



It was back in the mid 1980s that the UK had its last jazz renaissance. Born during the harshest years of prime minister Margaret Thatcher's reign, the DIY movement spanned The Jazz Warriors black arts collective in London, the jazz dance of Kalima and Jazz Defektors in Manchester and the post punk uproar of Rip, Rig + Panic in Bristol. Thirty years on, during similarly divisive times, a new generation are again finding inspiration through the collective spirit of jazz. Integral to the scene is a fierce DIY spirit, with artists coming together to create their own nights, form collectives and release records on small

independent labels. This is the focus of this compilation, which shines a light on the eclectic range of UK jazz artists doing it themselves.

While London has been the focus of media attention as this selection shows the new sounds are coming from across the UK.

An ancient supercontinent that connected Africa, South America, Australia, Antarctica and India, Gondwana is a fitting name for the exploratory orchestra of Manchester trumpeter and bandleader Matthew Halsall. "Universal Consciousness has always been important to me



**YAZMIN LACEY**



and although we've done our best as humans to put borders up and divide people we are better as a united force," he explains. Gondwana is also the name of the label Halsall set up in 2008 to release his debut LP *Sending My Love*. It was born both from his love of modal jazz and his immersion in club culture. "I was first influenced by the elevating jazz of people like McCoy Tyner and John Coltrane but also sessions at Gilles Peterson's Dingwalls in London and Mr Scruff's Keep It Unreal in Manchester," he says.

It was through one of Mr Scruff's famously eclectic sets that Halsall first heard the

music of one of his greatest influences. "It was a very early Keep It Unreal and Scruff played Pharaoh Sanders' 'You've Got to Have Freedom' and after that I started digging for all his records," Halsall recalls. "And from there I discovered Alice Coltrane and I knew very specifically that it was a world I connected very strongly with because I was also studying transcendental meditation."

While Halsall's own spiritual jazz is certainly indebted to sages like Pharaoh Sanders and Alice Coltrane there is also a pastoral tone to his music that evokes some of the great British players from the





sixties. “It’s funny as I didn’t actually discover records like *Shades of Blue* by Don Rendell & Ian Carr until I’d put out a couple of records,” he says. “And when I heard that I was just blown away and it’s still one of my favourite records. But I think where what I do is much different is that I am very much into the production of electronic music where it’s all about finding the perfect loop, which again goes back to the meditation and that constant pulse or breath.”

Halsall (who also produces most of the LPs on his label at Manchester’s 80 Hertz Studio) has now recorded six LPs of spiritual modal jazz, the latter two with the Gondwana

Orchestra. “I came up with that name because I really wanted to make the band a collective project and for this amazing group of musicians to have an identity,” says Halsall. The title track from his LP *When the World Was One* (including Cinematic Orchestra drummer Luke Flowers, harpist Rachael Gladwin, pianist Taz Modi, as well as the addition of Koto player Keiko Kitamura who also plays with Jah Wobble & The Nippon Dub Ensemble) is a soaring piece of modal jazz. It revolves around Halsall’s soaring trumpet and the saxophone of long-time collaborator Nat Birchall, who Halsall performed with at jam sessions at Matt and Phred’s Jazz Club. An important hub





**THE CROMAGNON BAND**



for the experimental Manchester scene it was where Halsall first played alongside other future Gondwana musicians like Luke Flowers, bassist Jon Thorne, and pianist John Ellis.

Halsall's Gondwana label became a platform for these other Manchester jazz artists including Birchall whose saxophone has provided much of the spiritual uplift in many of Mathew Halsall's own releases. Birchall's sonic and spiritual quest began with the LP *The Sixth Sense* released in

1999. There followed a decade of being what he has called ‘alone in the music’ searching for the sound he heard in his head. “It took me a long time to realise that what I was doing with my music was tapping into a spiritual source,” says Birchall. He had a cultural awakening when he was asked to play alongside Halsall on the trumpeter’s first LPs for Gondwana. “I’d never been part of a scene as such and had always really been playing in isolation so I’d almost given up,” says Birchall. “But then I met Matt and started playing with him and he asked me to make an LP.” That LP was *Akhenaten* the first of three released on Gondwana between 2009-

2011. “What really surprised me about that was that it was getting airplay on the radio by people like Gilles Peterson next to soul and electronic music,” says Birchall. “So that was great for me seeing how my music can connect with all this different type of music.”

