

## JANUARY JAZZ JIGSAW

by Eric Myers

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*[The following two articles appeared in the February 1980 edition of Encore Magazine]*



Andrew L Urban...

**Encore editor Andrew L Urban writes:** *During 12 days in January, 1980, there were no less than 17 major jazz concerts, featuring several hundred musicians, who came from Australia, New Zealand, England and America. Nearly 20,000 people attended these concerts, paying a total of approximately \$170,000 for tickets to see and hear a jazz jigsaw put together by groups as diverse as Bob Barnard's band and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The jigsaw fitted together in a remarkable fashion: on the one hand, Horst Liepolt produced an 11-day festival under the auspices of the Festival of Sydney, coinciding with the Peter Korda/Peter Brendlé festival on strictly commercial lines.*

*The sheer variety of jazz idioms, styles, philosophies and concepts was staggering. This was a remarkable opportunity for musicians and the public to sample jazz as living music. The exposure to so much of today's jazz, performed by some of the most respected creators and players, no doubt pleased, offended, excited or bored the listeners in varying degrees. There is no question, however, that it demonstrated a surprisingly large audience prepared to spend money on live jazz.*

*The purists will fume for weeks over some of the music, the innovators will have gained inspiration, and debates will rage over who did what and why. But essentially the two festivals were successful - and they will both be held again next year.*



*Competing jazz festivals staged by Horst Liepolt (above, with US trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie) and Peter Brendlé (below, also with Dizzy Gillespie)...*



*To record, document and assess all this music, Encore commissioned Eric Myers to report on both festivals, as he sees fit. His comments are, as always, his own personal views, bearing the weight of his experience as a professional musician, arranger, and feature writer. Needless to say, it was physically impossible to*

*attend every concert, (nor would we have had space for a full review of them all) in view of the festivals overlapping during the week of January 14 to 19.*

*The Sydney International Music Festival also brought to Australia for the first time the celebrated jazz critic (and musician), Leonard Feather. As one of the sponsors of that Festival, The Australian published reviews by Feather on the concerts at The Regent.*



*Jazz critic Leonard Feather: brought to Australia for the first time by the Sydney International Music Festival... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

*Leonard Feather has written an Encyclopaedia of Jazz, his columns are syndicated world-wide to some 350 publications, is a regular contributor to Contemporary Keyboard, and also has to his credit a number of songs. Encore has commissioned him to write a special article for our [April] edition, giving his impressions of the Australian jazz scene as he saw it during his stay here in Sydney. Some of his comments, in the context of his reviews in The Australian, have already caused controversy among jazz buffs. It is certain that his Encore article will be revealing: the views of a man in his position, whether one thinks they are right or not, are significant to any assessment of the current standard of Australian jazz performance.*

*Eric Myers has joined the ranks of daily press critics, accepting the job of jazz critic for the Sydney Morning Herald. He took over from Jill Sykes on Feb 1, 1980, and will be writing two or three pieces a week in an expanded Arts section of the SMH, under new arts editor Richard Coleman. Eric will continue as Encore's senior music contributor. And now, over to Eric, on the "January Jazz Jigsaw".*

## MIDDLE OF THE ROAD JAZZ PACKS THEM IN

by Eric Myers

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The Sydney International Music Festival was overladen with commercial values. The American musicians, with the exception of Toshiko Akiyoshi and Lew Tabackin, were openly promoted as the great popularisers of jazz, who were able to reach a wider audience than the minority of jazz buffs. Still, it afforded an opportunity for over 100 Australian jazz musicians to appear and, with the festival being filmed, and the presence of the distinguished US jazz writer Leonard Feather, there was the feeling that this was indeed a rare event.

The proceedings were opened by the Young Northside Big Band, fresh from their recent triumph at the Monterey Jazz Festival in the US. They began with *Quiet Breaker*, the title track of their album on 44 Records. Unlike the Daly-Wilson Big Band, which has shown the influence of electric rock and popular music, the Young Northside has shown a reversion back to older values. Its playing is supremely relaxed, in the Basie mould, without the killer instinct and high energy of Daly-Wilson. The interesting thing about this band is that, despite the extraordinary musical talent which comprises the band, very few of the players intend to play music professionally — most are headed for other professions.



