

# The Guardian



Broad tapestry ... Mike Westbrook's 21-piece Uncommon Orchestra.

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## **Mike Westbrook and the Uncommon Orchestra: A Bigger Show review – a party atmosphere**

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Mike Westbrook will be 80 later this month, was justly hailed as a game-changer in British orchestral jazz in the 1960s, and still joins up jazz, cabaret, brass band and circus music, rock and opera with an infectious openness and no little skill. His West Country-based Uncommon Orchestra's two-CD *A Bigger Show* is a typically Westbrookian stew of slamming guitar-powered riffs, lustrous brass harmonies recalling Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus, a mix of rather stagey fairground-barker badinage and Kate Westbrook's socio-political libretto, and anthemically roaring climaxes. His fine saxophonist Alan Wakeman and trumpeter Sam Massey fuse lyricism, abstraction and Miles Davis-like pungency on the gripping *Juxtapositions*, while the Mingus feel is compelling on the slow blues *Freedom's Crown*. The half-hour *Propositions* deploys the 21-piece band's broad tapestry of humming electronics, vocal harmonies and blearily majestic swing. The rock hooks, and a few of the lyrics, are a bit on the nose but the live-show party atmosphere is palpable and the idiomatic sweep is inviting for Westbrook faithfuls and the newly curious alike.