

Bakelite Jazz Press & [Phantom Dancer CD](#) Reviews

Review: [JazzReview.com](#) (US)

<http://www.jazzreview.com/cd/review-18790.html>

Don't you just appreciate pleasant surprises? Especially musical ones! There's nothing like stumbling across an artist who is fresh, original, filled with musical integrity, and especially one that has a unique perspective on the familiar. Australian Jazz vocalist extraordinaire Greg Poppleton is such an artist; one whom this reviewer can't say enough great things about.

The album "The Phantom Dancer" by Greg Poppleton & His Bakelite Dance Band is a delightful tribute to the swing era of 1926-1939 and approaches the material with remarkable finesse and a genuineness that places the listener squarely in the lap of nostalgic mystic. Even the artwork and notable liner notes are unfeigned in their approach to the rich history of a period where jazz was the official pop music of the day. Greg & crew has maintained the sound and feel of relatable records by recording live in the studio in one session, so you get all of the energy (and sonic infidelities) – the truth of musicians swinging their hearts out.

And boy do these guys swing! Peter Locke plays the meanest, leanest piano this side of the Australian border and drummer Joel Davis (playing a vintage 1927 kit) is pocket perfect on every cut. Double bassist Dieter Vogt adds a pliant bottom to drape the incredible horn section of Paul Furniss (alto & tenor saxes and clarinet), and trumpeter Bob Henderson. The thoughtful pianist, Matt Baker who sits in on the tender ballads, adds an arrant dash of sensitivity to these magnificent selections. Sprinkling his mystifying vintage stardust throughout the mix is the ever daring Mr. Poppleton, delighting us at every turn.

The set opens with the uncompromising James P. Johnson/Harry Creamer mixer "If I Could Be with You (One Hour Tonight)" allowing the band to stretch out a minute before we are introduced to 'the voice' and are firmly indoctrinated into the epoch of reminiscence. This tune is the perfect set up to understand the depth of each musician's skill and prepares us for what is to follow.

The Gershwin magnet "Do, Do Do" (1926) quaintly follows with pianist Matt Baker perfectly comping Poppleton's tender delivery. A perfect duet makes this a classic yet again!

"My Blue Heaven" (1927) is a solid toe-tapper. Joel's hit-hats are singing, Peter's piano is swinging and the horns are soaring. Greg handles the Donaldson/Whiting composition with a clarity that makes it a vibrant romp 80 years later.

“Love Me or Leave Me” (1928) shows the band peaking at the arc of swingdom! A mellow cascade into the melodic Donaldson/Kahn rhapsody showcases the heart of Furniss and Henderson who share a flaring duet gingerly encased by Locke’s piano strut while Greg sings with the perfect miscellanea of silk and soul. This is my favorite track!

Henderson’s trumpet opens Hoagy Carmichael’s haunting ballad, “Star Dust” (1929). Poppleton takes ownership of the Mitchell Parrish lyrics and the satiny saxophone of Paul Furniss subtly seduces. Henderson returns for a whispering solo. The band takes their sweet time, lingering over every chorus and phrase, making sure you know they are rewriting history. This is the consummate presentation of perfection.

By the time the groove begins “On the Sunny Side of the Street” (1930), you realize that the Bakelite Dance Band is a critical force to be reckoned with. Everyone approaches this bash with ease and frolic where solos abound. Furniss whips out his clarinet and begins to chase Henderson around the studio. Poppleton knows this song like he knows his name. Vogt & Davis swing like a playground and Locke hops in and out of a Double Dutch! Just TRY not to sway to the music. I dare you!

Baker returns for “Would You to Take a Walk” (1931) and you’re immediately captivated by the chemistry he and Greg create, as if out of thin air. Suddenly Tin Pan Alley is right outside your window. As Poppleton scats the melody, he asks, “Isn’t this a pretty tune?” Baker’s sumptuous playing seems to answer, “Why, yes it is!”

A little Cuban synergy etches Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” (1932) with some sultry percussion caressing the horn section and the groove is magnetic. For some reason, Henderson’s trumpet seems distant, either by design or poor placement, but swings incessantly. Furniss is my new favorite altoist. Peter Locke’s beautiful approach to this cut actually made me stop writing to ‘google’ him. I will be following his career from now on! Feel the energy!

How many times have you heard Billy Rose’s “It’s Only A Paper Moon” (1933)? It’s been performed in several genres in a myriad parade of shapes and sizes. Well these guys take it up a notch by boosting the tempo and pumping a tad of funk into the swing. You can actually feel Vogt’s fingers and he dances across the fret board. Out comes the clarinet and everyone is all over Davis’s big beat, bending and stretching and GROOVING – and then we’re out! At 2:25, it’s the shortest cut on disc and my second favorite!

