

THE AUSTRALIAN

Best you'll get of jazz without intimacy



L-R, Zela Margossian on piano, Stuart Vandegraaff (soprano saxophone, clarinet) and Adem Yilmaz (percussion) ...PHOTO COURTESY SIMA

MUSIC

Zela Margossian Trio
Sydney Improvised Music Association
Online August 29

ERIC MYERS

In the final concert of its streamed series, SIMA presented an impressive half-hour performance by pianist Zela Margossian. Accompanied by colleagues Stuart Vandegraaff (soprano saxophone, clarinet) and Adem Yilmaz (percussion), she breezed through four of her compositions, revamping two (*Mystic Flute: A Version* and *Ceasefire*) from her quintet's splendid 2018 album *Transition*.

The performance underlined the extreme difficulty of manufacturing the warm atmosphere essential to jazz in a cold studio without an audience. Also, the instrumentation lacked a bassist who might have given the music added warmth.

Still, given an ambience suggesting the austerity of classical chamber music, it was immaculately played, confirming Margossian's reputation as a brilliant talent to watch. She was born in Beirut, Lebanon, of Armenian heritage, and is said to be influenced by various strains of Middle Eastern music, particularly Armenian jazz. While only an informed musicologist could decipher those influences in her works, it is true that her use of minor keys gives her music a pleasing hint of the exotic.



Zela Margossian: born in Beirut, Lebanon, of Armenian heritage, she is said to be influenced by various strains of Middle Eastern music...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

It is a truism that the essential component of jazz is improvisation, and there was much in Margossian's music. Many would argue also that other components, such as the flavour of the blues, and at least nodding awareness of the swing-feel are just as essential. That those components were not much evident in Margossian's music is not a criticism, but more an acknowledgement that much Australian jazz has been moving away from African American sources for some time.

The webcast included film clips from three piano-bass-drums trios led by Mark Isaacs, Alister Spence and Cathy Harley, which were highly energising. This marvellous footage from the 2001 ABC TV series *The Pulse*, beautifully filmed in black-and-white at The Winebanc, ran for only half-an-hour, but the vibrant spirit in the music of all three groups was a salutary reminder of what has largely been lost in Australian jazz over the last 20 years.



Three piano-bass-drums trios were led by Mark Isaacs (above), Alister Spence (below) and Cathy Harley (far below)... ALL PHOTOS CREDIT JOE GLAYSHER



The Harley trio in particular, including bassist Jay Miller and drummer Adam Pache, displayed the sort of raunchiness and explosive creativity that was

inevitably missing in the music presented earlier by Margossian.



Cathy Harley was seen as the logical successor to the mantle set by two outstanding Sydney pianists of New Zealand origin Judy Bailey (above) and the late Jann Rutherford (below)...RUTHERFORD PHOTO CREDIT JOE GLAYSHER



In 2001 Harley, a brilliant youngster with talent to burn, was seen as the logical successor to the mantle set by two outstanding Sydney pianists of New Zealand origin Judy Bailey and the late Jann Rutherford.

Shortly after this film was shot, Harley left for the holy grail of New York and disappeared. Whatever happened to her?