

SANDIE WHITE: A FASCINATING AND VARIED LIFE

by Ralph Powell* and Sandie White

This article was initiated by Ralph Powell who approached Sandie White to read, correct, and add to the text. It appeared in the magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum, AJAZZ 87, November 2020.

American trumpeter Nat Adderley is quoted as saying, “I never heard of a jazz musician who retired. You love what you do...”. Jazz singer and consummate scat performer Sandie White is testament to that with a career spanning six and a half decades beginning in 1955. An inveterate performer, she has entertained jazz lovers across the globe throughout her long career.



Sandie White: a career spanning six and a half decades beginning in 1955... PHOTO COURTESY JAMM MAGAZINE

**Ralph Powell joined the Victorian Jazz Archive over a decade ago as a general factotum (data entry work, website maintenance and development work) before dusting off his library skills to catalogue the Australian Jazz Museum’s extensive library. He became an occasional contributor to, and proofreader for, the VJazz magazine and in November 2020, when this article was written, was a member of the AJM’s magazine editorial committee. In 2022 he is Collections and Research Officer/Assistant to the Collections Manager, a Board member, and the current editor of the AJAZZ magazine.*

Sandra Louise Walker had sung from an early age, even busking with family friends for sixpences as a four-year-old with her rendition of *That Old Black Magic*. She credits her love of singing to her mother Beatrice Walker (née Hussey-Cooper), who was a classically trained singer, nightclub crooner and radio personality in Sydney.



Four-year-old Sandie entertained family and friends for sixpence singing the standard “That Old Black Magic”... PHOTO COURTESY SANDIE WHITE

As a pupil at Mittagong’s Frensham – her secondary school – she did become exasperated that only senior students were allowed in the school choir, but Sandra had never considered singing as a profession until orchestra leader Sid Simpson – who had known the family since Sandra was four years old – invited her to perform with his combo at the Australia Hotel’s Sapphire Room in Sydney and the jazz career of Sandra Louise began. At the age of 17 she went from working at a jewellery store to earning 18 guineas a week as a nightclub singer!



In 1955 Sandra Louise Walker at 17 began singing with Sid Simpson’s orchestra at the Hotel Australia in Sydney... PHOTO COURTESY SANDIE WHITE

In December 1955 Sandra accompanied her mother to England where she soon became involved in the buzzing London nightlife, spending 12 months with Harry Roy at the Gargoyle Club. The television industry offered new opportunities and Sandra appeared on *They're Off*, AR-TV's horse-racing game with Nicholas Parsons. In July 1956 Dutch comedian Max Tilleur booked her for a month and a half at his *Cabaret de Doofpot* [Coal Scuttle] in Amsterdam. Performing that same month, on another TV show, *Bob Hardy Entertains*, she was seen by Ray Ellington who was looking for a singer to replace Marion Ryan and was invited to join the Quartet. After three months she went out on her own to freelance.

She was lucky enough to work with such luminaries as Ike Isaacs, Dill Jones and many other fine British musicians. In 1957 she auditioned for Basil Kirchin, and joined the band. Basil disliked her name and changed it to Anita Louise.



Sandie White, then Anita Louise, performing with the Basil Kirchin Septet in 1957, with saxophonist Alan Rowe in the background... PHOTO COURTESY SANDIE WHITE



The drummer Basil Kirchin (left) whose band Sandra joined in London in 1957: he changed her name to Anita Louise... PHOTO COURTESY BASIL KIRCHIN ESTATE

Described as an “Outstanding personality vocalist ... whose attacking impact is terrific,” she cut her first record with the Kirchin Band on the Parlophone label, singing *Waiting for the Robert E Lee*. The recording took place at Abbey Road Studios with George Martin engineering the session. The B side was the band’s Vocal Quartet of which she was a part, singing *Serenade in Blue*.

In 1958 she worked for a year entertaining American forces in Germany and North Africa, which led to invitations to perform with Lionel Hampton, Zoot Sims and Oscar Pettiford in Wiesbaden, Paris and Stuttgart. During this time she was encouraged to form her own quartet which Sandie described as, “Three wonderful German musicians. The piano player also played bass and the bass player played guitar and vibes as well. The drummer – well he just played drums.” They taught Sandra to play about six songs on the bass so that there would always be that necessary bass drive.

On her return to Australia in 1959 she performed at the Princes Restaurant, Sydney with Jimmy Henney’s Orchestra, singing songs from the Great American Songbook. Australia’s television industry provided plenty of scope for Sandra with appearances on Brian Henderson’s *Bandstand*. She was seen on these shows by Channel 7 executives who picked her up and she starred in all the variety shows on that channel – including *Review 61* and *Review 63*, culminating in her own TV show *Cue for Music*. She also appeared on Graham Kennedy’s *In Melbourne Tonight* many times, on Channel 7 Adelaide’s *The Light Show* for three months in 1960, on ATN 7’s *Studio A* in 1963 and ’64 and with Jimmy Hannan in 1966. It was during these years that she worked in many clubs all over Australia; there were continuous live shows during this time.



