

Jazz man is going back to the basics

Old standards on a new instrument

Award-winning jazz virtuoso Tony Kofi will be mastering a new songbook – and a new instrument – at the Hideaway on Friday. Ahead of the gig he chatted to Soundcheck's Rob Garratt

Name: Tony Kofi
Website: www.myspace.com/tonykofi
Band: Rod Youngs (drums); Trevor Watkins (piano); Larry Bartley (bass)
Live: Saturday, March 12 at Hideaway, SW16 2BF



TONY Kofi could so easily have ended up a carpenter. Working on a building site when he was 16, a freak accident resulted in him plummeting three floors. When he landed he ended up in a coma he might never have woken up from.

But when he came around three days later, he had one simple demand – a saxophone.

Tony said: "On the way down I thought, 'This is it.'"

"Everything went into slow motion and I was seeing all these images of me doing things I'd never done – travelling the world, having a child, achieving awards – and playing the saxophone.

"When I woke up I thought 'I'm here for a reason'. I quit my job and bought a saxophone."

That was 30 years ago, and despite having been kicked out of his high school music department, he learned by ear from old LPs, eventually earning a scholarship to the prestigious US jazz haven the Berklee College of Music.

Since that pivotal decision Tony has led a life in jazz, picking up numerous awards and playing with some huge names along the way, including Courtney Pine, Andrew Hill,

Donald Byrd and Abdullah Ibrahim, as well as becoming one of a handful of Brits to join the World Saxophone Quartet.

Kofi's own recordings include 2004's debut *All Is Know*, a tribute to jazz great Thelonious Monk, prepared after a decade's careful study of the maestro's music.

His studies climaxed with a six-hour marathon of all 70 of Monk's compositions, performed at the London Jazz Festival in both 2003 and 2007.

"When I first heard Monk I didn't like it, it didn't make sense," said Tony.

"But I wanted to know why, and the more I investigated the more I wanted to play his music."

Meanwhile Tony's second album, *Future Passed*, released in 2006, pitted his searing sax alongside a soulful organ trio, while the classic-sounding *The Quiet Truth* – inspired by his son's terrifying premature birth – earned him the best instrumentalist title at the prestigious 2008 BBC Jazz awards.



NOT YOUR STANDARD: Tony Kofi

But continuing to evolve, for Saturday's Hideaway gig the alto and soprano player will embrace a whole new challenge – the tenor saxophone, an instrument he learned last year in a manic two-month rush ahead of a New York recording session with jazz legend Ornette Coleman.

As well as a new instrument, Tony will be approaching a whole new set of material,

leaving behind his own compelling compositions to focus on the standards songbook for the first time.

"A lot of people know me playing my own stuff, or Monk," he said.

"But standards are how I learnt to play and I'm paying homage to the music that got me here in the first place.

"2011 is the year I will show people a very different side to my playing."



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