

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## Talent saves the day as Vince eclipses Van



*Jazz singer Vince Jones... PHOTO CREDIT KEVIN PETERSON...*

### **JAZZ**

Vince Jones

The Concourse, Chatswood, Sydney

November 19

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### **ERIC MYERS**

Singer Vince Jones, now an icon in Australian music, is best-known as a supreme performer in the small, intimate jazz club, his natural milieu. The large concert hall however, presents different challenges. Here Jones encounters the perennial difficulty confronting jazz artists in this country since time immemorial. How can a good sound-balance be achieved in such a venue with high ceilings and minimal capacity to absorb the strident sounds of amplified instruments, particularly guitar, double bass, and drums?

The successful negotiation of these variables, highly unpredictable, is usually handed to an embattled sound technician who, seated towards the rear of the hall, may or may not have the required expertise to cope with what can be, certainly in the case of jazz, a horrendous responsibility.

Jones did not present his normal repertoire here. Instead, the program was given over to works on two legendary albums issued some 50 years ago by the Northern Irish singer Van Morrison: *Astral Weeks* (1968) and *Moondance* (1970). Jones presented virtually all the compositions on both albums, more or less in chronological order.

He was backed by the Astral Orchestra, including his musical director, pianist Matt McMahon, with Karl Dunnicliff (bass), Ben Hauptmann (guitar), James Hauptmann (drums), plus two violinists and two horn players.



*The Astral Orchestra included the Hauptmann brothers, guitarist Ben (left) and drummer James...*

Alarm bells were sounded early in the performance when Jones's introductions were inaudible. Audience members were unusually assertive, with cries of "we can't hear you" and "turn it up". During the first half of the concert, devoted to the *Astral Weeks* album, this problem remained largely unrectified. At the intermission the concert was on the brink of failure.

Discussions in the break, however, led to a consensus that, even if certain sound problems were insoluble, Jones's vocals should at least be clearly heard. Accordingly, successful representations were made to the sound technician. As a result, the improved clarity in Jones's vocals largely led to the success of the second set, where works from the *Moondance* album were presented.

Also, given this enhanced presence, Jones's personal strengths – his humility, his air of vulnerability, his uniquely individual singing style – were able to carry the day.

Jones did his characteristic storytelling routine whereby, accompanied by soft piano accompaniment, he hums wordless vocals interspersed with sometimes very moving autobiographical snippets, on this occasion relating them to the lyrics of Morrison's tunes. In my view those lyrics are generally banal, but as Jones is, compared to Morrison, a vastly superior singer, he was able to rescue Morrison's mostly ponderous compositions and render them highly listenable.



*Jones (left) and McMahon on piano, returned as a duo to perform the traditional farewell song "The Parting Glass", played beautifully by Jones on flugelhorn...  
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

Towards the end of the concert, Jones was soaring, and after spirited versions of *Moondance* and *Glad Tidings*, the nine musicians left the stage. The applause was vigorous enough to justify an encore, whereupon Jones and McMahon returned as a duo to perform the traditional farewell song *The Parting Glass*, not only sung by Jones but also played beautifully by him on flugelhorn. It was a timely reminder of his instrumental artistry, which had been missing in the Van Morrison extravaganza.