

## Brecon Jazz Festival



### **STROLLING PLAYERS: Bass player Paula Gardiner talks to Penny Simpson about the highs and lows of performing at the internationally acclaimed Brecon Jazz Festival.**

For musicians worldwide, the Brecon Jazz Festival has become a byword for a good time.

It's not just the fact that quality performances are assured year after year - many of them exclusive, one-off gigs - it's also the impromptu networking that goes on in just about every nook and cranny of the small Georgian market town that has paid host to the festival for the past 15 years.

Paula Gardiner is one of Wales' foremost jazz musicians and composers. The Brecon Jazz Festival is, she admits, a "highlight" in her calendar, and she always writes new material for the event.

"What makes Brecon different from so many other festivals on the circuit is the sheer range of events going on at any one time. There might be traditional jazz playing in an open-air venue, whilst down the road, in a hotel, something more experimental can be heard.

"It's busy and hectic, with events going on night and day, in contrast to other festivals where there might be a series of concerts booked consecutively over a week with not much else going on besides.

"The downside is trying to get from gig to gig, because of the huge crowds and the amount of traffic. I only once got a parking ticket, but I wrote away explaining I was playing in a concert in the festival, including a map showing my venue, and my fine was waived!"

Paula, a classically trained guitarist from the Welsh College of Music and Drama, has appeared regularly at Brecon both with her own band and as a member of rhythm sections for international guest artistes.

"It's a brilliant and nerve wracking learning curve," she explains.

"The soloist might turn up just hours before the gig, after flying in from New York, or wherever, and there's just one rehearsal in a hotel garden, say, before going on stage and performing. They might have a chart to help you, more often than not, it's a case of finding common ground. You have to concentrate really hard on gearing yourself to their style."

Over the years, Paula has met with many jazz musicians she has admired - she has even exchanged CD's with them having just brought out her first recording. She has also built up a strong following with the Stroller crowd - owners of the

special tickets admitting festival goers to some 60 performances in a variety of venues. Another 32 shows feature in the Main Concert Programme and they are ticketed separately.

Unlike die-hard festival goers, Paula opts to commute to festival gigs from her home in New Tredegar. Along with the 50,000 other people attending the festival each year, she has her favourite venues:

"The Castle Hotel is always good to play," she adds, "but we've also appeared at The Captain's Walk, which sounds picturesque, but is actually a bandstand in a car park.

"One of my best memories is playing on the open-air bandstand in the High Street in 198. There was an incredible atmosphere and as you looked down the High Street, all you could see was a huge swaying crowd!"

*\* The Brecon Jazz Festival takes place each year in the second weekend of August, close the heart of the spectacular Brecon Beacon National Park.*

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