

JCA NSW PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2000

by Bruce Johnson

[Editor's note: The AGM of the Jazz Co-ordination Association of NSW took place on April 26, 2000. Its primary business, other than tabling the necessary reports for members, was to expedite changes to the Association's constitution, including the devolution of responsibility for the National Program to the National Jazz Development Committee. There were several changes to the Association's committee of management. Peter Nelson retired as Treasurer after two years in the job, and Secretary Tim Dunn moved to Treasurer. Others who retired from the committee included Gai Bryant, John Morrison and Eric Myers. The Association welcomed four new committee members, who were elected at the AGM: Marion Benjamin (Secretary), Sam Millar, Sue Spence and Darren Heinrich.]

Bruce Johnson presented a President's report as follows:

"This is the first year that the AGM has included a brief President's Report, and that innovation in itself reflects the broad shifts which I would like to signal.

"After about a decade of office, I can see significant shifts in the culture within which the Jazz Development Program operates, both in terms of its constituency - the jazz community - and its funding bodies - the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council. I don't see these as necessarily value-laden shifts. They are simply those kinds of changes which enter into any living and developing community, resonances of both local and global developments. Some are signs that the Program has been enormously successful: its growth, the increasing maturity of its policy-formation competencies, the proliferating functions of *JazzChord*, the growth of the jazz infrastructures which we have initiated. The Association thus finds itself in a rich new environment which is to a large extent of its own making, but one which in turn requires that we review our strategic objectives and tactics.

"Over the last year or so, it has become clear that with the increasing activity in all regions, it is appropriate to devolve and decentralise various administrative mechanisms and structures. There are many reasons for this, and they all work to the advantage of grass roots regional development at both micro and macro levels. Above all, we have devolved responsibility for the National Program to the National Jazz Development Committee. This is the rationale for one of the constitutional changes tabled for consideration at this AGM. Although the coal-face administration of the National Program will continue to be conducted by the NSW Development Officer, wearing his 'National' hat, at this time, the shift in policy responsibility, in 'where the buck stops', will have the valuable effect of dissipating the perception that the National Program is Sydney-centric.

"At the same time, it should leave Eric Myers a clearer space in which to administer the NSW component of the programme, without becoming entangled in decision-making processes that disperse his energies.

"Apart from the constitutional change, there are other operational changes which we hope will secure these objectives. The office of Association Secretary is now no longer held by the Jazz Development Officer himself, and there has also been appointed an Editorial Committee

for *JazzChord*, consisting of individuals from Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. Again, this is a decentralising process which leaves the NSW Development Officer more space in which to 'develop' the music rather than have to disperse his energies in inter-regional negotiations. I believe that these changes will enable the Program to conduct its affairs more efficiently, and also produce a more varied and flexible repertoire of strategies for mediating the grass-roots jazz community and our funding bodies.

"It represents a general broadening of perspective in a number of ways. It may seem paradoxical to say that decentralisation constitutes a more 'comprehensivist' view, but in fact it is a way of recognising that the Association now functions within a broader range of options than it did a decade ago. Its constituency is larger and more policy-savvy. It knows itself better. Its collective imagination is expanded, it has more of the 'vision thing'. It is shifting from a culture of casual anecdote and bar-room grievances, to researched narratives and confident authority. On a personal note, I am deeply gratified at the difference this Program has made to the music. I believe it is about to enter a new stage, which is probably a good time to encourage new executive talents. Apart from signalling the shifts I have spoken of, I would therefore like to foreshadow an intention of phasing myself out of the position of President over the next term or so. It must happen at some time, and I mention this now simply to facilitate the transition.

"In relation to its competitors in the arts funding market, the jazz community has come an enormous distance, and indeed this Program is itself now the envy of many and the model for some. By the end of this current triennium it will have drafted long-term proposals and projections for the future of Australian jazz. The strategic shifts referred to in this and other Reports, and the constitutional changes, foreshadow such projections. They commence a clearing of the ground that will enable jazz to situate itself in a position of authority over the coming decade, and I strongly commend them to the attention of the membership."