



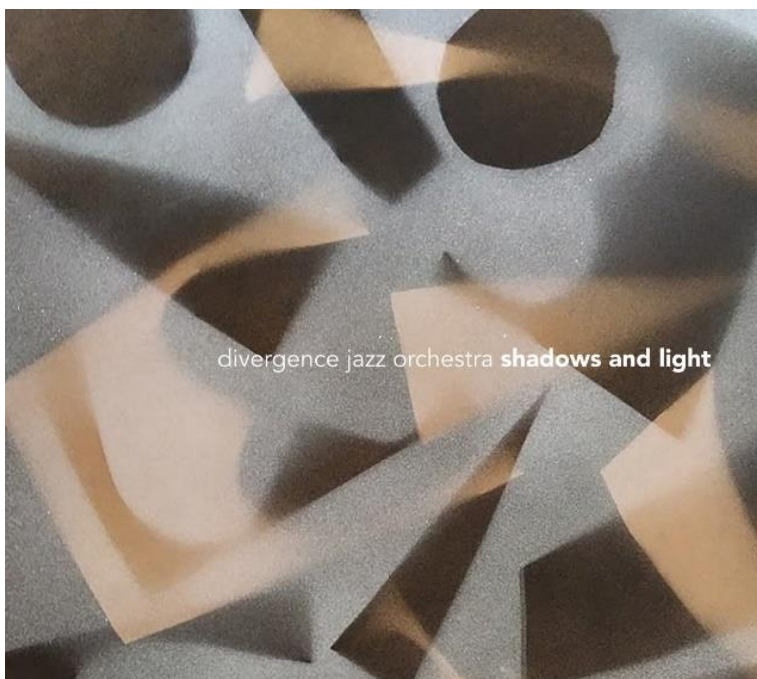
DIVERGENCE JAZZ ORCHESTRA: SHADOWS AND LIGHT

Album review by Eric Myers

Label: Independent

Director Jenna Cave **Trumpets/flugelhorns** Matt Collins, James Power, Paul Murchison, Will Endicott, Will Gilbert **Saxophones/woodwinds** Loretta Palmeiro, Abi McCunn, David Reglar, Louis Klaassen, Laura Power **Trombones** Paul Weber (co-bandleader), Alex Silver, Rose Foster, Luke Davis **Double bass** Hannah James **Guitar** Yutaro Okuda **Piano** Adrian Keevill **Drums** Mike Quigley **Voice** Marie Le Brun (track 3) **Tenor & soprano saxophones** Paul Cutlan (tracks 1 and 8)

[This review appeared in AJAZZ 99, November, 2023, on page 19]



For various reasons I was unaware of the Divergence Jazz Orchestra's first two albums: *The Opening Statement* in 2013 and in 2016 *Fake it Until You Make It* in 2013. As those two albums pre-dated my reviewing jazz albums for *The Australian* in 2017, they escaped my attention. Their third, *Shadows and Light* however has arrived with a vengeance, stimulating my curiosity. Most of the names of the splendid players in the orchestra were unknown to me; I wondered where they came from. What could explain the immaculate section work I was hearing? How come the key improvisors played such highly musical and heartfelt solos, which were an inspiration? I now know that many of the musicians in the DJO came through the successful jazz studies program at the Sydney Conservatorium...

Jenna Cave is a professional composer/arranger who doesn't perform as an instrumentalist with the big band she directs. That's because she, initially a saxophonist, encountered RSI at an early age and subsequently found that expressing herself through arranging and composition was her forte. From 2002 she studied composition and arranging at the ANU in Canberra with trumpeter, composer and educator Miroslav Bukovsky, and later studied with Bill Motzing at the Sydney Conservatorium, where she completed the Master of Music (Composition) degree. Cave and her co-bandleader Paul Weber founded the DJO in 2012.



Jenna Cave: she found that expressing herself through arranging and composition was her forte... PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK

There's much to praise here. The character of such a big band is largely determined by the drums, and the DJO is fortunate to have an experienced, brilliant drummer in Mike Quigley. Add the talented bassist Hannah James, and the excellent rhythmic feel throughout all tracks, helps to explain the success of the soloists' improvisations.



Mike Quigley: an experienced, brilliant drummer...

