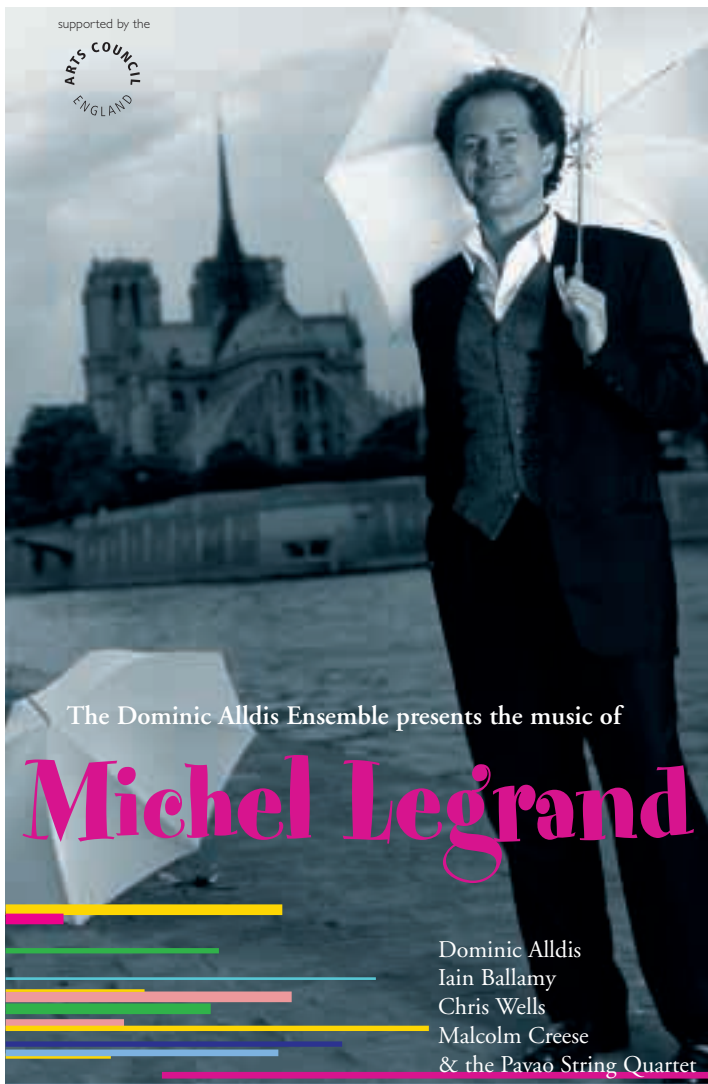


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[www.uce.ac.uk/newsdesk/concert/concert.htm](http://www.uce.ac.uk/newsdesk/concert/concert.htm)
- 27 **LONDON** Wigmore Hall 020 7935 2141  
[www.wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk)
- 30 **MANCHESTER** Royal Northern College of Music 0161 907 5555  
[www.rncm.ac.uk/events/index.asp](http://www.rncm.ac.uk/events/index.asp)
- 31 **DURHAM** Gala Theatre 0191 332 4041  
[www.galadurham.co.uk](http://www.galadurham.co.uk)

## November

- 1 **GLASGOW** Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama 0141 332 5057  
[www.rsamd.ac.uk](http://www.rsamd.ac.uk)
- 2 **EDINBURGH** Queen's Hall 0131 668 2019  
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- 6 **POOLE** The Lighthouse 01202 685222  
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- Wed 12th **NOTTINGHAM** 8pm  
Djanogly Theatre, Lakeside Arts Centre, University Park 0115 846 7777
- Thurs 13th **SOUTHEND** 9pm  
Maritime Room, Cliffs Pavilion, Station Rd, Westcliff on Sea 01702 351 135
- Fri 14th **LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL** 7.30pm  
Pizza Express, Dean Street, London W1 0207 439 8722
- Sat 15th **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL LONDON** 4pm  
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# 'LIFTING THE SPIRITS IS THE POINT'



The 21st century jazz world teems with singers – though not many win the respect of hard-bitten instrumentalists. But Liane Carroll makes friends wherever she performs. So isn't the title of her new CD *Billy No Mates* therefore something of a mystery? BRIAN BLAIN unravelled it.

'NOW THAT I AM REACHING the 40 mark, maybe I'm beginning to feel just a bit ambitious,' Liane Carroll ponders. 'Perhaps I would like a bit more than just waiting for the phone to ring – although, touch wood, it always seems to.'

