive in a constantly evolving idiom. And we are course have to operate in a world which is constantly changing and full of uncertainty - one reason I mentioned the election.

You will hear in a moment from our Research Archivist, David Nathan, from the chair of the Marketing and Communications Committee, Nick Clarke, and from John Dale, Chair of our IT Committee. We are also delighted that Dr Nic Pillai from BCU is here to give a presentation on his latest project.

Finally I will be paying tribute to all the volunteers and personnel who are the lifeblood of the archive and play such an amazing role in keeping it going.

#### **Review of the year**

Last year saw an exceptional level of public activity by the NJA to celebrate our 30 anniversary. This included two major exhibitions in London, at the Barbican and at 2 Temple Place, and some amazing concerts, including one with NYJO at the 100 club. This all took a huge amount of time, energy and resources for an organisation which for the most part is run on a shoestring by volunteers. Another huge achievement at the end of last year was the soft launch of a completely revamped NJA website.

A conscious decision was taken this year to focus our energies on consolidation and working on the core functions of the archive. I will say more on this in a moment. That isn't to say that the Archive hasn't continued its important work on exhibitions and collaborations. I will mention just a few recent examples. One is the assistance the archive has provided to the makers of a film celebrating the Ronnie Scotts 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This should hopefully be screened soon and shown on TV. David may be saying a little more about this. On the subject of Ronnie Scott, there is a terrific exhibition of photographs from the first ten years of the club in the Barbican Music Library until January. It's small but well worth a visit. The Archive has provided some interesting items to support the exhibition. Another recent example of important outreach was support given to an event two weeks ago at the Guildhall aimed at school girls aspiring to careers in jazz.

I will talk now about the focus on core activities. Nick and John will also be saying something about this.

### **Core activities**

I will start with a brief reminder of last year's report. To quote *'One area of weakness where the Archive has not made as much progress as had been hoped is in relation to the preservation, cataloguing and digitisation of our collections.'* The report spoke of the difficulty in recruiting a qualified archivist and the importance of doing so, and the importance of developing our volunteer base to deal with this work which is so vital for the archive.

I should add that the archive receives a steady flow of donations of materials, there is always a trickle, and often there is a flood. Donations of material are of course always very welcome, but it is frankly a huge task to find storage space, to sort it, to catalogue it, and ultimately to digitise it. This year the archive accessioned a further number of major collections. Just one is the massive and significant Brian Foskett photograph collection.

Against this background I'm delighted to report that very real progress has been made this year. Instead of employing a permanent archivist NJA has decided to engage archivist Jo Blyghton on a consultancy basis. She is an extremely capable professional archivist and is particularly well qualified for the task. Jo was previously employed by NJA on the Story of British Jazz Project and comes with a good insight into the archive. Her advice has been invaluable in developing a plan for getting on top of all the issues that need to be addressed. I will leave it to John and Nick to elaborate on some of the finer points.

The main volunteers' day is Wednesday, if anyone here is interested in joining the team. If you come in on a Wednesday it is not unusual to find a dozen or so volunteers beavering away under the skilful supervision of our volunteer organiser Angela and working hard on accessioning, sorting and digitising.

### **Collaborations**

NJA remains totally committed to collaborations with any organisations or individuals who share our values and our passion for jazz. There isn't time here to talk about all of our collaborations, but there are two that deserve special mention.

#### **BCU**

The first is our partnership with Birmingham City University. As you may know BCU is a leader in the world of jazz academic research and in relation to the media and arts generally. Our partnership has made big strides during the year. We welcomed Professor Tim Wall this year as a new trustee. Tim is

Professor of Radio and Popular Music Studies at BCU. Unfortunately Tim is unable to join us here today.

NJA now has a firmly established satellite collection which is housed and readily accessible in state of the art archival facilities in Central Birmingham. The satellite collection includes our collection of jazz posters, which is probably the most comprehensive in Europe. A number of complete personal collections have also been transferred to Birmingham where they will be more readily available for research students. These include the collections of Kate and Mike Westbrook, Ian Carr and Charles Fox.

Last but not least, Graham Langley's British Institute of Jazz Studies collection, which is a very significant comprehensive collection in its own right, is due to be incorporated at BCU in the New Year.

I hasten to add that the headquarters of the Archive will remain in Loughton. However, developing a second branch in Birmingham, in the heart of the UK, greatly improves access from around the country to what the Archive has to offer and enhances our position as a national institution.

Finally I should mention that in January BCU will be holding an important international conference - *'Documenting Jazz'* - with delegates attending from around the globe. Another one of our new trustees, Professor Catherine Tackley, who heads the music department at Liverpool University, will be a keynote speaker and NJA will be sponsoring her. A number of trustees will also be taking part.

### **The Jazz Centre UK**

The second institution that should be mentioned is The Jazz Centre UK which is based in Southend-on-Sea. NJA negotiated the original agreement to have a Centre in Southend and was very much involved in the initial stages of setting it up. Shortly afterwards what is now known as the Jazz Centre UK was formed by Digby Fairweather and a number of local volunteers to take the project forward. There was an amicable agreement for the Jazz Centre UK to take over the arrangements with Southend Council.

