



FRANK GRIFFITH

News and Reviews

HOLLAND PARK NON-STOP – CD REVIEWS

This is a collection of the many excellent reviews Frank's new CD has had published in various places....



" ... on this evidence, reports of the big bands' death are greatly exaggerated indeed!"

I first caught **Frank Griffith** some years ago at the Vortex with his NONET and a singer. Here he is with a considerably enlarged outfit on this most welcome CD, in a big band context with **Tina May** guesting on vocals on three numbers. The generous 12-track disc, weighing in at just under 67 minutes, was recorded at Pinewood Studios in 2010 and 2011. It's so highly polished, energetic and hip that it comes across like a blast not from the past, but the future — a world where the big bands never died, or at least came back fighting. And swinging.

Tina May sets things on an energetic footing right away as the disc opens with a scat intro to *'Oh You Crazy Moon'*. The singer features on a total of three tracks — the sort of proportion you might have got from a big band in the heyday of swing before the collapse of touring economics conspired to write an epitaph for the bands, and solo singers took over. The other vocal numbers are *'That's All'* and *'Travellin' Light'* and the CD as a whole represents a shrewd blend of new and old, originals and standards — even wringing fresh beauty and meaning from the old war-horse *'Body and Soul'*.

While I was already well aware of Frank Griffith's considerable prowess as a reed player, what really hit me here was his talent as an arranger and writer. *'Antonia'*, one of his four originals, is breezy, cooking and highly organised with a light touch and great use of space. The sound throughout the album is sparing and elegant, strikingly fleet and nimble, deploying the large instrumental forces on hand so tastefully that I was occasionally startled to remember that it's a big band and not an intimate combo I was listening to. The splendid arrangements contribute hugely to this effect, notably on the aforementioned *'Body and Soul'*, which is just ravishing.

Other highlights include a smooth, expert and swinging performance of Horace Silver's *'Strollin''* and a fascinating elaboration and modernisation of the 1910 Tin Pan Alley song *'Shine'*... and while it's difficult to single out individual players in such a tight, professional outfit I should mention **John Turville's** piano, sparing and adroit on *'Baby Won't You Please Come Home'* and weaving sinuous shapes on *'JCC'* (another Griffith original) and **Tony Dixon's** wonderful fluid flugelhorn solo on *'Holland Park'* — yet another excellent Griffith composition and the track which gives the album its title.

Alastair Robertson's Hep, one of the eminent British independent jazz labels, is to be congratulated for supporting this sumptuous release. In an age of mopeds, it's a Rolls Royce — of the original British marque. On this evidence, reports of the big bands' death are greatly exaggerated indeed.

Andrew Cartmel

"The whole disc is a joy. Listen!"

If big bands are dead how come new ones spring up all over the place? This one is a goodie combining the best of the tradition (Basie, Goodman etc) with a modern approach on several selections and some crisp soloing.

The leader is a good tenor soloist but he chooses here to use clarinet most of the time; not a bad idea considering how underused the instrument has been in modern jazz over the years ... and if anybody still thinks clarinet is not the right instrument for contemporary solos, in any context, just listen to Frank Griffith on *Baby Won't You Please Come Home*. Every baby would hurry home after hearing this solo.

The opening, *Oh, You Crazy Moon* is a tightly controlled swinger and has a brisk, freshly thought out vocal from Tina May. Freddie Gavita is a young trumpeter to watch, fairly new on the scene but distinguishing himself here with some strong solo work. He shares the honours with Matt Wates's scintillating work on *Antonia* with the orchestra in bristling full flight behind them. Some of the best of British talent fill the ranks of this big band and I hope they get gigs rather than just existing as a rehearsal outfit, as most of the others seem to these days

The leader goes back to the swing era stylistically for his tenor outing on *Body and Soul*, every tenor player's delight or nightmare depending on how good they are. Frank has no problem. Other highlights here include Gavita's trumpet solo on Silver's *Strollin'*, Tina on *That's All* and *Travellin' Light* and Karen Sharp's rich tenor on *Ricochet* but really, the whole disc is a joy. Listen!

Derek Ansell

Clarinetist and tenor saxophonist Frank Griffith's new big band album, *Holland Park Non-Stop* (Hep), covers a lot of musical territory; from Horace Silver's *Strollin'* to *Body and Soul* and *These Foolish Things*, as well as a number of Frank's originals.

Frank has worked with several leading big bands over the years, including those led by Toshiko Akiyoshi, Mel Lewis, Buddy Rich and Mel Torme. Frank's tone on the reeds is warm and breathy, and the band swings away on every track. The arrangements are all Frank's.

For more, go [here](#).

You'll find this one at iTunes and [here](#).

Mare Myers

HERALD SCOTLAND, SEPT 2011

Oregon-born saxophonist Frank Griffith hasn't just settled in the UK to give Brunel University students the benefit of his considerable jazz experience. He's also brought with him a conviction that the golden age of the big band doesn't need to be recreated.

With arrangements that sing clearly and a mostly home-reared orchestra that swings crisply and surely, those big band days can simply be continued. That's certainly what's happening here as Griffith combines his admiration for Duke Ellington, Count Basie and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra with an approach that's both classic and fresh and a programme that follows the form of vintage big band radio broadcasts, complete with a guest singer, Tina May.

Griffith's own compositions, including the bluesy *JCC* and the waltzing *Holland Park*, are classy and played with relaxed exactness.

But for the ultimate then-is-now experience, try *Shine*, a 1920s piece that sounds newly minted thanks to Griffith's masterly and at times mischievous clarinet playing.

EVENING STANDARD, AUGUST 2011

FRANK GRIFFITH BIG BAND

Holland Park

Non-Stop

(Hep)

★★★★☆

An American in Uxbridge, big Frank Griffith hails from Oregon but is built more along Texan lines. As [Brunel University's](#) jazz performance director he looms equally large as tenorist, clarinettist, arranger and bandleader, yet his 17-piece band is refreshingly unbrassy, its arrangements longer on swing and musicality.

He doesn't hog the microphone either, giving proper space to a strong line-up ranging from established sax stars Bob Sydor and Matt Wates to such fast-rising talents as trumpeter Freddie Gavita, altoist Sam Mayne and pianist John Turville. Guest diva Tina May, at her Anita O'Day-ish best on *Travellin' Light*, *That's All* and, adds icing to a nourishing cake.

Jack Massarik

THE MUSICIAN, AUTUMN 2011

Seriously swinging big band delights!

Sax supremo Frank returns with his chosen crew of first class players, plus the added attraction of vocalist Tina May.

Known for his arranging skills and melodic playing, the Oregon born Frank once again exhibits his total understanding of the big band form and how to bring out the very best from his impressive lineup.

John Turville (piano), Steve Fishwick (trumpet), Matt Wates and Karen Sharp (saxes) all shine during smooth and entertaining takes of *Oh! You Crazy Moon*, *Baby Won't You Please Come Home*, *Body and Soul* and *These Foolish Things*

Guaranteed to delight all fans of big bands and a great entry point for novices.