



The Royal Over-Seas League is pleased  
to support this debut album by  
Jonathan Radford and Ashley Fripp



CHAMPS HILL  
RECORDS

# THE SAXOPHONE CRAZE

HOMAGE TO RUDY WIEDOEFT

Jonathan Radford *saxophone*  
Ashley Fripp *piano*



Gershwin ~ Hager ~ Ring ~ Savino ~ Schulhoff  
Shostakovich ~ Weill ~ Wiedoeft

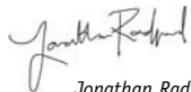
## FOREWORD

The conception of this album began during the Covid-19 pandemic when the world suddenly came to a standstill. An album exploring the music of the Roaring Twenties felt particularly timely, as we all yearned for a renaissance of this incredible period 100 years on.

A central figure of this programme is saxophonist Rudy Wiedoeft – a hugely virtuosic and prolific musician known as ‘The Kreisler of the Saxophone’. He was responsible for the Saxophone Craze, a cultural phenomenon that would secure the future of the saxophone. The rise in popularity of the saxophone inspired many major composers of the period to write for this ‘new and novel’ instrument. Although his impact as a musician in the 1920s and 30s was astronomical, his music is sadly mostly forgotten.

Our programme brings together several original Wiedoeft compositions, pairing them with works that were either originally written for saxophone, or that included the saxophone in their original orchestrations. In this sense, all the music featured on this album has helped shape the instrument into what it has become today. It is my hope that this album will pay homage to an important icon from the Roaring Twenties, whilst celebrating the diverse nature of the saxophone across genres.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone involved in the creation of this album: Alexander Van Ingen, Mary Bowerman and the team at Champs Hill Records for believing in this project and supporting my artistic vision; Ashley Fripp, the most wonderful pianist and friend who approached every aspect of this project with utmost enthusiasm and energy; Patrick Allen for your patience and amazing skills in recording this album; my teachers Kyle Horch and Claude Delangle for their wisdom, artistic guidance and inspiration; The Royal Over-Seas League and Geoff Parkin for their support with this album.



Jonathan Radford

## TRACK LISTING

- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 1  | <b>Danse hongroise</b> Justin Ring & Fred Hager<br><i>for alto saxophone and piano – transcribed by Rudy Wiedoeft</i>  | 4'43  |
| 2  | <b>Dans l'orient</b> Rudy Wiedoeft & Domenico Savino<br><i>for alto saxophone and piano</i>  | 4'22  |
|    | <b>Hot-Sonate</b> Erwin Schulhoff<br><i>for alto saxophone and piano</i>   |       |
| 3  | Movement I   | 4'07  |
| 4  | Movement II  | 1'56  |
| 5  | Movement III   | 4'09  |
| 6  | Movement IV  | 4'38  |
| 7  | <b>Waltz-Llewellyn</b> Rudy Wiedoeft<br><i>for alto saxophone and piano</i>  | 3'08  |
| 8  | <b>Valse Marilyn</b> Rudy Wiedoeft<br><i>for alto saxophone and piano</i>  | 4'10  |
|    | <b>Extracts from The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper)</b> Kurt Weill<br><i>arranged for alto saxophone and piano by Jonathan Radford &amp; Ashley Fripp</i>   |       |
| 9  | Mack the Knife (Moritat von Mackie Messer)   | 2'25  |
| 10 | Ballad of the Pleasant Life (Ballade vom Angenehmen Leben)   | 2'04  |
| 11 | Polly's Song (Pollys Lied)   | 1'57  |
| 12 | Tango Ballad (Zuhälterballade)   | 2'51  |
| 13 | Cannon Song (Kanonen-Song)   | 2'31  |
| 14 | <b>Waltz No.2</b> from <b>Suite for Variety Orchestra</b> Dmitri Shostakovich<br><i>arranged for alto saxophone and piano by Jonathan Radford &amp; Ashley Fripp</i> | 4'03  |
| 15 | <b>Rhapsody in Blue</b> George Gershwin<br><i>arranged for alto/soprano/tenor saxophone and piano by Jun Nagao</i>   | 15'56 |

