



Title: Jack Graham: An Appreciation

Author/Editor: Graham Blamire

Page range: 1-3

Date published by SJA: 30 May, 2022

URL: <http://scottishjazzarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/jgaa.pdf>

Jack Graham – jazz clarinettist: an appreciation

(b. 1929, d. 2005)



Jack Graham in about 1970

Followers of jazz in Edinburgh and indeed around Scotland will have been saddened to hear of the death at the age of 77 of Jack Graham, for many years one of our best-loved and most admired jazz clarinettists.

Jack first appeared on the Edinburgh jazz scene in the early 1950s. His accomplished playing and musicianship quickly established him as major force and he was soon invited to join a band which included Dave Keir (trombone) and Alex Welsh (trumpet) and in which he succeeded Archie Semple.

Jack was a mainstay of Edinburgh jazz throughout a career covering five decades. At one time or another, he played with most of the established Edinburgh jazz bands and was in constant demand in dance music. He put in lengthy spells Charlie MacNair's Jazz Band, Old Bailey and his Jazz Advocates, Mike Hart's Society Syncopators and the Scottish jazz Advocates. In the 1990s he provided the perfect foil for the trumpet of Jim Petrie in the Diplomats of jazz. With these bands, Jack made many broadcasts and recordings which remain to remind us of his playing.

Admiration for his sinuous and graceful clarinet sounds was not confined to Scottish jazz, and he won many friends and admirers when on tour in America and Europe, where he was a familiar figure at many jazz events.

As long ago as the 1950s, Jack was voted best clarinetist in a Scottish jazz poll and he was with the Society Syncopators when they took the trophy for best traditional band at the 1979 Dunkirk Jazz Festival. The Edinburgh International Jazz Festival brought opportunities to play alongside distinguished jazz musicians from all over the world and Jack's playing drew glowing compliments from fellow musicians.

Jack's clarinet playing was sometimes likened to that of the great Ed Hall, but, in truth, he was his own man, with an instantly recognisable sound. He was blessed with a fabulous ear and had a vast knowledge of tunes and songs. I played hundreds of gigs with Jack and came to believe that he knew and was able to play just about every tune ever written.

In many ways, it was Jack's remarkable versatility and ability to fit in so readily that made him such a well-loved and respected musician. He always sounded completely at home in jazz settings that varied from New Orleans to Swing, his supple, responsive and agile clarinet nicely complementing the trumpet lead and enhancing the ensemble, his tone bright with a quirky little rasp that was a sort of trademark.

Jack was a quiet man who made wonderful music that delighted and entertained several generations of fortunate jazz followers. The subject of many affectionate anecdotes, he

was, above all, a friendly, approachable man with whom it was privilege to play and a joy to hear.

Graham Blamire, 2005