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New music books

Him Through Me: Making Love And Music In The Sixties & Seventies

Pamela Windo

Self-published Pbk 200 pp

Him Through Me would make the basis of a substantial and gripping romantic TV drama. Its two protagonists were once childhood friends. He, a budding saxophonist, joins the Merchant Navy and goes off to see the world, ends up part of the New York jazz scene, gets busted for heroin, is sent to Rikers Island jail before being deported back to the UK in 1969. Returning to Brighton after 16 years, he meets up with his childhood friend. She had spent some time with a lover in Tunisia, but had returned to the seaside town, and was about to be divorced from a marriage with two children and a “semi-detached house with a green Mini Cooper parked outside”. He had specifically come to visit her sister, but they

strike up a relationship. She then decides to explore the hippy lifestyle, moves in with and later marries the saxophonist.

The characters in the story are real. He is the late Gary Windo, regarded as one of the most talented British saxophonists of his generation; and she is Pamela (who doesn't mention her birth surname), then a rather uncertain singer and musician, and now an established writer and author.

Pamela Windo's compelling memoir is written in a clear, unfussy style, but is full of observation and insight. Her depiction of suburban England in the late 60s on the cusp of social change – “a one off moment of cultural liberation” – shows how one had to be particularly singleminded to break away from the restrictive order of conservative postwar social mores. The author explores the mixed blessings of this liberation, particularly her conflicted views

on an “open marriage”: the empowering pleasure and intense jealousy it produced and her thoughts that this Erica Jong-inspired aspect of feminism was maybe just another way of giving men what they wanted.

All this domestic drama takes place alongside Gary playing with his sadly unrecorded freeform blowing group Symbiosis, Brotherhood Of Breath, Centipede, Ray Russell's Running Man and Robert Wyatt – who was one of the many musicians to rent the spare room in the Windo's Highgate flat – in the early 1970s. Gary Windo became a major figure, but his story ended in 1992 – when separated from Pam – with his death from bronchial asthma.

The Windos made a number of albums together, some of which have been reissued in more recent years. *Avant Gardeners* and *The Steam Radio Tapes* were recorded in 1976 and 77 as tryout sessions at Pink

Floyd's Britannia Row studios (Gary was friends with Pink Floyd's Nick Mason). Pamela attracted the attention of Albert Grossman and had a brief career in the early 80s fronting Pam Windo And The Shades.

But the most touching aspect of the book is that, unlike some members of what she describes as that earlier era's patriarchal jazz community, Gary was always keen to encourage her talent. She was a late starter as a pianist and lacked in confidence as singer, having been told as a child that she couldn't hold a tune. But her talent is evident from the recordings and she conveys the sense of wonder experienced in her first ever improvising session with Windo and drummer Laurie Allen. “The process was like a moving sculpture,” she writes. “Hewing shapes from the material, which was sound itself.”

Mike Barnes