

HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR JAZZ CO-ORDINATOR

Samantha Katt* interviews Eric Myers

[This interview took place in 1986. A longer version was published in the Australian "Jazz Magazine", Winter, 1986.]

The jazz co-ordination programs in Australia began in 1983, as an initiative of the Music Board of the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body. Part-time jazz co-ordinators were appointed in all states of Australia, except the Northern Territory. Three co-ordinators who began in 1983 are still in those positions three years later: Alf Properjohn in Tasmania, Paula Langlands in Victoria, and Eric Myers in NSW. The present Western Australian Jazz Co-ordinator Garry Lee is that State's second co-ordinator, having succeeded Adrian Kenyon in October, 1985. Don Porter, who commenced his appointment in early 1986 in South Australia is that State's fourth jazz co-ordinator. In Queensland Ted Vining held the position from the beginning of 1983 to the end of 1985; the Music Board did not fund the position in Queensland in 1986. In NSW the State Government matched the Music Board's funding at the beginning of 1984, making the position four days a week, and both funding authorities have continued to fund the position. Eric Myers, now in his fourth year as NSW Jazz Co-ordinator, is interviewed by Samantha Katt. Eric Myers points out that, in this interview, he speaks basically for the jazz co-ordination program in NSW. In other States, there will be different programs and priorities, depending on the varying skills of the individual co-ordinators, and the unique conditions of the jazz communities in which they work. Samantha Katt's questions are in bold, and Eric Myers' responses in light italics.



Eric Myers, pictured in the early 1980s...

**Samantha Katt is a pseudonym for a freelance writer who has a particular interest in jazz.*

Samantha Katt: What does a jazz co-ordinator do?

Eric Myers: It might be simpler and easier to approach that question by first talking about what jazz co-ordinators don't do. We don't find work for jazz musicians, publicise new gigs, put on concerts, organise jazz festivals, or run jazz education workshops, and so on - at least not directly. Naturally, we want to see things like this done, and we will become involved in processes which bring these things about. Sometimes we will start these processes ourselves. But the best way of explaining jazz co-ordination is to say that, rather than do the work directly ourselves, we try and find people to work on whatever might be desirable, in the interests of jazz. We try and mobilise people to act; we encourage them to do things properly and, hopefully, provide support and skills, or advice on how to develop skills which those people will need in order to get things done.

A jazz co-ordinator doesn't play a principal role in the jazz world, then?

I've always thought that the best jazz co-ordinator is the one with the lowest profile. We work on a fairly subtle level, a few steps away from the action, behind the scenes, egging people on, and supporting them. We may be directly involved in a project, but we're one or two steps away from principal responsibility. That approach makes sense, because no jazz co-ordinator should become so involved with a project that he becomes essential to it. The idea is that a co-ordinator should be able to bow out of a project leaving it running self-sufficiently; if the co-ordinator is essential to the project, then it's going to fall flat on its face when the co-ordinator moves on.

Isn't there a danger that, if the co-ordinator's role is not a direct one, people will not appreciate what he or she does?

There is that sort of danger. A jazz co-ordinator should try and work it so that the key people he is assisting get credit for the project. That's good for jazz enthusiasts and the musicians, and encourages them to maintain their enthusiasm. But there is the danger that people who are not closely aware of the jazz co-ordination program can assume that the co-ordinator is doing nothing. Occasionally, one hears along the grapevine something like "Nothing's being achieved by the jazz co-ordinator". But these comments are pretty ill-informed; they're just knee-jerk reactions from people who don't know what's going on.

What have you achieved in New South Wales?

There are a number of achievements I'm particularly proud of, and in describing how they came about, perhaps I can throw light on what a jazz co-ordinator does. A simple and obvious one is the Midsummer Jazz Concert which is now part of the Festival of Sydney. Towards the end of 1983 I contacted the Festival of Sydney, which hadn't been doing much for jazz following various disasters in previous years, and asked them what they were doing in the 1984 festival. As you know they had a number of big open-air, free concerts in The Domain, which had been going for four or five years, particularly Symphony Under The Stars and Opera In The Park. People in the jazz world had been saying 'why not a big jazz event?' but no-one had done anything about it. When I contacted the Sydney Committee in 1983 it was too late to do anything for 1984 so I arranged to meet with the festival

organisers once the dust had cleared after the 1984 festival. Meanwhile I contacted John Speight who had been thinking along the lines of such a concert for a long time. Obviously, with his track record with the Manly Jazz Carnival, he was ideally suited to playing a major role — producer, stage manager, musical director, or whatever — so I arranged to take him along to the meeting with Stephen Hall, the General Manager of the Sydney Committee, and John Moulton, the Operations Manager. Well, I was delighted to find that there was enough enthusiasm about the idea for it to proceed in 1985. Of course, John and I had to encounter a certain amount of scepticism from the Festival officials who were, to some extent, dubious that jazz would get the mass audiences that came to hear the opera and the symphony. But the proof would be in the pudding and, of course, the inaugural event in the 1985 Festival of Sydney drew 45,000. In 1986, on a day when it was overcast and raining intermittently, 60,000 came! I wonder how many people would come if Midsummer Jazz was held on a fine day, and on a Saturday night like the opera and symphony events, rather than a Sunday afternoon/evening. Anyway, the event turned out to be very successful, and I think that the Sydney Committee is committed now to keeping it as a permanent part of the Festival of Sydney.



NSW committee member John Speight: he had been thinking along the lines of a big concert in The Domain for some time...

So, you claim credit for getting Midsummer Jazz on?

No, not exactly. Not full credit, anyway. I claim credit for taking the initiative to get the ball rolling; for introducing to the Festival officials someone who could get the job done — John Speight — and for making noises as to why the Festival of Sydney should have such a major jazz event. Luckily for me, as jazz co-ordinator, others took the ball and ran with it, so I really didn't have to spend a lot of time and energy on it. Midsummer Jazz is, to a great extent, John Speight's achievement. But I think that the event can also be claimed as a major achievement of the jazz co-ordination program. If I hadn't acted, one wonders if we'd still be just talking about it. In retrospect, one can now see that it was an event about to happen, and all it needed was a little push in the right direction. Midsummer Jazz is an important event because it provides an opportunity for seven or eight jazz groups to perform to a mass audience instead of the usual small jazz audiences and, also, in one swoop, it has given jazz the status it deserves alongside opera and the symphony, as far as the Festival of Sydney is concerned.

