



Bio information: **SOS [John Surman, Mike Osborne, Alan Skidmore]**

Title: **LOOKING FOR THE NEXT ONE** (Cuneiform Rune 360/361) Format: CDx2 / DIGITAL

WWW.CUNEIFORMRECORDS.COM

Cuneiform promotion dept: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: joyce [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (Press & world radio); radio [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (North American & world radio)

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: JAZZ

In 1974, three poll-winning British saxophonists joined forces around a radical concept: Dispense with a bass player and a drummer and go it alone. The result was **SOS**, the trio of **John Surman**, **Mike Osborne** and **Alan Skidmore**, saxophonists who led or played on many of the groundbreaking British jazz recordings of the late 1960s and '70s. Although **SOS** lasted less than three years, they paved the way for **World Saxophone Quartet**, **Rova** and other all-sax bands. During their brief existence, **SOS** recorded only one LP – a self-titled studio album for the legendary **Ogun** label – that has been frequently cited by critics and historians for almost 40 years as a landmark recording in British jazz history.

Undoubtedly, **Cuneiform's** release of *Looking For The Next One*, a 2-CD compilation of studio sessions and live recordings, will not only rekindle discussions about **SOS's** innovative music among connoisseurs, but introduce their exciting, virtuosic music to a new generation of listeners. The inclusion of the entirety of their legendary July 1974 **Balver Höhle Jazz Festival** concert is a game-changer, as it reveals **SOS's** penchant for connecting multiple compositions with open improvisations, an approach they did not employ on the **Ogun** album. The concert also documents how **Surman** seamlessly integrated keyboards and synthesizers – instruments that were overdubbed for **SOS** – into a performance, and gives more space to **Skidmore's** energetic drumming than on the **Ogun** album.

The CD of studio sessions include several unique tracks, including an intense **Surman** overdubbed solo piece for soprano saxophone and synthesizer, hard-hitting tracks with the late, great drummer **Tony Levin** – who played with everyone from **Joe Harriott** to **Mujician** – and burners like “Rashied,” a tune **Surman** and **Osborne** learned at an early '70s session with **John Coltrane** drummer, **Rashied Ali**. The collection also includes new, extended versions of such memorable tunes from **SOS**, as “Country Dance,” “Goliath,” and “Where’s Junior?,” as well as prime examples of their use of **Irish folk** tunes and **Bach** inventions.

With a 16-page booklet featuring archival photographs – including shots taken during **SOS's** **Balver Höhle Jazz Festival** concert – and a concise history of the band and their groundbreaking music, written by jazz critic and Point of Departure founder **Bill Shoemaker**, *Looking For The Next One* is a substantial addition to **Cuneiform's** important catalog of archival British jazz and progressive rock recordings. It not only fleshes out important aspects of their materials and methods, it also reinforces the risk these three celebrated British musicians took in undertaking this endeavor.

While **Surman** had already recorded *Westering Home*, his first album of overdubbed solo pieces featuring baritone and soprano saxophone, bass clarinet and synthesizer, his reputation was largely built on his high-energy albums for **Decca**, his work with **The Trio** (with **Barre Phillips** and **Stu Martin**, and contributions to important recordings by **John McLaughlin** and others. Like **Surman**, **Osborne** first gained notice on the mid-'60s London scene with the **Mike Westbrook Concert Band**; the alto saxophonist also had a strong connection with the South African exiles who made London their base as a member of **Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath** and **Osborne's** own trio with **Harry Miller** and **Louis Moholo**. **Skidmore** was renowned for his **Coltrane-like** intensity and virtuosity on tenor saxophone; like **Surman** and **Osborne**, **Skidmore** played on important early recordings by **Westbrook** and **McGregor**, shared the front line with **Surman** and **Osborne** on **Surman's** early dates, and led his own groups on acclaimed albums released on **Decca**.

Even though they were among the most celebrated homegrown musicians in the UK at the time, **SOS** still had to contend with a conservative domestic press, wary promoters and a weak economy. While **SOS** had the enthusiastic support of **Steve Lake** and other progressive British critics, conservative critics derided **SOS's** music, even comparing it to “a strange, barbaric maypole dance,” a typically snarky reference to **SOS's** inclusive embrace of Celtic folk elements. When the slumping UK economy shrank local touring opportunities for **SOS**, they found ample work throughout Europe, thanks to the network of presenters **Surman** had established subsequent to his 1969 “farewell” to London (**Surman's** last jam session before departing was issued by **Cuneiform** in 2005 as *Way Back When*). However, a number of factors, including **Osborne's** declining health, forced **SOS** to dissolve in 1976.

The release of *Looking For The Next One* provides a timely look back at a pivotal point in **Surman's** early career. Far from a sidebar in his pioneering career, **SOS** helped lay the groundwork for his subsequent recordings for **ECM**. *Looking For The Next One* documents how **Surman** brought together proficient keyboarding, a strong feel for tone color, and folk music-infused melodies to create his signature multi-track “solo” music.

While *Looking For The Next One* is the 1st **SOS** album to be issued by **Cuneiform**, it is not the label's 1st CD to feature all three saxophonists. In 2011, **Cuneiform** released **Surman's** *Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop–April 1969*, a CD/DVD package featuring a big band with **Surman's** **SOS** colleagues, as well as such luminaries as tenor saxophonist **Ronnie Scott** and trumpeter **Kenny Wheeler**.

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com



SOS BIOGRAPHIES

“Surman....is without doubt one of the key figures in contemporary jazz over the past four decades.” –*The Encyclopedia of Popular Music*

“Saxophonist at the heart of the resurgence of British jazz.Mike Osborne.... could be numbered among the most outstanding exponents of his instrument, irrespective of nationality.” –*The Guardian*

“[Alan Skidmore] A player with immense physical and imaginative stamina, at home in any context, from tight structures to total abstraction, and with any tempo, from breakneck to slow.” –*Jazz: The Rough Guide*

JOHN DOUGLAS SURMAN (born August 30, 1944)

Bio info from: Surman's official Web Site: <http://www.johnsurman.com/> Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Surman
All Music Guide <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/john-surman-mn0000189180> Discogs <http://www.discogs.com/artist/John+Surman>

Surman was born in Tavistock, Devon in 1944. He initially gained recognition playing baritone saxophone in the Mike Westbrook Band in the mid-1960s, and was soon heard regularly playing soprano saxophone and bass clarinet as well. His first playing issued on a record was with the Peter Lemer Quintet in 1966. After further recordings and performances with jazz bandleaders Mike Westbrook and Graham Collier and blues-rock musician Alexis Korner, he made the first record under his own name in 1968.

