

JUDY BAILEY

by John Clare

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Pianist and composer Judy Bailey established herself as an important voice in Australian music very soon after her arrival here from New Zealand in the early sixties. Those were the last golden years of Sydney's famous jazz club, the El Rocco. To play at the El Rocco was to be accepted as one of the top jazz players in the country. That is where Judy soon found herself, in the company of Graeme Lyall, Don Burrows, Errol Buddle, Lyn Christie, John Sangster, Lennie Young, Stewart Speer and a number of others.



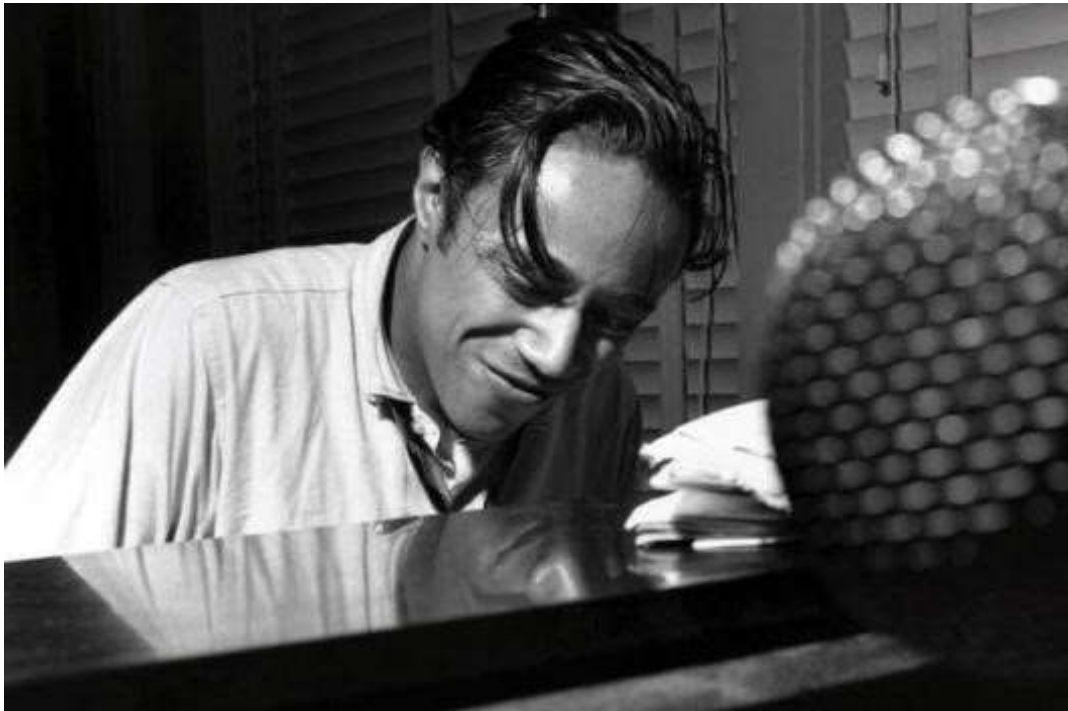
Judy Bailey, performing at the El Rocco in the early 60s... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY

At the same time, Judy landed a job with Tommy Tycho's band — on the recommendation of Julian Lee. Since then she has led a number of bands of her own. Her sidemen over the years have included John Pochée, Bernie McGann, Col Loughnan, Ken James, Neville Blanchett, Graeme Lyall, Derek Fairbrass, Ron Philpott and Laurie Bennett.

It comes as something of a shock then, to learn that Judy had played scarcely any jazz at all before coming to Australia, and that her only professional experience had been a regular spot on the radio at Wangarang. Where's that? North of Auckland,

and about as small as it sounds. Judy had of course been well schooled in classical piano, which should surprise no one who has admired her precise technique. Her father had taken her to audition for the radio, without letting on where they were going. "Otherwise, he knew I would have been too nervous to go," she says.

Her interest in jazz began when a musician played her some Horace Silver and then some George Shearing. "I immediately ran to the piano to try and work out what they were doing," she said. "It was like setting off on a great adventure, and I still feel that way about playing jazz, or any music.



Judy's interest in jazz began when a musician played her some Horace Silver (above) and then some George Shearing (below)...SILVER PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS; SHEARING PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN



"I think I had one advantage in that I had always played a lot by ear. When I did the radio spot, one of the technicians would bring along his clarinet and after I had finished the programme we would have a bit of a swing session."

Judy says she found no condescension amongst male musicians on the Sydney jazz scene. "They were all very kind. Occasionally someone would say, 'Gee, you play really well for a woman', but at the time I took it as a joke. Thinking back, they were never the really good musicians who said that.

