

Tributes to jazz man John Hughes



Haunting homegrown jazz filled Telford Crematorium as family and friends crowded to pay tribute to John Hughes, founder and musical director of [Walsall Jazz Orchestra](#).

John's funeral, on Monday (15 April), saw more than a hundred people, many fellow musicians, WJO members, proteges and pupils past and present, gather to say goodbye to the much-loved music man.

He died peacefully on Monday 18th March, at home with his wife and daughters at his side, after a brave eight-year battle with cancer. He was 78.

WJO recordings were the soundtrack to a day of stories, laughter and tears, which John had helped to plan, along with his wife of almost 60 years, Jeanne, and daughters Penny and Sue.

As John wished, the Tim Amann xTet, long-time WJO members, played at the wake, joined on stage by WJO alumni including trumpeter Duncan McKay and bassist Trevor Lines.

Born and bred in Chuckery, Walsall, John and Jeanne later moved to Shropshire, living in Apley Castle, Telford.

He fell in love with jazz in his teens, when he heard records at a friend's house - Dizzy Gillespie's The Champ, Woody Herman's Wild Root, Stan Kenton's Hammersmith Riff and Charlie Parker's Cool Blues.

In an [interview with journalist Peter Bacon](#), John said: "I was just blown away. From having no interest whatsoever I wanted to go out and buy every record I could get my hands on..."

"My friends wanted to buy instruments so I did too. One bought a trumpet, the other a saxophone and they said what we needed was a trombonist. I did a paper round to earn the money to buy a trombone."

He spent the rest of his life performing and teaching across the region and Walsall Jazz Orchestra was born in 1975 at Queen Mary's Girls High School, John's first teaching job. Their reputation grew in the Midlands and further afield, winning the BBC Big Band competition, playing three times at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland and touring the USA and Poland.

WJO marked its 40th anniversary in March 2015 with a show at Birmingham's CBSO Centre, welcoming former colleagues who went on to international fame, including saxophonist Julian Argüelles and trumpeter Martin Shaw.

Julian Argüelles, who was in the band in the 1980s, told London Jazz News: "He was a wonderful man and I will always be very grateful for all he did for us."

Both Penny and Sue still play in WJO, alongside band colleagues they count as their oldest and closest friends.

Following the funeral Penny said they all hoped the band would play on. She said: "Obviously everyone needs a bit of time but I would really hope the band will carry on and continue Dad's legacy."