In 1969 he founded the well-regarded and influential group The Trio along with two expatriate American musicians, bassist Barre Phillips and drummer Stu Martin. In the mid-1970s he founded one of the earliest all-saxophone jazz groups, SOS, along with alto saxophonist Mike Osborne and tenor saxophonist Alan Skidmore. During this early period he also recorded with (among others) saxophonist Ronnie Scott, guitarist John McLaughlin, bandleader Michael Gibbs, trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff, and pianist Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath.

By 1972 he had begun experimenting with synthesizers. That year he recorded *Westering Home*, the first of several solo projects on which he played all parts himself via overdubbing. He recorded his final album with Mike Westbrook, *Citadel/Room 315* in 1975.

Many of the musical relationships he established during the 1970s have continued to the present. These include a quartet with pianist John Taylor, bassist Chris Laurence, and drummer John Marshall; duets and other projects with Norwegian singer Karin Krog; and duets and other projects with American drummer/pianist Jack DeJohnette.

His relationship with ECM Records has also been continuous from the late 1970s to the present, as Surman has recorded prolifically for the label playing bass clarinet, recorders, soprano and baritone saxophones and using synthesizers, both solo with a wide range of other musicians.

In recent years he has composed several suites of music that feature his playing in unusual contexts, including with church organ and chorus (*Proverbs and Songs*, 1996); with a classical string quintet (*Coruscating*); and with the London Brass and Jack DeJohnette (*Free and Equal*, 2001). He has also played in a unique trio with Tunisian oud-player Anouar Brahem and bassist Dave Holland (*Thimar*, 1997); has performed the songs of John Dowland with singer John Potter formerly of the Hilliard Ensemble; and made contributions to the drum and bass album *Disappeared* by Spring Heel Jack.

Other musicians he has worked with include bassist Miroslav Vitous, bandleader Gil Evans, pianist Paul Bley and Vignleik Storaas, guitarists Terje Rypdal and John Abercrombie and trumpeter Tomasz Stańko.

MIKE EVANS OSBORNE (Sept. 28, 1941 – Sept. 19, 2007)

Bio info from: Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Osborne Discogs <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Mike+Osborne>
All Music Guide <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/mike-osborne-mn0000524917> Independent <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/mike-osborne-403429.html> The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2007/sep/21/guardianobituaries.obituaries>

Born in Hereford on September 28, 1941, alto saxophonist Mike Osborne was among the premier exponents of the British jazz resurgence of the mid-'60s. A supremely skilled and inventive player, Osborne relocated to London at age 18 to study clarinet, piano, and harmony at the Guildhall School of Music. There he befriended pianist and composer Mike Westbrook, soon joining baritone and soprano saxophonist John Surman, trombonist Malcolm Griffiths, and trumpeter Dave Holdsworth in what would become the Mike Westbrook Concert Band. This ten- to 12-member ensemble would produce some of the most visionary jazz talents of its generation, recording a series of now-classic LPs to wide critical acclaim.

Often praised as "the Jackie McLean of Britain," Osborne channeled his affection and knowledge of the post-bop idiom into a distinctively cerebral and incendiary approach all his own. As his renown grew, so did demand for his services, and in addition to serving in Surman's octet, he also collaborated in projects as diverse as pianist Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath and bassist Harry Miller's Isipingo. McGregor and Miller returned the favor for 1971's *Outback*, the first LP credited under Osborne's name. Shapes followed in 1972 and again featured McGregor and drummer Louis Moholo, Osborne's cohorts in a trio that yielded his 1974 breakthrough *Border Crossing*, justly celebrated for his most impassioned and exhilarating playing on record. A year later, the trio was also documented via *All Night Long*, a live set recorded in August 1975 at Switzerland's Willisau Festival. Around the same time Osborne teamed with Surman and tenor saxophonist Alan Skidmore in *SOS*, cutting a self-titled album for the Ogun label.

In 1977, he returned to London to lead the Ogun session *Marcel's Muse*, but did not resurface on record until two years later, when Ayler issued the John Stevens trio date *Live at the Plough*. The date was Osborne's final appearance on LP, although he continued playing until 1982. He died of lung cancer on September 19, 2007, less than two weeks shy of his 66th birthday.

ALAN RICHARD JAMES SKIDMORE (born April 21, 1942)

Bio info from: Alan Skidmore's official Web Site: <http://www.alanskidmore.info/>

All Music Guide: <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/alan-skidmore-mn0000689801> Discogs <http://www.discogs.com/artist/Alan+Skidmore>

Born in London on 21 April 1942, Alan Skidmore is the son of jazz saxophonist Jimmy Skidmore, who gave him a discarded tenor that Alan ignored until he was about 15. At that time he taught himself to play. The younger Skidmore's muscular approach reflects the influence of Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon and, above all, John Coltrane. Skidmore began playing professionally in 1958, and did various commercial engagements, including tours with comedian Tony Hancock and singer Matt Monro and five years in the house band at London's Talk Of The Town nightclub.

In 1961 he made the first of many appearances on BBC Radio's Jazz Club, and also met his idol, Coltrane. In the following years Skidmore worked with numerous important and/or successful bands, including Eric Delaney, where he replaced his father when Jimmy decided to leave (in 1963), Alexis Korner (1964), John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (1964), Ronnie Scott (1965), Georgie Fame And The Blue Flames (1970), Mike Westbrook (1970-71), Mike Gibbs (1970-71), and Chris McGregor's Brotherhood Of Breath (1971). In 1969, he formed his own quintet (Kenny Wheeler, Tony Oxley, John Taylor and Harry Miller), with which he won the best soloist and best band awards at the Montreux International Jazz Festival and gained a scholarship to Berklee College Of Music, although he did not take this up.