But the fun doesn’t stop there as we revisit Porter’s “Anything Goes” (1934). The horns are delightful, but are somewhat suppressed by Henderson’s trumpet being so far away from the microphone (perhaps this is the same session as “Night & Day” –

giving preference to the percussion.) Nonetheless, the guys whiz along without a care and this standard is the better for it.

Brooks Bowman's "East Of The Sun" (1935) is treated with similar TLC. Drummer Joel Davis pays careful attention to the lockstep Vogt. It's hard to figure out how they control their energy for ballads like this as they seem to sprinkle and pour just the right amounts of snap into the groove for the solos and then pull back in time for Poppleton to cautiously walk across the lyrics.

The Yiddish "Bel Mir Bist Du Schoen" (1932) – this interpretation highlighting Sammy Cahn's version features Davis' bouncing drums and (finally) a solo. The tune perks along and gets you UP out of your seat! Furniss & Henderson make fantastic use of the melody and clarify the definitive phrase ' It Means That You're Grand' in appropriate style.

"Two Sleepy People" (1938) is gorgeous. The lyrics are placed squarely center stage. The atmosphere is full of comfort and provides fertile space for Locke, Furniss and Henderson to waltz through their solos with discerning repose.

The set ends with the Carr/Kennedy epiphany "South of the Border"(1939). The band moves easily between the dynamics of the Mexican excitement and Big Band Flair concluding with the entire gang singing background with Mr. Poppleton in the final chorus – the prefect end to a great hour of music!

I thoroughly enjoy this CD. It's fresh and open. The music literally pulls you into yesteryear and reminds you of the infinite palettes jazz offers and a peak into where it was in the late 20s. The musicians are incredible and their presentation is flawless.

Greg Poppleton has captured the essence of the jazz singers of that era and is able to exhibit an originality that make his offering a new standard for tomorrow's generation. You will be listening to this disc for years to come!

Tracks: If I Could Be With You (One Hour Tonight), Do Do Do, My Blue Heaven, Love Me or Leave Me, Star Dust, On The Sunny Side of the Street, Would You Like to Take a Walk?, Night & Day, It's Only A Paper Moon, Anything Goes, East of the Sun, Bel Mir Bist Du Schoen, Two Sleepy People, South of the Border

Reviewed by: Gerald H. Beulah, Jr.

Review: eJazzNews.com (US)

<http://www.ejazznews.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=9834>

Greg Poppleton (1920s & 1930s style vocals) Bob Henderson (tpt) Paul Furniss (as, ts, clarinet) Matt Baker (piano, tracks 2,5,7) Peter Locke (piano) Dieter Vogt (bass) Joel Davis (1927 drum kit and temple blocks)

This recording of swing era tunes from 1926-1939 is a pleasant departure from my BeBop roots. This music was the precursor of the big bands of the '40s and the 'modern' jazz that followed.

"If I Could Be With You" saunters along with Bob Henderson's trumpet opener having a whisper of dixieland. Poppleton's vocal is truly representative of the era.

Jump time with "My Blue Heaven" Henderson's trumpet solo again in a dixie bag and he jumps on this tune like it was something good to eat. Poppleton's vibrato filled vocal again captures a moment in time and then some.

"Anything Goes" and it sure does in this day and age, the lyrics are certainly apropos to both now and then. Greg Poppleton's in fine fettle as he swings nicely.

This album is rooted in dixieland more so than the early swing era, but that is not to detract from the intent of this recording. Poppleton's vocals capture the essence of the swing years with uncanny accuracy.

Rating: 5 Stars

Reviewed by John Gilbert

Review: City News

"Yes, some people were born out of their time and the delightful Greg Poppleton is one of them.

Devoted to swing, jazz and dance music from the 1920s to 1960s, his radio show, The Phantom Dancer, has been keeping the dream alive for decades now. But passion isn't all that Poppleton has going for him.

He is both a snappy dresser and, more importantly, a talented vocalist.

The CD presents 14 classics from a bygone era, faithfully represented by Poppleton's dulcet tones and a very good band. Not quite in the league of Tommy Dorsey or Artie Shaw, but then there aren't many Beatles left playing, either.

The liner notes include an invaluable historical rundown on each track. Transport yourself to a time when all music was played on phonographic devices emblazoned with that little dog and his loudspeaker - the trust His Masters Voice."

