

# Clarinet & Saxophone

Winter 2011 Volume 36, Number 4



**LIVERPOOL SINGLE REED DAY  
PHOTO SPECIAL**

William Opton

# Jazz rock pioneer **Barbara Thompson's** inimitable blend of jazz, rock and classical music is still taking the saxophone into new territory

Saxophonist Barbara Thompson is one of those rare beings: a jazz musician who has achieved mass popularity and critical success without the sacrifice of artistic integrity. Anyone who is unfamiliar with her work will recognise the arching melody that cuts to the heart of the opening credits to *A Touch of Frost*. She was a pioneer in the birth of British jazz-rock and since 1977 has played stadia across Europe with her all-star group *Paraphernalia*, recording over fifteen albums with various ensembles. Following the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease in 1997 she retired from performing in 2001. Happily for music lovers she was subsequently persuaded to resume live performances with the group *Colosseum*, led by her husband and producer, the drummer Jon Hiseman, and is still playing to huge audiences. 🎷

Barbara follows in the footsteps of maverick multi-instrumentalist Roland Kirk

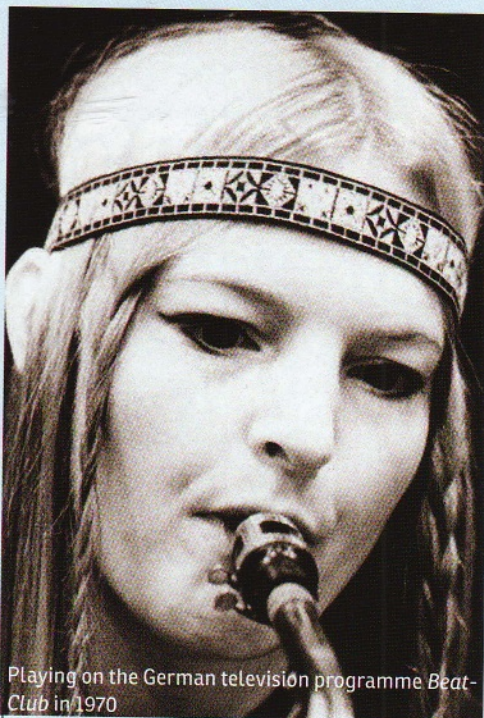


# Barbara Thompson

Over the last forty years Barbara and Jon have played an important role in the UK music scene with bands such as the *New Jazz Orchestra*, in collaborations with Andrew Lloyd Webber, and on countless recording sessions. As with other British jazz musicians, they have achieved most recognition in Europe. 2011 has been a busy year for Barbara, with the long-awaited release of her new DVD, *Paraphernalia Live '05*, the broadcast in February of a BBC documentary about her entitled *Playing Against Time*, and an ever increasing demand for her talent as a composer of rhythmically vital classical music.

Being aware of the debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological condition that makes movement increasingly difficult, I visited Barbara without knowing what to expect. I found her busy preparing for the Polish leg of Colosseum's summer tour, her lounge table replete with saxophones, boxes of reeds and earplugs, and her piano covered in work in progress for *Paraphernalia's* next album. For a musician the effects of Parkinson's are particularly devastating and this is Barbara's last tour until new medication is available. Barbara remains practical in the face of adversity. "I have played for as long as I knew I could but I have come to the stage that I know my illness is going to start having an effect. I want people to remember me for what I can do rather than what I cannot." That Barbara has maintained such a high standard of musicianship over the last decade is a message of hope to all sufferers. "I think we would always have started to cut down on touring; it is time to start making some new journeys," says Barbara. I know from experience that Barbara has a lot to offer as a teacher via masterclasses and is keen to pass on her insights on musicality and repertoire.

