

AJAZZ

The Magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum ©



The Banjo in New Orleans Jazz

australian
jazz
museum

Issue 105 | May 2025

ISSN: 2203-4811

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**The Banjo in
New Orleans Jazz**

PLEASE NOTE:

The deadline for contributions to the next AJazz is 15th July 2025

Established in 1996

A fully accredited Museum run entirely by volunteers.

Home to the largest Australian Jazz Collection.

All items catalogued to Museum standard and stored in archival conditions.

Patron: James Morrison AM

Location

AJM
 "Koomba Park"
 15 Mountain Hwy
 Wantirna 3152
 Melway Reference 63C8
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Regular \$75
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AJM Jazz Ambassador Paul Grabowsky AO

Peter Wykes Burgis

1936 – 2025



Notable record collector, music enthusiast, historian, author, magazine articles journalist, record re-issue producer.

Peter Burgis was born in Parkes, N.S.W., on 26 August, 1936. His father worked at senior level with what became the ANZ Bank. His placements meant the family moved around a lot and this gave Peter a diverse background of Australian country towns.

His aunt gave him a gramophone for his 17th birthday and some extra money to buy records. His first interest in records was with country music. Schooling through the NSW government network, he obtained good results leading to tertiary level studies in agriculture. His placement for this work gave opportunities to talk with young farmers through radio broadcasting.

Around 1960, through radio programs for young farmers he learned the fact that station libraries were dumping radio program transcription discs, 78 rpm records and equipment and replacing them with vinyl LPs, magnetic tapes and 45 rpm records. This enabled Peter to purchase what was being discarded. His own record library grew to a huge quantity, and curiosity for why such music came together kindled his interest of writing to other collectors and discographers – Jack Mitchell OAM for jazz, David Crisp for country music, and Mike Sutcliffe for the broader discographical and theatre and opera stars. Peter worked at Ashwood's Record Store for seven years in the 1960s.

Then came the Centre for Advancement of Teaching in public relations at the Macquarie University, 1972–1974, founder at the National Library of Australia as Sound Archivist, 1974–1984, and Director of the National Film and Sound Archive, 1984–1992. He retired to create his own cassettes of Australian re-issues on "Kingfisher". Peter was co-author of the Peter Dawson biography, with Russell Smith. Peter was also producer of the 10-album box set of Peter Dawson recordings, released in 1980. His knowledge of jazz and country music was vast, having worked with the likes of Jack Mitchell and David Crisp. Their work and collections are now housed at the Australian Jazz Museum and Tamworth Country Music Archives. Peter's contribution to the retrieval and documenting of a vast array of Australiana encompasses everything from jazz, country, classical, comedy, and radio entertainment from its inception to talk-back. Peter continued to write for various magazines catering to Australia's past till the end.

Peter Wykes Burgis died at Port Macquarie on March 5, 2025. A life well lived and a person much loved by all who knew him and his work.

Geoffrey Orr, March, 2025



Collection Manager's Report

by Mel Blachford OAM

The important work of preserving and archiving our Australian jazz history continues at full pace at AJM. We continue to receive important donations of jazz material from all over Australia to add to our large collection. Some of the larger collections donated include photographs, music and posters from Bill Armstrong. Of particular interest is his 1949 Pyrox wire recorder on which he recorded many of the early bands. Also of interest are many albums of photographs originally belonging to Swaggie Records' owner, Nevill Sherburn, of musicians he recorded on that label.

Memorabilia from the late Joe McConechy estate came to us in four large boxes with a lifetime of memories from Joe to be triaged and sorted.

Loretta Barnard, daughter of trumpet legend, Bob Barnard, has sent a box of privately recorded cassettes from his long career.

Max Hull was the sound recordist at Festival Hall from mid 1950s to 1980s. His grandson has kindly donated 30 reel-to-reel tapes of jazz sessions to add to our collection to be digitised.

Ron Jobe, who recently turned 90, has given us the remainder of his jazz photo collection not already donated. He was a familiar sight at jazz events taking photos of the bands, and his photos are a valuable record of many musicians who are no longer with us. Ron is finally putting his camera down after decades of service.

An important focus of our Collection policy is to embrace and reach out to jazz musicians playing today to seek copies of their music for future generations. Jazz played today will be history in the years to come. If readers attend jazz events please encourage musicians to donate their music to AJM. With so much music in digital format only it becomes essential to have copies when a key stroke on a computer can erase an entire album.

The Australian Jazz Museum video interview program, funded by a grant from the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) has now recorded 10 sessions. I have been the interviewer in several of these. Our newest ones are Brett Iggulden and Tony Gould. Go to www.ajm.org.au and click on Our Collections then Video Interviews. These are a wonderful insight into the lives of some of our favourite musicians and their jazz adventures.

A big thank you to everyone who has donated jazz material since 1996. Without you the AJM would not be the repository of our Australian jazz history. If you have items you are thinking of donating send us an email to info@ajm.org.au or ring me on mobile 0438 360 369.

Help Wanted

The museum requires help from people with Jazz knowledge for 2 important roles:

1. Help in **identifying Jazz people/ Musicians** in the photos we have.
2. Help is also needed to **sort the collections** at the Museum.

No Computer experience is required and no long-term commitment.

If you are interested, please contact Margot Davies on 0412 826 216

or

Call the Museum on Tuesdays on 9800 5535 between 10.00 and 3.00

The Banjo in New Orleans Jazz

By Ken Simpson-Bull OAM



The Banjo has a long, if not controversial, history as regards to its use in jazz. Purist *aficionados* of New Orleans jazz, which they refer to as the real jazz or Dixieland jazz, often claim that the world's first jazz bands used the banjo in preference to the guitar in early performances and thus true original jazz must include a banjo. Are they right? We shall see.

Firstly, where did the banjo come from? Although Africans had been playing simple plucked instruments such as a string on a stick attached to a drum for hundreds if not thousands of years, the earliest written indication of an instrument akin to the banjo is in 1621 by Richard Jobson in describing an instrument like the banjo which he called a *bandore*.

However, the term *banjo* has several other etymological claims: the *Banjul* from Gambia (the material for the neck, called *ban julo* in the Mandinka language gives *banjul*). The West African *akonting* which it is made with a long bamboo neck is called a *bangoe*. The Kimbundu word *mbanza* results in the *banza*. And the Oxford English Dictionary claims that the term *banjo* comes from a pronunciation of Portuguese *bandore* or from an early Anglicisation of Spanish *bandurria*.

Banjos with fingerboards and tuning pegs resembling modern instruments appeared in the Caribbean as early as the 17th century. The instrument became increasingly available commercially from around the second quarter of the 19th century due largely to minstrel show performances.

However, banjo-like instruments seem to have been independently invented in several different places in addition to the African ones. For example, the Chinese *sanxian*, the Japanese *shamisen*, the Persian *tar*, and the Moroccan *sintir*.

Despite similarities, the *guitar* is a different instrument, having evolved in Europe, probably Spain, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the mandolin being a typical forerunner.