Are there any other achievements you can point to?

One of the most impressive results of the jazz co-ordination program in NSW has been the establishment of SIMA — the Sydney Improvised Music Association. Here again, I don't claim full credit, although the establishment of SIMA in 1984, and support for its ongoing activities has required a fair degree of direct involvement on my part. SIMA illustrates again what can be achieved by the jazz co-ordinator working with people in the jazz world who are prepared to do a little moving and shaking. Here I can't speak too highly of the work of Peter Rechniewski, who became President of SIMA.



Peter Rechniewski, a member of the NSW Committee, who became President of the Sydney Improvised Music Association... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH

The modern and contemporary jazz players in Sydney are very lucky having Peter as a spokesman; he's intelligent, pugnacious, an excellent speaker, and he spends an enormous amount of time and energy on behalf of the music that he wants to support — and remember that he's a volunteer. As jazz co-ordinator, I was very lucky to meet him in 1983. It was just as obvious to him, as it was to me, that there were increasingly fewer opportunities for the contemporary musicians — those who were playing more exploratory music in Australian jazz — while the venues were increasingly turning either to more commercial forms of jazz, or to safe, inoffensive jazz that would be unobtrusive background music for winers and diners. Peter was anxious to do something to help the musicians who were being isolated. The Keys Music Association (KMA) had done a lot of very important work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but even their strongest supporters would agree that, by 1983 and 1984, they had run out of steam. I suggested to Peter that he get together a number of contemporary jazz enthusiasts and form a new association. The sort of scenario I originally had in mind has actually come about: the association would basically be an entrepreneur, designed to put on concerts; it would apply to the funding authorities for financial assistance; and it would also approach the Festival of Sydney and try to get on a contemporary jazz series every January. My involvement with SIMA was quite direct. I helped with the administration involved in setting up a steering committee and the mechanics of forming an association; I went with Peter Rechniewski to put submissions to the Festival of Sydney; I helped with the grant applications to the funding authorities. Assisting SIMA has been a very high priority for me as jazz co-ordinator, and I'm very proud of their work to revive opportunities for modern and contemporary jazz musicians in Sydney. As well as two years of various successful concert series, they've also been instrumental in laying the groundwork for the formation of John Pochée's Ten Part Invention, and that group's engagement by the 1986 Adelaide Festival.

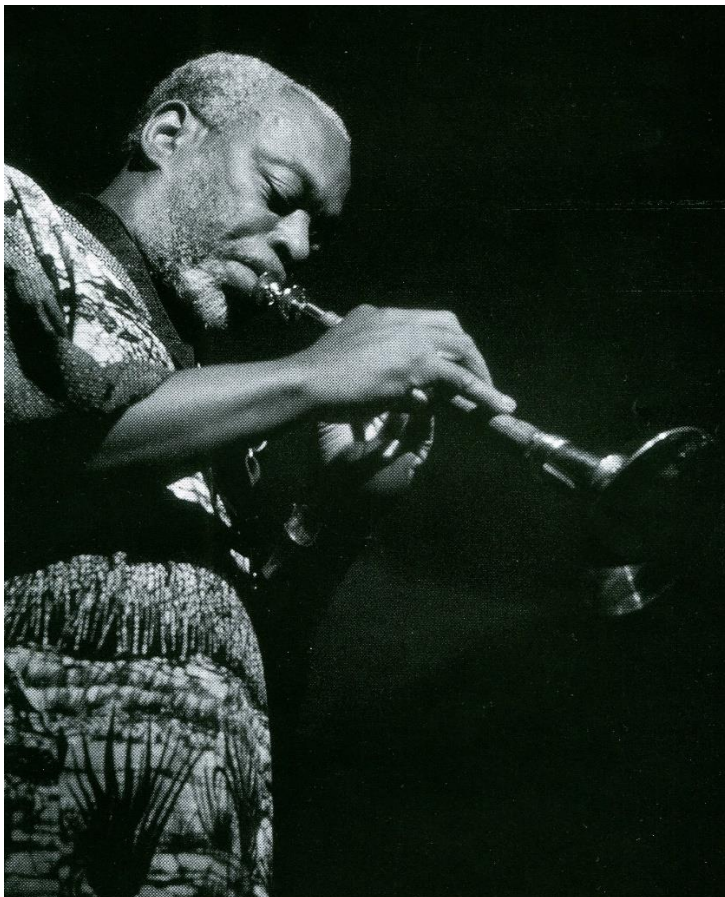


The original Ten Part Invention, L-R, Roger Frampton, John Pochée, Sandy Evans, Bob Bertles, Hugh Fraser, James Greening, Ken James, Miroslav Bukovsky, Bernie McGann... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

I claim credit for the jazz co-ordination program for SIMA's achievements but, once again, I have to point out that SIMA has been the result of a jazz co-ordinator working with key enthusiasts in the jazz world. If there had been no Peter Rechniewski, it would have been much more difficult. I would have been looking for someone else to play the sort of pivotal role that he has played.

However, won't SIMA collapse when you withdraw your involvement?

Actually, I have been much less involved with SIMA in 1986, and there is no sign that the association is going to collapse. For example, SIMA did its own grant applications to the funding authorities for its 1987 activities without reference to me, which indicates that they no longer need my assistance in that area. They've got bigger and better plans for 1987 — bringing out an American quintet from New York for the 1987 Festival of Sydney, whereas they brought out only one American musician, Dewey Redman, for the 1986 festival; trying to get two regular nights of contemporary jazz a week at one venue; and so on — and my involvement is quite peripheral. I think you'll find that SIMA is now well-established. As long as they maintain an enthusiastic committee and a fair membership, they'll continue to be a major force.



SIMA is planning to bring out an American quintet from New York for the 1987 Festival of Sydney, whereas they brought out only one American musician, Dewey Redman (above), for the 1986 festival... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ & BLUES

What other achievements can you point to?

