

Bio information: **JOHN SURMAN**

Title: **WAY BACK WHEN** (Cuneiform Rune 200)

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#### **FILE UNDER: JAZZ**

One of Europe's foremost jazz musicians, **John Surman** is a masterful improviser, composer, and multi-instrumentalist (baritone and soprano sax, bass clarinet, and synthesizers/electronics). For nearly 4 decades he has been a major force in Britain's jazz scene, producing a prodigious and startlingly creative body of work that expands beyond jazz, into rock, fusion, electronic, folk and even chamber and choral music. Surman's extensive discography numbers more than 130 recordings to date, including solo and group works, on **Island, Moers, Blue Note, ECM, RCA, Columbia, Deram**, and other labels. Surman has worked with dozens of prominent jazz and rock artists worldwide, including **John McLaughlin, Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath, Dave Holland, Graham Collier, Miroslav Vitous, Jack DeJohnette, Terje Rypdal, Karin Krog, Bill Frisell, Paul Motian** and many more. Surman is probably most popularly known for his longstanding association with the German label **ECM**, run by **Manfred Eicher**, who began releasing Surman's recordings in 1979. Surman has won numerous jazz polls and awards (BBC's 2002 'Instrumentalist of the Year', Wire Award, 1989 Bird Award), and a number of important commissions.

Born in **Tavistock**, England, Surman discovered music as a child, singing as soprano soloist in a Plymouth-area choir. He later bought a second-hand clarinet, took lessons from a Royal Marine Band clarinetist, and began playing traditional Dixieland jazz at local jazz clubs. Surman found his instrument of choice, however, when he discovered baritone sax. He recalled in an interview:

"When I was 16 or 17, I saw two saxophones in a music store, an alto and a baritone. They were both the same price, and I thought, "Wow, all that much more saxophone!" (Laughing) But I really liked the look of the instrument. It was a very old French instrument that had been reconditioned. So I gave it a try. I sort of worked my way down to low C and my whole body vibrated. It was pretty much my first sexual experience (Laughing)."

Surman attended the **London College of Music**, where he studied clarinet. In an interview with Tom Erdmann, he explained that "in those days, you weren't allowed to study the saxophone. It wasn't considered a legitimate choral instrument." Surman later learned to play synthesizers, and began incorporating them in his music by the mid-70s - a radical notion for jazz.

Early in his career - while still a teenager! - Surman was recognized as a world-class talent, the most innovative voice on baritone sax since **Gerry Mulligan** in early 50s. **The Penguin Guide to Jazz** credits Surman: "In the early 1960's, he had modernized baritone saxophone playing, giving an apparently cumbersome horn an agile grace that belied its daunting bulk and adding an upper register much beyond its notational range..." Surman lived in London during the 1960's and thrived in the exploding music scene. '60s London was the world's center of popular music, and Surman was a key figure in its core, working with dozens of notable jazz and rock musicians. First appearing on a 1966 **Peter Lemer** recording on **ESP**, Surman played with **Mike Westbrook, John McLaughlin, Dave Holland, Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath, Alexis Korner, Mike Gibbs** and many others, recording for such labels as **Deram, Polydor, EMI, Decca, Columbia** and more. He listened to everything, including **John Coltrane** and **Sonny Rollins**, and worked with scores of bands in London's melting pot, playing everything from free jazz to hard bop, mainstream jazz, blues, jazz rock, and South African township music.

By the end of the 60s, the British Jazz emerging from London was recognized world-wide as one of jazz's most vital and creative manifestations. In 1968, **Miles Davis** visited **Ronnie Scott's** and subsequently recruited two Surman collaborators, **Holland** and **McLaughlin**, for his American band. Surman's activities intensified; he appeared on at least 8 recordings, including a compilation live at Ronnie Scott's, and then played the '68 **Montreux Jazz Festival** with his **Octet**, winning its award for best soloist. He began recording solo albums, his first in '68 featuring pianist **John Taylor** and bassist Dave Holland; by 1974 he had released 7 on **Deram, Dawn, Futura** and **Island**. Surman would surpass these activities in 1969, his busiest year of the decade. He appeared on 11 recordings that year, including McLaughlin's *Extrapolation*, and began working as part of a new, Belgium-based unit called **The Trio**, which included American ex-pats **Barre Phillips** (bass) and **Stu Martin** (drums). The Trio would prove to be a watershed in Surman's career, launching his international profile.

