

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY: AUSTRALIA'S JAZZ COMMUNITY SOUNDS OFF

by Loretta Barnard*

[This article appeared on the internet on April 29, 2017 at this link <http://thebigsmoke.com.au/2017/04/29/international-jazz-day-australia-jazz-community-sounds-off/>.]



International Jazz Day is upon us, so let the expertise of the local jazz scene explain why you should care about not just the day, but the art of arts.



**Loretta Barnard is the daughter of the Australian jazz trumpeter Bob Barnard and mother of the jazz pianist Casey Golden. She is a freelance writer and editor who, in a long career, has done almost everything possible in the book publishing industry. She has edited *Jottings Of A Jazzman: Selected Writings Of Len Barnard* and co-authored a book with her father, *Bob Barnard's Jazz Scrapbook: A Pictorial Memoir*. These days she actively pursues her love of music, literature and theatre, and is something of a wannabe roving ambassador for the creative and performing arts.*

In 2011, UNESCO recognised jazz as a powerful messenger for peace, an international art form promoting freedom of expression and “intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding”, and instigated International Jazz Day, April 30, to celebrate the incredible diversity and expressiveness of jazz. Our Australian jazz musicians are world class, no question. Performers, composers, educators, they’re also messengers of jazz, so in the spirit of promoting peace and harmony, and to learn a bit more about why jazz matters, we approached ten leading Australian jazz artists to shed some light on this most creative musical genre. We began by asking:

What does jazz have to offer today’s listeners?

Gordon Rytmeister (drummer/music educator): Jazz is really like no other music in as much as what you’re hearing as a listener is real-time composition. At its best, that real-time composing, combined with a listening, interacting and swinging ensemble, generates a unique and profound feeling of excitement and freedom. That feeling is what jazz offers listeners today – but it also must be said that it always has!



Gordon Rytmeister: what you’re hearing as a listener is real-time composition...

Hannah James (bassist/composer): I think of all genres, jazz has the potential to offer listeners the most. It can embrace and blend all other genres; it can offer extremely high levels of musicianship and artistry; it can suit the concert hall as well as a pub or party; it offers an incredibly rich alternative to what can be a very bland mainstream.

Sean Foran (pianist/composer): Jazz is always changing and the scope of what it “is” and “sounds like” continues to grow. I think jazz offers listeners a real sense of energy and a true experience of music made in the moment, where you hear something special for that time only.



Rob Burke: jazz offers today’s listeners a concept of experimentation in improvisation...

Dr Robert Burke (saxophonist/composer/academic): Jazz offers today’s listeners a concept of experimentation in improvisation. More specifically, we learn about musical agency, choice and indeterminacy; informed by the history of jazz and what’s happening “now”.

Warwick Alder (trumpet player/music educator): Jazz offers the beauty of spontaneity and improvisation, a rare thing in modern music.



Warwick Alder: Jazz offers the beauty of spontaneity and improvisation, a rare thing in modern music...PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS

Shannon Barnett (trombonist/vocalist): Jazz is really an umbrella term. Because of its many and varied influences, there's really something for everyone. Luckily in Australia, it's possible to hear a lot of this variety at live concerts.



Shannon Barnett: Jazz is really an umbrella term...

Lawrie Thompson (drummer): Listeners of early jazz enjoy its familiar melodies, robust vocals, and a sense of “hot” execution that translates into youthful exuberance. The “middle period” – say from 1945 to the end of last century – is probably the most popular with listeners, because it offers accessibility and artist recognition that holds the attraction of even casual listeners. More contemporary innovative jazz offers listeners excellence in musical execution and an option to appreciate thoughtful unexplored directions in composition and creativity.



Lawrie Thompson: More contemporary innovative jazz offers listeners ... an option to appreciate thoughtful unexplored directions in composition and creativity...

Our next question:

What do you think the cultural impact of jazz is?

Sandy Evans (saxophonist/composer): In jazz, individuals harmoniously work together with others in a group to create something magical and uplifting. The uniqueness of everyone's character is celebrated, while a greater collective energy emerges. I'm indebted to African American people and all those around the world who've shared and developed this amazing art form. Special thanks to our many great Australian jazz legends. And I'm thrilled that the contribution of women to jazz is starting to be more widely recognised and look forward to seeing this grow exponentially in the future.



Sandy Evans: individuals harmoniously work together with others in a group to create something magical and uplifting...

Sean Foran: For me as an Australian contemporary improvising musician, I believe jazz has an impact on the musical culture of the place as it really highlights the energy, spontaneity and collaborative nature of improvised music. It blurs lines of style, draws in people from varying backgrounds, and can surface in a wide variety of venues – a true testament to the ability of the music to morph itself into changing situations, and continue to be relevant!



Sean Foran: jazz highlights the energy, spontaneity and collaborative nature of improvised music...