Total playing time: **63'00**

Produced and Edited by Patrick Allen

Engineered by Patrick Allen

Recorded on 12-14 April, 2021 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Booklet photography: Patrick Allen

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen

Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: Camilla Carden

A collective desire for good news swept through Europe and the United States in the aftermath of the First World War. Those too young to serve in the military and those thankful to have survived the carnage of modern warfare wanted pleasure, not pain, a point understood by the entertainment industry. It was time to open new cinemas and dance halls, sell gramophones and records, lift spirits with the diverting sights and sounds of Broadway shows and jazz. The twenties became the 'era of big business', a time when fortunes were made and stars were born. One of those stars, who made and lost a fortune, was once a household name, now little more than a footnote in specialist surveys of the period's music. Rudy Wiedoeft suffered the fate of so many musical pioneers and evangelists, preparing the way for others before falling into obscurity. He was among the first, perhaps *the* first, to establish the saxophone as something more than a toy-shop novelty, only a few steps up in the evolutionary tree from the kazoo or swanee whistle.

Wiedoeft's jaw-dropping technical skills and legendary devotion to practice kept his name alive among the global community of sax players. Yet it was the *joie de vivre* and appeal of his many recordings and compositions that caught the public imagination a century ago. His first recording of *Saxophobia*, Wiedoeft's signature piece, sparked a saxophone craze that swept America within months of the disc's release in 1920. A contemporary advertisement depicts Wiedoeft holding his trademark gold-plated C-melody saxophone while towering over a line of high-kicking chorus girls. 'Hear Him!', the copywriter commands. The ad falls short when it comes to the correct spelling of the artist's name, but is in no doubt that 'Rudy Weidoeft [sic]' is the 'World's Greatest Saxophone Artist'. Others knew him as 'The Kreisler of the Saxophone', a neat comparison for a musician who

showed prodigious talent as a child violinist. Young Rudy's fiddle-playing days were ended when he broke his bowing arm at the age of ten in a cycling accident; he took up clarinet soon after, practised hard and became a professional player long before he left school.

Rudolph Cornelius Wiedoeft was born in Detroit on 3 January 1893. His family came to Michigan from Germany in the mid-1800s, drawn by the recently established state's campaign to attract agricultural workers from Germany's kingdoms and principalities with promises of a better life and prosperity in a young country. Brewers from Bavaria were among those who made their way to Detroit, a city noted for its grand avenues and elegant public buildings, already home to French and Irish settlers. Rudy formed a band with his three older brothers, with Herb on trumpet, Adolph or Al doubling on trombone and drums, and Gerhardt or Guy doubling on tuba and double bass. The Wiedoefts profited from Detroit's hospitality business, thanks not least to little Rudy's turns in the solo spotlight; following their move to Los Angeles in 1903, the Wiedoeft Family Orchestra, now with their father on violin and sister on piano, was in demand on the hotel circuit.

Wiedoeft added saxophone to his portfolio of instruments around 1908. Years later he recalled spotting one protruding from a green bag in a pawnbroker's window. 'I thought there might be big money in the novelty,' he added. 'This revolutionary move on my part was not greeted with favour by friends, relations and colleagues.' Despite hours of practice in the wood-shed, the badly made pawnshop sax proved beyond redemption; Wiedoeft sold it and put the money towards buying a superior saxophone which, in lieu of specialist teaching methods for the instrument, he taught himself to play with help from tutors conceived for the oboe. He

continued to build his sax skills after moving to San Francisco in 1913 to become first clarinetist with Porter's Catalina Island Band, among the attractions used to draw visitors to the burgeoning tourist resort in the Gulf of Santa Catalina, and launched his career as a saxophonist the following year.

Wiedoeft, aware that US audiences regarded saxophone as little more than a child's toy, recognised the market potential open to the first musician who could demonstrate the instrument's virtuosity. At the end of 1916 he crossed the United States to find work on Broadway and made his breakthrough in February 1917 at the Morosco Theater in New York City. Wiedoeft graced the show's four-month run of the musical *Canary Cottage* with his pulsating roudades and musical ad libs. The future Mrs Wiedoeft, Mary Murphy, a hot-tempered member of the *Canary Cottage* chorus line, soon joined the musician's many new admirers. 'Rudy's obligatos ... were so thrilling,' noted one critic, 'that he took more bows from the pit than the singer from the stage.'

