

MY LIFE AS THE SA JAZZ CO-ORDINATOR

by Margaret Reines*

On 18th August 1989 I commenced my term as SA Jazz Coordinator, working two days a week. Prior to that I had done various teaching jobs, and this new job was hugely challenging for me. The extent of my particular involvement in jazz was teaching jazz units in secondary school, but I had undertaken many years of music teaching and running music centres. One thing that really attracted me to the position was my Executive Officer Brian Chatterton's statement that there was a lot of autonomy in the job.

I was told 'Here's your key - here's your office - off you go.' This was totally alien to me, as in teaching we were spoon-fed. I did feel as though I had been thrown in at the deep end, and it was somewhat overwhelming initially. I recall in the first few weeks walking towards my office and wanting to turn around and walk back from where I had come.

The members of the panel which had interviewed me had their own jobs, and did not have too much time to assist. So, in my own way, I got stuck into things. The brief was to 'plan, promote and coordinate jazz for SA' - no mean feat. I did speak to my predecessor Peter Thurmer, but I believe the committee to which I was responsible wished me to build on what Peter had achieved; they wanted me to find increased funding for a third day, specifically for the purpose of presenting concerts in SA.

We applied for this third day successfully and, by 1990 we had funds available to present concerts. At that stage I was funded two days a week from the Australia Council in Sydney, and one day a week from the SA Government in Adelaide. That however was misleading for, to do the job properly, one had to work at it 24/7. It was also the type of work that generated more work, and thus I found in my 18-year tenure that, in order to be successful, I had to think about the work 24/7. To that effect, I never left the office at night thinking it was all done. There was always more.

Some people saw the job as a glamorous one (usually women) and were known to ring my bosses, and the head of jazz studies Bruce Hancock, saying they would like to do my job. They saw Jazz Co-ordination as swanning around at concerts with a glass of champagne. They didn't see me in my office at 2.30am. If you read Eric Myers' account 'A Day in the Life of a Jazz Coordinator' on this website, you will get a feel for the daily grind. I usually started at about 11.30am, did the housekeeping-type jobs, had lunch and then got stuck into the core of the job at about 4.00pm. I then went on till about 12 midnight or 1.00 am. I also worked sporadically on weekends.

In the early days, I remember I had to transport a Swiss group of musicians to a radio station for an interview. When I arrived at the motel, they were wandering around in their jocks, and I thought 'This job is going to be different.'

**Margaret Reines was SA Jazz co-ordinator for 18 years from 1989-2007.*



Margaret Reines: From the beginning I was utterly determined to achieve in the jazz co-ordination job...

I quickly got more venues going in Adelaide, such as the beautiful little jazz cellar called Satchmo's Jazz Bar, the Green Mango on Magill Rd, and The Ambassadors Hotel in King William Street. We presented some of our concert series at Satchmo's. At one point we had jazz at the Stamford Plaza five nights a week (the manager Graeme Goldberg being a jazz aficionado).

I was utterly determined to achieve in the job, and I recall saying to my Chair Ted Nettelbeck in the early days that, if I was offered a full-time teaching job, and it meant leaving the jazz job, I would refuse. His reply was 'You're mad.'

That was 1989 and I resigned in 2007, after 18 years. At the initial interview I was told 'We don't know how long this will last', so I guess that was ironic. I worked two jobs for five years and in a sense was in a catch 22 as they were both contractual. And, as my marriage had recently dissolved, I needed the money to support teenage children. My second job was classroom music teaching which was highly energized, so it was fortunate that the jazz job had flexible hours and I was a healthy 43-year-old. I don't think I could do it now!

The arts bodies awarded annual funding so I had to apply to the Australia Council and ARTSA annually, although I did receive triennial funding for 2001-2004 from ARTSA. It has occurred to me that the people on my committee were often too busy to assist and, for the triennial funding application - ie three years of concerts funding from ARTSA - I approached people outside my committee for advice: lecturers, musicians, even members of the public, all of whom had good ideas to contribute.

The application to ARTSA was especially hard to compile. I think that some people saw all these concerts and activities and assumed that they all happened by osmosis. They don't. I recall that during the course of my tenure I spent maybe six or so nights working through the night into the next day to get funding applications in. On one occasion after working through the night I went home the next day at about 5.00pm and found myself sitting in my car at the lights with my eyes closed. I also missed family events to complete those applications. I also applied to, and received funds from, Health Promotion Through The Arts.