*The Young Northside Big Band, conducted by John Speight: in the saxophone section are Trevor Griffin (third from the right) and Paul Millard (second from the right)...*

Kerrie Biddell and her group Compared To What followed the Young Northside Big Band. Kerrie Biddell presents something of a problem to the reviewer. Leonard Feather gave her singing qualified praise in *The Australian* but wrote that "her

handicap is the disconcertingly flip, pseudo-hip personality she displays between numbers".

**Artistry:** I believe Kerrie Biddell to be a magnificent singer, and her artistry is particularly well-suited to the songs of Stevie Wonder, two of which she performed — *Superwoman* and *Saturn*. In her powerful version of the latter, she brought the song to an end with an inspiring and soaring crescendo. She is also a brilliant exponent of the "wordless vocal" as it is now called, in unison with saxophonist Graham Jesse. To hear such great music, I am cheerfully prepared to ignore Kerrie's much-criticised patter between numbers. Unfortunately, the habit of jiving the individual members of the band, deflating the audience, and making ironic quips can work only if the audience can understand the irony. Did Kerrie misjudge her audience?



*Kerrie Biddell performing in the festival, January, 1980... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

Still, other Australian groups shared this general approach with Kerrie Biddell. Australians tend to take their talent lightly, and approach these big occasions with self-effacing and self-deprecating humour, as if they are opposed to the pretension of major concerts, as if they believe that the occasion, the audience, the film crew, themselves, and the other artists need to be deflated. This approach was taken, not only by Kerrie Biddell, but by Galapagos Duck and Ricky May on later nights.

The Dave Brubeck Quartet had no such troubles. Led by a smiling Brubeck, the quartet consisted of Butch Miles (drums) who was in Sydney recently with the Count

Basie band, Jerry Bergonzi (tenor saxophone) and Chris Brubeck (bass & trombone). They gave out the feeling that playing was, for them, a great joy.



*Dave Brubeck: a percussive approach which produced crashing, two-handed chords and tremendous crescendos... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

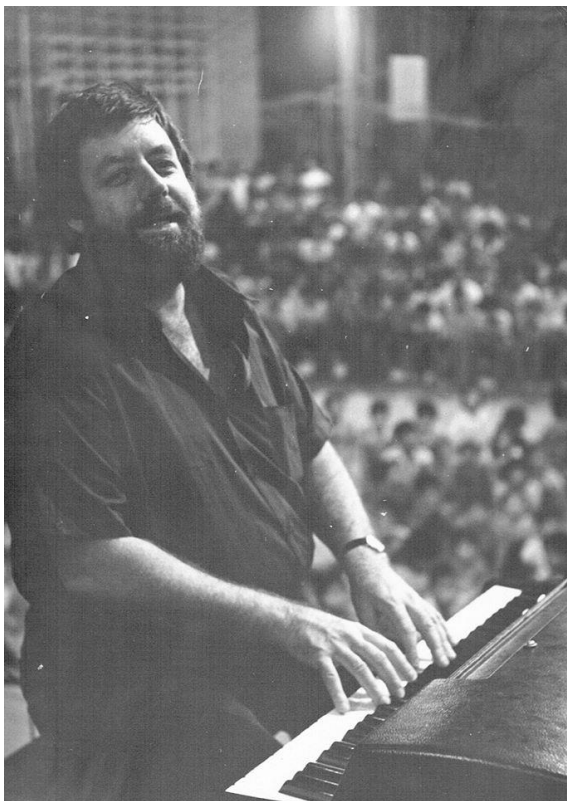
**Put on a show:** The audience had come to hear Brubeck and, as one of the first jazz musicians to turn modern jazz into a saleable commodity on a large scale, he really put on a show. In *Brother, Can You Spare A Dime*, he stated the melody simply on piano, stated it again in fugue-style, after Bach, before commencing in tempo. During his solo he freely borrowed from jazz history, breaking into stride piano at one stage, and inserting phrases from other standard tunes. Later in the concert, his trademarks were evident: a percussive approach which produced crashing, two-handed chords and tremendous crescendos, and a propensity for polyrhythms, playing in four against the rhythm section's three, and vice versa.

