

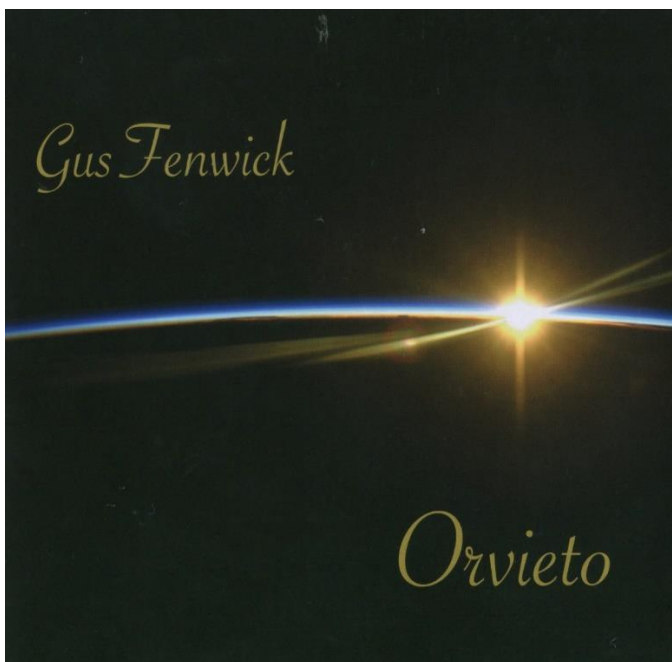


GUS FENWICK ALBUM “ORVIETO”

Reviewed by Eric Myers

Label: Independent

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This outstanding album results from sessions at Jim Kelly’s Tone Ranger studio near Lismore, NSW. Two quintets with overlapping personnel were recorded: the January band with leader Gus Fenwick (bass); Kerry Jacobson (drums); Jim Kelly (electric & acoustic guitars); Wil Sargisson (piano, organ, clavinet, strings); and Scott Hills (percussion); and the November band, with three personnel changes: Doug Gallacher (drums), Louie Shelton (guitar) and Brendan St Ledger (piano, organ, Wurlitzer). Additional guests, each on one track, are Mal Logan (keyboards), Michel Rose (pedal steel) and Shannon Marshall (trumpet).



L-R, Jim Kelly, Brendan St Ledger, Gus Fenwick, Doug Gallacher, Louie Shelton...

If forced (reluctantly) to categorise this music I would have to call it R & B. However, given the splendid improvisations from the guitarists and keyboardists, much of the music sounds to me like straight-ahead jazz, underlining the fact that of course R & B and jazz are closely related genres.



Guitarist Jim Kelly (top) then clockwise Louie Shelton (guitar) and Doug Gallacher (drums)...

Most of these musicians have been on the fringes of jazz throughout their careers, particularly Kelly and Gallacher who were members of Crossfire, the great fusion band of the 70s and 80s. But they have also been active in the recording studios where expertise in a range of genres is required, and on this album that expertise shines through.



L-R, Wil Sargisson (keyboards), Jim Kelly (guitars), Gus Fenwick (bass), Kerry Jacobson (drums)...

The character of this sort of music is largely determined by the drums, and I found the drum styles here energising and educational. As a reviewer for *The Australian* I usually hear albums where modern jazz drummers have increasingly reflected the evolution of rhythmic feels towards free-er expression over the last 70 years, dating back to bebop of the 1940s. Liberating themselves from mere timekeeping, drummers have increasingly become equal contributors to the interaction which now takes place in the modern rhythm section. While this works beautifully in most settings, the playing of some modern jazz drummers can sound like undifferentiated clutter behind the soloists.

Given that phenomenon, it is refreshing to hear R & B drummers like Gallacher and Jacobson laying down the required time-feels without varying them unnecessarily, and establishing a down-home groove that enables the other musicians to dig in and fly. Just as important is the playing of Fenwick, an unobtrusive electric bassist who provides the rhythm section with a great feel.

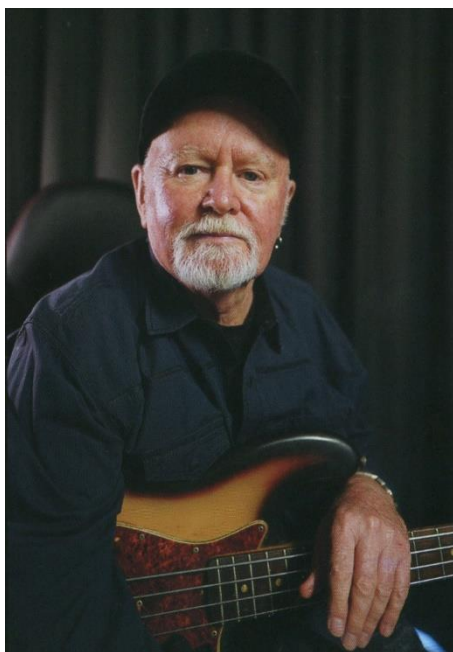
The various eight-feels which emanate from rock, fusion, and R & B, are given a solid workout here by experienced musicians who know exactly what's needed to enable a rhythm section to groove. Having said that I'm glad to see also that the immortal

swing feel survives, and there could not be a better example than Fenwick's composition *The Peter Pan Boogie*, featuring splendid solos from Michel Rose on pedal steel and guitarist Louie Shelton. Gallacher uses brushes throughout on this track, a decision which warms the heart.



Michel Rose (pedal steel guitar) top, then clockwise Mal Logan (keyboards) & Brendan St Ledger (keyboards)...

When the leader is a bassist, how to feature him? Here, two well-known compositions, Lennon & McCartney's *Eleanor Rigby* and Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie 1*, enable Fenwick to play the melody on fretless bass.



Bassist & leader Gus Fenwick... PHOTO CREDIT MADDISON WADDINGTON

While I'm no expert on the recording output of these musicians, which I imagine is prolific, I'd be surprised if there is an Australian album featuring more convincing, more beautiful, guitar improvisations than those played here by Jim Kelly and Louie Shelton. Certainly they are surrounded by other splendid musicians but, even so, the album would be worth buying to savour the guitar solos alone.