In 1973, he co-founded *SOS* with Mike Osborne and John Surman. He has subsequently formed various small groups of his own, including *El Skid* (co-led with Elton Dean), *SOH*, and *Tenor Tonic*, and has worked with the George Gruntz Concert Band, the Elvin Jones Jazz Machine, the Charlie Watts Orchestra, Stan Tracey, Mose Allison, Van Morrison, Georgie Fame again, and with the West German Radio Band as featured soloist from 1981-84. In April 1991, he was reunited with Surman when they played as a duo at a benefit for Osborne. In 2002 he was once again playing with Georgie Fame And The Blue Flames, as well as leading his own groups.

what the press has said about:

JOHN SURMAN FLASHPOINT: NDR JAZZ WORKSHOP (APRIL '69) CUNEIFORM 2011

Line-up: John Surman (soprano sax, baritone sax), Kenny Wheeler (trumpet, flugelhorn), Alan Skidmore (tenor sax, flute), Ronnie Scott (tenor sax), Mike Osborne (alto sax), Malcolm Griffiths (trombone), Harry Miller (bass) Alan Jackson (drums), Fritz Pauer (piano), Erich Kleinschuster (trombone).

"... A mind-blowing gathering of the cream of British jazz musicians plus two Austrian guests, *Flashpoint*... serves as an essential historical document as well as vital performance...

The set closes with the title track...When Alan Skidmore...takes over on tenor, ...he builds his story-telling solo to an ecstatic high before the action falls and dovetails right into Surman's energized baritone feature. It's **the programs final leap-from-your-chair moment, some of the best that British jazz had to offer. Decades later, Surman has left a sterling legacy.**" – Jeff Stockton, *The New York City Jazz Record*, July 2011

"...Saxophonist John Surman gathered seven horns and a rhythm section for an NDR workshop and let them loose on a mixed bag of big band modal riffs, free-form blasts and bucolic waltzes – the black and white DVD captures the ambiance. **The confidence and energy are palpable, and confirm the hugely creative talents that flourished in London in the late 60s. [Rating: 4 stars]**" – Mike Hobart, *Financial Times*, March 25, 2011

"For fans of 60s Brit-jazz, the band is an absolute dream team featuring the era's most vibrant players: Alan Skidmore and Ronnie Scott on tenor saxophones, the late Mike Osborne on alto, as well as Canadian trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, South African bassist Harry Miller and the criminally under-appreciated drummer Alan Jackson. They provide a big band heft that gives themes...an orchestral lushness. ...

...the undeniable highlight here is the title-track, a Surman original that begins with a coruscating wall of free-blowing (prefiguring his more experimental work with The Trio) before quickly settling into a maniacally up-tempo hard-bop belter, providing a framework for...Osborne and Skidmore that conclusively steal the day. ...

The clincher is the conclusion of the DVD, which presents the original German TV show from which the cuts are taken. Clear, crisp, black-and-white footage brings the date vividly to life... As a snapshot of deep 60s jazz, British or otherwise, this is 100% gold."

–Daniel Spicer, *BBC*, April 4, 2011

"...John Surman is...one of the UK's foremost jazz musicians...blazing and maintaining his own singular path in Europe. ...

Stylistically, Surman has pursued several distinctive directions...*Flashpoint* is mainly forward-looking large-group bop with free/out overtones, in the vein of modernist hep cats such as Carla Bley, Charles Mingus, and George Russell. ... 'Once Upon A Time' is a pretty, yet driving number with some bracing solos courtesy of UK jazz now-legends such as the great trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, ...saxophonists Ronnie Scott, Alan Skidmore, and the late Mike Osborne, and trombonist Malcolm Griffiths. ...*Flashpoint*...is recommended not only to JS fans but to lovers of creative, envelope-pushing large-combo jazz. [Rating: 4 stars, excellent]"

– Mark Keresman, *ICON*, April 2011

"This long-lost workshop session, recorded in Hamburg, Germany, for television broadcast, is a rare document that shows how John Surman and U.K. colleagues like trumpeter Kenny Wheeler and tenor saxophonists Ronnie Scott and Alan Skidmore (who later played with

Weather Report) were stretching the form and beginning to incorporate elements of the New Thing into their compositions. ...The John Coltrane Classic Quartet is clearly a touchstone here. Surman and company meld some of that heightened energy on the opening modal number 'Mayflower,' which finds the leader wailing in uninhibited fashion on soprano sax...

... an accompanying DVD...captures the performance in startlingly vivid black and white." -Bill Milkowski, *Jazztimes*, September 2011

"Recorded shortly after UK saxophone player and composer **John Surman** finished *How Many Clouds Can You See... Flashpoint* sees him in Hamburg, Germany, at the helm of a ten-piece jazz ensemble – **conducting the cream of the 60s British jazz movement for a television broadcast by the NDR Jazz Workshop.** ...

...impressive line-up... The DVD portion gives a fly-on-the-wall account of the session... **The CD part cuts out the between-track workshop discussions and concentrates fully on the music, all of which is excellent. *Flashpoint* is a valuable document that shows how the 60s European Jazz movement was dawning, with some of its brightest stars already in the ascendant.**" - Edwin Pouncey, *The Wire*, May 2011

"The first wave of modern British jazz is only in retrospect a golden age... it showed great foresight on the part of German broadcaster NDR to film John Surman's big band... April 1969... **The participants are a virtual Who's Who of Jazz Britannia (Alan Skidmore, Ronnie Scott, Mike Osborne, Kenny Wheeler, Harry Miller), caught in a space between tradition (borrowing inspiration and structures from Duke Ellington) and innovation (the infusion of free jazz, and the South African influence).** The footage offers valuable insights into the nature of communal music-making... Clearly, on the basis of wishful themes like Once Upon A Time, **Surman's melodic sense was born full-formed. An essential document.**" - Mike Butler, *Diverse Music*, February 23, 2010

"**Once again, Cuneiform fills in the historical gaps by dropping a stellar broadcast from the North German radio and television archives.** ... The standout track is the aptly named "Flashpoint." Of its time, **the free opening captures the fire-and-brimstone abandon that is prerogative of the youth; Surman was just twenty-four.**... and his blistering baritone solo is matched in fury only by Osborne's searing alto. The head...is more traditional, crossing Coltrane modality with Mingusian arrangement. ...