I'll just mention them quickly, without elaborating too much. The establishment of SWIM (Sydney Women In Music). They had a very successful three-day jazz workshop for women at the Conservatorium in 1984. I haven't heard a lot from them since, but I see that they've survived and are putting on some workshops soon at the Seymour Centre. By the way, for those workshops, they're using money granted by the NSW Government's Office of the Minister for the Arts, via a grant application I worked on for them last year. I've had quite a bit to do with Larrikin Records' "Cornerstones of Australian Jazz" series, working with Warren Fahey. The series now includes LPs by Brian Brown, Bob Bertles, Charlie Munro and Onaje, and is looking very impressive so far. Peter Rechniewski and I suggested to Warren that he re-release the 1967 CBS LP "Jazz Australia", and I understand that's next. It includes Don Burrows, John Sangster, Judy Bailey and Bernie McGann. The first three have recorded prolifically but it's the only McGann on record — two compositions of his, "Spirit Song" and "Lazy Days". Otherwise, I'm particularly proud of the fact that the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) introduced an award for jazz composer. They'd had awards for pop, country, rock, serious, and film music since 1982. In 1985, after a bit of lobbying, they introduced the inaugural APRA Music Award for Most Performed Australasian Jazz Work, and it went to Judy Bailey. In 1986 it went to Vince Jones.



Judy Bailey (left) receiving in 1985 the inaugural APRA Music Award for Most Performed Australasian Jazz Work, presented by Graeme Bell ...PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR



The 1986 APRA Music Award for Most Performed Australasian Jazz Work went to Vince Jones (above)... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Also, I've had quite a bit to do with the logistics of getting performances at overseas festivals for Australian groups. There I've worked closely with Peta Williams, International Co-ordinator at Musica Viva, not only at the international end, but also here, trying to ensure that Music Board and Foreign Affairs financial assistance went to groups who deserved it. Among others, I helped to push for The Benders in '85, but they only did a handful of performances. I'm now trying to assist a couple of groups to mount more comprehensive tours in 1987.

Is there much correlation in your work between the amount of energy spent and achievement?

I'm glad you asked that question, because you can spend an enormous amount of time and energy with very little resulting. Frequently, some of the best results I've had, which look very impressive in retrospect, have come about through relatively little effort. Meanwhile, I can spend weeks and months slogging on something which yields very little.

Can you give an example of that?

Well, just the normal administrative routine can eat up the hours: answering letters, answering phone enquiries, writing reports for the management committee, transcribing minutes for the management committee, trying to cope with the administrative budget, going to the post office. Without any secretarial assistance, all these things take an enormous amount of time. Every now and then I get a string of people coming to see me, or I might have a number of things going on

which involve a number of telephone calls to the Music Board, to the other jazz co-ordinators, or whatever. These conversations and administrative matters can be highly crucial in the short-term, but in the long-term they are often a waste of time, and achieve very little for the jazz co-ordination program. I suppose they are necessary to keep the program afloat, but I'm always thinking, at the back of my mind, 'I've got to get this out of the way, so I can get back to projects which will be of lasting value'.

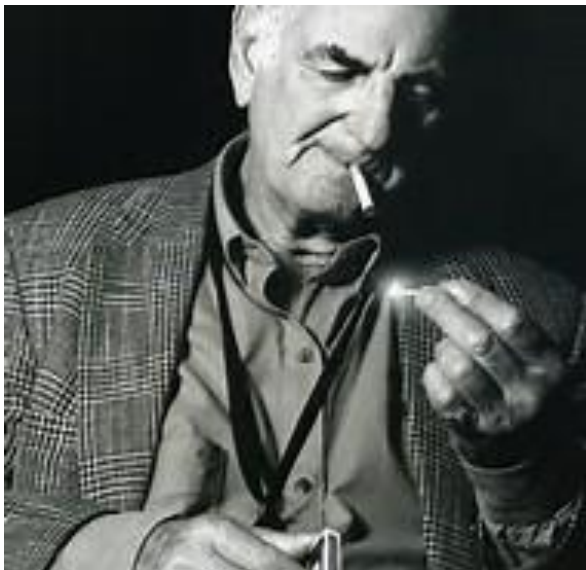
I was thinking more of particular projects which took up your time, rather than routine administration.

Well, a recent one — which was an experiment, rather than a project — was the campaign to get the Bernie McGann Quartet some gigs in Europe. I should preface this by saying that, out of the five State jazz co-ordinators I have just become National Jazz Co-ordinator. The title makes the job sound more important than it is. It merely means that I have a particular responsibility to take an overview of the jazz co-ordination program on a national basis which, in effect, means collecting information from the other co-ordinators on their activities. Also, it means that, where State boundaries are irrelevant, I act for the other co-ordinators. For example, in the international arena. It would not make sense for five State jazz co-ordinators to be lobbying the Montreux Jazz Festival to get an Australian group on. This would be my job and if, say, Don Porter in Adelaide had a local quartet wishing to perform in Europe, he would get in touch with me, and I would do the lobbying on his behalf. Well, I knew that the Bernie McGann Quartet had been offered a gig at the Greenwich Village Jazz Festival in New York in late August, 1986. So, I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to see if a number of gigs could be lined up in England and Europe, which the group could do on the way to New York.



Bernie McGann Quartet, L-R, Jonathan Zwartz, John Pochée, Roger Frampton, Bernie McGann: the jazz co-ordinator was engaged in an experimental project to get gigs for this group in Europe...

This involved sending publicity material and, in some cases, tapes, to the producers of about 60 or 70 jazz festivals in Europe. So, it was a relatively expensive exercise. It wasn't merely that I wanted to promote the McGann quartet — I would have done the same thing for any leading Australian jazz ensemble that was going over. I wanted to see if it was possible, in principle, to arrange for some gigs sitting at my desk in Sydney, using the postal service and the telephone. By the way, if I'd had a telex machine, it would have been a great advantage. Anyway, this experiment was very time-consuming in the first three months of 1986. In retrospect I can't see where all the time went, but I seemed to be working on it virtually every day for weeks. There were a number of difficulties, one of them being that there really was no decent tape available of the quartet, only three badly recorded tunes from a Jazz Action Society concert. But, at the end of the day, the results were mixed. When we started to run out of time, there was, in the bag, a performance at the NorthSea Jazz Festival in Holland, a gig at the Pompeii Jazz Festival in Italy, a week at Ronnie Scott's in London, the gig in New York, and good chances of other gigs in Europe through the network of cultural officers in the various Australian embassies, plus good chances of other miscellaneous gigs in England. The itinerary was coming together and was starting to look more impressive than the itineraries done by, say, The Benders and Pyramid, who went over in earlier years. But then things started to go wrong. Ronnie Scott changed the date for his week from July 21 to August 18, and anyway, it looked as if one member of the quartet would have difficulties getting away.



