

THE PRESS

Preview: Blackford's Clarinet Concerto, St Olave's Church, Marygate, York, January 17

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By Charles Hutchinson



Mark Crooks

TWENTY one years ago, York composer Dick Blackford wrote his Clarinet Concerto expressly for York Sixth Form College pupil Mark Crooks to perform.

Now established on the London and international jazz scene, Mark has taken up an invitation to play Blackford's work once more as the guest soloist at tomorrow's concert by the Academy of St Olave's at St Olave's Church, Marygate, York.

"Dick was head of music at the Sixth Form College and I guess Mark was an outstanding player," says the Academy's publicist, John Hastie. "He must have been, because the solo part is pretty challenging.

"Dick has always been good at exploiting situations like this and creating excellent opportunities for youngsters. Now, 21 years later, Mark – who has become a highly regarded jazz man – is willing to return to York and play this dazzling piece. It's a great tribute to Dick."

Mark studied clarinet at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music after winning the Young Jazz Player of the Year competition in 1991. Since leaving college, he has worked in a variety of musical settings, including classical work, sessions and concert performances on both clarinet and saxophone.

However, his real love is jazz clarinet, as expressed in appearances at clubs and festivals all over Europe, not least residencies at Ronnie Scott's and the Pizza Express Jazz Club in London.

In 2007, Mark was the clarinet soloist with fellow York old boy James Langton's Solid Senders Orchestra for two performances of the music of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw at the National Concert Hall in Dublin. These sold-out concerts led in turn to Mark's participation in the London premiere of Artie Shaw With Strings at the Cadogan Hall last September, and he will reunite with Langton's Solid Senders on February 26 for another Goodman evening at the same London hall. He is a member of the John Wilson Orchestra and Back To Basie Orchestra and has recorded three CDs with his own quintet. *I Won't Dance* and *How My Heart Sings* were followed by last September's release of *After You've Gone*, with a line-up of Crooks, on clarinet or tenor sax, Colin Oxley on guitar, John Pearce on piano, Dave Chamberlain on bass and Matt Skelton on drums.

At tomorrow's 8pm concert, Blackford's Clarinet Concerto will be complemented by Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture and Kurt Weill's "fantastic, little known but really gripping" Symphony No 2.

- Tickets cost £9, concessions £8, and are available from the concert secretary on 01904 644528 or on the door.

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