

# T'ain't just what you do, it's the way that you do it

Nottingham's JazzHouse - promoting jazz for younger audiences and performers

**Carl Billson, JazzHouse Education Representative & Chair of Friends of Notts NYJO**

*"T'ain't just what you do, it's the way that you do it"* - a slight paraphrase on a jazz refrain rings true for the way Nottingham JazzHouse has enlisted more younger people to engage and participate in jazz music. What kind of things have they done and how have they done it? This piece will focus on their support for younger musicians, creating opportunities for playing in public and enlisting professional jazz musicians as mentors. Crucial to success is the level of networking - partnering with others involved in jazz music in the locality, such as youth jazz bands, sponsors of jazz competitions and the Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Music Hubs.



Jazz enthusiasts will place jazz as centre-stage, but the reality is that people's involvement in jazz will be on a spectrum from appreciation to participation - and JazzHouse has support and activities for all. So, while not everyone aspires to making a career as a professional jazz musician, for those that do, JazzHouse has provided a springboard to further their ambitions. For instance, at the age of 16, local bass player Mark Lewandowski joined a two-year mentoring scheme run by JazzHouse. This put him in contact with jazz performers who generously shared insights into both the musical craft of jazz and the business graft involved in working professionally which he has used to his advantage.

Mark moved to London in 2010 to study jazz music at London's Guildhall School of Music and has twice returned as leader of jazz outfits comprising fellow Guildhall musicians, taking the stage at Nottingham JazzSteps ([www.jazzsteps.co.uk](http://www.jazzsteps.co.uk)) where he was once in the audience and meeting visiting musicians. The drummer with Mark on those occasions was another Nottingham youth jazz alumni, Will Glaser and both recently appeared on Radio 3 - evidence of building their experience and status as performers, all while still studying.

Will's younger brother, alto sax player Sam Glaser, also followed the same mentoring scheme and joined 'apprenticeship' Saturday sessions at the Guildhall. In this mix, JazzSteps also provided a platform for Sam to play alongside Nottingham-born international sax star Tony Kofi when Tony was performing at JazzSteps.

This came about through networking and links established with the Nottingham Youth Jazz Orchestra. Established in 2008, Notts NYJO has 3 bands - a development group, a Big Band and, drawn from members of the Big Band, an 8-piece Combo which provides more space for budding improvisers.

Notts NYJO ([www.nottsnyjo.co.uk](http://www.nottsnyjo.co.uk)) have Tony Kofi as their musical patron and the connections were made for Tony to perform with the Combo during the interval in the bar at JazzSteps. This was inspirational for the young players and memorable for the audience.



How else to reach younger audiences? Innovative thinking by local libraries in Nottinghamshire, and good connections with JazzHouse, have meant a programme of jazz 'Live In Libraries' being brought to the doorstep of audiences around the country. Programming that includes accessible times and venues, such as Sunday afternoon jazz from the 18-piece Notts NYJO Big Band, means that younger audiences especially have chance to get hear music played by their peers.

Sounds familiar? JazzHouse readily acknowledge the path forged by neighbours Derby Jazz (who for decades have had a programme of supporting younger players through summer schools, mentoring, commissions and support of youth music such as with The Music HotHouse). Derby Jazz alumni include Josh Blackmore, Matt Ratcliffe and Tom Bunting.

Making connections, networking and giving mutual support are essential, especially when funding is tight. For example, JazzHouse is one of a number of organisations that support the Nottingham International Jazz Piano Competition, a marvellous and creative venture led by Nottingham-based Clement Pianos ([www.nijpc.com](http://www.nijpc.com)).

As well as bringing inspirational talented young jazz pianists from around the globe, this event sparks opportunities for people locally to learn more about jazz. During a weekend of music competition (first week of October 2012) that is open to the public, the panel of judges, who are themselves stars on the jazz circuit, provide master-classes and jazz appreciation sessions for all ages to enjoy. JazzHouse has used its promoter role to arrange follow-up gigs for interested competition entrants. The whole event is highly inclusive of young jazz musicians - the contestants, those joining associated classes and the local 8-piece Notts NYJO Combo who provide entertainment during the intervals of the finals.



So, it all adds up. These examples illustrate how inspired thinking, active networking amongst the local music fraternity and working for the common good, creates rich jazz music opportunities where the sum is truly greater than the parts. JazzHouse is delighted to be involved with the newly-formed Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Music Hubs to collaborate in shaping new opportunities to bring jazz into the lives of younger people. As enthusiasts, we aspire to help both listeners and players of all ages to develop a shared, lifelong appreciation for jazz - a musical form that is one of the major cultural achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The involvement of younger people, with the coordinated support of jazz organisations such as those mentioned here, will ensure that jazz confidently progresses in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and continues to surprise and enhance our lives.



*Tony Kofi, award-winning Nottingham-born jazz saxophonist and patron of Nottingham Youth Jazz Orchestra, with two members of the band: drummer Alex Blackwell and alto sax player Sam Glaser. Tony joined the 8-piece NottsNYJO Combo for a couple of numbers at Nottingham JazzSteps*