

Gerard Presencer

Gerard Presencer is universally recognized as one of the best trumpet / flugelhorn players in his field. His most celebrated recorded performance, which has led to his being described as "subliminally, the most famous trumpeter in the world", is his solo work on the 3 million selling album by US3, "Hand on the Torch" (1993) on Blue Note. It is Gerards' trumpet that is featured so heavily on the big hit of that CD, Cantaloop.

Presencer was born in London on September 12, 1972. At the age of 11 he became a member of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and at the age of 15 he made his recording debut with the alto Peter King.

Presencer had been playing with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra for nearly five years, when he got his first important break. He was spotted on a 1988 jazz boat trip out of Southampton, where he was playing with saxophonist Tim Colwell, by Clark Tracey. The celebrated drummer/leader immediately asked Presencer to dep for Guy Barker in his quintet, and subsequently formed a quartet, featuring the 15-year-old as his sole front-line player. "Learning to listen to the rhythm section" and "relying on my imagination, having no saxophone to fall back on, to share solos with" are the two vital skills Presencer recalls learning in Tracey's band, but it was his securing of the trumpet chair in the prestigious Pizza Express Modern Jazz Sextet that really launched him on the London jazz scene: "That was very important, because I got to play, week after week, with some extremely good players - sharing a front line with Alan Barnes and Dave O'Higgins, and their occasional deps, Tim Garland and Andy Panayi - and it was about then, when I was 18, that I began playing with Stan Tracey, in his big band, octet and septet." This last connection was responsible for one of Presencer's highest-profile appearances, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall concert marking Stan Tracey's fiftieth year as a professional musician in 1993.

At the age of 18 he was first noticed on the world stage for his work with Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts, whom he continues to work with; writing, producing and playing. In 1991 Charlie Watts formed his Quintet with Presencer, saxophonist Peter King, bassist David Green and pianist Brian Lemon. The group toured the world and released several albums in the next years.

"When I was 18-20 I played with all of the bands on the now legendary label Acid Jazz", Presencer recalls. "I toured the world several times with their most successful act, The Brand New Heavies. I also played on the early Jamiroquai records. I wrote and played for another funk band of that period, Incognito on the album '100° and rising'. This was around the same time that I got a call from the then unknown band US3 to play on their track Cantaloop, which later went on to sell 3 million worldwide. This solo is one of the most famous in jazz, people still hassle me about it to this day! I played it in one take. During this period, I wanted to develop my solo career and played with many of the young jazz musicians coming through the London scene in the 80's and 90's, such as: Courtney Pine, Jason Rebello, Tony Remy, Steve Williamson, Nigel Hitchcock etc."

Since then, Presencer has become a fixture on the London music scene and an in-demand sideman for dozens of leaders, both British and visiting Americans and Europeans, playing in a great variety of musical contexts. With Britain's leading alto player, Peter King, he plays elegant, agile, post-bop jazz; under composer Colin Towns, he contributes blistering, whip-smart solos to the plangently eloquent music of the Mask Orchestra; with bassist Lawrence Cottle's tight fusion band, he transforms himself into the archetypal terse, funky trumpeter alongside alto player Nigel Hitchcock.

Such versatility is a function of contemporary musicians' entirely sensible refusal to allow themselves to be pigeonholed. In the 1990's Presencer is just as likely to contribute his unique trumpet skills to record dates and live appearances by the likes of Sting - Presencer collaborated on an unplugged project, culminating with a duo performance of "Roxanne" on the BBC's Top of the Pops - Ray Charles, James Brown, Robbie Williams, Kylie Minogue, Tina Turner, Joni Mitchell, The Spice Girls, Paul Weller, The Pet Shop Boys or Kula Shaker as to a straight-ahead jazz band. He has performed with many famous jazz musicians as John Dankworth, Roy Hargrove, Ronnie Scott, Cleo Laine, Red Rodney, Johnny Griffin, Phil Woods and has recorded with Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and vibraphonist Joe Locke alongside with Bob Berg.

He also leads his own small groups and has always been an active composer, writing for large and small ensembles in different genres. He has recently completed work on a film score ("Body Song") with Jon Greenwood of Radiohead.

Presencer has two previous albums available on Linn Records (UK): "Platypus" (1998) and "The Optimist" (2000). "I was playing in studios for many different artists, beyond the realms of jazz. As a result, my personal tastes have never been solely jazz. The funk groove has always been a major influence in my writing and playing and although I have recorded many straight ahead jazz albums over the years (at least 30 or 40), I have never made one in my own name." The name "Platypus" itself, he asserts, is symbolic of "an attempt to transcend the dogmatic classification that can be such a hindrance to creativity within the current music scene. As a versatile musician, versed in everything from avant-garde, free jazz to hard-core rap, I've simply tried to reflect my musical taste, ignoring the restrictions that a so-called 'jazz' or 'funk' album would labour under: it's simply a mixture - entirely appropriate to our postmodern era - of what I like."

"Chasing Reality" with Geoffrey Keezer, Joe Locke and others (release in February 2003) marks his debut as ACT recording artist. In March 2003, Presencer will present his new project on a "Rising Stars" - Tour.

On the British Jazz scene, Presencer has won the trumpet category of the Hamlet British Jazz Awards four times, most recently in 2002.

Since 1999, Gerard Presencer is Professor of Trumpet in the Jazz and Popular Music department at the the Academy of Music "Hanns Eisler", Berlin and Director of the Jazz Department at the Royal Academy of Music, London.