Rating: 3.5 stars out of 4
Reviewed by Chris Peken

Review: MuzikReview (US)

<http://www.muzikreviews.com/reviews.php?ID=401>

Sure enough, The Phantom Dancer swings, but it's not a replacement for classic recordings. The band knows what to do in terms of style, and the instrumental performances are convincing, but the vocals are not quite up to the high standard of the musicians. On the very first track, "If I Could Be With You", the band demonstrates a complete understanding of slow swing. The push-pull between the drummer and the rest of the ensemble that is a defining characteristic of the style is just right. Furthermore, Bob Henderson (on trumpet) and Paul Furniss (on reeds) sound as if they have been playing together all of their lives. "It's Only a Paper Moon" is a high point. In fact, all of the up-beat tracks where they are cranked up a little such as "Anything Goes" or "My Blue Heaven" are fun to hear because of their great duo work. Some very solid playing from the rhythm section completes the formula that makes the Bakelite Dance Band swing. In spite of Greg Poppleton's obvious love of the music, I have to take some issue with his vocals. He is a decent crooner, but sometimes over-doing the 'crooner' style leads to ambiguities in pitch. The problem is most obvious on the slower tunes, like "Star Dust" or "Would You Like to Take a Walk". I'm not saying that the vocals should stop a fan of these tunes from adding this nice recording to your collection. Because of the vocals however, I would have to say that The Phantom Dancer is not on the same level as recordings that have become classics, such as those by the Dorsey Orchestra. Of course, getting to that level is a life-long pursuit and this band is still developing its sound. I look forward to hearing what they do on their next album. This album is not only about the aural experience, though. There is tremendous benefit in the CD jacket. It reads like a history of some of the biggest hits and most prominent composers of the early swing era. It also features unique period pictures and original artwork in the commercial style popular in the 1920s and 30s. These materials could almost be published as a book without the recording, and are a testament to Greg Poppleton's hard work on research and his strength as a producer. For swing enthusiasts the trivia alone is worth the sticker price, never mind all of the nice music

Reviewed by Donny Harvey-

MuzikReviews.com Contributor

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Sydney Morning Herald Entertainment Guide

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/tv--radio/in-the-swing-of-things/2007/04/29/1177787955879.html>

"Greg Poppleton was considered a little eccentric growing up in Five Dock in the mid-'70s. As his mates bought the Sex Pistols' album or sang along to Queen on the radio, he was rifling through the back shelves of music stores looking for recordings from the 1930s swing era.

"I wasn't considered nerdy because I'm a bit of a fighter," the 46-year-old Newtown actor and musician says. "I never apologised. In fact I was probably annoying and obnoxious because I attacked their taste in music."

His fascination for swing began at age three when Channel Nine still broadcast telescriptions (early black and white music clips) between programs.

"I particularly remember Louis Armstrong playing his trumpet with his white handkerchief. I just thought it was fantastic."

Swing has remained a passion for Poppleton since then. In 1985, long before the swing renaissance, he persuaded community station 2SER to drop its ultra-modern jazz program on Tuesdays and replace it with *The Phantom Dancer*, featuring live vintage swing, jazz and dance music from old radio and TV broadcasts. It has become Australia's longest-running swing show and a 22-year unpaid commitment for Poppleton.

"I enjoy doing it," he says. "It's a great release to go into the studio for 11/2 hours each week and to sit back and listen to the music I love. I'm constantly learning and fine-tuning. The key is to respect the listener's intelligence."

Poppleton walked away from a secure job as a chemical engineer in 1989 for the more precarious life of a musician and actor. He describes himself as Australia's only exclusively 1920s and '30s-style singer, performing in a swing band called Greg Poppleton and his Bakelite Dance Band. He has appeared in several TV ads and what he calls "blink and miss" roles in films such as *Moulin Rouge*, *Dirty Deeds* and *Footy Legends*.

In *The Phantom Dancer*, Poppleton deliberately keeps his own talking to a minimum, letting the old recordings speak for themselves. A recent program featured

performances by Count Basie, Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa, all recorded live, as well as advertisements for the Jarman Shoe Company and the US Navy and an interview with aviator Casey Jones.

"I think listeners are attracted to the historical and social context of the music, as much as the music itself," he says. "You hear the announcers, the ads, snippets of news. It's a raw glimpse into 20th-century history, without snide comments or little asides from me."

Poppleton says in his first few years presenting the show he had a lot of complaints from older listeners who were used to jazz. But these days he says the audience is younger, mostly 25 to 40, and even includes hip hop and punk musicians. Unkle Ho, the producer of the hip hop band the Herd, has credited The Phantom Dancer as the inspiration behind his solo album, Roads to Roma.

"People are much more open to different styles of music these days," Poppleton says. "Swing might not be their first choice but they appreciate the skill and sophistication that has gone into the music and lyrics."

The Phantom Dancer airs on 2SER 107.3 FM on Tuesdays from Noon to 1.30pm & Saturday nights 6 – 7:30pm

Sue Javes SMH Entertainment Guide

Feature Article - April 30, 2007

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