

THE AUSTRALIAN

The Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival goes live



Artist-in-residence Sandy Evans... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS

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The Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival began in 2012 as a modest event with six performances in one venue over two successive weeks.

Now in its ninth year, it has evolved into one of Australia's outstanding arts events. The current festival, featuring 87 musicians in live performance over ten days, began on October 30 and runs to Sunday November 8, spread across three venues: Foundry 616, Venue 505 and Mary's Underground (formerly The Basement).

Founding artistic director in 2012 Peter Rechniewski, who is still in the position and is the owner of Foundry 616, describes the SIWJF as "the largest festival of its type in Australia and actually one of the largest in the world, from what I can see."



Founding artistic director of the SIWJF Peter Rechniewski...

Zoe Hauptmann, one of Australia's most formidable jazz bassists, became co-artistic director in 2016. She says the turning point in the festival's evolution came with the visit of the African American drummer Terri Lyne Carrington in 2017.

"That really raised the festival's profile", says Hauptmann, "and now I'm getting a lot of inquiries every year from well-known internationals, because they've heard about the festival."

"We're a community-based festival. We're not just about bringing in a headliner and them playing with their own bands. We really want internationals to interact with our local musicians. So it's about building that sense of community, and supporting women musicians here and throughout the world. It's not just a straight festival; we are addressing gender inequality issues in the music industry."



Bassist Zoe Hauptmann, who became co-artistic director of the SIWJF in 2016...PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ

Normally the festival's artist-in-residence is an overseas musician but, with internationals unable to travel this year, the position has been taken by one of Australia's most prominent jazz musicians Sandy Evans.

In many ways the current festival belongs to her. On Tuesday there was a digital screening of Evans's work *Ahimsa: Meditations on Gandhi*, a musical interpretation of Mohandas Gandhi's writings on non-violence, performed by Evans's all-star sextet, including Australian-Indian musicians Sarangan Sriranganathan (sitar/vocals) and Bobby Singh (tabla).

On Saturday Evans launches her album *Postcards from the 2020 Anthropocene* live from Halfback Books on Sydney's northern beaches. Featuring Hamish Stuart (drums) and Adam Hulbert (Eurorack modular synthesiser with theremin and wind controller) this was recorded during last year's bushfire crisis, and is a protest against environmental destruction and climate change.

Following this streamed performance, the (mostly all-women) ten-piece ensemble Pharos, will present a program of Evans's music at Mary's Underground.

On Sunday night Evans closes the festival with two performances at Venue 505 with long-time collaborators Satsuki Odamura (koto) and Steve Elphick (bass).

Rechniewski says that when Evans emerged in the early 1980s she was a real eye-opener.



The ensemble Pharos, who will present a program of Sandy Evans's music at Mary's Underground...

“Sandy is a great instrumentalist, and a very good composer”, he says. “She's very supportive of people whom she plays with, and she's inspired a lot of young women to go in and play this music. She's also got an international reputation and some consider her one of the great tenor players now. Sandy has shown a range of interests and preoccupations that have made her a force.”

In 2001 the Sydney Improvised Music Association was looking at ways to help and encourage young women jazz musicians.

“We ran a series of workshops for them to try to bridge the gap between what they learnt in high school before trying to get into the Conservatorium”, says Rechniewski. “It was Sandy who wrote the first curriculum for those workshops, and they have actually been very important over the years. You only have to look at who are the graduates.”

Describing Evans as “a national treasure”, Hauptmann applauds Evans's advocacy and work in the field of gender equality. “She's a prolific writer and a wonderful person. We're so lucky to have her in Australia.”

Hauptmann believes that one of the highlights of the festival will be the commissioned composition *Lighthouse Keepers* that Evans has written for Pharos, the ten-piece ensemble formed in 2016 as the Sydney Women's Jazz Collective, and now led by bassist Hannah James. This group will present a program devoted to Evans' music on Saturday.



Sandy Evans (centre) pictured here with two colleagues in her all-star sextet, bassist Brett Hirst (left) and drummer Toby Hall...

Evans says the inspiration for her composition derives from talking to James about the connections between herself and the various players in Pharos.

“I sort of trace my relationships to them,” says Evans. “Many of them go back to the workshops. It’s amazing to see how these young players blossomed and really developed strong musical personalities. So, I’ve written a piece that I hope captures some of the energy of the sort of connectedness of the journeys of all of us as musicians.”

Other prominent women musicians in a massive program include saxophonist Gai Bryant and her Afro-Peruvian sextet Ally plus her big band Caribe; Zela Margossian & her quintet; vocalist Emma Pask; Jenny Eriksson and her electric viola da gamba ensemble Elysian Fields; Elana Stone Band; Hilary Geddes Quartet; vocalist Monica Trapaga & The Pocket Trio; the Alice Terry Big Band; Mahalia Barnes and The Soulmates, supported by vocalist Joy Yates & pianist Dave MacRae; and vocalist & kora player Miriam Lieberman.
