

19-02-2016 THE HERALD Scotland

Mike Westbrook & the Uncommon Orchestra

A Bigger Show

(ASC)

WHAT a swell party it was. Possibly only Mike Westbrook could have created the epic circus-cum-fairground phantasmagoria of A Bigger Show.

Jazz-rock oratorio is decent shorthand for what unfolds generously over two discs to celebrate the Devonian pianist-composer's 80th birthday, although it doesn't convey the sheer joyful mischief that Mrs Westbrook, Kate, and her two singing accomplices have while observing how the internet and loyalty cards spy on us, pairing up David Beckham and Boadica and enunciating "Constable MacLeod" with matronly relish.

The Uncommon Orchestra is well-named. It's twenty-one strong, with two rhythm sections, and Westbrook marshals it expertly, allowing horn players freedom to blow heroically, sending them off on a swinging parade that Sun Ra might have coveted, letting them loose on a hungrily riffing guitar blues, and restraining the ensemble beautifully on the prayerful, Gil Evans-like Freedom's Crown.

In short, it's a grooving, adventurous blast and one that's crying out for a visionary, and resourceful, festival director to restage hereabouts.

Rob Adams