

# And all that jazz...

Jazz convert SUE CADE talks all things big band with Devon Youth Jazz Orchestra manager and conductor Brian Moore

**B**efore my son joined Devon Youth Jazz Orchestra my overarching impression of jazz was that it was ‘all over the place music’, something portrayed with gentle ridicule by *The Fast Show* team. “That’s jazz. Nice.”

But far from being the dominion of seasoned musicians blowing smoke rings and drinking whisky, jazz is alive, well and responsible for influencing huge numbers of young musicians in Devon who have learned the ropes with DYJO.

DYJO started life in the mid-1970s under the leadership of jazz musician Ken Parr, who still performs with AJ’s Big Band. In the 1990s it split into two groups, appropriately named DYJO 1 and DYJO 2 - the first made up of more experienced musicians and the second, the up and coming stars of tomorrow.

DYJO 1 is led by jazz trumpeter Graham Hutton, who played with the band before taking over the reins in 2005. Graham’s remit is to stretch the players’ skills in many different directions and raise their standard of playing to that of some of the best big band musicians in the country.

DYJO 2 is the domain of Brian who evaluates the new musicians



**ABOVE:** The trumpet section does its bit

**BELOW:** DYJO 1 playing at a TRIP fundraiser in Offwell

who turn up each September and gets them working together to make great music. “Everyone who plays in DYJO 1 has learnt the ropes in DYJO 2. It’s the way they get to understand the ethos of jazz and performing ensemble,” Brian explains.

There’s also an offshoot called the Ambassadors, a group of players who perform ‘small band jazz’. They take this genre out to schools under the Devon Jazz Explosion banner, trumpeting the fact that jazz is alive and well - and hungry for new blood.

The Ambassadors recently shared a concert in Uffculme with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and everyone reaped the benefits when ‘NYJO met DYJO’ at one of the orchestra’s gathering days in Exeter.

These monthly gathering days are the only time the young jazz musicians have the chance to rehearse together for upcoming performances. Brian says the rehearsal structure is rooted in

practicality: “Devon is a large county and some of our musicians travel for close to two hours to rehearse, so to ask more time of them could prove to be a burden.”

With such a small amount of practice time available, it’s astounding how both bands have developed such a slick sound, particularly the younger musicians. I tell Brian I remember the first time I saw DYJO 2 perform and how just months later the difference to the standard was profound. “I think this is down to musical risk-taking. As a child, when you fall over you learn how not to fall over again - DYJO gets you to where you want to go by allowing you to take risks.

“I always say we provide a safe space for musicians to be able to make mistakes - mistakes are cool.”

Unlike some big bands, DYJO actively encourages all players to perform solo; scarily for them this isn’t scored but requires







One of the DYJO vocalists

**DYJO TOP TEN BIG BAND TUNES**

**Count Basie: *Moten Swing***  
Classic Basie Swing, with typical extremes of dynamics, and space for the rhythm section just to groove

**Thad Jones: *Central Park North***. A kaleidoscopic piece, using Thad Jones's typical spicy harmonic language

**All Blues:** a really good big band version of the Miles Davis classic

**Groovin' Hard (Buddy Rich):** a reminder of one of the greatest drummers of all time

**Naima:** a brilliant reimagining in a bossa groove of the John Coltrane original

improvisation. "It's a chance for the musicians to try something new. And to learn that even within improvisation there are conventions and rules.

"The music they create needs to tell a story and they have to be aware of leading back into the whole band when they've finished."

As a relative newbie to big band jazz, I ask what it is that makes this musical genre so special - and

relevant to young people. "The jazz format helps players to create an individual voice, developing their brains and encouraging confidence. And to be able to play ensemble and be a member of a team - these are really useful life skills."

Both bands have the opportunity to perform at various

events during the year. I saw them at the Dartmouth Music Festival in May, the following week they were entertaining the crowds at the Devon County Show. They've also had the opportunity to experience the heady heights of playing at the Montreux Music Festival and the Vienne Jazz Festival.

Brian says that DYJO is always keen to hear from young musicians interested in

getting involved (particularly trombone players - there is, it seems, a national shortage). And while players may not be aiming for a professional career as a musician, there really can be a future in it; one erstwhile DYJO trombonist, Tom White, is now touring with Olly Murs! ♦ [Dyjo.org](http://Dyjo.org)

**'The jazz format helps players to create an individual voice, developing their brains and encouraging confidence'**

**ACTOR'S APPROACH**

"I think the key that differentiates the good actors from the mediocre ones that are still trying to come up, is that the good ones know how to listen.

"It's like being in a jazz band. They know how to listen to what the other musicians are playing. And where to come in and where to sit out.

"That's my approach to being in an ensemble cast and working with any kind of actors in a scene." - quotes on jazz from actor Wesley Snipes.



The trombone section in full flow



A tenor saxophonist playing as part of the orchestra