Ronnie Scott: he changed the McGann quartet's date for his week from July 21 to August 18...

With the uncertainty about the overseas trip, the group started to get offers in July and August for performances here. So, the whole thing had to be allowed to fall through. My point is that a lot of my time and energy went into this experiment, for limited results. The positive result was that we now know that a string of engagements can be organised from here. But good tapes have to be available, and the publicity material has to be prepared well in advance and, by the way, that is an expensive exercise, because there are so many festivals you have to contact. ISD

telephone calls are necessary, which raise the cost. Also, my feeling is that letters to festival directors in, say, France and Germany should be written in French and German. It is presumptuous of us to assume that everyone welcomes letters and publicity material in English. If an Australian group wants to perform in Europe, a whole campaign has to be mounted, and it has to be thought through, with proper planning. The costs involved in such a campaign are considerable, and jazz groups wanting to do this could probably do with assistance from the funding authorities to help cover the costs. So, maybe the results of this exercise were positive after all. But it did take up an enormous amount of time.

What sort of qualifications does a jazz co-ordinator need?

Well, he has to enjoy working alone and here I'm lucky — I really enjoy solitude. But, more seriously, I think the basic qualification is the ability to understand the organisational structure of the jazz world, and to perceive ways in which things can be improved; in other words, to encourage improvements that wouldn't happen in the natural course of events. This doesn't mean putting your energy into airy-fairy schemes which are not going to work; one has to be realistic and work on projects that have a good chance of success. In other words, you have to be able to develop strategies that will benefit jazz. Other than that sort of intellectual understanding, you need to have good administrative skills: the ability to compile and retrieve information; typing and the ability to correspond are important too, in my view.

Would it help if the co-ordinator were a jazz performer?

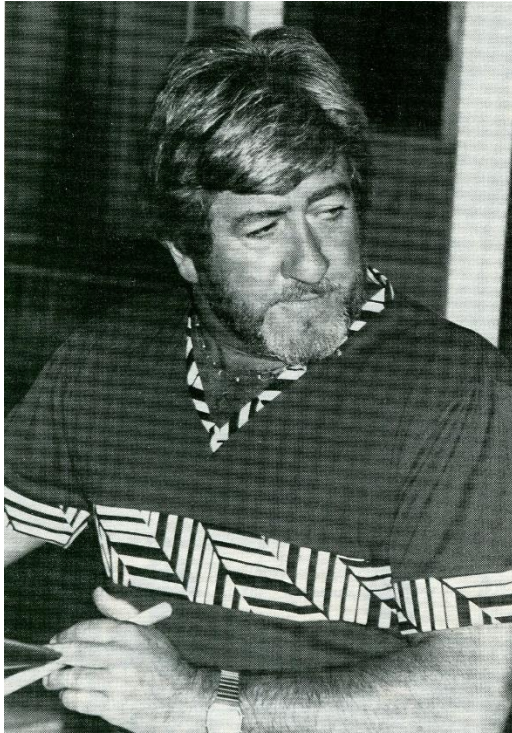
In my view, no. In fact, experience has shown that jazz co-ordinators who are also performers tend to be accident-prone. The difficulty is that, as jazz co-ordinator you're going to be involved in jazz projects; if they come off, and you end up performing in them, or perhaps teaching in them, then people may say that there's a conflict of interest — you're feathering your own nest.

What's wrong with a jazz co-ordinator performing or teaching under those circumstances?

It really does depend if the co-ordinator would be employed in normal circumstances if he or she was not jazz co-ordinator. If the co-ordinator was a musician who never got any gigs, and then started working in projects that came about through jazz co-ordination, then it's not on. But, if the co-ordinator had enough stature as a performer or teacher, then it might be okay. The Music Board has enunciated a principle to take care of this conflict of interest situation, which is, "As a matter of justice and the appearance of justice, the co-ordinator position should not be used to provide the co-ordinator with personal opportunities (eg for performance, or business involvement) which would not be available to him/her in the normal course of events." But even allowing for this principle, I think it would be very difficult for me to function as jazz co-ordinator if I was also a performer. How would people react if I ended up playing on the Midsummer Jazz Concert or in one of the SIMA concerts? People would, quite rightly, accuse me of having two bites at the cherry.

It sounds as if a jazz co-ordinator has to be very careful not to offend anyone.

Well, a jazz co-ordinator has to work in harmony with the jazz community, or the various jazz interests, if you like, which make up the jazz community. You can't function if you get everyone offside. Two jazz co-ordinators — Adrian Kenyon in Western Australia, and Ted Vining in Queensland — were virtually forced out of office because, among other things, serious opposition to them arose in their jazz communities.

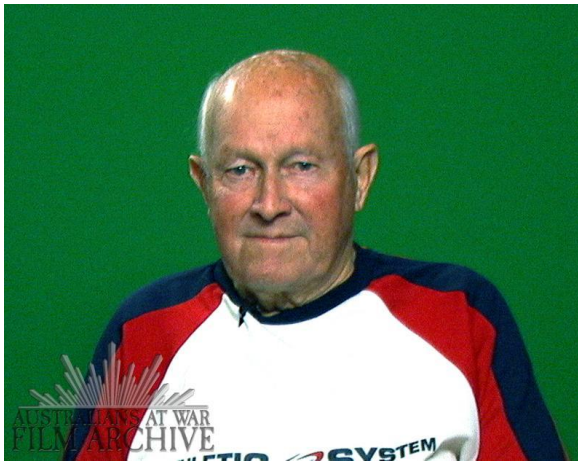


Ted Vining: in Queensland he was virtually forced out of office because, among other things, serious opposition to him arose in his jazz community... PHOTO CREDIT BILL McCARTHY

