

PETER BRENDLÉ: A MAN BEHIND THE MUSIC

by Eric Myers

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Peter Brendlé's skills are in the areas of promotion, publicity and administration – areas which are peripheral to music itself, but which, many would argue, are an essential part of the music industry. In fact, the greatest weakness of jazz artists in Australia is probably their lack of ability to promote themselves in the marketplace, and publicise their art in the media.

Among most musicians, there is a trenchant dislike of promotional activity or commercialisation – it is, after all, not very "hip" – and a resentment of those who, while not being musicians themselves, get deeply involved in the business side of jazz. I heard one leading icon of the jazz world recently express some resentment at the activities of Peter Brendlé, adding the significant comment: "And he doesn't even play an instrument!"



Peter Brendlé, pictured in 1981: and he doesn't even play an instrument...

Of course, these inhibitions do not seem to affect American jazz musicians, who realise more clearly that their music is meaningful only if it has an audience, and preferably a large audience. In *Down Beat* interviews recently, artists like Patrice Rushen and Chick Corea spoke openly of music as a money-making industry and what they were required to do to win an audience.

Chick Corea said: "Blending the two worlds of music and business without hurting either is hard work, but it's very fulfilling".* Whenever this question arises, I always think of the time I met the guitarist and harmonica player Toots Thielemans in London in 1978. As soon as he discovered I was a freelance writer, he produced an array of publicity material complete with photographs, the achievements and highlights of his career, his major influences, reviews of his performances, and other information that could be used. In other words, Toots was well-organised on the promotional side.



Guitarist and harmonica player Toots Thielemans: well-organised on the promotional side...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

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It is this side of music where Peter Brendlé has made his mark. A Swiss-German, he was born in Basle, Switzerland, in 1943. In 1959 his elder sister Ruth left Switzerland and, in London, landed a job as au pair girl with Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonynges, who had arrived in England shortly before that time. Over 20 years later Ruth Brendlé, affectionately known as "The General", is still in charge of the Bonynges household, and surrogate mother for their son Adam. This may not have been important in itself for Peter Brendlé's career, but it meant that when he arrived in England as a young man, he was able to stay with the Bonynges.



On tour in Europe in 1978, the members of Galapagos Duck called in on Dame Joan Sutherland (centre) in Switzerland. Others L-R, are Peter Brendlé, Len Barnard, Greg Foster, Tom Hare, Chris Qua & Ray Alldridge...PHOTO COURTESY PETER BRENDLÉ

Similarly, when he first arrived in Australia in the early 1960s, it was the Bonynges who provided his initial accommodation. As a teenager Peter Brendlé played professional soccer in Switzerland for the top Basle club side and the Swiss junior national team. He had the distinction of playing against two of the greats of soccer, Pele and Franz Beckenbauer.

This again may not have been significant, but when Brendlé arrived in Australia, he was already known to the Swiss musicians Dieter Vogt and

George Brodbeck, who had settled in Australia. It was through the bassist Vogt that Brendlé took on his first jazz promotion, with the Nolan-Buddle Quartet.



Brendlé (above) as a promising young soccer player in Switzerland. Below (third from left) he is pictured with members of his Sydney soccer team, including prominent jazz musicians from Switzerland Dieter Vogt (far left) and George Brodbeck (second from right)...



By the age of 21, Peter Brendlé had given up soccer and had left Switzerland to see the world. He went first to England, then to Canada. His trade in Switzerland had been in typesetting. After a winter in Canada, he toured the United States, and went on to arrive in Australia in 1965. By this time, he had heard a great deal of jazz around the world.

"I just enjoyed the music", said Peter Brendlé recently. "I knew that if ever I got involved it would be more on the administration side or whatever. I knew the little tricks about how to organise air tickets and what's important, because I saw it happen very often with the Sutherlands – how important the little details become".

In Australia in 1965, he first worked for the *Daily Telegraph*, utilising his training as a typesetter, on the production side of the newspaper, designing advertisements and helping out with various other tasks. In 1966 he worked throughout the winter in Perisher Valley, in charge of the Chairlift Lodge. Here, he met his wife Tana, at that time a mannequin, who worked both here and overseas. They now live in Mosman and have a 5-year-old daughter.



