

SWEET DUSK

MUSIC BY MICK FOSTER

QUARTZ SAXOPHONE QUARTET

DEUX-ELLES: All the pieces on this album are by you, both as a player and as the composer, which is fantastic. We don't get many of those. How did it all start? Have you always composed, or improvised?

MICK FOSTER: Yes, I played the clarinet and then picked up the saxophone when I was about 13. And the thing that drew me to the saxophone, I suppose, was jazz. So I got into improvisation then, along with getting into the saxophone. They went hand in hand. Later, at the Guildhall, I had some formal tuition, which allowed me to take it further. But I think I've always basically made stuff up.

D-E: You've got two sax quartets on the album and then five contemporary dances. When were they written and how did that start?

MF: The first movement of the first sax quartet was probably one of the first substantial things I wrote. I finished the whole quartet in 2003. I also started writing big band pieces for the London Jazz Orchestra at that time. The London Jazz Orchestra features pieces by its members -- it has a lot of composer members and so everyone writes for that

ensemble. And then I just continued to write for different ensembles. I suppose that once I'd written the first sax quartet, then I just continued to write things for chamber ensembles.

D-E: That's brilliant. And it's mostly in the jazz style?

MF: A lot of these pieces for the chamber ensembles don't involve improvisation, but they do involve jazz harmony and rhythm. So quite accessible, but combined with more contemporary sounds. In a strange way, you can feel freer when you're writing non-jazz music because you know you can do anything. You can combine contemporary sounds with a jazz idiom.

D-E: I wasn't sure if anyone was improvising in the sessions, but clearly it was very much written out.

MF: Yes, the music on the album is all written out. I mean, people are sometimes putting their own interpretations on it, but it's all written out.

D-E: It's strange, isn't it? Because when you hear it, it sounds really free. But I could imagine that if

you had written in standard (free) improv sections, you would have been more restricted as a composer.

MF: You can also get a bit inhibited writing straight-ahead jazz - sometimes the weight of the history of the genre puts pressure on you - whereas when you're blending with a different type of music, you know that you can just do anything.

D-E: Are you the only one in the quartet who writes music?

MF: Christian's also very active as a writer, particularly with his Sanctuary project, which combines church organ and choir with saxophone. He's done very well with that over the last 20 years. That's become very popular.

D-E: Tell me about the history of the quartet. I know you were all at the Guildhall.

MF: That's right, the quartet got together around about 1994 and we were all students at various times, studying with John Harle. We started doing concerts, and we did a recording for Black

Box Recordings quite early on. And we were quite active for about a decade: we used to rehearse twice a week. We've done odd things occasionally since then, but it's nice to get back together properly again.

D-E: Something I loved in the sessions was that it felt like four old friends who know each other really well. You've got that old friendship to fall back on.

MF: Definitely, it felt really good to be playing together again. We'd been rehearsing since last October for these pieces - and some other things, actually, because in the process of getting this recording together we've had one or two other concerts come in, with other repertoire. So we've been rehearsing together again regularly and it just feels great.

D-E: It sounds that way as well. Tell us about the bass clarinet tracks. It's a very different sound world.

MF: It was Ian Mitchell, the clarinetist and director of the Gemini ensemble, who asked me to write that piece, originally for a group that he had at Benslow. I thought this would work really well when we were ►

thinking of other things to put on the album, just as a bit of a change.

D-E: Was it hard to swap between instruments?

MF: No, we're all doublers. Paul and Bradley do a lot of that sort of work in West End shows. And we can all play flute and clarinet as well.

D-E: I found it amazing in the sessions that you could do a whole day of blowing and then go off to do a West End show on a different instrument.

MF: Yeah, I think Bradley had done one day of that and then decided he was going to take the next night off!

D-E: Can you talk about the contemporary dances on the album?

MF: Those were originally written for saxophone and piano. They were commissioned as part of the Guildhall Saxophone Studies series, which was a series that the Guildhall promoted, and there was some music by Christian on that and some music by Carlos López Real. (There were a few of us who

contributed to that series.) Since then the dances have become quite popular: some of them have gone to exam syllabi for ABRSM and Trinity as pieces for sax and piano. I thought they'd work really well for quartet, so I rearranged them.

D-E: And tell us about the publishing. I know you've got stuff published with Saxtet Publications.

MF: Yeah, everything that we've recorded is published by Saxtet Publications. Saxtet are the go-to place for single-reed instruments, both in the UK and internationally. They specialise particularly in saxophone repertoire, and there's tons of stuff there. They've expanded into clarinet repertoire as well now, and they really champion original music.

D-E: That's fantastic. It must be very gratifying to be able to compose for people who know you well and really believe in what you do.