The DVD provides its own revelations. The video shows the musicians working together easily, humor being integral to their interaction. ...

As with all archival releases from Cuneiform, the sound is first-rate, which sets the label's offerings apart from so many others. As with releases by Soft Machine, Matching Mole and Brotherhood of Breath, we are given the privilege to hear these seminal performers at formative moments."

- Marc Medwin, *Dusted Magazine*, June 3, 2011

"**With a lineup that speaks for itself (just look at those horns!), this is a bracing document capturing the coexistence of advance large ensemble charts** (think somewhere between George Russell's bands of the period and Kenny Wheeler's *Windmill Tilter*) **with some of the technical and emotional registers of free playing. It's great to hear Surman playing soprano from this period, and indeed there's a real freshness to more or less all the music documented here.** ... There's a gorgeous, churning Scott solo on the graceful, but occasionally fiery (in a mid-period Trane sense) "Once Upon a Time."... there's an absolutely glorious soprano solo on the swaggering Pauer tune "Gratuliere," followed by a fulsome, lyrical turn from Griffiths... **The best bit on this radio shot, however, is the closing title track, filled with fire and cascading ideas** (again, Osborne is brilliant)... **the main key to this disc's appeal (aside from the awesome performances) is the sound of possibilities opening up during the pieces. Simply wonderful stuff.**"

- Jason Bivins, *Cadence*, September 2011

"... **Three of the five pieces are by Surman, one is by Pauer, and one is by Kleinschuster. All are of a similar character, though, and this is what makes the whole thing interesting. The heads are highly melodic and quite pretty. But when the solos commence, some players stick to that style and come off almost big band-ish... while others head out, but never to the degree of the free improvisors.**... Some of the wildest playing comes from saxophonist Alan Skidmore, who's speaking the language of Coltrane circa 1964-65, and trombonist Malcolm Griffiths...By contrast, Erich Kleinschuster plays a very straightforward solo... **Surman's own work, mostly on soprano saxophone, falls somewhere between the two poles – the compositions are his and the essential melodic quality remains present at all times, but he goes pretty far out before finding his way back to earth.** The rhythm section is excellent, particularly bassist Harry Miller. ...

... a fascinating document even for those (like me) not at all versed in 1960s British jazz." - Phil Freeman, *Burning Ambulance*, Sept. 6, 2011

"By the 1960s there was burgeoning jazz scene in England. ... **John Surman's *Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop, April 1969* is an incisive glance into the creative eminence of this formative musician.** ...the cream of the late sixties "Brit-jazz" was united with two equally adept Austrian band members. ...the sound is excellent. The copious horn section is crisp. The tone is never dense and the separation is discernible. The soprano saxophone, never easy to record, is piercing but not shrill. **The DVD (shot in black and white) has a factual unobtrusive style. ... small intro segments... give the viewer brief insights into a recording session. Cuneiform Records has unearthed a hidden treasure of British jazz.**"

- Robbie Gerson, *Audiophile Audition*, March 17, 2011

"***Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop – April '69* is a stunning discovery.** Featuring unreleased material executed by a unique ten-piece line-up of European jazz luminaries, it provides a **fascinating window into the development of British saxophonist John Surman at the every beginning of his career. Capturing an international all-star ensemble working through Surman's formative concepts,** ... audio and video quality is remarkably good... the DVD features the entire 45 minute performance as filmed, preserving snippets of illuminating in-between song banter... Series producer Hans Gertberg invited Surman to bring a few of his regular associates to collaborate with...two Austrians—pianist Fritz Pauer and trombonist Erich Kleinschuster, as well as British saxophonist Ronnie Scott. Surman's regular collaborators at the time included... **a virtual A-list of late sixties 'Brit-jazz.'**

... **Brimming with a casual, exploratory energy, the performances offer each participant a spot in the limelight.**

... **one of the year's most essential reissues.**"

- Troy Collins, *All About Jazz*, March 4, 2011

"... Brian Morton... rightly identifies the musical generation that came of age in the 1960s as having no sense of cultural inferiority, a point...made most potently on ***Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop – April '69* in music that reveals a character every bit as identifiable as anything coming at the time.** ... after forty-odd years; it's been worth the wait.

Surman was truly blessed in being able to put together an Anglo-Austrian band that so truly and brightly burned. Anything emerging from the vaults featuring the likes of alto saxophonist Mike Osborne is more than welcome and... on the opening "Mayflower," he turns in a solo as incendiary as anything he was doing with Mike Westbrook...

The DVD offers insight into the processes of the music, through the unedited TV program as originally broadcast. This makes...one of those “rescued from the vaults” releases for which we can be deeply grateful.”

-Nic Jones, *All About Jazz*, April 26, 2011

“Best of 2011... Unearthed Gems... John Surman – *Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop (April '69) (Cuneiform)*”

-*The New York City Jazz Record*, January 2012

“An absolutely unexpected gem from the delightful Cuneiform label—which between showcasing some of the world’s brightest and most adept contemporary musicians and spotlighting older, often unissued works by unsung masters, is about the most adventurous record company out there at the moment. Anyone captivated by the British jazz scene that thrived in the ‘60s and ‘70s will be thrilled by the release of this superb set...Best of all, the set includes both an audio CD and a crisp video version of the session on DVD—which, for younger fans who never thought they’d witness this stuff while it was happening, is a virtual godsend. A fantastic release, and I hope more is coming!”

-Dave DiMartino, *Yahoo Music*, February 8, 2011

“Flashpoint captures Surman leading a ten-piece ensemble, comprising some of the top players in the 60s British jazz scene.”

-*Wire*, May 5, 2011

“Those curious to know the reason for the recent resurgence of interest in British jazz of the 1960s and 1970s need look no further than this 1969 NDR Jazz Workshop session...

... this is thus not just a rousingly enjoyable session led by one of UK jazz’s most influential figures, but also an important (and fascinating) historical document.”

