

Smith's Academy Informer

Founded in 1985 by John and Margery Styles

An occasional journal with information about all Westbrook projects,
tours and recordings.

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Swanning About

More than a year has elapsed since **The Uncommon Orchestra's** triumphant London appearance at Kings Place. After a period 'in the wilderness', the Orchestra is back, and 'A Bigger Show' is on the road again.

The 'Phantasmagoric Circus' will first pitch its tent at The Albany, South London on Friday September 29th. The very next night it will be at The Apex in Bury St. Edmunds.

The Westbrook Band's association with The Albany goes back to the 70s, and its early days as a centre for community arts and alternative theatre. It has evolved into a state-of-the-art venue, still rooted in the community it serves. The Apex is a brand-new concert hall in the centre of Bury St.

Edmunds. The Westbrooks' return to the city follows hard on the heels of the much-acclaimed performance of *WESTBROOK BLAKE* in the Festival back in May.

The 21-piece Orchestra will be re-united at the beginning of September. All the regulars will be on board, with the exception of **Andy Dore** (temporarily unavailable) and **Ken Cassidy** who has hung up his bass trombone. The new face in the trombone section will be that of the young **Sam Chamberlain-Keen**, a DYJO member. The very talented **Joe Carnell** will take the trombone solos.

The venue for this gathering will be The Swan's Nest, a spacious and hospitable pub out in the Devon countryside near Exminster. The Orchestra will hold 'open rehearsals' on September 3rd, 10th and 24th. These Sunday sessions will start around mid-day, and admission is free.

If the open rehearsal idea proves popular, maybe the Swan's Nest could become a new base for the Orchestra, and a much-needed rallying point for jazz and contemporary music aficionados in the area. Like the music, the food may sometimes be controversial but the groove is guaranteed!

Flipster

The line-up of **The Uncommon Orchestra:**

Kate Westbrook, Martine Waltier voices
Billy Bottle voice and bass guitar
Roz Harding, Sarah Dean, Alan Wakeman,
Pete Whyman, Ian Wellens saxes
Jon Scott, Sam Massey trumpets
Dave Holdsworth sousaphone and
pocket trumpet
**Joe Carnell, Sam Chamberlain-Keen, Stewart
Stunell** trombones
Jesse Molins, Matthew North guitars
Marcus Vergette bass
Coach York, Theo Goss drums
Mike Westbrook keyboard
Tim Goodwin concierge

Remembering Catania 1992



Mike Westbrook writes:

Over three nights in the summer of 1992 the Associazione Catania Jazz, directed by **Pompeo Benincasa** and **Marcello Leanza**, did me the great honour of presenting a 'Mike Westbrook Music Festival'. Our friendship with the Associazione had begun in the mid-80s with a surprise booking for the **Brass Band** to perform an open-air concert in the Giardino Bellini. The rapport with the audience was so instantaneous and exuberant that, after several encores the police had to be called in to disperse the crowds. The idea of a full-scale festival of our music was born. It took several years, and many meetings in London and Catania, to bring it to fruition.

Eventually Pompeo and Marcello were able to raise the necessary finance (from Anti-Mafia sources) to stage an ambitious

event that involved twenty-five musicians plus production team, with all their travel and hotel costs, a dozen European jazz journalists flown in, all expenses paid, and the publication of a book to accompany the festival. Moreover, the concerts were free to the public. There were critics present from the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. The festival was widely reviewed and a full account appeared in SAI no. 28.

The Orchestra at that time was at a peak and boasted one of its strongest line-ups (see below). This was a period when we were touring in the UK and Europe with **BIG BAND ROSSINI**, culminating in a concert in the Albert Hall in the BBC Proms. This followed a season at Ronnie Scott's and the recording of the **ORCHESTRA OF SMITH'S ACADEMY** album at the Crawley Jazz Festival.

The first concert in Catania, on July 24th, was a performance of **BIG BAND ROSSINI**, by then well established in the repertoire. For the second, on the 25th we were joined by **Dominique Pifarely**. **AFTER SMITH'S HOTEL** focused on recent original compositions such as *On Duke's Birthday* and *London Bridge*, and included the first public performance of *I.D.M.A.T.* It also saw the premiere of *Measure For Measure*, one of the most complex and demanding works Kate and I have ever attempted. It's like a semi-improvised opera, with Kate's 'Shakespearean' lyrics set against shifting blocks of orchestral sound, and the sparring of two great alto saxophonists, **Chris Biscoe** and **Alan Barnes**.

