

## WORK AND THE PERFORMING ARTIST

by Ian Muldoon\*

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**M**y son Rhys Muldoon is a performing artist - an actor. He's good enough to be cast in classics such as Shakespeare (Edmund in *King Lear*) and to win acting awards in works by modern masters such as Steven Berkoff (*Decadence*) and to perform at the Sydney Opera House. But as to work, a steady gig, Play School (ABC) has provided that for 21 years and allowed him to use his skills and refine his art. You see, you can't practise acting - you actually have to perform before an audience even if that audience is the director, cast and crew on a film.



*Actor Rhys Muldoon, who has had a steady gig on the ABC's Play School for 21 years...*

The vast majority of actors, or those that aspire to acting, aren't acting but work as inter alia, waiters, educators, shop assistants, instructors or administrators. My admiration for Rhys and his talent has been greatly enhanced by his persistence and dedication and commitment to his craft and work on Play School. And such work, to an audience of child or parent, doesn't look like work - it looks like fun. Do people

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*\*Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

actually get paid to do this? Some might ask. It's just two adults mucking around with kids. My mum and dad do this! Very few know or understand the craft and art that goes into the production of a Play School episode with its carefully written and crafted 120-page script. It's the only children's show inducted into the Logie Hall of Fame. Artists such as John Waters, Simon Burke, Noni Hazelhurst, Colin Friels, and Deborah Mailman have worked on Play School and their superb art and craft does not reveal itself - they make it look easy and fun. If in doubt, go for an audition and give it a try. As well, one of our finest jazz artists Judy Bailey was part of the Play School team for over 15 years. Which brings me to Andrew Scott, Maximillian Alduca, and Tim Geldens of The Pocket Trio of Sydney and their work.



*The Pocket Trio, L-R, pianist Andrew Scott, bassist Max Alduca, drummer Tim Geldens...*

On the first day of winter, 2021, at 7.25 pm Eric Myers and I edged our way through the narrow entrance to Moya's Juniper Lounge, Redfern. The narrow, dark, deep room was abuzz with chatting and laughing and clinking. Much of the right back side of the venue featured a wall of bottled liquors in a multitude of shapes and colours. At the front, adjacent to the entrance, and to the right squeezed up against the wall was an upright piano. Uh oh! I thought. In the remaining few square metres behind some chairs and just to the left of the piano the bass and drums were subsequently set. A sense of dread settled on me. The ambient noise together with the lack of performing space and the upright piano with a missing lid (!?) set my expectations low.

I sat alone in worried anticipation as Eric had decamped to another venue for a cappuccino which was not available at Moya's. The beginning of my recovery came when I went to the bar and ordered a lemon, lime and bitters. The bartender, who may have been Mr Charles Casben the owner/manager, told me to return to my seat as he would wait on me. My drink was brought through the milling crowd and served as if I'd ordered a \$300 bottle of champagne. I noticed the same service to all, mostly young, throughout the evening. This is a Tuesday! Isn't that the dead night of the week?

The next part of my recovery was the positive demeanour and disposition of the pianist Andrew Scott who arrived clearly happy to be at Moya's. In the event, the

performance of The Pocket Trio that night got me thinking about Haydn, Fats Waller, satisfaction, and Ahmad Jamal, and was an instance of the transcendent beauty of the finest of musics in a vibrant human setting. *Say what!?*

Bear with me. When I say *transcendent beauty* I'm referring to the music of jazz (so-called) which lifts our spirits beyond our present cares, often because of the intricacies, subtleties, and power of its rhythms. Haydn piano trios I like: but swinging jazz piano trios I love, because they are an evolutionary advance in music - rhythm has advanced such a long way in Western music in the past 150 years. And I say there should be no hierarchy between notated and improvised music. I just this moment finished listening to a breathtaking and beautiful mainly improvised 17 minutes of *Blinks* (Lacy) part of a 1983 live performance by Steve Lacy, soprano sax; Steve Potts, alto and soprano saxophones; Irene Aebi, cello, violin, and voice; Jean-Jacques Avenel, bass; and Oliver Johnson, drums (*Blinks... Zurich 1983 Steve Lacy Five Hat Hut 1995*).



