

DisChords

*A column by Jazz Co-ordinator
Eric Myers*



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The Sydney Theatre Company's production of William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was a delightful experience including, as it did, six great jazz compositions by Sydney pianist/composer Michael Bartolomei. Lyrics were by Shakespeare, and the tunes were beautifully sung by Kerrie Biddell. The backing tracks used in the production were pre-recorded by Michael on piano, with Craig Walters (soprano & tenor saxophones), Scott Tinkler (trumpet), Adam Armstrong (bass), and Andrew Gander (drums). I don't know whether jazz has been used in this way in Shakespeare before (surely either John Dankworth or Mike Westbrook has attempted it in the UK) but it was very effective, bringing the play to life for me. I



Six great jazz compositions by Michael Bartolomei, lyrics by Shakespeare, were beautifully sung by Kerrie Biddell...

wish such a production of *As You Like It* had been available 30 years ago when I was an adolescent struggling to understand it. The idea of using jazz in this way came from the producer Simon Phillips, who brought in Kerrie Biddell. Kerrie in turn brought in Michael Bartolomei, and I think it would be true to say that the magnificent standard of musical excellence in the production was the result of Kerrie's insistence. Michael was responsible not only for the tunes, but also 25 minutes of lovely underscoring recorded on keyboard synthesisers. Speaking of



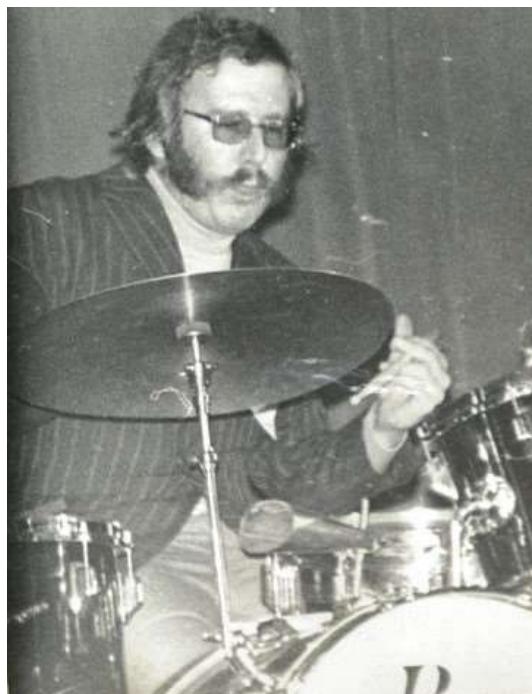
Michael Bartolomei: 25 minutes of lovely underscoring recorded on keyboard synthesisers... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Kerrie Biddell, her long-overdue solo album called *The Singer* is now out on Origin Records, which is developing an impressive catalogue, including the Scott Tinkler Quartet (two CDs), the Australian Art Orchestra, and the Paul Grabowsky Trio. Kerrie sings with superb authority as always, absolutely in control of her material,



and she's overdubbed some very hip background vocals. Has there ever been a singer in Australian jazz with greater mastery than Kerrie? One of the delights of the album, for me, is the drumming of Alan Turnbull, another great master of his instrument who should be better acknowledged. In a world where young, powerful, technically proficient drummers, influenced by electric, eight-feel music, now make the running, it's easy to overlook a drummer like Alan, who exemplifies the rich acoustic jazz tradition. His approach – the way he colours the music, and reacts quickly and flexibly to what is going on around him - is something to be treasured, along with the styles of drummers like Len Barnard, John Pochée, and others. I hope that young drummers coming up are increasingly able to learn something from these older masters, lest something very valuable in the music be lost. Come to think of it, Simon Barker, to my ears, exemplifies that tradition; so perhaps all is not lost. Certainly the sort of mastery that Kerrie Biddell shows would be difficult to imagine without the sort of loose, relaxed, and responsive drumming that Alan Turnbull* provides.

**In the Jul/Aug, 1996 edition of JazzChord, the following letter to the editor was received from drummer Alan Turnbull: Sir, Thanks for your comments about my playing on the Kerrie Biddell CD The Singer (Mar/Apr, 1996 edition of JazzChord). I have been lucky enough to work with Kerrie since 1972 till now. In my nearly 40 years as a professional musician I haven't encountered a better singer than Kerrie, who is also a close friend. I feel the public does not really understand how good she is. It's a great pity that when she had her band Compared to What some years ago, she applied for arts funding but missed out. Australia has many singers with less talent, so it's really a buzz to work with Kerrie. In my career I've worked with many of the world's great singers, including Neil Sedaka, Billy Eckstine, Cleo Laine, and others. But Kerrie is the best. So I hope the public appreciates her talent and buys her CD.*



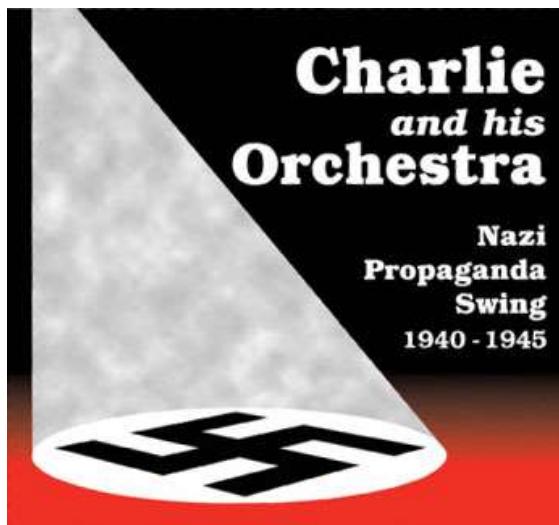
Alan Turnbull: in nearly 40 years as a professional musician he hasn't encountered a better singer than Kerrie Biddell...

