**Peter Conway Promotions**

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**RANDOLPH MATTHEWS - WALTER TULL IN B MAJOR PRESS RELEASE**

“*The rich enveloping world of Randolph Matthews.*” Jazzwise.

“*A stunning, McFerrin-esque talent.*” Songlines.

“*Dazzling improvisational skills. Flawless and world class*.” Jazz FM.

Acclaimed British vocal performer, composer and educator Randolph Matthews presents *Walter Tull In B Major*, a show that celebrates the short, vivid life of a black pioneer – a professional footballer and first world war hero - and the strength and joy to be found in grace under pressure.

In living your best life. In being major.

Featuring dynamic modern songs delivered in Matthews’ remarkable, expressive voice – variously heard unaccompanied, improvised, embellished with effects and buoyed by a mighty trio on piano, double bass, drums and percussion – *Walter Tull in B Major* will tour 9 venues across the UK from 27 September – 20 November.

“Walter’s story connected with me immediately,” says the London-raised, Folkestone-based Matthews. “I was inspired by his courage and resilience and struck by how relevant his challenges are to those still facing people of colour today. His life deserves a musical backdrop. I wanted to be the first to do it.”

Walter Tull was one of Britain’s first black footballers, and the first black army officer. Born in 1888 in Folkestone, Kent, the son of an English mother and a Barbadian carpenter – himself the son of a slave - Tull was orphaned at the age of eight and raised in a children’s home (now Action for Children) in east London. He went on to work at a printing yard and enjoy an amateur spell at a local club, Clapton F.C, before signing for Tottenham Hotspur in 1909, aged 21. The racial abuse that ensued from the terraces eventually saw him demoted to reserves.

Snapped up by Northampton, Tull was about to sign for Rangers F.C when war broke out and he enlisted in the two Footballers Battalions, rising through the ranks and fighting at the Battle of Somme as a sergeant. In 1917, despite regulations that forbade “negroes” from becoming infantry officers, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Special Reserves. Cited for bravery under fire after leading his company of 26 men to safety in Italy, he never received the Military Cross recommended for him. Tull was killed in action in France in March 1918, aged 30. His body was never found.

“Walter was an extraordinary Edwardian figure whose legacy is slowly being acknowledged,” says Matthews, who tells Tull’s story through the prism of lyrics based in fact and fired by imagination, through music laced with harmony, melody and meaning - and the risk embracing, revolutionary spirit of jazz.

“Jazz was originally political music. Our music. Music that expressed our truth and functioned as therapy, that took the revolution out into the audience and beyond. The jazz medium allows me to respond to the life of a person who rose above prejudice a century ago, and whose life has clear parallels with my own.”

A hugely charismatic performer, Matthews has been captivating international crowds for two decades now, working with the A-list likes of Herbie Hancock and Mulatu Astatke and winning accolades including a Best Live Performance nomination at the 2018 Jazz FM Awards along the way. His live shows are testaments to the power and potential of the voice, each show imbued with the sort of fourth-wall-smashing dynamism so intrinsic to the roots of jazz.

A recent turn as a featured vocalist in the 2019 BBC Prom *Duke Ellington: Sacred Music* at the Royal Albert Hall proved as revelatory for Matthews as it did for those around him: “At the centre of the music is spirituality and hope. Ellington wrote variations on this theme and made every performer integral to the music in a deep, meaningful way. It reminded me that the essence of the Walter Tull story is living your truth, and that I’m like a conduit for this message.”

The son of parents from Grenada, a 50-minute flight across the Caribbean from Barbados, Matthews has also battled discrimination in order to follow his truth both as an artist and a human being. Like many people of colour, he’s had to leap higher hurdles to gain recognition. Racism is racism, he says, referencing a shock verbal encounter on the streets of Folkestone, Kent, where he moved with his family five years ago, to a house near the home in which Walter Tull was born.