MF: Yeah, that's what I felt. This album was a real treat, because it was all my music, and everyone was totally committed to it and really up for playing it to the best standard they could. ■

QUARTZ SAXOPHONE QUARTET

Quartz Saxophone Quartet brings together four of the UK's top professional saxophonists. They started playing together in 1994 as students at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and have performed extensively throughout the

UK and Ireland. They have commissioned and recorded new pieces by composers such as Gary Carpenter, Alex Levine and John Buckley. Their first album was released to critical acclaim on Black Box Music. ■

MICK FOSTER

BARITONE SAXOPHONE / BASS CLARINET

Mick is a saxophonist and composer who is especially known as a soloist on the baritone saxophone. Originally from Harrogate, he studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and has since worked extensively in the fields of jazz, commercial and classical music.

Mick has appeared with many ensembles which include the big bands of John Dankworth, Stan Sulzmann and Mike Garrick; Alan Barnes +11, The Humphrey Lyttelton Band, Ginger Baker's Air Force, Laura Jurd's Human Spirit, The London Philharmonic Orchestra and English National Opera.

Mick has recorded four albums under his own name and appears on many albums and film & TV soundtracks including Don't Look Up and Downton Abbey.

As a composer Mick has written for many types of ensemble including Onyx Brass and the London Jazz Orchestra. His music has been recorded and played around the world, broadcast on BBC radio and included on exams syllabuses

Mick is known as an educator and teaches at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London, and at Jazz School UK. ■

PAUL STEVENS

SOPRANO SAXOPHONE / BASS CLARINET

Paul studied with John Harle at Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He has had a successful and varied career as a saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist and has performed around the world in venues including Carnegie Hall, The Lincoln Centre, Orchard Hall (Tokyo), Theatre des Champs, Esplanade (Singapore), the Royal Albert Hall, Barbican and the Festival Hall.

He has played and recorded with many orchestras and ensembles including the LSO, Philharmonia, LPO, City of London Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, BBC Concert Orchestra and London Saxophonic. Artists with whom Paul has worked include Elton John, Katie Melia and

Damon Albarn. He has recorded the sound tracks for many film scores including the Oscar nominated Mr. Turner for which he was a featured player; Monuments Men, Fantasia 2000 and Goya's Ghosts. Paul has held chairs on many West End Shows including Aladdin, Kinky Boots, High Society, Sleepless, Urinetown, A Chorus Line, Shrek, Sister Act, Spamalot, Billy Elliot, Jerry Springer the Opera, My One and Only, Merrily We Roll Along, Maddie and Candide.

Paul has held teaching positions at Reeds School, the Guildhall School Junior Department. He currently teaches saxophone, clarinet and flute at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London. ■

CHRISTIAN FORSHAW

ALTO SAXOPHONE / BASS CLARINET

Christian's distinctive sound as saxophonist & composer has drawn a global audience. His playing & writing have been featured by Tenebrae on *When Sleep Comes*, Voces8 on *Lux*

& *Eventide*, and he was recently commissioned by the BBC Singers to compose and arrange 3 new works for a performance in Cadogan Hall, London in April 2024. To date he has recorded

6 solo albums, most featuring his own writing and arranging.

His music is heavily influenced by the choral landscape he grew up with, alongside colours from minimalism and jazz. In 2023 his music was included by Ridley Scott in the 20th Century Fox

movie *The Last Duel* featuring Matt Damon. He has worked with artists as diverse as Brian Eno, Michael Nyman, Damon Albarn, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Hugh Jackman. Since 2002 Christian has been Professor of Saxophone at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London. ■

BRAD GRANT

TENOR SAXOPHONE / BASS CLARINET

Brad Grant studied saxophone at the Guildhall School and Music and Drama in London with John Harle. His performing career has taken him all over Europe and across the world playing at some of the world's prominent venues.

He is actively working as a freelance musician in fields as diverse as orchestral, dance bands, chamber groups and film sessions. He regularly plays with many of the country's leading orchestras and chamber groups. Most of Brad's performing time is occupied in theatre in London's West End, trebling on all saxes, clarinets and flutes. After starting out on several UK and European touring productions

he has since been the chair holder on many West End shows and deputised on countless others. He currently plays alto sax, clarinet, flute and piccolo on The Book of Mormon, a chair he has held since 2016.

Brad has played with a variety of orchestras and ensembles including the Philharmonia, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of London Sinfonia, Britten Sinfonia, English National Opera, Royal Opera House, Icebreaker, London Saxophonic, the Michael Nyman Band and the Graham Fitkin Band. He has also been recorded on a number of film soundtracks. ■

SAXOPHONE QUARTET NO 1

1 With movement	6:24
2 Freely, slowly - Tranquil.....	5:03
3 Lively	5:03

SAXOPHONE QUARTET NO 2

4 Brooding.....	5:48
5 Lively	2:35
6 Tenderly.....	2:50
7 Joyful.....	3:42

AUTUMN TONES

8 Sweet Dusk	3:08
9 Leaf Swirl	4:02

FIVE CONTEMPORARY DANCES

10 Jivers	2:08
11 For Astor	2:42
12 Saturday Night	2:32
13 Witney's Lament.....	4:11
14 Salseros	2:41

Total playing time: 52:48