Prior to her breakthrough as a soloist Barbara worked extensively as a multi-instrumentalist in shows and with the all-female *Ivy Benson Band*. Her experience in the show *Cabaret* inspired her to pursue a creative career and she was soon working with luminaries such as John Mayall, Georgie Fame, Kenny Wheeler and Graham Bond. The 70s were something of a golden age for the jazz-rock saxophone. In America Michael Brecker and David Sanborn were the leading lights in a scene that included *Blood Sweat and Tears* and *Chicago* while England could boast Dick Heckstall Smith, Lyn Dobson and Chris Mercer. Barbara brought new degrees of subtlety to what she describes as an otherwise macho environment. Her ability to bring light and shade to any ensemble seems to have been a result of her classical training at the Royal College of Music in London. "The saxophone wasn't even recognised as an instrument when I was at college," says Barbara. "I broke all the rules the minute I got there." She was the only student gigging



Playing on the German television programme *Beat-Club* in 1970

Her advice to composers is to keep the musicians on their toes

outside of college and no one else studied three instruments: clarinet, flute and piano.

Barbara studied clarinet with Sydney Fell and took surreptitious lessons with saxophonist Charles Chapman, an acolyte of Ronnie Ross, the virtuoso baritone saxophonist also known as *The Sewing Machine*. The influence of Ross is apparent in her playing, although her own personality shone through.

"I did loud and fast, but if you are trained as a classical musician you learn to phrase things in a certain way. They liked the way I could bring things down very quietly," says Barbara.

Musical education has changed dramatically since Barbara was a student. Today the saxophone is not only accepted but colleges are producing dedicated classical saxophonists who are enthusiastically

pursuing advanced techniques, including quartertones, harmonics and multiphonics. Specialist jazz courses form a significant part of music education as they attempt to teach jazz saxophone with varying degrees of success. "It's quite incredible," says Barbara. "I think the saxophone has really come into its own. I've just been asked to write works for saxophone orchestra to be premiered by the Royal Northern College of Music at the World Saxophone Congress in St. Andrews next year." She was keen to play the first of these works which showed that her inimitable blend of jazz, rock and classical music is still taking the saxophone into new territory.

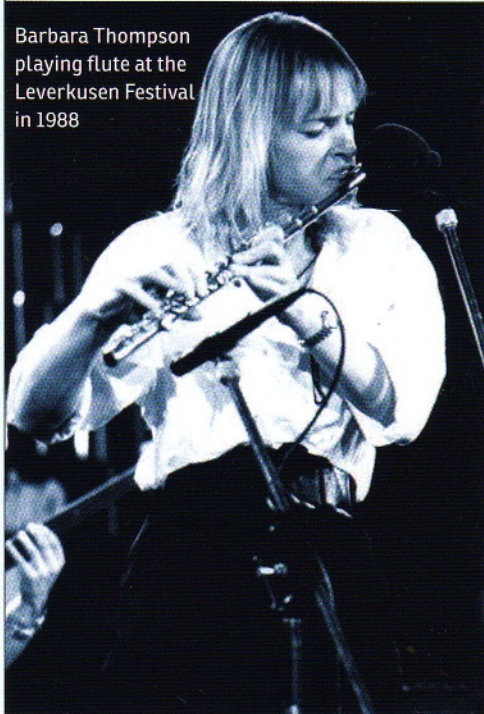
Barbara's approach to classical composition is certainly unique and does not make concessions for different genres. "I think rock has become more sophisticated in its own way than jazz and classical music," says Barbara. "There's no doubt modern classical music is quite weak rhythmically. That is what modern classical composers cannot do, so I think modern classical music is looking to rock for inspiration." Living with drummer Jon Hiseman Barbara learnt rhythm the hard way, or as she puts it. "When you've got a drummer like Jon behind you, you get rhythmical". It often seems that the only difference between Barbara's music for *Paraphernalia* and compositions such as her Saxophone Quartet No. 1 is the musicians who play it. Barbara plays me her new work for flute and piano, *Chinese Whispers* which builds on the Eastern influences of *Paraphernalia's* album, *Shifting Sands*. This work certainly makes up for the absence of a rhythm section with its scintillating melodies, grounded by a driving piano accompaniment.

