

## Phil Robson – Musician | Composer | Educator



### An introduction:

Winner of ‘**Jazz CD of The Year**’ in the 2015 **Parliamentary Jazz Awards** for Partisans – ‘Swamp’.

Winner of ‘**Jazz Musician of The Year**’ in the 2009 **Parliamentary Jazz Awards**

*“Phil Robson’s music, on a first hearing, always gives me that feeling I haven’t yet heard right the way through it to the other side. Yes, there are moments of beauty, external allure, yes there is variety. But there is also a depth which brings one back wanting to revisit, to hear more and more...unmissable.”* **londonjazznews.com**

Multi award-winning guitarist Phil Robson is internationally regarded as a highly versatile and creative player who appears in all kinds of diverse settings, as well as being an acclaimed bandleader and composer. A large cross section of influences is apparent in the mix of Robson’s playing and writing, but the end result has created an individual voice that prompted US sax legend, **David Liebman** (ex-Miles Davis, Elvin Jones etc) to say- *“Phil is a wonderful guitarist and composer, definitely a unique player. We had a ball and hopefully I will be able to play with Phil again.”*

UK born Robson was an integral part of the London and wider European music scene for many years. He relocated to New York City in 2015 where he lived for 5 years before making the beautiful countryside of Northwest Roscommon, Ireland his home in March 2020.

### Projects as a band leader/composer:

**2023** – In this year, Robson began to do concerts around Ireland in various formats with the great Derry Based Tenor Saxophonist **Meilana Gillard**. There will be more to come!

**2023** – **IRIS** – Robson was selected to take part in Music Network’s ‘**RESONATE**’ series as artist in residence at the Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny, Ireland. For this, he formed a multiple genre, cross art form collaboration, inspired by ideas of deconstruction, fragmentation and a shared love of improvisation. Using both music and video, the project featured pianist **Izumi Kimura** & visual artist **Jaki Irvine**. <https://youtu.be/WprN02N7M4?feature=shared>

**2022** – **Portrait in Extreme** – Robson self-produced and recorded a project of all new original compositions and sonic soundscapes for an **EP/Album** released in March 2022 on **Lyte Records**. It features Phil on all guitars, electric bass, electronics (Ableton Live Suite 11), voice and lyrics, along with drum loops provided by **David Lytle** and a guest appearance on two tracks by **Christine Tobin**. It was enabled by a grant from the Arts Council of Ireland Music bursary grant.

<https://www.jazzwise.com/reviews/review?slug=phil-robson-portrait-in-extreme>

**2018 - 2022 – Robson/Levy Quartet** - This collaboration with NYC saxophonist/composer **Jed Levy** was initially formed in NYC to tour Europe in Nov 2018. The band since toured California including the legendary venue Yoshi's, plus sold out shows in Birdland, Smalls, The 55 Bar in NYC plus Barcelona, Berlin, London, Rome and in 2022 toured Ireland with additional gigs in the UK and Germany. The other core NYC members are **Clarence Penn** drums & **Peter Slavov** bass and the European incarnation of the band featured Italian drum legend **Roberto Gatto** and great UK bassist **Dave Whitford** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VlwvUJyvlg>

**2014 – ongoing - The Phil Robson Organ Trio** with **Ross Stanley** Hammond B3 & **Gene Calderazzo** drums which released their album, 'The Cut Off Point' in 2015 to critical acclaim.

<https://www.allaboutjazz.com/the-cut-off-point-phil-robson-whirlwind-recordings-ltd-review-by-roger-farbey>

**2010 - 2013 - The Immeasurable Code Quintet** with **Mark Turner, Gareth Lockrane, Michael Janisch, Ernesto Simpson**. 'The Immeasurable Code' CD released 2012.

<https://philrobson-whirlwind.bandcamp.com/album/the-immeasurable-code>

**2009 -2010 - Phil Robson Quartet** featuring US sax legend **David Liebman, Jeff Williams** and **Dave Whitford**. Two major UK tours plus several **BBC** radio broadcasts.