The last of the three LPs following *Guided Spirit*, *Sacred Dimension* (also released on vinyl on Birchall’s own Sound Soul and Spirit Records), from where ‘Ancient World’ comes, continued Birchall’s personal journey of musical enlightenment following the spiritual path of the masters like Coltrane and Pharoah. Intrinsically tied to the political and social





radicalism of the time their most important LPs of the 1960s were recorded during similar turbulent times to today. “The power of music is at its most profound level when it’s played in the community and when it becomes part of everyday life,” says Birchall. “Then it really is a spiritual thing with people playing music for a higher purpose.”

London spiritual jazz outfit Levitation Orchestra have quietly built their reputation outside the media scramble for the next big jazz name. Founded by trumpeter Axel Kaner-Lidstrom (also of Cykada and Where Pathways Meet) the 13-piece band

composes music collectively very much in the same communal vein as Nat Birchall. With a ritualistic approach to composition the members practice the material through four rehearsals, then play four unique concerts, before heading to the studio to record the material. Their LP *Inexpressible Infinity* was the second of such cycles. When asked for inspirations, the group name Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane and the catalogue of Strata-East. But there is also something in ‘Odyssey’ of the very English modal jazz of Michael Garrick and Norma Winston thanks in a large part to the vocalise of Sophie Plummer and Zakia Sewell.



Saxophonist and flautist Chip Wickham received his jazz education in Manchester's creative scene of the early 1990s. There he played with such luminaries as hip-hop collective Grand Central Records and Rae & Christian. In the 1990s following tours with Roy Ayers and Badly Drawn Boy he met Matthew Halsall appearing on his debut LP *Sending My Love*. As well as touring with Halsall he has also regularly appeared with Nat Birchall. Spanish for the 'The Shade', his debut LP *La Sombra* was released in 2017. It came out on Madrid's Lovemonk label who had released a couple of 7" s of Wickham's after he relocated to the city in 2017.



**TENDERLONIOUS**



There he also worked with Eddie Roberts from The New Mastersounds under the name The Fire Eaters. Drawing heavily on the flute led jazz of Yusef Lateef from the late sixties 'La Sombra' opened his debut LP.

Formed around the DIY home studio experimentation of saxophonist and producer Pete Cunningham, Bristol four-piece Ishmael Ensemble debuted with their *Songs for Knotty* LP in 2017. While previous Bristol jazz heavyweights Rip, Rig + Panic drew on the punk, dub and free jazz heard in post-punk clubs like the Dug Out, Ishmael Ensemble's sound is even more of a Kaleidoscope,

touching on everything from ambient electronics to contemporary jazz and psychedelia. The LP was the second to be released on Bristol's small independent label *Banoffee Pies*. With their maxim of '*creativity without order. A platform for music with no signature sound*', this small micro label has released everything from minimal techno to samba soul and mutant disco. Supported by people like Gilles Peterson the album continued Bristol's rich and eclectic independent musical heritage while displaying the club conscious electronic sensibilities at the heart of much of the new UK jazz scene.

The UK has a long tradition of female singers rooted in both jazz and street soul while drawing on their Caribbean roots for inspiration. Very much in the tradition of Caron Wheeler and Rose Windross, who rose to fame through Soul II Soul in the 1980s, Yazmin Lacey debuted with her *Black Moon* LP in 2017. While she was raised in East London, Lacey began writing in her bedroom after moving to Nottingham to work for a children's charity. Putting a band together and playing local gigs she got her break after being picked up as one of the Future Bubbblers of Gilles Peterson, the figurehead that has helped so many within the UK scene.

Her track 'Marie' opened the first Future Bubbblers compilation on Peterson's Brownswood Recordings label in 2017 with support from Arts Council England. The programme featured mentorship as well as a collaborative and DIY ethos that saw Lacey found The Running Circle label with fellow Future Bubbler artists Three Body Trio. Thanks to the mentorship through the programme and a busy live music programme, Lacey returned with the more polished sound of *When The Sun Dips 90 Degrees* on Aly Gillani's contemporary jazz/soul label First World Records. Produced by Three Body Trio's keyboardist Peter

Beardsworth, who also appeared on the LP alongside the band's drummer Tom Towie, it opened with '90 Degrees' a breezy piece of UK soul jazz.

The amount of female players and bandleaders in what was traditionally a male dominated scene has been one of the most exciting things about the new London movement. "There has been a real shift and the younger women are seeing the older women up there at the front of the band blowing their horns so there is nothing there to stop them now," says London saxophonist and flautist Tamar Osborn. "That perception that it is not their





**THEON CROSS**





role as a musician to be a leader with a horn instrument has definitely changed.”

