

  **THE JAZZ CRUISE • 2011**  
Jan. 30 - Feb. 6  
[www.thejazzcruise.com](http://www.thejazzcruise.com)

 **THE SMOOTH JAZZ CRUISE • 2011**  
WEEK 1 Jan. 16 - 23 • WEEK 2 Jan. 23 - 30  
[www.thesmoothjazzcruise.com](http://www.thesmoothjazzcruise.com)

 

- [Log in](#)
- [Sign up](#)



12/01/10 • [By Steve Caputo](#)

## Gwilym Simcock: An Interview

### UK pianist on Jazz and "Blues Vignette"



Steve Caputo

SC - Gwilym discuss with us a little bit about your pull from classical to jazz and back to classical.

GS - I started piano from an early age, being taught initially by my father. As I got older I realized that I wanted to get more and more involved with music, and at the age of 9 I went to one of the top specialist music schools in England, Chetham's Music School, up in Manchester. There I was studying to be a classical concert pianist, as well as a french horn player and composer. In my early teens, I went along to some improvisation classes set up by the school, and these were being run by the English bassist Steve Berry (one of the members of 'Loose Tubes', a groundbreaking British big band of the 1980's). He is a fantastic and enthusiastic educator, and I think he could see that I really enjoyed improvising. (This was something I'd always done from a very early age, without realizing that there was a whole genre of music based around it!). He made a cassette up for me which contained loads of different music but the tracks that really stuck in my mind were the first three- 'Questar' from 'My Song' by Jarrett, and two tracks from 'Travels' by Pat Metheny. There was so much power and emotion in this music, coupled with all the elegance and beauty that I loved about classical music, so I guess from that point I knew that this would be the way forward...

When I left school at 18 I went to the Royal Academy of Music in London, to study for a degree in Jazz performance. At that point, after 9 years at classical school, I guess I wanted to get really into the essence of what jazz is all about, so the classic side of my musical life took a back seat. After a few years though I was asked to join a trio called 'Acoustic Triangle', which is a group (with sax and bass) dedicated to playing unamplified music that crosses the boundaries between classical and jazz. That really got me back thinking that I should be trying to draw more from the background I've had when I'm working on my own music. Since

then I've been involved in many collaborations with classical groups, including playing my own Piano Concerto at the Royal Albert Hall in the Proms in 2008. Blues Vignette has the strongest link to my classical side of any of my output so far, although for me the important thing is for me that it is just music. 'Classical' and 'Jazz' are just terms at the end of the day. When I heard that cassette of music back in the 90's, I didn't think 'wow this is great jazz!', I was just bowled over by the strength of emotional pull I had to what I heard, and that's what I hope to be able to similarly communicate to the people who listen to my music.

SC - As a composer does the strong combination of classical study and jazz study influence the compositional approach that you may take on one of your own pieces?

GS - Well for me the fun thing is that every piece is different. So some of the tunes I write are very open, to the point of there being some free improvisations on the album. Other tunes are very through composed, with a lot less room to improvise. I think the important thing for me and the crucial element of the music is where the composed and the improvised combine. So hopefully it's not always obvious where the change is. For me, successful improvising in this style of music requires the improvisations to have the satisfying shape and structure that you would have in a composition, whilst the written material needs to have the openness and freedom to allow the improvisations to spiral out of them. Again, I don't want people to sit there thinking 'oh this bit's written, this bit's improvised'. If the tune is successful, then it may have any blend of the two, but most importantly it will take the listener on an enjoyable emotional journey.

SC - How do you maintain the patience and persistence that is required in today's crowded jazz recording world?

GS - Ha, well I'm not sure about patience! What can you do?? You just have to get on with what you do. As there are so many people making music (which is fantastic by the way!) all you can do is be yourself, and try to tell your own story with as much profundity and heart as possible. Fly it up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes it! When I was a little younger, I used to listen to loads of other piano players and think 'oh they're amazing at this, this and this, and I'm just rubbish' and get down on myself. As I get older though I realize that it doesn't matter about anyone else. All you can do is what you think is right (basing that judgment on hopefully as wide a musical palette as possible) and work hard so that the music you produce is of the highest quality it can be. Then you just have to let it go and hope listeners can hear what you're trying to achieve.

SC - Tell us a little bit about your approach to the new recording Blues Vignette.