Peter Brendlé (far left) with members of the Nolan-Buddle Quartet, L-R, Laurie Bennett, Col Nolan, Dieter Vogt, Errol Buddle...PHOTO COURTESY COL NOLAN

In 1966 the Brendlés went to Europe, where Tana worked in London and Paris. After a year they returned to Australia, and Brendlé demonstrated computer typesetting equipment, as well as continuing to play professional soccer. In the early 1970s, the Brendlés returned to live in Zurich and Montreux, while Peter worked for Avon Cosmetics, at that time establishing its European network.

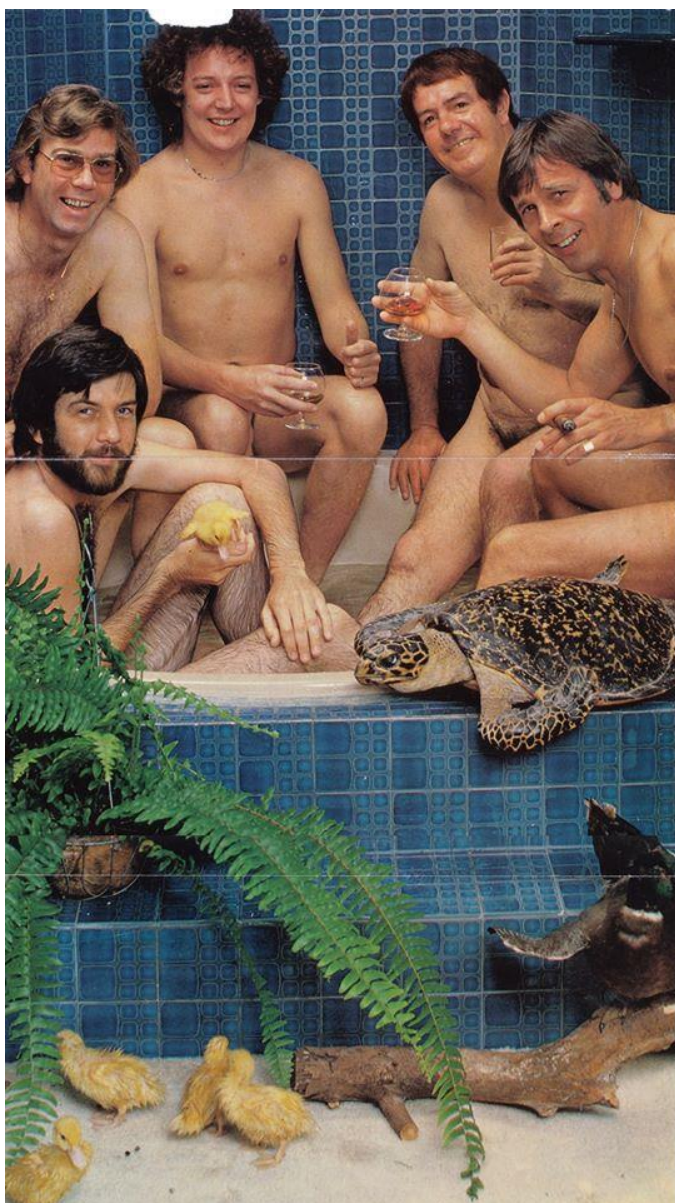
Back in Australia around 1975 Peter Brendlé met, for the first time, his Swiss compatriot Dieter Vogt who, at that time, was playing bass with the Nolan-Buddle Quartet at the Old Push – "an unbelievable band", says Brendlé. At that time it included Warren Daly on drums. In his first jazz promotion, Brendlé booked the Music Room at the Opera House and presented the Quartet in concert along with the singer Heathermae Reading.



Singer Heathermae Reading (above): presented along with the Nolan-Buddle Quartet at the Music Room of the Sydney Opera House in Brendlé's first jazz promotion...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Right from the start Peter Brendlé was concerned to widen the audience for local jazz players. "I wanted to attract the fringe people", he said, "the ones who enjoy jazz but are not really mixing with the jazz crowd". Accordingly, he started to promote jazz in areas which would reach the non-jazz audience. It was his idea later, for example, for Galapagos Duck to do their nude centrefold for *Cleo* magazine, an idea which was adopted also by the Daly-Wilson Big Band.

