

## Teesdale u3a – Monthly Meeting – July 2023

Roger Browne was the speaker at the July meeting of Teesdale u3a. Music has always been an important part of Roger's life from when he gave his first public performance at the age of 4 in his home town of Salford, singing songs from the hit film of the day, 'The Al Jolson Story'. He said that he retired from singing at the tender age of eight although his subsequent career indicates that he revived it and singing was a major part of his musical career. He developed a passion for the musical theatre and particularly the subject of his talk, 'The Great American Songbook'. Since then he has composed, written and performed with some of the well known jazz musicians of the day. Currently he is a pianist with the Manchester Jazz Band.



The 'Great American Songbook', was music composed between the two world wars and Roger covered gospel, blues, ragtime, jazz and music from the shows. He was also able to put the music into its historic setting. For example, at the end of performances of the musical, Showboat, written by Jerome Kern, it was reported that audiences were walking out in silence as they became aware of the cruel conditions that slaves were working under. The last line of Old Man River ' I am tired of living but afraid of dying' is very appropriate.

Cole Porter was another of Roger's favourite composers. Following a challenge, the composer wrote 'Miss Otis regrets she is unable to lunch with you today madam'. Roger played and sang the whole song very moving, describing how, following a betrayal, Miss Otis took her revenge and eventually her life. Roger had particular praise for the contribution made by lesser known composers and arrangers, particularly Robert Russell Bennett, well known for his orchestration of many well known Broadway and Hollywood musicals.

Roger finished with another of his favourites, George Gershwin, a prolific composer who died at the young age of 38. As a tribute, Roger gave a brilliant keyboard rendition of just a fraction of Gershwin's music.

This was an extremely uplifting performance which left the audience in a very positive frame of mind. There were lots of happy smiling faces leaving the hall. The next meeting will be held on 24th August when Veronica Bird OBE will be speaking on 'From Prison to Palace'.

Ian Reid  
29/07/2023