<https://londonjazznews.com/2009/04/30/review-dave-liebman-and-phil-robson-vortex/>

**2007- 2008 - Six Strings & The Beat** – with **Peter Herbert** – Bass, **Gene Calderazzo** – drums, **Emma Smith** – violin, **Jennymay Logan** – violin, **Naomi Fairhurst** – viola, **Kate Shortt** – cello. The band released an album of the same name in 2008 for **Babel Label**.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/may/09/jazz.johnfordham1>

**2001 - 2003 - Phil Robson Trio 2** – with US drum legend **Billy Hart** and **James Genus**, bass. The band released an album '**Screenwash**' on the Babel Label in 2003.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/apr/03/jazz.johnfordham>

**1998 -2002 - Phil Robson Trio 1** with **Dave Whitford** bass & **Asaf Sirkis** drums. Robson released his first solo album 'Impish' with this trio + special guest pianist **John Taylor**.

<https://babel-label.bandcamp.com/album/impish>

**1997 Phil Robson Octet** with **Jason Yarde, Julian Siegel, Christine Tobin, Karen Street, Thebe Lipere, Gene Calderazzo & Steve Watts**. UK touring + writing commissions.

**1996 -2019 - Co leader of** the cult London based band '**Partisans**' with **Julian Siegel** which featured **Gene Calderazzo** drums & **Thaddeus Kelly** bass which was described by The Times as the "*Godfathers of the ferocious 'post-jazz' UK groups*". They toured extensively over a period of 23 years, releasing 6 celebrated albums!

<https://www.allaboutjazz.com/partisans-never-the-same-way-twice-partisans-by-john-kelman>

**1995 – ongoing** - long term collaborator with musical & life partner, **Christine Tobin**, the Irish vocalist/composer whose groundbreaking, multi-award-winning approach to music is internationally acclaimed. <http://www.christinetobin.org>

With Tobin, Robson co-devised & co-curated a highly successful, concert series called '**Tobin's Run on 51**' at the **Irish Arts Center** in **NYC**. Each show has a theme related to the socio-political history of jazz such as 'Rip, Rig & Panic', 'Village Vibes & Chasin' the Trane' etc and featured some of the finest musicians based in NY such as **Steve Wilson, Ingrid Jensen, Kate McGarry, Billy Drummond, Dana Stephens, Dave Binney, Peter Washington, Janis Siegel, David O'Rourke** and many more. These mixed media events included film clips, talks from guest speakers such as **Ashley Kahn**, audio clips, slideshows and much more. This was considered a unique format within the musical landscape of NYC and beyond.

<https://irishartscenter.org/event/tobins-run-on-51-night-dreamer>

## **Musical Education:**

Attended and completed the post graduate jazz studies and performance course at the **Guildhall School of Music and Drama** 1988-89, being the youngest person to do so at the time. The course became the modern MA course in later years.

**2002 -2012 The BBC Big Band** - Phil was the regular guitarist for 10 years, during which he worked with world renowned visiting musical directors, soloists & vocalists.

**As a freelance guitarist** - Robson worked with: **Nikki Iles and the NDR Big Band, Kenny Wheeler, Barbra Streisand, Big Jon Patton, Charles Earland, Steve Lacy, Georgie Fame, Michael McDonald, Ingrid Jenson, Phil Woods, Lalo Shiffron, Mike Gibbs, Bob Brookmeyer, Django Bates, Donny McCaslin, Mike Figgis (film director), Steve Wilson, Sir John Dankworth, Dame Cleo Laine, Kurt Elling, John Williams (guitarist), Joe Lovano, Patti Austin, Maceo Parker, Brian Byrne, Amy Winehouse, Vince Mendoza, Maceo Parker, Paul Muldoon (poet), Wayne Krantz, Eliane Elias, Francesco Turrisi, Bugge Wessletoft, Amit Chaudhuri (author/musician), Lennie Niehaus, Liam Noble, Jiggs Whigham, Michael Janisch, Julian Argüelles** etc, etc. Was a regular band member with **Jeff Williams, Alec Dankworth** & more recently with **Peter Leitch's 'New Life Orchestra'**.

<https://www.chicagojazzmagazine.com/post/cd-review-peter-leitch-new-life>

**Recording Artist:** Phil Robson has recorded 6 acclaimed solo & 6 co-led albums, some of which were for the groundbreaking indie label '**Babel**' ([www.babellabel.co.uk](http://www.babellabel.co.uk)) and more recently for the UK/USA label '**Whirlwind recordings Ltd**' ([www.whirlwindrecordings.com](http://www.whirlwindrecordings.com)) and '**Lyte Records**', as well as appearing on many other labels as a guest player and producer with diverse artists.

## **As an Educator:**

**1990 – 1997** Visiting guitar teacher in various London secondary schools & community centres.

**1997- 2015** Jazz guitar teacher at both '**The Royal Academy of Music**' and '**Trinity Laban College Of Music**' in London. Robson is still a visiting teacher in these institutions.