No one can ever accuse Brubeck of being able to swing in the usual jazz sense — his approach is a little too urgent and iconoclastic in an apparent search for dissonance. Still, he has not lost his uncanny ability to comp behind the saxophone solos. This was one of the delightful features of his great partnership with the now-deceased alto player Paul Desmond. In *Like Someone In Love* (which was standard repertoire for the old Brubeck Quartet) Brubeck's pungent chords at the end of the saxophone phrases were marvellous to hear again.

The second night of the Festival was opened by the Bob Barnard Jazz Band. This great band is merely the tip of the iceberg of the Australian traditional jazz movement, which still flourishes strongly today. They appeared in grey safari suits and were filmed by the ubiquitous film crew which glided around the stage. Musically, they felt the pressure of the occasion and Bob Barnard, uncharacteristically, had a hard night on the trumpet. Also, there were sound problems. On some occasions, the bass and piano were uncomfortably loud; at other times the sound was unbalanced, with the clarinet down and the trombone too far up. Still, a band as good as this one never really plays badly. The following week, as part of the other Festival at the Seymour Centre, they had a much better time.

**Vintage performance:** Galapagos Duck, who would probably seriously rival Don Burrows as the most popular jazz attraction in the country, gave a vintage performance. They are self-declared practitioners of jazz as entertainment, and I don't suppose any jazz purist takes their music seriously. Still, their music is inspired by warm and whimsical feelings, and everyone in the group plays with fire, and is determined to swing.

The real delight of the group was pianist Col Nolan, whose talents suit the Duck. In one memorable solo spot, he played *The More I See You* as a ballad, using the funky, blues-oriented licks which are a feature of his playing, then took off in four, playing the solo of the night. It swung so much that, on the last chord, Nolan played a huge tremolo and, on the cut of the chord, bounced back onto the piano stool, which shattered!



*Col Nolan: on the cut of the chord, he bounced back onto the piano stool, which shattered... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

To the extent that Galapagos Duck's music can be categorized, it would have to be called "mainstream". They play mostly standard tunes and blues in the straight-ahead, swinging, quasi-bebop style that has become a feature of Australian jazz, play funky jazz/rock feels, utilising popular songs and, of course, their multi-instrumental skill is impressive. Their last two numbers — *Mack The Knife* and Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely?* — moved into the hot style of traditional jazz, illustrating again the group's ability to borrow from various areas of jazz.

The Thursday concert was opened by Crossfire, featuring two new players, Dave Ellis (bass) and Tony Buchanan (saxophones and flute). The great merit of Crossfire's music is that, although it is related to various genres of contemporary music, it never feels derivative. In fact, their music is often a whimsical commentary on other types of music and is, to a great extent, satirical. They play with reverence and originality.



*Saxophonist Tony Buchanan of Crossfire: their music never feels derivative...*  
PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER

The second tune in their program, called *Away in D Major* was written by Mick Kenny, who stated the gospel-type theme richly, if gently, on acoustic piano. Then the rhythm section took the music into a funky rock feel. At that stage, the guitar and tenor saxophone entered, playing an absurd melody in unison over the rock feel. This absurdity was presented with deadpan seriousness, a quality which has always characterised Crossfire.

Their third and concluding number *Roll The Ivory Dice*, written by Jim Kelly, was also distinguished by this type of absurdity. It was a happy, Latin-oriented tune which missed a beat — it was in the time signature of 7/4. Again, this was an



interesting idea which challenged the audience's cognisance of that type of sound. Crossfire's music continues to grow and keep listeners on their toes.

