

# Jim Young - pioneer of Edinburgh New Orleans jazz

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**An appreciation:**

**Jim Young – jazz string and brass bass player - born in Edinburgh 7<sup>th</sup> June 1933, died Edinburgh 13<sup>th</sup> August 2017, aged 84**

The world of Edinburgh jazz has lost another link with its earlier days with the recent death of veteran string and brass bass player, Jim Young. Jim Young spent many of his school boy years in Canada and it was there, in his school brass band, that he learned to play the sousaphone. Although brought up on a diet of classical music, in common with many others who would become life-long devotees of jazz, he would often recall a seminal moment that opened his ears to this music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was in 1945 and back in Edinburgh, when he saw a short film in the Grand Cinema in Stockbridge about the revival of interest in early forms of jazz. Like many another, Jim recalled that it was the rhythm of the music that particularly captivated him and he would describe how that first experience made the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

The revival of interest in early jazz was a global phenomenon which swept across the UK in the 1940s and the impact on Edinburgh was there and waiting for an energetic young man with his curiosity and enthusiasm aroused. Consequently, it was not long before Jim found his way into the Edinburgh jazz scene of the time where he visited the West End Cafe, hearing Graeme Bell's Australian Jazz Band, and the Oddfellows Hall in Forrest Road, where he regularly listened to the band of clarinettist Sandy Brown. Even in these early days, this was fine band which included trumpeter Al Fairweather and pianist Stan Greig, both of whom, together with Sandy Brown, were to go on to make a considerable impact on both British and international jazz. Jim Young, a creative and innovative individual throughout his life, was never going to remain content as a listener and, after further opportunities during National Service in the RAF to develop his brass playing ability including playing in a military band at the Queen's coronation in 1953, he returned again to Edinburgh determined to play an active part in this exciting new music.

Amongst those he met during his time in the RAF was one Mike Hart, then fresh from playing drums with the Sandy Brown band in Edinburgh and later to be a mainstay of Edinburgh jazz and founding director of the Edinburgh International Jazz and Blues Festival. Back in Edinburgh, it was not long before Jim was involved with others of similar persuasion and taking his first steps towards playing jazz. Early efforts on trumpet and trombone came to nothing and it was entirely by accident that he found himself playing the string bass. Attending a session at which the Edinburgh Art College Jazz Band was playing, it turned out that the bass player had failed to show up. Improvisation is at the heart of jazz and the band leader, trumpeter Pete Davenport, knowing that the double bass was at the venue, called over the Jim Young *'You know about music, pick up that bass and play it. It has the notes marked on it so you should have no problem'*! Nothing loath, Jim did as instructed and by 1955 he had acquired a bass of his own and his jazz career was up and running.

Something of an entrepreneur, Jim was quickly involved in the setting up and running of jazz clubs around the city and, decades later, was still bemused by the resistance put up by the authorities of the time. Time after time, jazz initiatives were closed down by the police or the local council until, in desperation, a session was arranged on a hired boat, the M.V. 'Second Snark' out on the Firth of Forth! However, the jazz scene was too vigorous to be denied and soon Jim was one of a group who made up the Climax Jazz Band, which would remain a major player in Edinburgh jazz for many years. Others in this group included trumpeter Jim Petrie, trombonist Jack Weddell and drummer Kenny

Milne, two of whom are still active in local jazz today, 60 years later. The Climax Jazz Band was dedicated to what, at the time, was called 'purist jazz' and now usually called 'New Orleans jazz', that is jazz founded on the very earliest of jazz in New Orleans, long before the later more commercial varieties of jazz developed.

Jim was also a key figure in a London version of the Climax Band and played and made recordings with a number of well-known marching jazz bands, including 'Casimir's Paragon Brass Band' and 'Dejan's Olympia Brass Band'. He was also selected by the famous band leader Chris Barber to play brass bass in a set of recordings issued as an LP, 'Chris Barber Special'. Back again in Edinburgh, Jim was a key figure in the local development of bands in the marching tradition, forming the Auld Reekie Parade Band in which he played brass bass, frequently playing in the early Edinburgh International Jazz Festivals. Back in the 1960s, Jim regularly organised a marching jazz band to play at the Tron Church on Hogmanay and always reckoned that this successful venture was the seed from which the later Edinburgh Hogmanay celebrations developed. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he played in excellent bands built around a core of high class veterans such as Al Fairweather, clarinettist Dave Paxton and Kenny Milne.

Jim Young's involvement in the active playing of jazz continued, including a re-union tour with the Climax Jazz Band to Australia, until the middle 1990s when, sadly, arthritis in his hands and wrists brought his string bass playing to an end. He continued for some years after this to play the sousaphone and, even in recent years, would still turn out to hear local jazz with his enthusiasm undimmed, still giving great encouragement to active players. Jim Young was one of the pioneers of New Orleans jazz in Edinburgh and his organising ability, influence, enthusiasm and music over 5 or 6 decades played a major part in establishing Edinburgh as one of the UK's major jazz cities.

**Graham Blamire, August 2017**

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