



photo: Brian Smith

Quick Q&A

CHRIS BARBER

Between Chris Barber's two sets, Andy Snipper was able to grab ten minutes with the man himself...

BM: Tell us about the new "Chris Barber Presents... The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series"...

Chris: Well, first you have to understand that in the '50s we didn't have the American Bluesmen here to study and if we wanted to develop we had to bring these guys here to help us learn the Blues, about their techniques. But the Musicians Union was in charge across all of the venues, which made it impossible to bring bands over here because they claimed that it took work away from English musicians. However, voices are unique and so it was okay to bring over these guys who sang and just happened to play guitar or harmonica. So, we were able to bring in the likes of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny & Brownie, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Sonny Boy Williamson...

And the MU were happy?

Well, in general. I remember that we brought Louis Jordan over for a tour and in the middle of his set he pulled out his saxophone and played an instrumental. The MU official didn't seem to make any comment, so we thought we had gotten away with it... until I got a call from the Union telling me off for importing an American musician and saying that, if we did again, they would close down the venues. In the meantime, if I couldn't find a British musician to play the solo, could I not have found a Russian? Which tells you a little bit about their politics at the time!

Tell me about the new series of releases...

They were all recorded at the Manchester Free Trade Hall, which is a nice venue, 3000 seated. We didn't have systems like they do today but we had a few microphones above the stage and if you followed the wires down the hall there was a little room with a lady inside who twiddled a few knobs to get the balance right in the hall. Now, she had a friend who plugged a tape recorder into this control unit and recorded everything - not just our stuff, but because our set-up was so simple it sounded much better than any orchestras did. A few songs have appeared here and there but most of these recordings haven't been released before. It brought back some memories in compiling the collection. **AS**