Barbara's classical training is also obvious in her writing for *Paraphernalia* which features violin virtuoso Billy Thompson and pianist Peter Lemer alongside bassist Dave Ball and Jon Hiseman. "I write everything down so a lot of the time Peter is playing exactly what's written," says Barbara. "The jazz musicians I use come from the same background as me. Classical musicians are a



Colosseum on their 'Tomorrow's Blues Tour', 2003

Barbara Thompson playing flute at the Leverkusener Festival in 1988



university circuit that provided a platform for high quality left field groups such as Pink Floyd, The Jimi Hendrix Experience and Yes. "We just do not have a history of supporting the arts," says Barbara. "A circuit gives good unknown groups a chance of gaining a foothold but we've lost the footholds." Readers will be familiar today with the experience of hearing promising performers play to small apathetic audiences in pubs. "If you're not well known then nobody comes and that's it," says Barbara.

Increasingly, musicians are aware of the need for adaptability for which Barbara has been a great advocate. Today she questions whether individuality has become a millstone. "The institutionalisation of music has turned out a lot of brilliant young musicians and quartets," says Barbara. "They follow the path that I took and play a bit of everything, but have nowhere to go." Asked how she thinks she would fare as a budding musician today she suggests that talent is no longer the main arbiter of success. "If you are a very good musician but not a good hustler then without the old platforms you won't get anywhere," says Barbara. "My advice is to play the instruments that others do not. That gives you a chance of being noticed. I had the advantage of being female but that is nothing new now."

Barbara's creativity has often seen her setting trends in music. Her 1991 album *Songs*

whole are so used to having different things put in front of them and *Paraphernalia* have got to be able to play like classical virtuosi one minute and *rooty-tooty* jazz musicians the next." Her advice to composers is to keep the musicians on their toes. "If they are bored that is when you are in trouble".

Generously, Barbara has made the scores of her compositions free to download via her website [www.barbara-thompson.co.uk](http://www.barbara-thompson.co.uk). She has recently completed a piano reduction of her concerto in three movements, each featuring a different saxophone. Barbara is keen for works such as this to be performed by the amateur and professionals alike. Other notable works include her three quartets, written for the Apollo Saxophone Quartet and recorded on their album *Three Quartets*, and *Mirages, Concerto No. 2* for saxophone quartet and string ensemble, commissioned by the Rascher Saxophone Quartet.

Like many artists in the 70s Barbara enjoyed being part of a thriving live music scene, performing with John Dankworth, Stan Reynolds's The Greatest Swing Band in the World, The United Jazz & Rock Ensemble and her own Jubiaba along with recording for the likes of Manfred Mann. Amazingly, she did not play a saxophone until the opportunity arose to play alto in the *Háry János Suite* with the London Schools' Symphony Orchestra when she was 19. Barbara showed me the Conn 6M Underslung alto saxophone she used on that occasion and which was only recently superseded by a more ergonomic Yanagisawa. "When I finished school I did a secretarial course and thought this is living hell," says Barbara. She took saxophone lessons and played with the Ivy Benson Band for a year. "I learnt everything about swing from her. She was very upset when I left to go to RCM. During those three years in London everything happened. I was very lucky."

Barbara is concerned at the loss of the

*from the Center* (sic) of the Earth, recorded in the vast Abbey du Thoronet in Provence, presaged the success of Jan Garbarek's *Officium* and the wave of jazz-world music that followed. *Songs from the Center of the Earth* explores ancient folk music with plangent improvisations on themes ranging from European plainsong to ballads from Syria. Her rendering of *The Fanaid Grove* became famous as the theme for *A Touch of Frost*. "We had to record it at night to the accompaniment of bats' wings; all those years ago when it was just my solitary saxophone and the bats. I could never have imagined 19 million people would hear it as the theme for *Frost*. That's the music business; the things you think are bound to be a success never are and then something like that really takes off."

