

JAZZAHEAD

by Sean Foran*

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Sean Foran, Music Australia's Jazz Councillor...

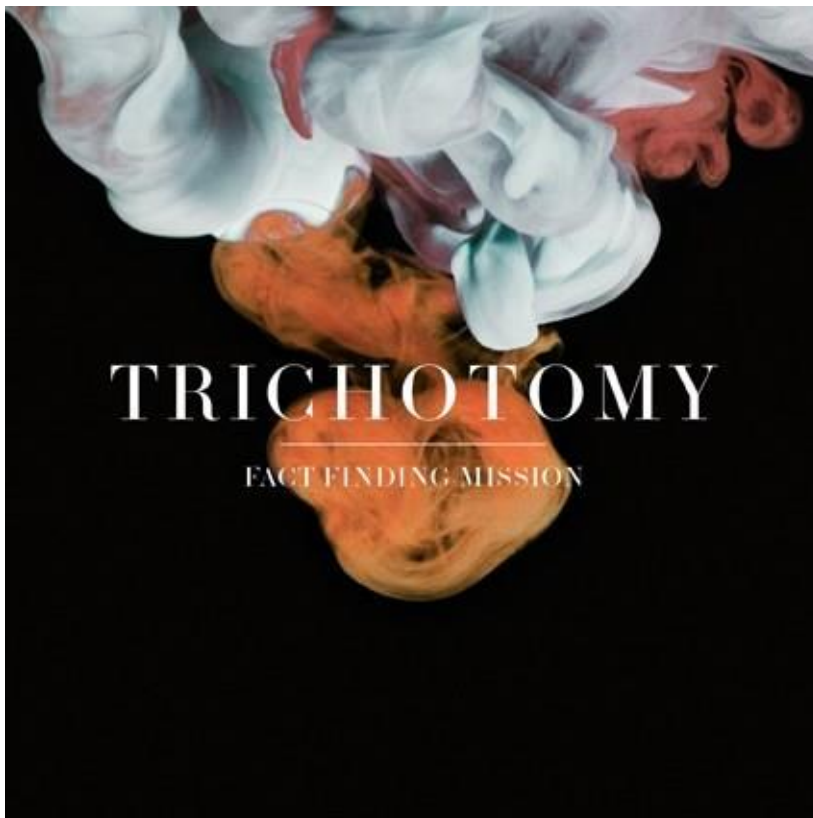
Jazzahead is the leading industry conference, showcase and networking event for the jazz scene internationally. Occurring in Bremen, Germany, for a few days in late April every year, it has quickly become a key meeting place for jazz industry from Europe and further afield, including the USA, Asia and Australia. Australian musicians have been making their presence felt at this event over the years, utilising the showcasing opportunities and networking possibilities to assist them develop a presence and profile in Europe. Artists including Trichotomy, The Vampires, Stuart Hunter, The Australian Art Orchestra and Mn'Jam Experiment have all presented showcase concerts, while dozens of artists and industry representatives have attended the events as delegates.

**Brisbane-based pianist & composer Sean Foran, a graduate from the Queensland Conservatorium with a major in jazz piano. has performed widely in Australia and overseas for many years. He has released four albums with the piano/bass/drums jazz trio Trichotomy (formerly Misinterprotato), three of them internationally on the British label NAIM.*

Jazzahead by the numbers:

- 100 concerts and showcases in four days
- 15,000 visitors to the concerts
- 3,196 professional participant delegates from 60 countries
- 1,356 exhibiting countries

I have been to Jazzahead four times now, showcasing once with my trio Trichotomy and the other three times I attended as a delegate. The numbers are a little overwhelming and when you're coming from Australia where the jazz scene isn't one of the most popular genres of music, it's even more breathtaking. I still recall the first time I attended, and I think I really wasn't prepared for how intense an experience it would be. The huge amount of incredible music, a massive array of artists, and a list of who's who in the jazz scene – clubs, festivals, agents, labels, all in attendance.



For Australian delegates, Sounds Australia has recently come on board at Jazzahead, producing a stand at the trade fair, and helping build a more robust Australian presence at the event. Glenn Dickie is the Export Music Producer at Sounds Australia, and in his role he acts as a conduit between Australian musicians and industry at these kinds of events, helping the Australian delegates get the most they can out of the experience. Essentially what that means is that Dickie, or one of his colleagues is there, on the ground at Jazzahead, running the Australian stand, hosting events, and creating a meeting space, a hub and information point for Australian jazz. The vegemite and cheese toastie usually goes down pretty well at the 'Meet the Australians' function.