- Chris Parker, *London Jazz*, May 17, 2011

“4 stars. This previously unissued treasure contains a fascinating slice of European jazz history. It is a recording made... the NDR Jazz Workshop broadcast series in April 1969, featuring saxophonist John Surman and a group of mainly English musicians who were at the forefront of the emerging European jazz scene of that era... The recording quality is excellent, and the sense of invention, engagement and commitment in the music retains a freshness and excitement that is still palpable four decades on.”

-Kenny Mathieson, *The Scotsman*, April 9, 2011

“...“Flashpoint” is firmly rooted in acoustic hard-bop and clearly informed by the classic John Coltrane Quartet, although some of the assembled artists’ solos reflect the heat of the European free jazz fire-storm exemplified by Peter Brotzmann’s “Machine Gun”...

... the NDR production style is unfussy...its emphasis squarely on the music. ...The DVD sound and (monochrome) vision are of excellent quality...

...Surman’s “Mayflower” is... a bright up-tempo kicker... The partnership of Jackson with ex-Blue Notes bassist Harry Miller is inspired...

The opening of the set’s closing number, Surman’s “Flashpoint”, drops the ensemble into glorious free-fall before leveling out into a passage of hard-driving, pugnacious riffing as a prelude... to stretch out and blow.

After this session Surman’s art would progress rapidly. ...But “Flashpoint” is no footnote to his career; indeed retrospectively it seems well named. Having been recorded at the cusp of the transition from the immediate post-Coltrane era to the age of electric jazz, “Flashpoint” blends the freshness of inspiration with a significant sense of cultural stock-taking. It’s a vital document, and it still sounds exciting more than forty years later.”

-Tim Owen, *The Jazz Mann*, May 23, 2011

“Tavistock, in deepest Devon... was the town that produced one of Britain’s finest jazz musicians, saxophonist John Surman. Just out is an amazing session from him called *Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop – April '69 (** Cuneiform)* that has the multi-reedman leading a stellar band that includes fellow Brit luminaries Ronnie Scott, Kenny Wheeler and Alan Jackson. Recorded in Hamburg and screened on German TV (the package includes a DVD of the broadcast) the set sizzles with modal invention and exploratory large ensemble compositions, best exemplified by Surman’s own tunes Mayflower and Once Upon A Time.”**

-Charles Waring, *Record Collector*, August 2011

“1969 was a watershed year for John Surman. ...

...on “Mayflower,” the burning modal opener to *Flashpoint: NDR Jazz Workshop—April 1969*, a golden find of a German television performance, rescued from obscurity by Cuneiform Records and released as a double-disc set... With a ten-piece ensemble culled from the cream of the late-‘60s British jazz crop along with a couple of lesser-known Germans, Surman’s recruitment of Kenny Wheeler makes *Flashpoint* an even greater find... Wheeler’s flugelhorn solo on the change-heavy, waltz-time “Once Upon a Time” demonstrates everything that has made Wheeler a quiet legend, in particular his melody-drenched lyricism...

...it’s the music and the combined solo firepower of Surman’s band that make *Flashpoint* such a treasure...

...*Flashpoint* adds further detail to the picture of Surman’s early years, where a myriad of promises emerged concurrently, to ultimately merge into one of jazz’s most distinctive voices on the big and little horns.”

-John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, February 1, 2011

What the press have said about: John Surman Way Back When Cuneiform 2005

Lineup: John Surman (baritone & soprano sax), John Taylor (electric piano), Brian Odgers (bass guitar), and John Marshall (drums), with Mike Osborne (alto sax)

“Critical reappraisal of modern British jazz circa 1969-72, long overdue, can’t hurt John Surman. His long association with ECM chronicles a nurturing and productive relationship... What it has obscured is the passionate soloist who has done as much to expand the baritone saxophone as Steve Lacy did for the straight horn. *Way Back When* is thus both a good surprise and a healthy reminder. ...

The hand of Miles is not so invisible, with ticking drums and a warm cushion of electric piano drawing inevitable comparisons to *In A Silent Way*. Roughage makes the difference. ... John Warren’s “Owlshhead” gives them more to chew on. Surman finds the honeycomb and coffee flavours in the warm melody, and anticipates the vigorous poet to come. ...” – Randal McIlroy, *CODA*, Issue 325, Jan/Feb 2006

“You could make a case for John Surman as England’s Wayne Shorter... To hear Surman at his youthful best... the previously unreleased *Way Back When*—a 1969 studio session teaming Surman with altoist Mike Osborne...provides a splendid introduction. ...when he switches to baritone for “Owlshhead” and “Out and About”—oh, boy, there wasn’t an American baritonist taking the horn up as high or down as low and exhibiting as much muscle and smarts until Hamiet Bluiett. ...along with Cuneiform’s McGregor and Graham Collier releases, *Way Back When* illuminates a lost chapter in British jazz...” – Francis Davis, *The Village Voice*, June 13, 2005

“...this is a fine, if exploratory, jazz-rock set from Surman. It sits really nicely as an example of the times but also in the brave new world populated by EST, Acoustic Ladyland and other groups. Actually laid down several months before Nucleus’ groundbreaking *Elastic Rock*, it suggests how fast things were moving on the UK scene at the time. ... Marshall...sounds most at home in this setting. His great strength lay in his ability to combine the power of rock with the moving rhythmic pulse of jazz and he drives this music... The two tracks with Osborne are more jazz than jazz-rock but in a way more assured... The altoist combines beautifully with Surman’s baritone on John Warren’s ‘Owlshead’...his presence seems to push Surman harder and the range he pulls from his baritone is astonishing. Music that matters as much now as then. [3 stars]” – Duncan Heining, *Jazzwise*, Issue 89, August 2005

“Cuneiform have done it again. It still startles me that a tiny record company in Maryland, USA is turning out some of the best reissues and rediscoveries of 60s and 70s British Jazz (think Brotherhood of Breath, Graham Collier, Nucleus) as well as giving a home to more recent work from people like Paul Dunmall.

This release gathers material recorded by John Surman in 1969...a snapshot of where Surman and his mates (John Taylor, Brian Odgers, John Marshall and Mike Osborne) were at the time. ...it's a rewarding listen...

