

JOE STILGOE

BIOGRAPHY



“Not since Oscar Peterson’s halcyon days have I heard a Jazz piano player who could be compared to such a great artist in both technique and inspiration”
– Sir John Dankworth

Joe Stilgoe is a serious musician having fun. His singing, piano playing and sense of humour have made him a favourite at the UK’s top jazz clubs, where he regularly plays with his dynamic young trio. But he has had to work hard to make it all look so easy.

His formidable piano technique (described by jazz singer Ian Shaw as “a cross between Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans and Les Dawson”) and vocal range (described as “wonderful” by New York cabaret legend Steve Ross) stem from a classical training starting when he was five.

His parents, both professional musicians, spotted his talent at the piano and encouraged him, with partial success, to practise. Sometimes bribes were used. Through his father, songwriter Richard Stilgoe, he began to learn and love the songs that made Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Mel Torme and Harry Connick Jr. (all strong influences) famous. From his mother, opera singer Annabel Hunt, he learnt the discipline and understanding needed to tackle a career in music.

Following University, a year playing on cruise ships ensured that Joe learnt every song in every key while nobody listened. Back on shore, he played with anyone who’d take him, from backing a drag artist in Bournemouth to playing Christmas carols for a firm of lawyers three weeks after Christmas. In his spare time Joe has performed as Christ in the St John Passion, written two orchestral pieces performed at the Festival Hall, run a funk band, played drums in a pantomime, arranged and transcribed music books for Diana Krall and Jamie Cullum, worked as a session singer and pianist, and been fired half way through a West End show. He spent two years as singer and pianist with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and has also played most of the hotels and bars around London. At the Dorchester, playing Liberace’s mirrored piano with Tony Bennett watching at the next door table, the King of Malaysia asked Joe to play ‘Misty’ for him. Joe forgot the tune halfway through. Tony Bennett walked out. Hundreds of weddings, parties and even a couple of funerals provided an opportunity for more people not to listen.

Except that some people did listen. One cruise ship passenger invited Joe to play some dates in New York, earning rave reviews: “Many a musician twice his age might listen with a mix of admiration and envy”, Peter Levy, Cabaret Scenes NY. His friends pushed him to get up and sing at a jam session where he was spotted, earning him his first London date at Pizza On The Park.

Joe is now playing everywhere, and everyone is listening.

Joe has appeared at Ronnie Scott’s, the Royal Festival Hall, the 606 club, Pizza Express Jazz Club, the Barbican, Chelsea Festival, City Of London Festival, Henley Festival, Sardinia Jazz Festival, Montreux Jazz Festival, Dubai jazz Festival and in jazz clubs from New York to Berlin to Milan. He has appeared twice on Radio 2’s Friday Night Is Music Night, on Radio 2’s Live From The Stables, and on Parkinson’s Sunday Supplement programme. His debut album ‘I LIKE THIS ONE’ is out in October this year on Candid Records. The album will be launched in conjunction with three dates in the famous Ronnie Scotts club in London.

Joe has drawn comparisons with singer/pianists such as Nat King Cole, Harry Connick Jr, Buddy Greco and former Candid artist Jamie Cullum, but soon more people will discover Joe Stilgoe in his own right and relish the chance to listen to a serious musician having fun.

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