A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music, Osborn developed her sound playing baritone sax for Dele Sosimi’s Afrobeat Vibration. She has also appeared with other African rooted bands including ethio-jazz band The Krar Collective. As bandleader and composer with her own group, the seven-piece modal jazz collective Collocutor, Osborn has fused different elements from her rich musical education to create a sound all her own. “I had originally drawn inspiration from medieval choral music but I was also really

interested in the textures and layering from the minimal music of Michael Nyman and Terry Riley,” she says. “Then from the Afrobeat side I tried to draw on the interlocking of different instruments.”

Blending these disparate influences, Collocutor’s 2014 debut for On the Corner (‘Label of the Year’ at the Gilles Peterson Worldwide Awards of 2018) *Instead* was firmly located in 21st Century London. “The cultural diversity here has been very important to us,” says Osborn. ‘Gozo’ from that debut LP, produced by Nick ‘Emanative’ Woodmansey, is a scorching percussion heavy Afro modal jazz bomb





featuring a  
heavyweight  
band led by  
Osborn's soaring  
baritone and  
soprano sax.

Another  
saxophonist and  
bandleader  
making serious  
waves on the UK  
scene is Cassie  
Kinoshi. A  
student of Trinity  
Laban  
Conservatoire of  
Dance and Music  
in south-east  
London, where so  
much UK jazz  
talent has been  
nurtured, Kinoshi



**NAT BIRCHALL**



**MAKAYA MCCRAVEN**

earned her spurs as a member of Tomorrow's Warriors. This grass roots community music organisation founded by original Jazz Warriors' bassist Gary Crosby and partner Janine Irons in 1991, sits in a long line of jazz educators – from the mentoring of Horace Tapscott to the young LA jazz scene through to Muhal Richard Abrams' Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in Chicago. The collective ethos and supportive structure of Tomorrow's Warriors has been central to the growth of the UK scene with former members including such high-profile players as saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings and

drummer Moses Boyd. Their focus on collaboration and musical boundary pushing was the foundation for Kinoshi's SEED Ensemble. This 11-piece jazz collective features other rising stars from Tomorrow's Warriors like trumpeter Sheila Maurice-Grey (also a student at Laban), tuba player Theon Cross and keyboardist Ashley Henry.

Like many on the London scene SEED Collective forged their sound at a number of DIY venues across the capital including Total Refreshment Centre (TRC). Opened by Parisian Londoner Lexus Blondin in 2012 in an old Edwardian factory in Stoke

Newington, North London, TRC became an incubator for the city's eclectic club-conscious jazz scene. The legacy of this venue that sadly closed in 2018 is examined in a book by writer Emma Warren - *Make Some Space: Tuning into Total Refreshment Centre*. In the introduction she explains the importance of the venue to the subsequent scene. "As soon as I walked in I recognised it as a place that was generating culture. Something was happening, present and continuous. I found myself watching the flowering and expansion of London's young jazz musicians into a movement that has brought worldwide attention to the

city. The signal was pulsing, loud and clear."

TRC was also an important venue for the development of the many projects of Tomorrow's Warriors' most famous alumni Shabaka Hutchings. "Having somewhere that people from different sectors of music and art are coming together is really important," he told Warren in *Make Some Space*. "TRC brought a space to playing, to meet people and hang out. Part of making music is the hanging out, being around musicians without necessarily rehearsing or playing but understanding where they're coming from."

The Birmingham-born, London-based, saxophonist is a restless creative force embracing both London's club sounds and the carnival spirit of Barbados where he lived from the age of six to 16. One of Shabaka's primary influences has been the exploratory work recorded in the late 1960s and early 1970s for Impulse!, the label he is now helping to re-ignite. "These LPs from Impulse! were the first records I heard that sounded like the musicians were creating something bigger than what they all knew," explains Hutchings. "These were players who had a very specific aesthetic and they were going into the studio in

a search for an accurate portrayal of what they were going through at the time and what was happening around them."

As well as being a member of both SEED Collective and the newer incarnation of Sons of Kemet, trombonist Theon Cross is a regular collaborator with drummer Moses Boyd whom he first played with as part of Tomorrow's Warriors. The instrument he chose to play has a long tradition in UK jazz - from Jazz Warriors' Andy Grappy (who became a mentor to Cross) to Loose Tubes' Dave Powell. But it has never been played with the fiery intensity of Cross, whose heavyweight licks have also

helped power the ensembles of Sons of Kemet as well as the mardi gras music of Tom Challenger's Brass Mask.

Along with sessions for Tomorrow's Warriors an important stage for Cross as well as many other young London players was Jazz-Refreshed, the long running Thursday night session in Notting Hill, West London, set up by Justin McKenzie and Adam Moses in 2003.

