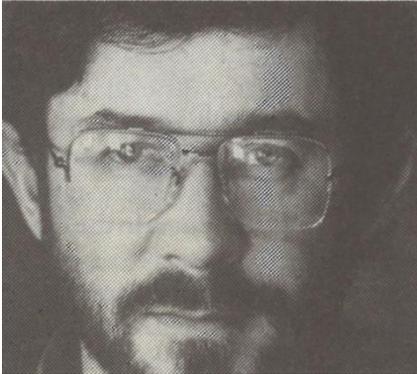


DisChords

A column by Jazz Co-ordinator
Eric Myers



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Until recently, the **Carl Dewhurst Quartet** enjoyed a ten-month residency at the Slip-Inn in Sydney every Thursday night, and in the process, established another night of music at a new venue. The quartet, other than Carl, included Warren Trout, Stu Hunter and Cameron Undy. Nick McBride, one of the main forces behind the JazzGroove Association, reports that a band of semi-professional musicians approached the Slip-Inn and undercut Carl's group, more than halving their fee. "This is a slap in the face to some of Sydney's most respected musicians," says Nick, "and has potentially sacrificed the Slip-Inn's live entertainment policy. I



Bassist Cameron Undy: a member of Carl Dewhurst's quartet which was undercut by a band of semi-professional musicians at the Slip-Inn... PHOTO CREDIT GORDON UNDY

believe this pathetic manoeuvre has not only created another rift within the struggling musician community, but is disrespectful to Carl and his band. It doesn't do musicians any favours in the long term, considering that in the next few months we will all have to deal with the GST and its ramifications on the industry. The Slip-Inn is a thriving venue and could afford a modest band fee. The other bandleader could have tried for another night at the venue but chose instead to opt for a 'second set' on the same night as Carl's band. This meant that Carl's band was gradually faded out of the gig over a period of about a month and, if this is not enough, the new band would bump in past Dewhurst like it was no big deal! Jazzgroove seeks to actively promote new local talent, to unify the scene and ultimately bring about more opportunities for all jazz musicians. I hope that this message is passed on to the greater jazz community so everyone will be aware of this situation. I feel very strongly about this issue. It is a pity we have to deal with such selfishness. Something tells me that the new bandleader's karma is to have his band replaced by a DJ".

* In the last *JazzChord*, in my *Mediawatch* column, I made the point that arts editors are often in the habit of downgrading or ignoring jazz, unless they happened to have a personal interest in the music. On the other hand, it was unusual for an arts editor who had little interest in dance, for example, to exclude that art form from coverage. In an aside I mentioned *The Australian* in this context, and the *Australian's* film writer **Lynden Barber** is quite right to point out that the *Australian's* coverage of jazz has improved recently. Lynden himself, who writes occasionally in *The Australian* on world music and contemporary jazz, has certainly made a significant contribution... and I note that reviews of jazz and world music CDs, written by Lynden and/or Kevin Jones, appear every Monday in *The Australian*. In *The Weekend Australian Review*, July 31-August 1, 1999, Iain Shedden, Lynden Barber and Kevin Jones surveyed pop, rock and jazz, in feature articles which went over four pages. Lynden's article posed the question: will jazz survive into the 21st century? "Is contemporary jazz playing the role of postscript - a beautifully scribbled epilogue to a great literary work?" he wrote. "Will it transcend the curious status it has routinely had to weather - its falling between the stools of



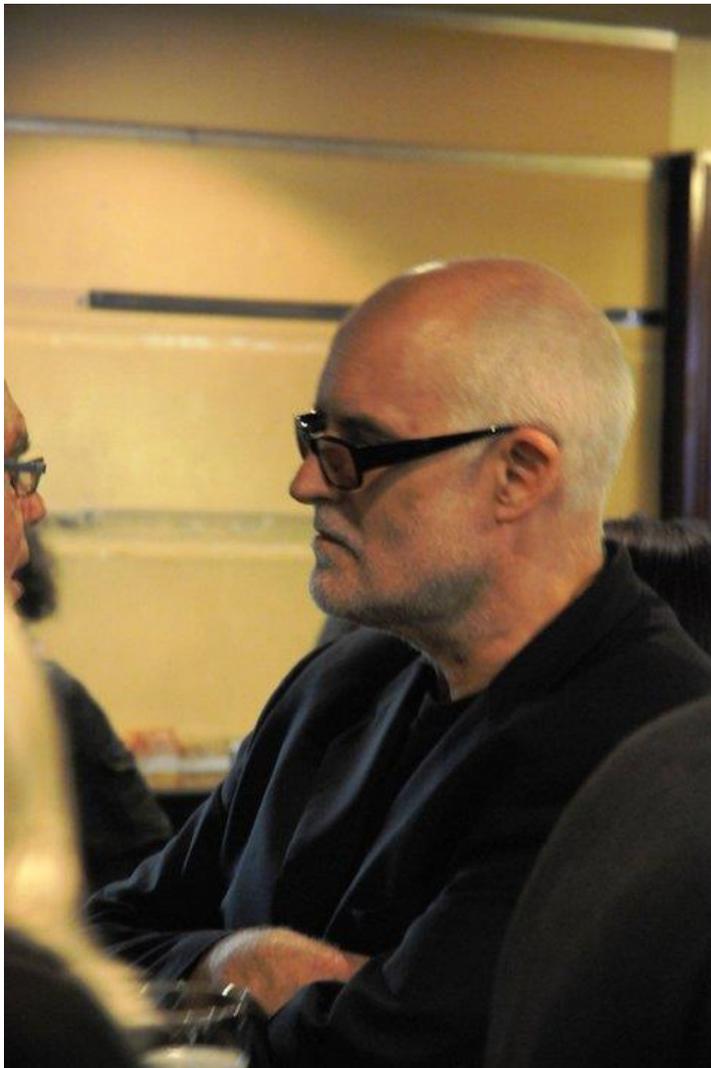
The Australian's Lynden Barber: will jazz be seen in relation to the 20th century as, say, baroque was to the 17th?...

