

DisChords

A column by Jazz Co-ordinator
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In this day and age, most people in the jazz community expect jazz to be represented, as a matter of course, in the deliberations of organisations like the Australia Council. Yet, it's been suggested that the new **Music Fund of the Australia Council** may be constituted without a representative of jazz. When it was announced that the Australia Council was replacing its Performing Arts Board with three funds (Music, Theatre and Dance), most people thought that, with the increase of representatives of Australian music to seven, to make up the Music Fund, there would be at least one representative of jazz. After all, when there was a Music Board in the old Australia Council structure, there was usually a representative of jazz, and two names come to mind - Judy Bailey (NSW) and Sylvan 'Schmoe' Elhay (SA) - who served the jazz community, indeed the wider music community, with distinction in the 1980s.



Judy Bailey, who served the jazz community, indeed the wider music community, with distinction in the 1980s.... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY



Paul Grabowsky, pictured with his colleagues Gary Costello (centre) and Allan Browne (right), was chair of the Music Committee, and served on the Board during 1994, until he resigned in early 1995...

After the Music, Theatre and Dance Boards were amalgamated into the Performing Arts Board some years ago, there was a period when the Board included no jazz rep. This was the case until the advent of Paul Grabowsky, who, as chair of the Music Committee, served on the Board during 1994, until he resigned in early 1995. Paul was not replaced by anyone from the jazz community so, when Bruce Johnson and I saw the then Minister for the Arts Michael Lee on November 22, 1995, we raised this matter with him.



AC chair Hilary McPhee: she announced that appointments to the new Music Fund would after all be made, not by the Council, but by the new Minister Richard Alston.

Mr Lee said that appointments to the Performing Arts Board had been devolved to the Council. Accordingly, I wrote on February 5, 1996, to the General Manager of the Council, Michael Lynch, suggesting that Sylvan (Schmoe) Elhay (SA) and Peter Rechnlewski (NSW) be considered for membership of the Music Fund. Only when I attended the Australia Council briefing on April 15 did I discover, from Hilary McPhee's speech, that appointments to the new Music Fund would after all be made, not by the Council, but by the new Minister Richard Alston. On April 19, 1996, therefore, I wrote to Senator Alston, urging him to ensure that the new Music Fund was not constituted without a credible representative of the jazz community. "In fact, it would be an appalling omission if the new Music Fund was constituted without such a representative," I wrote. "All the figures we have on jazz activity in Australia - the size of the scene, the number of ensembles operating, the number of applications for assistance to the Australia Council from the jazz community, the size of the audience for live jazz performance, and so on - indicate that it would make no sense for the art form of jazz to be excluded from the Music Fund." On April 24 the chair of the National Jazz Alliance Bruce Johnson followed up my letter, formally nominating Schmoe Elhay for membership and enclosing Schmoe's CV. "It may be that the



Bruce Johnson, chair of the National Jazz Alliance formally nominated SA's Schmoe Elhay (pictured above) for membership of the new Music Fund, enclosing Schmoe's CV... OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ COURTESY SCHMOE

membership of the Fund has to fulfil geographical criteria,” Bruce wrote. “If our nomination of a person from South Australia is superseded by another nomination from that state, may I suggest that you or your advisers consult with the National Jazz Alliance? We would be prepared to nominate others who would have the confidence of the Australian jazz community should they be invited to serve on the Music Fund.” There is no doubt that omission from the Music Fund would be a substantial slap in the face for Australian jazz. Would anyone seriously consider establishing such a committee without a representative of classical music? But classical music, which is no more important in Australian music than jazz, is included as a matter of course, while jazz is often thoughtlessly ignored. Such an omission would mean that music policy discussions, and discussions of the merits of applicants from the jazz community for financial assistance, would take place without the benefit of knowledge and expertise on jazz at the Fund level. It would be intolerable.