THE EUROPEAN SONG BOOK, the July 26th concert, drew on three decades of compositions including *Citadel/Room 315*, *The Westbrook Blake*, and *Mama Chicago*. Above all it featured material from *The Cortège*, a work that was inspired by the **Brass Band's** tours in Italy. As well as Dominique, special guests **Phil Minton** and **Daniilo Terenzi** were welcomed onto the stage. Among many highlights was Phil's rendering of *'I See Thy Form'* against the high trumpet arrangement never before heard outside the studio. *Leñador* unleashed a marvelously passionate solo from Daniilo.

This was to be the last time he played with us. Within three years he had died of cancer at the age of thirty-nine. Since Catania we have also lost **Dave Plews**, **Pete Saberton** and our tour manager **Phil Clarke**.

It was a concert of musical and emotional extremes, but it ended with the tranquility of *Golden Slumbers* and the unison voices of Kate and Phil. They then led us into the grand finale of *The Toppers' Rant*. At the end, the musicians dispersed into the crowd, and the music faded away leaving an empty stage.

Shortly before the festival was to take place, Italy was shocked by the Mafia assassination of the judge Giovanni Falcone in Palermo on May 23rd. Across Sicily public events were cancelled. In a brave gesture of hope and an affirmation of solidarity against the widespread mood of hopelessness and disillusionment, the Associazione decided to press ahead with the festival. For security reasons they were not able to use the intended venue, the amphitheatre of Rocca Normanna di Paternò, near Catania. At the last minute they switched to the roof terrace of a crumbling palazzo in the old town, now used as the headquarters of the trade union CISL. All around the streets, banners proclaiming 'Basta Mafia!' ('Enough of Mafia') hung from balconies.

Pompeo and Marcello and their friends transformed the rooftop area into a magical performance space, open to the night sky, with stage, excellent sound and lighting, a superb grand piano, a small bar and the distant sound of traffic from the streets below.

Today with our advanced technology, no performance seems to take place that is not filmed and recorded, even if it's only on someone's phone. Twenty-five years ago all we came away with was a 'desk mix' of bits and pieces. The desk mix records what goes into the microphones, not the acoustic sound, so the balance is all wrong. This is a problem that has

affected many 'live' recordings in the past. Some classics by the Ellington Orchestra and the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band come to mind. Fortunately a strong performance can still break through a poor quality recording. There are moments of the Catania tapes that give a flavour of the gig, like the piece we have chosen here *View From The Drawbridge*, with a memorable solo by Alan Barnes. But really no recording could have begun to capture the joy and energy of the music or the atmosphere of love and friendship generated by this very special event. Our Catania friends gave me the best gift a composer ever had. I am eternally grateful to them.

Listen to 'View From The Drawbridge' and see photographs from the Festival:
<http://tinyurl.com/yd622rdw>

MIKE WESTBROOK ORCHESTRA CATANIA 1992

Kate Westbrook voice

*Chris Biscoe, Alan Barnes,
Pete Whyman, Alan Wakeman, Chris Caldwell*
saxophones

Karen Street saxophone & accordion

*Graham Russell, Dave Plews, Noel Langley
James McMillan* trumpets

Paul Nieman, Adrian Lane, Tracy Holloway
trombones

Andy Grappy tuba

Frank Shaeffer cello

Pete Saberton piano

Anthony Kerr vibraphone

Steve Berry bass

Peter Fairclough drums

Mike Westbrook piano

with guests

Phil Minton voice

Dominique Pifarely violin

Danilo Terenzi trombone

Blasts From The Past

Martin King travels back to the late 1960s and early 70s with new CD reissues of early Westbrook works MARCHING SONG, LIVE 1972 as well as a release of a pair of BBC recordings by Neil Ardley and the New Jazz Orchestra.

MIKE WESTBROOK CONCERT BAND MARCHING SONG

*(volume 1, volume 2, plus bonus disc)
RPM Records TURBXM 500*

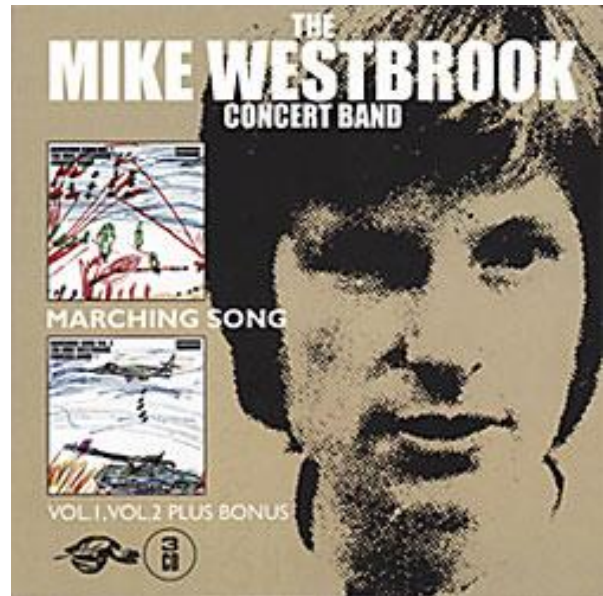
*John Warren, Mike Osborne,
Bernie Living, John Surman, Brian Smith,
George Khan, Alan Skidmore (saxes)
Dave Holdsworth, Kenny Wheeler,
Greg Bowen, Henry Lowther,
Ronnie Hughes (trumpets)
Eddie Harvey, Malcolm Griffiths,
Mike Gibbs, Paul Rutherford (trombones)
Tom Bennelick (french horn)
George Smith, Martin Fry (tubas)
Mike Westbrook (piano)
Barre Phillips, Chris Laurence,
Harry Miller (basses)
Alan Jackson, John Marshall (drums)*

