

ORGANFAX

In 2025, master musician Pete Shaw celebrates 50 years in the music industry, during which time he has become well-known as one of the most versatile entertainers in the UK. To celebrate, we are pleased to reprint here an interview about his life in music from the Keyboard Cavalcade Magazine in 2023 and hope you will enjoy learning more about him and his amazing career.



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Meet the UK's KING of KORG
PETE SHAW



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In Conversation PETE SHAW

with Michael Wooldridge

Pete is one of the most highly regarded players in the organ and keyboard world, not only a superb player but also a great vocalist and a highly experienced accompanist and arranger.

Probably best known to us for his great shows for KORG UK, I thought it would be interesting to find out even more about his multi-faceted life in music and his work on and off stage.



How did your interest in keyboard instruments first begin?

My early inspiration came from my Father, Gordon Shaw (below).



He was a semi-pro pianist from the late 1940's till the early 1990s. Throughout his career he played in small bands, dance bands, then from the late 60s onwards, also organ and piano in North West Social Clubs, then keyboards in later life in local community centres.



Conversations I've had with my parents lead me to believe that I had my first (Toy) Piano in December 1963, aged 3yrs 11 months (left).

Can you tell us about your early progress and your success in competitions?

My parents tried to get me started with piano lessons at the age of 4 with local tutor Irene Samby, from Hindsford, Manchester, but she advised them to bring me back at the age of 6, so I then had two years transitioning from my Christmas toy piano to my father's Zender Upright Piano that we already had in the house. Then I had formal piano lessons between the ages of six and fourteen, and also help in between lessons from my father's musical knowledge.

Whilst on holiday in seaside resorts between 1967 & 1975, my parents always put me in for the 'End of Pier' talent shows in Blackpool, Llandudno and Great Yarmouth, and also local talent shows around the Wigan area.

One talent competition I remember very well was in 1975 - Junior Showtime. They had an organ/keyboards & drums duo backing the talent where it was needed. In the heat I played 'Nut Rocker' by Bee Bumble and The Stingers and was backed by the duo. I did have a rough cassette recording of this but I've been hunting for it for years but still to no avail! I made it into the final at the Monaco Ballroom in Hindley, near Wigan, and played the lovely song 'All the Things You Are' chosen by my father, and luckily came first!!!



How did you make the transition to the professional stage

After I'd won the competition, at 15 years of age, my father asked me whether I would like to join him every Friday on his club gig? This was at Tyldesley Labour Club, Manchester. The stage set up was Dad on a Hammond C3, Frank Smith on Drums/Percussion and me on a Broadwood 6'9" Grand Piano. I did this for around 18 months and eventually got a Wednesday night on my own there between the bingo sessions, and this was when I transitioned to the Hammond C3.

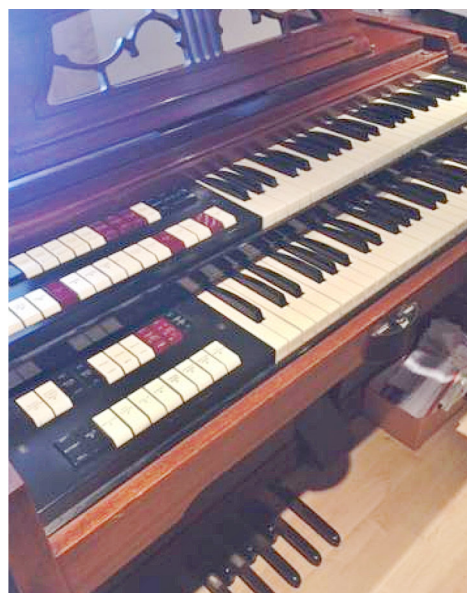
Not long after 1976 I got an Organ residency in Leigh, at Westleigh Village Club, and that was my first experience of sight reading, accompanying female and male Vocalists, and here we are 47 years later, and I'm still doing that type of work; just a couple of months ago I was back in Manchester!

Besides your dad, who were your favourite organists and influences when you started?

Back in 1977 I got my first job in an organ and piano showrooms, with Woods Pianos & Organs Ltd in Bolton, and I worked there till 1981. We were the importer/distributor and retailer of Conn Organs, then also Italian maker Welson, then a Wurlitzer dealer.

It's here I met my organ Sales Manager, my idol, Stan Holland. At this point I knew nothing much about organs really, or the business, but under his wing I very quickly learnt organ technique and about who's who in the organ world and the wonderful makes and models of organs, pianos and keyboards available at that time.

Stan introduced me to the sound and mastery of UK Organists Alan Haven and Harry Stoneham, and from 1979 to 2022 I was the proud owner of a 1965 Lowrey Heritage DSO1, which I played regularly in the North West Social Clubs, and even at two organs festivals -



Middleton Towers in 1988 and Caister late night bar 2003, an event which still comes up in conversation with two of the greats from those days, James Sargeant and Howard Beaumont.

Left - Pete's Lowrey Heritage DSO1

Over the years I've seen you playing some stunning demonstration shows. Can you tell us some of the manufacturers you've played for, as I know there are quite a few, including some of the good old names of the past.

From 1981 to 1996, both myself and my mentor, Stan Holland, moved to Dawson's Music in Warrington, Cheshire but, although still on the retail side, I soon was asked to play at demonstration evenings on Technics and Yamaha instruments, and this is where I first met Chris Powell; he was sitting on the front row with his Dad Viv at a Yamaha HS Electone Organ Evening up in Nelson, near Burnley!

