

# EMPIRICAL

## ABOUT THE BAND

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“Empirical could turn out to be one of the most important bands in British jazz history” (Jazzwise, 2009) – there can hardly be a more expectant prophesy to live up to for a young band, but since their formation in 2007, Empirical haven’t ceased proving their indefatigable and fearless creative fervour while honing an instantly recognisable group sound rife with raw energy and roiling emotion.

Featuring **Nathaniel Facey** (alto sax), **Tom Farmer** (double bass), **Lewis Wright** (vibraphone) and **Shaney Forbes** (drums), the band settled on its current line-up in 2009 following the departure of three of the original college-friends quintet. A tribute concert to Eric Dolphy, centred on his classic 1964 album *Out To Lunch!* found Facey and Forbes joined by Wright and Farmer. The quartet bonded through a sense of common purpose: “I’d never met guys who took it so seriously. The process of studying together is really what brought us together, and we just carried on doing it” recalls Tom Farmer.

Collective study and exploration has remained the bedrock of Empirical’s creative process and has seen the band assimilate influences from right across the rich history of jazz. While oblique harmonies, translucent textures and jagged, quick shifting rhythms are the signposts of Empirical’s musical territory, the band is not afraid to explore other musical realms: a collaboration with the string ensemble Benyounes Quartet, and the attendant challenge of making strings an integral part of the Empirical sound, brought out some of the band’s most complex and lyrical writing.

Empirical’s sound is defined by a deep commitment to improvisation and a uniquely collective spirit that allows each band member to play an equal part in shaping the music, during recording and in live performance. The band’s rare instrumentation lends perfect expression to this vision: “Empirical are among the most admired and individual-sounding bands in contemporary jazz. [...] Much of this is down to the instrumentation of alto saxophone, vibraphone, bass and drums, which has the lightness and clarity to convey quite adventurous ideas without losing the listener along the way.” (The Observer, 2016).

Empirical’s knack for pushing boundaries is not limited to their music: in an effort to win new audiences for jazz, in February 2016, the band took their music directly into people’s daily lives by setting up a week-long ‘Pop-up Jazz Lounge’ at Old Street Underground station in central London. Performing 24 live sets over the course of six days, including an 8am gig for surprised morning commuters, their risk-taking approach paid off amply by attracting close to 3,000 listeners, many of them new to jazz and Empirical.

Playing an intense run of gigs such as their 2015 six-day residency at Foyles bookshop or the recent pop-up lounge has also been a way of fulfilling the band’s ambition to develop music through experimentation during live performance. “We’ve always had huge respect for all those great bands that played together night after night.” notes Shaney Forbes. “It was pivotal to how their music developed and being able to do that ourselves allowed us to be in the mindset of improvising and composing on the spot.”

Coming together in an environment that treats jazz as a search rather than a destination, jazz’s heyday isn’t just a musical inspiration: “That constant search for meaning in the early avant garde was really powerful and it’s essential to our band.” Not least in seeing Empirical as a long-term collective project as Lewis Wright emphasises: “We’re really committed to each other. We’ve been together for ten years, produced five albums and have no plans to put the brakes on.” On the contrary: in 2017 the band took its ‘pop-up jazz lounge’ project to Birmingham, London and Berlin and is set to release a new album in 2018.

Despite the intellectualism often ascribed to jazz, for Empirical, it’s ultimately all about moving, rather than impressing their audience. As Nathaniel Facey sums it up: “It’s nice having people realise that they don’t have to ‘understand’ what we’re doing. That it’s really about what the music is communicating. Can I hear some honesty and some depth? Does it mean something to me? Does it move me?”

# FACTSHEET

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**Name** Empirical

**Genre** Jazz

**Founded** 2007

**Hometown** London (UK)

## **Members**

Nathaniel Facey (alto sax)

Lewis Wright (vibraphone)

Tom Farmer (double bass)

Shaney Forbes (drums)

## **Albums**

2016 **Connection** (Cuneiform Records)

2013 **Tabula Rasa** (Naim)

2011 **Elements of Truth** (Naim)

2009 **Out 'n' In** (Naim)

2007 **Empirical** (Destin-e)

## **Social media stats**

1,741 Facebook likes

1,683 Twitter followers

3,426 Soundcloud plays

29,147 YouTube views

## **Press quotes**

'Empirical are among the most admired and individual-sounding bands in contemporary jazz. [...] As anyone who has heard the band live will know, their approach is so fresh and their sound so appealing that there's never a dull moment. Much of this is down to the instrumentation of alto saxophone, vibraphone, bass and drums, which has the lightness and clarity to convey quite adventurous ideas without losing the listener along the way.' (*The Observer*)

'Empirical flirt with nostalgia, while living on the edge of experimentation.' (*Jazzwise*)

'[Empirical] has a recognisable signature sound. They don't get caught up in a thicket of their own improvisational energies, but always maintain a lightness and transparency, even in the freest of improvisational moments.' (*FonoForum*)

'[Empirical] espouse a playful style of jazz that is full of surprising changes both rhythmically and melodically and, at times, reaches an almost merciless intensity – but is consistently marked by an exceptional technical brilliance.' (*Weser Kurier*)

'Empirical have become fascinating and fearless' (*The Guardian*)

'(Empirical) continue to display a fiercely imaginative sensibility, producing music as challenging and stimulating as anything on the international scene' (*MOJO Magazine*)

## **Awards**

2016 Urban Music Awards – BEST JAZZ ACT

2016 Parliamentary Jazz Awards - BEST JAZZ ENSEMBLE

2010 MOBO awards – BEST JAZZ ACT

2008 Parliamentary Jazz Awards - BEST JAZZ ENSEMBLE

2007 EBU/European Jazz Competition – WINNER





2007 Peter Whittingham Award – WINNER

2007 Jazzwise – ALBUM OF THE YEAR  
2007 Mojo – JAZZ ALBUM OF THE YEAR

### **Festivals**

2018 Cheltenham Jazz Festival  
2017 Berlin Jazzfest  
2017 Muenster International Jazz Festival, Germany  
2016 London Jazz Festival, UK  
2016 Musikfest Bremen, Germany  
2016 Bedford Jazz Festival, UK  
2015 Calstock Jazz Festival, UK  
2015 Lancaster Jazz Festival, UK  
2015 Alfa Jazz Festival, Ukraine  
2014 Wiltshire Music featuring Jason Rebello, UK  
2014 Nisville Festival, Serbia  
2013 Jazz a la Vilette Paris, France  
2012 London Jazz Festival supporting Ambrose Akinmusire, UK  
2012 Vietnam British Council Touring  
2011 London Jazz Festival supporting Archie Shepp, UK  
2010 Cheltenham Jazz Festival, UK  
2010 Jazz Sous Les Pommiers, France  
2010 Molde Jazz Festival, Norway  
2009 London Jazz Festival supporting Bobby Hutcherson, UK  
2009 Bath International Festival supporting Branford Marsalis  
2008 Newport Jazz Festival, USA  
2008 New York Jazz Festival Supporting the Bad Plus feat Kurt Rosenwinkel, USA  
2008 Vancouver Jazz Festival, Canada  
2008 Montreal Jazz Festival, Canada  
2008 London Jazz Festival supporting Courtney Pine, UK  
2008 Gateshead International Festival supporting John Schofield, UK  
2007 Toronto Jazz Festival, Canada  
2007 North Sea Jazz Festival supporting Joshua Redman, USA

### **Online**

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### **Bookings & contact**

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