

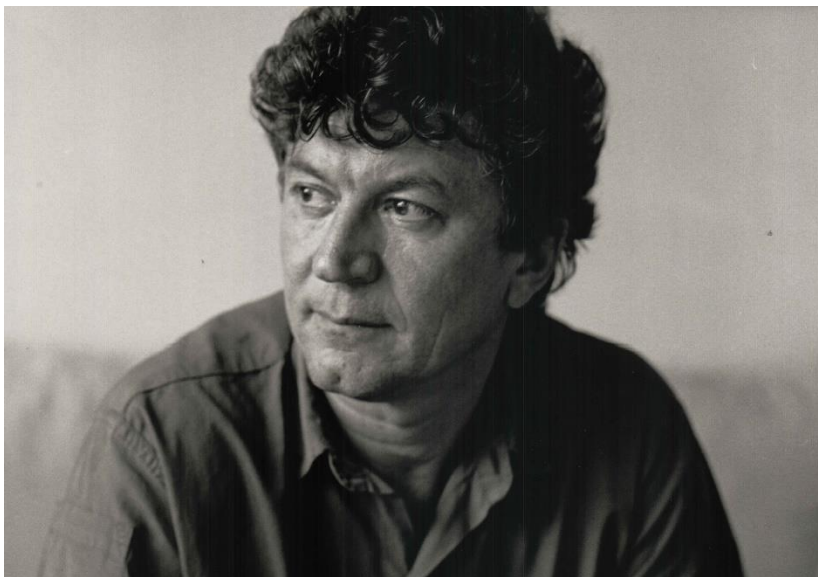
## MIROSLAV BUKOVSKY: A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

by Eric Myers\*

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**M**iroslav Bukovsky is probably best-known to the public as a trumpeter who plays in brass sections behind various pop stars. Since the mid-1970s he has worked with many big names, including Marcia Hines, Renee Geyer, Max Merritt, Australian Crawl, Eurogliders, Jimmy Barnes, Wendy Matthews and Jenny Morris. A more important parallel career has been his quiet activity as a composer.



*Miroslav Bukovsky: a parallel career has been his quiet activity as a composer...*

In 1985 his composition *Plain Talk* won the Jazz Action Society of NSW Original Composition Competition. From that inauspicious beginning, he has gone on to write for two of the most important ensembles that are prominent in the current renaissance of contemporary jazz: Ten Part Invention, of which he was a founder member in 1986, and is co-musical director with Roger Frampton; and his own group Wanderlust, which has just released a CD through ABC Music.

So, he now has an important body of work to his credit, some of which has been recorded. He won the JAS Competition again in 1991 with his composition *Bronte Cafe*. Yet, he doesn't think of himself as a composer; nor does he take himself all that seriously. It is left to others to define him, such as Tim Dunn, executive producer of the Wanderlust CD.

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\* When this was written in 1993 Eric Myers was National Jazz Co-Ordinator, a position funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, and by the New South Wales Government's Ministry For The Arts. He was also editor of the national jazz newsletter *JazzChord*.

"Miroslav Bukovsky is a citizen of the world whose experiences have cultivated in him a keen sense of the absurd," writes Dunn. "His music's interplay of time, space and colour; freedom and form; nobility, naivety and comedy are vivid expressions of this sense."



*Tim Dunn, executive producer of the Wanderlust CD: Miroslav Bukovsky is a citizen of the world whose experiences have cultivated in him a keen sense of the absurd...*

"I've never done any serious composing really," says Miroslav. "I've always treated it as a bit of fun. The only time it gets serious is when I have to finish something on a deadline, writing things for Ten Part for instance. Then it gets not just serious, but almost nerve-wracking. "I don't really consider myself a composer, you know. I suppose if you're a composer you really have to take care of your craft, get your



*Bukovsky (centre, on flugelhorn) performing with Ten Part Invention with trombonist James Greening (left) and saxophonist Ken James (right)...*

commissions and write all the time... To me, I think, playing is the number one thing for me, so I just write to play. It goes hand-in-hand with the concept of improvisation."

Born in 1944 in Czechoslovakia, Miroslav Bukovsky was the son of musical parents: his father a violinist and saxophonist active in jazz, and his mother a pianist. He began on piano at the age of seven, and took up the trumpet at 12. From 1959 he worked in dance bands, and began conservatorium study in 1961. He later worked with small bop groups, rhythm-&-blues bands, the Ostrava Radio Band, and a Czech big band that performed at festivals in Iron Curtain countries.

In 1968 he was in Yugoslavia with his then wife Carla when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. Some members of his band returned to Prague, but he and Carla went on to Vienna, then to Australia. They chose this country partly because the Australian Embassy in Vienna made it less difficult for them than the embassies of Switzerland, Canada and the US, where they might have migrated; and also because Australia seemed exotic, and they were simply curious about such a faraway place.



