

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 serves as an essential historical document as well as vital performance...

In his informative liner notes, Brian Morton asserts that Surman and his crew probably learned much of what they knew from records...the LP that quickly comes to mind is Coltrane's *AfricalBrass*. ...

The set closes with the title track, commencing with a raucous overlapping fanfare. Surman's bari sits down below and Osborne screeches on top...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 Stocktor, *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

“...Flashpoint...reveal[s] Surman's hard-bop roots. ...

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 like Surman's Western-tinged *Mayflower* an orchestral lushness. ...

Unsurprisingly, there's a post-Coltrane feel to much of the session – not just in Surman's scalding soprano solos, but also in the arrangements... That said, 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, blk-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. The yearning ‘Gratuliere’ could be an outtake from Oliver Nelson's enduring *Blues and the Abstract Truth* album. ...***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 NDR Jazz Workshop, ...put together programs that brought German musicians in contact with visiting American and British players. The German contingent in this tenet is represented by trombonist Erich Kleinschuster and pianist Fritz Pauer. ...

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...

...This...release comes with an accompanying DVD that 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. As jazz scholar Brian Morton explains in detailed booklet notes...the music that Surman and his contemporaries were playing at the time was...embraced in Europe...

...impressive line-up... As can be seen on the bonus DVD, the atmosphere in the recording studio is informal but disciplined, with Surman gently guiding the ensemble...and making verbal suggestions about some of the playing parts. The DVD portion gives a fly-on-the-wall account of the session... The opening Surman composition “*Mayflower*” breaks open with his expansive and joyful soprano saxophone solo, where he makes his mark as leader and principal player for the session. All involved are given the opportunity to flex their own creative...

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, *Dyverse 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. This time, it’s a 1969 broadcast, presented in audio and video, led by... John Surman. He fronts a 10-piece unit that represents the fruitful cross-pollination that was British jazz in those heady days. ... 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 – and all the others performed that April Day – is more traditional, crossing Coltrane modality with Mingusian arrangement. ... Special mention must be made of Miller’s player and of the way he interacts with the underappreciated drummer Alan Jackson/ They provide excellent support throughout, but each is also given a chance to shine. ... 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

“Saxophonist John Surman convened a 10-piece band... They headed off to Germany to play a concert which would be recorded and broadcast on NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk). ... **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** (Scott and Wheeler are the most conventionally swinging and boppish), **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, who erupts into squeals and smeared blurts. By contrast, Erich Kleinschuster plays a very straightforward solo...and Scott’s tenor sax solo is almost romantic... **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*, September 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.** This CD & DVD documents a complex five song performance by a complex aggregation of ten skilled musicians. Recorded in mono, the cream of the late sixties “Brit-jazz” was united with two equally adept Austrian band members. The set opens with a Coltrane-esque original composition, “Mayflower”. With a rhythm section... that recalls the early sixties Trane structure, Surman explodes on soprano with a blazing solo that is complicated in its Eastern motifs. ... hard bop piece (“Puzzle”) by trombonist Eric Kleinschuster has an improvisational feel as both he and Malcolm Griffiths solo with flair. ... The finale is an exploration of free form experimentation. ... **Despite the simple mono recording, 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... Released by Cuneiform as a double disc set, the CD contains the isolated audio tracks, while 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 some hand-picked musicians for the session, including two Austrians–pianist Fritz Pauer and trombonist Erich Kleinschuster, as well as British saxophonist Ronnie Scott. Surman’s regular collaborators at the time included saxophonists Alan Skidmore and Mike Osborne, trombonist Malcolm Griffiths, trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, South African bassist Harry Miller and drummer Alan Jackson – **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)”

“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...”

Five pieces... are solidly but energetically propelled by bassist Harry Miller and drummer Alan Jackson, and their frequently churning power... provides the perfect platform for a series of steaming solos from the saxophonists... and a gem of a solo from Wheeler (*‘Once Upon a Time’*), its poise, elegance and fluency rendering it worth the admission price alone.

Also of great interest is the influence of free jazz... Griffiths in particular bringing a blustering vigour... and the entire band occasionally indulging in brawling free-for-alls that complement the more structured playing perfectly. ... **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, and the between takes conversation among the musicians is kept brief enough to give a nice insight into the personalities at play... there is no presenter or voice-over to disturb proceedings...

The selection of the ensemble and the music they would perform was mostly Surman’s... he recalls that with the exceptions of the Vienna-based players Kleinschuster and Pauer, and of Ronnie Scott...the majority of the ensemble were familiar to one another. Kenny Wheeler was the other exception...Surman’s “special choice” for the date... Wheeler’s bold but somewhat plaintive tone helps to bridge the forceful playing of John Surman, Alan Skidmore and Mike Osborne with the more lyrical styles of Ronnie Scott and Erich Kleinschuster. ... Surman’s “Mayflower” is a great one to start with... a bright up-tempo kicker... The partnership of Jackson with ex-Blue Notes bassist Harry Miller is inspired... Together they switch effortlessly between passages played freely and passages in time with soloists. ... **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. ...

The Coltrane connection can also be heard 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...* Surman’s soprano solo is an incendiary combination of visceral trills and screams, but even its greatest extremes reflect the underlying pastoral melodism that distinguished Surman, even at this relatively early stage in his career. **With a ten-piece ensemble culled from the cream of the late-‘60s British jazz crop along with a couple of lesser-known German, 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...

The set list may be identical on the CD and DVD, but the black and white video stretches out another five minutes, Surman’s between-song discussion with his band mates revealing the saxophonist as a focused but relaxed and warm—and occasionally boisterously funny—bandleader. But **it’s the music and the combined solo firepower of Surman’s band that make *Flashpoint* such a treasure...** the leader’s closing baritone solo on the title track—a combination of expressionistic free play and frenetic swing that also features a fiery solo from Osborne—brings the show to a powerful close.

Surman continued to explode creatively in the next year, moving into electric territory with another Cuneiform rescue, 1969’s *Way Back When* (2005), and the formation of freewheeling The Trio...*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*