**The Blowout Sax:~ 'Playing The Dream Machine.'**

**The Idea**

The saxophone -- the look, the sound. It's the one musical instrument that everyone recognises as sexy and the one that everyone loves, but it's also something most people don't know much about. The goal of this programme grows out of The Blowout Sax ethos which is to make the sax accessible to everyone.

The Blowout Saxophone School in Bath is the only music schools in Europe dedicated solely to the saxophone. The film follows the School’s charismatic director, Marc Archer, 'the greatest saxophone teacher in the world,' as he teaches an individual celebrity the Blowout Sax method.

Mark’s method is revolutionary and effective so that in a very short space of time the student will be playing to a high standard using the *Blowout Sax Teaching Book*. *The Book* teaches the student how to play without having to read musical notation through its step-by-step method illustrated with humorous cartoons and practical advice.

Part of the programme will show Marc and his celebrity student meeting those who played famous sax solos and talking through the stories and the music of the *Sax Madmen* who lived before them. The whole series will climax with the celebrity playing a glorious pop sax solo in the middle of a live gig with fellow Blowout saxophone students performing on stage before a large supportive audience.

Within the Blowout Sax –Playing The Dream Machine Series.

1 The Sax Factor

The first of six programmes will focus a selected celebrity who are committed to learning the sax and who are open, extrovert personalities unafraid of having their lessons televised.

Possible candidates might include say, Ian Wright who said in his autobiography *Mr Wright* that playing the tenor saxophone ‘was a way of just easing off the pace a bit…when I get my alto I’ll get back into the swing of the sax’. Other possible celebrity sax players might include the likes of Davina McCall who possesses a fine singing voice.

The episodes would take the celebrity from their opening notes on the ‘dream machine’ to playing the glory solos and tunes unbelievably quickly. Simultaneously we can weave interesting pieces of information about the celebrity’s career into the programme. By the end of the final episode the students are performing in a gig with a live band in front of a paying audience.

2. The Story of the Other Adolphe – Adolphe Sax.

Within an early episode we tell the unbelievable but true story of the mad Belgian genius who invented the saxophone. Using a comical style of historical drama this episode will show how Adolphe Sax overcame huge obstacles (not least assassination attempts by Parisian instrument makers) to impose his peculiar musical vision on the world.

3. Spine-tingling Sax Solos.

Crucially within this series Marc Archer and his celebrity student will track down the creators of the famous sax solos and ask them about their musical creations. This can run on into a loose jam including the celebrity and we can weave in a live gig/recording session. The top tunes are included in *Blowout The Best Pop Sax Of All Time* book.

Saxophonists to meet and interview might include:

Candy Dulfer to talk about ‘Lily was here’

Plas Johnson to talk about ‘Pink Panther’

Lee ‘Bix’ Thompson to talk about ‘One step beyond’

Stuart Matthewman to talk about ‘Mr Cool saxman' with Sade,

Maceo Parker to talk about working with the late Great James Brown.

4  *Sax Madmen*: Legends of the Horn

 From the book *Blowout Sax Madmen* tales can be woven of the famous 'cutting contest' between ‘President’ Lester Young and ‘The Godfather of the sax’ Coleman Hawkins in Kansas City.

The maddest and baddest man on the planet with his 'beautiful sound,' Stan Getz.

The 'dry martini' pure sound and wit of Paul Desmond.

And from the *Blowout King Of Soulsax* book the triumphant King Curtis.

**Mr R. R. and the Mystery of Baker Street**

The saxophone solo on ‘Baker Street’ is probably the most famous to adorn a chart-topping pop song. Yet the biography of the musician who created this mini-masterpiece and inspired millions to a love of the saxophone is still largely a mystery.

Out of curiosity I searched YouTube to find some back-story to the Baker Street phenomenon but the only available material I could discover was a six minute interview with the saxophonist and a few tracks of scarcely memorable note.

Who is the man responsible for this legendary piece of pop history? Well, here are a few facts: his name was Raphael Ravenscroft. He was paid £27.50 for the session and the cheque for that sum bounced. An annoyance made more distressing by the fact that, in contrast, the song earned singer Rafferty £80,000 a year in royalties – royalties in which Ravenscroft had no share.

In a television interview in 2011, Ravenscroft admitted that his own performance annoyed him. ‘I'm irritated because it's out of tune,’ he said. ‘Yeah, it's flat. By enough of a degree that it irritates me at best.’

Hugh Burns the guitarist has scored movies like *Die Another Day* and *The Hobbit*, and has played on sessions with the likes of Paul McCartney, Michael Jackson, Jack Bruce, and George Michael throughout his career. He is also responsible for the blistering guitar solo on *Baker Street* and considers working with Gerry Rafferty one of his career’s great honours.