The Minstrel Era, 1830s–1870s

During the American slave era many enslaved Africans played the banjo, spreading it to the rest of the population. The minstrel show, also called minstrelsy,

was an American form of theatre developed in the early 19th century. The shows were performed by mostly white actors wearing blackface makeup for the purpose of comically portraying racial stereotypes of African Americans. There were also some African-American-only performer groups that toured. Each show consisted of comic skits, variety acts, and music performances customarily including banjos.



In the 1820s one Joel Walker Sweeney, a white minstrel performer, was credited with adding another string to the then four-string African-American banjo, which then became the more popular five-string banjo. Sweeney's musical performances occurred at a time when banjos shifted away from being homemade folk instruments to instruments of a more modern style. Banjos were introduced in Britain by Sweeney's group, the American Virginia Minstrels, in the 1840s, and became very popular in Music Halls.

American Banjo Manufacturer S.S. Stewart began making banjos in 1878, and along with others, led the way in developing hybrid banjos: *banjeaurines* (a fourth of a tone higher than a standard 5-string), *piccolo-banjos* (half the size of a standard 5-string), *cello-banjos* (tuned a fifth lower), *bass banjos*, *plectrum-banjos* (which eliminated the 5th string), *banjolins* (a combination of a banjo and mandolin), *ukulele-banjos* (ukulele neck and strings, banjo body), *tenor banjos* (4-strings, tuned like a viola), and *guitar-banjos* (guitar neck and strings, banjo body).

By this time, the instrument had moved from being the province of African Americans and minstrel performers to an

instrument enjoyed by even high-society performers. While the rare banjo hybrids can still be found, the banjos that survived this prolific period were the 5-string and tenor (4-string) banjos – the latter to be adopted as an instrument of classic jazz.

Classical Banjo

A classical banjo player generally picks the strings in the same way as a classical guitar player. Originally, the banjo was more popular than the guitar and there were even banjo orchestras. Banjos at this time nearly all used gut strings instead of steel and the drum skins were made of thin animal hide.

A banjo sounds better and louder when the head is tight and in the days before synthetic skins it was very hard to get the head tight enough to sound good without breaking it. A lot of professional banjo players carried a spare banjo in case a skin broke during the show.

Nearly all banjos have the strings fitted in order of pitch from highest-sounding to lowest-sounding, but the fifth string is not only a different length from the other four strings, it is also placed out of order – the fifth string is the highest string on the banjo and is positioned where you would normally expect the lowest string to be.

This unique arrangement of the strings has led to many different playing



A Banjo Orchestra

styles being developed. The technique of playing a five-string banjo is quite different to the technique of playing other stringed instruments such as the guitar or the mandolin.

James Europe and the Tango Craze

James Reese Europe and Will Marion Cook helped to popularise new banjo

hybrid instruments. Europe's groups played many arrangements of ragtime tunes. Instead of the ragtime being performed on a 5-string banjo in the musical foreground, Europe's banjo section played 4-string banjos in the background that maintained the rhythm.

James Europe collaborated with dancers Vernon and Irene Castle who brought the Tango to America in 1912. This became a very popular dance and music form in the 1910s and '20s. The type of banjo that was used to play this popular dance, the tango banjo, was the banjo we know today as the tenor banjo, which has four strings tuned in fifths (c-g-d-a) instead of the standard 5-strings (G-d-g-b-d).

It was James Europe's fame and recordings of the tango/tenor banjo being used in tango music and ragtime during the tango craze that helped push the 4-string banjo into traditional jazz.

In the 1910s and 1920s, performers like Harry Reser, who led Dixieland-style recording bands, contributed to the technical advancement of the 4-string instrument. In 1917, a few months after the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded the first jazz tunes, the Frisco Jass Band became the first jazz band to record with a banjo strumming in the rhythm section.



Harry Reser (with banjo) known as the world's greatest banjo player.

The Jazz Banjo

From 1917 Jazz started to become popular, and the banjo was much in demand as a rhythm instrument, mainly because it was quite loud and the sound cut through a group of trumpets, trombones, and saxophones. (As a reminder, the rhythm instruments, so called because they are the time-keepers of a band, usually consist of banjo, guitar, piano, string or brass bass, and drums. Of course, when required, each instrument could also perform a solo chorus.)

However, the first jazz bands used the instruments that were available, not

necessarily by preference. Early photographs illustrate that guitars were seen almost as often as banjos. Another disputed instrument in original jazz, the saxophone, was also seen in photographs of the earliest of the jazz bands despite modern purists disputing the fact. The string bass is another instrument sometimes in dispute. Because the string bass could not be carried by a marching band, brass basses were used instead which then became commonplace in regular performances.

The imagined *preferred* use of the banjo instead of the guitar in the early Dixieland bands appears to have originated mainly in the recording studio.



Buddy Bolden (cornet) circa 1905. Note the guitar!

In a time of acoustic recording (up until around 1926) the smoother but *softer* sound of a guitar was barely audible on these early recordings, hence the louder and sharper sound of the banjo was used to produce a more satisfactory result. Around 1930 the electric guitar was invented which was louder than the banjo and overtook the banjo in popularity, eventually becoming the instrument of choice. Also, the string bass did not record well, hence another reason why tubas were often substituted, further explaining their appearance in regular performances.

The New Orleans Players

There is much proof that it was the guitar that mainly featured in early New Orleans jazz rhythm sections, not the banjo. In the history of New Orleans musicians there is a clear trend of performers slowly moving from guitar to banjo. Referring to some prominent New Orleans players of the period, **Brock Mumford** performed on guitar in Buddy Bolden's band from around 1900, which was the norm in bands at that time. By around 1915,

musicians began to be listed as guitar/banjo players. Finally, around 1920, musicians were listed as primarily banjoists.



Louis Armstrong and Johnny St Cyr

Johnny St. Cyr (of Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives) and **Carl Le Blanc** both began on the guitar, and all the significant New Orleans banjoists of the 1920s and 1930s seem to have started their musical training on instruments other than the banjo.

Louis Keppard recalls that "My first instrument was guitar when I was about 14 years old."

Lawrence Marrero, another important figure in New Orleans banjo, said, "[My] first instrument was a guitar, then I left guitar and went to playing bass violin, then I went to banjo. When I was a child, around 1910, all the bands I knew about were using the guitar, not banjo."

Bill Johnson, whose career reached back to before the beginnings of jazz, began as a guitarist, switching to bass in the late 1890s. He is credited with being the first jazz person to pluck (as opposed to bowing) the strings of a bass.

Nick Lucas recalls, "When I started I was playing an instrument called the banjeaurine – a mandolin with a banjo head on it – because they wanted more volume than a guitar."

However, others played only banjo: **Bob Gillette** played banjo with Bix Beiderbecke & the Wolverines, and with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings.

Lou Black was a prominent Jazz-era banjo player, part of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings during the 1920s. He began playing banjo during early childhood and became professional in 1917.

Fred Guy spent most of his playing career with the Duke Ellington Orchestra.



Bob Gillette



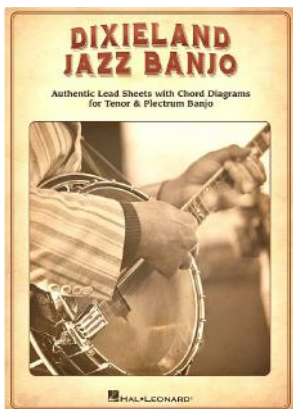
Bix Beiderbecke (t) & Don Murray (bj) recording for Gennett, 1924.