**2010- current day** - Visiting jazz guitar teacher at '**The Guildhall School of Music and Drama**' in London.

**2006-12** Jazz guitar teacher at the '**Birmingham Conservatoire of Music**'. **External examiner** between **2021-2023**

Robson presented workshops in South Africa, India, Sudan, China, Bulgaria, USA, Germany and in many other countries as part of tours, festivals & often for organisations such as the **British Council, The Irish Arts Center NYC, Music Network** etc.

He taught on many jazz summer schools, both in the UK & beyond, e.g. **Chelmsford Jazz Summer** school (10 years), The **Dordogne Jazz Summer School** in France (3 years), The **European Jazz Academy**' in Germany 2012. In 2008 Phil was requested to coach the German youth big band BUJAZZO in Berlin at their summer school. In 2017, he gave masterclasses and performances with students of the **Bruckner University** in Linz, Austria. In Nov 2018, 2019, and again in 2022, he presented masterclasses and guitar lessons at **Kunstuniversität Graz** where he also performed with **Julian Argüelles** and other members of the faculty and students. He was an external examiner at **Leeds College of Music** for 7 years and at **Birmingham Conservatoire** in both 2021& 2022. In New York City he was a visiting teacher for the **Jazz Standard's** 'Jazz for Kids' program and presented workshops for both the **Irish Arts Center NYC** and **Bronx Arts Ensemble**. In 2022 Phil was both a tutor and performer in the '**Sligo Jazz Project**' **summer school/jazz festival** in Ireland. On behalf of Music Network In September 2022, he ran a series of workshops and classes in the community of Castlerea, County Roscommon for participants aged

55 and over, as he had done similarly in the Bronx, NYC. Robson produced 2 tuition videos for **'Mike's Masterclasses'** <http://bit.ly/2opYDfC>

#### **Awards:**

2015 **'ARAM'** Phil was elected to be 'Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy of Music' which is a highly prestigious award given for services to that Conservatoire.

2015 Winner of **'Jazz CD Of The Year'** in the 2015 **Parliamentary Jazz Awards** for the Partisans album, 'Swamp'.

2009 **Parliamentary Jazz Award** for **'Jazz Musician of the year.'**

1998 **Perrier Young Jazz Award** for the **'Best Instrumentalist Of The Year'.**

1997 **British Telecom Awards-** **'Best Soloist Of The Year'.**

#### **Nominations:**

2015 Parliamentary Jazz Awards. Partisans were nominated for 'Jazz Ensemble Of The Year & Phil was also nominated for 'Jazz Instrumentalist Of The Year'.

2013 Phil was nominated for a Jazz FM award for 'Best Instrumentalist Of The Year'

2012 'The Immeasurable Code' CD was nominated & shortlisted for both the 'Parliamentary Jazz Awards' for 'Best CD' & also in 2012 for a 'London Award for Art & Performance'

2013 Phil was nominated for a Jazz FM award for 'Best Instrumentalist Of The Year'.

2009 'Six Strings & The Beat' CD was nominated & shortlisted for a 'Parliamentary Jazz Award' for 'Jazz CD of the year'.

2008 Partisans were nominated for 'Best Ensemble' in the Parliamentary Jazz Awards.

2008 Partisans 'Max' CD was nominated for 'Album Of The Year' in the 'BBC Jazz Awards'.

#### **Important Albums:**

Phil Robson, 'Portrait in Extreme' with Phil Robson guitars/bass/Abelton 11 and guests David Lyttle (drum loops) and Christine Tobin (voice). Released on Lyte Records, March 2022.

Phil Robson, 'The Cut Off Point', organ trio with Ross Stanley & Gene Calderazzo. 2015 WR4672 Whirlwind Recordings Ltd.

Phil Robson, 'The Immeasurable Code' - 2011, WR4620 Whirlwind Recordings Ltd.

Phil Robson, 'Six Strings & The Beat' - BDV2876 released July 2008

Phil Robson, 'Screenwash' BDV2445 (NYC Sept 2003, B Hart, M Copland, J Genus).

Phil Robson, 'Impish' - BDV 2235 - (featuring John Taylor, Dave Whitford, Asaf Sirkis)

Partisans, 'Swamp' - 2014 WR4657 Whirlwind Recordings Ltd.

Partisans, 'By Proxy' - Babel BDV 2983. Released June 2009

Partisans, 'Max'- BDV2553 - Released April, 2005.

