

**Chris Barber's Jazz Band
supplied the music
Sonny Boy Williamson
played the mouth-harp
Ian Pickstock
wrote the words**

JULIUS CAESAR was apparently the first man who came, saw and conquered in Great Britain. Now we can add to the already long list the name of Sonny Boy Williamson who arrived in this country early last month for a series of concerts with Chris Barber and Cyril Davies.

His second date took him to the Hall he last played when he was here with the American Folk Blues Festival of 1963, the Fairfield Hall, Croydon.

This venue is one of the finest in the country for presenting this intimate type of music. Built on similar lines to the Royal Festival Hall it is better because it is only two-thirds the size and a much greater degree of rapport is built up between performer and the artist.

Sonny is an interesting character. He has the energy of a teenager despite his 63 years and never seems to stop playing. At all times he carries with him a bag containing several different types of Hohner harmonica and a bottle of scotch. At any time of day or night he is likely to either take one of his harmonicas out and play it or invite you to have a taste, even in a car on the way to or from dates.

Sonny got on splendidly with the Barber band, with whom he was playing, at Croydon, and told many anecdotes about his life in the States, most of which are unprintable! He also punctuated his stories with musical examples.

The Chris Barber band were the first to take the stage with their usual signature tune the gospel based "I Never Shall Forget". This was followed by the finest performance I have heard the band give. They played for one hour the first half of the show, and the audience was wildly enthusiastic.

Numbers like "Black and Tan Fantasy", "St. George's Rag" and "It's The Truth" flowed into beautiful jazz with that distinctive Barber sound. Pat Halcox was superb. His solos were all pure jazz with a lightness of touch and the emotion that characterises all good Jazz,

Chris was introduced by compere Harold Pendleton as Britain's leading Rhythm and Blues trombone. He proceeded to earn this title conclusively as the evening developed. Ian Wheeler was, as ever, excellent. Eddie Smith was his usual restrained self, still the finest jazz banjoist in the country.

Dick Smith took a couple of excellent, melodic solos and Graham Burbage exceeded himself, playing better than I have ever heard him. Of course he has the advantage of having sat in at Smitty's Corner in Chicago with Muddy Waters and Otis Spann and this must have helped him to fit so well when he accompanied the guest star.

When Sonny Boy Williamson took the stage the audience were already warmed up and the immediately greeted this great blues player with a tumultuous round of applause. It was well deserved.

Williamson, obviously deeply moved by his reception played his heart out for nearly an hour. He told stories which introduced all his songs and sang and blew brilliantly.

He has the sort of hypnotic effect on the audience which typifies all great artists. The whole audience

Williamson is a musician with fantastic technique he can almost make the harmonica talk. He al has a sense of rhythm that is rarely equalled, even by the finest drummers. In his performance he sways in time to the music and clicks his fingers to add punctuation I feel that it is this sense of rhythm that makes him so great.

Whatever he does, he swings. In fact, I don't think he could play anything without swinging.

Anyone who missed this concert at Croydon still has further chances to see this great artist before he travels on

Christmas Eve he is appearing at the Marquee Jazz Club with the Cyril Davies All-Stars in a special session.

On December 29th he will appear in the heart of the Beatle country at the Llverpool Empire and on New Year's Eve he is back at the Marquee. Both of these sessions are with the Chris Barber Band.

If you have a chance go along and hear him. It's well worth it

(from Jazzbeat No.1 January 1964, p. 4-5 less photos)