Following the relative success of his first promotion (the Music Room was three-quarters full) Brendlé then went to the Australian Government and Musica Viva and suggested that the Nolan-Buddle Quartet tour overseas as part of the Department of Foreign Affairs cultural programs. As a result of these initiatives, 12 months later, the Col Nolan Quartet toured various Asian countries in 1977



Galapagos Duck's nude centrefold for Cleo magazine: this was Peter Brendlé's idea...PHOTO COURTESY CLEO MAGAZINE

for Musica Viva. They were followed by the Judy Bailey Quintet, the Bob Barnard Jazz Band, Galapagos Duck and Crossfire, which established Australian jazz players as outstanding cultural ambassadors.

All these tours were organised by Musica Viva, with Peter Brendlé handling the negotiations on behalf of the various bands. When the Col Nolan Quartet performed at the Australian Embassy in Peking in 1977, they were the first Western musical group to have performed in Communist China since the Revolution of 1949.

It was also Peter Brendlé's idea for Errol Buddle and Col Nolan to record the now famous *Picnic At Hanging Rock Theme*. He approached M7 Records, got

their support, and took Nolan and Buddle to see the film. They agreed that there was something in the tune. When the record came out, it was promoted heavily by Brendlé and reached No 1 on the hit parades in many parts of Australia.

Brendlé believes that, to date, it has sold about 16,000 LPs and some 30,000 singles. "Even if you have to use a tune like this to promote a jazz record, it's worth it", says Brendlé. "It promoted the band, and it promoted jazz".



Another Peter Brendlé idea: he approached M7 Records, got their support, and took Col Nolan and Errol Buddle to see the film "Picnic At Hanging Rock"...

Peter Brendlé's promotional flair came to a climax, however, when he took over the management of Galapagos Duck in 1978, shortly before their appearance at the Jazz Yatra festival in Bombay, India. The Duck had just split with their former manager Horst Liepolt, and approached Brendlé to iron out the difficulties associated with that overseas trip.

"I could see that Galapagos Duck had what it took to get an audience in", says Brendlé. "Tom Hare, in the front, is a very audience-concerned person, Chris Qua could talk, and the musicianship was there. It was a very strong band, and the audience reaction was terrific".

Once established as Galapagos Duck's manager, Brendlé began planning for the group's appearances in Europe and England, which came about in late 1978. The Duck appeared at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, in several other European countries, and at the 100 Club in London. The two nights in London were sold out, and the group also played a concert at Australia House.

Polygram Records agreed to release an LP in England called *The Best Of Galapagos Duck*.

"There were only two things to do", says Brendlé, "either go back half a year later with a one-way ticket and work out of Munich or London, or stay in Australia". The band chose to stay in Australia, where their popularity was soaring through the residency at The Basement and successful appearances in other Australian centres.

The break between Galapagos Duck and Peter Brendlé came about, however, in 1980, around the time of the opening of the St James Tavern. The band had initially decided that they needed a change from The Basement. This would have been an ideal time to test the real popularity of the Duck. Were people coming to hear the band because of the music, they were wondering, or was it because of the reputation of The Basement?



The breakup between Galapagos Duck (above) and Peter Brendlé resulted in the loss of the group's whole rhythm section, here in the back row L-R, Len Barnard (drums), Chris Qua (bass) and Col Nolan (keyboards)... Others are Greg Foster (front left) and Tom Hare (front right)...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

"Tom Hare, like many artists, started to get a bit unsure of himself", says Brendlé. "Many artists are successful, and they don't know why." Brendlé and the Duck agreed that they would change their Sydney base to the St James

Tavern, do more travelling throughout Australia, and also think about working seriously in Europe.

At that time, Peter Brendlé had organised sponsorship for the Duck by two major companies, Peter Stuyvesant and Yamaha Musical Instruments, and also had a deal with Qantas. At the last moment, however, the Duck withdrew from the move to the St James Tavern, and decided to remain at The Basement, even though the sponsorship would go ahead. Peter Brendlé was devastated.

"They came back from Brisbane, and like musicians are, they didn't think it was any dramatic thing", says Brendlé. "The two who didn't want to continue just said 'Oh Peter, we changed our minds, we hope it isn't too much of a problem'. But, at that time, I had interstate things arranged, I was in constant contact with London and Germany — my mind was a year ahead. They didn't even expect me to leave them, but I was too disappointed. That was it".



