

BILL MOTZING: A MUSIC ADVENTURER AS EDUCATOR

by Andrew L Urban*

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Q: After almost three years, as Head of the Jazz Studies programme at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, you left at the end of 1978, just a few weeks ago. Did you leave amicably?

A: Oh yes, no problem. It's just that I'm not much of a bookkeeper — which is mainly what the job was. Mainly administrative, and though I did start some new courses, I learnt all I could from doing the job.



Bill Motzing: the head of that jazz school should be a very good and well-known jazz musician...PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER

**When this was published in March, 1979, Andrew L Urban was editor of the music and entertainment magazine Encore.*

Q: Was there a specific motivation for you to leave?

A: The motivation for leaving is that I was, and hope to continue to be, very busy outside, and I believe someone running that department should be there most of the time, more of the time than I could have given to it from now on.

Q: In retrospect, do you feel you have achieved something worthwhile during your three years?

A: I think so. Apart from the few new classes I introduced, my starting as head of the department actually coincided with the start of the full-time diploma course. This was six months after I took over from Howie Smith. And all the people who enrolled for that first two-year course were my choice, and the teachers that they were assigned to were also my choice. In that respect, it was a great opportunity for me, it was something worthwhile, and that whole course is now going as a full-time, Government-funded, jazz education course. Part of the reason I left, incidentally, is connected with that. I think the head of that jazz school should be a very good and well-known jazz musician. Now, I haven't been what you'd call a card carrying jazzer, a bebopper, for about 20 years — although I'm still involved in jazz and I still write jazz, but I'm not known in Australia as a jazz musician.

Q: Why exactly should the Head be a well-known jazz musician?

A: I think that position means not only the administrative work, but bringing attention to the work of that department. This could be, and would be done very easily by someone who is a practising jazz musician, which Roger Frampton is and Howie Smith was. Those men are travelling all over Australia, Roger has an album coming out, he's well-known in Australia.



Howie Smith (left, on soprano) & Roger Frampton (centre, on alto) performing with Jazz Co-Op at The Basement in 1977. Bassist Jack Thorncraft is in the background... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ DOWN UNDER

Q: You said recently how glad you were that Roger has the job now.

A: I'm delighted. I recommended him, and he was accepted by the powers-that-be; apart from him being very capable of running that department, I think he is a great musician and one of the true originals in music.

Q: Did you find many budding originals at the Con?

A: Yes, there are some originals. Originality isn't all that important to me. Some people are and some aren't. There are some in that first batch of students graduating this year: there is a fellow named Jon Rose who is involved very much in free improvisation — not necessarily in jazz improvisation — and he has some very original concepts. There are also some very talented people who will be starting their second year now; for example a young song writer, Noel McDonald, who has some fresh ideas. In fact I'd say almost all of them should make a mark in music if they are given the opportunity — some are already doing so.



A fellow named Jon Rose (above) is involved very much in free improvisation — not necessarily in jazz improvisation ... PHOTO CREDIT KALEV MAEVALI

Q: In an earlier conversation you indicated that you regard music education at present as being too rigid and conservative. Can you elaborate?

A: I think it has always been conservative, at least in this century, and I'm afraid the same conservatism has taken over in jazz education to a large degree. I think so many students are being admitted to courses, all over the world but particularly in America, that they have to produce courses and approaches to be able to handle the volume. That's one cause of the conservatism — you can't keep coming up with original ideas by the pound, so to speak. But part of the problem is that most teachers have never been professional musicians. They have come out of a Con as students, only to go into another Con as teachers — without much pro experience, and with a tendency to turn out more people in their own image. This tends to go round and round and getting more and more conservative, out of touch with life in the streets,

and music in the streets, as it were. I think part of the solution is to limit the intakes to only those who have real potential.

Q: There is a tendency, would you agree, to rely heavily on teaching by copying or imitating various great musos?

