

Sue Richardson at Pizza Express Jazz Club, London W1

Clive Davis Wednesday, February 9

When the cast of *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue* led a high-spirited tribute to the late Humphrey Lyttelton at the Hammersmith Apollo last year, the trumpeter Sue Richardson was among the many musicians who helped to give the old man a stirring send-off.

Some of his insouciant comic timing seems to have rubbed off on her as well: she is a breezy presence on the bandstand who is quite happy to make self-deprecating asides about the everyday problems of finding a lipstick that doesn't leave sediment inside her horn.

More to the point, she also possesses something of Hump's flair for constructing a concise, neatly crafted melody. If Chet Baker and Clifford Brown are two of her main role models — her timbre is warm and full-bodied — her soloing, while avoiding high-note theatrics, evokes the generosity and exuberance of players from the swing era. Dour introspection is not for her. At the end of her opening set she even set sail into the audience, firing off a tattoo of notes on the irresistible, hand-clapping calypso beat of *Out for a Duck*, one of the tunes from her newly released album *Fanfare*.

She cut a more restrained figure earlier when she switched to flugelhorn on *Winter Lullaby*. What gave added vim to her opening set was the presence of two guest saxophonists in the shape of Robert Fowler and the irrepressible Alan Barnes, a musician who has redeemed countless sessions and concerts over the years. With her regular line-up augmented by this two-man turbocharger, Richardson clearly relished the opportunity to cut loose in front of what sounded almost like a mini big band. Barnes, on tenor on this occasion, made every note count; Fowler's baritone proved every bit as agile.

Richardson's gentle singing voice added another element to a well-judged mix. The lyrics of original songs such as *Walk on Gravel* — written by the trumpeter's namesake, the poet Susan Richardson — were buoyant and witty. If her vocals sometimes lacked colour, her rhythm section, led by her wise-cracking husband, Neal Richardson, at the piano, filled the gaps. The guitarist Andy Williams, double-bass player George Trebar and drummer Sam Glasson completed a forceful team.