

A Tribute to 'Jazz at the Philharmonic'
(Cadogan Hall, 14th September 2014. Review by Peter Vacher)

How's this for a plan? The Jazz Repertory Company's **Richard Pite**'s aim was to recreate Jazz At The Philharmonic in facsimile form, using the best local talent, and thereby to pay due homage to these ground-breaking shows and incidentally, their instigator, Norman Granz. Those of us old enough to remember a time when such all-star US troupes came into town, sweeping all before them, Oscar and Ella at the forefront, might have given Pite's dream short shrift but he has form when it comes to this kind of adventure. More to the point he has a retinue of able players and vocalists who can, momentarily, take you back to a time when a package show like JATP could offer you all that was best yet sometimes vainglorious about this music.

The avuncular Pite, split in two as part-time front-man and drummer, had badged the show as a 70th anniversary celebration and programmed it to follow JATP's time-honoured routine. Thus pianist **Nick Dawson**, with bassist **Joe Pettit** and guitarist **Nigel Price**, opened as representing the Oscar Peterson Trio and my, what a fist they made of it. Dawson played like a man possessed, his keyboard dash and flow of ideas on *Honeysuckle Rose* like OP on fast-forward. The trio stayed on [with drummer **Elliot Henshaw** added] for **Nicola Emmanuelle**'s all-too short Ella-inspired set, this singer's vibrato wider than Ella's, her tonal warmth a delight and swing savvy uppermost on *It's Alright With Me*. And with me, too.

Tenorist **Pete Long**, with Pite on drums, and Dawson rallying round, then offered their version of the Gene Krupa Trio, all spirited fun although Long's emulation of Charlie Ventura was too near parody for my taste. **Georgina Jackson** was then given the perhaps unenviable task of evoking Billie Holiday in a three-song mini-set, with an augmented band. Nicely done, even if her US-accent distracted me for a minute, but again her innate jazz feeling and sheer vocal élan won the day. As Red Allen used to say, 'Nice'. And then came the first half closer – The Three Tenors, that's Long, playing himself this time, **Ray Gelato** and **Dean Masser**, all three 'Brylcreamed and smartly-suited', as Pite put it, again with the masterly Dawson, Price, whose every solo was a startler, Pettit and drumming dynamo Henshaw. Bristling, hard-swinging, surging, big-toned, competitive, the dictionary can hardly do it justice, what with Henshaw's tireless drive and the rhythm section's vital swing. Each man on song, trading choruses, eights, fours, riffs, you name it. What a joy.

The second half was made over to the 'Jam Session', with the Drum Battle between Pite and Henshaw for starters, the two men as one, the latter just edging it for me, trombonist **Callum Au**, trumpeters **George Hogg** and **Tommy Walsh** added to the ensemble. There followed the Ballad Medley, each player heard in turn, major-domo Long on clarinet, all of this delirium culminating in the Trumpet Battle on *Sweet Georgia Brown*. Here Hogg's classy structures emerged a tad ahead of Walsh's high-altitude forays, both young men compellingly good, as were, well, every one of them. Pite's beatific smile throughout said it all as did this audience's cheery approval. Quite a celebration and quite a show.