

Elliott Henshaw Big Band  
Ronnie Scott's  
29<sup>th</sup> July 2012

"Buy my CD!" shouts the voice from the stage, which clearly hasn't mastered the art of subliminal advertising, but the audience laughs as they enjoy the joke along with the great music. With the country gripped by Olympic fever, Ronnie Scott's was hosting its very own Olympic Classic Jazz Series, and carrying the torch to help shine a light on the drumming masters of the Swing Era was the Elliott Henshaw Big Band.

Henshaw, a well-known drummer in London's West End, and who recently put together the Buddy Rich Memorial Concert, played two sets with his band, which consisted of a stellar line up of musician's including such luminaries as Nigel Hitchcock on sax and Laurence Cottle on bass. The first set featured classic tunes by Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Thad Jones/ Mel Lewis, and paid tribute to the likes of Gene Krupa, Harold Jones, Louis Bellson and Sonny Payne, while the second set was dedicated solely to the music of Buddy Rich.

The musicianship was superb and the banter between the band members was humorous, and with a plentiful array of sounds and feels, the music never tired. One minute it was a fast, driving "Basie Straight Ahead", which the brass section punched out with the full force of a hurricane followed by the mellower Basie number, "Cute", featuring delicate brush solos from Henshaw that paid tribute to Sonny Payne. "Big Dipper" had the band playing a shuffle that positively dripped with feel and with Henshaw playing the "Oriental Crash of Doom" china cymbal, recalling the way Mel Lewis used to play, this had to be one of the highlights of the first half.

Punctuating the sets were trio numbers and pianist, James Pearson's moving version of "Bye Bye Blackbird" was a fine tribute to the former Ronnie Scott's house drummer, Chris Dagley, who tragically died two years ago.

After the interval it was all Buddy Rich charts and the band kicked off the second set with the anthemic "Dancing Men". They cheered each other on in the solos and there were plenty of opportunities for each player to shine. In between the high squealing trumpets and low growling trombones, long melodies flowed from the saxes, weaving it all together; the excitement dial was turned up more for every tune until the needle was in the red, whilst underneath it all the rhythm section fuelled them on even further. A blistering "Love for Sale" for the finale had the band teetering on the edge and taking risks, leaving the audience clinging to their seats for support.

This was a truly Olympic effort from everyone involved, but especially Nigel Hitchcock who then proceeded to sprint off stage to catch the last train home.