NEIL COWLEY
BIOGRAPHY

As a young boy, London-born **Neil Cowley** studied classical music as a Junior Exhibitioner at the prestigious Royal Academy, and by the age of 10 had performed a Shostakovich piano concerto to a full house at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. However, by his mid-teens, he had joined a friend in a Blues Brothers tribute band, "as a way" he says "of getting into pubs", and by 17 had turned his back on formal training altogether, and entered the world of pop.

Cowley's early musical career spans many genres making him very different to most musicians on the jazz scene; he has not been schooled on any jazz course, rather his skills have been learned on the job. He went on to record and tour with some of the best soul and funk bands of the day including the Brand New Heavies and Zero 7, alongside his own band, Fragile State, with whom he produced two critically acclaimed albums, from which came *Four-Four-Four*, a track that was later licensed by Vodafone for a nationwide commercial. His incredible versatility as a composer would see him producing themes to a number of television programmes and documentaries, drawing on desert blues, jazz and orchestral soundtrack.

By the mid noughties, Cowley began to find the experience of extracting music from a computer chip unbearable, so, with his dear friend the piano began composing, and eventually realised a long-standing vision and formed the **Neil Cowley Trio** with Richard Sadler on double bass and Evan Jenkins on drums.

In 2006 Cowley formed his own label and released the trio's debut album **Displaced;** an outstanding album of original recordings that established him as a dazzling pianist and stunning composer. Cowley created a unique trademark sound that delivered powerful music of massive dynamic range and contrasts – where ferociously forceful, hook laden melodies sit side by side with reflective, tender pieces capable of heart shattering tenderness. The album was released to huge critical acclaim, and won the **2007 BBC Jazz Award** for **Best Album**.

In 2007, the Neil Cowley Trio undertook their first full UK tour revealing Cowley's instinctive flair and ingenuity as an entertainer. At the heart of their captivating live performance is Cowley's marvellously English wit, mischievous humour and remarkable rapport with his audience. (They would go on to conduct many more UK tours and become the first ever act to perform 'in the round' at Ronnie Scott's in two sold out shows; they have performed at some of the genres most prolific jazz festivals – Montreal (three times), North Sea Jazz (twice), and Montreux Jazz.)

In 2008, the trio released their follow-up album, **Loud... Louder…Stop** for the indie jazz label, Cake. Fizzing with the energy of rock and the surging dynamics of dance music, Cowley solidified his sound, yet stretched the envelope further. The recording placed the trio at the forefront of the British 'Post-Jazz' movement, and earned them critical acclaim from across the musical spectrum. Mojo hailed the recording as a "Modern Classic", and listed it in their '50 Best Albums' of that year. Dubbed 'Jazz for Radiohead fans', the trio became noted for blurring the boundaries between jazz and other genres, and enticing a new, younger audience into the genre. A TV appearance on *Later with Jools,* a Mojo cover- mounted CD (a celebratory reworking of the Beatle's *Revolution*), and a Guinness commercial inched them further toward crossover status.

In the same year, Cowley's unique handle on bringing inanimate ideas and objects to life earned him a 30 second nationwide television commercial for *Nokia.*

Radio Silence, Cowley's third album was released in 2010 on one of the UK's most exciting Indie labels, Naim Jazz. It solidified Cowley's reputation as a fine composer, and represented the magical empathy of his unit, who, with thousands of hours under their belt had learnt to breathe and listen as one.

In 2011, Cowley nourished his fondness for grand, commanding sounds, and began a love affair with orchestration. He spent the year working towards his fourth release, **The Face of Mount Molehill** which, released in early 2012, showcased his burgeoning talent as a composer and arranger for trio and strings. The recording marked a significant change in direction. Not only does the trio record and tour with strings for the first time, but it presents Cowley's new bassist, Australian, **Rex Horan.**

Also in 2011, Neil Cowley and his trio were appointed by the British Council in Khartoum to work with students and renowned local traditional musicians. In finding a common musical language that would override different musical influences, they composed and performed a unique collaboration in a closing concert at their international jazz festival.

In the meantime, Cowley has become the go-to piano man for soul and pop acts that require a jazz technique and rhythmic suppleness to their artful pop hits. Cowley has contributed to global chart-topping albums by multi Grammy-winner **Adele**, including, amongst others, the poignantly expressive intro to *Hometown Glory* on 19 and the stomping piano on *Rolling in the Deep.* In fact, with Adele's album *21* being 2011's biggest-ever selling album in a single year, and of the decade, he is quite literally – the most listened to pianist on the planet.

Further projects in 2012 included working with London's **Wigmore Hall Learning Programme** to create an interactive concert for children based on the acclaimed children's story, **Mr Big,** by author and animator Ed Vere. Through the creation of a jazz soundtrack, he sensitively and humourously tackled the subject of bullying.

Earlier in the year, Neil Cowley appeared in the Sky Arts programme *First Love* which challenged comedienne and lapsed pianist Sue Perkins, to conquer her fears of self worth to perform a Beethoven Sonata at the Cheltenham Festival. Cowley worked with Sue to become 'at ease' with the instrument in what was described as a 'pivotal moment' in her journey

Also in 2012 the Neil cowley Trio embarked on a triumphant set of shows across the United States'

In November, Cowley collaborated with violinist Julian Ferraretto and Goldsmiths College to devise and present a unique project bringing together a 30 piece classical string ensemble (students and professionals) to learn to perform music by ear and feeling. This new aural based string ensemble performed Cowley compositions at a stunning show at London's Barbican. The performance was recorded live for transmission on BBC Radio 3 and earned a standing ovation on the night.

In January 2013 Neil Cowley collected the 2013 gong for Best UK Jazz Act at the inaugural Jazz Fm Awards. He is currently Musician in Residence in Derry-Londonderry, 2013's UK City of Culture, an appointment awarded by PRS for Music Foundation.

Neil is married with two gorgeous children.