Warwick Alder: The cultural impact of jazz today is in the area of offering a more subtle and nuanced musical form of self-expression. I'd like to think that this subtlety, as compared with shallow, very unsubtle pop music, helps people improve their lives.



Hannah James: the cultural impact of jazz is more substantial in America than here in Australia...

Hannah James: I think the answer changes depending on where you are in the world. For example, the cultural impact of jazz is more substantial in America than here in Australia. In Australia, I think it functions as a niche subculture where its primary wider cultural influence stems from training musicians to a high enough level that they are then able to become more influential in other genres or areas of the arts or pursue careers overseas.

Robert Burke: Jazz in the twenty-first century is a cultural mirror of society, premised historically on a creative improvisatory pathway.



Rob Burke: jazz in the twenty-first century is a cultural mirror of society...

To round things off, we asked our jazz musicians maybe the hardest question:

Is there is an album or artist you never tire of hearing?

It's a pretty big ask, I'm sure you'll agree. Their choices are as revealing as they are diverse. If you haven't heard some of the artists cited, then your own jazz adventure can take off in new directions.

Kristin Berardi (singer): I love Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert* and Pat Metheny and Charlie Haden's *Under the Missouri Sky*.



Lawrie Thompson: Even after 60 years I still listen to Louis Armstrong's *Hot 5* and *Hot 7*; Jelly Roll Morton's *Red Hot Peppers*; Eddie Condon's *Coast to Coast*; Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown and Beige Suite*; Modern Jazz Quartet's *European Concert*; and everything by Miles Davis. I also enjoy being challenged by many contemporary artists.



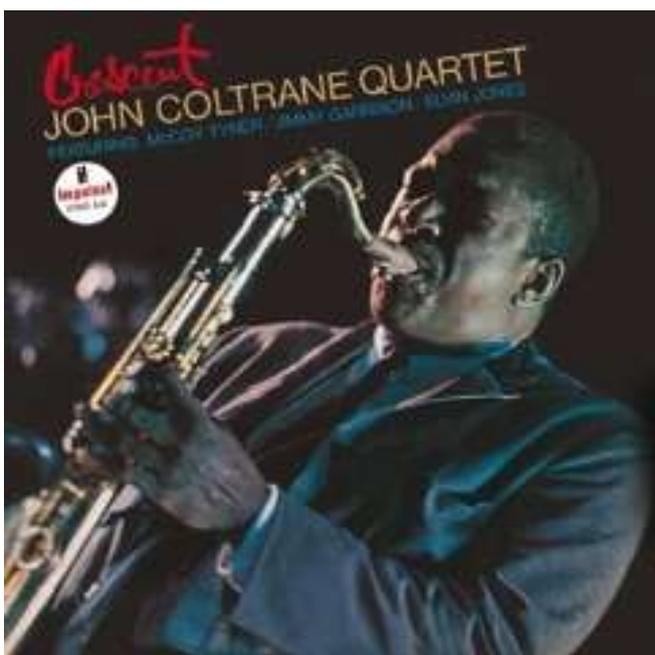
Everything by Miles Davis...

Sandy Evans: I never tire of John Coltrane. Listening to him always makes me love music more deeply, and connect with my instrument and the universe in deep and enjoyable ways.