Bruce Johnson, pictured here on trumpet: he suggested that Senator Alston or his advisers should consult with the National Jazz Alliance... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

* Speaking of the Australia Council, the rule that an application for assistance can be made **only once a year** - either May 15 or November 15 - may work to a particular artist's disadvantage. Consider the following conundrum. The saxophonist Bernie McGann put in an application to the Australia Council (AC) on November 15, 1995, for assistance for his trio to go to the US in August, 1996, to perform at the prestigious Chicago Jazz Festival and elsewhere. This application was to be assessed by the then Music Committee of the Performing Arts Board, which met from February 27-March 1, 1996. Meanwhile, David Sacks, Executive Director of the Jazz Institute of Chicago needed to know by a deadline of February 20 if the Trio was definitely coming. If we couldn't guarantee that Bernie's group was coming, he



Bernie McGann: wanting to perform at the prestigious Chicago Jazz Festival and elsewhere in August, 1996... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ REAL BOOK

wanted to fill immediately the spots on the festival being saved for the group. We couldn't say whether or not the AC would fund the application, so David suggested that the invitation to Bernie could be postponed to the 1997 festival. It was therefore decided to withdraw the Trio's application to the AC. Now, fast forward to May 15, 1996. Could the November 15, 1995 application be re-cycled for May 15, 1996, so that the application would be assessed in plenty of time for 1997? 'No' was the answer from one of the performing arts program officers; you have to use the new application form. Should Bernie therefore go to the trouble of putting in the application on May 15, 1996 on the new form? After all, for a festival in August, 1997, it's far too early to secure the additional engagements which the AC would require in order to fund the application. In fact, it would be unlikely for such an itinerary to be available even in September/October, 1996, when the AC would be doing its assessments - US jazz venues simply do not book that far ahead. But, if the application went in on November 15, 1996, that would replicate the 1996 situation in 1997: Chicago would be asking if the Bernie McGann Trio was coming, in advance of the AC decision. Also, what about other applications that Bernie McGann might be wanting to make for 1997? Recording projects, touring projects, etc? If an application went in on May 15, Bernie would then be excluded from the November 15 round. But it's too early, in May 1996, for Bernie to be devising 1997 projects; he may be thinking of them in 'big picture' terms, but it's too early for him to have such projects planned and budgeted. The answer from the program officer: put the application in on November 15, 1996, and seek a 'quick-response' (see page 19 of the new *Australia Council 1996 Grants Handbook*, in the 'Quick response and out-of-time applications' section). Great news! Still, a nagging question remains. Is it likely that a 'quick-response' application will succeed? My instincts tell me that it will be difficult to get such an application up. Will this turn out to be a lose-lose situation for the McGann Trio? I feel that, in all of this, it's possible to lose sight of the main game: the importance of a leading Australian jazz ensemble making an inroad into the remarkably closed US market.

* It's great to see that musicians in Sydney are rebelling against **playing in smoke-filled venues**, and want smoking banned at all concerts in NSW. On April 14, 1996, an article appeared in the Sydney *Sun-Herald*, which drew attention to the Musicians Union's recent resolution, that the Union "support the health concerns of its members in their exposure to tobacco smoke in their workplaces". Sydney pianist & composer Mark Isaacs, who moved the motion said: "By talking to various health agencies, I had uncovered data indicating that Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) was a workplace hazard comparable to asbestos on a building site, and that workers in the hospitality industry generally were one of the last remaining groups not provided with a smoke-free workplace. I also found out that the NSW State



Pianist Mark Isaacs (above) and singer Monica Trapaga (below): appearing at a smoke-free concert at The Basement in Sydney during QUIT Week... ISAACS PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY



government had recently convened a Passive Smoking Taskforce to examine this issue with a view to recommending to the Health Minister on possible legislation outlawing smoking in indoor public places. Legislation was seen to be the way to go, as it provided a level playing field, removing any disadvantages that might be suffered by individual venues self-imposing a ban." Mark and his trio will perform in a smoke-free concert at The Basement in Sydney on June 9, 1996, during QUIT Week, along with Monica Trapaga, George Golla and Kerrie Biddell.