*In 1968 when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia, Miroslav and his then wife Carla were in Yugoslavia, so went on to Vienna, then to Australia...*

From an early age he was interested in composition, and began to train his ear early. "If I liked something on the radio, I would go and find out what it was on the piano", he says. From this, it wasn't far to picking out his own tunes. Miroslav remembers that, in Czechoslovakia, there were many opportunities to study composition, but he was more interested in girls and beer than study. There was a teacher at the Ostrava Conservatorium who had been a student of Janacek; Miroslav wishes that he had been more aware in those days.



*Miroslav studied composition with Howie Smith (left) and Bill Motzing (below) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in the early 1970s...*



It was only in Australia that he studied composition seriously, with Howie Smith and Bill Motzing at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in the early 1970s, after the establishment of the Jazz Studies course. He wasn't there long when Smith asked him to join the faculty as a teacher.

Miroslav taught at the Conservatorium from 1975 to 1981, when he travelled to the US on an Australia Council grant. There he studied with leading American musicians David Baker, William Adam, David Liebman and Randy Brecker.

"A lot of the things I knew about composition, about jazz harmony, were very disorganised," he says. "Howie and Bill helped me to put some kind of logic into it. For instance, analysing Bartok, then I could understand harmony, looking at it from a jazz point of view. The approach of jazz harmony made it more logical, made it simpler."

He also credits the Hungarian musician Jackie Orszaczky who assisted him to make it all fit together. "A lot of the motivation for me is actually trying to uncover mysteries, you know, trying to find out why certain things work, why they sound good. When I hear something, I like to find out the logic of it. Then, if you discover what that is, how certain things work in a nutshell, then they're yours basically. You've discovered them, and you can utilise them. That way, you don't have to imitate; you can then create, using that logic. That, to me, is part of the excitement of it."



*Hungarian musician Jackie Orszaczky: he assisted Miroslav to make it all fit together...*

Miroslav Bukovsky's whimsical approach to composition is illustrated by his suite *The Second Voyage*, part of the Ten Part Invention repertoire. It was written for the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations. "I think I'm basically subversive by nature, so I was trying to take the Mickey out of it a little bit," he says.

Miroslav wrote the suite as a commentary on the re-enactment of Captain James Cook's voyage. The first movement *New Endeavour*, opens with a seafaring fanfare, and goes into a samba ("because I knew they were heading for Brazil.") The fleet reached Rio too early, and was stuck there for a month, waiting for funds to come through. So, the second movement is called *Moon Too Soon*.

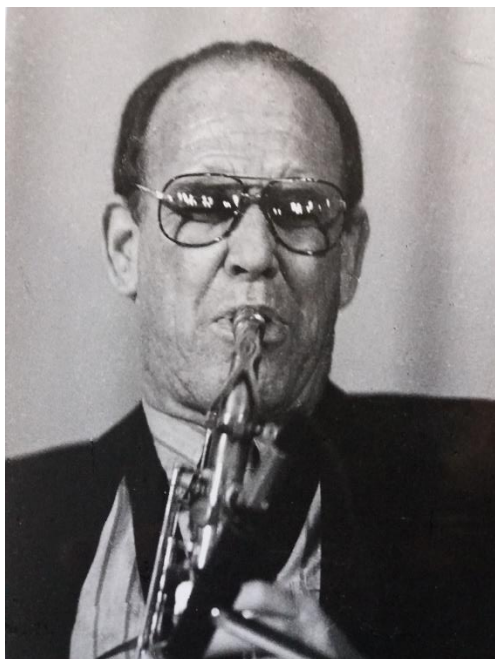
The fleet was rescued by Coca-Cola, which provided the funds to enable them to proceed, so Miroslav calls the third movement *The Arrival Of Captain Coke*. When the fleet arrived in Sydney Harbour the main ship had a huge Coca-Cola logo on its mast.



*The original Ten Part invention, which performed at the 1986 Adelaide Arts Festival: L-R, Roger Frampton, John Pochée, Sandy Evans, Bob Bertles, Hugh Fraser, James Greening, Ken James, Miroslav Bukovsky, Bernie McGann. [Missing: Warwick Alder]... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR*

"Not very serious, I guess, but that's how I felt about it," Miroslav says. Like most jazz composers, Miroslav likes the idea of utilising the strong personality of a certain musician, and building a composition around that. No better example exists than his *Ten Part Invention Blues*, which opens with a long solo by the alto saxophonist Bernie McGann.

"The way Bernie does that, he sets up the head beautifully", says Miroslav. "When I was writing it I was thinking of Bernie playing, his kind of phrasing. I guess it is one of my favourites; it's kind of a romp. It goes from something that's actually written out to gradual disintegration."