Thomas Edison was also impressed by Wiedoeft, sufficiently so for the near-deaf inventor to invite him to record for the Edison label. Rudy cut his first disc, *Canary Cottage One-Step*, with the Frisco 'Jass' Band in May 1917, and recorded five more pieces for Edison by mid-September, including his solo debut disc, *Valse 'Erica'*. In answer to his country's call, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and ended his short military service in 1918 as a member of the Marine Band in Washington, D.C. While *Saxophobia*, the work that made his name, dates from the war's last year, it looks forward to a peace filled with boundless jollity.

Rudy Wiedoeft was a phenomenal player and smart self-publicist. He was the first saxophonist to broadcast on a US radio station, indeed one of the first American musicians ever to broadcast a concert, and a box-office draw at America's grand

picture houses, home to musical variety as well as the movies. He was also a pioneer in matters of saxophone technique, inventor of so-called slap tonguing, master of articulation and purveyor of flawless fingering at the fastest tempos. His recordings unleashed a wave of enthusiasm for saxophone and inspired countless kids to take up the instrument, at times causing demand to outstrip the supply of new saxophones. Wiedoeft's sliding legato style left its mark on the young Bing Crosby, who freely acknowledged the saxophonist's influence on his own smooth, crooning vocal technique.

Practice and patience were among the virtues outlined in 1927 by Wiedoeft in his short guide to *The Saxophone – with hints on how to play it*. His 'helpful hints' were signed with a flourish beneath 'Saxotively yours', typical of a larger-than-life character who appeared to have stepped out of a Damon Runyon story. He and his wife lived – and often brawled – in New York, in an apartment at 145 W. 45th Street. Their drink-fuelled parties became the convivial front for Wiedoeft's alcoholism, which gradually affected his playing; his popularity, meanwhile, fell from its peak in the mid-1920s and was further undermined in the early thirties by the Great Depression. In 1926 Wiedoeft travelled to London with the concert pianist Oscar Levant, a noted early interpreter of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. The duo performed at the Prince's Hotel on Jermyn Street during the summer season, while Levant gave a private performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* for the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII.

Towards the end of the decade Wiedoeft's blend of ragtime and vaudeville repertoire was eclipsed by new trends in popular music and jazz, including those brought to the Brunswick label by Bing Crosby, Hoagy Carmichael and the Dorsey Brothers. The Wiedoefts moved to Paris, where Rudy and his music were still in

demand, but soon tired of the City of Lights. They returned to the United States, where the death of one of Wiedoeft's brothers and a disastrous investment in a gold mine in California's Death Valley pushed him to become increasingly dependent on alcohol and reliant on credit. The combination of falling income and rising domestic pressure finally exploded in March 1937, when Mary Wiedoeft almost killed her husband with a meat knife; he chose not to press charges and she later explained that it was simply a kitchen accident. The couple were reconciled and lived together at their Long Island home until Wiedoeft's death from cirrhosis on 18 February 1940.

Jonathan Radford decided to learn more about Wiedoeft when he heard a few of his recordings. He was amazed by the saxophonist's technical command and the quality of his sound; and he was seduced likewise by the charm of Wiedoeft's compositions, written for a young instrument that lacked solid technical foundations. 'There are still things about his articulation and virtuosic technique that nobody has been able to come even close to,' notes Radford. 'Rudy Wiedoeft grew up in a family who played many different instruments. His saxophone playing could easily have been inspired by the violin; he definitely applied his sense of string legato and articulation to saxophone.'

*The Saxophone Craze* looks back to the Roaring Twenties. This album represents a wish to see a return of the decade's best attributes: its optimism and sense of fun. Wiedoeft was in tune with the age that mass-produced everything from bicycles and cars to valve radios and gramophones, and raised living standards across Europe and the United States. Between 1917 and 1930 he made over 300 78rpm recordings for, among others, the Edison, Aeolian-Vocalion, Emerson, Victor, Columbia, Okeh and Brunswick labels. Some were pressed, supposedly

under licence, in the Soviet Union, extending his reach to the world's first socialist state.