A: Right. All of us who have studied music have somewhere along the line found people whose music we liked — whether it be jazz or classical or rock or whatever — that we listen to over and over — and we study. That's how we learn, so that in itself is not a bad thing. But there is a difference between deciding to listen to a particular musician because it appeals to you, and the teacher saying "This is the person you should listen to". Students are impressionable, and if you say "go and learn to play like John Coltrane" they will take it seriously, with the result that you will have 5,000 imitation John Coltranes, all playing John Coltrane's ideas and songs, just like he played them, but without any sense of originality. And the simple fact is that imitation of this kind is not professionally useful — why listen to the imitation when you can listen to the original?

Q: What about purity in jazz? When Oscar Peterson was here I interviewed him and he strongly decried the fusion of jazz and rock, saying jazz has no need of rock, and rock can say its own thing.



Oscar Peterson: he plays the same kind of music today that he played 20 years ago... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS

A: Oscar Peterson has been around for a long time, and I can understand perhaps his reluctance to be involved with rock in any way. He plays the same kind of music today that he played 20 years ago. He's very much a jazz musician, which I can respect. I agree with him to a degree —for example I have not yet heard a good rock improviser —strictly rock. To me most jazz rock lacks any sort of depth or subtlety in the improvisation, mainly because the rock rhythm section, an electric rhythm section, is a very unsubtle thing most of the time. However, I am not myself a purist in anything — except cricket, and I still watch the Test, not World Series Cricket...

Q: What impact has jazz/rock had for the study of jazz?

A: Well I think that strong demarcation we had about 10 years ago is disappearing, it's not so strong. And as most students are young, I'd say about 95% of them have had a great deal to do with rock — they are at least interested in it. Now sometimes the teacher can learn from the student, and many have learnt, and found that there is something worthwhile in rock. Music educators have to realise that to keep getting young students they need to find out what the young people are familiar with already, and take advantage of it.

Q: You've had a wide range of musical experience, can you outline it?

A: Basically, it can break down into ten-year segments. During the 50s I was very much involved in jazz. I played with various bands who were names at the time, like Gerry Mulligan, Bill Russo, Sal Salvador's band, Nat Pierce's band, John Lewis (of the Modern Jazz Quartet) had an orchestra called Orchestra USA, which I played in ... the 50's were pretty much jazz-oriented for me, although I was going to Conservatory then and learning about the classical side of music. Then when I graduated from there (the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, New York) I spent the next ten years in symphony orchestras and chamber music groups, that sort of thing.



Q: Were you writing at that time and arranging?

A: Yes, I was. No matter what I was doing primarily, I've never been completely out of touch with the other aspects. Then at the end of the 60's I joined Blood Sweat and Tears. I was their sound mixer, and that's really when I started to get more into the rock side of things, which I've been mainly involved in here in Australia, though of course I was involved with jazz at the Con, and actually the first three years I was here I worked in the Elizabethan Trust Orchestra.

Q: You have been involved as a producer or arranger, sometimes even singing or playing synthesizer I believe, with some 35 albums in the last three years. Has this diversity carried through onto wax?

A: There have been different things, mainly rock and pop, since that's mainly what the record business is about; but jazz and even classical things have come up.

Q: You have also written some movie scores, notably *Newsfront*.

A: Yes, *Newsfront* was a straight, symbolic orchestral score of the type you heard in the 40's and early 50's — they wanted a period score for the movie. There is a more recent picture called *Cathy's Child* which is more contemporary, in style, though it isn't a pop score by any means.



Q: I've been leading up to ask whether you think this diversity is an important rounding process for a pro musician?

A: Well some people are interested only in one sort of music and they have done very well at it. But getting to know more about a wider range of things can broaden you. Though there is also the danger of becoming a jack of all trades and master of none.

Q: But that hasn't happened to you?

