

Friday 3rd March 2023 interview with Jim Hunt for Oral Histories Session Musicians

We hear about the important role his father played in putting music before Jim. His father was cartoonist for the Economist and ran a photo archive but was a keen amateur musician with an extensive music collection. He bought a Jim a tenor sax and after listening to Charlie Parker's track "KoKo" that was his "lightbulb moment". His father used to organise live gigs in Suffolk where the family were living and so Jim's first live gig he got to play alongside famous British saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith.

After 3 years at Leeds Music College - at the time known for teaching jazz and "light music", Jim came to London. He played with National Jazz Orchestra and this is the point when his career started in earnest.

First session after leaving college was in Acid Jazz label's Denmark Street-based studio. Told story of how being in the right place at the right time was the start of regular session work Studio engineer gets call during session and asks those horn players in studio if free next day for PRIMAL SCREAM session. Jim said "yes" and that's where it all started for Jim.

Jim talked about the medium-sized studios where he regularly used to do sessions all now gone. One of his favourite studios was Olympic Studios in Barnes (now gone) but not anything to do with the music - it had a tennis court which he made full use of. He also talked bit the challenge of not enough work vs too much - saying "If I could have cloned myself two or three times I could have been working the whole time....difficult to say "no".

Whilst his primary ambition was never to be a session musician he has enjoyed it and initially getting session work was by word of mouth for him - he didn't have an agent. His work spans different music genres, saying mostly you would go into a session "cold" with no idea what music you'd be working on. Being a successful session musician you have to have good people skills, be careful not to overstep the mark. Sessions can vary a lot, can be very jovial.

In 1990s there would have been very few other jobs where you'd turn up for work and have a fridge full of beer - but that's changing. The old drugs and alcohol lifestyle has meant that it's now a route thing to pick up the paper and discover "another one gone" at a sadly young age. Was a very permissive environment which could make it a dangerous job if you were prone to a drink or two.

The impact on family life - for many, many years music came first for Jim - he described himself as a workaholic but after one partner ended their relationship saying "I don't want to be a musician's widow" he readdressed his priorities and made a concerted decision not to go on tour any more.

Talked passionately about early sessions with PRIMAL SCREAM and being involved, getting excited, contributing.

Talked of the days when record companies had large budgets for newly-signed artists to have paid sessions in large studios. Now you need to be "product-ready" with about 100k social media followers before you get to go into the studio for a session. That all changed about 15 years ago.

Jim takes great pride in the recordings he's worked on - "they'll be there forever" and so "you've made your mark" to a certain extent. Said how good it makes him feel when pushing the buggy around Westfield and hears the music being played "oh that's me" or in the pub "oh head, that's me playing in that"

The relationships that do endure are the important ones. 80% of work now is with people he's known for 15 years, relationships go back so far they've become friends/part of the furniture.

END