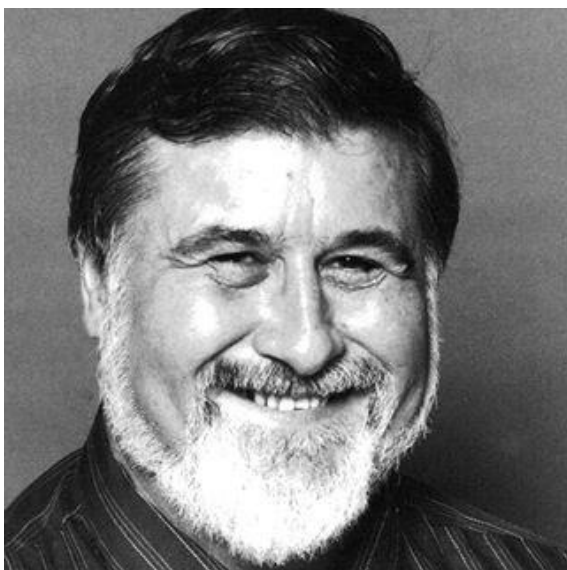
I'm not saying that the co-ordinators were to blame, mind you, nor that their opponents were to blame — these were both complex situations — but, in both cases, the co-ordinators just couldn't continue. If you've got influential people in the jazz community going around bad-mouthing you, and jumping up and down, and complaining to the funding authorities, then obviously you can't function effectively. Jazz co-ordinators are on Government money after all — the taxpayer's money — and people are entitled to ask: what are we getting for the money that's being spent on the jazz co-ordination programs? People are perfectly entitled to be critical of a jazz co-ordinator as long as they go about it the right way. Jazz co-ordinators have to be able to account for what they're doing and, now that the programs in every State are in their fourth years, the co-ordinators should, by now, have some runs on the board.

What do you mean by 'people can be critical of a jazz co-ordinator, as long as they go about it in the right way'? What is 'the right way'?

Let me answer that question in a roundabout way. Jazz co-ordinators are responsible to management committees which, ideally, are fully representative of the various interests which make up the jazz world. I'd better speak here only of NSW, because the management structures tend to vary throughout the different States, particularly since the Music Board specified, in 1985, that jazz co-ordinators should henceforth be contracted to incorporated associations rather than responsible to honorary committees. But in NSW we have had, since the beginning of 1984, an excellent committee, which has been willing to take responsibility for the jazz co-ordination program. In fact, that committee has decided to form an incorporated association in 1986 in order to retain control over the program, rather than surrender it to a non-jazz body. The committee provides the jazz co-ordination program with direct links into the jazz world. To illustrate this in NSW, I'll give all the names of the present committee members, plus an idea of their credentials, so you'll see what I mean. Our Chairman is Alan Nash, who is Secretary of the Musicians' Union in Sydney (by the way, he was a fine jazz trumpeter when he was playing); Peter Newton, Vice-President of the Sydney Jazz Club, is our Deputy-Chairman.



Chairman of the NSW committee is Alan Nash (above, Secretary of the Musicians' Union in Sydney) and Deputy-Chairman is Peter Newton (below, over the page), Vice-President of the Sydney Jazz Club...



Then there are, in alphabetical order, Kevin Casey, who represents the Jazz Action Society of NSW; Su Cruickshank, the professional singer and entertainer, whom everyone knows; Danny Fine, who is a professional musician and musical director – he has also been a jazz broadcaster, and was very much the heart and soul of the Keys Music Association in the late 1970s and early 1980s...



NSW Committee member Danny Fine, performing at the Paradise Jazz Cellar: he was very much the heart and soul of the Keys Music Association... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SMETANA

Dennis Koks, who represents the Kiama Jazz Concert Committee; Julian Lee, professional musician and arranger, whom everyone knows; Frank Maietta, General Manager of the Australian Music Centre, which devolves the Government grants which fund the jazz co-ordination program; James Morrison, who is not only one of our leading performers, but also teaches at the NSW Conservatorium of Music; Ron Philpott, again a leading performer and teacher at the Con; Peter Rechniewski, who is President of SIMA; and, last but not least, John Speight, who runs the Northside Big Band and the Young Sydney Jazz Orchestra, and also produces Midsummer Jazz, the Manly Jazz Carnival and the River City Jazz Festival in Taree.



Other NSW Committee members include professional musician and arranger Julian Lee (above) and James Morrison (below, over the page):



NSW Committee member James Morrison: he would make a splendid President of a jazz educators' association, if he had the time to devote to it... MORRISON PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

As you can see, it's a pretty impressive committee. All the members are key people in the jazz world, out and about amongst jazz musicians and as I say, they provide links between the jazz world and the jazz co-ordination program. Frequently, individual committee members will make suggestions as to something I can do, or see an opening where I can play a role. By the same token – getting back to your original question – if people in the jazz world want to complain about the program, or make suggestions, it would be perfectly proper for them to take any matters up directly with the committee members, or write to the Chairman. There are very few people in the jazz world who can say that they're not represented in some way by someone on the committee. In fact, we've had no controversy at all about the jazz co-ordination program in NSW – certainly not the sorts of controversies there have been in other States – and I put a lot of the program's easy passage down to the representative nature of the committee.

What controversies are you talking about in other States?

I can't give details but, in general, they've included unrepresentative committees, which haven't enjoyed the full support of the jazz community; conflicts of interest regarding the co-ordinator's professional activities outside of jazz co-ordination; the co-ordinator failing to keep his or her committee fully informed; the committee being unaware of its responsibilities; and the co-ordinator being seen in the jazz community as an opponent of a particular style of jazz. By the way, these problems in other States have now been largely resolved.

So, you feel that the NSW committee has helped you avoid those sorts of problems?

Certainly the NSW committee has kept me honest. The members are not dummies; they read my reports and when our meetings come around, they have the

opportunity to put their views. Occasionally I show a lapse in judgment, and they pull me back onto the tracks. But I think those lapses have been rare, and always on minor matters, so generally we've had a pretty smooth relationship.

To get back to what we were talking about before, what other achievements have there been in NSW?

Rather than continue with 'achievements', can I talk about the routine services offered by the program?

Sure.

