

**Accordion Jazz Course**  
**Knuston Hall, Irchester, Northamptonshire**  
**31<sup>st</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019**

Bert Santilly's residential accordion jazz workshop took place at Knuston Hall in Northamptonshire, over the first weekend of June 2019. This annual course runs from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon, with plenty of breaks and time to chat, and with each of the accordion jazz teaching sessions lasting about 75 minutes.

Knuston Hall is a Grade II listed Adult Residential College and Conference Venue near Rushden, Northants. The accommodation is comfortable, staff are friendly and helpful, the surrounding countryside is beautiful – and the food and drink is absolutely delicious! A variety of residential courses are held at Knuston throughout the year, alongside 'Dinner Talks' and day courses. This weekend, we shared this lovely venue with another musical course; a viol workshop. [www.knustonhall.org.uk](http://www.knustonhall.org.uk)

As always, Bert was ably assisted on the Accordion Jazz course by his wife Helen, who helped with the preparations, the setting up, computer technology and music distribution - and somehow also managed to sing her own vocal arrangements extremely well (goodness knows how!) whilst 8 accordionists practised accompanying her in various styles and with varying levels of chord accuracy and not always in the same timing - or even at the same time; well done, Helen!



We arrived at Knuston Hall on Friday evening and settled into our accommodation before dinner was served at 7pm. After dinner, there was time for a coffee or a drink at the bar and a chat with fellow accordionists, before our first session. We took our accordions to the Practical Room - one of the many external buildings in the grounds - where Bert and Helen had already set up the room with large screen presentation, microphones and recording equipment, and our first accordion jazz session ran from 8.15pm to 9.30pm. This year there were 8 of us participating, plus Bert and Helen Santilly. Bert did a sterling job of organising and

delivering the course, as always, with lots of beautiful jazz standards and some well-thought-out exercises, all of which he had arranged himself.



This time, Bert had changed the course format slightly, to involve us in more playing of different jazz styles on the first evening, plus lots more work on our left hand bass technique. This is what players had specifically requested in answer to a particular question on last year's evaluation forms, and it went down really well. We started by revising our bass scales, then Bert introduced some melodic left-hand exercises and riffs. We practised moving between bass chords and bass notes (using fundamentals and counterbasses), then moving more melodically. We studied bass accompaniments in different styles and were then guided into learning the bass riff for the song 'Fever', which moves through different keys and was great fun to play. Over the weekend, we looked at lots more tunes, including 'Up Jumped Spring' 'These Foolish Things' 'Girl From Ipanema' 'Sweet Sue' 'Stormy Weather' 'As Time Goes By' , 'Sweet Georgia Brown' and my particular favourites 'Dream A Little Dream of Me' and the lovely Michel Legrand composition 'What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life.'

For each tune introduced, we were given our own printed score with the single line melody and chord symbols above, with the chords also written out in full on a line beneath. Using the sheet music, we all played through the melody and then the chordal accompaniment several times together, to familiarise ourselves with it. Bert then gave us ideas for playing the tune and/or accompanying another instrument

playing the tune, or accompanying a vocalist. Chord symbols were explained and Bert described and demonstrated how to make various jazz chords - in either or both hands - and we explored different rhythmic accompaniments. Those who were brave and willing tried out improvisations and between us, we arranged several of the tunes and then audio recorded them, some with Helen's vocals. It was useful to listen back to our group arrangements and to share thoughts and ideas. After the course each year, Bert and Helen usually put our course recordings (and photos) onto Dropbox for the group to access.



On Sunday, we were each given an A4 sheet of manuscript paper with a tune that Bert had composed over a pre-determined (I VI II V) chord structure, with chord symbols written above the melody line, but no bass notes written on the bass staff. We were encouraged to look at ways of playing a bass line for this piece and to make our own arrangements of it. We all then dispersed into different rooms on site or around the gardens, in order to begin working on our own arrangements. Bert came round to see each of us working, to offer guidance and ideas for those who wanted this, and to listen to our emerging arrangements. We then met back after lunch to listen to each others' ideas and to record our attempts. It was amazing to note that although we had all been given exactly the same chord progression, we came up with very different tunes, in a variety of styles and rhythms.

All in all, it was a lovely weekend spent playing our accordions in beautiful surroundings with excellent tuition. Our group was friendly and supportive and

speaking to other participants, we all felt comfortable within the group to ask questions, offer ideas, try out musical ideas and to explore and expand our accordion technique.

Having attended Bert's jazz courses for many years now, there is always something new to be learned. Bert listens and always adapts his teaching methods to suit individual needs and abilities, and to the group as a whole; not an easy task but one which he manages extremely well.

Thank you Bert and Helen Santilly for another enjoyable Accordion Jazz Weekend.

The dates for the next Accordion Jazz course will be **28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020**. If anyone is interested in coming along to Knuston Hall next year, please contact Bert Santilly in the first instance, on [bert@santilly.co.uk](mailto:bert@santilly.co.uk) Please note that you should be of at least BCA Grade 4 playing standard, have a basic understanding of treble and bass scales, know your way around the Stradella bass keyboard and be familiar with playing tunes hands together in a variety of keys. If in doubt, please speak to Bert for guidance...it would be lovely to see you there!

Looking forward to more accordion jazz next year.

Dawn Loombe

June 2019