

Full Bio

Like other Jazz musicians blessed with that "here's me" originality in their soloing, tenor saxophonist Johnny Lippiett was first inspired to play through listening to gospel singers. In particular, a choir of voices radiating from a Pentecostal Church near his childhood home of Manchester, England.

"I recall they had these amazing signers and musicians up there on stage, and the whole place was really going off like some Baptist Church in the Deep South! That was my first exposure to the excitement of improvised music", he explains.

"So it seemed natural that the first band I ever joined was a church band, simply because of the energy and the way that the music came straight from the heart."

Although Gospel soon gave way to Blues - and his heroes became Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf and Hendrix - Johnny managed to keep one ear tuned to jazz through his Dad's extensive Bebop collection.

He says he never really fitted in at school, leaving without any formal qualifications. But after he heard of a diploma in jazz studies he quickly found his niche. His playing took a quantum leap forward. It was there he met (tenor saxophonist) Bobby Wellins, one of England's finest jazz talents who took hem under his wing and became his friend and mentor.

(cont'd)

Through Wellins, he started experiencing the London jazz circuit, sitting in with many of the top players. After completing another short performing arts course, he packed his bags for North America; firstly Montreal, then New York and New Orleans.

"I guess I would've been 18 at the time. I was completely flat broke, hardly knew anyone and was really scuffling to get by," he says.

"But what the New York scene gave me was an invaluable lesson in jazz history and of the self belief and determination that is necessary to succeed in this industry."

Returning to England, Johnny managed to gain access to the prestigious Dartington College of Arts on the strength of his playing where he graduated with an Honours Degree in Music. Over those three years he was a finalist in the young jazz musician of the year competition, worked with jazz great Courtney Pine and studied regularly with saxophone virtuoso Morninton Lockett.

The Independent at the time said Johnny was 'One of the most exciting and original new voices to be emerging onto the jazz scene.'

Upon graduation he continued to work the London scene with his own band as well as getting a valuable teaching qualification in jazz saxophone from the University of London.

After meeting a kiwi girl in London the pair moved to New Zealand. While some might argue that the move limited his own burgeoning career, Johnny says he has no regrets.

(cont'd)

"I only came here for a little holiday and a look around but then I met Paul Dyne and Roger Sellers and we hit it off instantly. Roger had been a resident drummer at Ronnie Scott's and Paul was one of Montreal's first call bassists, we came from the same place!"

The three started playing live in Wellington, later recording the 'Boptet' album.

It was through Dyne, then head of jazz at Massey University, Johnny started as a lecturer at the music school. Shortly after he became a Selmer Clinician.

Johnny says he's enjoying advancing his practice at the conservatorium while still keeping in touch with the International scene through his research. He also fits in the occasional mini-tour whilst he's in Europe.

He still plays live regularly - the Lido club has become something of an institution every Sunday night.

Johnny is also busy with lots of corporate work and recent commercial contracts have included Air New Zealand, Mobil and Saatchi & Saatchi.

"I see Wellington as a great place to get your head together, to practice, to compose and to take your playing forward. Working at Massey is brilliant in terms of the resources I can call on. I feel truly blessed."