From 1925 he was with Ellington for 24 years. He played banjo up until the early 1930s and his rhythmic and percussive style was an asset to the early band. However after switching to guitar, Guy was practically inaudible.

Charles Bocage, who only played banjo, was with Piron's New Orleans Orchestra, one of the most popular bands in New Orleans in the 1920s. (Johnny St. Cyr also played for a short time with Piron's orchestra.)

Many guitar-trained players in the early days played 6-string banjos tuned like the guitar because you could barely hear their guitars. Some switched to tenor banjo. Some guitar players bought louder but expensive archtop guitars. A few played resonator guitars to increase volume. The common theme was to punch out the rhythm loud enough to be heard. Amplification was not available, nor was it needed. Musicians claimed that there was nothing better than listening to a good acoustic band.

Banjo players adapting to jazz, quickly found that the fifth drone string got in the way of the many chords used in ragtime and traditional jazz and removed it, and soon manufacturers reverted to making banjos with only four strings.



Nearly all the banjos made in the 1920s and 1930s were four-stringed instruments.

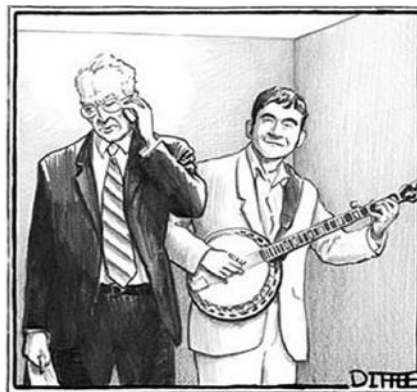
However, some of the earliest and best-known trad players, Johnny St. Cyr and Clancy Hayes among them, played six string banjos. Eddie Condon played

(as well as banjo) a guitar with plectrum tuning.

As recording technology improved and tastes changed the guitar came back into fashion and the tenor and plectrum guitar appeared to cater to banjo players who didn't play six strings.

One musician noted, "Each note played on a banjo has overtones that don't occur with a guitar, and the more strings that are played at one time, the more those overtones interfere with each other. So a six-string banjo must be played very carefully and not just strummed as can be done with a guitar. The four-string banjo helped overcome this problem".

If you look at photos of the earliest trad bands, you see some six-string



Banjo players were the subject of friendly mocking humour as evidenced by these two cartoons.



plectrum banjo which became the standard in trad jazz bands along with tenor banjos. Tenor banjos are tuned like violas and have an even higher and sharper tone than plectrum banjos.

The Australian Scene

Australian banjo players have not been highlighted in this article because we are discussing original early New Orleans jazz. However, the first Australian jazz

players tried to emulate what they heard on records or from visiting American bands, but it was only much later that locals were able to accurately re-create the original Dixieland sound. Witness Jazz legend Bill Miller who stated in the early 1940s that he had never, to that time, heard "real jazz" from an Australian band.

Nevertheless, almost all Australian Dixieland/Trad bands have at one time or another (or always) employed banjo players. Taken at random, a short list would include Cliff Clarke, Willie Watt, Johnny Malpas, Bill Tope, Dave Hines, Peter Cleaver, Norm Baker, Jack Varney, Peter Allen, Smacka Fitzgibbon, Jeff Arthur, Oscar Smith, John Brown, Ray Price, John Scurry, Charlie Farley, Jack Beamish, Tony Orr, Lee Treanor – the list goes on.

So if the guitar was originally the most common instrument of the early Dixieland bands, why do so many current jazz bands still use banjos? The only three reasons would seem to be 1) To emulate the sound of those legendary New Orleans-style bands that can be heard on the recordings made in the early days of recorded jazz, 2) To cut through the sound of other instruments during non-amplified performances, or 3) Simply because, to many people, the banjo sounds better and more appropriate.

One thing is sure – banjos have played in bands for about as long as they've existed.

Methinks the banjo is here to stay! ■

Major Sources: Clayton and Gammon, *The Guinness Jazz A to Z*;

Web sites:

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo>
- <https://sites.duke.edu/banjology/banjo-and-jazz/>
- <https://jazzagebanjo.wordpress.com/>



Ray Price



Smacka Fitzgibbon



Jack Varney

Multifunction Room Upgrade

The Jazz Museum's main room, officially known as the Ray Marginson room (after the Museum's founder) serves as the main exhibition area hosting displays of significant jazz instruments (e.g. Ade Monsborough's Grafton plastic saxophone and Graeme Bell's piano) plus other treasures. It is also used for special exhibitions such as the topical "Women in Jazz". In addition, the room is the venue for the live band performances given to community groups during "lunch and tour" visits.

A much-needed renovation was planned in order to display more of the museum's large collection, much of which was regrettably stored away out of sight. The upgrade involved removal of the large bookcase housing the reference library. There were many books that were considered superfluous to the needs of an *Australian jazz museum* – for instance a multitude of similar books on Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and other widely-known artists. The unessential books were sold, helping with the cost of the upgrade. The bookcase was disposed of and the remaining books re-housed in a Compactus unit in the international storage area in the "back" room.

New attractive carpet tiles were laid, a fresh coat of paint applied, and two extra glass display cases purchased. All displays were rearranged and a new position in the room for band performances allocated. The work was done by volunteer staff and financed by a small fund-raising exercise.



Top Right: The original library shelves with several books already removed.

Above left: The books relocated into the Compactus units.

Above right: The main display room after the bookcase was removed showing the extra space gained.

Left: The first group visit in the newly upgraded room.

Photos: Ian Rutherford, Helen Burke and Ken Simpson-Bull



Stan was the Man

By Ralph Powell

STANLEY George Chisholm and band leader Tom Davidson were both members of the RAAF No. 2 Mobile Entertainment Unit, based in northern Australia and New Guinea.

In 1944 Stan was highly recommended by Tom, who was Unit leader, for inclusion in the concert party. Other members were Alex King, Arthur Riley and Alan Wood on trumpet, Gordon Critcher on trombone, Billy Williams, Ron Bohme, George Dudley and Tom on reeds, John Robertson on piano and Mick Walker on drums. Stan played bass.

In civilian life Stan had played with Tom at St Kilda's Palais de Danse, a position he relinquished in April 1938. A year later, in June, he was advertising his availability as a string bass player.

In the summer of 1941 the Bell Band decided to open their own Sunday show at a coffee lounge called Leonard's in St. Kilda. As Roger recounts, they "added that wonderful bass player Stan Chisholm to make the band into a quintet and ran for a glorious three months" whilst Graeme says of Stan's inclusion, "We were flattered and honored to have Stan, who was one of Melbourne's top professional musicians."

In December of that year 18-year-old Don Banks recorded 'Don Banks Boogie', in Melbourne with Ron Howell (guitar) and Stan Chisholm (bass).



Pixie Robert, Stan Chisholm, Roger Bell, Graeme Bell, Russ Murphy at Leonard's in 1941

Stan enlisted in October 1942 and, with Tom Davidson, he composed the music for a highly rated number "Happy in an Unhappy Kind of Way" while posted to New Guinea's Goodenough Island during WW2. Stan was discharged from the RAAF in 1946.

