

# Young jazz at The Palace

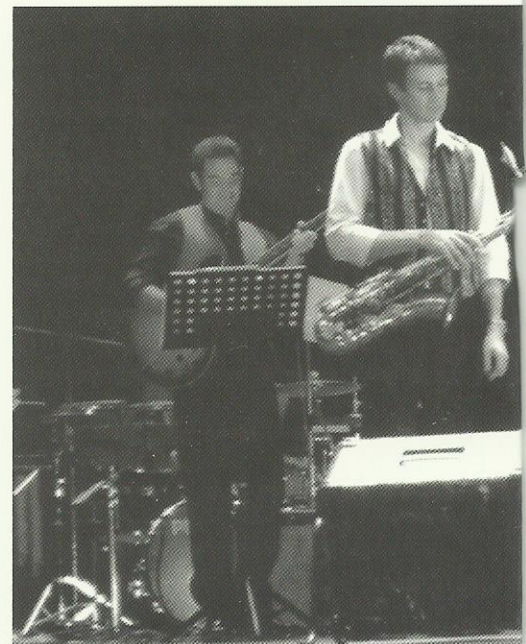
**Musicians' love for NYJO is here to stay**

**F**reeman Keith Howell writes The concert appearance of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra at the Palace Theatre in London's West End on Sunday 30 September was the showcase event of the 16th Soho Jazz Festival, and provided the Musicians' Company with a perfect opportunity to launch its three-year sponsorship programme: see also page 1.

The NYJO's arrival on stage was preceded by a subtle and lively performance by this year's Company Bronze Medallist, guitarist Colin Oxley, and his trio of bassist Simon Wolf and drummer Sebastian de Krom, whose deftly swinging and cohesive musical interplay was both highly inventive and beguiling.

Their four extended performances culminated in a particularly effective rendition of the old Bobby Troup blues *Baby, baby, all the time*, following which Colin received his medal from Master David Hill and expressed his thanks to the Company for its work in supporting jazz.

Junior Warden Nigel Tully, who skilfully



▶ booking the band. Then I failed my exam, Part 1 Institute of Actuaries, two years running. The boss called me in and said, 'Mr Barber, we actually wanted a mathematical student and we appear to have a clerk who plays the trombone. Would you mind leaving before we actually sack you?' So I left."

Chris Barber's father, resigned to the fact that his son wasn't going to become an actuary, offered to pay his fees to study at the Guildhall School of Music, if he was accepted. This was the early 1950s, with most young men doing their National Service, from which Chris was exempted due to his twisted spine.

"I went along to the Guildhall, and was the only trombone player that had come in the whole year. If I'd gone and said I was willing to learn to play the trombone if they'd buy me one, they would have said, 'Yes, yes, yes, please!' They had no brass players as they were all in the army.

"Prior to going to the Guildhall I actually went to Denis Wick for two lessons to try and get the idea of which end was which, and where the notes were supposed to be, so I could play a scale of C or something, enough to get me in. But I'd never even tried to read music on the trombone, and there I was on the first day playing Brahms' Second Symphony."

Violins were plentiful at the Guildhall, so Chris suggested he might take double bass as a second instrument, although he didn't actually own one

"That wasn't a problem as they said I could use one of theirs. I was taught the double bass by Jim Merrett, possibly the world's greatest double bass player at that time. In three years, with a half-hour lesson a week, I don't think I played the bass once. I heard him play for half an hour every week! I play all right, and I've sold more records on the bass than on the trombone as I played bass on *Rock Island Line*.

"On that first day at the Guildhall I was the only trombone player in the First Orchestra. Within a month I brought in Keith Christie on first, and Eddie Harvey on third. The only trumpet was Johnny Harris, a marvellous and underrated player. He was Lulu's MD for so long, and then Tom Jones', that he never got a chance. He could have been put out like a Maynard Ferguson, at that level, I'm convinced of it. But this was the Guildhall School of Music First Orchestra and it was straight, very straight! Tiny Winters was on bass because there were no bass players. There were

no musicians around because all those of a certain age were in the bloody army!

"I remember one time we were playing a Stravinsky symphony and the principal, Sir Edric Cundell, stopped the orchestra.

"Brass."

"We all covered. 'Yes, sir.'"

"You all play jazz, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give us some *rhythm*, then!"

"I was taught by Maurice Smith, who was orchestral manager at Covent Garden and used to make records during the war for the Gaumont British Dance Orchestra, or whatever they called it. So he'd been around and knew his stuff.

"He said: 'Chris, I can't teach you to play the trombone. You know how to play. You'll be all right. But I'll teach you the things you've got to know if you're going to be a professional musician. Orchestras only need trombones for certain works, so you should know those works - Brahms One, Two, Three, Four, *Rosenkavalier*, Verdi operas', and so on.

"The next term the Guildhall decided the First Orchestra wasn't up to standard so they were going to re-audition for it. We all had to go to the principal's office one by one, and he gave me *Rosenkavalier*, which of course I knew by heart. I couldn't have sight-read it, but I played it perfectly. 'Good, Barber. You play jazz, don't you?'"

"Yes sir."

"Play me some."

"What the hell do you do by yourself on a trombone, relatively inexperienced, to say the least? So I played a chorus of *Tiger Rag*.

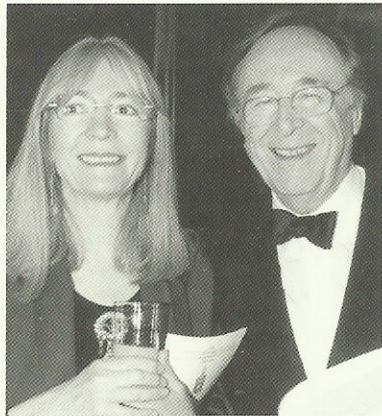
"When you play this with others, how do you know what you're going to play?"

"Well, we use chord symbols."

"Write me down some, I'll play them on the piano.' So I wrote out *Careless Love* and he played the chords while I played the tune. 'Thank you,' he said, and that was all. Nothing else. He was willing to see that there was something worth understanding, but he didn't draw any conclusions or say anything about it.

"He knew we used to get together in the canteen sometimes after orchestra sessions, playing jazz. The fiddle players looked at us with envy as they never got to improvise anything in their lives, and they were totally amazed by it. The simplest phrase you can play flabbergasts them as they only play when they're told what to play because they've been brainwashed. You can't have an orchestra unless you play

*Continued on page 14*



**Silver Medal jazer: Chris Barber and his wife Kate at this year's Musicians Mid-summer Banquet**