MIKE WESTBROOK LIVE 1972

Hux Records Hux 151

*George Khan (tenor sax, electric sax,
flute)
Gary Boyle (guitar)
Mike Westbrook (keyboard, harmonica)
Butch Potter (bass guitar, pogo stick,
flute)
Alan Jackson (drums, alto sax)*

**NEIL ARDLEY &
THE NEW JAZZ ORCHESTRA
ON THE RADIO: BBC SESSIONS 1971**
Dusk Fire, DUSKCD115



MARCHING SONG, one of Mike Westbrook's first major compositions for big band is back in a new CD release. The work, according to **Duncan Heining** in his extensive and informative notes included in the package, 'combines emotion with intellect and gut feeling with a musical language that is articulate and imaginative'. For me it has a special resonance as, in London in 1968, this was my first live encounter with Westbrook's music. That performance was given by the 15-strong **Concert Band**, though for the 1969 studio recording the forces swelled to a roof-raising 26-man line-up (and I think there are one or two passages where double-tracking expands that number even further).

There's a stellar cast of soloists - **John Surman**, **Mike Osborne**, **Alan Skidmore** and **George Khan** all turn in strong statements, and that's just the sax players. Turning to brass we hear from **Dave Holdsworth**, now a stalwart of the Uncommon Orchestra and the contrasting trombone styles of **Paul Rutherford** and **Malcolm Griffiths**, and the frantic cries of **George Smith's** tuba. The late **Harry Miller** is featured in a couple of bass duets, the first (*Landscape*) with **Barre Phillips**, the second (*Home*) with **Chris Laurence**. The two drummers **Alan Jackson** and **John Marshall** provide a powerhouse of muscular but flexible drive. Listen, for instance, to the way the incessant crisp yet buoyant military beats underpin the restless harmonies of the title track then break up into the ferocious chaos of battle noise.

Westbrook himself provides some typically reflective solo piano (*Landscape*) but, in an album that challenges much jazz orthodoxy, his major contribution is that of composer. He creates a vast and vivid picture of the horrors of war, comparable to Picasso's *Guernica* in its scale and impact. While the work is clearly a product of the late 1960s, and captures the revolution-in-the-air feel of that era's politics and music, its message and music transcend its time and speak directly to us today. It deserves to be heard wide - and loud!

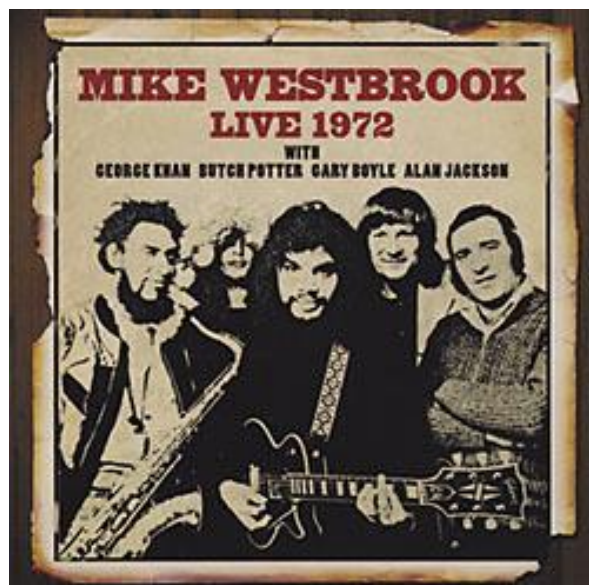


Pablo Picasso, Guernica (1937)
Oil on canvas, 7.76m x 3.49m
Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid

A bonus disc (*WHEN YOUNG*) included in the *MARCHING SONG* package includes an embryonic version of *Marching Song* by the **Mike Westbrook Sextet**. Dating from 1966 this shows how the piece began its life in Mike's regular working group, and incidentally marks the earliest Westbrook recording to be officially released.