Burns was performing on the road with Jack Bruce in 1978 when he made arrangements to visit the London studio where Rafferty’s album *City to City* was being recorded. ‘I went to the studio after I played the gig and I think one of the first songs we played was *Baker Street.* And I said, ‘This is fantastic. This is a great song.’

During my interview with him, Burns confirmed that Rafferty composed the famous riff in *Baker Street*. After Burns had recorded his solo Rafferty asked him to ‘have a go at what obviously became very famous, which was the sax line.’

Burns tried the riff out on guitar but the two men agreed that it would be better on the saxophone. ‘That’s the way I always saw it,’ he remembers Rafferty telling him at the time.

‘It’s important to say that in the case of the instrumental introduction to *Baker Street* it was entirely Gerry’s line,’ declared Burns. He also referenced the demo, explaining that it was Rafferty himself playing the line on guitar. Then, in an almost offhand way, Burns offered this in an aside:

‘Strangely enough, on another record that I played on, which was a massive hit, certainly in this country and I think in America as well, called *Careless Whisper,* that also had a massive opening solo. And the interesting thing is that that sax solo, the line itself, was also given by the singer [George Michael].’

It seems evident enough then – Rafferty came up with the sax riff. But depending on whom you ask, myths surrounding *Baker Street* don’t quite give way to historical fact. For decades in the UK it was widely believed that Bob Holness, the buttoned-up British gameshow host, had actually performed the saxophone solo in *Baker Street.*

For its own part, Rafferty’s hit has been covered by a diversity of musicians, ranging from Waylon Jennings and the London Symphony Orchestra, to Lisa Simpson, the Foo Fighters and Rick Springfield. It’s Springfield’s failure to make a glam-rock rendition of the song sufficiently compelling that helps to highlight the allure of the unconventionality of *Baker Street* – a song ultimately about depression, transition, and weary aspiration.

When Burns was asked why he thought *Baker Street* is still popular nearly 40 years after its release he said that ‘firstly, Rafferty wrote from his experience. So what you get is someone’s heartfelt experience and you put that into the lyric and into the song. The lyric and the melody fuse beautifully and the lyric is complemented by the melody. The music itself – the orchestration, so to speak – complements the lyric in a perfect way.’

Burns also nodded to the song’s unusual structure, which he compared in its unorthodox nature, to Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody*:

‘It’s not just opening, verse, chorus,’ he said. ‘It doesn’t do that. It goes through a little kind of journey, it takes you through a journey and so, in some sense, it’s a very complete composition, which is unusual for popular music at that time. People weren’t quite used to that.’

For his part, Raphael Ravenscroft maintained in his interview that ‘my speciality is tonality. I learnt from Hendrix solos therefore producing a sound not heard before.’

Ravenscroft went on to become the session man in the 80s and worked with icons such as Pink Floyd, John Lennon Tina Turner Abba and Marvin Gaye on but on what songs? Can we hear them?

More recently worked as a session musician for artists Daft Punk and Duffy.

Again on what - love to hear them?

In 1990 Ravenscroft, also a former tutor of music at York College, published an instruction book, The Complete Saxophone Player. And he produced a set of teaching books (show mine) I didn’t use.

In 2011, he recorded a commemorative tribute to Rafferty called Forgiveness, which combined his saxophone playing with the voices of Grammy-nominated choir Tenebrae. That also sounds amazing is there any footage of this? And why Forgiveness - because he made all the money and took the acclaim?

A personal tale is: He played *Fool On The Hill* on sax with my late Great partner Gypie Mayo of Dr Feelgood Yardbirds game.

Scarlett Raven, Ravenscroft's daughter and a contemporary artist, said it was ‘incredible’ to see how many people her father had inspired.

She added: ‘He is an absolutely incredible man. You could tell from the way he played that he put his heart and soul into his music. He touched your soul and made you want to better yourself. I think he was very proud of *Baker Street* and that it made people feel good. I'm sure a lot of people will put on Baker Street and smile today.’

The Bakes Street Sax Phenomenon continues to inspire new players: We can incorporate the live footage of blowout sax students playing.

It’s my quest is to discover whether Ravenscroft’s saxophone skills produced any other amazing gems which may, perhaps, be languishing in forgotten session recordings. Or whether he was, like Wes McGoogan on *Will You*, limited to one fine performance.

Other questions bother me. What was Ravenscroft’s personal history in music? How did he learn the saxophone? Where? Who were his favourite players and what were his favourite saxophone recordings? What kind of character was he? Was he eccentric, as many sax players are? Did he compose? Ravenscroft’s stepson Tom mentioned a recording with Paul Oakenfold in Ibiza. Who owns these recordings?

So the idea of this programme is to find out more about this sax man from his Wife Nicola Ravenscroft and Scarlett and any students.