

**CHRIS BARBER PRESENTS...
THE BLUES LEGACY:
'LOST & FOUND' SERIES**

PRESS COVERAGE

BLUES IN BRITAIN MAGAZINE – NEWS PIECE



Veteran bandleader and trumpet player **Chris Barber** also has a new release on CD called *Can't Stop Now*, reviewed in this issue. It features vocals by Andy Fairweather-Low on vocals. Harry Shapiro has interviewed Chris Barber for a forthcoming issue of *Blues In Britain*.

BLUES MATTERS MAGAZINE – NEWS PIECE



LOST & FOUND

Chris Barber unearths live material

Classic Studio T are about to release a series of re-mastered and previously unreleased material from legendary artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. "Chris Barber Presents...The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series" has seen the co-founder of the famous Marquee Club in London and the Richmond Jazz and Blues Festival trace original live recordings from the '50s/'60s. Chris and his partner Harold Pendleton played a large part in starting and furthering the careers of The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, The Yardbirds, Led Zeppelin and John Mayall. chrisbarber.net.

BLUES MATTERS MAGAZINE – INTERVIEW PIECE



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**



Sing out Sister: Rosetta Tharpe, bringing blues on Free Trade agreement.

Blues Explosion!

Chris Barber Interview
Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series & Can't Stop Now

Mojo Magazine
December issue 2007

BRIT-JAZZ ELDER CHRIS BARBER PRESENTS UNHEARD MUDDY, HOWLIN' WOLF AND MORE.

When you live through things, you sometimes don't notice them as much as you should," says veteran jazz trombonist Chris Barber. "These recordings are evidence that they happened."
He's talking about a series of archive tapes, some 70 per cent hitherto unheard, covering the late '50s, when Barber brought over such American blues players as Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf and Sister Rosetta Tharpe for UK tours. Due early next year, *Chris Barber Presents... The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series* will feature shows from the above plus Jimmy Witherspoon, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Champion Jack Dupree and Louis Jordan, all solo or with the Chris Barber