Partisans, 'Sourpuss' BDV 2029

Julian Siegel & Phil Robson, 'Partisans' EFZ 1021

Christine Tobin – Returning Weather. Released in 2022 on 'Trail Belle' records. As well as playing on the album, Robson also mixed and produced it.

Christine Tobin - PELT. Released in 2016 on 'Trail Belle' records.

Christine Tobin - 'A Thousand Kisses Deep' Released 2014 on 'Trail Belle' records.

Christine Tobin - 'Sailing To Byzantium' Released on 'Trail Belle', July 2012.

Christine Tobin, 'Secret Life Of A Girl' BDV2875. Released July 2008.

Christine Tobins 'Romance & Revolution' - BDV2455 Released Oct 2004.

Christine Tobin 'You Draw The Line' BDV2327

Christine Tobin 'Deep Song' - BDV 2028. (Recorded in NYC featuring Mark Turner, Billy Hart).

Christine Tobin 'House of Women' - BDV 9820

Christine Tobin 'Yell of the Gazelle' - BDV 9613

Christine Tobin 'Aililiu' - BDV 9501

Liam Noble 'Romance amongst the fishes' Basho SRCD13-2

Alec Dankworth - 'If You're Passing By' Candid CCD 79773 released 2003

Alec Dankworth - 'Spanish Accents' - Basho SRCD 21-2 released July 2008.

Hans Koller. London Ear featuring Steve Lacy. Robson was co-producer as well as playing on 2 tracks.

Paul Booth, 'Pathways' - Pathway Records.

Paul Booth 'Trilateral' - Pathway Records

Michael Janisch, 'Purpose Built' - Whirlwind Recordings LTD.

It's testament to Robson's ability as an accompanist alone that **'Universal'** called him to join **Barbra Streisand** for her world exclusive on **Jonathan Ross** (2009). Being invited to join the **BBC Big Band** illustrates his great skill as a studio musician. He represented his country internationally for organisations such as **'The British Council'** (South Africa, India, Bulgaria, China, Sudan), **'Jazz Ahead'** (Germany), **Jazz Services LTD** (he was selected 3 times to perform at the **Xerox Rochester International jazz festival** in NY state, which included presenting a workshop at the legendary **Eastman College**) & has performed at many other of the world's great festivals & venues such as **'Berlin Jazz Festival'**, **'Montreal International Jazz Festival'**, **Monterey Jazz Festival**, **'The North Sea Jazz Festival'** in Holland, **Tempere 'Jazz Happening'** in Finland, **Manaus Jazz Festival** in Brazil, **Birdland, Smalls, Ronnie Scott's, Yoshi's, Love Supreme, Cork Jazz Festival, Vancouver Jazz Festival** etc.

**As composer** Robson was commissioned many times to write music & put new creative projects together by such organisations as the **BBC, Derby Jazz, Birmingham jazz** etc.

#### **Press & other quotes:**

*"His first album in the organ trio format – with Hammond organist Ross Stanley and drummer Gene Calderazzo – is certainly rooted in that noble tradition, but there is also a darker, more contemporary edge to this powerful new trio, and on a set of his own compositions (with one Dave Liebman cover), the guitarist – egged on by his two creative, ever-attentive companions – proves himself a fearless experimenter, capable of striking out into the unknown and finding new textures in a classic format."* **The Irish Times Newspaper**, \*\*\*\* review of **'The Cut Off Point'**.

*"Phil Robson's inventiveness on the guitar is unstoppable..."* **The Telegraph Newspaper**

*"Robson performs impeccably throughout, whether he's contributing chordal washes in support of Lockrane or Turner, or taking the spotlight for some intricate, fluid solos of his own."*

**AllAboutJazz review of 'The Immeasurable Code'**.

*"Phil Robson is one of the best guitar players in the world today. His musical ideas flow continually and with a seamless logic. His technique is flawless and is in service to his fertile imagination. One of my favorites and a source of inspiration! Don't miss an opportunity to hear this modern giant!!"*

**Peter Bernstein** (USA guitar star)

*"based in London, Robson is a top-class soloist but is also capable of remarkably sophisticated writing for string quartet, voice and rhythm section."*

**From the Evening Standard Newspaper \*\*\*\* review of '6 Strings & The Beat'**

*"Those who look for substance in the maturing Brit Jazz renaissance need look no further than this many textured outing which reveals Robson not only as guitarist, but even more pertinently as an accomplished writer. The roots for this music go deep...this is music to return to time and again."*

