



5133/JK

16th October 2008

Birmingham graduate jazz girls prove it's not all about men

- **Conservatoire's female graduates prove success is about talent rather than testosterone**
- **Alumna awarded £10,000 BBC Performing Arts Fund bursary to further her career**
- **Worshipful Company of Musicians / Jazzorg Prize for jazz composition graduate**

The continuing proliferation of 'women in jazz' showcases at major festivals and on the radio is a frustrating sign that female musicians still occupy a marginalised position in the jazz world. But four of Birmingham Conservatoire's recent jazz graduates have been busy proving that success is about talent and training, rather than testosterone.

Alto saxophonist and bandleader, **Mary Wakelam**, was one of the first cohort of students on the Conservatoire's specialised BMus (Hons) Jazz course. Alongside her job as General Manager of Birmingham Jazz, Mary is an active performer and, earlier this year, was awarded a £10,000 BBC Performing Arts Fund Urban Music bursary to help further her career.

To capitalise on this success, Mary has formed 'Maylight', a new seven-piece band fusing jazz and hip-hop (*pictured*). The band will appear at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the London Jazz Festival on 22 November and will record its first album in the New Year. Joining Mary in Maylight are several Conservatoire jazz graduates, including vocalist Lizzy Parks.



Mary said: "My experience on the jazz degree course provided an invaluable foundation and ensured I was able to follow my ambitions of forging a sustainable career in jazz promotion and performance."

Out on 22 September, **Lizzy Parks'** second album *Raise the Roof* (Tru Thoughts label) was launched on 3 October at Birmingham's Town Hall where she performed alongside The Heritage Orchestra, DJ Cro and other guests in an epic six-hour gig. Another pioneer of the BMus Jazz course, Lizzy has featured as a guest vocalist with The Heritage Orchestra and performs regularly with the Nostalgia 77 Octet.

Produced by Ben Lamdin and with orchestration from bassist Riaan Vosloo (both of Nostalgia 77), *Raise The Roof* showcases Lizzy's distinctive style through its combination of retro jazz, boogie soul, ambient experimental music and more. The title track – released as a single in August – has won radio play and support from Laurent Garnier, Gilles Peterson (BBC Radio 1) and many other including Pete Isaac (Jelly Jazz). Lizzy and producer Ben Lamdin have worked together for a number of years, notably on *The Hope Suite*. Co-written and sung by Lizzy, it was nominated for Track of the Year in Gilles Peterson's BBC Radio 1 Worldwide Awards.

Another huge talent to emerge from Birmingham Conservatoire's first undergraduate jazz cohort, **Alcyona Mick** was named a Jerwood Rising Star the year she finished her studies in Birmingham, in 2003. Her debut quintet album, *Around the Sun* (Audio-b, 2006) was made possible by a Leverhulme Fellowship award (Royal Academy of Music) and shortlisted for a Parliamentary Jazz award in 2007. Alcyona not only writes original material for her quintet (which recently won the Promoter's Choice award) and her BLINK trio, she has also been commissioned to write for other bandleaders.

Shortlisted for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Composer's award in 2007, Alcyona has toured and performed with many musicians and performers and is a member of London's Loop Collective. In 2008, she released a second album with BLINK on Loop Records and performed at the HSBC Cheltenham Jazz Festival.

Tenor saxophone player **Nicole Jaques** followed a degree in music with a Graduate Diploma in Jazz (GradDip) at the Conservatoire. Given a 'rising star' award at Newark Jazz Festival, she is currently setting up her own business, which provides jazz music for weddings, parties and functions. Studying for the Conservatoire's GradDip gave her the chance to develop her composition skills. She now writes her own music and this year won the inaugural Worshipful Company of Musicians / Jazzorg Prize (Small Bands category) with *Empty Heads*, netting herself £500 and a performance.

Ends

Issued by Birmingham City University Media Relations Office.
For more info or a high-resolution photo of Mary Wakelam, please contact: Joy Krishna

Tel: 0121 331 7984

Email joy.krishna@bcu.ac.uk

Out-of-hours: 07967 271 532

Notes to Editors

- Birmingham Conservatoire is part of Birmingham City University (formerly UCE Birmingham). Introduced in 1999, the BMus (Hons) Jazz is a four-year course offering tailored tuition for aspiring jazz musicians. Competition is high, with around 9 applications for every place available. Introduced in 2005, the Graduate Diploma in Jazz is a conversion course for trained musicians moving into jazz performance and composition. For more information on these courses and the Conservatoire in general, visit www.conservatoire.bcu.ac.uk
- Mary Wakelam's 'Maylight' is composed of Mary Wakelam (saxophone), Lizzy Parks (vocals), Joe Egan (trumpet), Rob Barron (keyboard), Chris Read (turntables), Colin Somervell (bass) and Jim Bashford (drums). Find out more about Maylight at www.myspace.com/maylightmusic
- The BBC Performing Arts Fund was formerly the Fame Academy Bursary Trust. For more information on the 2008 Urban Music winners, visit www.bbc.co.uk/performingartsfund/urban/winners08a.shtml
- For more information on Lizzy Parks, visit www.lizzyparks.com
- For more information on Alcyona Mick, visit www.myspace.com/alcyona
- Read what the judges said about Nicole Jaques' winning composition at www.wcomjazz.co.uk/News.html
- Birmingham City University is the only UK university to offer specialist training in the arts through an international music college - Birmingham Conservatoire; an NCDT-accredited drama school - Birmingham School of Acting; the dedicated Birmingham School of Media, aligned with the largest art and design school outside London - Birmingham Institute of Art and Design; and a National Academy of Writing, embedded within its School of English. For more information, visit www.bcu.ac.uk