

Ronnie's Spirit Of Co-Operation

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Chris Searle on Jazz

Ronnie Scott

Fast And Loose: Live in 1954

(Acrobat)

“SYNCOPATED Marxism” was how the band’s baritone saxophonist and jazz writer Benny Green described the music played by Ronnie Scott’s nine-piece band in the mid-’50s.

Almost permanently on the road, the band played their hot music in dance halls throughout the land, but still managed a wildly innovative sound.

It was made up of some prime British jazzmen of the era.

Alongside Ronnie was the Dundee-born trumpeter Jimmy Deuchar, trombonist Ken Wray and the altoist Derek Humble, who was to become one of the leading horns of the Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band during the next decade.

Also on hand was tenorist Pete King, who was Ronnie's business partner for years at their Soho jazz club.

The pounding drummer was Tony Crombie, the bassist Lennie Bush and the featured pianist and vibes player was the prodigious Victor Feldman, who in 1957 crossed the Atlantic, eventually becoming the pianist in Cannonball Adderley's band and recording with Miles Davis on his *Seven Steps To Heaven* album in 1963.

Although they played under Scott's name, they were very much a co-operative band, and Simon Spillett's vibrant sleeve notes tell how the band members "drew equally" on their performance earnings.

As Ronnie remembered: "We encountered much petty jealousy from bandleaders and none at all from the musicians.

"The inference is clear. A thriving co-op band is a dangerous thing so far as bandleaders are concerned. They see communism round the corner and start worrying about how far they may go in exploiting their own musicians."

Perhaps this sense of unity and equal respect within the band caused its sense of jubilant sound and Ronnie remembered that "I've never laughed so much in my life as I did with that band."

The boisterousness, goodwill and joyously fine musical artistry comes boiling out of the new compilation *Fast And Loose: Live 1954*.

It's there from the very first title track where Ronnie hurtles into full tempo in his solo and brother horn Humble is right with him.

Crombie's drums are in full combustion and the band is bursting with fire.

Crombie's *Body Beautiful* shows what a fine bassist Bush was, before Humble and Deuchar take poised choruses.

Then into Carlie Parkers's bebop classic, the *Yardbird Suite*, with Deuchar's pure tone ascendant with Humble's sheer fluidity preluding Feldman's rampaging piano runs.

There were nine balladeers in the studio that March 1954 day too, with Wray's slides leading the way on a poignant version of *If I Should Lose You* and Ronnie digging deep for a beautifully mellow reading of *Laura*, abetted by Feldman's lyrical keys and Bush's ever-present bass heartbeat.

The versatile Feldman brings out his vibes for *This Can't Be Love* and runs up the pace Lionel Hampton-style while the horns watch on.

From the Thames to the Mississippi for *Dear Old Southland* and the brassmen are shining Deuchar comes down from the north for a lucid solo and Wray engages the

trumpeter in a free colloquy.

Leo Parker's El Sino gives the stage to the grace of Humble's alto and Wray's guffawing trombone before Green's rumbling baritone takes its moment.

Billie Holiday gave her heart to I Wished On The Moon, and Humble's horn sings too with a disarming tenderness.

The album ends with seven tracks recorded for single 78s on the Esquire label in April 1954, by a quartet made up of Scott, Feldman, Bush and Crombie.

The two takes of Sunshine On A Dull Day could be the last waltz at any of the dance hall venues from Stockport to Margate where Ronnie's bands played, and Fools Rush In and Poor Butterfly must have delighted many a romancing couple.

But as you listen you still can't get the performances of the marvellously animated nine-piece outfit out of your head.

The co-operative sound, the absence of egoism, the unity of musicianship, the comradeship of jazz going from city to city in a battered bus.

Music of its time and place, but now with this marvellous record, a gift for always.

Chris Searle Jazz Ronnie Scott Fast And Loose: Live In 1954

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