A: Well I don't think it has, I hope it hasn't happened to me, but if it hasn't it's because I spent so much time pretty well exclusively in each one of those areas, though as I say I kept in touch with all the others as well. For example, when I was playing in symphony orchestras I was thoroughly involved in it; I was known as a legit guy. But I kept in touch with the other things. And I also had the advantage of growing up in a very musical family, and they would listen to all kinds of music, they didn't categorize it, so I didn't even know then that they were called jazz or classical or pop or whatever. I remember asking a friend once to come and listen to some records, and he came from a very Catholic family. He said all right, as long as I didn't play 'any of that jazz'. I agreed, not having a clue what he meant. The first record I put on was some swing band of the time, and he just about freaked, ran out of the house. I had no idea — it was music, and I loved it all.



Motzing: now wanting to concentrate on film scores primarily...

Q: So now you have left the Con, you are 41, and you said you want to concentrate on outside things, like film scores. What else?

A: Film scores primarily; in fact I just finished another short film — I did a number of shorts between those two features, also. I'm working at the moment on an orchestral piece, just for myself, for my own amazement, about half an hour long. It's for a full symphony orchestra but it has an improvising violin solo in it. Not a jazz piece, but it does have that improvisation in it. So I want to finish that.

Q: You have an agent, I understand.

A: Yes, a lady named Jane Cameron who takes care of the business side. She got me into film scoring, she got me *Newsfront*, which was a great start, as my first feature film. I also want to do more conducting. I've done lots of concerts, Gilbert and Sullivan, rock operas, all different kinds of music. I hope to audition for the ABC to maybe do some guest conducting around Australia — pop groups, orchestras, big bands, whatever.

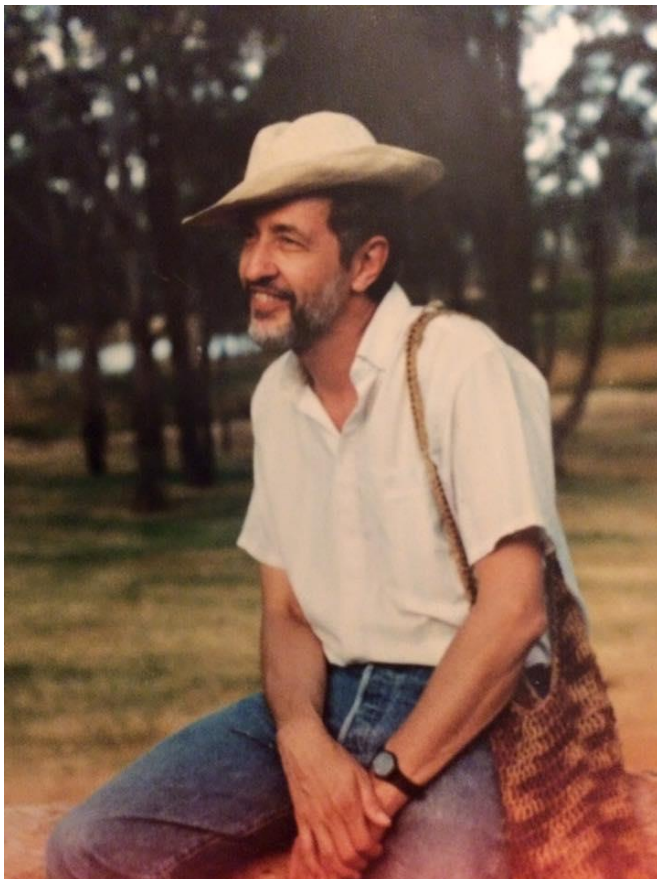
Q: Are you going to do any more teaching?

A: Yes, I am still teaching at the Con four hours a week, and I have half a dozen private students. And of course I still produce records freelance.

Q: What is your impression of music education at school level in Australia?

A: I think the situation in the public schools is deplorable as far as music education is concerned. It doesn't exist, as a rule, apart from kids sitting in music appreciation classes, that sort of thing. You have brass bands and school orchestras, but I don't think there is enough money given to it, and I don't think people take it seriously at all. The arts are equal absolutely to the sciences; they should demand and get the same respect, in terms of funding and attitudes.

Q: Most of the great composers have come from very different environments to ours here, do you think this is a factor in Australian originality musically?



