

signum
CLASSICS

Recorded in RAK Studios, London,
from 2nd to 4th January 2020

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Producer – Miles James

Recording Engineer – Mike Hatch

Recording Assistant – Connor Panayi

Cover Image & Design – Marshall Light Studio

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Signum Records, Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex UB6 7LQ, UK.
+44 (0) 20 8997 4000 | E-mail: info@signumrecords.com | www.signumrecords.com



I Got Rhythm

Julian Bliss Septet

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Julian Bliss Clarinet

Martin Shaw Trumpet

Lewis Wright Vibraphone

Neal Thornton Piano

Colin Oxley Guitar

Tim Thornton Bass

Ed Richardson Drums

1	I Got Rhythm George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	3.04
2	S'Wonderful George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	3.07
3	Embraceable You George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	5.40
4	Strike Up the Band George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	3.49
5	Airmail Special Benny Goodman, James Mundy & Charlie Christian	3.03
6	Slipped Disc Benny Goodman	3.43
7	Fascinating Rhythm George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	2.53
8	Rose Room Art Hickman & Harry Williams	4.22
9	Somebody Loves Me George Gershwin, Buddy DeSylva & Ballard MacDonald	2.46
10	A Smooth One Charlie Christian	3.41
11	Soon George Gershwin & Ira Gershwin	3.48
12	Sing Sing Sing Louis Prima	3.49
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Total timings		40.05

Arrangements by Neal Thornton, Lewis Wright and Julian Bliss

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Foreword

Ten years ago I made the decision to start playing jazz. I had always listened to it, admiring the incredible artistry alongside such a relaxed musical approach and ability to improvise, but had never imagined myself playing any. That all changed when I started getting into the music of Benny Goodman (what a legend) and eventually put my own band together.

Being able to work and create music with some of the most phenomenal musicians on the London jazz scene is so much fun, and over the last 10 years we have been lucky enough to tour all over the world, with our

first programme largely-based on the music of Benny Goodman. As we started to explore more music together, George Gershwin came up over and over again. It was not only the huge list of fantastic works that appealed to us, but also his love of both jazz and classical – just like Benny Goodman. Some of his greatest compositions could claim to be either classical, jazz or both genres and so we wanted to create a show to celebrate this rich seam and common ground.

This album is a combination of some of our favourite tunes to play and listen to. Some were composed by the great

George Gershwin and we've included other tunes that Benny Goodman was associated with throughout his whole career. I am so incredibly lucky to have Lewis, Martin, Neal, Colin, Tim and Ed in the band. Not only amazing to work and collaborate with, but great friends too. There are no dull moments when we are on stage or on tour and I would like to think that comes across during our performances. So, here we are, eight years later and back with a second album!

Julian Bliss

I Got Rhythm

George Gershwin and Benny Goodman were not exact contemporaries as Benny Goodman was about 10 years younger than George, but they were both active during the important years of the emergence of jazz music into the mainstream and contributed to that process in different ways.

Gershwin created ground-breaking fusions of classical music with turn of the century jazz styles, resulting in his unique symphonic style. He also wrote a seemingly never-ending catalogue of popular songs. Benny Goodman, known as the 'King of Swing', was a band leader and performer who helped bring jazz to a wider audience – ultimately creating a new 'pop music' of the time.

Both Goodman and Gershwin were instrumental in bringing jazz to

a global audience. Goodman loved playing Gershwin's tunes in his famous small group settings, and they also worked together with Goodman playing in the orchestras for the shows *Strike up the Band* and *Girl Crazy*.

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn to Russian Jewish immigrants as Jacob Gershowitz in 1898. He had an older brother called Israel. The family changed name and the boys became Ira and George Gershwin. George grew up playing in streets like all other kids and didn't really show an interest in music until age 10. His parents bought a piano for Ira but it was George who actually used it the most. Later in his life he said that his early musical training was mostly coming home from hearing music played live, and doing his best to play it again from memory. Something not every 10-year-old can do!



When George left school at the age of 15 he found his first job as a 'song plugger' on Tin Pan Alley, with a brief to give customers a preview of the sheet music to encourage them to buy it. Gershwin earned the princely sum of \$15 a week at this job. For comparison, his first published song earned him just 50 cents! George's first hit was *Swanee* in 1919. Almost

unbelievably, it sold more than two million recordings and over a million sheets of music.

George Gershwin was a master of blurring the lines between jazz and classical. In 1924 George was commissioned to write what would end-up being his most famous piece of orchestral music, *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The perceived brilliance and success of the piece led to him taking a trip to Europe where he wanted to study with eminent classical figures like Nadia Boulanger and Maurice Ravel, but Boulanger refused to help him saying that her classical style would ruin his jazz-influenced style. Ravel and Gershwin met for the first time when Ravel travelled to the USA and the respect between them was clearly mutual. Ravel famously rebuffed George's request for composition lessons by saying "It is better to write good Gershwin than bad Ravel, which would happen if you worked with me".