Ricky May and Friends were on the same bill with Crossfire. Ricky May is one of those much-loved Australian performers whose great talents have never been amply rewarded. Perhaps his appearance at this Festival, with a nine-piece band of top Sydney musicians, might have been a turning-point. The band comprised David Glyde, Col Loughnan (woodwinds), Keith Stirling (trumpet), Herb Cannon (trombone), Ray Forster, Jamie Rigg (keyboards), Dieter Vogt (bass), Steve Murphy (guitar) and Willie Qua (drums).



*Ricky May: a self-destructive propensity to deflate the occasion, in his inimitable style... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

**Lack of rehearsal:** The front-line section work was superb but this array of musical talent could not disguise certain evidence of under-preparation or lack of rehearsal. Furthermore, Ricky May himself suffered from a self-destructive propensity to deflate the occasion, in his inimitable style which, rather than being a reaction when things are against him, seems to have become an end in itself.

Ten years ago on the Gold Coast, Ricky May had a band called The Chaos at the Surfers Paradise Hotel. Brilliantly unpredictable, Ricky and the band would wend their way through various songs that came to mind, modulating into different keys at will, with Ricky continually working off the audience with his quick wit and generous personality. As spontaneous entertainment, it was magical and unparalleled. It was this kind of magic that Ricky May was seeking at the Regent but, to many people, it appeared not to work. In musical terms, there were some mysterious goofs, including an uncomfortable version of *As Time Goes By* in which the set tempo was too fast for the vocal line.

Still, on the positive side, there was an opportunity to hear Ricky May's own lovely song *Snow*, which was beautifully arranged and sung, and there were some stunning solos by Loughnan, Glyde and Stirling. Ricky closed with his famous version of *West Side Story*, in which he scats the whole score, mostly accompanied by drums only, and it drew an enormous response from the capacity audience.



*Ricky May in performance with some of the musicians who were with him at the Sydney International Music Festival gig, including saxophonists, L-R, David Glyde & Col Loughnan, trumpeter Keith Stirling & trombonist Herbie Cannon. On the far left is guitarist Steve Murphy... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

Herbie Mann's Family of Mann consisted of himself on flute, a vocalist (Linda Sharrock), a percussionist, bassist and drummer. Much of their music utilised the technique of wordless vocal in unison with flute. Their use of it was highly musical, and the group played gently, with many passages where the rhythm section whispered.

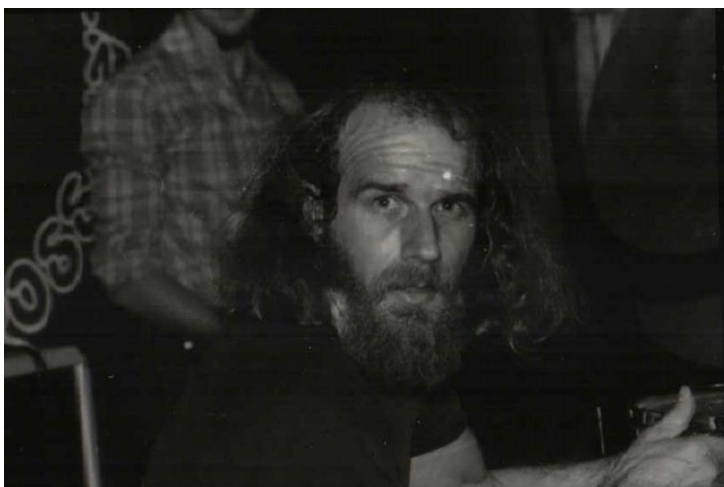
**Changing tonality:** The absence of a keyboard or guitar player in Herbie Mann's group meant that the soloists were afforded a great amount of freedom and could change the tonality at will without the restriction of chords. On the other hand, I felt that, because of this, the music tended to sound empty and one-dimensional. There



*American flautist Herbie Mann: a repetitious quality about the music which caused drowsiness in the audience... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

is no doubt that Mann is a lovely stylist on flute, but there was a repetitious quality about the music which caused drowsiness in the audience.