Before leaving London to work with The Trio, Surman gathered a number of his musician friends for a jam session on Oct. 7<sup>th</sup> 1969 in **Tangerine Studios**, located in London's East End. With Surman on baritone and soprano saxes, and **John Marshall** on drums, **Brian Odgers** on electric bass, **Mike Osborne** on alto sax, and **John Taylor** on electric piano, the group performed works by Surman and by composer **John Warren**. The session would be Surman's farewell to 60's London; he moved shortly afterwards. The Trio became one of the most active and widely acclaimed jazz groups on the European circuit, and Surman subsequently embarked on other projects. Meanwhile, Tangerine Studios closed. The '69 tapes were lost and forgotten for decades.

When the 1969 tapes emerged, Surman and **Cuneiform** collaborated to release them as the CD, *Way Back When*. Surman noted:

"...we have resisted the temptation to reedit and remix the session, so what you are hearing accurately reflects the sound of the sixties. This is pretty much 'music in the raw' - but it certainly offers a genuine insight into some of the musical directions that were being explored at the end of that 'swinging' decade in the UK."

Spacious and atmospheric, the haunting music on *Way Back When* reflects the influence of **Miles Davis** provocative *In A Silent Way*, which had just been released. The Miles recording was the first to feature his new player, McLaughlin, who had long been Surman's collaborator (Surman played on McLaughlin's first release). A product of the vibrant 60's British jazz scene, *Way Back When* also hints at the fusion revolution to come. It shows Surman listening voraciously to a wide world of music, exploring far beyond the traditional boundaries of jazz and, on the way, finding his own unique voice.

**BAND BIOS:**  
**JOHN SURMAN & FRIENDS**  
**WAY BACK WHEN RECORDING SESSION AT TANGERINE STUDIOS, LONDON, 1969**

**John Marshall** (drums). One of the most renowned drummers in British jazz, Marshall became seriously involved with music while at **Reading University**, where he received an Honours degree in psychology. After serving as the drummer for **Alexis Kormer's Blues**, he played with the **Graham Collier Sextet** from 1965-1970 and with the **Mike Gibbs Orchestra** in the late 60s. Marshall joined **Nucleus** as a founding member (5 records) in 1969, leaving in 1971 to join the **Jack Bruce Group**. In 1972, he joined **Soft Machine**, recording 10 discs with the band. Marshall, a **Melody Maker Poll Winner** in 1972 and 1973, recorded with numerous artists in the 70s, including **Morning Glory** (w/ **John Surman**), **Hugh Hopper**, **Elton Dean**, **Volker Kriegel**, and **Charlie Mariano**. Marshall joined **Eberhard Weber's Colours** in 1977 (3 records). In the 80s and 90s Marshall worked with the **Gil Evans Orchestra**, **Ian Carr**, the **Kenny Wheeler's Quintet and Big Band**, **Graham Collier**, **John Surman**, and others. He has also performed with several classical groups, as well as working with such singers as **Sarah Vaughan**, **Leon Thomas**, **Norma Winstone**, **Annie Ross**, **Elained Delmar**, and **Karin Krog**. His personal activities include studio work, drum clinics, and lectures/teaching at workshops in Germany. Marshall's current bands include **John Surman Quartet**, **SoftWorks**, **John Etheridge Trio/Quartet**, and **Arild Andersen Trio**. Marshall has worked with scores of jazz and rock artists (including **The Crazy World of Arthur Brown**) in his career, and appeared on at least 100 recordings thus far, released on **Vertigo**, **CBS**, **Columbia**, **Deram**, **ECM**, **RCA**, **Cuneiform**, and other record labels.

