

Jazz on a Summer Evening

The Friends of Wareside Church were delighted to accept an offer to raise funds from local resident and Musical Director of Ronnie Scotts' Jazz Club, James Pearson, for an evening of jazz entertainment. James, with singer Polly Gibbons, recently returned from a tour of North America, produced a memorable evening of jazz with bass player Sam Burgess. During the evening James invited one of the event organisers, Paul Goodman, to join them with his unusual Cajon drum. Together they almost raised the roof and had us dancing in the aisle.

The church was packed with devoted jazz followers where it was standing room only. James has a unique talent which has been honed over the years with great artists like Cleo Lane. When I met up with him a few years ago on a Baltic Cruise ship he was Jackie Dankworth's pianist. Now he tours with Polly Gibbons who also has an excellent vocal range and improvisational flair. Along with Sam Burgess on Bass they treated us to a varied programme of well-known jazz classics. The highlight of the evening was James' request spot where members of the audience were invited to suggest a familiar tune to be played in the style of a famous musician. George Shearing, Dave Brubeck and Rachmaninoff all crept into the list of challenges along with the theme for East Enders and Three Blind Mice. No-one was able to catch out the maestro who delighted the gathering with his interpretations!

During the interval and a chance to chat with friends, the audience were treated to sandwiches and wine outside in a marquee. Jo and Danny Field provided the delicious and varied spread. The evening was warm so there was nothing to dampen our enthusiasm for the second half.

Paul, the occasional percussionist, was invited again to accompany Polly on his Cajon drum, which he had picked up about a year ago. He tells me that he wanted "something that was versatile and fun to play but which was easier to carry around and which worked with acoustic instruments". This box-shaped percussion instrument originally invented in the late 1800s from Peru certainly wasn't too loud for the keyboard, singer or bass.

Thanks must go to James and his fellow musicians and the other organisers of this event, Nicholas Buxton, Richard Hart and Steve Wood with their helpers for bringing about an exceptional evening for the community and friends further afield. We'll all be eagerly waiting for the next Jazz Concert. The money raised from the event was an impressive £2,500.

Ann E Neuff

Ann E Neuff, retired Drama teacher from Hitchin Girls School, produced James in a musical production of "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe" when he sang the role of Edmund aged about 14 years!