

CALLUM AU BIG BAND: BIOGRAPHY

The Callum Au Big Band is a young, up-and-coming 18-piece big band, led by musical director Callum Au, and featuring many of the rising stars of the UK jazz scene. Since its formation in 2009, the band has been fortunate enough to perform with some of the finest jazz musicians in the world as guest soloists, including trombonist Mark Nightingale and saxophonist Nigel Hitchcock. It has performed in many of the top London jazz clubs, and has put on theatre shows in Oxford.

The band frequently performs original compositions and arrangements specially written by Callum and other band members, including Tommy Laurence, Simon Marsh, Freddie Gavita, Emma Smith, and Tom Walsh. Influenced by writers such as Duke Ellington, Bill Holman, Bob Florence, Laurence Cottle, and Nelson Riddle, as well as classical composers Richard Strauss, Igor Stravinsky, and Claude Debussy, the band creates its own distinctive and original sound by laying down contemporary grooves and harmonies, while respecting the classic building-blocks of the tradition.

Between them, the band's members have performed with artists including the BBC Big Band, the Ronnie Scott's Jazz Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and Guy Barker; and have played in locations as diverse as the Royal Albert Hall, the North Sea Jazz Festival, and the Lincoln Centre, New York.

The band's most recent project is Callum Au's West Side Story Suite: a six-movement extended work based on some of the most famous melodies from Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story. It functions as a single continuous suite of music, and features many of the band's soloists, including a series of extended solo piano cadenzas from Yamaha Prize recipient and band member Chris Eldred. Recent public outings of this suite include performances in various London jazz venues and a concert at Cadogan Hall as part of the Out to Lunch Festival. We are currently planning a collaborative project with the London Arts Orchestra which will feature this suite along with the Bernstein original; and some new commissions based around the concepts explored in the musical.

In November 2012, the band will be recording its debut album at Angel Studios, entitled Something's Coming. This will feature the band's West Side Story Suite as well as original commissions from Gareth Lockrane, Freddie Gavita, and Callum Au; and guest artists Emma Smith (voice), Anthony Strong (voice), Nigel Hitchcock (saxophones), and Gareth Lockrane (flutes); set for an early 2013 release.

Next summer, we plan to tour the UK, using this album as a springboard and starting point with which to approach festivals and larger venues. On the tour, the band will perform the West Side Story Suite in its entirety, as well as a full set of new commissions from other band members and UK jazz greats. By featuring modern big band arrangements of music as well-known and loved as West Side Story, juxtaposed alongside a series of original commissions, we aim both to raise the profile of the band and to attract an audience to big band jazz who would otherwise perhaps not have been aware of its existence. We want to provide music that is hip, modern and accessible to the widest possible audience, and bring the big band genre into the 21st Century, while still respecting the great big band tradition.