



CHRIS BARBER

Come blow your horn:
Chris Barber with
trombone, 1960.

“MUDDY WATERS *with* A TROMBONE”


Jazz legend **Chris Barber** tells how he toppled the first domino of the British blues movement, bringing icons like **Muddy Waters** to the UK in the 50s and 60s.

Words: **Ed Mitchell**

NOBODY EVER BOOED!” We’ve only been in the company of British blues pioneer Chris Barber for a few minutes and he’s already setting the record straight. This is the man who brought blues to Britain in the 50s and 60s, hosting American artists like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin’ Wolf, Memphis Slim, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Muddy Waters. It’s a niggling urban myth regarding Muddy’s ’58 British tour that has Chris poking the tabletop that separates us with his index finger. He knows where the bodies are buried. He was there. Muddy and his peers were really only plying their trade on British soil in the first place thanks to Chris and his love of blues.

“Certain people put out stories that Muddy Waters was too loud and that fans really wanted to hear acoustic,” says Chris. “They didn’t want to hear acoustic. The people that broadcast that theory were promoters Horst Lippman and Fritz Rau in Germany. They admitted afterwards that they’d made a terrible mistake, because Muddy Waters brought an acoustic guitar and couldn’t bloody well play it. He was a bit better than John Lee Hooker on acoustic, but that’s not very good.”

“Muddy played 20 concerts with us all over the country,” continues the 82-year-old. “There was no booing whatsoever. Somebody obviously decided that there ought to have been. Journalists do that all the time. Muddy’s was the quietest electric guitar player I’ve ever played with.”

We’re sitting in blues guitarist Stephen Dale Petit’s home studio in North West London. As we’re tasked with protecting a plate of sandwiches from SDP’s persistent Schnauzer pups, 



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