We're talking over a pot of tea at the Café Rouge across the road from what is still regarded as one of the most famous jazz clubs in the world – Ronnie Scott's, where Liane is about to begin her twelfth season at Frith Street in eight years. She doesn't say so, but I suspect that her decision to release an unaccompanied album (*Billy No Mates* is just Liane's voice and her piano) might have been occasioned by a subconscious urge to dispel some of that 'Gimme

a Pigfoot' traditional image still pinned to her by some critics. Certainly the latest disc, recorded at Ronnie Scott's, is very different to its two predecessors on the Jazz House label.

OK, let's get something out of the way straight off. This remarkable artist is a lifer. When Liane takes the stage she fills the room with her presence. She brings warmth, spontaneous humour, raw emotion and, frequently, no little pain to her presence. But though she consistently performs to roomfuls of 'mates' transfixed by her performances, why has she called the album the playground taunt *Billy No Mates*? 'Because it's just me,' Liane simply says. 'There's no one else to blame if it didn't come out so good.'

This might be another example of British self-deprecation concealing a lack of self-belief, but Carroll has less cause for doubt than most. She generates rapturous enthusiasm among her fellow singers – and, equally significantly, among instrumentalists. Saxophonist Steve Rubie, owner of Fulham's 606 Club and writer of the album's excellent liner notes, has a telling Carroll story about that. Rubie relates that during the course of the club's 25th anniversary celebrations a couple of years ago, alto legend Peter King – who had already finished his own set – was so exhilarated by the singer's performance that he unpacked his alto and sat in.

Likewise, after a week working opposite her with The Couriers Celebration band at Ronnie Scott's earlier this year, drummer Martin Drew was determined to sit in on her final Saturday night. 'I don't know why it has taken me so long to catch up with her', Drew told me a few months ago, 'but I do think that she is really special.' I quote these two out of many, to say nothing of the countless singers who try to catch her at Rubie's establishment or Ronnie's whenever she performs. Admiration from the hardbitten long-term practitioners of the bebop arts is particularly revealing about Liane Carroll, because many of the players and fans at the hard core end of jazz can still be deeply suspicious of anyone who

*continued overleaf*



## SINGER TO SINGER – IAN SHAW ON LIANE CARROLL

UNFORGETTABLE, funny and often painfully honest, Liane Carroll's solo gig is now captured on *Billy No Mates*, a jewel of an album recorded live in the studio this summer.

Closer to Nyro than Norah, this is a collection of American Songbook gems, brilliant originals and Greenwich Village confessionals by the likes of Tom Waits and the singers' favourite, Joni Mitchell. Incapable of the empty, glamorous vocal gestures that adorn many of her contemporaries' work, Liane's readings of standards such as 'In the Wee Small Hours' and the opener 'It Never Entered My Mind' are bluesy and honest, fairly prodding the listening heart with a voice that's tender, angry, shameful, hurt and always soulful.

Liane's right hand often merges with her voice, producing (as George Benson did with the guitar) an exhilarating chorus of scat or, as on 'A Foggy Day', an entire chorus scatted without piano, reminiscent of some of the great '70s Sarah Vaughan live albums. Her improvising on her own 'Fly Little Bird' sounds like Sanborn. Joni's 'River' begins as a whispered conversation over unfolding hymnal piano and ends in self-reproach, the singer not afraid, at all, of showing how, like speech, the voice often cracks and falters. The album's emotive overall landscape is kept in check by some well-placed swingers: 'Don't Blame Me' would satisfy any Krallster with its playful phrasing and 'A Beautiful Friendship' is driving and insistent. Carroll's greatness is marked by the stand-out track, 'Picture In A Frame', where the spartan Tom Waits lyric is transformed into an urgent declaration of love, now lost, upsetting, honest, very beautiful and beyond all vocal category.

I've waited years for this album. (*Ian Shaw*)



Photographs: © David Sinclair

*continued from previous page*  
 strays outside of the standards repertoire, or introduces material by Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell or Tom Waits in the way that Liane does.

So who is she – and why has it taken us so long to start giving her the recognition she deserves? There is no doubt that she is a jazz fan with roots. ‘I have loved jazz since I was about 11 years old’, she told me, and right from the start I was a *Jazz Journal* reader. You may not believe this, but I had a real crush on Scott Hamilton – and I still like his playing’. She lived in Carshalton for a while, but has spent most of her life in Hastings, and has been married for 13 years to Roger Carey, one of the bass players that she regularly works with.