Way Back When is cool, supple music. The use of electric bass and piano suggests rockist tendencies, and...there's a strong whiff of *In a Silent Way* in the air. The title track...theme...turns up as "Glancing Backwards" on John McLaughlin's *Where Fortune Smiles*...

Surman's thorough investigation of his instrument's range makes for some lovely moments, but it's the fluid dynamic of Marshall's drumming and the glistening, sweetly melodic funk of Taylor's electric piano that offer the most pleasure here.

Things shift up a gear when the much missed (and under-recorded) Mike Osborne turns up. ... Lyrical, fiery and restless, his playing prods Marshall, Odgers and Taylor into animated four way conversation... Nice.

A must-have for anyone interested in 60's Brit jazz or the early days of fusion. Thank God for Cuneiform...

– Peter Marsh, *BBC: Music*, www.bbc.co.uk, June 7, 2005

“Cuneiform is a trusty US label that does a roaring trade in contemporary American jazz, and modern progressive rock. They’ve also cornered the market in re-releasing important and long-lost albums from the fertile late 60’s / early 70’s British Jazz scene, what some might call the ‘Golden Years of Brit-Jazz’. ... John Surman’s ‘Way Back When’ is an example of great music that has been buried for decades... ‘Way Back When’ will transport you directly back to late 1969 and the eve of the jazz-rock revolution. ... The electro-space jazz of Miles Davis’ ‘In A Silent Way’ is never far away...Surman flails on soprano sax with his customary boiling intensity. ... ‘Way Back When’ is invigorating, exuberant and alive to the possibilities of jazz integrating with rock, made at a time when those worlds were just beginning to collide. It’s a very welcome addition to Surman’s large discography and well worth tracking down. Thumbs up, Cuneiform. Keep digging!”

– Kami, “Golden Years Revisited”, *funhouse*, July 10, 2005

“...the tapes...make fascinating listening. Odges and Marshall straddle jazz and rock, sometimes sounding like a looser Jimi Hendrix rhythm section, or that of Soft Machine...

Surman and Taylor were already ahead of the pack in exploring sonic possibilities, especially texturally. ...Taylor could have slipped easily into a Miles Davis band of the era, while Surman was developing his own language and drama on soprano and baritone. ...”

– John Shand, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 17, 2005

“...John Surman has always been quite an explorer and has covered almost every style one could imagine.

This lost 1969 album sees John very much in a Soft Machine cum Nucleus, Canterbury meets jazz field, with a then virtually unknown but now veritable supergroup cast...it’s a fine album, and certainly worthy of release, helping to cement some long lost history together, as a missing link between many other projects.” – Alan Freeman, *Audion*, Issue #51, Spring 2006

“...hearing these 1969 sides, recorded and released only months apart from Davis' own aforementioned record, one can not only hear Mile's influence, but the more agitated sounds he would reveal a year or two down the line. ... *Way Back When* is an exemplary pre-fusion document, rugged and impassioned in a way that later crossover attempts lacked.

...Surman’s burly baritone work has outre tendencies that Davis would never have entertained. ...This group can whip up a propulsive frenzy as easily as they can ease back into the groove and steer the listener into more introspective territory. An essential document in the annals of electro-acoustic jazz, *Way Back When* is not only a must have for fans of the genre, but an exceptionally executed program of stirring late 1960's jazz. [4 stars]” – Troy Collins, *Junkmedia.org*, May 31, 2005

“Surman’s music comes from that late ‘60s nexus when hard-bop, the avant-garde, and progressive rock overlapped. *Now* features catchy melodies, crisp and punchy rhythms mixing swingin’ and rockin,’ and the shimmering, lyrical electric piano of John Taylor...along with Surman’s hearty, bittersweet soprano and lissome, churning baritone saxes. **Another thumbs-up.**” – *Primetime A&E*, June 2005

“...While many look to Miles Davis and his associates in the late ‘60s as the progenitors of jazz-rock fusion, the truth is that a wide range of artists were exploring the juncture of these two styles...Nucleus would emerge in ‘70 with the seminal *Elastic Rock*, and Soft Machine would make...*Third* the same year. However, a recently discovered recording by British saxophonist John Surman shows that the British jazz community had been melding jazz and rock at least a year earlier. ... While Taylor and Osborne get the opportunity to stretch out, **this is clearly Surman's date, with the leader taking the lion's share of the solo space. Even this early in Surman's career, it is clear that he had a distinctive voice on the baritone saxophone that extended its range beyond traditional limits, and a facile soprano approach that had some precedence in Coltrane but, for all of Surman's ability to create his own wall of sound, was more consistently lyrical.**

Way Back When fits comfortably within the Nucleus/Soft Machine purview, yet for all its similarities, remains distinctive through Surman's voice... ‘69 was also the year that Surman collaborated on John McLaughlin's classic debut, *Extrapolation*, and one wonders if, had *Way Back When* been released in its time, Surman would have been catapulted to greater fame in North America.”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, May 30, 2005

“Most listeners know John Surman for his spacious baritone and soprano saxophone work on around thirty ECM releases... The recently discovered *Way Back When* dates back to 1969... it’s...a snapshot in time back to the dawn of fusion. ...it's quite illuminating about his roots and entertaining in general.”

– Nils Jacobson, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 4, 2005

“...Surman...was a man on a mission. Breathing fire and brimstone, Surman puts his young improvising chops into tenth gear atop a gorgeous yet somewhat haunting primary theme that resurfaces repeatedly during the title track. ...A lust for newness and creativity sparks this highly listenable blast from the past. ... a joyous sense of reality.” – Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 17, 2005

“Britain in the sixties was a musical maelstrom. ...British musicians were beginning to cast their own voices and give the music new extensions in ideas and approaches. John Surman was one of them.

... Surman was to leave for Belgium... Before his departure, he called Brian Odgers, John Taylor, John Marshall, and Mike Osborne to lay down some tunes. ...the tapes were...forgotten. ...they have since been rediscovered... And that is something to be thankful for.

Surman shows amazing dexterity in exploring the range of the saxophone. He scoops the bottom and extends the upper register, the latter tearing in and escarping the monument he has constructed. He goes past the melody and returns in constant, if passing reference, dwelling on the theme in detail at the end of each dramatic path that he has set up. He is up front and centre, driven by the pulsating bass of Brian Odgers and the crisp, trenchant pulse of John Marshall on drums.