Another collective experience for Cross was his time with the carnival collective Kinetika Bloco founded by the late Mat Fox. "Kinetika Bloco was all about having fun with music in a carnival type feel and Tomorrow's Warriors was





**RUBY RUSHTON**



like the next step,” says Cross. “They really push you into doing the work you need to do and also teaching you how to play in a section and in tune with each other. It was great to be able to have that space to call on friends and to practice on tunes together and to figure out our ideas. I really don’t think the London jazz scene would look like it does without Tomorrow’s Warriors.”

On his debut LP under his own name *Fyah*, in a band featuring Moses Boyd and saxophonist Nubya Garcia, Cross furthered his innovation with the tuba, mixing New Orleans style bass lines with rhythms from

the clubs. “I have been blessed to take the tuba into different scenarios it wouldn’t usually be,” he says. “I also have Caribbean roots and understand reggae and calypso so I also bring in those rhythmic sensibilities to my playing.” One of the standouts from his album, ‘Candace of Meroe’ destroyed dancefloors wherever it went.

The tuba also plays an important role in Emma-Jean Thackray’s WALRUS project. Also closely associated with TRC this trumpeter, flugelhorn player, DJ, beat maker and producer was raised in Yorkshire, in the North of England, but is very much a part of South





London's DIY scene. She debuted in 2016 with the self-titled LP from her band Walrus (Elliot Galvin on Hammond Organ/ Wurlitzer, Ben Kelly on Tuba, Liz Exell on drums and electronics of Pie Eye Collective). One of the most highly individual and experimental releases of the burgeoning London scene it really stood alone. While Thackray is known for working with key figures from the London scene such as saxophonist Nubya Garcia and Ezra Collective, her roots were in the local brass dance culture of Yorkshire. And it's this mix of club conscious jazz and booming tuba-led brass music that makes the title track of her *Walrus* LP so unique.

The album was released on her own Deptford Beach label, sharing a name with the London neighbourhood where influential club night Steam Down is located. Founded in 2017 by Wayne Francis in a converted railway arch, Steam Down became a hot bed for collective improvisation with an energy amongst its young multi-ethnic crowd more like a club night rather than a jazz gig.

Another important night for Thackray and her contemporaries on the burgeoning scene was Steez that took place in a number of venues across South London in the 2010's. One of those figures was London keyboard



virtuoso Joe Armon-Jones who owes much to the night's collaborative environment.

"Steez was a great place with a very special energy created by the people who were playing there and the guy who ran it Luke Newman," says Armon-Jones. "He gave a platform to anyone who wanted to play music and lots of people passed through there. It was a proper good night and it's a shame it doesn't happen now. But there are now other nights like Steam Down that share that energy. So it's still continuing."

Schooled on the keys by his father who played in various jazz-fusion bands Joe Armon-

Jones developed his skills at Trinity Laban while also attending sessions with Tomorrow's Warriors. "That was hugely important to me as it was where I met most of the musicians I play with today," he says. His debut LP of May 2017 *Idiom* with long-time collaborator bassist and producer Maxwell Owin, was released on the small YAM Recordings label out of Peckham, south London.

The album featured some of those players he met through Tomorrow's Warriors. On 'Tanner's Tango', saxophonist Nubya Garcia provides the warm tones to the typically languid but complex keyboard lines of Armon-Jones whose

love of Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea are as deep as his passion for London club sounds and the dub of King Tubby. And you can hear all these influences on the track featured here, a broken beat space jazz odyssey that introduced one of the most talented and progressive players on the London scene. "I just take the



**MATTHEW HALSALL**

direction that the music I'm listening to today takes me," he says. "You can't really plan ahead as I never know what I'm going to be listening to at that time – it could be dub or it could be Bach."

Like Armon-Jones, saxophonist-turned-flautist and synth player Ed 'Tenderlonious' Cawthorne treads a path all his own. "Growing up I always felt strongly about being true to myself, sometimes that meant it was difficult to fit in as I was unwilling to change regardless of what others wanted or expected from me," he explains. The Prodigy fan purchased a soprano sax after hearing the eastern-infused

jazz of Yusef Lateef. "I got some books and started from there, mainly one by Yusef Lateef called the 'Repository of Scales and Melodic Patterns'," he recalls. Cawthorne began making beats in his bedroom in suburban Woking, sampling the records he discovered at shops like Mole Jazz in King's Cross, north London. "By then I had been listening to a lot of jazz records because the music I was making at that time was primarily sample-based," he says.