I found the applications to the Australia Council horrendous. The forms were incredibly detailed and heavy duty. Here I acknowledge the assistance of my initial chair Ted Nettelbeck who in the early years, assisted me when I felt overwhelmed with the scope of the job. He was of vital importance in helping me with applications. Later Schmoe Elhay spent many hours with me throughout my tenure, to ensure that applications were completed professionally. Without his expertise and patience, it would have been very difficult for me to complete the forms. Plus there was stiff competition for funds. But, in general, we were quite successful in receiving funds for performance projects, which resulted in valuable work for the musicians. Perhaps that was why I felt miffed that, towards the end of my tenure, at a meeting I had with arts officers from the Australia Council and ARTSA, two out of three were critical of me. I felt therefore that the arts are more about personalities than achievements.

I resented the fact that they had their Public Service salaries and finished at 5.00pm whilst I generally worked on till about 12 midnight or 1.00 am. However I have to say that some administrators from the funding authorities were very supportive, especially Julia Szuster at ARTSA and Vanessa Chalker at the Australia Council. I believe that they were well-informed, and had an appreciation for my work.

A few members of the Adelaide jazz community were against my appointment and things turned unpleasant towards the end of 1991, after my being in the job for about two years. I was contacted and told that, at the next committee meeting, a discussion would ensue as to my continuing appointment. I relayed this to my EO Brian Chatterton, who stated in a letter to the committee that he strongly advised that the matter be part of a 'wider agenda item'. The latter move was probably a good idea, as the committee would have wanted me to step outside whilst they voted on whether or not to keep me on. To this day I don't understand why they did this, in view of my success in presenting jazz workshops and concerts.

It took a year for a Performance Review to take place when certain people in the jazz community did everything in their power to evict me from the job. Derogatory phone calls were made about me to the Australia Council in Sydney. (This was a worry, as I understood that the Council didn't fund you if you are 'brawling' with your jazz community). The committee meetings were torturous, long-winded, and occasionally upsetting. In Brian Chatterton's words, the meetings were 'obsessed with minutiae.' For example, 'what were my hours in the office?' Occasionally I ended up in tears.

Still, despite some unpleasant aspects, the job also had some wonderful times. For example, the Wangaratta jazz festivals, a conference on Hamilton Island, and Jazz Co-ordinator meetings which were held interstate. The first of the latter was in June 1990 when I was six months into my position. I found it invaluable to receive feedback from the other state jazz coordinators and exchange ideas with them.

At the 1990 meeting Peter Rechniewski, the NSW representative on the National Committee, and President of the Sydney Improvised Music Association (SIMA), said 'The Adelaide scene is as flat as a tack.' Peter actually assisted me to hone my vision for the job, as I felt, 'If that's how people see the Adelaide scene, then I had better do something about it.'

I also have Peter Rechniewski to thank for assisting me at the 2002 Wangaratta Jazz Festival in putting together the background I needed on Sydney jazz musicians. I came back from

Wangaratta and proceeded with an application under the Australia Council's Presentation and Promotion program to bring three Sydney groups to Adelaide. We were successful in receiving \$9,900 to bring to Adelaide John Pochée's group The Space Cadets, The Band of Five Names, and a group led by the saxophonist Gai Bryant, which included the pianist Paul McNamara.

I think that was definitely one of the highlights of the job, especially as the funding is competitive. For that round the success rate was 24% Australia wide. I guess I did have a vision of a touring circuit, and there was some reciprocity with some Adelaide players going to Sydney. The following year we applied to bring three Melbourne bands to Adelaide, but that application was unsuccessful. It was at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival that I obtained much information about the bands I wished to present. The first Wangaratta I attended was in 2000. I stayed in a convent. I recall someone at the Uni saying: 'I hope there isn't a vow of silence.'

I also enjoyed presenting Adelaide concerts at the Governor Hindmarsh Hotel. Prior to the Gov, I had presented some ARTSA funded concerts at other hotels. I was aware that some people in the jazz community felt that jazz should be presented in a smaller room, but I was especially conscious of 'audience development' and the Gov housed a few hundred people. The Gov presented all genres of music and was/is an icon. They have nobly resisted the pokies call, and stuck to live acts. I am indebted to their support, and the wonderful people who ran it. Jazz people who came to Adelaide have said, 'There wouldn't be a hotel like this anywhere else in the whole of Australia.'



The chair of my committee for most of my tenure as SA Jazz Co-ordinator, Sylvan (Schmoe) Elhay...