"Happy in an Unhappy Kind of Way" was recorded by George Trevare on Parlophone with the Sun newspaper of September 16, 1946 reporting that it had "topped the Hit Parade in USA – an unprecedented feat for an Australian tune."



LAC Chisholm 'improvising' – Darwin c. 1944.



Stan Chisholm, Pixie Roberts and Roger Bell n.d.

Stan returned to his position at Brunswick Council, where he was a highly regarded employee, before branching out into clothing manufacturing in his latter years.

He died in December 1970 aged 64. ■



*Graeme Bell Band
Fooling around –c 1948
Graeme Bell; Pixie Roberts cl; Stan Chisholm sb; Russ Murphy dr; Roger Bell tp*

Max Teakle - A Piano Life

By Penny Eames Gurry

On the 9th of September 2020, I posted the following on the Australian Jazz Lovers Facebook page:

Exciting news that our grandson Max Teakle was awarded the Graham Coyle Scholarship by the staff at The Victorian College of Arts. It is such a thrill that it came from the legacy of a great Australian musician, lovely man and jazz friend of our family going back four generations to Max's great grandfather Bob Cruickshanks (Port Jackson Jazz Band), grandfather, Graham Eames, grandmother, me, parents, Lucy Eames and Steve Teakle, both musicians who have passed on a love of jazz to him.

Thank you, Dear Carol Coyle for your generosity in setting up the scholarship for Graham to be remembered.



A youthful Max Teakle tickles the ivories

Max was in his first year of a music degree at VCA in 2020 when he received this award and I contacted Carol to tell her it was my grandson that had been the recipient. She was thrilled and told me that it was the first time she'd known anything about who had received the scholarship. I rang Max and said it would be a good idea to listen to the Swaggie album, "The Naked Dance" but he was on the ball and had already listened to that particular track and was enjoying all the other gems that the album had to offer.

I told him how greatly admired Graham was and that both his great grandfather and I had played with him a few times over the years ... Dad at Jazz Conventions and jam sessions at Tony Newstead's ... me at Allan and Jean Leake's Jazz Party in the mid-seventies where I first met Graham and later gigs in Melbourne and at Bob Barnard Jazz Party. Also commented on how wonderfully entwined the jazz world is in Australia.

The beginning of that school year in 2020 and onwards was a hard year for everyone in Victoria with

so many lock downs. Max practised piano constantly at home shut up in his bedroom where his new Yamaha upright was situated and viewed his lectures on zoom and ensemble playing which was difficult due to time lags.

His musical journey began in Darwin where he was born in June 2001.

On his second Xmas he was given a small kid's drum kit and there are videos of him beating out rhythms with his two sticks for a while then moving the kit a metre or so and starting over again. He spent hours doing that and it's very amusing to watch. Also, he exhibited great rhythm for one so young.

Because his parents, both BMus graduates, were working musicians, young Max was exposed to live music in the home and at gigs ... absorbing all of it, classical, jazz and country.

At times Lucy (cello, guitar) who was in the Darwin Symphony and Arafura Orchestra and Steve (piano, piano accordion and guitar) who was employed by Darwin University, travelled with Max to some of the First Nations' remote and Island communities where they gave workshops funded by Darwin university.

They helped the students learn instruments, guitars, bass guitars and drums mostly, set up bands and compose music and songs. It was a great life; they loved it and little Maxie thrived on it.

Young brother Oscar was born when Max was four years old and a year later it was decided to sell up in Darwin and move to Melbourne but not before a six-month desert and Kimberley trip in a converted 26-seater Toyota Coaster bus teaching at workshops at communities on the way. Lucy has often remarked ... "I don't know how I did it"

They bought a house in Brunswick East not far from the famous Lomond hotel which was to feature later in Max's early gigs.

Max attended Thornbury Primary School where he started piano and violin lessons at seven.

By high school age, he was able to enrol at Princes Hill Secondary College in Carlton North because he played two instruments. He joined the school big band on piano in Year 8.

I went over to Melbourne for a visit and was blown away by Max's standard of playing in the band and the excellent performance from the band made up from a cross section of students of various ages.

On that same trip to Melbourne, I heard Max's band at The Lomond for the first time.

For about six months Max had been playing solo piano at the hotel for an hour every Friday at five. He then managed to get a two-hour gig with a couple of reed players and a trombonist from the school band to form a band with two of the older regular musos who played gigs there, Lenny on drums and Steve on bass.

I had a sit in and it was such a thrill to sing with my 14-year-old grandson who was playing like an old pro. They were getting a good size crowd in there as well. Needless to say, I was very proud of him.

A year later, Max transferred from Princes Hill to Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School where he received piano tuition from the greats, Mark Fitzgibbon and Barney McCall. How lucky was he?



Max Teagle jamming with Penny Eames

After finishing high school, the natural progression was to attend the VCA where the wonderful Andrea Keller was his piano tutor. As stated previously ... what a difficult time that was!

2021 was a slightly better year, pandemic wise and Max was awarded the Will Poskiitt scholarship mid year and the 'Outstanding Music Student scholarship' at the end of that same year.

He had heard about auditions for an international band consisting of eight musicians that the Basel international university jazz campus put together each year with a scholarship on offer. He had sent an audition tape for the 2021/2022 university year but wasn't successful, so with the help of his scholarship money decided to travel to Switzerland in February 2022 and audition in person which they preferred.

Again, he wasn't successful but they were impressed with his performance and his scholastic achievements from two years BMus. studies and offered him a scholarship starting in September, (term one) 2022 to complete his final year of his music degree in Basel.

This was wonderful for Max but also created a dilemma. He couldn't afford to fly back home and then back to Switzerland so decided to look around and ask for a few sit ins and get to know some of the jazz students. The sit ins led to a few gigs and then he set off to Paris by train.

I had told Max about the few expats that I knew who were living in Paris and London. There was Leigh Barker well known bass player from Melbourne, living 80 miles out of Paris and Louise Messenger, Anita Wardle vocalists and Duncan Hemstock, reeds, who I knew well from Adelaide. They were doing very well teaching and gigging in London and abroad. I sent Max a video clip of "The Intercontinentals", a band in which Leigh, Louise and Duncan played, usually in Paris.

Max ran into Leigh playing in a club in Paris and introduced himself, had a sit in and Leigh hired him for a few gigs. Later on, Duncan and Louise came to Paris for an Intercontinental gig that the young Lindy Hoppers and swing dancers were going mad for and they booked Max for the nights they were to play.

One club was the famous *Le Caveau de la Huchette* (a basement cellar by the Seine dating back to pre-1551) where a lot of the jazz greats have performed. He has made the odd quick train trip from Basel to gig with them in the last two years

Another serendipitous meeting occurred during his first month in Paris. He happened upon a very cluttered antique shop in the Marais district which had an old piano, opened with sheet music on display, just begging him to come inside and play.

The owner, Martine, was delighted when he asked permission to play but she was even more delighted when he played a beautiful jazz standard. She wouldn't let him leave and he gladly played for two hours.