Sandra (right) in 1959 on the set of the Channel 7 variety show “Music Box” with producer Roy Hampson... PHOTO COURTESY SANDIE WHITE



*A prolific performer during the 50s and 60s as Sandra Louise, here she is (on the left) appearing on Melbourne's Channel O in 1966. Below she is performing on the cruise ship Fairstar in the same year...
PHOTOS COURTESY SANDIE WHITE*



During the early 60s Sandra regularly appeared at Sammy Lee's Latin Quarter Restaurant in Pitt Street before deciding, once again, to head back to Britain and Europe. At Lorrae Desmond's prompting Sandra worked for several months in South African cabarets, The Beachcomber at Durban's Beach Hotel, The Tullbach Club, Cape Town and Salisbury's Le Coq D'Or in late 1961. Back in London for 18 months she focussed her attention on becoming a travel agent whilst continuing her singing career.



Sandie White, then Sandra Louise, performing at Sammy Lee's Latin Quarter in 1961... PHOTO COURTESY SANDIE WHITE

She again performed at Salisbury's Coq D'Or in Rhodesia and at The Colony club in Johannesburg on the way back to Australia in 1963. In 1965 she went to visit her mother and stepfather in Mallorca, Spain. She fell in love with the island and was offered a job in travel. She returned home, and in July 1966, packed up and went to live in Mallorca. After three months in travel she was offered a two-weeks engagement at Tito's night club, which turned into six weeks. And then, in January

1967, there followed six weeks at The Castellano Hilton in Madrid, before touring through Europe with Los Lecuona Cuban Boys, as their “English” singer.

The Band broke up for the winter and Sandra worked for six weeks in Malmö at a restaurant called the Malmborgen before returning home to Mallorca for Christmas where she continued to work in nightclubs including Club Tago Mago and the Jonquet Mills which housed several clubs, with the Bob Weeden Trio. She even spent six weeks in the nightclub scene in Iran namely in Khorramshahr in the Persian Gulf and in Teheran. In October 1969 she went to London for a visit and ended up taking on a position there as an Estée Lauder consultant.

Returning to Australia and marrying in 1972 she took an extended sabbatical from singing. In 1974/5 her previous agent begged her to come back to the club scene and so for about 15 months she tried it – but finally said, “No! This is not what I want to do.” The marriage broke up after six years and it wasn’t until August 1979 that she was encouraged to begin performing with pianist Jack Allen at the Paddington Inn. There she met her new husband, Patrick White, which was the start of a gradual return to jazz, and the name change to Sandie White.



In August 1979 Sandie began performing with pianist Jack Allen (left) at the Paddington Inn, where she met her new husband, Patrick White... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

A recording session at 2MBS in Sydney with Dill Jones resulted from an unexpected reunion at the 1981 Geelong Australian Jazz Convention where Jones was performing. This was a private tape – never released – but was sent to Eric Child at the ABC and Phil Haldeman at 2SM where it was given plenty of air play.

After four more years with Estée Lauder in Australia, she returned to the travel industry. The American John McGhee, Regional Managing Director for the South Pacific of Pan Am Airways, was also a jazz drummer who worked professionally in Sydney. McGhee always said that there was a heap of talent in the local industry and organised a prestigious talent quest. Sandie won that quest in 1982 singing to an audience of 2,000 in the TAA hangar at Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport.



American John McGhee, head of Pan Am Airways in Sydney, on drums... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Despite a severe bout of influenza, she appeared at the Sacramento Jazz Festival with the Noel Crow band in 1983. A musical partnership with American ex-pat pianist Vince Genova led to many gigs in Sydney and resulted in her *Angel Eyes* LP on her own label, Jazmin Records. During the 80s she had a Monday night residency at Quincy's Restaurant in Cremorne for four years and a four-year residency at The Top of the Treasury in the Intercontinental Hotel Sydney. Sandie also sang at The Don Burrows Supper Club, and was part of Mark Murphy's first Vocal Jazz Summit, which took place at Kinselas Restaurant and Nightclub in Darlinghurst, Sydney. That was followed in 1984 with an appearance on ABC-TV's *The Don Burrows Supper Club Presents* which was shown in December of that year.



