

# The Need for an Australian Jazz Advocate

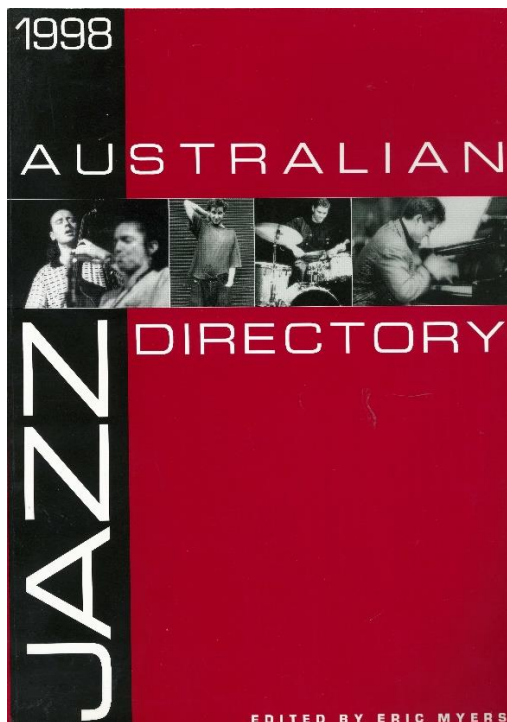
A proposal by Eric Myers (currently jazz writer for The Australian newspaper).

I think the following five propositions are true:

1/ Australia is producing **world-class jazz musicians** on a prolific scale. In Australia it is possible to gain a degree in jazz at tertiary institutions in every capital city and some regional centres. In most states jazz now sits alongside classical music at both the secondary school and tertiary level.

2/ The development of the musicians, over say the last 20 years, however, has outstripped the **development of performance opportunities**. Moreover the size of the available audience attending live performances has declined. There are many reasons for this which cannot be canvassed here.

3/ Since the demise of the jazz co-ordination programs 20 years ago no individual or organisation has systematically compiled **essential information** on the extent of jazz activity in Australian culture. The *Australian Jazz Directory* was last published in 1998. Widespread ignorance about jazz is rampant. Many people assume – in the absence of relevant evidence - that jazz is an insignificant art form, with a negligible following, and can therefore be neglected or ignored.



*The Australian Jazz Directory: last published in 1998...*

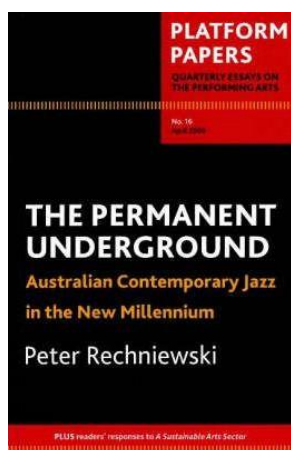
4/ Similarly, there is currently no individual or organisation charged with **lobbying** on behalf of the jazz community - that is to say, thinking in terms of the jazz community as a collective, rather than in terms of the interests of individual jazz musicians.

5/ We cannot rely primarily on the musicians themselves to do the work necessary to represent the jazz community. Most of our jazz musicians are, and always have been, overwhelmingly preoccupied with their own musical projects, and the need to secure gigs. In the past the essential and most effective work in this sphere has always been done by enthusiasts in the **support system for jazz**.

Bearing these things in mind, I suggest that jazz enthusiasts who think in terms of the welfare of the whole jazz community, should now support the appointment of an **Australian Jazz Advocate** (AJA).

## Is a national jazz organisation possible to host the AJA?

Over six months, during the last half of 2019, I hosted an email Discussion Forum, which canvassed many of these issues. One of the forum's members was the prominent lawyer Peter Townsend. Following the publication of Peter Rechniewski's 2008 platform paper *The Permanent Underground: Australian Contemporary Jazz in the New Millennium*, Peter Townsend devised a legal structure for a proposed national organisation. This venture failed, and Peter Townsend subsequently described the Australian jazz community as follows: "The problem is that being an arts and entertainment form, there are a multitude of small stakeholders (musicians, promoters, venues, managers, record labels, administrators, critics and, of course, fans) and no-one has the necessary clout to shepherd these multitudes into a coherent body. The initial discussions fell apart due to a lack of agreement on how all these voices would be heard within the company and the lack of resources to push for resolution."



*Peter Rechniewski's "The Permanent Underground": a proposed national organisation did not eventuate in 2008...*

## What legal structure might be possible to employ the Australian Jazz Advocate?

Peter Townsend argues strongly for a **company limited by guarantee**. It seems to me that his views are authoritative. He has written "[A] company limited by guarantee has immediate Australia-wide coverage and standing... [It] is a company which has members who guarantee the liabilities of the company to the level of \$2 per member. Clearly this is a nominal amount that simply allows for the use of the structure with minimal possible liability to members. The initial Board [would] be appointed by the founders of the company. The founders are those persons who sign the initial constitution of the company. Not sure who that is likely to be but, with the initial set up costs likely to be in the order of \$800 - \$1,000 it may boil down to anyone prepared to make a donation of some of that set up cost, say five founders who contribute \$200 each."

## Where would the funds come from to employ an Australian Jazz Advocate?

There are three possible sources of funds:

- 1/ **The Commonwealth Government:** perhaps the Australia Council, perhaps a direct grant from the Federal Minister for the Arts Paul Fletcher's ministry.
- 2/ **State arts ministries**, in NSW now known as Create NSW, and in Victoria Creative Victoria.
- 3/ **Philanthropists**, such as the Anthony and Sharon Lee Foundation, and the Freedman Foundation.

## What should the Australian Jazz Advocate do?

In my view the AJA's priorities should be:

1/ **To establish a professional website** which would incorporate information on jazz activity in Australia, to be constantly updated. In other words, something like the 1998 *Australian Jazz Directory*, but online, using current technology.

2/ **To publish a monthly newsletter** online which would be widely distributed free-of-charge, particularly to those in a position to affect the interests of jazz. Hopefully the national jazz community would unite around such a publication.

3/ **To bring the ABC on board.** Despite the acknowledged success of its piecemeal current activity, the phenomenon of marginalisation of jazz is in force at the ABC. We must encourage them to do more.

4/ **To investigate the new technologies available, particularly on social media:** Forum member Tim Nikolsky has written: "Jazz has not evolved with the technological advances of this century; and along with it effective engagement with the age group that predominantly consumes this technology." This is a vital area, where the AJA should be involved, and supply much-needed leadership to the jazz community.



*Tim Nikolsky: jazz has not evolved with the technological advances of this century...*

I feel we need a young, savvy, intelligent, literate, articulate person (appropriately mentored) who loves jazz, and understands the latest technologies.

---

*Eric Myers writes: If anyone who attended the Australian Jazz Forum on Sat Sep 26 is interested to hear more about the proposals here I have a 3,000-word paper which provides relevant background detail. If you email me at [emyers2568@gmail.com](mailto:emyers2568@gmail.com) I'd be happy to send you a copy of that document.*