I'll make them brief. The basic bread-and-butter of the program is the operation of an information service. I can handle just about any enquiry about Australian jazz or any musician. Also, to assist anyone trying to publicise a jazz event, I have a number of helpful lists of contacts. The one I circulate most is the one I call 'Who's Who in the Jazz World'. It includes the names, addresses and phone numbers of jazz writers, broadcasters, arts editors, office-bearers of jazz societies, jazz photographers, freelance writers involved in jazz, contacts in the funding authorities ... anyone who is in a position of influence in the jazz world, or in a position to assist jazz. My other lists include jazz societies around Australia; educational institutions in NSW which have a history of involvement in jazz; jazz festivals, or arts festivals with a jazz component; jazz venues; and so on. Some of the other routine services I offer include assistance with grant applications to the funding authorities; advising on how to publicise and promote jazz events ... I have a little paper called 'How To Get Free Publicity For A Jazz Gig', which I distribute to anyone who asks for it. By the way, it's always amazed me that so many jazz groups or venue owners totally ignore the avenues of free publicity that are available in the media of Sydney. If a group wants to perform in country areas of NSW, I can provide information on whether a tour is feasible, and who is likely to want to hire the group. That reminds me of a new project within the jazz co-ordination program.

Can you say something about that?

Sure. The Music Board has just funded a project officer to work two days a week with me on the feasibility of performing circuits in country areas of NSW. This will involve the collection of all relevant information needed by a group which wishes to tour in a country area. In other words, the jazz co-ordination program, after a while, will be able to provide the names of potential entrepreneurs in particular areas; the sorts of venues available; the costs of travel and accommodation etc — all the sorts of information which are extremely difficult for jazz artists to gather together. I'm really excited about this project. It's badly needed, and there is a great potential for jazz performances out there in NSW. The position, by the way, has just been taken up by Gail Cork, who is a freelance writer and publicist in the music industry. She is putting all the information on computer and we hope eventually to have some sort of handbook or directory of contacts and facilities which will have indispensable information to assist touring groups. From the initial work that Gail has done, it's apparent that she is very capable, so the management committee and I are looking to her to make this a really successful project; if so, it will help greatly to develop employment opportunities for many of our musicians.



Gail Cork: she was, for four years, Manager of EMI Custom Records, so she has a comprehensive knowledge of what's involved in making an LP...

By the way, Gail is a very valuable person to have involved in the jazz co-ordination program. She was, for four years, Manager of EMI Custom Records, so she has a comprehensive knowledge of what's involved in making an LP, if you are financing it yourself. I've already asked her about this, and soon we will have available a paper called something like 'How To Make Your Own Jazz LP'. One of the problems with jazz musicians is that, often, they just don't have ready access to information which they need to further their careers. If they know realistically what is involved in putting out an LP, then it's more likely that they can attempt it. Too many musicians put recording their music into the 'too hard' basket, just as they fail to apply for Government assistance, because the whole process appears too difficult. But our 'How To Make Your Own Jazz LP' paper might encourage some groups to go ahead. I'm also just finishing two papers which I've been working on: 'How To Form A Jazz Society'; and a paper I've put together on the advice of Su Cruickshank — it's for the owner or manager of a jazz venue - and it's loosely called 'How to Cope with a Group of Jazz Musicians in the Initial Stages of a New Engagement'. I'm hoping that all these papers will help jazz artists to advance their careers.*

**Editor's Note: a paper entitled "How To Apply Under 'Project Grants' For Assistance To Record" by Eric Myers, summarising what was known at the time, was published in the Mar/Apr 1996 edition of "Jazzchord". It is reproduced on this website at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/jazz-coord-page-6>.*



NSW management committee member Su Cruickshank: concerned with how venue managers interacted with jazz groups performing in their venue...

Speaking of the Music Board, it's generally felt that jazz gets a raw deal from government funding authorities. Why has so little money gone to jazz over the last few years?

The whole question of Government funding for jazz is a very complex one, and it probably is too complex to go too far into here. By the way, you have to remember that the Music Board is not the only funding authority; there are also State Government funding authorities, and in many States they virtually ignore jazz — there's not even a category which jazz could be included in, to qualify for funding. In NSW there is some funding of jazz by the State Government, and the Music Board itself is at least serious in funding jazz projects. In general, I don't think jazz gets a fair go, but jazz probably isn't the only smaller musical idiom that gets devalued during the whole process of funding decisions, which is very arbitrary, from what I know of it. I think, however, that the jazz world could organise itself better as a lobbying force to put its case to the Government funding authorities. Some key organisations do it well; SIMA, for example, has been quite successful with grant applications. But generally jazz people haven't yet fully realised how crucial Government funds can be to help them keep the music alive. The groundswell has to be there; jazz organisations have to be hungry; they will have to compete better for the available funds. But, let me answer the question in terms of what the jazz co-ordinators can do. We can ensure that, if people are applying for assistance, they fill out the application forms properly. That might seem an elementary thing to suggest, but you have to realise that it is very difficult to fill out those forms, and I would go so far as to say that 90% of jazz people find the task virtually impossible, at least when they have their first go. They need assistance, and jazz co-ordinators have a responsibility to be able to assist, to have the skills required. We need to understand budgets, how they're put together, and also we should be able to help an applicant mount a good case for funding. As I understand it, the Music Board traditionally doesn't get good applications from the jazz world.

There's a lot of whingeing from jazz people that jazz doesn't get enough money, and that too much money goes to the other musical idioms. But you can hardly blame the Music Board if they get grant applications from the jazz world which are so poor, they have to be thrown into the wastepaper basket. My aim, in helping people to fill out the forms, is to ensure that the success of the application depends on the worth of the project itself, rather than the standard of the application. In other words, a good project should not be allowed to fail through the application being sloppy. And my feeling is that many jazz applications in the past have been sloppy: the budgets haven't added up, or have been unrealistic; questions haven't been answered properly; and the applicant hasn't given the Music Board valid reasons why it should fund the project. As I said, it is very difficult to fill out a grant application form, unless you understand what you're doing. Applying for financial assistance from the Music Board is like playing an elaborate game. But the Music Board publishes a little booklet called "Programs of Assistance" which tells you how to play this game. The Music Board sets out clearly what its objectives are, what it is trying to do in funding Australian music; if you're applying for money, you have to tell the Music Board clearly how your project will assist the Music Board achieve its objectives. In other words, you have to devise an impressive rationale, and address the Music Board's own guidelines.

You feel that a jazz co-ordinator can have an influence on this whole process?