The secret of Barbara's success lies in her instantly recognisable sound, a combination of vocal warmth and cutting reediness. Despite numerous imitators no one brings such a sense of musicality to the style. The influence of players such as Brecker and Sanborn is palpable, along with her favourite saxophonists, Roland Kirk and Yusuf Lateef. "I found that I just wasn't good enough to imitate other people," says Barbara, "because the people I wanted to imitate were the best and you couldn't do it better than them." Barbara's decision to follow her instincts brought her considerable critical acclaim and increasingly it was her own compositions that drew the biggest audience reactions. "*Little Annie-Ooh* was a big hit 30 years ago, particularly in Germany," says Barbara. "They play it at weddings and even funerals. It really gets serious when people say they want to have your music at their funeral."

Parkinson's disease has had an increasingly strong effect on Barbara's life over the last decade. For six years the director of *Playing Against Time* Mike Dib has shadowed her, gaining insight into the struggles backstage and in hospital. Barbara describes the crew rushing onstage to rescue her from slipping from her chair as she collapsed exhausted, saxophone in hand. The documentary is a sequel of his 1978 BBC documentary *Jazz, Rock and Marriage* which explored Barbara's musical relationship with Jon Hiseman. In 1978 Jon's band *Colosseum* disbanded and he joined *Paraphernalia*. This time the tables were turned and Barbara had joined the reformed *Colosseum*. "The emphasis was on how people cope with Parkinson's. How they keep working or not working, deal with collapsing or simply keep philosophical."

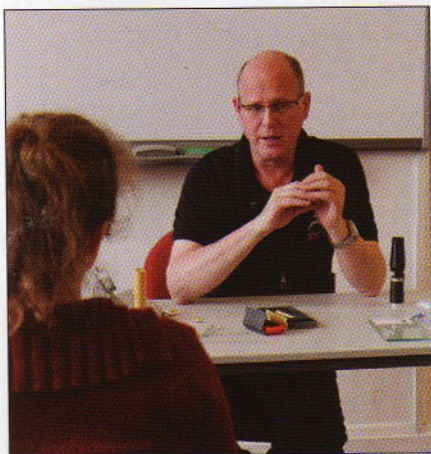
I left Barbara to her tour preparations and wondered how I could have coped with the problems that she has faced. I look forward to seeing her again at the Saxophone Congress and playing her compositions there. ■



Barbara on recorder

# DAY

Photos: Peter Thompson



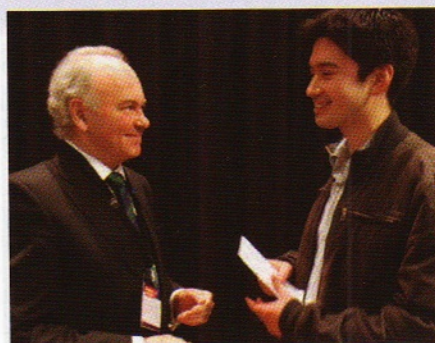
## Competitions 2011

### Clarinet Soloist Competition 2011 Winner:

Kimon Parry (accompanied by Tony Ingham)  
Adjudicators: David Campbell, Paolo De Gaspari, Linda Merrick

### Saxophone Quartet Competition 2011 Winner:

Quadrophonia Saxophone Quartet:  
Sally McTaggart, Catherine Evison, Ellie Steemson, Michael Brogan  
Adjudicators: David Campbell, Richard Ingham, Jeffery Wilson



Kimon Parry received a cheque of £1000 from David Campbell. His programme was:  
Schumann, *Drei Romanzen*, Op. 94  
1. Nicht schnell  
2. Einfach, innig  
Horovitz, *Clarinet Sonata*  
3. Con brio  
Lovreglio, *Fantasia da Concerto su motivi de la Traviata di G Verdi*, Op. 45



Quadrophonia received a cheque of £1000 from David Campbell. Their programme was:  
Scarlatti, arr. Bornkamp, *Sonata in D major*, K96  
*Rivier, Grave et Presto*  
Barbara Thompson, *Saxophone Quartet No.1*

