

MILEHAM HAYES: PLAYER & VISIONARY

by Sallie Gardner*

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Mileham Hayes on his beloved instrument: "I was so bad on clarinet that I had to form my own band. No one else would play with me"...

Mileham Hayes's latest joy was buying back the 78 player he sold 30 years ago. It's a long way from the days of hard saving in his youth for a new record every three months. Now his house in Eight Mile Plains overflows with jazz in every shape and form. His own albums are amongst thousands lining the walls. A practicing GP until two years ago, he has all the trappings of affluence; an intercom to stop unwanted intruders at the front gate, tennis court, pool and magnificent sprawling family home.

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So how can one describe Mileham Hayes, or Dr Jazz as he is more popularly known? Some say arrogant. But after listening to the love affair he shares with jazz, after hearing him play and talking to the man, that would seem an unduly harsh description. Determined, yes.

His obsession was born when, at 14, he heard a recording of Jelly Roll Morton. By first year University in 1959, he begged Lachie Thomson for help to start his own band. Lachie suggested he get a banjo and learn chords. He did.

"I looked at the cover of a record with a photo of a guy's hands and said, that must be a chord." From there, he worked out all the chords, and thanks Lachie for the advice. "I can hear frontline players who don't know chords and the changes, and they've got a block in their development."

He remembers the horror when he first bought a Louis Armstrong Hot Five record. "I expected *Blueberry Hill*, and instead out came this 'awful' noise. It was like watching the house you'd spent all your life savings on topple into the sea. What do you do?" Then the penny dropped. "I could still whistle you every note. That's jazz. The revelation".



Louis Armstrong's Hot Five in 1926: the penny dropped. That's jazz. The revelation...

From that moment, he saved for the clarinet, and today his name is part of the history of jazz in Queensland. Dr Jazz put Brisbane on the map. It was only in the last year or so that Mileham, now 40, had any formal training. His jazz soul sprang up first and along with it he developed his ability to play. In that order. "It's the only way."

Today he has all that he aspired to. He has the musicians he wants in his two bands: on Friday Wayne Moore, trombone; Ron Edgeworth (and now Chris Saunders), piano; Dave McCallum, drums; Horsley Dawson, bass; Alan Murray, trumpet; alternating on Saturdays with Mal Jennings, trumpet, Vic Connor, piano; Ron Rae,

drums; Geoff Kluke, bass; and of course Mileham on clarinet. And they have a club of their own, or at least one they helped to build. The Queensland Jazz Club's Cellar is open seven nights a week at lunchtime through the week. They boast cumulative membership of 16,000 with over 66% renewal rate.



The 1982 band. Standing from left, Dave McCallum (drums), Alan Murray (trumpet), Horsley Dawson (bass), Ron Edgeworth (piano), Wayne Moore (trombone). Seated, Mileham Hayes (clarinet)...

"I would point out that The Cellar is still the only club that I know of in the world that tolerates all kinds of music under the label 'jazz'". Mileham's first band, Varsity 5, opened up a small club and on Sunday nights they would have up to 600 people (without booze).

"Some bands have a profound influence even though they may not be very good." In 1975-76 he had an ABC radio programme, *Stop Off, Let's Go* which stimulated immense interest in jazz in Queensland. Then he was asked to do a TV series. "I'd been playing for one month. I was so bad on clarinet that I had to form my own band.

No one else would play with me." He smiled. Realising he had nothing to lose, he agreed to the programme.



Mileham's first band, the Varsity Five. Drummer Ian Bloxsom is on the far left, with Hayes holding clarinet. Others to be identified...

There were 25 editions of *Dr Jazz* in the series, making it one of Australia's most successful and longest running TV jazz series of its kind. The series featured Mileham's band, plus various guest artists from other cities.

"The right way to begin is like I did. You've got to be inspired to pick up an instrument that you love and imitate someone that you idolise. Then, when you get so frustrated with not being able to play it, you go and learn to play. It's the only way to swing."

He is modest about his own playing style and technique, but sad that his band is underrated. "Unfortunately, the band has never been recorded properly. When most of the southern bands hear us, we are in the middle of a festival with three sleepless months behind us. We're too tired."

Mileham himself is still in awe of Louis Armstrong, but more recently he has come to appreciate Benny Goodman as one of the greatest of all players. "My classical teacher had great difficulty with one of his transcribed solos and yet Goodman plucks this out of his head."

His initial hero worship of Johnny Dodds expanded to Australians Geoff Kitchen, Tich Bray, Greg Gibson, Ade Monsborough and the Melbourne inheritors Neville Stribling and Lachie Thomson, but observers feel he shares ideas and the way of thinking of Frank Teschemacher. He feels he may have the influence halfway between Negro New Orleans influence and Goodman and Shaw. He listens a lot to the tone and ideas of Kenny Davern, Bob Wilber and Don Burrows.