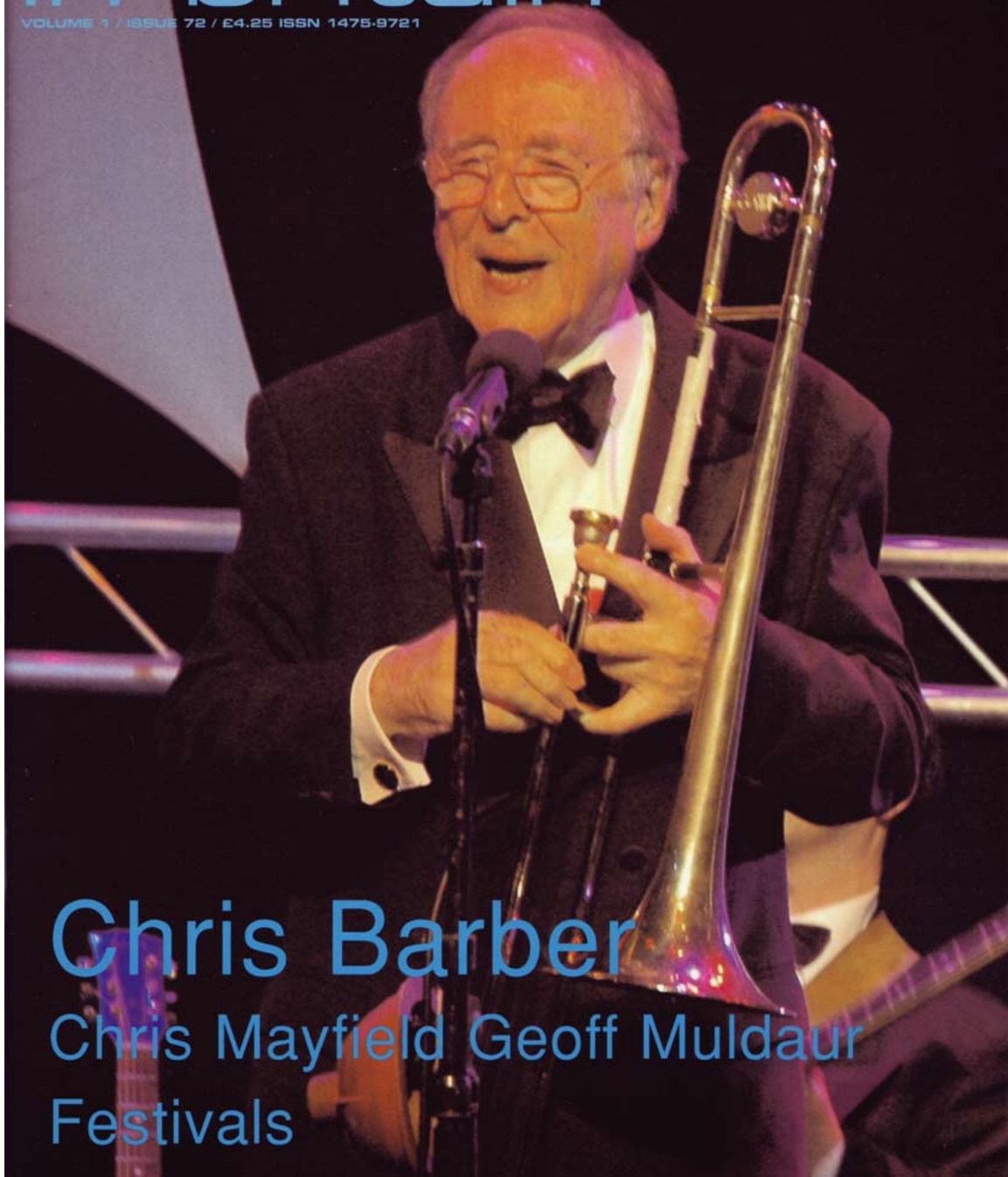
Band. Some performances were taped from live radio broadcasts, while others, from the Manchester Free Trade Hall, were recorded by fan Tom Adkins, who plugged his tape recorder straight into a three-mike sound system that was prehistoric by today's standards. The results aren't always pristine, but they're evocative. "People think Muddy Waters was a loud guitarist," says Barber, whose latest album is aptly titled *Can't Stop Now*. "But he had the ability to make a thrilling sound without needing to turn it up to 11. Whereas Rosetta, who played a 1955 Gold Top Les Paul, was always very loud!"
The importance of these tours to the British blues, and the eventual transatlantic exchange courtesy of the Stones, Yardbirds et al, shouldn't be underestimated. But what does the venerable bandleader think?
"I don't believe there wouldn't have been British blues without me," he says. "But I'm very happy for people to say it!"

"Sister Rosetta was always very loud."

BLUES IN BRITAIN – COVER STORY
& 4 PAGE FEATURE INTERVIEW

blues
in britain

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Chris Barber
Chris Mayfield Geoff Muldaur
Festivals

After an incredible fifty years in the business as a top instrumentalist, band-leader, musical pioneer and entrepreneur, the bandwagon rolls on. Interview by an exhausted **Harry Shapiro** trying to keep up with the breathless stream of anecdote and opinion. Photos: **Ben Williams / Classic T Stage**

John Mayall, Alexis Korner, Graham Bond and Long John Baldry are but four names promoted as 'The Father of British Blues'. But if you are looking for the Godfather of British Blues, the *Capo di Capo*, the man who made it all happen, then look no further than Donald Christopher Barber. Between 1950-60, he led Britain's most popular traditional jazz band, had top ten hit records, helped popularise skiffle as a national craze introducing a whole generation to the idea that you could make music as well as listen or dance to it – and if that wasn't enough brought major blues acts to Britain for the first time to captivate slack jawed teenage fans in the audience like Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, Brian Jones, and Eric Burdon.