She was a jazz enthusiast and had a huge collection of jazz 78s and LPs. She was born in Paris post war and they have become good friends with Max staying in her wonderful antique laden apartment on his many visits.

Max settled into study and University life in Basel and played in student ensembles and later formed a quartet of his own with Nikita Sipiagin, sax, from New York (Toshiko Ashioki the Grammy awarded pianist, composer, arranger and big band leader is his grandmother) Genius Wesley, drums, Los Angeles and Paddy Fitzgerald, bass from Melbourne.

Lois Stephenson had told me that Paddy was in Basel at the Jazz Campus and had bought husband Fred's bass before he left Melbourne and it still had the 1985 Ballarat jazz convention sticker on it. Fred played bass in Allan Leake's Storyville All Stars, a band with whom I had sung many times at The Manor House in Melbourne and had recorded with for two of their LPs. It was such a surprise when I saw the first photos on Instagram that Paddy was the bass player in Max's quartet. I rang him and said excitedly, here's another of those coincidences in Aussie jazz. You and I have both played and recorded with the same bass on opposite sides of the world!



Max Teagle with Graham Eames on trumpet

After graduating in August 2023, Max was granted a scholarship for two years to complete a Master's degree in Basel.

In early October 2023 Max won second prize in the annual International Jazz Piano competition held in Lausanne. It was a rigorous competition, assignments included playing in trio as well as two separate duo settings and performing Martial Solal's composition *Vice et Versa*.

In February last year he came home to a joyous welcome but only stayed for two weeks.

He will graduate this August but we think we've lost him to Paris. ■

South-East Melbourne's Jazz Oasis

By Con Pagonis OAM



Image: Paul Williamson

Paul Grabowsky p, performing with students from the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music

As a student through the early 1970s, I struggled through several years of lectures at the Monash University Clayton Campus's 'Rotunda' theatres. Fifty years later I am back in the same space on campus which has been re-developed as a wonderful jazz club – *The Count's!* No prize for guessing which I like more!

Not only does Monash offer Melbourne's south-east region this fantastic live music jazz oasis, but also an innovative jazz education through the *Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music and Performance (SoMP)*. The *SoMP* is a thriving hub of diverse musical practices in performance, composition, research, teaching, and industry engagement. It is home to an exciting community of undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional musicians, performers, and researchers working across music genres, including a strong focus on jazz.

The Monash School of Music's *Jazz and Improvisation (J&I)* specialisation aims to offer a strong technical and musical foundation that allows students to develop a personal 'voice' which is a result of their broad musical education and an awareness of their social and cultural being. The curriculum features a focus on African American jazz idiom, and music in Australia, as languages for learning. Students also develop their skills, knowledge and experiences within a wide selection of jazz and improvisational styles including world music, Brazilian, Indian, free, electronic, Latin and blues, and original compositions.

One-to-one lessons, small ensembles, creative practice classes and performance practice classes are central to scaffolded learning (these classes combine students from all year levels). Through the core of the degree students may participate in

classes that explore small ensemble performance, music theory and ear training, and the place of jazz and improvised music in the world, with electives available in areas such as orchestration & arranging, video game music, the history of electronic music, film music, and elective ensembles such as big bands and world music ensembles, amongst others.

The School's *J&I* program attracts the highest calibre of teaching staff and guest artists and offers a variety of performance, composition and research opportunities that provide students with crucial industry experience, engagement and connections. Academically, there is a focus on learning research skills in performance (practice-based/artistic research), which can lead to further study in graduate research. The specialisation connects students with current industry practices and practitioners and encourages the creation of new Australian music.

Key features of the *J&I* specialisation are co-curricular recording and performance projects, which offer unique opportunities for students to learn, be mentored, perform and collaborate with seminal national and international musicians. Examples from the past decade include: Carla Bley, Joe Lovano, Terri Lyne Carrington, Charles Lloyd, Linda Oh, Branford Marsalis, Kris Davis, Dave Douglas, Kristin Berardi and Paul Grabowsky. These opportunities enable students to gain professional experience and make lasting industry connections for their future careers. This includes performances at the *Melbourne International Jazz Festival*, *Melbourne Women's International Jazz Festival*, Monash Sessions recordings (*SoMP Bandcamp* releases), and the *Lunchtime Concert Series*. As well as Showcases each semester at campus venues like

The Count's and external venues such as The Paris Cat, The Jazzlab, and Uptown Jazz Café, there are also performance opportunities through the innovative Monash Art Ensemble, and the Monash Music Agency.

The success of the *J&I* curriculum design and aforementioned opportunities is exemplified by the impactful contributions of Monash alumni within the music industry – as professional musicians (performers & composers), educators (secondary and tertiary), researchers and research students, and within music business and arts event management. Notable achievements include Grammy winners and nominees such as Simon Mabern and Nick Marks, as well as glowing international reviews for Monash Session recording releases. The program has also earned prestigious accolades, including ARIA Awards and Australian Jazz Bell Awards for the Monash Art Ensemble (MAE).

Recent graduate accolades include Monash alumni Stephen Byth honoured as the winner of the esteemed 2024 National Jazz Awards, and multi-award-winning vocalist and 2021 Juilliard graduate, Olivia Chindamo, who has made waves in New York in recent years. Notable graduates like this evidence the excellence of the *J&I* program.

I recently had the opportunity of a chat over coffee at *The Count's* with the SoMP's Dr Paul Williamson; and he showed me around the School. Paul is a senior lecturer and Coordinator of Jazz and Improvisation and Honours at the SoMP. We started a discussion about opportunities for AJM to exhibit parts of our collection at the SoMP's high student traffic areas from time-to-time. Paul Williamson has established a distinguished reputation as a trumpeter and composer producing distinctive recordings of outstanding ensemble performances. As a leader, he's released sixteen albums and has performed extensively internationally and nationally with jazz greats including Carla Bley, Charlie Haden, Eddie Palmieri, Linda Oh, Bill Carothers, Dave Liebman, Paul Wertico, Tomasz Stańko, Kenny Werner, John Abercrombie, Hermeto Pascoal, Aaron Goldberg, Django Bates, Vijay Iyer, Mike Nock, Tony Gould, Nasheet Waits and Mark Helias.

In preparing this article I also interviewed Robert Burke, an Associate Professor in *Jazz and Improvisation* at the Monash SoMP. He is an internationally acclaimed performer and composer. Rob has released seventeen CDs under his own name and has composed and performed on a further 300 CD's. His sensitive and balanced perspective has allowed Rob to traverse many different styles, and this has, in part, been expressed as collaborative performances with international leaders in classical, jazz and experimental music. His embrace of many genres of music and the clear expression of his diversity in his role as an educator, researcher and performer, has given rise to a vibrant dialect that resonates through his students and his performances.

"Easily one of the top jazz clubs in Melbourne", is how *Beat Magazine* describes Monash's live jazz venue *The Count's*, where Paul and Robert perform from time-to-time. The music program there is curated by award-winning Creative Producer and vocalist Chelsea Wilson, who I also spoke with for this article. Chelsea not only puts the program together, but also MCs performances

and is also known to join performers on stage as 'guest' vocalist, usually on Wednesday evenings. Chelsea has also kindly invited AJM to discuss possibilities for exhibiting parts of our collection across 'MPAC' – the *Monash University Performing Arts Centres* – which include the Alexander Theatre, Robert Blackwood Hall, David Li Sound Gallery, The Count's, and the George Jenkins Theatre.