When Brendlé and the Duck split, the business side of the band was taken over by Tom Hare (above)... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ DOWN UNDER

When Brendlé and the Duck split, the business side of the band was taken over by Tom Hare. But Peter Brendlé believes that the breakup of the band— the loss of the whole rhythm section, Col Nolan, Chris Qua and Len Barnard at the end of 1980 — was entirely predictable.

"I told them 'within half a year's time, it's totally impossible that you can handle yourselves, because you're growing too big'. It needs a lot of administration,

publicity material, follow-ups. They have equipment that fills two trucks. A job is not just a phone call away. Galapagos Duck is a business."

Brendlé believes that, during this period, there was too much pressure on Tom Hare - from venues, from the other band members, and also, as a business partner of Bruce Viles, he was involved in the construction of the new venue Gas Lane.



Tom Hare was a business partner of Basement owner Bruce Viles (above), involved in the construction of a new venue Gas Lane...PHOTO COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN

"It's too big a band, and too well-known interstate, for one of the musicians to handle the business side", says Brendlé. "It's a business, and a musician is not equipped to be an administrator."

In the last two years, of course, Peter Brendlé has become known for his involvement in the 1980 and 1981 Sydney International Music Festivals. Brendlé, a director, is equal shareholder with the Chairman of the Festival, Peter Korda.



Chairman of the Sydney International Music Festival, Peter Korda, in 1981... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

One of the most interesting aspects of jazz promotion in recent years has been the fierce competition between this festival and the Festival of Sydney jazz, produced by Horst Liepolt.



Ill-feeling caused by festival competition between Brendlé on the one hand, and Horst Liepolt (above) & the Festival of Sydney's Stephen Hall (below) on the other hand ... PHOTOGRAPHERS UNKNOWN



Peter Brendlé traces the ill-feeling between his organisation and the Festival of Sydney people back to 1979. He had offered the Music Festival idea to the

Festival of Sydney, so that it could complement the jazz produced by Horst Liepolt. The Festival Executive Director Stephen Hall was delighted, and Brendlé went looking for a venue. They approached the Regent Theatre, only to find that Stephen Hall had the relevant dates pencilled in. Brendlé went back to Hall, who said that he would let the Regent know in a week if he wanted the venue. After some weeks, however, Hall had still not confirmed his booking, so the owner of the Regent, Leon Fink, agreed that, if Hall did not confirm after further approaches, the theatre would go to the Sydney International Music Festival. Hall did not confirm, and the venue ultimately went to Brendlé.



Owner of the Regent Theatre Leon Fink: he agreed that, if Stephen Hall did not confirm after further approaches, the theatre would go to the Sydney International Music Festival... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Stephen Hall apparently was furious at this move, and accused Brendlé of "going behind his back". From that time on, it was war between the two festivals. Meanwhile Brendlé had met Peter Korda who agreed to take on the organisational aspects of the Festival.

It appears that Stephen Hall then encouraged Horst Liepolt to step up the quality of the Festival of Sydney jazz, in order to compete directly with the Brendlé-Korda festival. Also, the sponsors of the Sydney International Music Festival — Yamaha, Qantas, and others— were approached by the Festival of Sydney with a view to their changing allegiance.

"They even confronted the General Manager of Yamaha in a restaurant in Sydney", says Brendlé. "Qantas started to receive letters. It was an incredible period. They tried to subvert the whole thing."

The outcome of the first battle between the two 1980 festivals is now generally well-known — both were successful in terms of audience reaction, with the Sydney International Music Festival probably more successful in commercial terms. But neither side could claim that they had convincingly defeated the other side, partly because the Festival of Sydney appealed more to a contemporary jazz market, while the other festival featured middle-of-the-road jazz.

Still, the scene was set for another battle in 1981, and there was some anticipation as to whether the two festivals would co-operate or compete. In February, 1980, shortly after the festivals, a meeting was held, attended by Korda, Liepolt and Greg Quigley to discuss co-operation, as all three men had overseas jazz stars coming to Australia.

The following month, at a meeting with Stephen Hall, Liepolt, and representatives of the NSW Government's Division of Cultural Activities, Brendlé brought up the February meeting and asked Liepolt to relate what had been discussed. Liepolt, however, denied that the meeting had taken place.