...the thing that drives the music and continues to give it a vital presence is the way the quintet cleaves in understanding. The recording is a rough mix, without cleanups and production niceties, but that does not diminish its impact. Matter of fact, it retains character.”

– Jerry D’Souza, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 2, 2005

“... Now refurbished and elucidated with song titles and a recording date, it provides insight to the influx of fusion in England and how quickly Brit jazzers had become their own players. ...hear Surman, Osborne, and Co. bidding farewell to an era.”

– Andrey Henkin, *All About Jazz & All About Jazz NY*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 2, 2005

“...In this 1969 version Surman is on fire, playing his soprano with singing, rubbery precision while John Taylor shows surprising ability at funky electric piano and Brian Odgers and John Marshall keep marvelous free-floating time. On the two other pieces Surman switches to baritone and is joined by one of Britain’s greatest saxophonists, Mike Osborne. ...

The majority of John Surman’s recordings are heavily structured so it’s really good to hear him in an informal blowing format for once. Mike Osborne blows so hard, it’s scary. ...” – Jerome Wilson, *Cadence*, November 2005

“The CODA Top Tens of 2005: Randal McIlroy... John Surman *Way Back When Cuneiform*” – CODA, Issue 325, Jan/Feb 2006

“...my year-end list for records released in 2005. ... 51. John Surman: *Way Back When (1969, Cuneiform)*” –Tom Hull, *TomHull.com*

“...fans of the British saxophonist would do well to pick up a copy.” – Derek Taylor, *Dusted*, www.dustedmagazine.com, June 9, 2005

“... This previously unreleased studio session captures John Surman in a period of transition. Surman was a rising star and innovator on baritone sax, featured on John McLaughlin’s *Extrapolation* sessions earlier that year. ...

With “Way Back When,” a four-part suite, Surman investigates then-current fusion influences with his soprano horn. Part 1 reflects the exotic sound of Miles Davis’ *In A Silent Way*, emphasizing John Taylor’s electric piano and John Marshall’s drum pulse. ... On Part 3, the interplay between soprano and Brian Odgers’ electric bass suggests parallels with Soft Machine (circa *Third*). Marshall...plays aggressively and relentlessly throughout.

... This enjoyable session will interest fans of Surman and the British scene of the time, and provides context for Surman’s later career.”

– Jon Andrews, *Downbeat*, Volume 72–Number 9, September 2005

“...I don’t know who resurrected this album but, bless them, it is well worth hearing as an example of the state of UK jazz or jazz rock at a time when many eyes and ears were focussed on Miles’ ‘In A Silent Way’. All the time phenomenally exciting sounds were emanating from players such as these. ... “

– Paul Donnelly, *Ejazznews.com*, May 26, 2005

“Long before ECM swallowed up saxophonist John Surman and...he actually recorded some great albums. Among these gems is *Way Back When*... The master tapes were thought to be long lost until 2003, when...they were found, which may have something to do with Toronto’s own Michael King... The album itself is a wonderful journey of discovery for those unfamiliar with Surman’s work prior to moving on up in the world of jazz. His signature swirling lines are present, mostly on alto, and the baritone howls are always very warm. ... Deep grooves and tightly executed solos make for an essential album...”

– Tom Sekowski, *Exclaim!*, September 2005

“Another intriguing document from way back in the form of a previously unreleased John Surman recording from 1969... the ambience...reminiscent of the Miles Davis band that made *In a Silent Way*.

... it’s John Warren’s eloquently languid *Owlshead*, for Surman’s baritone and Osborne’s alto, that grips the attention most, with the latter unfurling a solo of typical fluency over John Marshall’s crackling drums. As for the emphatic two-sax melody of *Out And About*, it hints at Surman’s distinctive 1970s sets for Decca/Deram... [3 stars]” – John Fordham, *Guardian Unlimited*, June 24, 2005

“... *Way Back When* is an early fusion album by British saxophonist John Surman. ... The music is a bit rough around the edges, but this is a generally exciting document of a time when the idea of integrating eclectic and acoustic instruments in an improvising ensemble was new and a fresh style was being simultaneously explored in the US and in England.” – Stuart Kremsky, *The IAJRC Journal* Vol. 40, No. 2. May 2007

“Despite a tough time at retail and major label cutbacks it’s been an unusually fertile year for new jazz albums that, as you can see from the choices of our writers, covers a refreshingly diverse range of artists both new and familiar. ...the continued reassessment and reissue of the trove of British jazz albums from the 1960s and 1970s, including many lost gems and half-forgotten curios, is to be applauded. ...

REISSUE/ARCHIVE...3. John Surman *Way Back When Cuneiform*” – Jon Newey, “Albums of 2005”, *Jazzwise*, Dec 2005 / January 2006

““What you are hearing accurately reflects the sound of the ‘60s.” That’s saxophonist John Surman on the long-lost jam session tapes just released as *Way Back When*. ...

Miles Davis’ moody electronic jazz had a big influence on what Surman and his sidemen were up to, but mid-‘60s hard bop figures just as strongly on this 1969 session. ...

The main attraction...is Surman, who sticks largely to the soprano horn and claims most of the solo space with his swirling, extended lines. ... This will...interest committed fans of the London scene and Surman’s music.” – Aaron Steinberg, *JazzTimes*

“...I have been rollicking for days because of the recent release of a long-lost LP-project from 1969. British saxophonist John Surman can be heard as a true inspirator... Anybody who likes the Miles Davis-classic ‘In A Silent Way’ should buy Surman’s ‘Way Back When’. ... A nice footnote from the early days of fusion (also called rockjazz or jazzrock back then), is the contribution of British musicians. Guitarist John McLaughlin and bassplayer Dave Holland were quickly ‘discovered’ by Miles, but no one would mark their influence on late sixties jazz music as being ‘British’. That will surely change with the emergence of John Surman’s new lost album as released on the Cuneiform label...”