Motzing: Australia with its climate is an outdoor country, and I don't think that is conducive to the development of the arts...

A: I think Australia with its climate is an outdoor country, and I don't think that is conducive to the development of the arts. It's too nice to go to the beach, or sit at the barbecue. Development of any art requires sitting alone in your room and hacking it out — practising, writing, whatever. It's an indoors activity. Just compare music with sport; it's obvious which comes out on top. This, I might say, is just one aspect. Originality — I think there are some originals, climate notwithstanding. Particularly in pop music — something identifiably Australian, although I can't define it — something different. Peter Martin has an original writing style and Roger Frampton is quite an original. He is still influenced by Keith Jarrett a bit, but I think he'll lose that eventually because he has enough of his own thing happening.



Roger Frampton: He is still influenced by Keith Jarrett a bit, but he'll lose that eventually because he has enough of his own thing happening...

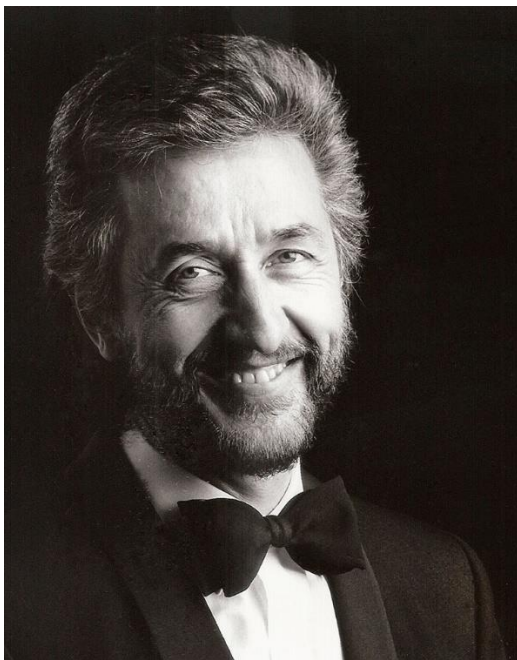
Q: What about the media? Do you think it offers a wide enough spectrum of music generally?

A: Not on a wide spectrum at all. It's either very narrowly pop-oriented or on the other hand, in non-commercial radio, very conservative classical music, which we have heard a hundred times. We are up against the old media story of giving people what they want. But I think it is equally the role of the media to expose their audiences to new things, things which they may come to like and want. But I know there is a huge market in Australia for other types of music — just look at the huge number of small import-record shops, offering and selling everything from avant-garde and European jazz and rock, classical — and I have seen examples of these records selling. I have had to wait six weeks for new stocks of records I thought nobody would want except me. Certainly the commercial stations are bound by the system of ratings to keep going. But the ABC which doesn't have to worry about that,

is also very conservative in what they dish up. Public broadcasting should be more concerned with music education — not in the formal sense, but presenting things on a much wider scale than they do.

Q: It's a problem of sectionalising music...

A: Yes, look, with 2JJ you get into the same problem as with 2FC and 2BL. Each one of them has to dish up so much of that one particular type of music all day every day. Now there isn't that much really good stuff to warrant that. Probably 90% of the classical music that's played on 2FC we have heard a thousand times. The music played on 2BL . . . once you have heard it about five times it's probably enough for life. And with 2JJ, how much really outstanding rock is there to keep it going day after day?



Motzing: I almost never listen to commercial radio, and to the ABC only when I know of a particular programme once or twice a week.

Q: Would you advocate a totally different programming approach, getting away from track-talk-track-talk?

A: Yes, something imaginative, which also assesses the audience and an ear for how far you can go. The FM stations are different in that. There is enough intelligence in Australia to listen to other kinds of programming.

Q: I ask all this still within the framework of education, though in a much broader sense, also including the social 'conditioning' aspects. Is the media a true reflector of public taste?

A: The only answer I can give you on that is that I almost never listen to commercial radio, and to the ABC only when I know of a particular programme once or twice a week. I prefer to listen to my own record collection.