

Give the drummer some!

Brit sticksman and Nigel Price's drummer, **Joel Barford**, is winning friends and plaudits with his irresistible swing-driven rhythms. **Peter Vacher** spoke to him

"I wasn't really looking for a permanent drummer. Ross Stanley told me about this 'kid who plays like Bill Stewart' and that they played well together. I gave him a whirl. The guy was all over it," renowned guitarist Nigel Price tells me. Thus began an association that has underpinned the continuing success of the stellar guitarist's quartet and more to the point, put drummer Joel Barford's name firmly on the map.

Now, it's pretty much a case of where Nigel goes, Joel goes too. "Joel's boundless energy, unbelievable playing and eagerness to have a right laugh just make me want to pick up the phone and tell him where we're going next," beams Price.

When I told Barford that writer Roger Cotterell had described him as "Price's

exuberant, irresistibly swinging young drummer," he answered, "Brilliant! That's exactly what I generally go for. Laying down the time to support others to do their thing while I try to be as swinging as possible."

Northants-born, but a Londoner now, Joel seems to have hit the ground

drumming, to rewrite the old cliché, stimulated by his music-minded family. Both parents are musicians as are his three siblings. Brother Tom is a critically acclaimed jazz saxophonist and eldest brother Simon is a drummer, known for his road-time with punk rock band Templeton Pek. Proximity to Simon's



Photo: Olivia Da Costa

set-up intrigued Joel enough to prompt his ever-supportive parents to buy him his first drum kit when he was seven. "I can remember it vividly," he says. "Big and red, with 'JOEL' written on the bass drum. It was at that age I started studying with a fantastic local teacher, Terry Mitchell, and he shaped me into the drummer I am today.

"With Terry, we focused on technique, reading and playing all kinds of different genres from rock and funk, and on to big band and small group jazz. He could see the direction I was headed in and gave me the tools I needed to prepare for the big scary world of gigs. I completed all my grades by the age of 13, which is when Terry retired."

Barford attended the Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust for six years, starting out as a juvenile percussionist aged 10 before graduating to playing kit drums for one of their three big bands. Six years later he was holding down the drum chair in the County Youth Big Band, regularly performing at theatres, and for competitions around the county while fronting workshops.

"At 17 years old I decided to take a year out of education and see if I could get enough work to play drums full time.

It was at this time I started attending NYJO 2 and joined the band to gain higher-level experience of big band drumming. It was also a great pathway to meeting like-minded people and making life-long friends."

Still youthfully rock-minded, Barford auditioned for a new roots/country folk band called CC Smugglers in April 2015.

"I received a call to join them and ventured onto my first European tour just one month later. We toured all over: Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, all this at 17/18 years old! It was a dream gig: we played the North Sea Jazz Festival, Rock Wertcher, and opened for Bruce Springsteen at TW Classic in Belgium to 60,000 people."

Once in London for good after two years with the Smugglers and now opting for jazz, he encountered organist Ross Stanley on a Tom Seals gig at Pizza Express. Ross then called him to dep with Nigel's trio at Southampton Jazz Club – and the rest is history.

"I've been first call for the Nigel Price Organ Trio ever since," Barford says, proudly. "Playing with Nigel and Ross is a never-ending source of inspiration. It's such a special band to me. I feel I have come on musically and personally from

having played so often with them. They are easily the greatest people to be on tour with. So many laughs," he smiles.

"Playing in big bands such as Louis Dowdeswell, Callum Au and the Ronnie Scott's Jazz Orchestra brings a lot of inspiration too. Always aiming to nail your part and make the music feel good. Being creative." Looking ahead, he says, "We have lots of exciting things in the pipeline with the Nigel Price Organ Trio like an autumn UK tour and another album. That first album *Wes Reimagined* with Nigel was a highlight. Louis Dowdeswell's Big Band have a new album in the works and I have lots of international gigs with vocalist Anthony Strong. Most recently I had a call to play in Trish Clowes' band with Ross, and we already have a few gigs lined up. I can't wait to see what the future brings."

Open to all sorts of possibilities, this highly professional 25-year-old, describes a "rolling motion of phone calls, emails, gig enquiries, recording enquiries, teaching enquiries etc. I do seem to work hard, maybe too hard at times but I put my all into it."

But then, he adds: "I love every minute of it and count my lucky stars that I'm earning a living from my dream job, playing the drums." 🎵