The Friday concert was opened by the American Howie Smith, who appeared with Roger Frampton (piano), Phil Treloar (drums) – two members of the original Jazz Co-Op – and Clive Harrison (acoustic bass). This group was another whose music was strongly criticised by Leonard Feather, who in my view, illustrated that “music criticism” can be subjective and unfair. As I heard it, Jazz Co-Op's music was brilliantly executed, although there was a suggestion that the quartet never really warmed up. Even though he does not have the fire of a Dave Liebman or the originality of a Bernie McGann, Howie Smith's saxophone playing is lyrical, inventive and swinging.



*Phil Treloar: his drumming was described by Leonard Feather as "insensitive, heavy-handed, and unswinging"...*

Phil Treloar, whose drumming was described by Feather as "insensitive, heavy-handed, and unswinging", played sensitively in my view, although he was not concerned to exhibit the sharp precision which characterises American drummers. Also, I'm surprised that Feather, who also was highly critical of Howie Smith and Clive Harrison, did not mention the piano playing of Roger Frampton.



*Roger Frampton: he always produces rich and unique music...*

Frampton is not one of those self-effacing musicians who merely goes through the motions in a concert situation. He is at his best playing in live performance and showed again what we often forget — that he can really play the piano; and always produces rich and unique music.



*The Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band, snapped in Sydney in January, 1980: Sydney musicians in the saxophone section, L-R, are Col Loughnan, Lee Hutchings, Errol Buddle and Dave Rutledge. Behind are, L-R, Herbie Cannon (trombone), Dick Montz (trumpet), Bob McIvor (trombone), John Hoffman (trumpet) and Dave Panichi (trombone)... PHOTO COURTESY DAVE PANICHI*

The Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band was warmly received by all, and deservedly so. The band was comprised of leading Sydney studio/jazz musicians, most of whom have been noted for their wide experience in many areas of music. It was no surprise to me that the band sounded so good, but it was odd to hear Toshiko and Leonard Feather express their astonishment that Sydney should produce so many fine players. What did they expect? Some years ago, Frank Sinatra remarked that he classed Sydney with London and New York, as the three cities in the world where he could be confident of assembling a superb big band.

**Relaxed Big Band:** The interesting thing about the Toshiko band was the predominance of straight-ahead, swinging music in three or four. There were few hints of the jazz/rock ethos and the experiments in complex time signatures which have influenced the recent bands of people like Don Ellis and Bill Watrous. Instead, Toshiko Akiyoshi seemed to be reverting back to the relaxed big band music of the fifties and sixties, although her voicings for the reeds in particular, and the colours she used in her writing, were often strikingly original. Her writing was most interesting when she drew from her own cultural heritage, as in the Japanese-influenced *Kogun*.



*Lew Tabackin: he provided a unique visual dimension to his playing, by continually readjusting his stance at the front microphone, and cocking his leg with excitement... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

Lew Tabackin, a vigorous flute and tenor saxophone player, provided a unique visual dimension to his playing, by continually readjusting his stance at the front microphone, cocking his leg with excitement, and breathing so loudly that a great deal of urgency was added to his playing, which was fluently reminiscent of many of the tenor saxophone greats.

Les McCann, whose quintet closed the concert, is now into the kind of music best described as "blues/funk". As such, it disappointed a number of people who are familiar with his records of some years ago. I found it difficult to cope with his funk

version of the jazz classic *Walkin'*, and his rock version of the lovely Billy Joel song *Just The Way You Are* burned along with a heavy eight feel that seemed to lack reverence for the original.



*Les McCann: an exponent of funk music for the middle-of-the-road audience...*

Still, Les McCann has chosen to become an exponent of funk music for the middle-of-the-road audience, and he was not unappreciated at the Regent. Moreover, his forte is as a rhythm player, and one would be hard put to suggest a more rocking electric pianist. He rarely played solos himself and left the soloing to the other members of his quintet, particularly Bobby Bryant on tenor saxophone and Steve Erquiaga on guitar. The music was repetitious, but that seems to be no handicap in popular music today.