Yes, definitely, and there's a good reason why jazz co-ordinators should be involved. One of the principle goals of the jazz co-ordination program is to increase financial assistance to jazz. The Music Board, I think, seriously intends to divert more of its available funds to the smaller musical idioms. This has been the whole idea behind its efforts to contain the amount of money going to the Australian Opera. If the Music Board is successful in this, then I don't see why jazz shouldn't get much more money. The network of jazz co-ordinators has a responsibility to try and ensure that more of that available money goes to jazz, and obviously one of the basic ways is ensuring that the Music Board gets impressive applications from jazz people. The jazz co-ordinators should, by now, be highly skilled in helping people complete these forms. Can I make a more general point?

Sure.

We've been talking about the skills involved in applying for Government assistance — skills which are in short supply in the jazz world. So the jazz co-ordinators need to have those skills to compensate. But generally, if any skill is in short supply in the jazz world, then the co-ordinator needs to quickly acquire that skill or, if necessary, find someone with that skill who can assist jazz people. To give an example, in my own case, I now know a great deal about the best ways of promoting jazz events — all the avenues available — and I can give sound advice to someone who wants to promote effectively. It's not that I've done any promoting myself, but I've asked successful promoters how they go about doing things, how they get their results, and I can pass on those insights to anyone who is promoting a jazz event. Similarly, with the promotion of a jazz LP, I can advise people on the best ways of going about it, and I know what sorts of things have been done by people who have marketed their LPs successfully.

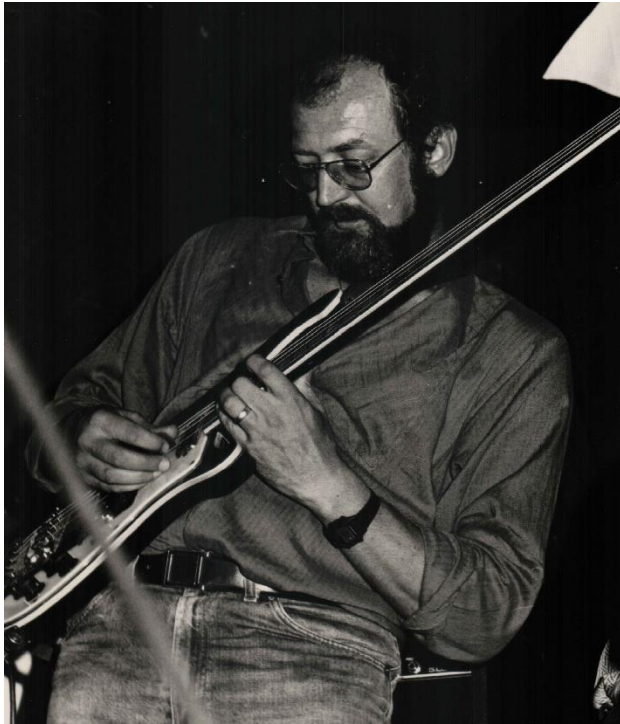
Do you have any important projects coming up — not for grant applications, but in the jazz co-ordination program?

Yes, the formation of an association of jazz educators in NSW, and I feel a certain amount of urgency to get it moving again. In 1985 I organised a meeting of about 20 people from various areas of jazz education at the Australian Music Centre, and obviously there was a great deal of enthusiasm in the air about combining and forming a lobby group. A sub-committee was formed to work on a constitution but the whole project lapsed because it dropped down my list of priorities; it just had to be shelved. Interestingly, very few of the educators rang up to ask why. I think Peter Newton was the only member of the sub-committee who eventually rang up and asked why there was a delay. This was a perfect illustration that, although people want something to happen, they often are just too busy themselves to initiate. So, this is where the jazz co-ordinator comes in. I now feel that it's time to move once again, and I've already asked Sy Bluhm, who runs the Jazz Action Society workshops and is a former lawyer, to draft some goals for the association, based on those of the American National Association of Jazz Educators. He's done that, and I'm hoping that the sub-committee will meet soon.



Sy Bluhm (right) who began the Jazz Action Society workshops, pictured here with his wife Freddie: Sy has been asked to draft some goals for the proposed jazz educators association, based on those of the American National Association of Jazz Educators... PHOTO COURTESY SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Here again I'm relying heavily on the jazz educators on my own committee — James Morrison and Ron Philpott in particular — to work with me on this project. Both are doing terrific work in the area of jazz education. Both teach at the NSW Conservatorium, of course, and Ron has developed some very impressive projects out in the schools, completely on his own initiative, along with the pianist Paul McNamara.



NSW Committee member Ron Philpott: a teacher at the NSW Conservatorium, he has developed some impressive projects out in the schools, along with pianist Paul McNamara...

So far as James Morrison is concerned, you only have to go down to Soup Plus to see him jamming with the students from the Con to see what good work he's doing with young players coming up. I'm hoping that James and Ron can play key roles in the proposed association, because they are both marvellous performers who also have the teaching side together. Often you get a great teacher who can't perform well, or vice versa. But Ron and James have got both areas under control.

What could an association of jazz educators achieve?

Oh look, the sky's the limit! There is so much that needs to be done, and can be done with the right people and the right strategies. An association could put pressure on the NSW Dept of Education and the Teachers' Federation to find some basis to allow jazz educators into the schools to assist harassed music teachers. At the moment there's a real Catch 22 situation: you have to have a degree and a Dip Ed to teach in the schools, yet most of the best jazz educators have no formal qualifications at all. The association could arrange for the production of jazz education kits, which are badly needed by teachers in the schools, it could set up a jazz music lending library. In fact, the NSW State Government has already granted \$1,000 to help set this up in 1986, so that will certainly be moving by the end of the year. This will hopefully get over the problem of jazz ensembles being formed in schools, and having no music to play.

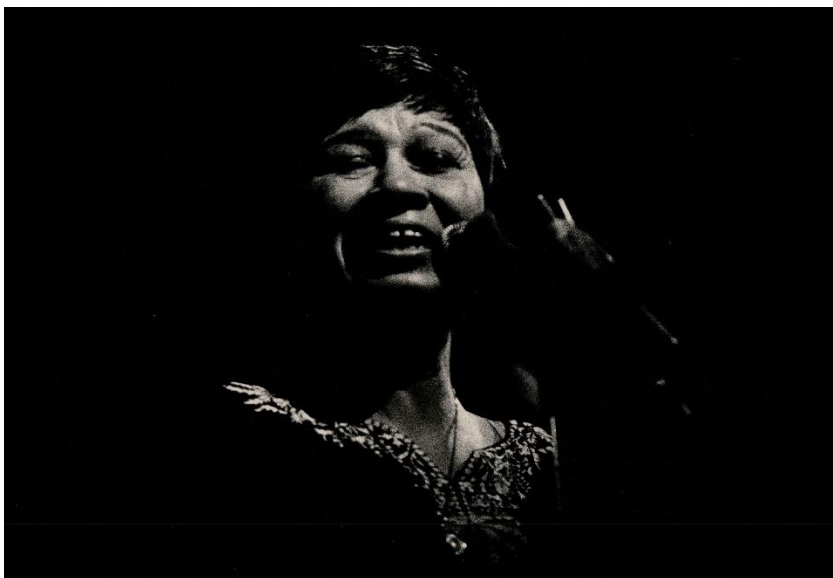
So there's plenty for the association to do?