“I knew that this was not necessarily the future of Folkestone because of the bright, engaged young people I meet there. I’ve done outreach work in schools where I tell the story of Walter in my own way artistically. And like most things which have real meaning,” he adds with a smile, “I didn’t feel like it was the end.”

The musicians gracing *Walter Tull in B Major* are among the finest in Britain today: award-winning double bassist Vidal Montgomery, the driving force behind artists such as Omar, Courtney Pine and Carleen Anderson. Drummer/percussionist Tristan Banks, erstwhile collaborator with icons from Roy Ayers to Marcos Valle and lynchpin of rising star trio Hexagonal. Lauded pianist and composer Alcyona Mick, whose CV spans the London Jazz Orchestra and headline acts Yazz Ahmed, Tori Freestone and Ibrahim Maalouf.

Matthews has collaborated with all three musicians on material for the show, and particularly with Mick (“Alcyona has such sensitive musicianship, and I appreciate her strong feelings on where we can go harmonically).“ There will be pieces that make the most of Matthews’ famed improvisatory skills - a football scene, say, or a battlefield, reimagined on the fly – and songs that tell of home and work and the strength that comes from truth, synergy and love.

The song ‘Walton Road’ visualises Tull’s childhood home in a terraced house in Folkestone, the family seated around the hearth, his siblings chattering, his mother combing his hair. His father speaking in a voice whose broad Barbadian accent is both reassuring and at odds with the whiteness of the seaside town they find themselves in.

“I can recall eating saltfish and yam as a kid in Camden while listening to my parents’ Caribbean voices,” says Matthews. “Walter’s father arrived in England hoping for a better life, and like Walter and so many people of colour in those times his very presence would have evoked strong reactions and feelings in people. The show is also a reminder that black British history predates the Windrush.”

Another song, ‘Working It’, is a rhythmic ode to Tull’s apprenticeship in a printing yard, all handclaps and *a capella* voices, loop samples and harmoniser.

Then there is the compelling title track, with its pulsing B major chords and ‘be major’ theme.

“It’s a utopian view, given the atrocity of war and a life – lives - cut short,” Matthews offers. “But we stand on the shoulders of the giants who went before us, and so many of us aren’t even aware these people existed. There’s a new generation of young black footballers who could do with knowing who Walter Tull was, and everyone everywhere can find inspiration in Walter’s courage and composure in the face of adversity.”

At a time when people of colour are still treated as lesser than, still denied equality on the pitch and off, *Walter Tull in B Major* prompts us to live our best lives, to confront the obstacles that seek to diminish, to have hope, stay positive.

Be major.

Ends

Jane Cornwell

**WALTER TULL IN B MAJOR**

**27th Sept:** [**Cleethorpes Jazz Weekend**](http://www.theculturehouse.co.uk/cleethorpes-jazz-weekend-2019/)

**11th Oct: The Lighthouse, Poole**

**26th Oct:** [**Club 85 – Hertfordshire**](http://www.club-85.co.uk/gigs.php)

**3rd Nov:** [**Quarterhouse –  Folkestone**](https://www.creativefolkestone.org.uk/whats-on/randolph-matthews-walter-tull-in-b-major/)

**7th Nov:** [**Pizza Express –  Maidstone**](https://www.pizzaexpresslive.com/whats-on/randolph-matthews-walter-tull-in-b-major)

**8th Nov:** [**Hermon Chapel – Oswestry**](https://www.hermonchapel.com/)

**9th Nov: Pizza Express, Birmingham**

**20th Nov:** [**The Albany – London**](https://www.thealbany.org.uk/shows/randolph-matthews/)

**29th Nov:** [**Gulbenkian – Canterbury**](https://thegulbenkian.co.uk/events/the-jazz-sessions-randolph-matthews-walter-tull-in-b-major/)

For press enquiries: **Peter Conway - peter@peterconwaymanagement.com**

**Peter Conway Promotions Ltd**

**Office: 211 Westcombe Hill, Blackheath, London SE3 7DR**

**020 8378 1012 / 07885 288512**