"Of course there is nothing unusual about a woman playing classical music, or singing popular songs, but jazz has been something of a man's world. I think the reason for that is that a certain sense of adventure is required to become really interested in jazz, and that hasn't been exactly encouraged in women.

"Things are changing all the time, however, and I meet so many women now who have got that sense of adventure. I think it's great."

Judy's current quintet, which recently toured South East Asia for Musica Viva, includes singer percussionist Bernadine Morgan, whose accurate voice often provides another 'instrumental' line for Judy to work with, and whose percussion sounds provide a range of colouration.



Three members of Judy's current quartet, performing in Indonesia in 1978, L-R, Bernadine Morgan (vocals, percussion), Col Loughnan (tenor sax) & Judy (electric piano)... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY

Judy's quartet album on the Eureka label was called *Colours*, and colour is an element of music of which Judy seems more conscious than many jazz musicians.



"I think colour is a very important aspect of jazz," she says. "The three generally accepted elements of music are melody, rhythm and harmony, but music is also shape, colour and form.

"I think of the shape of phrases pyramids, clouds, undulating waves — and the overall form in which those shapes occur. Jazz improvisation creates an enormous range of shapes and colours. When I compose, or listen to music, I don't think analytically".

At this point I offered my feeling that music which I found strong and memorable traced powerful shapes in the air, to which feelings attached themselves. Judy seemed to agree, and added, "I think composing is the tangible result of a process — a combination of emotion and intellect. It is a statement, a comment made by someone in a particular language, which in my case is music."

Judy's jazz playing has broadened enormously since the El Rocco days. Her improvising may take her into areas of modal euphoria or sharp thrilling dissonance. She can play with a flowing swing, or break everything up with unpredictably jumping atonal clusters. On her solo album *Hey Jude* on Eureka and in her concert work with singer Margret RoadKnight she shows her love of sweet melodic playing, and of rags, cakewalks and good old down home blues.

Her compositions have always been distinctive. Her *Two Part Sketch*, which appeared on the CBS *Jazz Australia* album in the sixties, still sounds fresh, and Judy has revived it as part of her quintet's repertoire.

Judy's musical activities as a whole have broadened. With a boy and a girl of her own, and a period of complete domesticity behind her, Judy is concerned to open the possibilities of music up to children at as early an age as is possible. She takes part in two ABC children's programmes —*Kindergarten* at 10.35 each schoolday morning and *Feel The Beat* at 2.20 on Tuesday afternoons.

Feel The Beat, says Judy, "is a programme designed to help children experience music and movement, and to use their imaginations in this area. Geoff and Jenny Ayling and myself create music for direct conscious activity as well as for fantasy outlet. Some of the music is written and some is improvised."

On Tuesday mornings Judy gives a period of music and movement at the local school, Lane Cove West. Five and six year olds take part in orthodox and unorthodox movement. They explore fantasy situations as well as depict in movement situations from the real world.

"I never get over my feeling of wonderment," says Judy, "that such a simple thing as music and movement can give children the opportunity to take part in such a joyful experience."



"I never get over my feeling of wonderment that such a simple thing as music and movement can give children the opportunity to take part in such a joyful experience"... PHOTO CREDIT BRANCO GAICA

"In a way the benefits spill over into their other work. Teachers tell me that during the weeks when I am not able to come, the kids are never quite as happy and confident. The music and movement allows them to let off physical and emotional steam in a constructive way, and it seems to make them better able to cope with general pressures —which children are also subject to."

Judy also composed songs for the Marionette Theatre's presentation of *Mysterious Potamus* and recently completed a couple of segments for Mr Squiggle — in which she sang in public for the first time! A pilot series built around an electronic puppet Ali Kazam for which Judy wrote the music, looks like being sold overseas. On Friday afternoons Judy rehearses an ensemble of diploma students from the Conservatorium Jazz Course.



Judy Bailey: I would be bored, frankly, if I were paid to play just one kind of music all the time, even if it was my favourite kind of music... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER

I wonder if in the midst of all this activity Judy ever wished she had time to sit down and just concentrate on writing The Great Masterpiece.

"No, I am very happy doing the things I do. I want to write for a string quartet one day, but I know that when the time is right, that is what I'll do. Another ambition I have is to write film music. I would be bored, frankly, if I were paid to play just one kind of music all the time, even if it was my favourite kind of music. I need variety to stimulate me. Somebody like Bernie McGann — I thought of him as soon as you asked that question — is of a temperament which needs to specialise and play nothing but jazz. I agree that it's just different temperaments."

Australian musical life is the more colourful and stimulating for there being both the Bernie McGanns and the Judy Baileys.