In addition to her role as Creative Producer at MPAC, Chelsea is a vocalist, songwriter, radio broadcaster and producer. Her debut album "I Hope You'll Be Very Unhappy Without Me" was lauded #2 Album of the Year on ABC Radio National and nominated for Best Soul Album at *The Age Music Victoria Awards*. An internationally acclaimed live performer she headlined the Arts Centre Melbourne stage at the Australasian World Music Expo; and made her UK debut at Glastonbury Festival 2015, subsequently selling out the famous London Jazz Café. Her second album "Chasing Gold" was nominated for the Australian Music Prize.

Chelsea's eclectic program at The Count's features iconic Australian songwriters, cult jazz outfits, premier instrumentalists and emerging talent. In addition to Paul Williamson and Robert Burke, artists who have performed at The Count's include 'The Count' himself – Paul Grabowsky AO – who is actually a descendant of Polish nobility; but best known as a Pianist, Composer, Innovator; and the Australian Jazz Museum's Ambassador!

The Count's has also featured great artists like plus Mo'Ju, Tania Doko, Kee'ahn, Kaiit, Deborah Conway, Mama Alto, Vince Jones, Fem Belling, Rai Thistlethwayte, Emma Pask, Professor Cat Hope, Jazz Party, Cookin' on 3 Burners, Parvyn, Barney McAll, and the late, great Renée Geyer. You can check on-line to see who's coming-up next! When MC'ing on-stage at The Count's, Chelsea always describes it as 'Melbourne's South-East Jazz Oasis'.

In coming years, the AJM hopes to build on its collaborative relationship with jazz educators and performers like Monash's Paul Williamson, Robert Burke and Chelsea Wilson. We are a unique repository of Australian jazz history offering a vast array of teaching and research resources – invaluable to all music educators and students of Australian jazz.



Shannon Barnett tb, performing with students from the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music

Cultural Treasure Ray Walker

By Western Australian correspondent Elaine Curtis

Ray Walker has been a mainstay of the Perth jazz scene for the past six decades and counting, his passion for jazz burning as brightly as ever. A gifted musician and dedicated teacher, Ray is respected internationally and highly regarded by all who know him professionally and personally. Renowned for his courtesy and consideration of others at all times, Ray represents all that is best in jazz as one of WA's most consistently sought after performers, a remarkable guitarist with a mastery of his instrument that has led greats such as American virtuoso guitarist Joe Pass to declare him as "the real deal."



Western Australian jazz guitarist Ray Walker

His impeccable credentials saw him recently named as a WA State Cultural Treasure for 2024 for his "deep and enduring impact on the WA arts landscape and substantial contributions to the arts sector and community." Mace Francis, formerly Artistic Director of WA Youth Jazz Orchestra and now Festival Director of Perth International Jazz Festival, holds Ray in the highest esteem. "Ray is a humble, honest, lovely human being who can also play guitar better than anyone else around. He has taught and mentored every guitarist that is worth anything in this state and his reputation keeps getting passed down from generation to generation

of guitar students. He stands as an equal with all the great jazz guitarists." At last year's Perth International Jazz Festival, Mace featured Ray with New York based jazz trombonist Mariel Bildsten (50 years Ray's junior) in "a truly special" concert sizzling with synergy.

Born on August 25th 1943 in Bangor (Belfast), Ray grew up in Dublin, cities producing more than their fair share of musicians of note - Van Morrison, Sinead O'Connor to name but two. Music permeated Ray's childhood. "The musical influence in my family comes from my mother's side. Her father was John Clarke-Barry, who had his own orchestra which was famous all over Ireland in the early 1900s. My mother played the accordion and sang in a professional vocal trio with two of her sisters. I had a number of uncles and cousins who were professional musicians in Dublin when I was growing up. I remember some fabulous parties as a child where music was a real feature!"

Ray's love of stringed instruments began early, aged eight, after encountering his mother's violin. However, it was to be the guitar that would capture his heart. "I switched from violin to guitar after hearing Hank Marvin from Cliff Richards' band 'The Shadows' playing on Cliff's hit records. I started by playing three chords my mother taught me and made up my own chord shapes from there." With none of the resources available nowadays, books, internet, learning aids; like many other accomplished guitarists of that era, such as Clapton, Lennon and McCartney, Ray is self-taught.

His family moved to England in 1958 to qualify for the assisted passage scheme to Australia and emigrated to Perth in 1960 as "ten pound poms" when Ray was 16. On arrival in Australia, Ray relates, "for two or three years I devoured anything I could relating to playing the guitar ... I was mainly using the guitar to accompany my singing at this time and I made quite a few appearances on a local pop show called Club Seventeen on Channel 7 in Perth. It was on this show that I first met jazz vocalist Helen Matthews and our careers intertwined for the next fifty years."

Ray's passion for the guitar motivated him to acquire the skills and experience needed to grow into one of Australia's leading contemporary jazz guitarists, "learning on the job." "Around 1962-3 I got hold of a record player and bought an album by Charlie Byrd (a jazz guitarist who played nylon string guitar). The album was called 'The Blues Sonata' and I wore it out learning to play most of it by ear. I then met a bass player called Keith Carton (who was to become a lifelong friend) who told me all about Barney



Swan River Ramblers - Pete Jeavons - sb, Ray Walker bj, Adam Hall t, Adrian Galante cl

Kessel, Tal Farlow, Johnny Smith etc. When I managed to get hold of their recordings I became hooked on jazz guitar and set about trying to get as much as I could off the records. I played in a dance band with Keith on weekends and after the gigs would end up at the 'Hole in the Wall Club', an after hours club where jam sessions would carry on all night. I learnt a lot on the bandstand in this way (still no lessons, books or YouTube!)"

Ray's tenacity and hard work laid firm foundations. His consistency, reliability and versatility produced the consummate professional, renowned for courteous manners, a genuine gentleman of jazz. The Ellington Jazz Club describes him as "a true jazz icon, one of WA's most revered musicians." Ray explains his journey to this epithet, "All through the Sixties I played in clubs, hotels, jazz clubs, weddings and the odd Big Band as a semi-professional until in 1968, I was invited to form part of a resident quartet for the new Parmelia Hotel (Perth's first 5 star). This was a five nights a week gig that paid twice as much as my day job for half the hours. Even though my wife Teresa and I had just been married, I decided to take the plunge and become a full time musician." The band proved extremely popular and was resident at the hotel for the next ten and a half years. It gave Ray the freedom during the day to take recording session work for radio and TV.

The 60s and 70s were a consolidation for Ray as a musician, supporting his family and a mortgage. Necessity meant that he had to be versatile and handle a wide range of styles and genres to fit the work he was offered, including orchestral and pit work for shows. "My "first love", namely jazz guitar, was something I could pursue only occasionally and often without any financial reward."

