

Tron connection inspires reactivated jazz label

An album recorded live at a former Edinburgh jazz venue is one of the inspirations behind a Dublin radio presenter becoming a record company executive.

Dermot Rogers, who hosts a weekly music programme on Dublin City FM was listening to *Overdrive* by Irish guitarist Louis Stewart when he realised that Stewart's recorded legacy was in danger of being consigned to history.

Overdrive was recorded in the basement of the Tron bar in Hunter Square, a regular spot in 1990s for jazz concerts organised by a group of enthusiasts including the late Bill Kyle, who subsequently opened the Jazz Bar in Chambers Street.

In February 1993 Kyle booked Louis Stewart with Scottish bass and drums team Ronnie Rae and Tony McLennan. The enterprising Alastair Robertson, of Edinburgh-based Hep Records, was given permission to record the gig and he released it as *Overdrive* in 1995.

"*Overdrive* is a great example of what Louis Stewart could do almost as a matter of course during his career," says Rogers. "He would turn up and play with local musicians and deliver a concert that was good enough to be released on a CD. It didn't happen all that often, though, and while *Overdrive* has remained in the catalogue, other recordings of Louis' haven't."

Stewart, who died in 2016, was a musician who deserved a much higher profile. He had become the first Irish jazz musician to play at world class level when he toured with clarinettist-bandleader Benny Goodman. He went on to feature with pianist George Shearing, French swing violin master Stephane Grappelli and saxophonists Tubby Hayes and Ronnie Scott. He also formed mutual admiration societies with more famous guitarists including Joe Pass, Jim Hall and Martin Taylor.

Rogers used to go and see Stewart whenever he played in Dublin and it occurred to him that there must be other people out there who wished they had Stewart's records.

"I had no ambitions of running a record company," says Rogers. "But I thought about the albums that Louis had recorded for Livia Records in Dublin and were no longer available. There was a solo album, *Out on His Own*, that a lot of people talked about and I thought it would be good for people to be able to hear that again."

Livia Records was founded by Gerald Davis, a Dublin-based artist, art gallery proprietor, literary scholar and music lover, in 1977. He released Stewart's *Out on His Own* the same year. At the time Stewart was playing in saxophonist Ronnie Scott's quintet and featuring regularly in Scott's London jazz club. On trips back to Dublin, Stewart would play locally and if there was a chance to record for Livia Records, he'd take it.

Aware that Gerald Davis had died in 2005, Rogers started looking into what had become of the Livia catalogue. He tracked down Davis' son, Les, in Christchurch, New Zealand and was given Les' blessing to access the Livia Records vault.

A remastered *Out on His Own* became the first release of the new Livia era in February this year. It has now been followed by a previously unreleased, and little known, duo recording by Stewart and his friend and mentor, pianist Noel Kelehan, *Some*

Other Blues.

“This album is actually the only known recording by Louis and Noel, who had quite a history of working together,” says Rogers. “People who knew them have dubbed Some Other Blues ‘the holy grail of Irish jazz’ because of its rarity value. Like *Out on His Own*, it was recorded in 1977 when Louis would fit in gigs with Noel in Dublin on visits home from London.”

Noel Kelehan went on to become a busy composer, arranger and conductor for Irish broadcaster RTE. This reduced the time he had available for playing jazz, but *Some Other Blues* finds both him and Stewart at the peak of their abilities. The former head of jazz for Sony Music UK and Europe has described the album’s opening track, *Yesterdays*, as “phenomenal.”

Rogers has plans to release more Louis Stewart albums and has been heartened by the response to his two releases as the new Livia Records boss so far.

“Both *Out on His Own* and *Some Other Blues* have had great reviews,” says Rogers. “They’ve also been featured on radio in the US, Canada, France, Belgium, and Australia, as well as in the UK and Ireland, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Louis isn’t around to enjoy this appreciation, but I’d like to think that we can introduce him to generations of new fans through the albums we have released and plan to release. It’s nothing more than he deserves.”



Louis Stewart