

Jazz
Mike Hobart



Mike Westbrook
The Uncommon Orchestra:
A Bigger Show — Live
ASC Records
★★★★☆

The UK composer's latest large-scale composition presents his 21-piece Uncommon Orchestra as a somewhat "Pythonesque" circus. The strong anthems, resonant Ellingtonia and bouts of collective mayhem are delivered with impressive musicianship. Alan Wakeman and Roz Harding on saxophones are top-notch and the jazz rock rhythms romp along. Kate Westbrook's somewhat Brechtian delivery of her self-penned lyrics adds a layer of eccentricity, set to Mike Westbrook's music.

THE SCOTSMAN JAZZ: **Mike Westbrook & Company: A Bigger Show Live** | Rating: ****
ASC Records

What a splendid rumpus. Mike Westbrook's 22-piece Uncommon Orchestra rolls into town like a rumbustious if faintly sinister carnival (think Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*) to perform a "jazz-rock oratorio" about the state of humankind in the age of the internet. Marking both Westbrook's 80th birthday and half a century as bandleader and composer, this live double CD delivers a vast tapestry of reeds, brass and electric guitars and double drums, not to mention fairground barkers, over which Kate Westbrook gives characteristically authoritative voice.

The opening *Gizzards All Glory* sees her apparently channelling Roald Dahl's *Miss Trunchbull* alongside Alan Wakeman's baying tenor sax, while *Juxtapositions* warns of "disasters yet to be", as soprano sax wheedles over a Greek chorus of brass. The cosmic meditations of *Gas, Dust, Stone* take the form of a sultry slow blues with howling guitars and eruptive brass, while *Lovers Galore* is dark and brassily funky. Shows don't come much bigger.

JIM GILCHRIST