"I said, 'okay I've had enough' in front of the Government people", says Brendlé, "I'm just not interested any more in listening to lies. We're going our own way, and you go your own way. I don't want to know any more".



Brendlé, pictured here with Ray Charles: Brendlé said 'okay I've had enough' in front of the Government people... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Peter Brendlé believes that Horst Liepolt, far from being concerned overall with the health of jazz in Sydney, cares only for jazz promoted by himself. "I don't want to take away what he has done for jazz", says Brendlé, "but he is such a difficult person in this scene".

This feud for control of Sydney jazz has now been going on for some years. The fact that the two principal protagonists are a German and a Swiss-German gives the fight something of a European quality. Brendlé, of course, has to take some responsibility for Liepolt's rise in the arts establishment, for it was he who first booked the Martin Place jazz for the Festival of Sydney, and introduced Liepolt to the Festival of Sydney Committee.



Brendlé (centre), pictured here with guitarist Kenny Burrell (left) and blues singer B B King (right) is known for his ability to get large companies involved in music promotion and sponsorship... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

After a series of manoeuvres, Liepolt emerged as the sole producer of the Festival of Sydney jazz, effectively leaving Brendlé out in the cold. "The first Festival we did together," says Brendlé, "down in the markets and then, the next festival, he was alone. I didn't want to fight for it because, I must admit it, I was a little bit busy and I felt 'that's it'."

Peter Brendlé is now known for his ability to get large companies involved in music promotion and sponsorship. How does he explain his success in this area?

"It's probably because I'm a Libra and Swiss", he says, laughing. "It's just that I probably have the knack of nicely negotiating, and offering them something as well. I never go in there, like many musicians try to do, and ask for air tickets or sponsorship for nothing. You have to have ideas. Nobody is giving anything for nothing".

However, Brendlé is not anxious to continue in this area, as the financial return for himself is meagre. "I can't anymore; I have spent the last three or four years without making money on jazz", he says, "I didn't make my money with jazz. And when you negotiate sponsorship, you negotiate a truck, or instruments, and what's in there, again, for me?"

"I've made my money with my involvement in publishing companies, and the publicity for various places, like the Caprice Restaurant, Stranded, the Sunday festivals at Balmoral Beach, the St James Tavern, and now Gas Lane and The Basement."

Also, Brendlé owns the *Midnight to Dawn* show on 2KY every Friday and Saturday night. This program plays only music and jazz, and is proving extremely popular with radio advertisers.



The Bob Barnard Jazz Band, circa 1980, L-R, John Costelloe, Lawrie Thompson, Barnard, Wally Wickham, John McCarthy, Chris Taperell: Brendlé is finalising arrangements for the American tour of this band... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

"The response to sponsors is enormous", he says. At the moment, Peter Brendlé is involved in finalising arrangements for the American tour of the Bob Barnard Jazz Band and, of course, his magazine *Australasian Jazz* is a going concern, following the success of the first edition — out of a print run of 10,000, about 8,000 were sold. A bi-monthly, the second edition was out at the beginning of March.



The first edition of Brendlé's Jazz Magazine, January/February, 1981: out of a print run of 10,000, about 8,000 were sold...

The great problem for jazz promoters is that, amongst the performing musicians they are not widely appreciated. This may well be a legacy of the fact that, until recent times, there has been only one active promoter, Horst Liepolt, who has fallen in and out of favour depending on whom he selects to perform in his venues.

The resentment which jazz promoters experience is the result of what might be called the "static" view of jazz, according to which many jazz musicians believe that only minimal money can be made out of the music and it should go exclusively to those who actually play jazz. On the other hand there is the "dynamic" view of jazz, which allows that promotion and publicity actually create work and create income. If the promoter takes a large slice of an already existing cake, then perhaps the resentment is natural, but if he expands the cake should he not take his cut?



Brendlé (far right) is pictured here with, L-R, Col Nolan, Stephane Grappelli, Jim Piesse & Dieter Vogt: it appears that Brendlé will be a force in Sydney jazz for some time to come... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Peter Brendlé unquestionably has a good track record in improving conditions, income and opportunities for those jazz musicians who, in the past, have called on his services. While he has so many irons in the fire, it appears that he will be a force in Sydney jazz for some time to come.