"When the gig (at the Parmelia Hilton) came to an end at the start of 1980, I did club work, session

work and became a casual guitarist with the WA Symphony Orchestra. In 1982 this led me to be invited to be the soloist with WASO playing the Adagio from Rodrigo's 'Concierto De Aranjuez' This of course was completely 'left of field' for a jazz guitarist but I took it on and spent two months becoming a classical guitarist. It turned out to be one of the most satisfying performances of my career!" Ray was to work with WASO for the next 45 years, resigning in 2024 to concentrate on jazz gigs after the many other styles of music he has played over his career to make a living.

In 1984, Ray accepted the position of Lecturer in Guitar for the new Jazz program starting up at the WA Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), a sessional position which became full time in 1991. "This teaching position came at just the right time for me. It enabled me to focus on my jazz playing and took the pressure off having to take every gig that came along. Not only was I playing jazz every day in my lessons and lectures but I also did a lot of research into improvisation techniques so I also became a student!" Over the decades, Ray has taught and mentored many of the state's leading professional jazz musicians. His professionalism, inspiration and example inspired generations of students to pursue musical excellence. Explaining to Joe Barth in the prestigious American publication *Jazz Guitar Today*, "There is only one 'you', so you must try to express that individuality in your playing. Transcribing your favorite players will give you some 'language' to draw on but don't focus on one particular player or even on guitarists alone. Try to develop anything you can identify as original in your playing. Above all, learn to 'hear' what you play rather than 'letting your fingers do the walking' as they say". On another occasion Ray expounds, "It's really hard to define what jazz is, the main bulk is improvisation, there is freedom in that but it takes a lot of discipline to get to that stage when you can be

free. You may start by imitating the greats, but try to find something that is unique to you, be yourself..." Ray's improvisations on the guitar always reflected his individuality, style and flair. Above all, the melding of self and jazz, a symbiotic alliance between individuality and instrument, the result of self discipline underpinned by technical proficiency. Ray resigned from WAAPA in 2016 after 33 years, enabling him "to focus more on performance."

Having played with many guitar greats throughout his career, Ray reminisces, "Through the 1980s and 1990s I was fortunate to play with many visiting guitarists who came to Perth for concerts presented by the Perth Jazz Society. Some of the names that come to mind were Joe Pass, Emily Remler, Martin Taylor, Louis Stewart, John Pisano and Peter Bernstein. I am particularly fond of a workshop given by Joe Pass where he invited me up to play with him". Indeed, legendary American jazz guitarist Joe Pass who has recorded and performed live with the likes of pianist Oscar Peterson, composer Duke Ellington, and vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, declared to Ray's students that "this guy knows what he's doing!" Ray's talent and technique impressed guitar greats from around the world. John Pisano "the American Godfather of Jazz Guitar" invited Ray to LA to record an album "Affinity" with him after playing with him on a visit to Perth in 2000.

With innumerable musical achievements and performances as a mainstay on the Perth jazz scene for so long, there are some that are extra special. "Some of the highlights of my 60 year career (to date) include the performance on classical guitar with WASO in 1982, playing with Joe Pass, performing in LA as guest on John Pisano's Guitar Night in 1999 (an institution in LA) with many famous guitarists in the audience and playing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the Opera House in 2023 with my daughter Jessica Gethin conducting".

Long time firm favourite at Jazz Fremantle, Ray has delivered consistently throughout his prodigious and productive career. Club president Ken Westgate says, "Virtuoso guitarist and teacher Ray Walker needs no introduction. He virtually lives at Jazz Fremantle. There is probably no finer in the business in WA ... a creative soloist whose solo flights and flurries embellished many of the numbers played... everything Ray does is perfect." Ken described as "phenomenal" one of Ray's recent performances (using his nylon stringed guitar), as "the best he had heard Ray, growing better and better with time, ever playing to date".

Ray and wife Teresa (a jazz vocalist) have four daughters, all who love music and growing up with it integral to their family, "Music has always been part of our home life". Individually and collectively, the sisters describe their father, articulated by Louise, as "a genuine treasure in every sense, a true gentleman, embodying grace, kindness and humility in all he does. Professionally, he always has unwavering attention to detail, approaching every task with thoughtfulness and precision. Beyond his remarkable talents, he is a man of deep integrity and steadfast loyalty, warm and unassuming."

Two of his daughters have careers in music and Ray has performed with both. Jessica (Principal Conductor at WA ballet and Head of Orchestral Studies and Conducting at the WAAPA) at the Sydney Opera House and Sophie, a classical cellist (founder of the WA Young Artists Chamber Music Program). The trio has performed together on many occasions as "The Walker Trio" and recorded an album of Ray's arrangements and compositions.



'The Walker Trio'

Ray and daughters Jessica Gethin and Sophie Curtis

The Walker Trio have also altruistically incorporated their love of music with events that have raised funds and benefits for community and charity. Jessica says, "His complete commitment to the art form which has never eased over the decades, his stellar work ethic, always musically prepared, always honouring contracts and doing the right thing by the people who engage him, no matter what the exposure or profile. His sense of integrity, humility and authenticity, and generosity as a musician shines through and has ensured his longevity in the industry over many decades. I have been so fortunate to share the stage with him over the years, from the Perth Concert Hall to the Sydney Opera House, and have watched time and time again how people respond to him and realise what an incredible inspiration he is to so many."

The epitome of a living treasure, not just a cultural one but one representing the best of humanity, Ray's exemplary life of service combined his love of jazz with an impressive wellspring of talent developed through his own efforts. A constant of Perth's jazz community, whether as soloist or accompanist, the same dedication, generosity and expertise was always present in a career built on discipline but infused with the flexibility, freedom and romance of jazz. Firmly with his sights on his next project, Ray shares, "I would like to record a work I composed in 1995 for an 11 piece jazz ensemble. It was performed for the Perth Jazz Society but never recorded. I am looking forward to focusing on my jazz playing now that I have stepped back from the many other styles of music I've played over my career in order to make a living. I enjoy virtually any style that involves guitar but jazz would be my first love." A love that is plainly still going strong. ■

Geoff Kitchen's Corsairs



A previously undiscovered recording from September 22, 1945, has been uncovered at the Museum. The 78rpm double-sided acetate was made on a home disc recorder, the method used for personal recordings before the advent of tape or cassette recorders.

The hand-labelled Blue-Rhythm disc credits the band as "Geoff Kitchen's Corsairs," with an 18-year-old Frank Johnson playing trumpet, Geoff Kitchen on clarinet, Eric Washington on trombone, Geoff Bland on piano, Harry Morrison on guitar, and Ken Thwaites on drums.