8 pages of Books, CDs, Concert & Music

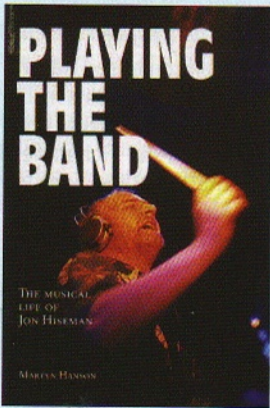
Clarinet  
& Saxophone

# Reviews

Book Reviews Book Reviews Book Rev

## PLAYING THE BAND

**The Musical Life of Jon Hiseman**  
Martyn Hanson  
Temple Music, £14.95



Jon Hiseman (born in 1944) has been at the centre of the British jazz-rock scene for over 50 years as a drummer, composer, bandleader and producer. In this extensive and well-written

biography Hanson is aided by the fact that Hiseman, far from the convention that if you can remember the 60s you probably weren't there, can recall those seminal times in meticulous and pragmatic detail. The book narrates Jon's life against the rise and fall of the British music industry but avoids eulogising over our lost collegiate music scene. In addition to leading his own group *Colosseum* to fame across Europe, Hiseman has performed with a bewilderingly eclectic list of musicians, from the New Jazz Orchestra to Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames. While some of these have since struggled to remain household names Hanson reminds us that others, such as Graham Bond, deserve to be remembered as tragically lost geniuses. Hiseman provides an honest account of the dynamics of touring groups; his recollection of John Mayall culling his entire band on a whim is particularly candid, if unsurprising.

*Clarinet and Saxophone* readers will be pleased to know that considerable sections are devoted to the lives of Barbara Thompson and Dick Heckstall-Smith, two of the most prominent British saxophonists of their generation. Hiseman describes his musical and

personal relationship with his wife Thompson as his greatest achievement in a career that has included collaborations with Jack Bruce, Gary Moore and Arthur Brown. Thompson's career as a multi-instrumentalist and composer is of particular interest, and Hanson provides a unique insight into the career path of a professional musician, including some of the pros and cons of being an attractive female in a male if not always macho world.

William Upton

## JOE HARRIOTT - FIRE IN HIS SOUL

Alan Robertson  
Northway Publications, £20  
ISBN 978 0 955090888 5 7

The first edition of this book sold out in May 2008. Author Alan Robertson reveals that after publication in 2003, numerous people contacted him to add details and provide a more detailed picture of the saxophonist. How pleasing to learn that a jazz biography has sold out, and that interest in Joe Harriott remains strong.

Joe Harriott was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1928. He came to London in 1951, sitting in with local bands at every opportunity, not only with the bebop players of the time, but with New Orleans and blues bands as well. Americans visiting Britain, including Paul Gonsalves, Clark Terry and Thad Jones, wanted to play with Harriott when they were in town. Soon afterwards Harriott began to develop his radical musical ideas. Robertson remarks that as early as 1958 Harriott was thinking his way towards something revolutionary. Ellsworth 'Shake' Keane (whose love of literature led to his nickname) said that they "tried to unscrew the inscrutable". They speculated on what would happen if you played jazz without chords. Ornette Coleman had yet to appear on the scene.

Yet critic Benny Green was unable to understand how such an accomplished musician as Harriott could not perceive the difference between free form and no form at all. At the time, saxophonist Tubby Hayes was also vehemently opposed to free jazz.

Although the outstanding Keane left Britain for Germany, Robertson's view is that 'with Harriott, self-doubt never had the air to breathe'. There was also no room for self-doubt in Harriott's attitude to drugs. He didn't like what had happened to Charlie Parker, his attitude being reinforced by close-hand experience of the effect of heroin on Phil Seamen and Tubby Hayes.