In addition to trademark vaudeville tunes, Wiedoeft composed pieces that sound at ease in the classical concert hall. *Dans l'orient*, for instance, pays homage to the fashion for all things exotic, present throughout the twenties in everything from the fairground *Palais de danses orientales* to the orientalist designs of Art Deco cinemas, while the *Danse hongroise* connects with an older trope in classical music, familiar at least since Haydn's time. *Waltz-Llewellyn* and *Valse Marilyn*, miniature showpieces created to fit one side of a 78rpm disc, are both blessed with charm comparable to that of Fritz Kreisler's violin encore pieces.

'Before Wiedoeft began his career, the saxophone was considered to be a novelty item or something you might see in a military band,' observes Jonathan Radford. 'It was certainly absent from the classical concert world. Wiedoeft transformed perceptions of what the saxophone was and what it could do. He was influential in the development of different genres for the instrument, even though he was neither a classical nor a jazz player; in fact, he's very difficult to pigeonhole, which is why I think he inspired musicians from so many backgrounds. It's interesting that he and Rachmaninov played in the same concert in the twenties; perhaps Wiedoeft inspired Rachmaninov to include saxophone in his *Symphonic Dances*.'

This album invites listeners to consider Wiedoeft's legacy and influence on others, whether direct or indirect. Saxophone, absent from the earliest jazz bands, became the genre's pre-eminent instrument during the 1920s, in part thanks to the Wiedoeft-inspired sax craze, in part by Wiedoeft's younger contemporaries Sidney Bechet and Frankie Trumbauer. Jazz offered a rich creative refuge to Erwin

Schulhoff throughout the Roaring Twenties and beyond. The Prague-born composer and pianist's frontline experiences in the Austrian army from 1914 to 1918 informed his pacifism and socialism, while his post-war encounter with the painter George Grosz, among Germany's first collectors of American jazz recordings, opened his ears to music filled with vitality and joy.

Schulhoff interrupted work on his jazz oratorio *H.M.S. Royal Oak* to compose the *Hot-Sonata*. The latter, written in 1930, represents the saxophone's apotheosis as a classical concert instrument, perhaps the noble alter ego of the sexualised saxophone that Schulhoff had described in a colourful article published in 1925. Its four movements marry the rhythmic riffs and roudades of jazz to the formal logic of a classical sonata. Kurt Weill, like Schulhoff, received anti-Semitic abuse from Hitler's Nazis, while his music was officially banned by Germany's fascists; unlike Schulhoff, who died of tuberculosis at the Wülzburg concentration camp during the Second World War, Weill escaped the Nazi Reich in 1933 to find refuge in the United States. Jonathan Radford and Ashley Fripp's selection of music from Weill and Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* recalls one of the Weimar Republic's cultural triumphs. First staged in Berlin in 1928, the work became an international hit and set the foundations for Weill's integration of classical and jazz styles within the same composition.

The saxophone became a glamorous guest in classical orchestras during the 1920s, heard in works such as Milhaud's *La création du monde* (1922–23), Ferde Grofé's orchestration of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), Kodály's folk opera *Háry János* (1926) and Gershwin's *An American in Paris* (1928). Shostakovich included saxophone parts in his early film scores for the silent and sound cinema, the ballet *The Golden Age* (1930) and his two Suites for Jazz Orchestra (1931 &

1938). The *Suite for Variety Orchestra* (written after 1956) was misidentified for many years as the second of the Jazz Suites until a piano score of the latter surfaced in 1999. Its Waltz No.2 reached a wide audience after Stanley Kubrick used it as the title theme and music for the closing credits in his final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*.