Chris' latest foray into the blues is a project fittingly called 'Blues Legacy'; "They were all recorded at the Manchester Free Trade Hall. In those days people didn't have travelling PA systems. You were stuck with the ones in the hall. At the Free Trade Hall, the PA was maybe good enough for one speaker at a conference – there were just three mikes – and the control for the mikes was done from a control room, not in the hall itself, but somewhere in the depths of the building run by a lady who was most uncooperative. You'd go down there and say ask for a bit more treble on the mic and she'd just say 'No!' But there was this guy, Thomas Adkins, who actually got on with her and he gave her a tape recorder and she recorded all the concerts for him. A few songs have appeared here and there, but most of these recordings haven't been released before. It brought back quite a lot of memories working on this collection – remembering Muddy Waters, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee."

Of course, conversation immediately swings to those blues legends: ask Chris about Muddy Waters and you hit a sore spot, "Nobody ever prints the truth". About what you ask? "This idea that Muddy Waters was too loud, people complained and when he came back he just played acoustic. No he didn't. Never!

"We sat close to Muddy's band, night after night in Chicago when we were on tour in America and you could sit four feet from Muddy's amp and conduct a conversation. He

could achieve these expressive tonal things with an electric guitar without turning it up to eleven and without any fuzz box or anything.

"If you wanted loud – Sister Rosetta Tharpe playing a 1955 Les Paul Gold Top was louder than my entire band and nobody complained about that. And it was perfect."

One of Chris' favourite anecdotes is discovering Muddy Waters. "It was John Lewis from MJQ that put me onto Muddy. Despite the music he was playing, John was a real Chicago blues fan. He suggested bringing Muddy over, but I said 'Well how do I get hold of him, you can't write to him c/o third cotton bush on the left. And he said, 'What do you mean? He's got an agent, a Cadillac, I'll contact him for you'."

This amply demonstrates how little blues fans on this side of the pond actually knew about a scene they could only glimpse from record covers. But Chris quickly made a bridge between cultures in quite profound ways. As the world of white blues fans was agonising over whether the whites either could or should play the blues, Chris and his band were already riding roughshod over the whole argument.

In the first place for Chris, "the only difference between jazz and blues is the instrumentation". And he demonstrated that guitar-based Chicago blues bands had no problem welcoming musicians from the UK who were not only playing brass, but were also white. So while white middle-class blues fans were guilt-tripping themselves to death over here (not to mention the actual fights breaking out between trad jazz fans and beboppers) – Chris was being welcomed with open arms over there. Why? Because the Barber band could play.

"I think we may have been the first white musicians to play at Smitty's Corner. We played there in 1959. First time we go there, they took us to Dixieland clubs in the Loop and we thought that was quite boring. So we got a cab to take us to Smitty's Corner which was quite hard to do to try and persuade a cab driver to even go there. Muddy was overjoyed to see us, 'My guests from the State of England' as he always announced us. Otilie went up to sing and got a great reaction from 'Southbound Train'. Muddy's audience was older people in their fifties and amazingly they had a great

nostalgia for the south despite all what went on there and people were almost in tears hearing it – they were back in church.

"Next time we went, we had the horns with us and played a whole set and they loved it. I played some gigs myself with Muddy's band playing trombone."

Another unique observation from the 'not many people know that' school of blues history is that the Muddy Waters band did not play blues the whole time: "Muddy knew his audience and as much as they loved the blues, he knew he couldn't play it all night. They would play from nine in the evening right through until four in the morning and Muddy would only appear at the end of each set to do a blues. The rest of the time, he left it to Jimmy Cotton, Otis Spann, Francis Clay or Pat Hare. They'd do non-blues things like 'Pretty Girls Everywhere' – Otis did that – and they did Miles Davis' 'Night Winds' as a straight 12-bar instrumental. They played crowd-pleasers – just current favourite songs.