*Steve Lacy: a breathtaking and beautiful mainly improvised 17 minutes... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ FROM NEW ORLEANS TO NEW AGE JAZZ*

Before that I was listening to a very carefully arranged piece by the Ahmad Jamal Trio based on *There Is No Greater Love* (Isham Jones/Marty Symes). It's a jazz standard and extant recorded versions of that song include those by Duke Ellington

(1936), Billie Holiday (1947), Miles Davis (1955), Circle (with Anthony Braxton 1971), and Woody Shaw (1983). Both the extended extemporisations of Lacy on his own composition over a driving rhythm section, and the live performance of the Jamal trio with its notated foundation and finely crafted arrangement performed by two of the finest rhythm players in the music, were hugely enjoyable and significant artistic accomplishments - one mainly improvised, the other mainly notated, both beautiful art.

When I say the *finest of musics* I mean the music whose origins emphasised powerful rhythms. Duke Ellington was the supreme musical artist of the 20th century and a fair portion of that claim rests on the roles of the bass and drums, as well as original compositions and arrangements. The bass (and drum) parts were not written out by Ellington which gave the likes of Wellman Braud, Oscar Pettiford, Jimmy Blanton, Jimmie Woode, Wendell Marshall and Sam Bell the responsibility and artistic freedom to listen, adjust and drive, in concert with the drummer, the push of the band, and its stunningly beautiful *swing*. Ellington employed a bass player permanently years before other bands did. The swing era changed all that. And how.



*The bass (and drum) parts were not written out by Ellington (above) for his orchestra which gave the rhythm section players the responsibility and artistic freedom to listen, adjust, drive, in concert with the drummer, the push of the band, and its stunningly beautiful swing... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

The music called “swing” is perhaps the most potent celebration of the discovery of the appeal and power of rhythms uncovered by the evolution of jazz. It was perhaps

the most historically popular music of all time through the reach and penetration of radio and records in the period 1930-1950. It was at once a discovery, a revelation and a joy. People were literally dancing in the yards, alleys, streets, bars, and halls to its rhythms. It's very popularity, in film for instance, may have meant it was discounted as "art" - "art" had to be experienced in concert halls and museums and dedicated venues. Yes? Nor is "serious" art popular, now is it?

The great genius of Fats Waller, famous for his entertaining skills and fun demeanour, was a major artist distinguished especially by his deep rhythmic sense, not just his pianism, compositional artistry or his organ playing. Indeed, it's his rhythmic sophistication that may have propelled him so high in artistic terms to the extent that Art Tatum paid him homage by claiming he, Tatum, was born out of Waller's music.



*Art Tatum (left) paid Fats Waller (below, pictured with his son Maurice in the 1930s) homage by claiming that he, Tatum, was born out of Waller's music... WALLER PHOTO COURTESY A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF JAZZ*



Deep sociological influences surround music and its performance. A small club in Redfern (!) can't possibly be the venue for art can it? And what about a venue like The Newsagency in Annandale - you won't find art there will you? Except for some of

the greats like Andrea Keller, Shannon Barnett and Sam Anning. And for possible emerging greats, like members of The Pocket Trio, whose delights may be discovered at Moya's Juniper Lounge in Redfern.

When I say a *vibrant human setting* I mean a congregation of mainly young, but also middle-aged and elderly (yours truly) of both genders, a range of social classes, jammed together for a range of reasons - flirtations, connections, relaxation, friendship, warmth, love, celebrations, thirst, and music. As Mike Nock noted in that very fine documentary film by David Perry (L W Savoy Productions 1998) titled *Dr Jazz*, the main goal of the music called jazz, is to connect with others. And the Pocket Trio does it in spades.



*Mike Nock, as he appeared in the David Perry documentary "Dr Jazz": the main goal of the music called jazz, is to connect with others...*

Partly through their attitude, partly through the programming into three acts over the evening but mainly through their music. Each musician arrives without fanfare, and quietly - even unobtrusively - sets up. Andrew Scott on piano, acting as MC, introduces the band and tries a few corny remarks in very good humour, and with a background of almost stentorian chit chat gets on with playing. Act One is hard to hear because the piano is a little low in the mix, but for an upright sounds remarkably piano-like and in tune.