The Soviet regime banned jazz during the 1920s and 1930s, branding the genre and the saxophone as symbols of bourgeois decadence. Saxophones continued to be produced at the old Zimmermann factories in Leningrad and Moscow, which had been nationalised following the October Revolution in 1917. Zimmermann's copies of American Conn instruments were stamped with the hammer and sickle on their bells. The egalitarian saxophone, easy to play yet truly hard to master, was authorised for use in military bands and concert orchestras, while performing its subversive part in clandestine jazz gigs. The instrument's versatility and staying power, proof against attacks by totalitarian regimes and puritanical condemnations of the 'Devil's Horn', owes a considerable debt to Rudy Wiedoeft, the man who turned the saxophone from toy into a serious musical champion.

Andrew Stewart

## I JONATHAN RADFORD

Jonathan Radford is one of the leading classical saxophonists of his generation. He is passionate about showcasing the saxophone's versatility across the classical and contemporary repertoire, delighting audiences with his characteristically energetic and expressive performances.

Jonathan is an international prize-winner, with notable awards including Gold Medal in the Royal Over-Seas League Competition (UK, 2018), SaxOpen International Competition (France, 2015) and Concorso Internazionale di Musica Marco (Italy, 2013). He was featured as a BBC Music Magazine 'Rising Star', and was selected as a Young Artist with Park Lane Group, Tunnell Trust, Making Music and Countess of Munster Musical Trust.

He has performed recitals at Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Bridgewater Hall (Manchester), Seoul Arts Center (South Korea), Grieg Hall (Bergen), and Philharmonie de Paris. He regularly performs at major music festivals in the UK, Europe and Asia.

A keen advocate of contemporary music, he has premiered works by Cheryl Frances-Hoad (*Algernon*, co-commissioned by ROSL), Luis Naón (*Tangos Utopicos*, co-commissioned by Radio France), Betsy Jolas (*Un post-it pour Henri*, commissioned by the CNSM) and collaborated with IRCAM in Paris.



Jonathan has given masterclasses at the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Chetham's School of Music, Melbourne Conservatorium and Nice Conservatoire. Jonathan is very passionate about bringing music to a wider community and is active in outreach projects throughout the UK. In collaboration with The Worshipful Company of Musicians, Jonathan regularly works with schools who have limited access to music education, and patients suffering from dementia and neuro-disabilities. He is a mentor for the Wigmore Hall 'Chamber Tots' programme.

Jonathan studied at Chetham's School of Music (UK), before entering the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris (CNSM) in the class of Claude Delangle. He was the 2018 Mills Williams Junior Fellow at the Royal College of Music, studying with Kyle Horch.

Jonathan is a Vandoren Paris Artist and plays Henri Selmer Paris saxophones.

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British pianist Ashley Fripp has performed extensively as recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician throughout Europe, Asia, North America, Africa and Australia in many of the world's most prestigious concert halls. Highlights include the Carnegie Hall (New York), Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), the Philharmonie halls of Cologne, Paris, Luxembourg and Warsaw, the Bozar (Brussels), the Royal Festival, Barbican and Wigmore halls (London), the Laeiszhalle (Hamburg), Palace of Arts (Budapest), the Megaron (Athens), Konzerthaus Dortmund, the Gulbenkian Auditorium (Lisbon) and the Konserthuset (Stockholm).

He has won prizes at more than a dozen national and

international competitions, including at the Hamamatsu (Japan), Birmingham and Leeds International Piano Competitions, the Royal Over-Seas League Competition, the Concours Européen de Piano (France) and the coveted Gold Medal from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Ashley was awarded the Worshipful Company of Musicians' highest award, The Prince's Prize, and was chosen as a 'Rising Star' by the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO). He has also performed in the Chipping Campden, Edinburgh, Brighton, Bath, Buxton, City of London and St Magnus International festivals as well as the Oxford International Piano Festival, the Festival Pontino di Musica (Italy) and the Powsin International Piano Festival (Poland). A frequent guest on broadcasting networks, Ashley has appeared on BBC television and radio, Euroclassical, Eurovision TV and the national radio stations of Hungary, Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium and Portugal. Ashley has recorded Chopin Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 (Spektral Records, 2013) and solo music by J. S. Bach, Thomas Adès and Chopin (Willowhayne Records, 2018).

Ashley Fripp studied with Ronan O'Hora at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and with Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole (Italy). In 2021 he was awarded a doctorate for his research into the music of Thomas Adès.

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