This extra CD contains other previously unissued material from 1970 by the **Mike Westbrook Quartet**. *When Young* opens with some Monkish piano and leads to a hard-edged ballad-with-attitude showcasing some of **Mike Osborne's** finest alto playing. He had fully assimilated Ornette Coleman's organic approach to free playing and this track is as inventive, melodic and passionate as anything by the harmolodic master. On *But It Must Get Better And It Will Get Better* he repeats a 10-note bass line for nearly four minutes while Mike provides a succession of piano counterpoints. He then goes off on his own explorations before the piece reaches a peaceful conclusion. These tunes also give us a

chance to hear **Harry Miller's** propulsive bass, with soaring virtuosic flights and moments of profound lyricism. Finally, a couple of tracks from the 1970 edition of the Concert Band (originally issued as a single and included in the Vocalion CD release of *LOVE SONGS*). With **Norma Winstone's** airy vocals there's a lighter touch here. *Original Peter* is a catchy little ditty, while *Magic Garden* is delightfully wistful



summer-of-love stuff. Two years later Mike was running a 5-piece band. The emphasis here was on jamming: rocky riffs and open-ended blues-inflected solos were the order of the day, often extending into spacey free-form blowing. This was the time the **Grateful Dead** toured Europe. At the Bickershaw Festival the Westbrook band appeared on the same bill as the Dead. Some of the music on *MIKE WESTBROOK LIVE 1972* - the slow blues of *Travellin'* or the most 'out' parts of *Compassion* for instance - would not sound out of place at a Dead concert. (Conversely some of the free improvisation on the Dead's *EORPOE '72* set could hold their own in a Westbrook performance.) Guitarist **Gary Boyle** is very much centre stage here, both in the mix and in the cover photo on the *MIKE WESTBROOK LIVE 1972* CD (Hux 151). The overall sound is rocky and earthy giving **George Khan** full reign for his highly animated tenor sax, electric and acoustic. **Butch Potter**, described by Westbrook as 'a great natural musician' and sadly no longer with us, was equally at home here as in the adventurous if somewhat abrasive rock approach of Pete Brown's *Battered Ornaments*.

Much of this album has been available before (as *MIKE WESTBROOK LIVE*) but this new release features a pair of additional tracks, *Spaces* which features a long, lively and imaginative drum workout from **Alan Jackson**, followed by a spiralling tune which provides a launch pad for a guitar solo, and this band's 10-minute take on *Marching Song* which is almost guaranteed to annoy your neighbours. It's good to see that Esther Ripley's comments, which featured so prominently on the original album cover, have been retained for the new packaging because they really hit the nail on the head. She wrote:

It is the infectious music which doesn't seem to begin or end. It whisks you away into a pulsating kaleidoscope dream of world sounds, bursts of noise and quiet, unnerving spaces. Then suddenly the melody is back, like a familiar turning in the road.

These albums make a welcome appearance and are essential listening for anyone interested in the formative years of Westbrook's music.



NEIL ARDLEY & The New Jazz Orchestra
On The Radio: BBC Sessions 1971



Summer of '72: The music was hot but the weather was not. Grateful Dead and Westbrook play the Bickershaw Festival.



Also, for anyone with a taste for British jazz from this era a new release by **Neil Ardley and the New Jazz Orchestra** (*ON THE RADIO: BBC SESSIONS 1971*), *Dusk Fire*, *DUSKCD115*) is also well worth a listen. Powered by **Jon Hiseman's** drums, and including other **Colosseum** members, notably **Dick Heckstall-Smith** and **Barbara Thompson** the NJO steam through a selection of pieces by the likes of George Russell, Mike Gibbs, Mike Taylor, Jack Bruce, Barbara Thompson and Ardley himself. You can hear Neil's deep admiration for Gil Evans in these carefully crafted arrangements. The set also features something of a rarity in *The Time Flowers*, an impressionistic piece for chamber jazz group, strings and electronics. Humphrey Lyttelton's original radio announcements are retained.

For new listeners, all these CDs provide a fascinating insight into an innovative era in our music, and for those of us old enough to remember, they take us right back to those pioneering years.

Hey, I'm 21 again!

Martin King

UP'N'COMING

The Uncommon Orchestra

The Swan's Nest

Exminster
Devon

Sunday Sept. 3rd.
Sunday Sept 10th.
from mid-day

'Open Rehearsals'
Admission free

Sunday Sept 24th
from mid day
'A BIGGER SHOW'
Preview Performance

Admission free

Friday Sept 29th. 7.30pm
A BIGGER SHOW
The Albany
Deptford
London

Saturday Sept 30th
7.30pm
A BIGGER SHOW
The Apex
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk

See Diary for full details
<http://tinyurl.com/cpc8ku>

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Contributions are welcome and should be emailed to the Editor, Martin King, email:

platterback@yahoo.co.uk

Westbrook website:
www.westbrookjazz.co.uk

email:
admin@westbrookjazz.co.uk