The Jazz Centre UK serves a different but complementary purpose to that of the NJA. The Jazz Centre UK is a centre for performance, it stages jazz workshops particularly for youngsters, and it has weekly film shows. It is a place where jazz enthusiasts can meet socially. It also has a fascinating display of jazz artefacts which are not collected by the National Jazz Archive which generally confines itself to printed materials and oral history recordings. The Jazz Centre holds a fine collection of books and journals which are on loan from NJA and are part of our duplicate collections.

Fellow trustee Roger Cotterrell and I went to visit the Jazz Centre two weeks ago and spoke at length with Digby about how we can continue to move forward together. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Jazz Centre UK on their recent lottery grant award to celebrate the 100 Club. NJA is hoping to work with the Jazz Centre on the project.

### **The Future**

What of the future? There are many reasons to be positive about the future of the Archive. We are doing remarkably well. Important strides have been made in some of the areas which were highlighted last year as concerns. These include:

- Maximising access to and knowledge of our holdings amongst the widest possible audiences.
- Making sure that our collections are maintained to the highest standards.

However, there are a number of issues which continue to dominate the discussions of the Trustees.

And there is one new one. The issues include:

- Space. There is never enough.
- Funding. This is an ongoing headache. We continue to look for sources of funding. There is still no one sustainable source which guarantees the future of the collections.

- Diversification. This applies across the board including membership of the board of the trustees and audiences. The Archive is still seriously un-representative when it comes to women, non-white people and younger people.
- As I mentioned, this year we have a new pre-occupation. This is a proposal by Essex County Council to re-develop the site of Loughton Library.

The library sits on a substantial site with a large parking area which arguably could be better used for much needed housing. The proposed development is potentially either a threat or an opportunity.

The plans are strongly opposed by local residents. This building is used by over 25 different community groups, including Loughton Town Council and Citizens Advice. The grant of planning permission to Essex County Council is subject to an appeal. An application has been made by Loughton Town Council for the library to be designated as a community asset.

There was of course much concern when the planning application was granted in August of this year. NJA has been pro-active in making sure our interests are taken into account. NJA has a 25 year Service Level Agreement with Essex County Council which takes us to 2028. The first point to make is that there is no question of there not being a library in Loughton in the future. This is a first tier library, which means that whatever branch libraries are closed Essex County Council is committed to keeping a library in this area.

It will also be important for Essex to house other important users of the library, which include Citizens Advice and Loughton Town Council. NJA has received assurances from the Chief Executive of Essex County Council and from the relevant planning department that NJA will be consulted regarding its needs in any development. So there are a number of possibilities. The development might not go ahead at all. If it does go ahead then it is hopeful that NJA will either be rehoused in an alternative building or that space will be provided in any new building on this site.

Before I go on to thank individuals for their support, I should thank Essex County Council for the valuable support they have provided over many years, not least the provision of the space in which we are sitting now.

## **Thanks**

This is an important occasion for thanking all of the people who have contributed to the success of the archive over the last year and often over long periods of time. I do so in no particular order.

## **Trustees.**

It is important for our Board of trustees to include where possible people with expertise and experience in all the different areas which are essential for a thriving Archive of this nature. We have continued to be pro-active in identifying gaps in the Board.

We have on the Board trustees with expertise on areas such as images and copyright, governance, financial management, marketing, the music industry, conservation and the museum sector, and in jazz history and IT. While the Board demonstrates an excellent range of skills and experience, the trustees are conscious that it lacks diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender and age and we will persevere in our attempts to address this imbalance.

Skill gaps that we have identified are in fund-raising, engagement with younger audiences and in professional archiving. These positions are due to be advertised shortly.

Trustees are of course all volunteers who give their time and expertise freely to support the Archive.

## **Other volunteers**

There are also many other volunteers who play a huge part in making the Archive what it is and who are the life blood of the Archive. There are too many to mention them all by name. However, I am bound to pay particular tribute to:

Mike Rose who works doggedly and tirelessly to put on fundraising concerts and other events during the year.

Namechecking of other volunteers present

### **Staff**

I thank **David Nathan**, our archivist, and Essex County Council. ECC have continued to provide our facilities at Loughton free of charge and pay for David's part time position. David will give a short report of just some of the ways the Archive has been used this year. I also take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Library who look after us.

Special thanks go to Angela Davies, our **volunteer manager**.

Other people to thank are **Helen Walker**, our bookkeeper, who has continued to work reliably and steadily over the years to keep our books in order; **Thomas Kuglin**, our IT 'guru', who works steadily in the background to keep our IT functioning; and **Scott Nicol** of Rabbit Records. The Archive receives regular donations of LPs and CDs which do not form part of our collections. Scott markets these and turns them into vital funds for the ongoing work of the Archive.

### **Patrons**

Finally I should mention the fantastic list of NJA patrons who come from all areas of the jazz world and who provide invaluable ongoing support as patrons and also in many cases by contributing to our fundraising concerts.

### **Conclusion.**

In conclusion, although we are far from complacent about the challenges the Archive faces, the Archive is in robust health. Hours were spent at the away day this year in Birmingham debating an update to our mission statement. The snappy version we eventually arrived at is '*Working for the past,*

*present and future of jazz.*' We are really grateful for your support in supporting this important mission. **ENDS**