

Review of Live Broadcast of the Clare Fischer Clarinet Choir

Monday 11:45 am Los Angeles – broadcast live on Stagelt.com

Conductor/leader/electric bassist - Brent Fischer

Clarinets/Reeds - Phil Moore, Alex Budman, Tom Luer, Nancy Newman,
Phil Feather, Lee Callet, Gene Cipriano, Bob Carr

Brass – Scott Whitfield (trombone) and Ron Stout (trumpet/flugelhorn)

Piano – Dave Witham

Drums – Ron Manoag

The Clare Fischer Clarinet Choir has released two fine CD recordings in recent years. Viewer-listeners to this broadcast were treated to a fine display of the great writing and arrangements of Clare Fischer and his son Brent Fischer, and wonderful playing from the dedicated ensemble of eight members of the clarinet family and brass and rhythm that have performed these fine works together for some years. A treat for those already well familiar with the music and a fine introduction for newcomers.

The ensemble opened with Westwood Walk, with its jaunty twists and turns, fine ensemble playing and with fine solos from trumpeter Ron Stout, alto clarinetist Alex Budman, and bass clarinetist Lee Callet. An arrangement of “Have Yourself a Merry Merry Christmas”, penned by Brent originally for Al Jarreau, and appropriate to the season, featured the many talents of trombonist Scott Whitfield – on vocals, a compact bebop bone solo, and not to be outdone, a feisty scat scat solo which displayed his well-honed bebop vocal chops – and nice clarinet ensemble work. Clare Fischer’s arrangements of two classic Birth of the Cool pieces - “Israel” by Johnny Carisi and “Jeru” by Gerry Mulligan - the former featuring Phil Moore on alto sax, bass clarinet unison lines and solid ensemble playing, and the latter featuring a fine solos from Ron Stout (trumpet), Dave Witham (piano) and Clare’s great reharmonising of the Mulligan shout chorus. In between these was Clare’s thoughtful Christmas medley. The final performance was the spirited Johnny Hodges tune Squatty Roo, with its “rhythm changes” and now classic Clare Fischer clarinet ensemble sounds, and fine solos from Whitfield, Luer, Stout (on flugelhorn) and Witham. The program fitted neatly into the half hour slot and permitted Brent to give credit to the performers before the broadcast time was over – and a brief cameo appearance at the end from Donna Fischer was not lost on this viewer!

This was a great introduction to the late great Clare Fischer’s woodwind accomplishments, fine playing by all, and a tribute to his son Brent for his dedication to the ongoing projects of keeping the Clare Fischer sounds alive, and live. This will hopefully be one of many broadcasts of the various Fischer ensembles in the future.

Simon Pilbrow, Australia