

BOOKS & DVDS //

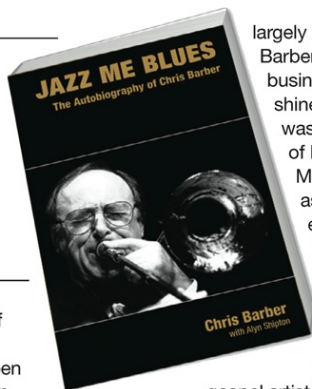
BOOKS

Jazz Me Blues – The Autobiography of Chris Barber

Chris Barber with Alyn Shipton

Equinox £19.99

Barber's contribution to the advancement of blues and jazz in this country has always been a matter for celebration. He continues to lead his band, now augmented and known as the Big Chris Barber Band, and has done so since 1954. His enthusiasm for African-American blues and gospel music has never waned and for many, including putative 1960s rock stars, the landmark tours he organised for artists like Muddy Waters and Sister Rosetta Tharpe set in train a transformation of the blues and rock landscape in this country. Hence this testimony from Van Morrison: 'Chris is the pivotal player in the game of British blues, jazz and skiffle'. Enough said. Given his many achievements, his commitment to the music and his sheer longevity as a performing musician, Barber's autobiography was clearly going to be something to relish. Well, at just 147 pages of text it's hardly a banquet, more like a light meal. However much Shipton may have questioned or prompted, this looks to me to be a book constructed on Barber's own terms. Thus, there's plenty about his parents, (left-leaning and committed to public service), his mother later the mayor of Canterbury, his father, a distinguished economist but rather less about other significant personal and musical relationships. How this potential student actuary turned into a professional jazz musician is Barber's real story, brought to life here as he describes how he fell for early jazz and became a collector, anxious to play and searching for like-minded souls with whom he could form a band. The ill-fated association with Ken Colyer is explored as is its eventual dissolution, and the arrival of Ottilie Patterson, the Northern Irish schoolteacher who became one of the most convincing of white blues singers is properly celebrated. She also became the second Mrs Barber but the more intimate side of their relationship is little explored, the first Mrs B. and her various successors



largely overlooked. Barber's serious business sense shines through (he was part owner of London's Marquee Club) as does his evident delight in touring the US and co-operating with every kind of bluesman,

gospel artist and established jazzman, notable among them Joe Harriott and John Lewis of the MJQ, who became a close personal friend. Of his current band's augmentation, rather less is said, although there is a full chapter about his passion for motor racing and his views on the various motor vehicles that he has owned. The illustrations are fine and there is a useful selective record list. If this autobiography reads like a busy man's first draft of a life, then so be it. Onwards and upwards, you could say. It's a good if sober read and we should be grateful for that. That there is a rather more substantial volume waiting in the wings may just be wishful thinking. **Peter Vacher**

Him Through Me – Making Love and Music in the Sixties & Seventies

Pamela Windo

CreateSpace Independent Publishing £9.00

"We lived on air and ideas, without cell phones and Facebook... we took quite a few drugs, and had quite a lot of sex... we were earnest and naïve... it was all so new, to be young and empowered... and it was music not money that played the major role." So says Pam Windo, the former wife, now travel writer, in this brief, honest and ultimately sad memoir of her life with the wayward saxophonist Gary Windo, who was a key part of the early 1970s UK experimental jazz scene spanning Soft Machine, SME, Brotherhood of Breath and Keith Tippett to sessions with Robert Wyatt, Carla Bley and Pink Floyd's Nick Mason. Strong on period flavour and the more colourful elements of hippie-era communal living and playing together, it's a frank tale of a restless reedsman who impressed many but who never seemed to nail his own musical vision and died in 1992 aged 50 of an asthma

attack following periodic problems with heroin use. One of the few books to chronicle aspects of this largely undocumented late 1960s to early 1970s improv circle, this fascinating era is begging for an in-depth study. **Jon Newey**

Highway 61 – Crossroads on the Blues Highway

Derek Bright

History Press £14.99

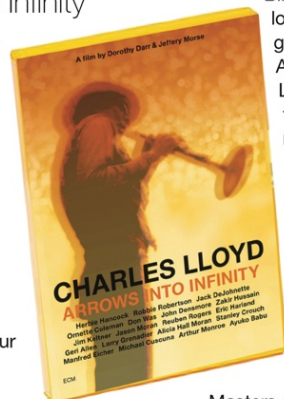
One of the road trips to end all road trips, Highway 61 is known as the 'Blues Highway' running from Minnesota 1,400 miles south to New Orleans, shadowing the Mississippi for the greater part, and has been a journey of pilgrimage among blues enthusiasts ever since the blues boom of the 1960s. British blues musician and researcher Bright is no stranger to this highway and, along with photographer Richard Brown, cranks the engine in Chicago, heads west and follows it all the way down, visiting the places that resonate so richly throughout blues, jazz and civil-rights history, including St Louis, Memphis, Helena, Clarksdale, Greenville, Natchez and New Orleans. Abundantly illustrated with photos of important streets, former homes, clubs, studios and hotels, as well as grave sites and locations that are still in use, Bright digs deeply for the story behind the story, particularly the decades of segregation and the struggles of the civil rights movement, and is not afraid to probe myths and ask questions. Above all though is the sheer thrill of discovering so much living history. Read this and book your next holiday. **Jon Newey**

DVD

Charles Lloyd Arrows Into Infinity

ECM DVD ★★★★★

Charles Lloyd's biography takes in a large slice of jazz history, which makes his story so compelling. Produced and directed by his wife Dorothy Darr and Jeffery Morse, it may have been a labour of love for Darr but nevertheless this documentary probes more deeply and looks more widely at the artist and



the milieu in which he works than any other I can think of. Brought up in a boarding house that catered for black musicians playing in the big bands denied hotel accommodation because of their colour, Lloyd's early encounters with inspirational musicians such as Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn set the scene for a career that would move fairly quickly through 'master/apprenticeships' in the bands of Chico Hamilton and Julian 'Cannonball' Adderley as he established himself on the New York jazz scene. Throughout, the use of film clips, stills and memorabilia of the time help bring the film's narration to life. Lloyd's career took off with a seminal quartet that included pianist Keith Jarrett and drummer Jack DeJohnette. The group were harbingers of the jazz-rock movement of the late 1960s, and film clips of the time bring this period to life in a valuable contextualisation. The significance of this band is provided not by jazzers, but by influential rock musicians Robbie Robertson and John Densmore who were in tune with the times. Sudden fame and fortune ended in dabbling with drugs (never far from the surface in jazz, especially in the 1960s) and a period of 'retreat' in the Big Sur coastal range. It was in these surroundings Lloyd got his life back together, a period that blossomed in happiness as Lloyd's relationship developed with Darr. Quite how long he would have remained out of the public eye became moot with the arrival of the French pianist Michel Petrucciani in the early 1980s whose talent so impressed Lloyd that he toured the world with the young player. Along the way is a sensitive portrait of his relationship with the drummer

Billy Higgins as Lloyd's long dormant career gathered momentum. A pivotal point was Lloyd's signing with the ECM label in the mid-1980s. Under producer Manfred Eicher's guidance he recorded a substantial body of work that ensured his rightful place in jazz history and the announcement just a few weeks ago of a NEA Jazz

Masters award which some may think was long overdue. **Stuart Nicholson**