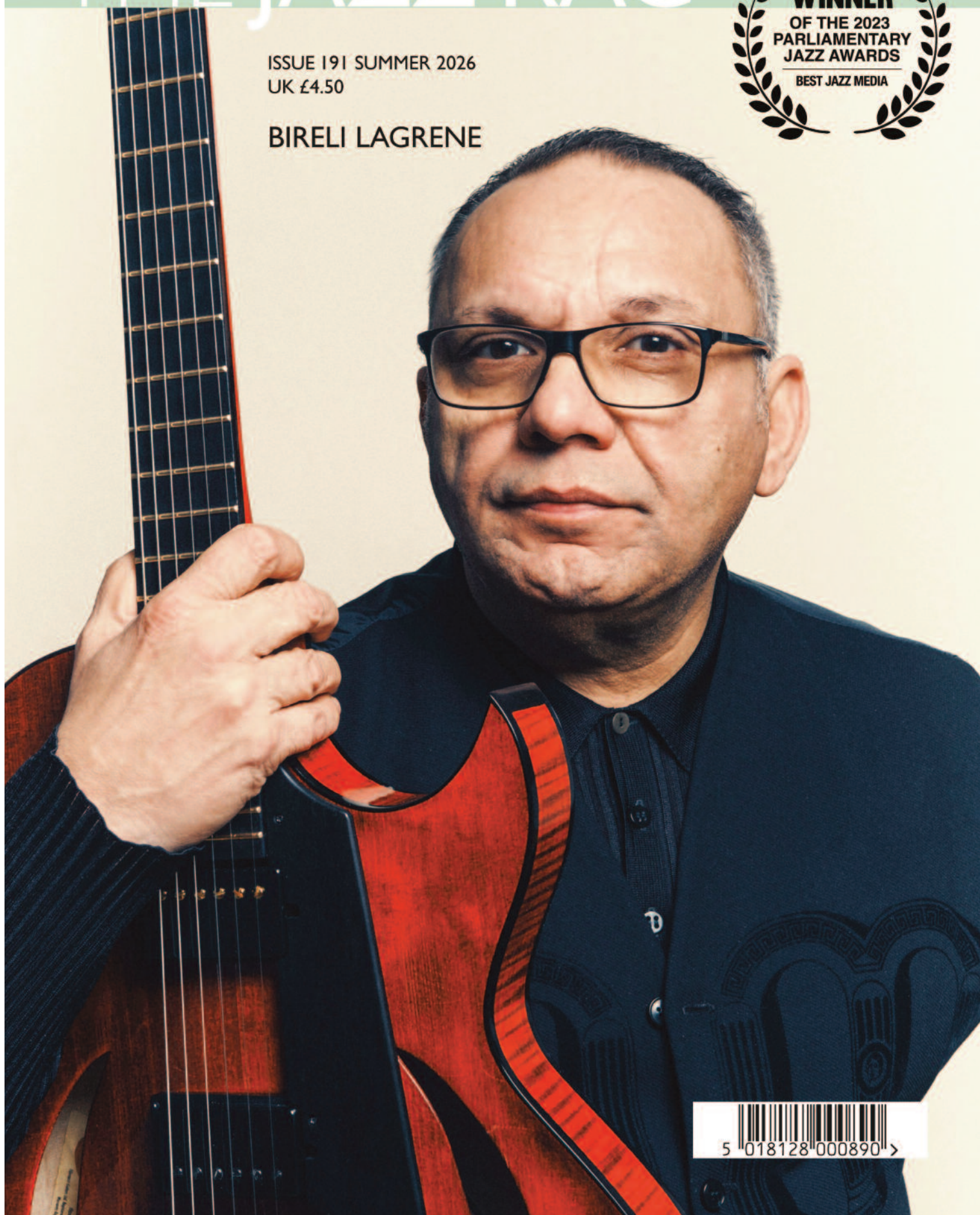


THE JAZZ RAG

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BIRELI LAGRENE





BIRELI LAGRENE, guitar virtuoso, discusses his most recent album, *Elegant People*, and the BL6, the guitar especially designed for him by Fibonacci Guitars (pages 8-9)

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UPFRONT

In this issue we pay tribute to three jazzmen, all in their nineties, who died recently. The life of Sonny Rollins, the man who grew into his famed album title *Saxophone Colossus*, is sensitively charted by Alan Barnes, and Chris Biscoe, who worked for him in many bands, explores the work of pioneer composer/arranger/bandleader Mike Westbrook.

And that leaves Abdullah Ibrahim. Born Adolphus Brand in apartheid-era South Africa, he earned the nickname 'Dollar' because of his devotion to all things American. He was possibly the most eminent of a generation of South African musicians to make his name in the West. That name he changed again to Abdullah Ibrahim as he developed a unique piano style that owed as much to the customs and geography of his homeland as to his heroes, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk.

Scott Yanow's annual survey of musicians born a century previously contains an increasing number who reach 100, notably Marshall Allen, still in charge of the Sun Ra Arkestra. So let us welcome the great Buddy Guy into his nineties – July 30, his birthday, has been renamed Buddy Guy Day at the Birmingham Jazz and Blues Festival.

BIRELI LAGRENE QUARTET

ELEGANT PEOPLE

Pec Wee Records PW 1021:
\$2.34

In his latest recording with his quartet Bireli Lagrene demonstrates how much wider is his range than the gypsy jazz with which he made his name. Jean-Yves Jung on piano, William Brunard (bass) and drummer Raphael Pannier provide a perfectly integrated setting for his harmonic and melodic ducking and diving.

The opening track, *Elegant People*, proves a bold re-working of the Weather Report tune. The CD begins with an explosion of guitar artistry backed by the hard-edged drums of Pannier. Lagrene leaves us in no doubt about his prodigious fluency and Jung offsets this with a dynamic piano solo. The pace doesn't drop on *Flair* either, a re-working of *Giant Steps*, with Pannier again to the fore, displaying instinctive understanding with his leader.

It comes as a surprise after these high-powered tracks to find two successive tracks where delicacy prevails over power: *A Time for Love* – otherworldly guitar sound elaborating on the melody – and, best of all, *My Foolish Heart*, a beautiful statement of the great melody followed by a sensitive solo from Brunard on bass. This mood then disappears from the album until the last track, the unexpected choice of Gilbert O'Sullivan's *Clair*, where Lagrene's improvisations lead us deeper into the melody before the track finishes in the same cheerful mood as in the opening, with Lagrene now singing along.

For myself I particularly enjoyed *New Blues*, Lagrene and Pannier uncompromisingly powerful, and *W. 48th Street*, with its appealing melody brought out with admirable clarity by the whole group.

RON SIMPSON



Fibonacci Guitars

For The Serious Guitar Player

Bireli Lagrene



New Album Out Now!