Accepting advice in good spirit he increases the volume of the piano a smidgin, and the sound balance is much better for Act Two. By Act Three, around 10pm, some 20 patrons remain and these are more likely to be the dedicated music lovers but also include two bespectacled young lovers enjoying the remnants of their cheese board snacks in front of our comfortable seating. Playing mainly originals, the trio grooves to some delightful heights to round off the evening, canvassing us towards the end - Hands up for a fast tune! Hands up for a slow one! Fast wins! - and *Turkey* (Scott) with its jaunty fun rhythms is played. A ballad concludes as a coda in respect of "the minorities present" - those who lost the first vote of what should be played. The evening closes on a sweet satisfying note and Scott bids us good night.

In terms of formal venues I'm guessing City Recital Hall in Angel Place would be acceptable to this outstanding chamber group. As to Moya's Juniper Bar, Charlie Casben should be congratulated for hosting the Pocket Trio since the 21st of March 2017. On leaving we were reminded of jazz tradition where a small opened suitcase on the floor had a sign: "Tips For The Band". Fats Waller called his container "Kitty". The suitcase was awash with legal tender of the paper variety, a sign perhaps of a satisfied and appreciative audience.



*Charlie Casben, manager at Moya's Juniper Lounge: he should be congratulated for hosting The Pocket Trio since March 21, 2017... PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK*

At Moya's I was reminded that artists have to take risks at earning a living - it's in the nature of being an artist as opposed to being a musician. Thanks to a combination of many factors, not least the persistence and artistry of Andrew Scott, Maximillian Alduca, and Tim Geldens and the support of Moya's, we had the distinct pleasure of enjoying an evening of transcendent beauty of the finest of musics in a vibrant human setting. Moreover, in this age of perpetual stimulation without satisfaction, Eric and I left Redfern in a state of happy satisfaction. Now to consider what could be described as a degustation of The Pocket Trio's book, the self-produced CD Pocket Trio *All At Once* (2020).



Before one listens to a note of the music in this document there are many references that stand out. The first is that the programme opens with a jazz standard, *Over The Rainbow* (Arlen/Yarburg). The version by Judy Garland has been voted the most important American song of the 20th Century by the Recording Industry Association of America and the National Endowment of the Arts; this includes consideration of *White Christmas* and *Good Bless America*. The American Film Institute also voted it the best movie theme ever over such stalwarts *As Time Goes By* (Hupfield) and *Singing' In The Rain* (Brown/Freed). *Over the Rainbow's* composer, Harold Arlen, also composed *A Sleepin' Bee* (lyrics by Truman Capote); *Come Rain or Come Shine* (lyrics by Johnny Mercer); and *I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues* (lyrics by Ted Koehler). Arlen is considered the most “jazz orientated” of the great composers of the Jewish Diaspora whose works make up most of the Great American Songbook. These include inter alia the Gershwin brothers, Irving Berlin, and Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.



*Harold Arlen (left), pictured in 1982: considered the most “jazz orientated” of the great composers of the Jewish Diaspora whose works make up most of the Great American Songbook...*