For Australian artists wishing to attend Jazzahead, gaining a showcase spot is a tough nut to crack. There are themed showcase nights, such as the European night, a night for the partner country, a German night, and finally, the international night. So really, there's potentially one spot available for Australian artists.



Sydney saxophonist Jeremy Rose (above) showcased in 2014 with his group The Vampires... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS

Sydney saxophonist Jeremy Rose showcased in 2014 with his group The Vampires, and has found the experience to be a useful tool in helping the band enter in the European market. *The Vampires* booked multiple festival and club gigs in the UK and Germany following their showcase performance, and Rose has continued to attend the event, following up on networks developed at the initial performance.

Rose notes the importance of being ready for the event. As a delegate or showcase artist, “you can see how saturated the European market is with so many artists, competing from Europe, the US and everywhere else. You really need to have the right kind of promotional material ready.”

Sydney pianist and composer Stuart Hunter showcased in 2017 with his Migration Project, and like Rose, has attended subsequent Jazzahead conferences, using the experience to start to build European networks. Hunter assets that for him Jazzahead is “a real key to opening up pathways for touring my music through Europe and to build an audience. My initial goal was to start to build relationships and find out how the network works over there”. Hunter also recognises the importance of sustained attendance stating “You’ve got to come back so that people can see you’re committed... through attending again we’ve managed to get some offers for festivals in Europe”.



Stuart Hunter showcased in 2017 with his Migration Project...

Apart from the showcase spots, attending as a delegate is still a worthwhile endeavor.

Speaking from my own experience, attending this conference has become a critical part of my work in developing ongoing opportunities for my music in Europe and Asia. In the times I have attended since our initial showcase spot I have been fortunate to book festival and club gigs, secure distribution for recordings, network with other artists, solidify relationships with media and make dozens of new contacts every time I go.

Like all the other Australians attending, it is a significant investment, both in time and money, but one that I continue to see benefits from, with evidence of the increasing interest and recognition of my music in Europe. Meeting other artists has been a particularly enriching experience, as their knowledge and advice is often some of the most useful. Jeremy Rose notes that “I’ve seen how other artists from Europe and the US have managed to build an ongoing touring career throughout Europe...the ones we met said how important Jazzahead has been to help facilitate that.”

Saxophonist, composer and co-artistic director of the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz and Blues Adam Simmons, has attended Jazzahead twice, using the experience to create deeper networks for the Wangaratta Festival and help broaden the recognition of the festival internationally. “People are constantly surprised at the jazz scene in Australia, and by being at Jazzahead I’ve been able (in my role) to be supportive, encourage and educate people about the scene”. Jazzahead has been helpful in Simmons working out

how “the festival connects at an international level, creating opportunities and networks in an ongoing way. “I don’t need to come here (as a booker), but it’s been helpful to learn about some artists that we wouldn’t know otherwise.”



Adam Simmons: it’s happening, it’s exciting, infectious and inspiring...

Simmons also stresses the importance of learning more about the financial support available in various territories, with travel funding enabling tours from international artists to Australia. Mirroring this, Australian artists need to be able to demonstrate financial support for their international tours, for festivals and presenters to realize the viability of the tour. In an excellent tangible demonstration of the Jazzahead experience, Simmons facilitated a partnership with the Amersfoort Jazz Festival in the Netherlands, bringing winners of the National Jazz Awards to perform at the festival with the 2017 winner James Macaulay performing at the 2018 festival.

Brisbane Jazz Festival artistic director Lynette Irwin has attended the festival for many years, using the conference to continue strong ties with presenters from around the globe and continue to make new connections. “I’ve met some incredible people at Jazzahead, and while promoting Australian artists I’ve made connections with musicians from all around the world, bringing some of them to Australia – artists such as Emie R Roussel and Tigran. Being here is essential for me.”

Jazzahead is a vibrant example of the jazz community internationally, and the Australian presence at this event is important in assisting Australian artists craft international careers. It also helps bring more attention to the jazz industry on our own shores. As Simmons says, “There’s a vitality here, it’s not just a niche, it’s happening, it’s exciting, infectious and inspiring.”