Gershwin was very outgoing with a magnetic personality. He was fond of parties, and the longer he was left to play, the better he liked it. Hosts and hostesses would often take advantage of his generosity. When his mother cautioned him about overdoing it, George replied, "You see, the trouble is, when I don't play, I don't have a

good time!". Despite his short-life, George wrote more than 17 musicals for Broadway, several film scores and dozens of hit songs which have become part of the jazz standard repertoire.

In 1936 George developed some strange symptoms and started behaving oddly. Doctors dismissed his concerns at first, but following a collapse he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and passed away during an operation at the age of only 38.

Even though George left the world at an early age his music exhibits his lasting greatness. Contemporary musicologist Hans Keller stated that "Gershwin is a genius, in fact, whose style hides the wealth and complexity of his invention. There are indeed weak spots, but who cares about them when there is greatness?"

Benny Goodman was born in Chicago in 1909 into a Jewish immigrant family. At the age of 12, Benny and his two



older brothers started taking music lessons at a local synagogue. Benny became an accomplished clarinet player fairly quickly and was taken with the New Orleans Jazz sound. At the age of 16 he was already part of Chicago's biggest jazz band, the Ben Pollack Orchestra.

Benny started his playing career as a session musician but in his early 30s he decided he wanted to be a band leader himself. Benny's most famous long-term collaborations were with Teddy Wilson, Gene Krupa and Lionel Hampton. His first group was just a trio with Wilson on piano and Krupa on Drums, but in 1936 he heard Lionel Hampton play and was very impressed with his lightness of touch and rhythmic accuracy which perfectly complemented Goodman and Wilson's style. Goodman was probably most well-known for his Big Band, but he frequently performed and recorded with small groups with anything from three to seven or so musicians.



On 21st August 1935, Benny Goodman started a run of performances at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles. With the evening not going to plan and with little reaction from the audience, Benny decided to play some original arrangements which the audience loved. This concert went down so well that it has been described by some as the beginning of the swing era.

One of the most famous concerts in jazz history took place in January

1938 in Carnegie Hall. This was the first time that jazz of this calibre had been played in what was considered the home of classical music. Goodman was reluctant to do the concert at first but in the end he was convinced. The concert sold out and Goodman's band were the stars. He was a perfectionist and demanded the absolute best from the musicians he worked with: sometimes regarded as being difficult to work with, this drive for perfection made his band the envy of others and one of the most revered of its time.

In the late 1930s Benny decided he wanted to start playing classical music. He took lessons with Reginald Kell and frequently met up with other classical clarinetists. He re-learned his entire technique in order to play classical: he changed his embouchure, had finger calluses removed and learnt new techniques. Like anything Benny did, he wanted to do this properly and thoroughly.

He commissioned a number of composers to write pieces for him, many of which have become firm favourites in the clarinet repertoire.

Benny Goodman's career spanned six decades and had a profound impact on popular music and the importance of the clarinet in jazz and classical music. Some people believe that there wouldn't have been a swing era without Goodman. He brought the instrument to a completely new audience and thousands of youngsters around the world were, and continue to be, inspired to play the clarinet because of him.

Julian Bliss & Neal Thornton

Biographies

Julian Bliss Clarinet

Martin Shaw Trumpet

Lewis Wright Vibraphone

Neal Thornton Piano

Colin Oxley Guitar

Tim Thornton Bass

Ed Richardson Drums

The Julian Bliss Septet was formed in 2010 and quickly became known for their trademark inspiring jazz-fuelled shows which have captivated audiences across the globe. Their dazzling virtuosity, extraordinary musicianship and charming humour shines through their programmes of swing, Latin, American and jazz music. The band has played at some of the most prestigious venues and festivals around the world, including the famous Ronnie Scott's and Wigmore Hall in London, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Bermuda Jazz Festival and on multiple US tours to sold-out

clubs and concert halls including Dizzy's Club at Jazz at Lincoln Center (New York).

The Septet's early shows were inspired by the great Benny Goodman whose iconic music captivated Julian Bliss as a young musician. Taking a fresh, modern approach to Goodman's work, the Septet's first album "The King of Swing" and live performances were enjoyed by audiences and critics alike, and these programmes remain in great demand today. Expanding their repertoire and working with new genres of music, the group used their mastery of Western classical, swing and jazz to complement the rich heritage of Latin and wider American traditions. Their programme of new

arrangements of Gershwin and his contemporaries includes music from *Porgy and Bess*, *Rhapsody in Blue* and long-time favourites – *I Got Rhythm*, *Embraceable You* and *Lady Be Good*: timeless classics.

Showcasing some of the much-loved music that has come from the movies, the Septet has put together a new show "Hooray for Hollywood". Starting with silent film and the early 'talkies', the band echoes music from wartime and Fred Astaire films, musicals and even the classic Disney blockbusters. This toe-tapping, romantic programme of glorious nostalgia and great music features tunes such as *Cheek to Cheek*, *As Time Goes By*, *Sing Sing Sing*, *Days of Wine and Roses* and *My Favourite Things*.

Julian Bliss

Julian Bliss is one of the world's finest clarinetists, excelling as a concerto soloist, chamber musician, jazz artist, masterclass leader and tireless musical explorer. He has inspired a generation of young players as co-creator of the Leblanc range of affordable clarinets, introducing a substantial new audience to his instrument. Julian started playing the clarinet aged 4, going on to study at the University of Indiana and in Germany under Sabine Meyer, turning professional aged 12.