‘Both my parents were singers – my mum sang professionally with Ken Macintosh – and my grandparents ran a transport café. I was a right little showoff, singing ‘Hello Dolly’ to the drivers when I was only five. I took piano lessons and by the age of 15 I was playing keyboards in a local jazz/rock band – but not singing. That started to come later.

‘My first real movement into jazz was with Trevor Watts’ Moire Music and that’s when I came across Liam Genockey, who’s a truly marvellous drummer. We still work together quite a lot. He and Trevor and I all live in Hastings, it’s a dangerous nest of musical vipers. I don’t know

which way I would have gone without that original connection with Trevor. In 1988 we did the Brecon Festival and afterwards we went all over the world. It was a marvellous education and a wonderful grounding, because Trevor really pushed me. And because of all the different cultures we tried to assimilate, it did wonders for the rhythmic feel I developed.’

Liane Carroll recalls that not all of her early gigs required that sophisticated rhythmic vocabulary. ‘I remember being booked into a country and western club with a local band,’ she laughs, ‘and we didn’t know any of the numbers they liked, so we got away with it by playing rock ‘n’ roll. I had grown out of my original jazz purism by then. I had grown to like lots of non-jazz stuff but obviously more at the soul end of the spectrum.’

As we talked I found her range of experience even wider than I had imagined. She worked for a year, in 1994, with Gerry Rafferty, touring Europe and making two albums.

‘To me, just being on stage with 11 terrific musicians was so wonderful,’ Carroll reflects. ‘On the other hand I’ve done the Berlin Jazz Festival with Norma (Winstone) and Kenny Wheeler, and have sung in a choir with Norma and Ian (Shaw). I occasionally do things with Jacqui Dankworth and Sara Coleman in a group that goes under the name of Passion. I find all those kind of things,

what some people would describe as cerebral and not ‘me’ at all, totally inspiring. There are so many different kinds of music to play and to enjoy that I don’t see the point of pigeonholing. In the end jazz is about improvising and making stuff your own, whatever genre it happens to be in. I get a kick out of guesting with a big band and singing standards, for instance. I also love the more funky things I do at Ronnie’s with Steve Lamb and Greg Leppard and, thanks to him, I have been part of Tony Coleman’s drum ‘n’ bass band London Elektricity for about seven years now. We’ve been all over Germany and Belgium and when we do the Jazz Café I bet hardly any jazz fans notice. But I love it, it really gives me a chance to fly. I bet that shocks you,’ she suddenly says, marking my old jazzier’s card and in the process lighting up the room with the kind of huge smile that makes everyone who goes to her gigs think that she is performing just for them.

While lots of her fans might first respond to the good-time vibe that she creates, with a lot of genuinely spontaneous banter between numbers, it’s clear to anyone who is open to all of her work that there is a vulnerability to her and an element of raw emotion that you find in few other British singers, although Carol Grimes and Christine Tobin – again, not purists’ favourites – share some of those same characteristics.

In the past few years I have given a lot more thought to the question of how singers, in particular, maintain that edge without manufacturing ersatz emotion. I share this with Liane, and it produces an immediate response. ‘You’re right, it’s a hard thing to cling on to as you get older, and I hope that I can carry on giving a genuine response to the material. That thing about honesty is a big question. I love loads of singers but Laura Nyro was my biggest inspiration and that’s a lot to do with the pain in much of her material. Nina Simone too – so much more to her than the fun of ‘My Baby Just Cares for Me’. I was on a tour of Switzerland with Dick Morrissey once and we talked about this – about how you stay fresh and honest with the music. That’s what he was like right to the end of his life, of course. I find it deeply upsetting to realise that there are players I admire who have actually lost the passion. I don’t ever want to get like that. Lifting the spirit is the point.’

A few months ago I talked my neighbour, a middle-aged woman who is very slowly learning the clarinet and sings in a madrigal group, and who’s a Scott Hamilton fan as it happens – into coming along to see Liane at Lauderdale House, an acoustic venue in North London definitely not designed for funk. At the end of the evening my neighbour turned to me and said: ‘that was one of the most amazing and moving musical experiences that I have had in my life’. I went over to Liane, who had concluded with Tom Waits’ poignant ‘Picture in a Frame’ and the singer’s eyes were brimming with tears. If only someone with a big-label budget could take that talent and handle it with skill and sensitivity, the creator of *Billy No Mates* could find herself with thousands more of them.

*Liane Carroll’s Billy No Mates is available online from [www.splashpointrecords.com](http://www.splashpointrecords.com). Check listings for autumn gig details.*