There's so much that needs to be done that, when the steering committee is formed, it will have to avoid taking on too much. But I'm confident that the right people will

emerge to take it on. James Morrison, for example, would be a terrific President. Maybe he will take a leading role. I'm going to press him to be involved, if he has the time. But there are so many good people who have worked in the interests of jazz education for a long time, usually on their own; if they combine, they can be a real force.

Do you feel you have any particular qualifications for the jazz coordinator job?

I think there are two things which I bring to the job which are very helpful. The first is my experience in music as a professional; and the second is more to do with temperament. To take the first one: at least I know what it's like to be a musician trying to make a living in a very insecure industry. For many years I was primarily an arranger for club artists, but I also had my own seven-piece band in the licensed clubs — I played electric piano and keyboard bass in it — and it was a very successful group. It worked in a number of top clubs, including Cronulla Leagues Club and Canterbury-Bankstown Leagues Club, and basically it was never out of work for about 20 years. By that, I mean that it worked for at least three nights a week, with hardly a weekend off throughout that time, and I was always able to pay my sidemen well above the Union rate - in fact, well above the ordinary average weekly wage. I have experienced that dreadful shock when, just at the time you're doing your best work, and everything is going beautifully musically, you get two weeks' notice. That helps me to relate to the conditions under which most jazz musicians work. Even though I wasn't a jazz musician myself, I found pretty quickly that the best kind of musician to hire was the jazz musician; as long as he could read well, he would play commercial music with so much more life than the non-improvising musician. In my writing for the band I allowed for more and more solo space, so for the last few years of the band, it was very much a jazz-oriented, pre-bebop, swing band with a lot of Ellington material, Billie Holiday tunes and so on. For the last four years, our singer was Marie Wilson, and over the years, a lot of good jazz musicians were resident with the band for long periods.



*Marie Wilson: singer with the Eric Myers club band for four years...PHOTO CRFEDIT
PETER SINCLAIR*



Two of the front-line players in the Eric Myers band (at Earlwood-Bardwell Park RSL) included the great saxophonist Charlie Munro (above) and the trumpeter Dick Montz (below)... MUNRO PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN COURTESY OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ; MONTZ PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH



They included trumpeters Miroslav Bukovsky, Steve Williams and Dick Montz; saxophonists Ken James, Mike Haughton & Charlie Munro; trombonists Bob McIvor, Bill Motzing, Mike Butcher & Bob Johnson; guitarists Ned Sutherland, Dean Kerr & Steve Brien; drummers Phil Treloar and John Morrison. So, I'm aware of the business side of running a band, and when jazz players talk about the logistics of doing gigs, the problems with sound systems, liaising with managements, and so on, I know exactly what they're talking about. Secondly, I think I'm suited to assisting jazz musicians. I like working in the support system around jazz. By temperament I'm an accompanist, and I get a big kick from trying to set things up so others can perform. In one of his recent film reviews in "The Australian", Evan Williams summed up the role of the accompanist in music in this way: "His art, by its nature derivative and self-effacing, nevertheless requires a very special set of skills and a rigorous craftsmanship of its own". I think that's a very apt description of what jazz co-ordinators do; we're not stars — we're accompanists. Our task is to do a lot of fine tuning behind the scenes so that others can go out on stage and play the music.



Arts administrator & film critic Evan Williams: the role of the accompanist requires a very special set of skills and a rigorous craftsmanship of its own... PHOTO COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN

Do you enjoy the job?

Yes, I do. I think I'm very lucky to be working in the support system of an art form I'm preoccupied with. I believe strongly that jazz is unquestionably the most important of the 20th Century musical genres, and it's a great shame that that view is not more widely appreciated. Of course, the money for the jazz co-ordinator job is very low by any standards; well below the average weekly wage. But the interest and fascination of the job make up for the low money.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Yes, just let me finish with a quote. Did you read the Wayne Shorter interview in the April "DownBeat"? It was quite inspiring. I'd like to quote the last couple of sentences which Shorter ended the interview with: "I guess my main goal — the

hopeful end result — is to create music so strong and uplifting that it will inspire people to want to be as good in their jobs and in their lives as the music makes them feel. That's the bottom line". I was very struck by those words.



Wayne Shorter: his main goal is to create music so strong and uplifting that it will inspire people to want to be as good in their jobs and in their lives as the music makes them feel... PHOTO CREDIT GIANCARLO BELFIORE

Like anyone who is really into jazz, I treasure the music — that is, experiencing the music — and I do feel uplifted and inspired by the best of it. It's almost impossible to put into words what one gets out of any music, I suppose. In jazz, for me, sometimes it's a spirit of rebellion, or of decadence; sometimes it's just lyrical beauty; it's often just an exploratory feeling, while a soloist is on the edge of creating something marvellous... whatever. But we do have terrific jazz musicians in this country, across the whole spectrum of styles and, to a great extent, they're often let down by those working in the support system. There's a lot of enthusiasm in the support system which surrounds the players, but often that enthusiasm is misguided, and generally there's not a great deal of expertise amongst people who are working on behalf of the musicians. There are exceptions, of course, and I don't want to take away from what many people are doing; remember that, apart from the occasional paid administrator or co-ordinator with a jazz society, they're all volunteers. There's little professional infrastructure working on behalf of jazz. But jazz co-ordinators are paid, and therefore they should have some professional skills and expertise. Our best jazz musicians — those who are world-class — really deserve a better support system. The jazz co-ordination program has been a great opportunity to fill that void and, at least in NSW, I believe the program has had an effect.