Shadows and Light features strong collaborations with multi-instrumentalist Paul Cutlan, and the aforementioned Bukovsky. Cutlan and Cave were contemporaries at the Sydney Conservatorium when both were studying there and, as co-producer of *Shadows and Light*, Cutlan's imprint on the album is substantial. He's a featured soloist on tenor sax in Cave's work *Long-lost Frenemy*, and in her arrangement of Bukovsky's *For Woody*, where he uses Roger Frampton's famous soprano sax.

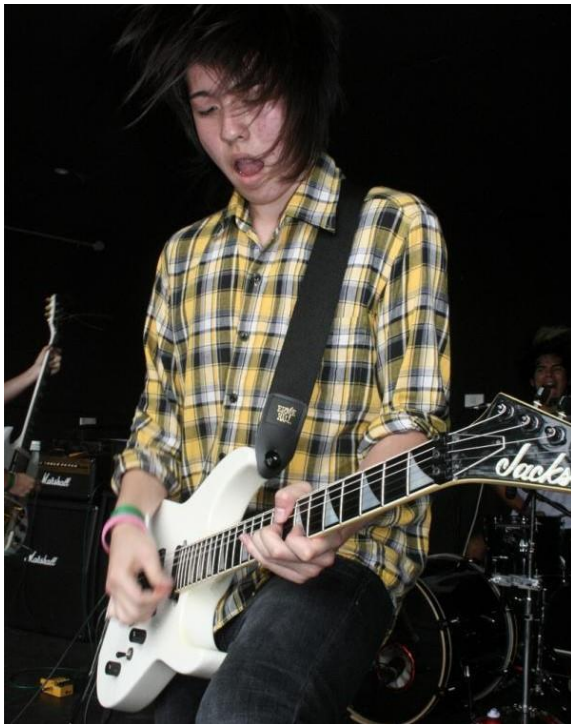


"Shadows and Light" features strong collaborations with multi-instrumentalist Paul Cutlan (above)... and Miroslav Bukovsky (see below, over the page)....
BUKOVSKY PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY



“Shadows and Light” features strong collaborations, not only with multi-instrumentalist Paul Cutlan but also with trumpeter Miroslav Bukovsky...
PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY

Cutlan’s composition *The Darkness of Silence*, the album’s longest track, is a milestone in that, written in 2016, it is his first piece for big band. Inspired by a newspaper article some years ago on the cover up of child abuse in the Catholic church, Cutlan says he was struck by the thought “that if those in the know don’t speak up when they know about this abuse, all that is left is the ‘darkness of silence’.” This brooding piece includes a biting guitar solo from Yutaro Okuda which drips with anguish, and a lovely section where Loretta Palmeiro (soprano sax) and Abi McCunn (alto sax) share solo space, in which they exchange phrases, then morph into collective improvisation.



Guitarist Yutaro Okuda: a biting guitar solo from him, which drips with anguish...
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Similarly, Cave and Bukovsky collaborated on a new arrangement of his composition *Delicatessence*, originally recorded by Bukovsky's group Wanderlust in 1998. And, as already mentioned, his classic *For Woody*, long a staple of Ten Part Invention's repertoire, closes the album with a great new arrangement written by Cave. There's also an excellent original *Willoway*, from Andrew Scott, the band's pianist for several years.

While the contributions of Cutlan and Bukovsky are substantial, Cave's four brilliant works dominate the album. Here, owing to lack of space, I simply list them: *Long-Lost Frenemy*; *This Too Shall Pass* (a vocal sung beautifully by Marie Le Brun, which goes into what one might call the avant-garde; during Will Gilbert's flugelhorn solo the music disintegrates into free improvisation, before restoring its equilibrium with a strong guitar solo, once again from Okuda); *Orange and Olive Trees* (a fascinating treatment of rhythmic displacement with bars of 13/8 and 11/8); and *Onwards Upwards (and Sideways)*, an energising treatment of the straight-ahead swing feel in four.



The Divergence Jazz Orchestra: back row, Paul Cutlan, Matthew Collins, Paul Weber, Marie Le Brun, Louis Klaassen, Mike Quigley, Adrian Keevill, David Reglar; middle row, Alex Silver, James Power, Jenna Cave, Hannah James, Loretta Palmiero, Rose Foster, Luke Davis; front row, Will Endicott, Paul Murchison, Will Gilbert, Laura Power, Abi McCunn, Yutaro Okuda.

I believe this lovely album progresses the art of big band jazz in this country. In my mind I bracket Jenna Cave with Melbourne's Andrew Murray and Vanessa Perica, two other professional composer/arrangers who don't perform as instrumentalists, but whose big band works shine with knowledge and inspiration.