In recital and chamber music he has played at most of the world's leading festivals and venues, including Gstaad, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Verbier, Wigmore Hall (London) and Lincoln Center (New York). As a soloist, he has appeared with a wide range of international orchestras, including the São Paulo Symphony,

Chamber Orchestra of Paris, Auckland Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras.

Album releases receive rave reviews from critics, record of the week spots and media attention. Projects include multiple jazz albums with the Julian Bliss Septet, Mozart & Weber Quintets with the Carducci String Quartet; Schubert's *Shepherd on the Rock* with Christopher Glynn (piano) and Sophie Bevan (soprano); Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint*; Mozart and Nielsen's concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia; a new piece for clarinet & string quartet by David Bruce, *Gumboots*, and a recital album of Russian and French composers with American pianist, Bradley Moore.

Julian has also arranged pieces for clarinet and piano, notably Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata Op. 19, the third movement of which has been set as a grade 6 piece on the new London College of Music clarinet syllabus.



Lewis Wright

Recipient of multiple awards, Lewis is one of the world's finest vibraphonists. He is recognised for his unique sound and approach to the instrument, performing internationally as a virtuoso improviser and recording artist. Lewis has been a featured soloist with Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra as well as Hugh Masekela, Tony Allen and Melody Gardot.



Martin Shaw

Having studied jazz and classical trumpet at the Royal Academy of Music (London), Martin continued his studies at Berklee College of Music



in Boston. Always in demand, his career has seen him perform with leading jazz artists including Cleo Laine, Jools Holland, Jamie Cullum and the BBC Big Band, also recording and touring with artists such as Jamiroquai, Brand New Heavies, Sting and Paul Young.

Neal Thornton

As a pianist, Neal has worked with a multitude of the top musicians in London jazz venues as well as devoting time to teaching. As arranger and composer he has produced albums and stage shows, including *Something Wonderful*, a Richard Rodgers centenary tribute, for Opera North and English National Opera. Neal co-founded the Julian Bliss Septet with Julian in 2010.



Colin Oxley

Multi-award-winning guitarist, Colin has toured and recorded with jazz luminaries around the world. He has appeared at the Montreux and North Sea Jazz Festivals, and is a member of Steve Fishwick Quartet, Dave Newton Quartet, Stacey Kent's group and The John Wilson Orchestra. Colin is also a professor at his alma mater, the Guildhall School of Music in London.



Tim Thornton

Winner of a British Jazz Award, Tim is one of the most exciting young bass players of his generation. He is a prolific writer



and arranger and as well as touring with some of the greats he has recorded three albums with his own group. He is also the co-founder of Karve, a pop-up restaurant/jazz club fusing original jazz and fine dining.

Ed Richardson

Graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, Ed has an eclectic and varied career. He is equally at home as a drummer for TV and film sessions, with orchestras, in West End shows and with artists including John Wilson, Pixie Lott, Mica Paris, Clare Teal and Gregory Porter. Ed's roots are still firmly in jazz, and he's seen most often at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London.



Thanks & Acknowledgements

In writing a word of thanks to the people who have helped to make this album possible, I would like to start with my incredible colleagues, friends, and fellow-musicians in the band: Lewis Wright, Martin Shaw, Neal Thornton, Tim Thornton, Colin Oxley and Ed Richardson. My appreciation and admiration for their stellar musicianship through every single moment, is matched by my thanks for them always being there to help, share ideas and most importantly being amazing friends. I couldn't think of better people to be on tour with than those six.

I am indebted to my incredible managers Claire and Meg. Having worked with them for a number of years, they are constantly working to create and cultivate opportunities

all over the world for not only myself but us as a group. I enjoy every single moment working with them and am staggered by the tenacity and drive they both show. I must also pay a huge thanks to Steph Carlesimo and the team at IMG Artists in New York for organising our tours in the USA. Being able to travel across many of the beautiful states in America, playing great venues and for some huge audiences is a dream come true.

There would not be a recording without Steve Long, Mike Hatch and Signum Records. They are some of my favourite people in the whole industry. Being able to record for such a label is a pleasure and I thank Steve for his willingness to allow me to pursue various recording projects and ideas. Mike is an engineer like no

other. A true master at what he does. I always ask for Mike whenever I record a new album and I'm very thankful he was part of this one too. I would like to thank our producer Miles James for his ongoing enthusiasm, attention to detail and also some nuclear grade coffee! It is always a pleasure to work with a producer that shares the same vision and idea of sound.

My brother, Adrian, came and spent two days in the studio with us to capture some video and photographs during the sessions. A big thank you to him for giving up his time and sharing his creative skills. We are looking forward to being able to release some videos to go with this album and hope you enjoy the behind the scenes photos.

There are lots of people to thank and lots of people that have helped get me to where I am today and I am eternally grateful to each and every one of them.

Lastly and most importantly I want to thank my Mum. None of this would be possible without her. There are no words to express how amazing she is.

Julian Bliss