*On March 3, 1996 ABC-TV showed a fascinating documentary on Nazi Germany called *Propoganda Swing: Dr Goebbels' Jazz Orchestra*. This was the story of a mysterious jazz group **Charlie & His Orchestra**, which remained a secret for 50 years after the end of World War II. It included the drummer Fritz Brocksieper, and included many of the best jazz musicians in Europe, such as the trumpeter Charly Tabor, and the leader, saxophonist Lutz Templin. The singer was Carl 'Charlie' Schwedler. This 14-piece group was able to play magnificent swing jazz throughout



Joseph Goebbels: Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945...

the war even though jazz had originally been banned, and ruthlessly suppressed by the Nazis. As early as 1935 the head of German Radio announced: "From this day on I am banning nigger jazz from the entire German broadcasting network forever." The German authorities showed film of people dancing to jazz in America with this sort of commentary: "This is the birthplace of swing. The Yankees go for this nigger circus with no inhibitions, and this in a country which claims to save the culture of the whole world! This is not Africa; we are in New York. This nigger dance competition revives jungle memories as the latest achievement of American civilisation." During the war, however, the Germans discovered that jazz, as a popular music form, was one of the best vehicles through which to disseminate their propaganda. So. Charlie & His Orchestra was established, and did versions of standard tunes such as *You're Driving Me Crazy*, with rearranged lyrics - "jazz with Nazi lyrics" - particularly to be played to the English and the Americans. The music they turned out was actually jazz of the highest quality, as is obvious from the film; an enterprising buff has now reissued many of them. The Orchestra was a permanent fixture for the shortwave



radio station at Goebbels's propaganda centre which, equipped with the latest technology, reached listeners all over the world. This was apparently a monumental attempt at world domination through the medium of radio; at its height the station was preparing 147 hours of programs a day in 53 foreign languages beamed to countries around the world. This excellent film was written and directed by David Eisermann and Florian Steinbiss.

* The evening of jazz presented at The Basement, Sydney, on March 4, 1996 was a great tribute to the late Russian jazz entrepreneur **Giorgi Bakhchiev**, as well as a fund-raiser for his family in Moscow. (\$765 was raised at the door, and there are moves to find additional funds, to bring the figure up to \$1,000.) The three groups performing were those that had done major tours of Russia organised by Giorgi: the Mark Isaacs Trio, with Mark (piano), Adam Armstrong (bass) and Simon Barker



The Last Straw, L-R, Tony Esterman, Lloyd Swanton, Ken James, Bernie McGann, John Pochée: specially reunited for the night ...PHOTO COURTESY TONY ESTERMAN



In 1995 the Mark Isaacs Trio did a 20-performance tour in 15 cities courtesy of Giorgi Bakhchiev, L-R, Isaacs (piano), Adam Armstrong (bass) and Simon Barker (drums)... BARKER PHOTO CREDIT GARY JOHNSTON



The Engine Room trio is pictured here in Russia in 1989, L-R, John Pochée(drums), Dima (interpreter), Steve Elphick (bass), Roger Frampton (piano & saxophones)... PHOTO CREDIT ERIC MYERS

(drums); The Engine Room, with Roger Frampton (piano); Steve Elphick (bass); and John Pochée (drums); and, specially reunited for the night, The Last Straw, with John on drums again, Bernie McGann (alto saxophone); Ken James (tenor and soprano saxophones); Lloyd Swanton (bass); and Tony Esterman (piano). Knowing Giorgi as I did, I believe he would have loved the music, had he been there. He was, above all, a jazz purist who unerringly recognised musical excellence. The three bands were in great form, producing a superior standard of music that was sustained unflaggingly over the evening. The musicians produced their best efforts, in itself a moving tribute to a beautiful man who loved jazz, and loved his Australian friends.

* My hat goes off to the Melbourne promoter **Henk van Leeuwen**, who recently toured the trio led by the great Danish bassist Niels Henning Orsted Pedersen – a sensational group, by the way. With the visit of Finland's Trio Toykeat, Henk made a real inroad by securing Finlandia Vodka as the tour sponsor. Accordingly, Finlandia launched its new red vodka Finlandia Cran berry at the Harbourside Brasserie,



The great Danish bassist Niels Henning Orsted Pedersen: his trio toured by the Melbourne promoter Henk van Leeuwen... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Sydney, on March 6, 1996. The function was attended by various jazz, food and entertainment writers. As a veteran of a tour of Russia, where downing huge amounts of vodka is *de rigueur*, I feel qualified to say that Finlandia Cranberry is a very nice drop, and I like the promotional spiel: "Millions upon millions of little, round, red, innocent cranberries were crushed to a pulp to bring [you] this vodka. A moment of silence please. Now, let's drink the little suckers..." Henk is working on other Northern European companies which are marketing products in this country, and pressing them to get involved in jazz tours.

*My thanks to an old friend, Peter Thoms - ex-Melbourne but living in London for well over 20 years - for sending me reviews of a performance by **Woody Allen and his New Orleans Jazz Band** at Royal Festival Hall on March 18, 1996. The band was on a month-long European tour. The personnel were interesting in that the front-line players other than Woody on clarinet (playing the ancient Albert System) were the ex-Melbourne trumpeter Simon Wettenhall, and the US trombonist Dan



Ex-Melbourne trumpeter Simon Wettenhall, pictured here with clarinetist Woody Allen...

Barrett, who has toured Australia often, usually in the company of Tom Baker. The audience numbered 2,500 people, paying up to 21 pounds a head. Not a bad box office result - apparently in the vicinity of 50,000 pounds. The reviewers seemed to agree that those in attendance, who jiggled to the beat and engaged in synchronised clapping, were primarily film buffs rather than jazz buffs.