Although he was self-taught on the saxophone, he mastered the instrument with the guidance of British jazz player Pat Crumly who helped



Cawthorne search for his own sound. “Pat was very important for me, he was my mentor and he taught me the values of being a true musician,” says Cawthorne. “The most valuable thing he taught me was the importance of sound - it’s all very well being able to play hundreds of notes in a minute, but if you don’t sound good then it’s all in vain ... I still practice long tones to this day.” Crumly was also a member of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Buddhist movement and provided spiritual as well as musical guidance to Cawthorne. “He was also practicing Buddhism at the time so that was helping to inform his approach to

teaching, which had a positive effect on me,” adds Cawthorne.

After Crumly sadly passed away it was through the creative hub of Peckham in south London that Cawthorne found his community, setting up the 22a record label (named after the street number of his childhood home in Woking) in 2013. With his own early 12”s and those of Henry Wu, Mo Kolours and his brother Jeen Bassa, 22a came to jazz via the sounds of London’s clubs and pirate radio stations, be it broken beat or house.

But it was through his heavyweight band the





**JOE ARMON-JONES  
AND MAXWELL OWIN**

22archestra  
he fronts as  
Tenderlonious  
that the  
musician and  
producer has  
shown the  
depth of his  
technical and  
compositional  
skills. His  
third LP on  
*22a The  
Shakedown*  
was recorded  
with his full  
22archestra  
(featuring  
Yussef  
Kamaal's  
drummer  
Yussef Dayes,  
Hamish

Balfour on keys, Fergus Ireland, bass, and three percussionists) at London's famous Abbey Road Studios in a single 10-hour session in March 2017. "There's an energy in the walls at Abbey Road that's hard to put into words. The history of that studio is immense," says Cawthorne. "For *The Shakedown* I hadn't rehearsed or written any of the music, all the compositions were based around simple melodies and chord progressions that I was working on at the time for Ruby Rushton (Ed's other band)," he recalls. "When the Abbey Road session was offered to me I only had 24 hours to assemble a band. The Ruby Rushton guys were

unavailable so I took the opportunity to invite a group of musicians who I had worked with over the years and admired." The title track is a masterwork of freeform cosmic future jazz for the heads, channelling '70s fusion through a 21<sup>st</sup> century filter. Also included here is 'Moonlight Woman' the opening track from *Trudi's Songbook: Volume One*, the third LP from Ruby Rushton released on 22a in 2017.

Saxophonist Idris Rahman, brother of Zoe Rahman and previously leader of reggae/afrobeat band Soothsayers, founded London's *Ill Considered* in 2017. Continuing a long

tradition in the capital for jazz improvisation, Rahman and his group (Emre Ramazanoglu on drums, Leon Brichard on bass, and Satin Singh on percussion) recorded their self-released debut LP *Live at The Crypt* of St. Giles Church in Camberwell, South London in 2017. Reacting to the “mood of the audience and the sonics of the room to create music that is unique to the moment” the four-piece were at their deepest and most intuitive that night. The swirling but angular calligraphy of Vincent de Boer which graces the album’s sleeve gives a clue to the music within, a fluid and fiery jazz sound that is both improv and funk spirited.







## **ILL CONSIDERED**





Powered by Rahman's soaring saxophone and driven by Brichard and Satin Singh, 'Long Way Home' showed the full range of individual musicianship and collective interaction that makes Ill Considered such a powerful force.

Another small independent London label represented on this compilation is Albert's Favourites. Taking its name from the studio of Adam Scrimshire, Jonny Drop and Dave Koor of The Expansions, the label was set up to release music from the founders and their various collaborations.

'Mosaic' represents the funkier end of the London jazz spectrum. It's a heavy

slice of broken fusion, revolving around the killer synth lines of Dave Koor and the heavyweight drumming of Jonny Drop. Emerging as one of Gilles Peterson's Brownswood Bubblers, south London producer, composer and DJ Hector Plimmer caught the attention of Adam Scrimshire and Dave Koor at a performance at Sounds of the Universe in Soho, London (and the home of Soul Jazz Records). The title track of his second LP, 'Next to Nothing' is a jazz-rooted slice of electronic soul featuring Emma-Jean Thackray.

If there is one group here that best captures the DIY spirit at the heart of the UK scene it's





Brighton's Ebi Soda. As the band state their “only debt to typical jazz being to attempt to innovate and experiment at every opportunity.” The result of their staunch anti-traditionalism is the LP *Bedroom Tapes* recorded in a small Brighton flat, and on ‘Dimmsdale’ this sprawling collective create a loose and languid lo-fi sound.



*Andy Thomas*