The Indo-Jazz Fusions, in which Harriott played a role, are dealt with in some detail. According to John Mayer, 'World Music began here'. Robertson includes an account of an appearance at Ronnie Scott's where sitarist Diwan Motihar was late to arrive. Scott's club announcement was in character: 'Ladies and gentlemen we are sorry we are a few minutes late, but Diwan Motihar couldn't find a baby sitar.'

Shake Keane returned to St Vincent in 1972 to take up a government position as director of culture. By then, Harriott was scuffling for money. Disillusioned, he lost control over his drinking. Joe Harriott died in January 1973, at the age of forty-four.

Robertson's account of Harriott's life is thorough and moving, an important addition to the written history of jazz in Britain.

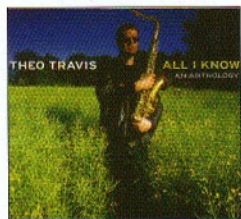
John Robert Brown

First published in *Jazz Journal*. Used by kind permission. ■

*Immeasurable Code*, featuring a Morse Code motif and a piccolo solo. All nine tracks following track one have something interesting to say for fans of 21st century jazz.

Kenneth Morris

## ALL I KNOW – AN ANTHOLOGY



**Theo Travis**  
(tenor/soprano  
/flute) with  
various small  
groups  
33JAZZ215 (two  
CD set)  
www.33jazz.com

Quoting Brian Morton and the late Richard Cook (of the *Penguin Jazz Encyclopedia* and *Guide to Jazz Recordings* fame), 'Theo is a British saxophonist who moves easily between post-bop, fusion and, most recently, free jazz idioms' to which I find it imperative to add 'a composer and performer of themes and improvisation of exquisite musicality'.

As the album title implies all of the 21 tracks are extracts from nine CDs made in the years 1993 to 2009 using musicians from the leader's jazz club and jazz festival touring combos, principally quartets and quintets. The album notes observe that all the items were 'honed (to perfection – my two added words) on the road' over scores of appearances. Tony Coe, on bass clarinet, makes a guest visit in disc one track four and Palle Mikkelborg brings his trumpet or flugelhorn onto a track in each disc. Otherwise an extraordinarily competent bunch of pianists/Hammond organists, bass players and drummers support Theo's broad-toned horn across all of the tracks in the set.

Disc one carries his melodic modern jazz offerings/lyrical easy listening solos mainly on tenor but with one track *Ghosts of Witley Court* on flute and *Northern Lights/Sand Dance* on soprano. My most admired track is *Waterlily Boogie*, nothing whatsoever to do with boogie woogie, just a beautiful mid-tempo composition and superb improvisation. Only one track *Here's That Rainy Day* is not a Travis original, the rest, nine, are. Conclusion: 68 minutes of pure pleasure.

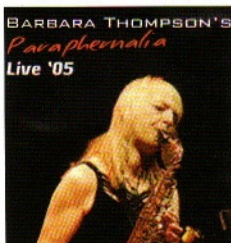
Disc two is devoted to eleven mainly jazz-rock fusion pieces and lasts just over 70 minutes. Again all but one (track four) 21st Century *Schizoid Man* are Travis compositions. I particularly enjoyed tracks five to eight made up of *Things Change*, an excellent flute solo; *Lovely*, a 100% improvised sop sax/bass guitar duet; *Full Moon Rising (Part 2)*, a light fusion 12 bar blues and *Barking Dogs and Caravans*, a slow fusion number with a little altissimo tenor work. John Etheridge (guitar) guests on two tracks, *The Crow Road* and *Anything to Anywhere*, to great effect. Conclusion: if you like jazz-rock fusion and you're a tenor

sax 'improver' Theo Travis is well worth a listen.

Again, quoting Richard Cook, 'He (Theo) could use more exposure of his work on more prominent (jazz promoting) labels'. After reviewing this excellent value set, I agree.