GS - I think a lot of the issues I've mentioned above are crucial to the musical decisions I made when making this album. I've started in the last few years to get more and more into playing solo, I guess it's the 'Holy Grail' when it comes to pianists, (as well as something I've done all my life as a classical player), so I wanted a section of the album to document the beginning of this musical journey. In my trio I'm lucky to have two wonderful musicians to play with, and the bassist, Yuri Goloubev, had a wonderful classical training in Moscow, and this is evident in his virtuosic approach to his instrument. Especially remarkable is his arco playing, and his facility at the high end of the bass. He can really make it sound like a cello, in a way that maybe only a handful of improvising bass players in the world could manage. Because of this, I'm always trying to find ways of giving him sonic space in the trio that might be a little different from the norm. I think this element of space hopefully makes a nice contrast with the solo music. To finish it off, around the time of the recording, I was commissioned to write some music for a concert in London, and I decided to compose it for cello and piano. The concert was a success and I thought it would be nice to document that music alongside the rest of the more 'jazz' based work, as I feel that at the end of the day both should be together, as it is all coming from the same source.

SC - A question I have been asking all jazz artists in this profile column.... Right now there are two schools of thought when it comes to the question "What is the current state of Jazz" Some believe is very healthy and some believe its worse than ever.. What is your take on this question and what are some of your current views

of Jazz music today.

GS - Well I think both are true!! There are certainly many more fantastic musicians coming through the colleges and universities now than there have ever been. It's never been easier to 'check out' recordings, and even videos of musicians of every type and origin at the click of a mouse. That can only be a good thing. However, we all know there aren't enough places to play, not enough money to play for, and it's really very hard to sell cd's of anything other than pop music these days. So it's a mixed bag really! For me, I feel absolutely privileged to be a working musician, it's all I've ever wanted to do all my life, and as long as I can afford to eat, sleep, and that someone wants to hear my music I'll be very happy. Having said that, it is frustrating sometimes, as for instance I'd love to come and play over in the US, but it's so difficult to get a tour together that will make even enough money to pay the visas and expenses in the first place! I hope with this new album I might become a little more well known in the states, as without any presence in a 'territory' it becomes very difficult to make anything happen.

SC - As far as influences on the piano who would you say influenced you the most?

GS - Well hearing Jarrett at the beginning was such a huge thing for me, and it's hard to say there's been a better player of the piano in the history of our music. I've always been a huge fan of Chick Corea too, as his time feel and the spirit in his music is so infectious. In England there's a truly wonderful player called John Taylor who is a huge hero for everyone in our country. His individuality shines through his music and I have so much respect and admiration for that. Aside from the piano, I have always adored Jaco's music. Again, his heart and spirit flooded everything he played and wrote, and if there was one person I wish I'd had the chance to play with it would have been without a doubt him.

SC - What do you have planned for the future on the writing and recording side?

GS - Well I've just recorded a new solo album for the German 'ACT' label, which will be out early in the new year, and I'm off to Australia to do a solo/trio tour in February so I'm very excited about that!

SC - Gwilym if you had one artist you could record with - who would it be?

GS - Pat Metheny. I remember seeing the Metheny Group in London a few years ago and I loved the power, joy and of course 'stadium jazz' element of his music. It's brilliant how many varied sounds and textures the band create, and you can recognize that 'sound' in an instant, which I guess at the end of the day is what we're all striving for! My favorite band has always been 'Weather Report' so one day I'd love to have a group that combined all the wonderful elements of those two groups...

## Add a Comment

You need to [log in](#) to comment on this article. No account? [No problem!](#)

- [E-mail](#)
- [Share](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Report](#)

## Community Authors

**Steve Caputo**

- [View Profile](#)



## More Articles in Community Articles

- [Eric Felten: An Interview](#)  
Steve Caputo
- [Critique: "Roads" \(CD\)](#)  
Leslie Connors
- [The Shape of Jazz to Come](#)  
Matthew Kassel
- [JW Marriott® Starr Pass to Host Sell-Out New Year's Eve Jazz Event](#)  
Jeremy
- [Singer Tony Adamo and the Black Cherry Group](#)  
Tony Adamo
- [Resonance](#)  
[Yotam](#)  
Dan Adler
- Company
  - [About JazzTimes](#)
  - [Advertising](#)

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)

© 1999–2010 JazzTimes, Inc. All rights reserved.

- Articles
  - [Columns](#)
  - [Departments](#)
  - [Education Spotlight](#)
  - [Features](#)
  - [News](#)
  - [Photos](#)
- Community
  - [Community Articles](#)
  - [Community Profiles](#)
  - [Contribute](#)
- Guides
  - [Artists](#)
  - [Events](#)
  - [Labels](#)
  - [Schools](#)
- Promotions
  - [Jazz MP3s](#)
  - [Sponsored Events](#)
  - [Sweepstakes](#)
- Reviews
  - [Albums](#)
  - [Books](#)
  - [Concerts](#)
  - [Home Audio](#)
  - [Instruments](#)
  - [Movies](#)
- Shopping
  - [Back Issues](#)
  - [Clothing](#)
  - [Subscriptions](#)