**Brian Odgers** (bass guitar). Contributed on **Serge Gainsbourg's** "L'Homme a la Tete de Chou," **Roy Harper's** "Lifemask," and **Paul Millins'** "Dito".

**Mike Osborne** (saxophone). Has released 4 LPs: "Outback" on **Turtle/Future Music Records**, and "Bordercrossing," "All Night Long," and "Marcel's Muse" on **Ogun**. He is a member of the **London Jazz Composers' Orchestra Ensemble** where he plays the alto saxophone. He has recorded with various artists such as **Harry Beckett**, **Brotherhood of Breath**, **Rick Colbeck**, **Mike Cooper**, **Friendship Next of Kin**, **Michael Gibbs**, and **Jazz in Britain**.

**John Surman** (saxophone). [see front for pre-70s bio]. During the 1970s, Surman toured Japan in his long-standing duo with **Karin Krog**, as part of the European Down Beat poll winners' group. He released numerous albums, both solo and with groups, working with **Terje Rypdal**, **John Taylor**, **Barre Phillips**, and others, while continuing other longtime collaborations. Surman worked with **Trio SOS** (w/ **Alan Skidmore** and **Mike Osborn**); expanded **The Trio** into a quartet called **Mumps**; and began a long-term collaboration w dancer **Carolyn Carlson** at the Paris Opera. 1979 marked his first solo recording with **ECM**, beginning a long and fruitful relationship that continues to the present day. Surman continued to work with Krog in the 80s and 90s, and toured and recorded with such artists as **Miroslav Vitous**, **Paul Bley**, **Gil Evans**, **The Per Husby Orcheatra**, the 10-piece **Brass Project** (with **John Marshall**, **Chris Laurence**, composer **Warren** and others), and many more. Besides touring and recording widely, Surham received numerous commissions during the 90's. He composed a soundtrack to the 1920's silent film, "The Grandmothers," on commission from the **Leicester Film and Video Festival**; composed a piece for the **Sadler Wells Royal Ballet**; and wrote numerous works performed by new music, chamber and choral groups; and composed for theatre and TV. Surman remains a formidable force in the world of jazz today, continuing to produce significant work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since 2000, he has released 2 solo albums and two collaborative projects with Jack DeJohnette on **ECM**, as well as working with **Spring Heel Jack**, and **Christine Collister**. Recently serving as 'Composer in Association' with the **Sarum Chamber Orchestra**, Surman has written several orchestral pieces premiered in Salisbury UK in 2003 and 2004. [For more information, see Surman's website at [www.johnsurman.com](http://www.johnsurman.com)]

**John Taylor** (piano). Taylor first came to attention on the London jazz scene in 1969 playing with **John Surman** and **Alan Skidmore**. In 1970 he appeared on a recording with **Graham Collier**. He played and recorded in the early 70s with numerous artists, including **Jan Gabarak**, **Mike Westbrook**, **Norma Winstone**, **Volker Kriegel**, singer **Cleo Laine**, and the group **Morning Glory** (w/ Surman and others), and became a member of the **Ronnie Scott Quintet**. In 1977, he formed **Azimuth**, a trio with **Norma Winstone** and **Kenny Wheeler** which recorded on **ECM**. During the 1980s, Taylor worked with such artists as **Soft Machine**, **Lee Konitz**, **Enrico Rava**, **Miroslav Vitous**, **Kenny Wheeler**, and **David Sylvian**. The '90s saw Taylor working with **Ben Harper**, **Peter Erskine**, **Ian Carr**, **Lary Coryell**, and numerous others. The professor of jazz piano at **Cologne College of Music** since 1993, Taylor is currently a member of the **Kenny Wheeler Quartet**. In recent years, Taylor has recorded with **Maria Pia De Vito**, **Ralph Towner**, **David Sylvian** and others. In 2002, his composition, "The Green Man Suite," received the **BBC Jazz Award** for 'Best New Work'. Taylor has released several solo CDs and has appeared on numerous recordings with others. He has released 7 albums on labels such as **Turtle Records**, **Jazz House Records**, and **Sentemo**.