This recording offers a rare glimpse into the early days of what would later become a legendary jazz career. While only Kitchen and Bland eventually joined Frank Johnson's "Fabulous Dixielanders", this disc reveals a previously unknown chapter in his musical journey, one that jazz history books had not documented. Though the performance sounds somewhat raw compared to the polished band that would go on to become one of Melbourne's finest, it is still a valuable piece of history. Frank Johnson passed away in a traffic accident in 2000. ■

By Ralph Powell



Frank Johnson



Geoff Kitchen

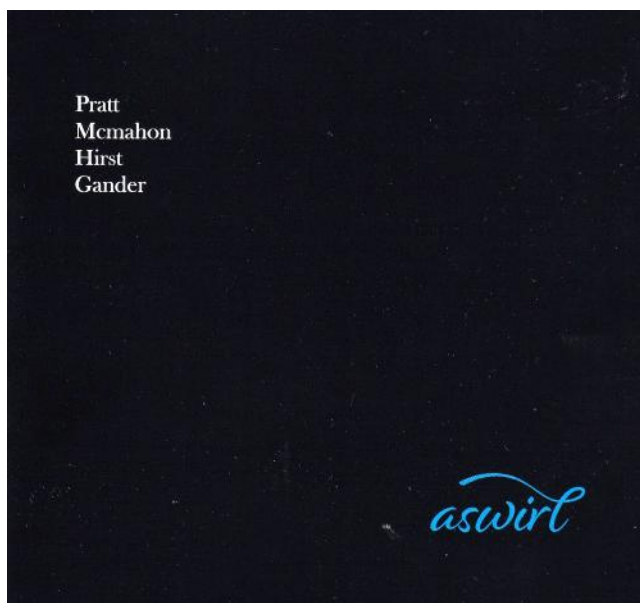
PRATT MCMAHON HIRST GANDER : **ASWIRL**

Album review by Eric Myers

Music written and performed by all four musicians

Label: Independent

Personnel: Daryl Pratt (vibraphone), Matt McMahon (piano), Brett Hirst (bass) & Andrew Gander (drums)



these master musicians so naturally that I find it infectious.

The first two tracks are instructive. The opening one, Pratt's composition *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*, has what he describes as "a 7/4 groove". It begins with a lovely double bass improvisation by Hirst, accompanied by Gander using brushes. Pratt creeps in with the head of the tune. Hirst continues with a similar figure, this time composed rather than improvised. Rhythmic figures bring in a piano improvisation while Gander continues with brushes until, at a certain point, as the music develops momentum, he picks up his sticks during McMahon's solo. Pratt re-enters with his solo while Hirst continues in "broken time" mode as the music moves towards a climax. Pratt continues to solo with Gander still using sticks until the energy-level is brought down, and Pratt re-states the head of the tune, as Gander reverts to brushes, ending with some rhythmic figures which take the tune out. I found the restraint in the playing on this track very beautiful.

This lovely album from four brilliant jazz musicians is a gem. Recorded in 2016 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, it has been in the can waiting for drummer Andrew Gander to return from overseas before its release onto the market.

As a matter of interest, during those years Gander was living in Asia and Europe, playing, touring and recording with artists such as Joseph Tawadros, Blaine Whittaker, Will Vinson, Carl Orr, and many others. He also presented material from his PhD thesis at universities in Austria and The Netherlands, and did solo performances at drum festivals in China.

Other than Gander, *Aswirl* features Daryl Pratt (vibraphone), Matt McMahon (piano) and Brett Hirst (double bass). Ten original compositions are played: five from Pratt, two each from Hirst and Gander, and one from McMahon.

I found *Aswirl* a breath of fresh air, and am wondering why I found it so agreeable. Perhaps it sounds like a document from another era, as it feels so relaxed and unhurried. I wondered: has society changed so much over the last eight years, that it's hard to imagine such an uncomplicated album being released in 2025?

The times these days now seem so much more turbulent, and I feel this is palpably being reflected in Australian contemporary jazz, certainly on those albums which come my way for review. I hear much on this album, but nothing more pleasurable than how the music echoes the jazz tradition. Moreover the music rolls out of



Vibraphonist Daryl Pratt: kept this album, recorded in 2016, in the can for eight years...

Compare this to the second track, Hirst's composition *Innocently Evil*, where the approach is somewhat different. Pratt states the head of the tune, with Gander using sticks from



L-R, Andy Gander (drums), Daryl Pratt (vibraphone), Brett Hirst (double bass), Matt McMahon (piano)

the first note, with Hirst adopting a two to the bar time-feel in more or less broken time. McMahon takes the first solo, and Hirst now plays four to the bar, allowing the piece to swing gently, giving this piece a character which contrasts with the opening track. McMahon's relatively long solo eventually gives way to a bass solo from Hirst, while Gander stays with sticks, giving a model display of how to accompany a bass solo with sticks, until Pratt re-enters with the theme followed by a short coda featuring exchanges between him and McMahon to wind the tune down and bring it to a close. Gander is a master of the conversational approach that modern jazz drummers have adopted over many years but the key to the music's success here is its impeccable sound balance. As a result Gander never sounds intrusive, his volume level being close to perfect.

The third track, Gander's *Lotus Eaters* is a tune in 5/4 (although it also includes an alternating section in 6/4). Once again the group's approach is disarmingly gentle, maintaining the ruminative sensibility that the quartet is apparently aiming for.

The fourth track, Pratt's *Twice Removed*, is a sparse tune in three, with a rather busy time-feel provided by Gander with brushes. Pratt plays the head, and continues playing while McMahon plays a chordal solo, eventually moving into slightly higher energy while Pratt continues with what appears to be background figures. As usual McMahon's notes are bright and beautiful, and at some point Gander contributes to the

accumulating energy by switching to sticks, with the tune ending on McMahon's solo.

The next tune, Hirst's second composition on the album *Uncomfortable Silence*, is a slow to medium tempo tune in four. Relatively long solos from McMahon and Pratt lope along beautifully, with Pratt characteristically doubling the time, before Hirst enters for another great bass solo, as exploratory as ever.

Gander's second composition *Fungibles*, is a sparsely written piece which is remarkable in that it primarily reveals Gander's rhythmic ingenuity on drums behind the other players.

As for the last few compositions on *Aswirl*, there's not much to report on, except to say that the exquisite ambience of the album so far described is retained to the end, with ample evidence of the overwhelming talent of these masterful musicians.

The merits of this album are so subtle and nuanced that I felt a detailed, blow-by-blow analysis of some tracks would hopefully catch the essence of the music for the benefit of readers. It's unusual for me to be writing a 900-word piece, as my reviews in *The Australian* are invariably thumbnail pieces of 170 words.

One of the most appealing aspects of *Aswirl* is its impeccable sound, and in particular the luscious sound of Pratt's vibraphone. The sound balance throughout is faultless, and is an example for others to emulate. *Aswirl* is an album for the true jazz believers. ■

Reminiscing

100 years of Australian Jazz recording



2025

A milestone year for Australian Jazz Recording.

THE first jazz recordings in Australia were Mastertouch piano rolls recorded in Sydney from around 1922 but it was not until 1925 that jazz was first recorded on disc in Australia, initially in Melbourne and shortly thereafter in Sydney.

"For the first time in the history of Australia, records manufactured in Australia in their entirety were issued in Melbourne last week. They are the product of the World Record Company and recordings have been made by Melbourne's leading dance orchestras. Bert Ralton's hits, ... are extra good and should have a ready sale on the market. Ray Tellier's Band at the Palais de Danse St.Kilda, have also recorded", stated *Everyones Magazine* in July 1925.

The last *Mastertouch* roll was of "12th Street Rag" made by stride pianist John Gill on May 20, 2004 but never released.