Mark Murphy's vocal jazz summit, Kinselas, Sydney 1983, L-R, Murphy, Peter Cross, Sandie White, Vince Genova, Nancy Stuart, Kerrie Biddell, Edwin Duff, Vince Jones, Jan Adele, Carlos Gonsalves (just visible). Hidden musicians are Ed Gaston (bass) & Alan Turnbull (drums)... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH



A musical partnership with American ex-pat pianist Vince Genova (above) led to many gigs in Sydney and resulted in her Angel Eyes LP on her own label, Jazmin Records... PHOTO COURTESY RAY MARTIN



1987 saw Sandie opening Upstairs at Ronnie Scott's in London with the Harry South Trio and she was support to tenor saxophonist Scott at Kinselas and other clubs in 1989, when he was touring Australia.

Sandie has appeared in many festivals including Manly, Werana, Brisbane, Taree, Rockhampton, Noosa, Magnetic Island and Eltham.

The esteem with which her peers held Sandie, led to her being awarded the inaugural Jazz Action Society Jazz Vocalist of the Year Award in 1986 which she proudly shared with Marie Wilson.



In 1986 Sandie (on the right) shared the inaugural Jazz Action Society Jazz Vocalist of the Year Award with the late Marie Wilson (left)... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

However, it was not until 2001 that Sandie began recording again, a gap which, fortunately, she has addressed with a string of recordings - *Be Diggin' Me Clear Now*; *Taking Risks*; *A Bluer Shade of White*; *Wild October Gladness*; *So Many Songs, So Little Time...*

In March 2014 Sandie was invited to perform at the Auckland Jazz and Blues Club and it was successful enough for her to be invited to return in November of the same year.

Currently she is fortunate to work constantly with such luminaries as Judy Bailey, Craig Scott, Kevin Hunt, Matt McMahon, George Golla, Dan Barnett, Eric Ajaye, Ray Alldridge, Steve Russell, Brendan Clarke, Col Loughnan, Glenn Henrich, Dave Smith, Billy Burton and many others.

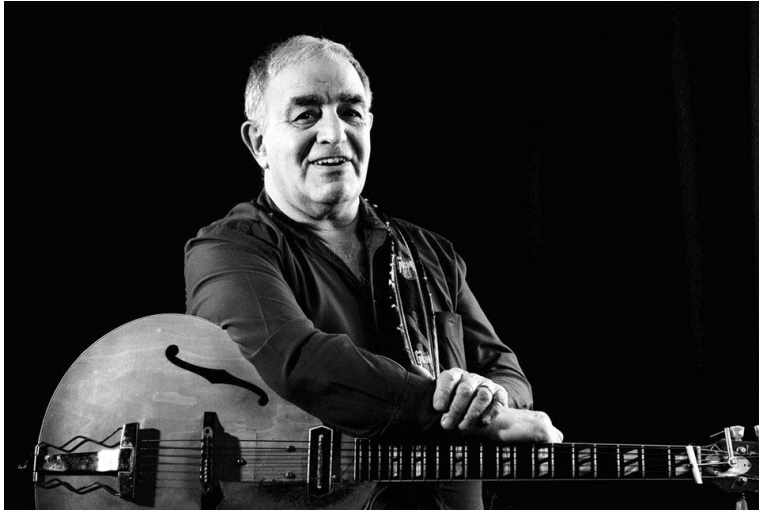


Sandie White performing in the Sardine Can in her home with bassist Ed Gaston (left) and pianist Kevin Hunt (right)... PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON

In July 2018 she opened Eric Ajaye's The Jazz Haus in Canberra and returned there in April 2019. She has appeared, over the last 40 years, in major venues in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth such as Dizzy's Jazz Club, Top of the Treasury, Don Burrows Supper Club, Foundry 616, Venue 505, The Brisbane Jazz Club, the Jazz Lab, The Gold Coast Arts Centre and Fremantle Jazz Club.

The past year, 2019, has included performances with Welsh jazz guitarist, Esmond Selwyn. They performed together at Melbourne's Jazzlab, at the Eltham Jazz Festival and in Fremantle. She also joined up with Esmond at the International Guitar

Festival at Birkenhead in the Wirral, a peninsula in North West England, and did a very successful jazz cabaret performance at Olby's Soul and Music Room in Margate, England, with pianist Roger Lewin and bass player Maurizio Borgna.



In 2019 Sandie did gigs with Welsh jazz guitarist Esmond Selwyn (left) at Melbourne's Jazzlab, the Eltham Jazz Festival and in Fremantle, and also at the International Guitar Festival at Birkenhead in the Wirral, England... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Sandie's warmth, energy and vibrancy are still evident in her regular performances in Sydney and the eastern states, and, when she's not travelling, Sandie holds small recitals in the Sardine Can at her home, backed by a variety of local jazz musicians and supported by her 'roadie', husband of 40 years, Patrick.



Sandie's husband Patrick White (left), is pictured here with Sandie. (Editor's note: Patrick, who was born on May 24, 1935, died on February 8, 2022)... PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK