

The Severn |Jazzmen – 40th Anniversary

Somewhere roundabout this time, nobody seems to be very certain when exactly it is, the Severn Jazzmen celebrate their forty years of residency at the Old Duke in Bristol. In view of the risk of not making it to the 50th anniversary it was deemed appropriate to celebrate now. The band, renowned for its broad range of jazz styles from New Orleans to Mainstream, shows no signs of giving up and with a healthy book of engagements, still continues to develop its repertoire. Plans are in hand to produce an anniversary CD to showcase some of their new numbers and also to play at several public venues during the anniversary period.

Starting out in 1967 as the Steamboat Stompers playing at the Black Horse in Thornbury, the band moved via the Bear in Hotwells to become the resident band on Wednesdays at the Old Duke in 1968. In the heady days of the Trad boom, the band quickly established itself and had no shortage of gigs. It was in demand for many private functions and Jazz festivals both in the UK and on the Continent. Tours were made annually for many years to Germany, Holland and Belgium. On one occasion in Dendemonde, Belgium the band found itself sandwiched on the same bill between Louis Armstrong's All Stars and the Dutch Swing College.

Over the years the members of the band have come and gone but three of the original members, Dave Millman (Piano), Brian Huggett (Clarinet/Sax) and John Viner (Banjo/Guitar) are still with the band. Many will remember 'Flurge Appleyard' the trumpet player who was with the band from those early days until his untimely death in 1997; a man of few words but many wonderful trumpet notes and phrases. His replacement, Martin Williams plays very much in the Bix Beiderbeck style and is known to grace the audience with the occasional vocal refrain. Alan Bramley (trombone) joined the band in 1987 having had to leave his own band, The Seventh City Jazzmen of some 18 years standing in Leeds due to a job change. John Keel joined the band in 2007 with a background of classical as well as jazz drumming. The man with the peculiarly looking stick bass is Mike Ducker; nobody has ever seen him ask for music or heard him play a wrong note!

The band has, on a number of occasions, enjoyed the enriching experience of having some top jazz professionals playing with the band; Acker Bilk, George Chisholm, Danny Moss, Roy Williams, Kenny Baker to mention just a few.

Despite the vicissitudes of landlords and breweries, the band has survived at the Old Duke and continues to attract good audiences for its alternate Monday sessions. Is 40 years of residency at one location a record for a jazz band? Further anecdotal information about the band is available from Dave Millman for the price of a pint. In the meantime watch out for the celebration events which include the Old Duke on Monday 20th October this year and check the band website for updates at www.severnjazz.co.uk.