Kenneth Morris

## PARAPHERNALIA DVD



**Barbara Thompson**  
Live  
Theaterhaus  
Stuttgart, 15th  
November 2005  
Temple Music

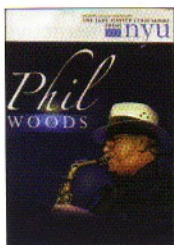
This DVD is a major addition to Thompson's legacy. Her struggle with Parkinson's disease led to a recent decision to retire from live performance for the foreseeable future. This is a strong release and confirms that her energy and drive will be sorely missed on the live music scene. The unlikely frontline combination of saxophone, violin and synthesisers is redolent of late *Steps Ahead* and the group swings from Django Reinhardt inspired trad jazz to reeling folk music with ease. Although Thompson is the star of the show violinist Bill Thompson is the perfect foil, contrasting her gritty solos with virtuosity and finesse.

The footage is traditionally produced allowing the music to do the talking but the simultaneous use of multiple camera angles cleverly reflects the interaction between these musicians. The DVD communicates Thompson's stage presence and *Paraphernalia's* obvious camaraderie in a way that would surely be lost on CD.

The set is drawn largely from her album *Never Say Goodbye*, and takes off when Andy Scott and Rob Buckland make a cameo appearance in *On the Wings of a Prayer*. As if to remind us that *Paraphernalia* can rock with the best Jon Hiseman is almost invisible, although not inaudible, driving the music from behind a fortress of cymbals and drums.

William Upton

## PHIL WOODS DVD



**The Jazz Master Class**  
Recorded 9th October,  
2005 at the Centre for  
Jewish History, New York  
City  
Includes interview with  
Gary Giddins, interview  
with Phil Woods, and  
various students. Total

running time three hours, 23 minutes.  
Artist House, The Jazz Master Class Series,  
Ahmc7

Phil Woods plays, talks, listens to  
advanced students playing, gives

comments, takes questions from the assembled students from various NYC jazz schools, and is interviewed intelligently and at length by noted critic Gary Giddins. Hitherto there has been too little of Phil Woods's playing available on DVD. This release is therefore welcome.

During the 1990s the saxophonist was suffering from dental problems as well as emphysema. Happily there are no signs that dental problems impair his playing in this DVD. Woods, born in 1931 (80 this year), is clearly overweight and tends to be short of breath. However, his playing is still focused, fluent and, when needed, fiery. Woods's beautiful tone still sets the standard for jazz alto.

"If you're entertaining notions of becoming a brain surgeon or a tenor man, I'd go with brain surgery," he advises the assembled saxophone students. "Jazz music is only for those who have no choice." Getting close to biting the hand that feeds, of the contemporary scene he adds: "There's so much jazz education, and so little jazz". He has deserted his long-time favourite gold-plated Mk V1 Selmer alto for an unlacquered Yamaha 82Z. We learn that he plays on a Meyer 5 medium mouthpiece from the 1950s, which has never been worked on. "You don't work on mouthpieces. You just play on them and they become yours," he says. His reeds are Vandoren ZZ. Previously he used LaVoz reeds, but had criticisms of the packaging. So he wrote to Rico to make suggestions for improving the way that the reeds were packed for sale. A letter came from the company: 'Dear Mr Woods; We are sorry that you are dissatisfied with our produce. If you tell us what instrument you play, we will send you a box of reeds.' He keeps that letter on his 'humble wall', he says. "I'm not Kenny G. I'm not that famous. I've only won the *DownBeat* Award twenty years in a row."

Woods has words of wisdom concerning standard songs. "Ninety per cent of the standards that Dizzy [Gillespie] loved were written by Jewish people. It's never pointed out that the blacks and the Jews really invented jazz," he says, pointing out that this was omitted from the Ken Burns Jazz programme. "As was Benny Carter, and the European harmonic tradition," he adds, naming Kurt Weill, George Gershwin and Vernon Duke. He looks to a type of Latin American jazz as the way forward. "If there's a future for jazz, it lies in that direction," he says. "The idea of five guys jammin' on *Confirmation* in a garage is over."

An excellent DVD of generous length, and highly recommended.

John Robert Brown