



Modern Jazz at The Deer's Leap 1963

Feb 1963 – Bill Le Sage, swaying gently, engrossed in the rhythmic complications of his music, filled the hall with his own inimitable brand of jazz music. Behind him grouped on the tiny stage, the Swinging Shepherds with their polished backing quietly followed in his footsteps, stopping from time to time as Le Sage swung into a series of bewildering yet perfectly acceptable improvisations, wresting from the fans spontaneous bursts of applause. This was Monday night in The Deer's Leap, Penhill, and Swindon's centre of modern jazz, Club Moderne, already assured of at least a minor place in the history of modern jazz in the West Country, was packed. Its members not only drawn from Swindon but from towns and villages nearby and including a few confirmed modernists from Bristol, the club is fast becoming known to the country's leading exponents as appreciative and discriminating in the extreme. Modern jazz, whose biggest stars included trumpeter Miles Davis and pianist Thelonious Monk, was a more complex form of jazz than the more dance-oriented styles which had gone before and had a very dedicated following. Club Moderne was often packed out. The first Swindon club for those followers was Club 60, which had been founded by local musician Henry Francome, known professionally as Paul Henry, who subsequently moved on to more dance oriented orchestral jazz. The Swinging Shepherds were led by piano player Graham Sheppard, who told our reporter, "I suppose my interest really began with my first job, when I could afford to buy jazz records and go to jazz concerts at the Albert Hall. It has just grown since then – from trad I turned to modern jazz, and I get a lot of enjoyment from listening to a really good musician working through a series of improvisations."

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