

## OBITUARY: KATE DUNBAR (1923 - 2017)

by Bill Haesler\*

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**T**he unexpected death of singer Kate Dunbar, who died peacefully at home in Stanmore, NSW on Monday 10th July 2017, has saddened the jazz community.

Ruth Kathleen Dunbar, née Kelly, was born in Manchester, England on 13 May 1923 to an English mother and Australian ex-serviceman father and came to Sydney in about 1928. Attracted to music at a young age she studied piano privately and singing from the age of 16 at the NSW Conservatorium of Music until her marriage to Eric Dunbar, who introduced her to jazz and vintage cars.



*Kate Dunbar: active as a jazz singer from her early 30s...PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM*

Kate joined the Sydney Jazz Club in 1953 and sang with the Paramount Jazz Band, performed at the Australian Jazz Convention at Cootumundra in 1955, played guitar with Pat Qua's all-women group in 1957 and worked with the Ray Price quartet at Adams Tavern and the Australia Hotel (1958-early 60s).

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*\*Bill Haesler OAM, based in Sydney, is one of Australia's foremost jazz writers, collectors, historians and documentationists.*

She later featured with the Black Opal Jazz Band, Graeme Bell's All Stars (including TV and radio) and Frank Traynor's Jazz Preachers, appeared at jazz festivals and performed regularly at concerts, the annual Jazz Convention and recorded under her own name with the Paramount Jazz Band for Swaggie, with Ray Price for PIX Records and CBS, Graeme Bell, the Eclipse Alley Five and Roger Janes' Band.



*Kate Dunbar (right) is pictured here with the trombonist Roger Janes, at the Strawberry Hill Hotel, 1992, performing with the Chicago Seven...*

Kate's long association with the SJC committee began in 1958. She was its *Quarterly Rag* editor (1959-1968), President from 1984 to 1998, a committee member into the new century and edited the monthly Newsletter up until last year. She retired

briefly from active participation in jazz in 1973, but returned refreshed in the early 1980s as vocalist with Ted Sly's East Coast Jazz Band.



*Kate Dunbar: her long association with the Sydney Jazz Club committee ranged over nearly 60 years, from 1958 till 2016...*

From November 1984 she was a jazz presenter on radio 2RDJ FM for many years and served on other committees including the Jazz Educators' Association, the Jazz In Australia website and helped organise the yearly Doubly Gifted art exhibition and its associated Bell Jazz Lectures\* at Waverley Library (1992-2014).

Kate established her Singers' Workshop in 1987 and through it, and private mentoring, encouraged numerous, now popular, professional Sydney girl singers, issued LPs featuring local singers, and CDs for the SJC. In addition to her honorary jazz activities Kate also ran a successful secretarial business and an art gallery.

Unsurprisingly, in June 1994 Kate was awarded a well-deserved Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in recognition of her service to music, particularly Australian jazz, and to the community. Which she continued selflessly into her 90s. Kate Dunbar was a remarkably energetic, talented much-loved lady and a tireless worker for jazz in Sydney for nearly 65 years.

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*\*The Bell Jazz Lectures can be read in full on this site at the following link*  
<https://www.ericmyersjazz.com/bell-lectures/>