Mileham's initial hero worship of Johnny Dodds expanded to Australians such as Geoff Kitchen (above) but observers feel Hayes shares ideas and the way of thinking of Frank Teschemacher (below)...KITCHEN PHOTO COURTESY NIGEL BUESST COLLECTION; TESCHEMACHER PHOTO COURTESY ALCHETRON



"I've done my apprenticeship, learning to love it first, trying to play, succeeding and wanting more. I'd gone as far as I could on the seat of my pants, so I took myself to a classical teacher."

However, he sees the jazz club still as the cradle, the nursery of jazz. He has been criticised for his strong opinions, loudly voiced, on this and many subjects but it doesn't worry him. He stands up for what he believes in.

In March 1982, he stood as the National Party candidate for Carina. Because he stands up for the little person, some people express surprise that he is not a Labor man. "What's misunderstood is that my politics are against multinational takeovers. I believe in the freedom of the individual."

The papers carried photos of him as candidate, playing with his band in front of City Hall. But he didn't win. This time. "I think I'm an achiever. If you're made to look foolish, interpreted as being brash, aggressive, self-centred, ego-maniacal, you have to wear that and get the job done. Someone has got to stand up for jazz."

Jazz can't survive commercially much longer, according to Mileham. He sees it as an endangered species. Record sales have dropped from 7% to less than 2%, he says, and there is very little jazz played on commercial radio. He is quick to point out, however, that classical music is obscenely funded and no-one is standing up to say that some of the money should go to jazz.

Despite his differences of opinion with the Australia Council, he believes that it will eventually be seen that what he has been fighting for is simply a better deal for jazz throughout Australia. He compares this with what he feels will be unfavourable recollections of others of the people on the Music Board.



Mileham's group went to Canada as official representatives to the XI Commonwealth Games Art Program in 1978...

"None of them, by their past record, has made a decision to date which, I think, in the light of history will be seen as a sane, just or fair decision; one that they can be proud of on their deathbed." So he has decided to go over their heads, but that is all he will say about it at the moment.

"I understand that they're trying to do their best, but they're a little bit too trying for me, I'm afraid."

"I'm a firm believer that actions speak louder than words. I think that the problem with jazz people is that they seem to get obsessively jealous of anyone trying to do anything. They start to fight among themselves. Meanwhile the Australian Opera yet again has a record financial deficit of \$34 million, on top of \$2.5 million they're allotted."

"It would seem to me much saner if everyone who loves jazz marched on the Australia Council, kicked the doors down and demanded a stop to this waste called the Australian Opera."

That is not to denigrate opera, he explained. It is that he seems concerned that no-one is actively opposing the bureaucracy. "I would have much preferred to present a reasoned argument and move slowly and progressively towards an agreed end result on behalf of jazz in Australia. But when you encounter such mediocre intelligence and this passive and now active opposition, then I'm afraid it requires different tactics."



The 1976 LP "The Band of Dr Jazz With Soloists", L-R, Mileham Hayes (clarinet & leader), Alan Bermingham (piano) John Cox (banjo), John Reid (electric bass), Ron Rae (drums) and Alan Murray (trumpet)...

"I feel that it is my medical duty on behalf of Australia to lance the carbuncle which is the Australia Council. I leave it to other surgeons to lance the ones in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, all of which I'm sure will occur."

According to Mileham, the Australia Council Annual Report should be published in the newspapers. "If people read this their hair would turn white overnight. All the people in the Australia Council and Department of Cultural Activities know what's going on, and of course they're trying desperately to shut me up, but they're not going to succeed."

In the past, Mileham survived a period of heavy study overseas because of his love for jazz. He came back to Brisbane to keep on playing and to keep fighting because for him there is nothing like it.

"With other forms of art, you can correct your mistakes. In jazz, you can't. Stuff it up and all your peers on stage know it. Do something great and they all know."

He feels that his band shines when it is backing another artist. "The guys concentrate on setting up a platform for these players." And it works. When they went to Canada as official representatives to the XI Commonwealth Games Art Program (1978), they went on to Eddie Condon's Club in New York and received a standing ovation. But sometimes it is a burden.



After Canada in 1978 Dr Jazz went on to the New York club named after Eddie Condon (above) & received a standing ovation..

"The clarinet's not even out of my hand, I'm doing a solo, people are tugging at you saying 'can you play *Tiger Rag*? etc', things straight out of your idiom or that you hate. You're at the beck and call of every fool, every drunk."

Having achieved his dream of the club and his band, Mileham has no need to tour, but he took Dr Jazz to Rockhampton and Gladstone this year. He will go on learning, growing and fighting for his vision of jazz clubs throughout the country.

"As I told the last Director of the Music Board, I'm younger than the lot of them, my serum cholesterol level is batting zero, there's a genetic history of longevity and if they think I'm going away, they're f ... mistaken."