

DEWEY REDMAN AT THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

by Eric Myers

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L-R, John Pochée, Dewey Redman, Geoff Kluge, Bernie McGann... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH

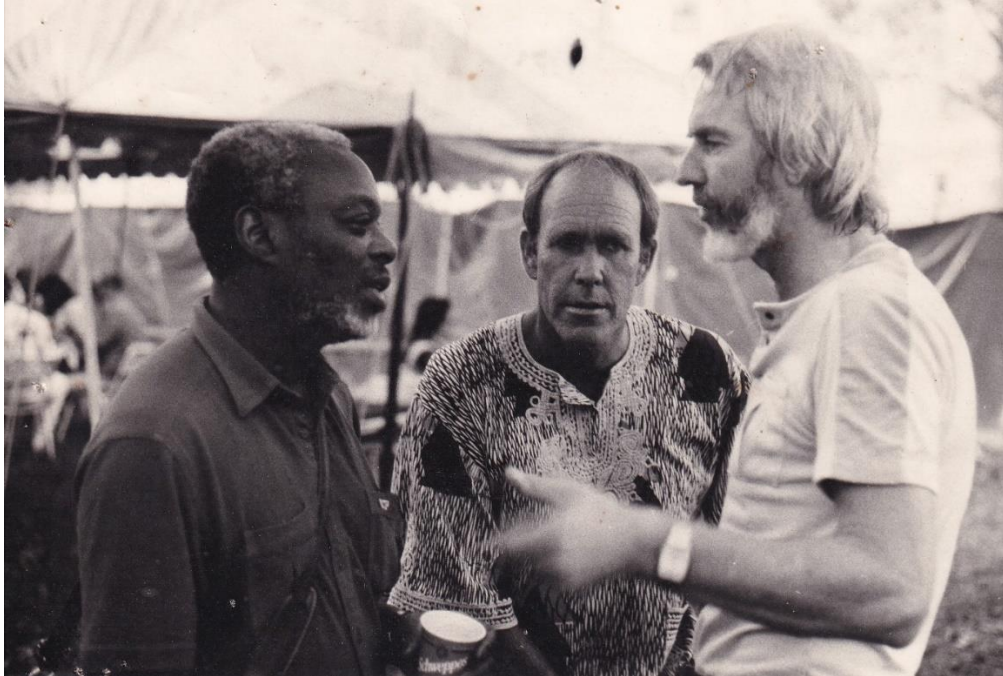
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA - The Sydney Improvised Music Association (SIMA), a small but effective contemporary jazz society formed in 1985, pulled off an impressive coup recently by bringing the tenor saxophonist Dewey Redman from New York for performances as part of the Festival of Sydney.

This visit has, one hopes, ushered in a new era for visiting American musicians. Some promoters, hard-pressed to make a profit, were in the habit of flying their artists into Australia the day before the opening performance. The result was, all too often, disappointing music played by deeply jet-lagged musicians.

In the case of Redman, SIMA—a non-profit association with government support—flew him in some days before the first concert, so he could acclimatize and rehearse solidly with the local musicians Bernie McGann (alto saxophone), Geoff Kluge (bass), and John Pochée (drums).

The group made a guest appearance at the massive, open-air Midsummer Jazz Concert in Sydney's Domain, before 60,000 people. Redman was also the star of

three of SIMA's five contemporary music con-certs, and all were sold out. The first set of the opening performance consisted of three tunes which became extended explorations: Charlie Parker's *Dewey Square* and two Redman compositions, *Daystar And Nightlight*, and *Boo Boo Doop*.



Dewey Redman (left) pictured here at a social function in Sydney with Bernie McGann (centre) and John Pochée (on the right)... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

It was fascinating to hear Bernie McGann and Redman alongside each other. McGann, a thrusting and passionate saxophonist with a rasping tone—he obviously has felt influence of Ornette Coleman - has always been regarded as a unsung hero in Australian jazz. It warmed many hearts to see him playing on equal terms with a great American saxophonist who has had such a close association with Ornette. Redman was warm, thoughtful, undemonstrative, and expressive, with an undeniable authority that emerged naturally.

Bassist Kluke had been brought from Melbourne especially to play with this group. His teaming up with John Pochée together, for the first time, four of the quickest ears in Australian jazz.. The two men were severely tested for, in this context—that is, a quartet without piano or guitar providing a harmonic background—there is no coasting for the bassist and drummer. They have to be continually alive to the ideas expressed by the soloists, commenting and punctuating, otherwise the music can lapse.

Kluge and Pochée were able to establish a considerable empathy with Redman and McGann—of course, both were very familiar with McGann's style—and they followed the saxophonists' lines of thought with uncanny anticipation. But it was hard work physically for them both and, at the end of the concert, Pochée in particular was completely exhausted.

In the first half, Redman had concentrated on playing the tenor saxophone, other than a brief example of vocalising through the horn. In the second, after McGann's boppish composition *Salaam*, he performed his tune *Unknown Tongue* on the musette, an unusual reed instrument with a powerful, biting sound reminiscent of a number of Eastern or African musics. He also contributed a very hip wordless vocal, suggesting some kind of incantation.



Dewey Redman on musette, an unusual reed instrument with a powerful, biting sound reminiscent of a number of Eastern or African musics... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ & BLUES MAGAZINE

The last tune, *Turn Over Baby*, from Redman's LP *The Struggle Continues*, brought the concert to a momentous climax. It was built on a simple blues figure with a hard backbeat. Redman had the audience clapping strongly on the off-beat, while McGann played a soulful improvisation that was truly inspiring.

By the end of the performance, the musicians had traversed an unusually wide range of influences now present in contemporary jazz. Redman showed clearly that the American avant gardists are interested, not only in stretching the music forward, but also in re-examining the roots of the music, as well as taking note of African and Eastern influences.

Other articles on this website which may be of interest:

Eric Myers, "SIMA and the Visit of Dewey Redman in 1986". The Australian, January 8, 1986, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/essays-page-33>

John Clare/Gail Brennan, "The Return of the Redman", Australian Jazz & Blues, Volume 1, No 5, 1994 at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/john-clare-28-1>