In 1983, I also had a hand in launching the Yamaha FS70 for our stores, as I was asked by our Dawson's Managing Director, David Briggs, if I would do the warm up spot for Brian Sharp! Well, as you can imagine, I was honoured to do this and played 30 minutes of my best party pieces, showing the organ at the very best I could. Unbeknown to me, Brian was pacing up and down in the dressing room, as apparently I'd played five pieces he was going to play! We did have a conversation about this many years later and he remembered the night.

My first work with organ and keyboard manufacturers was for Ketron around 2001, at the Caister Keyboard Cavalcade Festival. I went with a retailer, Keys Music of Oldham, just for a few days to play on the stand. From this, I received a call from Barry Crane of BCK Music and subsequently worked on Ketron products with him at both Caister and Blackpool Cavalcade Festivals for the following five years, which in turn kicked my organ society career off at Great Yarmouth Organ Society.

Following those years, from 2007 I've also worked for Hammond, Nord, Orla, Roland (Atelier) and, of course, for KORG at all of the Keyboard Cavalcade Festivals for the last 10 years.



KORG Showcase and KorgSchool areas at Keyboard Cavalcade Festivals

*Above - Hemsby 2014
Right - Hemsby 2022*



Yes, we always enjoy your shows and your late night sessions as well, where your cabaret skills are often to the fore. You now have the amazing new Pa5X. When did you start working for KORG UK?

I first did some demo work for KORG for a couple of years around 2003/4 on their new flagship arranger at the time, the Pa1X Pro, then I rejoined them playing Pa3X pro in November 2012 and have been with them ever since.



Pete playing Pa3X at Keyboard Cavalcade Hemsby in 2013

So you tour with the Pa5X. What else do you use for your concerts?

My current set up (which changes as new models appear) is the fabulous new KORG Pa5X-76 and the incredible KORG Nautilus 88, plus Midi Bass Pedals.



A fabulous stage setting for a concert at Das Tastenfestival in Herdecke, Germany, in October 2022.

I've heard you play all different types of music but do you have a favourite style or artiste?

Without a doubt, 'Jazz', as it's the genre I grew up in, with my dad's playing style, so my favourite piano artiste is Oscar Peterson.

Is there any organ or keyboard you still want to play?

Being pro and still working for manufacturers, I'm a very loyal person to the brand, but organ-wise I would go back to my roots and choose a Hammond, as it was the first organ I ever sat at back in 1975.

Aside of playing concerts for keyboard and organ societies, I know you are incredibly well established in the club and theatre world. How has that come about, and can you tell us about some of the many people you've worked with?

When I left my club residency back in 1984 I started learning to sing and from that I formed various duo's over the years, as cabaret acts using multi-keyboard set ups and drums.



Resident Gigs - Above 1983, Below 1985



That also branched out to function work with names such as David Alexander, The Grumbleweeds, Bernard Manning, Ken Dodd, Jim Bowen, Paul Crone from Granada TV & also Elvis Costello's Father, Ross McManus, who was previously lead trumpet player with The Joe Loss Orchestra.

From 1995 to 2016 I teamed up with my wife Vonnie as Saremma Duo. Vonnie had previously worked on cabaret and theatre shows with her own Harmony girl trio, 'Pillow Talk' with such names as Frankie Vaughan,

Tom O'Connor and Freddie Starr, Frankie Howard, Jim Bowen, Mike Reed and Bob Monkhouse.



Pete with his wife Vonnie - Saremma 2014

From 1995 Saremma worked Clubs, Hotels, Theatres, Restaurants, Weddings, Masonic Functions, Golf Clubs, Birthdays, Anniversaries etc up and down the UK, and also worked on big events and supported such acts as The Searchers, Herman's Hermits, The Ivy League, Peter Kay and Jim Bowen. 1997/8 saw us take up a Trio job in Blackpool, 6 nights a week, 52 weeks of the year, with me working as Musical Director with names such as Russell Watson, Joe Longthorne, Mick Miller, Stan Boardman, Johnnie Casson, Stu Francis, Smart Move, Mark & Phil Walker (Roy Walker's Sons) and various other vocalists and tribute acts of the time.



Above - Saremma Trio, Blackpool 1997 Below - With Mick Miller



I know that, away from the keyboards, you've done some extra work on TV?

Vonnie got me involved in Extra work for a good few years from 1995, and we worked on shows such as Coronation Street, Emmerdale, Cold Feet, At Home with the Braithwaite's, Hollyoaks, Brookside, Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps, Micawber -



(A Victorian production starring Alistair McGowan and David Jason) and 'Indahouse', a film starring Ali G.

Do you have a favourite event featuring the keyboards?

There's been lots of great memories over the 47 years so far but I would say my first ever organ festival appearances from 1985 to 1988, up in Morecambe, as they had around 1,200 people attending at that time and I got to work alongside the great organ masters of all time, Bryan Rodwell, Brian Sharp, Howard Beaumont, Tony Pegler, Glyn Madden, Tim Flint, Steve Lowdell, Carlo Curley, Trevor Daniels, and many more.

You lead such a busy musical life, but do you find time for any other hobbies?

I have had hobbies over the years, including Course Fishing, Golf, Crown Green Bowling, and I've recently taken up cycling again; in 2018 me and two friends cycled 1,022 miles from Lands' End to John o' Groats, in 14 days, raising money for children's cancer, and thanks to the organ world, friends and families, we raised just short of £5,000.



Celebrating our arrival at John o' Groats

Do you have any CDs for sale?

I've made six CD's over the years, available at concerts and festivals, or direct from me, Pete Shaw, 'Tudor Rose', 52 The Loont, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 1EU.

If you are having any kind of event where you require live music, you can do no better than to engage Pete, a real master in every style. To book him, email petershaw3@aol.com or petershaw3@icloud.com or phone him on 07889 177 761.

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