**Jazzwise Magazine \*\*\*\* review of 'The Immeasurable Code'**

*"Partisans were the highlight of the festival, jazz that makes you blink in its glare"*

**The Guardian Newspaper**, Re a 'Partisans' performance at Cheltenham Jazz festival in 2003.

*“One of the most exciting all-star experimental groups in Jazz today” BBC Radio 3 ‘Jazz Line Up’ RE ‘Partisans’*

To watch videos please see <https://rb.gy/otsh54> and hear audio visit <https://soundcloud.com/phil-robson>

## **Early Background**

Phil Robson grew up in Derby in the East Midlands, UK. He became interested in rock music and took up the guitar at the age of 10. Jazz was never far away however as Phil’s father, Trevor Robson, was a superb semi- pro clarinetist & a popular figure on the local mainstream & traditional jazz scene. Phil’s mother, Janet, although not a musician herself, has a fine imagination and natural ear for music, & encouraged the budding musician. Phil rapidly made progress on his instrument, taking a few classes in classical guitar and other one off lessons, but was largely self-taught until around the age of 14.

By an act of fortune or fate, they came across a small guitar shop in Burton Upon Trent, owned by **John Richards**. John is a highly renowned session musician & guitarist who, at the time, was the house guitarist at the ‘Royal Shakespeare Company’ in Stratford Upon Avon & Phil began to study with him on a regular basis over the next couple of years. John encouraged a great knowledge of many styles & skills & immeasurable progress was made in this period. This era coincided with Phil’s discovery of the music of Miles Davis, Charlie Parker & Barney Kessel (the latter whom Richards had himself studied with) in his father’s record collection, which had a profound impact on him whilst simultaneously still loving Black Sabbath, Zep & Jimi Hendrix. In a short time, Phil had begun to sit in on Trevor’s gigs.

The final piece of the jigsaw slotted into place on discovery of ‘Brownes’ Jazz club run by Geoff Wright of ‘Derby Jazz’. This was a thoroughly ‘modern’ jazz club & it enabled Phil to see the vanguard of visiting London bands such as Django Bates, Clark Tracey, Maggie Nichols & great South African influenced bands such as District 6.

By the age of 15/16, Phil was regularly playing Sunday lunchtime slots with ‘Sonus 4’, his father’s band & was beginning to play regularly at ‘Brownes’ notably duetting with **John Etheridge** & **Dave Cliff** plus a formative gig with **Bheki Mseleku**.

Phil attended Derby’s ‘Wilmorton College Of Further Education’ between 1986- 88. Although still continuing to develop & play gigs, that period was as much about investigating all aspects of life, but then, at the age 18, Phil moved to London to attend The Guildhall School Of Music & Drama, being the youngest person to ever do the post-grad jazz course at the time. The course was only for 1 year so, on leaving, Robson jumped straight into the deep end & has remained a professional musician since that time, being based in London for many years before spending time on the fabulous Kent coast before moving to NYC in 2015.

The first few years of being a London pro musician were scattered, but Phil played part time with the ‘**National Youth Jazz Orchestra**’ where significantly he met long time musical friend & future co- leader of Partisans, Julian Siegel, as well as many others including sadly departed drummer Chris Dagley. Siegel & Robson moved into a ‘jazz monastery’ in East Ham around 1990, a house full of musicians where they played and checked out music day & night, much to the great tolerance of the neighbours!

Phil then played in a a punk/funk/rock band called ‘**Nimlet**’ for a couple of years with incredible, maverick singer & keyboard player, **Alex Lewis**, which was very influential in the further broadening of Robson’s sonic palette & concept of time.

Importantly, around the same time, Phil became associated with the original ‘**Vortex Jazz Club**’

in Stoke Newington, Hackney, playing with many ex- 'Loose Tubes' musicians such as **Julian Arguelles** & **Steve Buckley**, which led to later gigs with **Django Bates**' '**Delightful Precipice**'.

The Vortex went on to be a seminal part of Phil's musical life in the 90's and 'Partisans' could not have been formed without the club's 'open' musical policy, as well as being a factor in beginning a long time partnership with the great singer/songwriter, **Christine Tobin**. After a brief period living in Bow in East London, Robson went on to move to Stoke Newington, where he lived for many years. The N16 area is multi cultural, bristling with creativity of all sorts, & was particularly so in that period, when so many great musicians & artists were living there before the next decade's gentrification process kicked in.