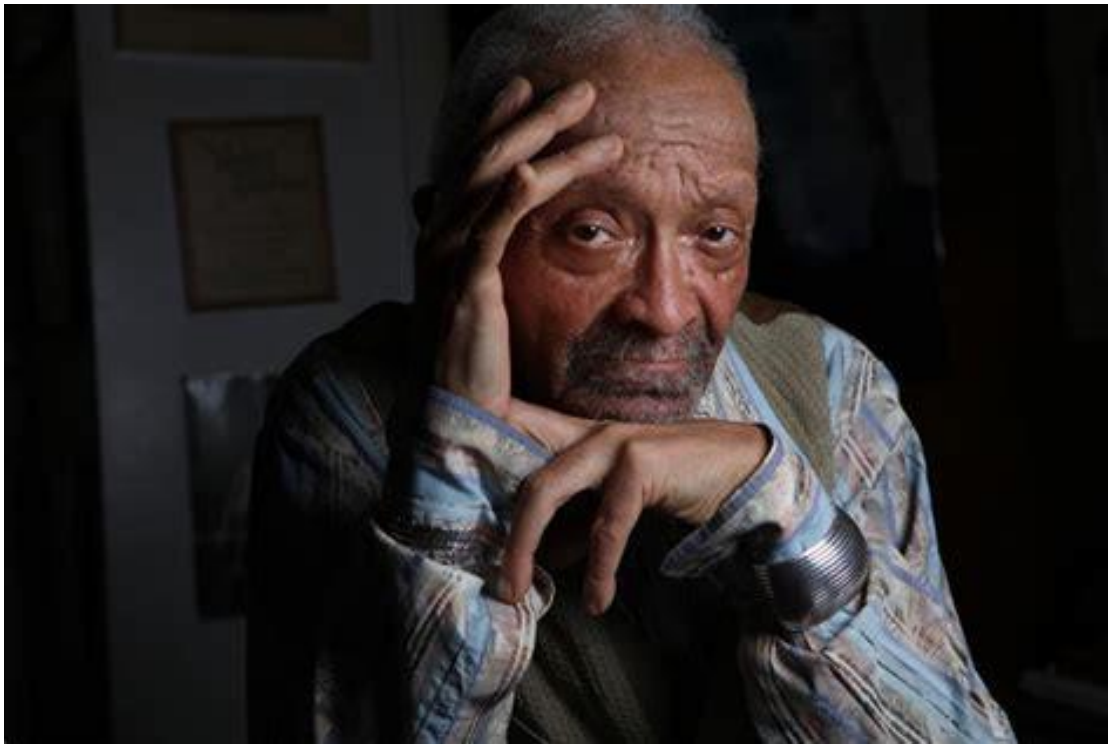
Secondly, the song has been recorded by some of the most distinguished pianists in jazz history - Bud Powell, Keith Jarrett, Dave Brubeck - as well as by some of the most popular bands, including Glenn Miller. In my modest library of music I have 57 versions, six by Art Pepper alone, and one by French Horn master John Graas. *Valse Hot* by Sonny Rollins is based on the chord changes of *Over the Rainbow*. A 1939 solo piano version by piano genius Art Tatum has received detailed analysis of the song noting harmonising chords, descending runs, dissonance, stride, blues, and speed of execution (cf *Jazz*, by Giddins and DeVaux, Norton, NY, 2009, pp 280/281).



For an emerging artist leading a jazz piano trio and documenting his work for the first time, to tackle *Over The Rainbow* is like a classical pianist starting out with the *Piano Trio in G major Hob. XV:25 "all'Ongarese"* by Haydn - any weaknesses in execution will be glaringly apparent so familiar is the work.

Thirdly, The Pocket Trio announces itself as being substantially about swing - being "in the pocket" is for a drummer to be relaxed, to have a tiny delay in the back-beat, and to be *with* the bass player. It means in practice to be loose, and to have very big "ears" for the music and to be sensitive to dynamics. The last 150 years has seen rhythm emerge as the most important evolution in music.

Some artists, like the late great Cecil Taylor (1929 - 2018), believe the greatest misunderstanding in American music is the lack of appreciation of the significance of rhythm. Even though the most popular music of the 20th Century was swing where bands such as Glenn Miller, Jimmie Lunceford, Artie Shaw, Count Basie sold millions of units, and then rock and roll with its more simple rhythms dominated popular music especially in the 1960s and 1970s.



*The late great Cecil Taylor believed the greatest misunderstanding in American music is the lack of appreciation of the significance of rhythm...*

Rhythm is still considered the bastard child by "serious" musical educators and students and musicians involved in classical music. The reality is, more musical skills and artistic talent are needed to be an effective swing group than many other musical aggregations. Swing seems simple, but it is not. This is why the "greatest jazz drummer" in jazz, Buddy Rich, paid homage to Jo Jones for his superior ability to swing. Jones was a legendary member of what many consider the finest swing engine in jazz: Walter Page, double bass; Freddie Green, guitar; and Jo Jones on drums.

Jones was a multi-instrumentalist and tap dancer before concentrating on drums where he was an innovative master of brushes and the high hat cymbal.