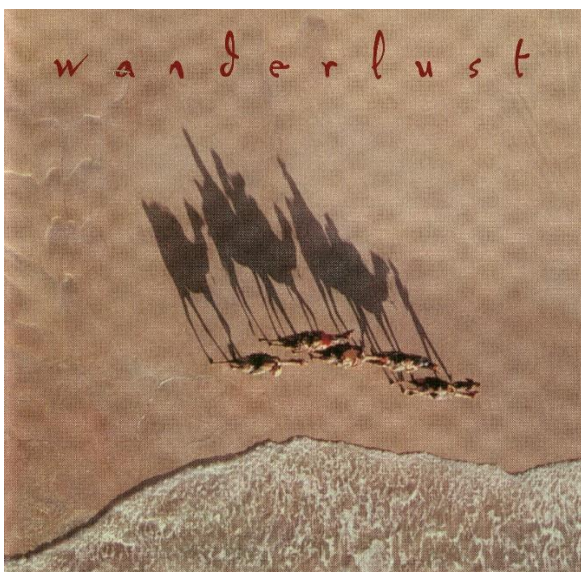
*Bernie McGann: he sets up the head beautifully in "Ten Part Invention Blues"...*  
*PHOTO CREDIT EVGENY RASKOPOV*

Miroslav's main current project is his own group Wanderlust. It includes James Greening (trombone), Carl Orr (guitar), Alister Spence (piano & keyboards), Adam Armstrong (electric & acoustic bass), Fabian Hevia (drums & percussion), and Greg Sheehan (voice & percussion).



*Bukovskuy's jazz ensemble Wanderlust: L-R, Bukovsky, Fabian Hevia, Carl Orr, Alister Spence, Adam Armstrong, James Greening (seated)...*

On the group's CD, *Wanderlust*, guest appearances are made by Tony Gorman (saxophone & clarinet) and Alan Dargin (didgeridu). In the liner notes of the CD Miroslav speaks about "ideas and concepts of music and music-making that are dear to me and have been exciting me for a number of years. It's not easy for me to talk about music or describe the process of making it. It is best to let sounds evoke feelings and moods by themselves."





*Tony Gorman (left, saxophone & clarinet) makes a guest appearance on the "Wanderlust" CD...*

He draws attention to musical influences "from different parts of the world, without ever trying to emulate ethnic or stylistic authenticity but rather fusing the mood and feel with jazz improvisation. The compositions are mostly skeletal, leaving a lot of space for individual and collective creativity and interplay... You will hear sounds that came together as the collective mind of a group of wonderfully talented musicians who are also dear friends."

Miroslav says that, despite its reputation, Wanderlust does not play so-called 'world music'. "Most people who play world music try to imitate certain styles", he says. "Maybe it's African, or Brazilian, or Indian, or whatever... I'm trying to consciously stay away from being authentic, because the authentic musicians do it so much better. So I've been trying to find a way of blending the sounds, and using some of the rhythmic sensibilities of, say, African or Brazilian music, but maybe put a different melody on top of it."



*Bukovsky:  
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not play so-called  
'world music'...  
PHOTO CREDIT  
TOMAS POKORNY*



Wanderlust, which he defines as "the joy of travelling", is "a kind of a fusion of things. But it's not just cooked up in my head; it's the resulting sound of all the musicians in it - what they can do, what they can contribute... I was trying to consciously make it sound like nothing I've heard before, something that's not imitating anybody at all."

Recording the composition *Only Connect*, with Alan Dargin was memorable, says Miroslav. Dargin was brought to the studio by Greg Sheehan to play on a track which featured the didgeridu. "Just meeting with the guy, and connecting with him was quite an experience for me", says Miroslav. "I've lived in this country for over 20 years now, and never really made a connection with an Aboriginal person, certainly not a musical one. So, it was a moving experience for me. He brought his didgeridus, sat down on the floor of the studio, and I tried to explain to him what I wanted from him. He didn't look at me once; he just looked down to the ground. I was thinking 'maybe that's the way he relates to people like me'. But, when we actually ran through the piece, he remembered absolutely everything that I told him. We rehearsed it once, and the next thing was a take. He has a remarkable musical intelligence. *Only Connect* became his piece."



*Didgeridu player Alan Dargin (above): on the "Wanderlust" CD, "Only Connect" became his piece...*

Even if Miroslav Bukovsky is not what one could call a 'serious' composer, he writes compulsively, and no doubt will continue to do so. "I think I write all the time, not just for the band, for the very reason that I have the need to express certain ideas that go in my head - things that I hear here and there, and think 'well that sounds really great - see if I can somehow develop this idea, or do something with it.' I let things run around in my head, and then I write them down."

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**See following page for Miroslav's compositions, 1984-1993**

**MIROSLAV BUKOVSKY: SELECTED COMPOSITIONS, 1984-1993**

*Bronte Cafe*

*Dakar*

*Folk Song*

*For Woody*

*MDD*

*Never Been To KC*

*Only Connect*

*Ornetteologic*

*Plain Talk*

*Pressure Makes Diamonds*

*The Second Voyage Suite:*

*I. New Endeavour*

*II. Moon Too Soon*

*III. The Arrival of Captain Coke*

*Sleeping On A Memory*

*Song Of Laughter*

*Ten Part Invention Blues*

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