There is a saying that 'If you can get people to attend concerts in Adelaide you can do it anywhere in the world.' I was very conscious of this difficult task. To be successful, I had to work hard at nurturing my subscribers (ie those who subscribed to a series of five concerts.) I looked after them, gave them the best seats, and kept the lines of communication open. I used many devices to attract new subscribers. I should mention that I comprehensively promoted jazz to the high schools through direct mail-outs and Email. Often we had regular groups at our Gov concerts from these schools. These groups also linked up with several workshops held in schools.

The *SA Real Book* launch was Bruce Hancock's baby. I was proud to assist Bruce in putting it together - the first *Real Book* in Australia - and it was rewarding to compile talented Adelaide musicians' work into a publication. The original funding came from the Australia Council, and I provided administrative assistance to Bruce. I solicited the musicians to contribute compositions to the book, advertised it within the jazz community and the schools, and when the *Real Book* was completed, co-ordinated its launch. We had an MP Angus Redford launch the book at the Gov. We had "in kind" funding of free wine for the launch, and some of my subscribers served drinks. We had *Real Book* compositions played at ARTSA-funded concerts, where the book was on sale.

I think it was very advantageous for my Jazz Co-ordination office to be situated at the Uni of Adelaide near the Jazz Studies School. Thus I was able to get a real feel for what was going on in the jazz scene, and hopefully promote the students' work. I was also able to make them aware of jazz happenings, and encourage their attendance at jazz performances. The weekly Jazz Forum tied all the jazz happenings together (it was a meeting of all students and faculty) and I often advertised upcoming concerts there. Really, for 18 years all my life was about jazz, and I was involved in little else.



The pianist Bruce Hancock, head of jazz studies: I was proud to assist him in putting together the first Real Book in Australia...

Every year on the June long weekend we had a Big Band Festival which often included bands from interstate. Once I billeted three Melbourne players. On another occasion I billeted Jamie Oehlers (2002) who came as a solo artist to play with an Adelaide group at the Gov. Another was the pianist Jeff Usher who came to perform with Jeff Usher's Adelaide Jazz Unit in 2003. Also, I regularly transported players to and from Adelaide airport. We also toured the Uni of Adelaide Big Band to Kadina on several occasions utilizing the student musicians to tutor high school students and, on one occasion, presenting an evening concert. There was a look of pure joy on the face of my contact there when we arrived in Kadina.

The Uni Big Band also toured to Mt Gambier to perform and, in spite of my advertising, there were few at that concert. It transpired that a competing musician in the town may have sabotaged our event by presenting their own event at another venue.

At my initial job interview, it was stated that it would be a coup if I could get Adelaide bands reviewed in the newspapers. John McBeath (who still reviews jazz regularly in the *Weekend Australian*) moved to Adelaide in 1997. In 2002 he began writing on jazz for *The Advertiser*, later moving on to write album reviews for *The Australian*. He regularly reviewed Adelaide bands in both newspapers during the last several years of my job. He was certainly a very good contact for jazz in SA and is probably irreplaceable.

My chairs during my 18-year tenure were mostly Ted Nettelbeck, Schmoe Elhay and Bruce Hancock. They are all pictured in this piece. I express my deep appreciation for their assistance over the years. Even though there were differences of opinion at times between us, all three were a valuable resource for an outsider like myself, who needed a point of reference to undertake the job.



One of my chairs, the pianist Ted Nettelbeck...PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

During the last two years of my tenure (owing to the then Dean's request) the committee changed from an advisory committee to a management committee and, in my opinion, this sounded the death knell for my position. The new Dean did not want the JC Scheme to remain under the auspices of the Uni. The dynamic of the board changed and that, coupled with some health issues, was the impetus for me to resign in 2007 from a job that I loved, and spent every waking breath thinking about.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Brian Chatterton for, without him on the interview panel, and in his follow-up position as EO of the host organisation, it is almost certain that I would never have had this wonderful opportunity to present concerts, and support the musicians as SA Jazz Co-ordinator. Brian came to as many committee meetings as he could, and was always interested to know what was happening, how I was involved with the jazz clubs, etc. As I was never given a brief for the job, I had to pick up on these things, and Brian was always very helpful. I believe that the job developed my creativity, and my organizational and administrative skills. I shall be forever grateful for that.

Sometime after my resignation I was in contact with someone from the jazz community who declared that the community never appreciated what they had, when they had a SA Jazz Co-ordinator. If only the pay had reflected the work that I - and jazz coordinators in the other States - did.