

REVIEW

# A welcome reprisal

**Dick Morrissey**

On The Spot: The Complete Recordings (Acrobat)

HE WAS born in the unprepossessing jazz territory of Horley, Surrey, in 1940 and became a teenage trad-jazz clarinettist at school, urged on by his Latin teacher.

An early meeting with the young and fiery alto saxophone prodigy Peter King in The Bun Shop jazz club of Surbiton introduced him to the records of Charlie Parker and that became that.

Dick Morrissey turned to tenor sax and began playing bop, gave up his apprenticeship as a prospective jeweller and made his West End debut at The Marquee in 1960.

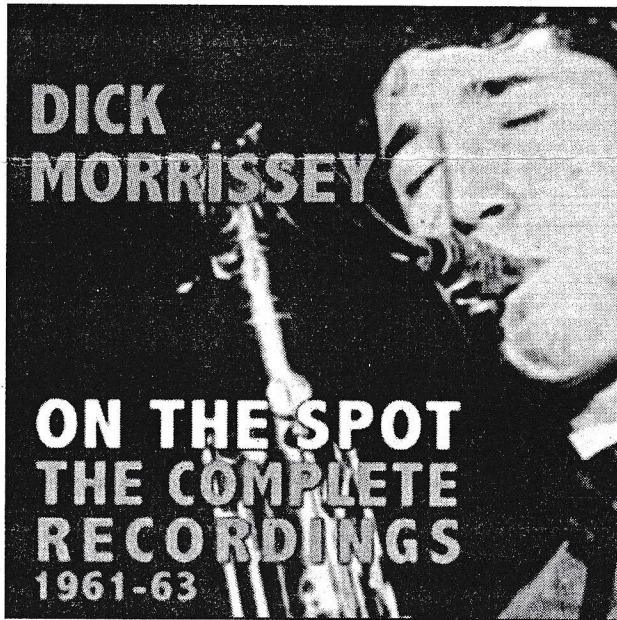
His was a fast introduction to professional jazz and by April 1961 he was making his first album *It's Morrissey, Man!* for the Fontana label, and this suburban boy was suddenly at the apex of British jazz alongside much-admired hornmen like Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes and Johnny Dankworth.

Then with his star beaming, he surprised all the jazz pundits and his contemporaries by heading off for a residency not in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles but to a restaurant in Calcutta.

When he returned he very soon realised that waxing a follow-up album was not going to be as easy as his first opportunity.

But his new quartet eventually found a backer in the 77 Charing Cross Road record shopowner Doug Dobell, whose 77 label cut the Morrissey album *Have You Heard?* in July-August 1963.

Both these albums have been long unavailable, so their reissue on this Acrobat label "twofer" is long overdue.



## Chris Searle on JAZZ

On *The Spot*, it's called, and Morrissey is there from the first track of *It's Morrissey, Man!* with his version of the Sonny Rollins classic *St Thomas*, with pianist Stan Jones, Malcolm Cecil on bass and Colin Barnes on drums.

Morrissey tears into Rollins's *Virgin Islands* theme with much more than mere Home Counties aplomb, with Barnes rattling his snares, Cecil pulsating and Jones lightly rocking beside him.

All through *A Bench In The Park* Morrissey's sound is lithe and buoyant, skipping through the theme with pace and fire, almost levitating over his notes.

*Sancticity*, a tune by another tenor saxophone giant, Coleman Hawkins, is played with a lightweight fluency, unlike the steam-engine power of its creator.

*Mildew*, by the tenorist known for his inordinate

speed, Johnny Griffin, is an exercise in sheer saxophone velocity, and Morrissey acquits himself expertly. Cecil is well up with him and races into a pacemaking solo.

The music comes home to London with Morrissey's version of Lionel Bart's *Where Is Love?* from *Oliver!*

Expressive, tender and gentle, it is suddenly Morrissey the balladeer, and he moves to unleash his swing in the album's closer, Mingus's *Jelly Roll*, where his supple and agile horn sweeps airily over the notes.

*Have You Heard?* was as much an album of pianist Harry South's composing skills as Morrissey's developing virtuosity.

With them were Phil Bates on bass and drummer Jackie Dougan, a member of Stan Tracey's Quartet on the epochal *Under Milk Wood* album of 1965.

Straight off with Phineas Newborn's *Down Home*, and Morrissey sounds deeper, more earthy and gutsy after his India experience.

South is a swinger, Bates brings his bow to the fore and Dougan rustles his snares.

Morrissey's easy-going fluency rides through the South tunes like *The Goblin* or *The Celt*, and as you imbibe his distinctly middleweight timbre, you may think that you are listening to an English Hank Mobley just in from the suburbs.

There are no reed histrionics, no frenzy of notes, but as in South's *There And Back*, for example, or *Journey Home*, an eternity of floating sound, of the limber and lissom not easily achieved.

These two albums were only a beginning. Morrissey started swinging for another three decades before his early death in 2000, and thanks to Acrobat, we now know on our senses how he made his first mark.

## TODAY'S Previews by Neil

| BBC1    |                                     | BBC2    |
|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Daytime | 6.00 Breakfast.                     | 6.05 P  |
|         | 9.15 Helicopter Heroes: New Cases.  | 7.0 Do  |
|         | 10.0 Homes Under the Hammer.        | 7.45 Sa |
|         | 11.0 Don't Get Done, Get Dom.       | 8.15    |
|         | 11.45 Saints and Scroungers.        | 9.0 Gr  |
|         | 12.15 Bargain Hunt.                 | Reviva  |
|         | 1.0 News and Weather.               | 10.0 G  |
|         | 1.45 Perfection.                    | Journe  |
|         | 2.30 Escape to the Country.         | 10.35   |
|         | 3.30 Hairy Bikers' Best of British. | 11.20   |
|         | 4.30 Flog It!                       | 1995 F  |
|         | 5.15 Pointless.                     | 12.30   |
|         |                                     | Film.   |
|         |                                     | 2.15 Gr |
|         | 3.15 Pl                             |         |
|         | 4.15 C                              |         |
|         | 5.15                                |         |
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