



**JazzChord, Jun/Jul 1997**

---

In the last *JazzChord* I mentioned that **Wynton Marsalis** received the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his work, *Blood on the Fields*. In the *Masterpiece* program, shown on SBS on April 21, 1997, this work was described by Andrea Stretton as an epic opera. I don't want to buy into the pro and anti-Marsalis arguments here, except to say that his music - where he primarily should be judged - has always seemed to me to be full of interest and beauty. I noticed that some people who disliked Marsalis still enjoyed the music presented by his band at his last concert



*Wynton Marsalis: Jazz music is like the light bulb, or the aeroplane - part of the marvellous boom of 20th Century invention that pushed humanity to a higher level... PHOTO CREDIT RAFA RIVAS*

in Sydney on March 2, 1994 at the Opera House. As far as Wynton's utterings are concerned, I believe he has said many things that are ill-thought-through. But any musician who puts himself forward as an ideologue and a theorist, as much as a performer, is liable to say things that one will agree with, as well as things one might dismiss. In the *Masterpiece* program Wynton said a number of interesting things that are food for thought, for example: "Jazz music is like the light bulb, or the aeroplane - part of the marvellous boom of 20th Century invention that pushed humanity to a higher level. Jazz is that in sound..." Or, how about this one? "Jazz is the musical poetry of democratic imperatives, or democratic conception. I don't use black or white anywhere in here; I'm trying to deal with something human." Or, consider the following, bearing in mind that Wynton is speaking off the cuff in the back of a limo: "Tragedy is a part of life. There is always tragedy unfolding around us. We're all part of it; pain is tied into perception. The weight of human suffering throughout all the ages bears down on our age. We're always looking for something that's going to help us make it through the day and night with some style... And that's what the early jazz music really has... And the blues means that, on top of all that communicating, our intent is to feel better when we get finished talking." One of the most interesting aspects of the *Masterpiece* program was the footage of Wynton's group rehearsing Jelly Roll Morton and Thelonious Monk compositions, and various



*An essential link between Jelly Roll Morton (above) and Thelonious Monk (below)...*



musicians talking about the essential link between Morton and Monk. There would be some Australian jazz educators who, I daresay, would not be emphasising this link, and would want to push the line that jazz really starts with bebop, when it first becomes an “art music”, developing the sort of harmonic complexity that one might find in classical music. That is, “serious” jazz starts with composers like Monk, but classic or traditional jazz, as epitomised by composers like Morton, is somewhat trivial. Some modernists reinforce this view by exhibiting a profound distaste for early jazz. I feel they’re missing something, and it’s no accident that some of them can’t stand Wynton Marsalis who, with his emphasis on the jazz tradition, actively contests this view. Just one further word on the failure of the Pulitzer Prize Board to award the Music Prize to Duke Ellington, which I mentioned in the last *JazzChord*: on viewing the *Masterpiece* program, I discovered that, in 1965, the Pulitzer Prize Jury actually recommended the awarding of the prize to Ellington, but the Pulitzer Prize Board refused to go along with the recommendation. Incredible? I’d love to know who was on that Board at the time. Does anyone out there know?



*The Pulitzer Prize Jury actually recommended the awarding of the prize to Duke Ellington in 1965, but the Pulitzer Prize Board refused to go along with the recommendation... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

\* Am I just being grumpy when I object to the relentless trivialisation of jazz in the media? To give an arbitrary example, the newspaper *The Australian* ran an obituary of the US trumpeter “**Doc**” **Cheatham** on June 6, 1997. It was syndicated from *The Times* and had no by-line. Cheatham was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on June 13, 1905, and had a career that almost spanned the entire history of recorded jazz. He died at the age of 91 in Washington on June 2, 1997. He was best-known in his later years for his regular Sunday afternoon “brunch” performance at Horst Liepolt’s New York jazz club Sweet Basil. Only the Saturday before his death, the obituary reads, “he played to an appreciative audience at the Blues Alley Club in Washington.” To all intents and purposes Cheatham was a dignified man, who kept alive the innovations of Louis Armstrong, and was influenced by other pre-bebop trumpeters such as Henry “Red” Allen. So, why did a clever sub-editor at *The Australian* head the obituary, “Jazz man kept on tootin”? There are examples of such trivialisation constantly in the newspapers. Readers of *JazzChord* are invited to send in the grossest examples; we’ll publish them here.



*Trumpeter “Doc” Cheatham: dead at the age of 91, his career almost spanned the entire history of recorded jazz...*

\* In the new entertainment supplement *Time Out* in the Sydney newspaper *The Sun-Herald*, there is a two-page section called *See it! Hear it! Do it!*, subtitled *The best of what’s on this week*. This featured some important jazz events during June, and is compiled by **Jane Hampson**. When I spoke to Jane recently about the jazz content of this section, she said that she received very little information from people in the jazz world, and that most of the jazz material she had published she had to solicit herself, by ringing up jazz organisations and venues such as The Basement. So, publicists and musicians in the jazz world need to service Jane with the material she

needs. She works up to a month ahead, and usually has her pages planned two weeks ahead, so don't ring or fax her the week before your event and expect her to simply publish your information. Of course, she will have material from other forms of entertainment and the arts and, at best, will only have room for two or three major jazz events. So, you will have to argue that your event is somewhat unusual or unique; just another normal gig will probably not get a run. If you can provide her with relevant colour transparencies this could be helpful. Jane Hampson can be contacted at tel (02) 9282 1857, fax (02) 9282 2151, and she is in the office at *The Sun-Herald* only from Mondays to Wednesdays inclusive.



*Commissioning Editor at ABC-TV Paul Grabowsky in 1990: as far as Express is concerned, it's as if the art form of jazz doesn't exist...*

\* When Melbourne's **Paul Grabowsky** was appointed Commissioning Editor at ABC-TV in late 1996, some people in the jazz world had high hopes that there would be a turnaround in the ABC's treatment of jazz on television. They had in mind, for example, the trivialisation of jazz that was par for the course in the old *Review* program, whenever there was the occasional jazz segment. They were hoping that Australian jazz would be treated on equal terms with, say, theatre, classical music and the visual arts in *Review*'s replacement program *Express*. Well, it hasn't happened. I think I've seen just about every *Express*; it's a very interesting program, and it's great that, if one misses it on Monday night, it's repeated the following Sunday afternoon. While there's been plenty of material on the visual arts, theatre and certain forms of music, however, I'm not aware of any specific jazz segment at all on *Express*, other than the occasional mention of it on the periphery of some other subject. As far as *Express* is concerned, it's as if the art form of jazz doesn't exist. Some things just don't change at ABC-TV.