pop and art - to be finally recognised as one of the century's great, original contributions? Will it be seen in relation to the 20th century as, say, baroque was to the 17th? Or, too long starved of the hothouse atmosphere that nurtured the emergence of genius after genius in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, will it fade into fustiness, appreciated by only a dwindling number of fanatics?" Lynden suggests a number of ways forward. Jazz musicians have only scraped the surface of non-American, ethnic musics, he argues; nor have they exploited the possibilities of ambient music, with the significant exception of the Australian trio The Necks. Lynden refers to the backward-looking Wynton Marsalis who has attempted "to establish jazz as 20th century black America's classical music." "If only Wynton would take a cue from his saxophonist brother Branford, and go easy on the shirt starch. The school has had a deadeningly conservative influence, both outside and inside its borders." Kevin Jones, in his piece, also has a tilt at Marsalis: "Wynton Marsalis carries the traditional banner of the music as its keeper of the flame", says Kevin, and his treatment of compositions by Ellington, Thelonious Monk and Jelly Roll Morton, have been "rewarding". "However", writes Kevin, "for all Marsalis's emphasis on the blues and swing and the brilliant line-up of soloists in his crack Lincoln Centre Orchestra, there is an indefinable something missing when compared to the original material." Kevin Jones nominates the "five greatest jazzmen of the century". They are Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Dizzy Gillespie.



Despite the brilliant line-up of soloists in the crack Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (above) there is an indefinable something missing...PHOTO CREDIT CAROL FRIEDMAN

* Annette Sharp in her column *The Diary* in Sydney's *Sun-Herald*, August 22, 1999 wrote that **The Basement**, "for 27 years Sydney's premier jazz venue - is about to be transformed into yet another dime-a-dozen Sydney nightclub, according to my spies. The famous joint was reportedly sold this month after five months on the market to former record executive Tim Read. While Read has, it seems, resisted the temptation to convert the legendary venue into a poker machine bar, *The Diary* has learnt The Basement will cease operating as a jazz club." Sorry, Annette. Chris Richards, for long part-owner of The Basement along with the now-departed Bruce Viles, said on August 23 - the night when the pianist Mulgrew Miller and the bassist Niels Henning Orsden Pedersen played to a sell-out crowd - that Tim Read has bought part of Bruce Viles's share. Also Chris has increased his stake in The Basement and now owns substantially more than 50% of the club. While The Basement has, for some time, presented various forms of music other than jazz, Chris says that the current proportion of jazz in The Basement program will continue. One of Annette Sharp's "insiders" said that The Basement was "set to be turned into another comfy couch club, the kind of place you might associate with Rene Rivkin". Thankfully, Annette got it wrong.



The Basement's Chris Richards: the current proportion of jazz in The Basement program will continue...



Richard Dreyfuss in the film Mr Holland's Opus...

* Recently a film starring **Richard Dreyfuss**, *Mr Holland's Opus*, was shown on commercial television. It was about an American music teacher, Glenn Holland, who devoted his life to music, and to encouraging the appreciation of music, at the school where he taught for many years. But, he always had a secret desire to compose and conduct his own symphony. It was interesting that he was turned on to music, as a teenager, by a jazz album, a story that Glenn tells his wife Iris, after she breaks the news that she's pregnant. When he was 15, he used to hang out at a local record store, where someone who worked there gave him an album he felt the young Glenn would like. It was a John Coltrane album. "So, I took it home and put it on the machine," says Glenn in the movie. "And I hated it! I mean I really hated it! I just didn't get it. So I played it again. I played it again, and I played it again. And then *I just couldn't stop playing it*. I kept listening to those notes! Then I realised that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, you know. Make music." It's interesting to me that, unselfconsciously, this could be written into the script of such a movie, especially when there are no other hints in the movie, as far as I can remember, that Glenn Holland was into jazz. He seemed to concentrate mainly on light classics and rock music. Still, Glenn and Iris go on to call their son Coltrane Holland (first name Cole for short) who, unfortunately, turns out to be deaf. The film has a happy ending, and Glenn, as a relatively old man, finally gets to conduct his symphony.



The saxophonist John Coltrane: In the movie Mr Holland's Opus one of his albums turned on the schoolteacher Glenn Holland to a life of making music...