

David Shepherd – Tribute from Jazz Steps

We are deeply saddened to learn that Dave Shepherd died recently. On behalf of all at Jazz Steps, we pass on our condolences to his wife Astrid, their family and close friends.

Dave held a life-long passion for jazz music - and its performers and audiences - that he generously channelled through being a promoter for live jazz in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire over several decades. Dave's larger-than-life presence and his skills in organisation and negotiation meant he was a vital part of the local jazz scene.

Dave Shepherd was born and brought up in Sneinton. He learned bricklaying at People's College and soon began working in construction. National Service saw Dave in Germany at the height of the cold war, in the 8th Royal Tank Regiment. Back in this country, he began promoting jazz gigs with friend Richard Castledine.

Work throughout the country took Dave away from local jazz until 1990, when he returned to Nottingham. He partnered with his friend Richard Castledine to promote gigs at the Hand and Heart. Continuing to work as a contracts manager until retirement, he was soon joined by Brian Pearce, leading to the start of Jazzhouse in 1993.



This successful, not-for-profit organisation operates under the name 'Jazz Steps' and has promoted contemporary jazz at the Bonington Theatre, Arnold for over 20 years.

Dave was the Chair of Jazz Steps for many years and also had a significant role in booking performers during that time. He was wise and funny and had an inimitable style when introducing bands and making announcements at gigs.

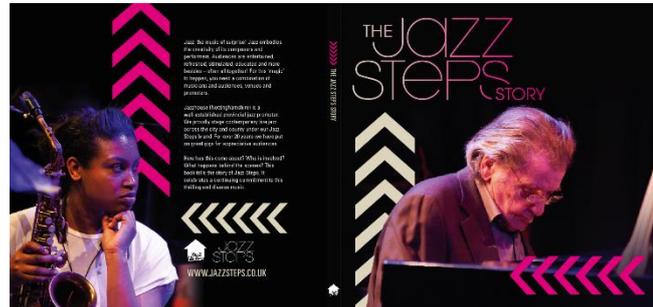
In the photo, Dave (left) is with other members of the Jazz Steps committee at that time - Katie Butcher, Ian Perry, Bob Meyrick, Brian Pearce and Carl Billson – and our audience at this gig at the Bonington Theatre.

Dave was the instigator, along with Inspire staff Michelle Dunstan and the late Marie Davies, of Jazz Steps Live At The Libraries (JLATL) – a joint venture that brings top quality jazz across different genres to enthusiastic audiences at library venues across Nottinghamshire. Dave was the JLATL music programmer for several years, booking regional, national and international artists for these 4-gig mini-tours that are popular with both audiences and artists alike. Those who went to JLATL gigs at West Bridgford library on Thursday nights would be warmly welcomed by Dave and be well entertained by his infectious humour as MC.



Dave took a lead in organising a first draft of a book to celebrate 20+ years of Jazz Steps at the Bonington Theatre. This was a springboard to volunteers producing a 150-page fully-illustrated book titled *The Jazz Steps Story* that is available in local libraries and through [Jazz Steps](http://www.jazzsteps.co.uk).

Dave contributed several pieces, including ‘Recollections’ (Chapter 2) where he ‘reflects on his passion for jazz and tells how he promoted live jazz in Nottingham at a range of venues before Jazzhouse came on the scene.’ It begins:



‘My passion for jazz music began as a boy, listening to the radio with my school friend Richard Castledine. We liked to listen on the radio to American Forces Network (AFN), which played rock ‘n’ roll and jazz of all kinds. We particularly liked one particular programme – Hot House. The station ended the previous programme with a polite “*At this late hour of the evening, be courteous to your neighbours – turn your radio down*”. But almost immediately came a more excited “*Now turn your radio up – it’s Hot House!*”, and a blast of bebop at its best followed.

Sharing a passion only serves to increase its intensity. So, on leaving the army in 1961 after a period of national service, Richard and I ran the Riverside Jazz Club at the Town Arms public house in Nottingham from 1962 to 1967.’



This photograph, reproduced from the book, shows the Riverside Jazz Club’s house band and the promoters standing behind Tommy Saville’s Hammond B3: (from left, Mel Thorpe (tenor sax), Richard Castledine (promoter), John Marshall (tenor sax), Tommy Saville (piano/keyboard), Geoff Pearson (bass), Les Shaw (drums), Dave Shepherd (promoter).



Dave provides some great anecdotes from those times. One involved saxophonist Tubby Hayes who was a jazz hero of his. Normally, Dave would book artists directly as few had agents. However, Tubby had to be booked through Pete King at the Ronnie Scott club - £15 cash to include his train fare. Dave recalls, ‘On one memorable night Tubby Hayes played a tune so fast he tried to lose the band. They stayed with him all the way, though, and at the end Tubby threw his arms around Tommy Saville and said “You mother*****! I tried to lose you, but you stayed with me.” The band and Tubby became firm friends as a result of that, and he came to the club several times afterwards.’

Dave was well-read and a keen bridge player, who also enjoyed a wide variety of the arts. His tastes in jazz were eclectic too – although he had a definite preference for bebop and straight-ahead jazz.

A while ago, we asked him to nominate a ‘My Jazz Choice’, part of our homage to One LP - <http://onelp.com/>, a project by photographer William Ellis in which musicians and other people in the arts are portrayed with a favourite album and tell why ...”



Dave’s choice was: The Shape of Jazz to Come by Ornette Coleman from 1959. Here’s what he said:

“I’ve been interested in jazz since my teens. Bebop was an early revelation, with groups on Blue Note such as those led by Art Blakey. Someone at the Nottingham jazz club I was going to at the time lent me the LP of Shape of Jazz to Come. On first hearing, I thought it was a bit weird-sounding, but then really liked it – and have been playing it ever since! I enjoy contemporary players who seem to be interested in pushing the boundaries of what jazz can be, for example Led Bib and Jan Kopinsky who both played at Jazz Steps. You should try listening to this Ornette record if you haven’t already!”

Through Dave’s widespread influence - and with his dedicated energy and drive as a local promoter - we have all had the privilege of being in audiences that have thrilled to the music performed by top quality jazz artists and improvisers.

Thank you Dave!

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