



Bio information: **JOHN SURMAN**

Title: **FLASHPOINTS AND UNDERCURRENTS** (Cuneiform Rune 515/516)

Format: CD / DIGITAL

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: **JAZZ**

John Surman - soprano and baritone saxophone, bass clarinet

Alan Skidmore - tenor saxophone and flute

Ronnie Scott - tenor saxophone

Mike Osborne - alto saxophone

Malcolm Griffiths - trombone

Erich Kleinschuster - trombone

Kenny Wheeler - trumpet and flugelhorn

Fritz Pauer - piano

Harry Miller - bass

Alan Jackson - drums

Recorded April 18, 1969 in Hamburg, Germany

Recently celebrating his 80th birthday and one of Europe's foremost jazz musicians, **John Surman** is a masterful improviser, composer, and multi-instrumentalist (baritone and soprano sax, bass clarinet, and synthesizers/electronics). For nearly 60 years, he has been a major force, producing a prodigious and creative body of work that expands beyond jazz. Surman's extensive discography as a leader and a side man numbers more than 100 recordings to date and has featured dozens of prominent artists worldwide. Surman is most popularly known for his longstanding association with the German label **ECM**, who began releasing Surman's recordings in 1979. Every period of his career is filled with highlights, which is why Cuneiform is exceedingly pleased to release for the first time ever this amazing document of the late 60s 'Brit-jazz' scene.

Born in **Tavistock**, in England, Surman discovered music as a child, singing as soprano soloist in a Plymouth-area choir. He later bought a second-hand clarinet, took lessons from a Royal Marine Band clarinetist, and began playing traditional Dixieland jazz at local jazz clubs. Surman found his instrument of choice, however, when he discovered baritone sax. He recalled in an interview:

“When I was 16 or 1, I saw two saxophones in a music store, an alto and a baritone. They were both the same price, and I thought, “Wow, all that much more saxophone!” (Laughing) But I really liked the look of the instrument. It was a very old French instrument that had been reconditioned. So I gave it a try. I sort of worked my way down to low C and my whole body vibrated. It was pretty much my first sexual experience (Laughing).”

Surman attended the **London College of Music**, where he studied clarinet. In an interview with Tom Erdmann, he explained that “in those days, you weren't allowed to study the saxophone. It wasn't considered a legitimate choral instrument.” Surman later learned to play synthesizers, and began incorporating them in his music by the mid-70s - a radical notion for jazz.

Even early in his career, Surman was recognized as a world-class talent, the most innovative voice on baritone sax since **Gerry Mulligan** in early 50s. Surman lived in London during the 1960's and thrived in the exploding music scene. '60s London was the world's center of popular music, and Surman was a key figure in its core, working with dozens of notable jazz and rock musicians. First appearing on record on a 1966 **Peter Lemer** recording on **ESP**, during the 60s, Surman played with **Mike Westbrook**, **John McLaughlin**, **Dave Holland**, **Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath**, **Alexis Korner**, **Mike Gibbs** and many others. He listened to everything and worked with scores of bands in London's melting pot, playing everything from free jazz to hard bop, mainstream jazz, blues, the then-emerging jazz rock, and South African township music.

By the end of the 60s, the British Jazz emerging from London was recognized world-wide as one of jazz's most vital and creative manifestations. In 1968, **Miles Davis** visited **Ronnie Scott's** and subsequently recruited two Surman collaborators, **Holland** and **McLaughlin**, for his American band. Surman's activities intensified; he appeared on at least 8 recordings, including a compilation live at Ronnie Scott's, and then played the '68 **Montreux Jazz Festival** with his **Octet**, winning its award for best soloist. He began recording solo albums, his first in '68 featuring pianist **John Taylor** and bassist Dave Holland. Surman would surpass these activities in 1969, his busiest year of the decade. He appeared on 11 recordings that year, including McLaughlin's **Extrapolation**, and by the end of the year, he left England to begin working as part of a new, Belgium-based unit called **The Trio**, which would prove to be a watershed in Surman's career, launching his international profile.

At the time of the recording released here, Surman had just finished recording his second album as a leader, *How Many Clouds Can You See*, so **Flashpoints and Undercurrents** is a unique chance to get an expanded view of his formative work as a leader and also at the early work of his musical compatriots who appear with him here. For this occasion, Surman led a ten-piece ensemble featuring the cream of modern British jazz players as well as two Austrian musicians.

What's doubly valuable about this release is that it contains a large amount of pieces never recorded elsewhere. High quality audio recordings from these musicians from this period are quite rare. Captured in excellent stereo sound, this release is an exceptional and hugely important document that will blow the minds of Brit-jazz fans and will open the ears, eyes and minds of those who don't know the great and distinctive work of these fine musicians!