*Drummer Buddy Rich (left) paid homage to Jo Jones (centre) for his superior ability to swing. On the right is drummer Gene Krupa... PHOTO COURTESY DRUMMERWORLD*

Indeed, it may be claimed that the Basie rhythm section with the piano of the leader, were a major influence on the evolution of the music especially in its renowned minimalism where great art was made out of a small drum kit, accompanied by the profound honing of skills over years, big ears, the dramatic power of the silence between sounds, and the musical sensibilities and artistry of Count Basie. And we recall that the greatest artists in the music reference rhythm and blues in their education: Ornette Coleman attended the University of Rhythm and Blues (Texas) where he majored on tenor. Louis Jordan, master of jump blues and one of the fathers of rock and roll, was one of John Coltrane's favourite musicians. Rhythm then is a distinction the Pocket Trio announces about its approach.

*Over The Rainbow* is very carefully arranged by Scott in the style of Ahmad Jamal who, as far as I know, never recorded it. A famous arrangement is by Israel Ka'ano'i Kamakawiwo'ole, the Hawaiian musical celebrity and activist, who performed and recorded an immensely popular version that began:

Ooh-ooh-ooh  
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh  
Ooh-ooh-ooh  
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh  
Ooh-ooh-ooh  
Ooh-ooh-ooh

The Pocket Trio's version begins with a lengthy lightly percussive piano repetitive figure that seems to have been based on the bridge of the song. The drummer sounds like he's using fingers for percussive effects. The introduction lasts about a third of the song. The coda has a precisely placed *plink*. It's a completely satisfying and finely crafted arrangement and beautifully played by the trio.

The remaining works are originals by Scott: *Julius Wolfgang* opened by the bass, swings throughout; *All At Once* reveals a memorable melodic phrase and a fine drum solo supported by percussive piano intervals; *Ready To Go* is a straight ahead mid-tempo romp at the top end of the piano; *See You Next Tuesday* sets up a nice groove and features fine bass and drum solos; *Turkey* is a fun piece and up-tempo romp; and the programme closes with a gentle *Pocket Dial* in which Alduca's woody bass sound is featured. The document is quite well recorded with a clear sound stage and nice balance, no boomy bass, with crisp well articulated percussion, and honest piano.



*Andrew Scott: most of the tracks on the Pocket Trio album are his originals...*

Maybe my delight at our alcohol free night out at Moya's on the 1st June 2021 where throbbing, bubbling life, and friendship and love were clearly in the air, was a visceral reaction to distancing, isolation and the Covid crisis of separation that has

entered our lives, I'm not sure. What I do know, is that the energy, artistry and joy of the playing by Tim, Max and Scott of the Pocket Trio, echoed and was in the tradition of, the great live performances of swinging piano trios that have preceded them: Oscar Peterson at the London House, Chicago; Keith Jarrett at the Blue Note Jazz Club, New York; Ahmad Jamal at the Spotlite Club, Washington,DC; and Bill Charlap, at the Village Vanguard, New York. In each of these brilliant groups there was no shuffling of personnel, one-night stands of pickup personnel, or the Norman Granz predilection for throwing disparate players together for recording sessions. In each case, it was a working band for many many years where the nuances, subtleties, grace, groove and individual artistry of each player became part of the being of the other.



*The energy, artistry and joy of the playing by the members of the Pocket Trio is in the tradition of great live performances of swinging piano trios that have preceded them, such as L-R, Ed Thigpen (drums), Oscar Peterson (piano) and Ray Brown (bass)...*

With Peterson it was (mainly) Ray Brown (bass) and Ed Thigpen (drums); with Jamal it was Vernel Fournier (drums) and Israel Crosby (bass); with Keith Jarrett and his Standards Trio it was Gary Peacock (bass) and Jack DeJohnette (drums); with Bill Charlap it is Peter Washington (bass) and Kenny Washington (drums) who may be biologically unrelated but after 25 years working with Charlap (since 1996), must be, at least in feeling and soul, very close indeed. These long artistic relationships refine the craftsmanship and fuse connections which engender such astonishingly beautiful music arising out of the rhythms of the great contribution America has made to the world: African American music.

It's been four years the Pocket Trio has worked at Moya's. It recalls *Casablanca* and Rick Blaine's (Humphrey Bogart) remark to Captain Renault (Claude Rains) - "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."