"The first time I saw Buddy Guy in 1961, he was doing Brook Benton numbers. He had an organ and two saxes, a tall girl playing bass plus drums and no blues at all. They ended the evening with 'When The Saints Go Marching In' and the two sax players went out the door, but I think they just stayed out there for a few minutes having a fag before coming back in as if they had marched all round Chicago".

Not all the Chicago blues guys were so accommodating at least not at first; "Little Walter would always turn his back on us when we were in the club. But one day we turned up, Muddy wasn't there and he was holding the stage with just a trio. When he saw us, he shouted, 'And here's Chris Barber and his band' and we went up and pretty much saved the gig for him".

But it wasn't just in Chicago where Chris Barber won over both black audiences and musicians. Twenty years later, Chris was working with Dr John, 'The first time we played Tipitina's in 1980/81, into the backstage area came the Neville Brothers who always had that look like you wouldn't want to meet them in a dark alley, but they were all smiles saying 'great music'. Then Jimmy Smith walked in who was

renowned for not speaking to white people at all and again he praised the music. We got a great reception and full houses every time we played there”.

Ok, so Chris' blues credentials are impeccable, but it wasn't what he was famous for – playing blues didn't put food on the table. The late 1950s and early 1960s, was the boom time for 'trad jazz', a phrase Chris hates, but that music pushed Chris Barber, Acker Bilk and Kenny Ball into the national spotlight. So what happened when the bubble burst?

“Well, if you look at the situation now” says Chris, “the traditional bands like Acker Bilk and Kenny Ball are working a quarter of the gigs that we are – which tells you something. And a load of the traditional bands that started up, did it not for the reasons that we did it – for the real love of the music – but because it was the thing to do – have a clarinet and be Monty Sunshine or Terry Lightfoot.

“The style we originated by accident which ended up being called 'trad' – because we didn't have a piano player at the time – was another kind of sound altogether. Most of the bands who tried to copy us initially couldn't hack it and they had to get a piano player in – because without piano, everybody is exposed. Every note the bass player plays you can hear it – and if they are the wrong notes, you can hear that. When you have a piano player, you have much of a rumbling, tumbling sound and you lose all the detail, which for me is very important”.

Although Chris is modest and casual about his success, it is borne of a very astute business sense and making timely adjustments to the band's presentation, “basically I was the only one who could add up the figures, I actually enjoy the business side

of it.

“And we play what we like – we've been doing that for years and getting away with it. But I put into together as a presentation on stage – so if somebody is coming along to hear traditional jazz, they'll also hear blues and some Ellington and we'll carry them along with it – our enthusiasm and love of the music makes it acceptable to people. I try and present it in a 'user-friendly' way, without being too serious about it – the audience didn't come for a lecture – maybe two or three numbers a night, I'll tell the audience about what we are going to play, that's interesting and valid information.”

Chris' new CD, *Can't Stop Me Now* is a souvenir of the band's European Tour of 2006-2007 – a good representation of the musical pot pourri of blues and jazz history the audience can expect - and introducing two new members of the band, Mike Snelling on reeds and Joe Farler on banjo and guitar, along with Andy Fairweather Low doing a remarkable tribute to Lonnie Donegan. But still there permanently,

since May 1954, is 77 year-old trumpet player Pat Halcox. Could this be a world record for a playing partnership?

And does Chris have any ambitions left in the business? “When you've done the Hollywood Bowl, played in New Orleans and been the only non-New Orleans person on the stage with Dr John, played to 12,000 people in Berlin one of only three time the hall was sold out for a jazz concert – what's left? Just good musicians playing the music they love”.

Back in 1955, with “Rock Island Line” in the charts, Chris decided to take a two-week holiday, but he was worried that after just a fortnight, he'd be forgotten. Half a century and ten thousand concerts later, I think he has his answer.

Chris Barber: Can't Stop Me Now (5048X)

Chris Barber Presents...

The Blues Legacy: Lost & Found Series

(Blues Legacy 500048X)

www.chrisbarber.net





chris barber