– Remco Takken, *Kinda Muzik*, www.kindamuzik.net, July 2005

“...a nice blast from the past. Baritone saxophonist John Surman, all of 25 at the time...convened some of his friends for a session... the master tape went missing till recently. ... On Soprano sax, he careens on the first four tracks, creating a kind of suite that gives its title to this record. On the two longer tracks (with Osborne), Surman shows his extraordinary command of the bigger horn, clearly reaffirming his position as master of that axe. For that reason alone, this disc merits four stars...” – Marc Chénard, *La Scena Musicale*, July 2006

“...British jazz from the late 60s and early 70s is back in favor...labels such as BGO and Vocalion or “rescue missions” by the likes of Cuneiform thankfully have brought back this marvelous music.

One of the most exciting recent discoveries is this October 7, 1969 date by John Surman. ...Surman’s colleagues, pianist John Taylor, bassist Brian Odgers, and drummer John Marshall—and later,...alto saxophonist Mike Osborne—are in fine form on this mostly modal, electrified jazz journey.

... The session concludes with the uptempo “Out And About”, which looks to Surman’s future works. ...the band is on fire...

Arguably a relic of its era in terms of the overly modal vamps and sound colors, this is a must if you have any interest in this fertile period of UK jazz and the way that Surman used to play. Indeed, the results here are far and away from Surman’s safe location these days. Bravo, Cuneiform.” – Jay Collins, *One Final Note*, www.onefinalnote.com, August 8, 2005

“... To my ears, electric jazz with rock-based rhythm (okay, "fusion") has sounded more natural and, consequently, more invigorating coming from English musicians than in the American counterpart, primarily because there was a significant amount of cross-pollination between improvisers and rock musicians that did not occur when American jazz musicians "plugged in" and played Fillmore. ... Before heading to Belgium in late 1969...Surman met up with Mike Osborne, John Taylor, John Marshall and bassist Brian Odgers to record a session... Cuneiform has released this as *Way Back When*, a crucial puzzle-piece in Surman’s discography that shows him at the close of the 60s equally interested in electric jazz forms as he was (and is) free improvisation and orchestral arrangement. The title suite (re-recorded with John McLaughlin as “Glancing Backwards” for 1971’s *Where Fortune Smiles*, released on Dawn) is a jazz-rock masterpiece... thankfully these watershed recordings and the environment they represent are once again seeing the light of day.”

– Clifford Allen, *Paris Transatlantic Magazine*, www.paristransatlantic.com, July 2005

“Cuneiform’s combing of vaults, archives and collections for Brit Jazz rarities has yielded some real treasure...

Dating from 1969, *Way Back When* was Surman’s last session before he left the UK. ...this date with Marshall, pianist John Taylor and bassist Brian Odgers...is a prime example of how well a simmering Miles-inspired groove meshed with the English melodic lilt with which the saxophonist is closely identified. Still well within the long shadow of John Coltrane, Surman’s quicksilver soprano dominates the four-part title piece. On the final two tracks, Surman switches to baritone and goes heads-on with the explosive alto saxophonist Mike Osborne.”

– Bill Shoemaker, *Point of Departure*, www.pointofdeparture.org, Issue #2, November 2005

“...another strong release from the purveyors of avant-prog and jazz, Cuneiform Records. ...*Way Back When* is a sax and electric piano lovers dream, and something that should surely appeal to fans of Nucleus, Soft Machine, and Miles Davis. Surman is joined here by the legendary John Marshall on drums, who had yet to join Ian Carr’s Nucleus or the Soft Machine....

The opening four part tour-de-force "Way Back When" is fusion gem... Taylor lays down some gorgeous solos...recalling the best of Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, and Joe Zawinul. ... The CD ends with the pulsating yet symphonic jazz sounds of "Out and About"...that mixes classic be-bop with British jazz quite nicely. ... Marvelous stuff!

OK, I’m gushing a little, but this is seriously cool stuff. Kudos to Cuneiform for unearthing this long lost nugget of superb British jazz-rock. ... [4.5 stars]”

– Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, www.seaoftranquility.org, June 13, 2005

“This is quite a find: a lost October 1969 session led by the notable British reedman John Surman, with John Taylor on electric piano, Brian Odgers on electric bass, and John Marshall on drums. Mike Osborne plays alto sax on the last two cuts. Listening to this, it’s clear how fast Miles’ electric concept rocketed across the pond... Surman plays gripping soprano sax on the opening four-part title suite—the main melody of which appeared...as “Glancing Backwards” on John McLaughlin’s (actually Surman’s) *Where Fortune Smiles* LP. Here’s it’s mellower and more psychedelic... Surman describes *Way Back When* as a “jam session”... but it is remarkably coherent and well-realized. And despite the obvious late-‘60s sonic stamp, it has a certain timelessness. Lesser musicians couldn’t have pulled that off.”

– David Adler, *Signal to Noise*, Issue 39, Fall 2005

“... One has to hand it to the jazzers for being more truly underground,...more dedicated to the music per se – regardless of fame, fortune or fashion – than most rockers. ... So in 1969, while Woodstock...was...happening notably overground, major talents such as Surman (arguably the foremost baritone saxophonist in the world) jammed away in basements regardless, creating brilliant, absorbing, subtle music on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis. On 7th October of that year Surman, John Taylor, Brian Odgers, John Marshall...and Mike Osborne gathered... The tape-recordings...are now released unadulterated. It’s great music...mixing the subtle intensity of Coltrane-era jazz with the smoother fusion ambience that had just been presented to the world by Miles Davis’ *In A Silent Way*...” – Rychard Carrington, *Songbook #8*, Summer 2006

“The Beatles haircut and Sgt. Pepper mustache make him look even younger than he was; the electric bass and piano suggest they were thinking of fusion, but Surman goes elsewhere: his soprano sax on the title suite was completely distinctive, and his baritone sax on the balance goes places no one else imagined. A-” – Tom Hull, *Static Multimedia*, July 2005

“...John Surman, captured by the U.S. based Cuneiform Records on a marvelous new CD, “Way Back When”... It’s just the latest in a series of superlative British Jazz reissues...lost classics... Surman’s playing is testing the edges of “out there” but, unlike his different but equally rewarding playing on “How Many Clouds Can You See?” from a year or so earlier...lands more on the side of melody.”

– Johnny Nostalgia, *The Fold Bulletin*