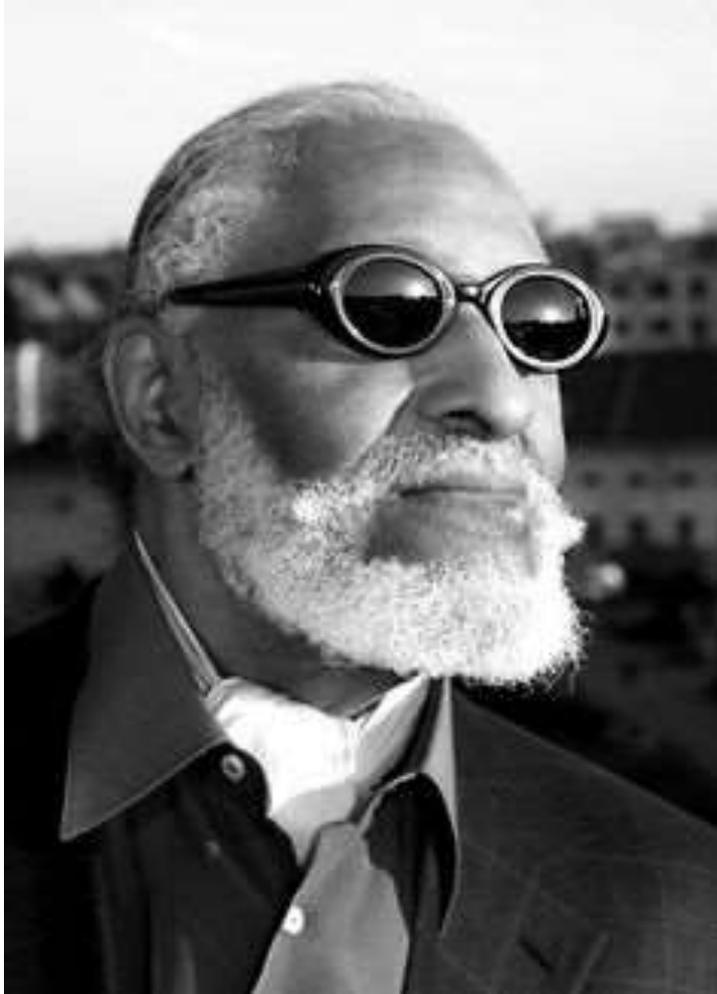


John Coltrane: listening to him always makes me love music more deeply... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Robert Burke: John Coltrane's *Crescent* is a particular favourite.



Warwick Alder: I still listen regularly to Sonny Rollins and Louis Armstrong. Have done for over 40 years.



Warwick Alder has been listening to Sonny Rollins (above) and Louis Armstrong (below) for over 40 years...



Shannon Barnett: Pianist and composer Carla Bley. For me, her compositions are a wonderful mix of humour and depth. She also brings out the best in the musicians who play in her bands.



Carla Bley: her compositions are a wonderful mix of humour and depth...

Gordon Rytmeister: The first time I heard Herbie Hancock live, his very first solo of the night had everything! It was beautiful, intense, building, dynamic, interesting, inventive, warm, colourful, daring, creative...just amazing! But there are many others. As a drummer, I never get sick of hearing Buddy Rich's absolute mastery and deep swing and intensity; and the late, great Tony Williams is always so fresh to listen to. And finally, Oscar Peterson: apart from the obvious virtuosity, just the complete and utter depth of his swinging groove keeps me happy.



The late, great Tony Williams is always so fresh to listen to... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

*Sandie White (singer): I love Peggy Lee and George Shearing's *Beauty and the Beat*; Carmen McRae's *Live at Dontes*; and Jacki Cain and Roy Kral's *Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most*. But there are many more too!*



*Sandie White (above) loves Peggy Lee and George Shearing's *Beauty and the Beat* (below)...*



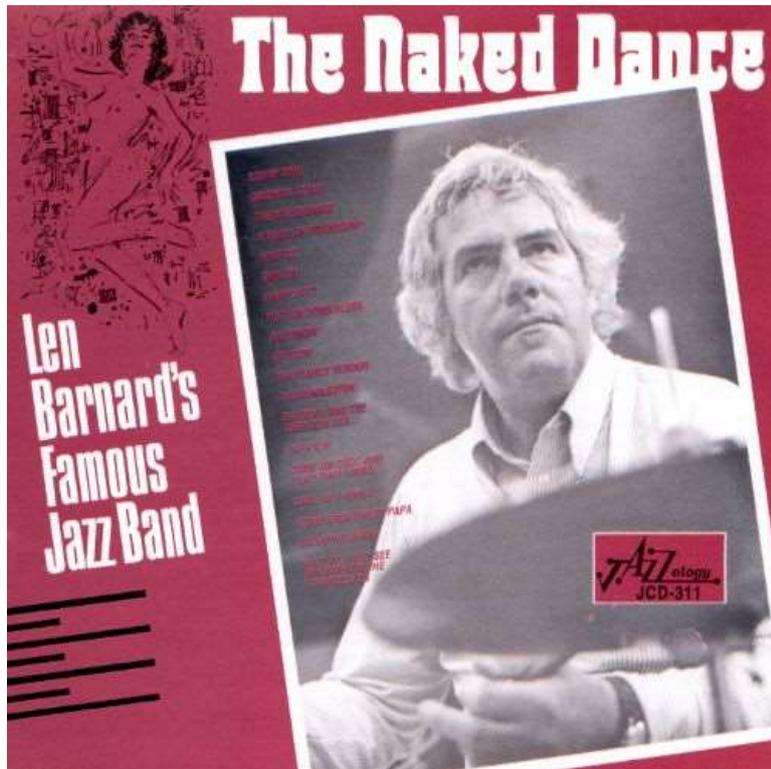
Sean Foran: Ahhh, too tricky, but I'll never tire of hearing Bill Evans. Such an incredible sense of melody and harmony.



Bill Evans: such an incredible sense of melody and harmony....

There you go – straight from the mouths of Australia's eminent jazz musicians. Why not embrace the creativity, excitement and imagination of jazz, a genre with

something for everyone – from the old to the new and plenty in between? You can find all our artists on YouTube, so make sure to check them out.



To kick things off, here are two clips, one from the iconic 1961 Australian jazz album, Len Barnard's *The Naked Dance*, featuring Bob Barnard on cornet (sorry about the nepotism), and a wistful piece from guitarist James Muller recorded in 2016.



A wistful piece from James Muller... PHOTO CREDIT PETER TEA

Happy International Jazz Day, everyone!