## **HORST LIEPOLT'S MUSICAL COUP**

**by Eric Myers**

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**W**hat is known as "free jazz" was pioneered in the US in the late fifties by Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, and subsequent waves of disciples, for more than 20 years, have driven the music into extreme latitudes. The black musicians who have led this movement have seen improvised music as an attempt to recapture jazz for themselves, by purging the black aesthetic of the restrictions placed on it by Western harmony, melody and rhythm. While this music could be heard only in lofts and basements for many years in the US, it has attracted a steadily-growing audience, so that now it can be regarded as a permanent and legitimate part of the jazz scene, with its influence increasingly felt in less avant-garde jazz. However, this kind of music has rarely been heard in Australia.

**Foresight:** Last year jazz producer Horst Liepolt brought out Mike Nock, David Liebman, David Friesen and Chico Freeman for the 1979 Festival of Sydney, thus giving Sydney the chance to hear contemporary jazz as it was then being played in New York. In 1980 he has been able to go a step further and present the Art

Ensemble of Chicago, perhaps the most accomplished and virtuosic of the "free jazz" groups. Liepolt's foresight was vindicated by three stunning, sell-out concerts at the Seymour Centre, all of which drew standing ovations.



*Members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

The York Theatre of the Seymour Centre was a good choice for the Sydney International Jazz Festival. Lushly carpeted, with the stage projected out into the audience, it is a warm venue for the performing arts, with an intimacy which transcends the older theatres. Sound problems have plagued this Festival in past years, and this year they were not entirely ironed out. Near the stage it was often hard to hear the acoustic piano; the sound may well have been designed for a good balance at the back of the amphitheatre. However, there were enough sound problems, particularly with the Australian groups, to indicate that attention needs to be devoted to this aspect of the performances in future years.



*The Art Ensemble's Malachi Favors... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

The Art Ensemble of Chicago gave three performances during the Festival, and their music differed on each occasion. Their first concert was entirely unamplified, unlike the later concerts. It began with an exploration of percussion and rhythm, with the various sounds of gongs, mallets, congas and the blowing of conch shells, wood flutes etc. It suggested traditional African music or certain pre-jazz forms of ethnic black music.

**Compelling passage:** It became evident that the music played by this group is firmly rooted in the traditions of African American jazz. One had the feeling that they were capable of borrowing freely from jazz history, able at will to suggest any form of jazz and reconstitute it into a startling new shape. One of their most compelling passages was played at the opening of their second concert. Here, against a breathy riff played in unison by saxophonists Joseph Jarman and Roscoe Mitchell in a medium walking tempo, trumpeter Lester Bowie, using the harmon mute, played a powerful solo which was entirely reminiscent of the modal playing of Miles Davis in the late fifties.



*Lester Bowie (above), using the harmon mute, played a powerful solo which was reminiscent of the modal playing of Miles Davis in the late fifties... PHOTO COURTESY PETER SMETANA*

On other occasions Bowie was able to freely suggest traditional jazz as it was played in New Orleans in the 1920s, the ballad style of pretty trumpet playing associated with players like Bunny Berigan, the free improvisatory style of Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy, and the melancholy sound of the blues. At a later concert, over the top of a Latin-oriented rhythm, he played at one stage what can only be described as mariachi music. Dressed in a doctor's white overcoat, Bowie provided elephant blurts, growls and sniggers, and short staccato passages which were often humorous.



The three horn players were able, at will, to drop into unison, bebop-style themes, played at a furious pace, which suggested the spirit of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Structurally, the music was completely improvised, as it moved in and out of various long sections or states of consciousness, as one reviewer noted. The music was propelled along by continual suggestion of musical ideas. By what method the ideas were taken up and developed, remains a mystery. But there were moments of rare beauty, not to be missed.

**Free ensembles:** The great question mark hanging over this music concerns the long, free ensemble passages in which the saxophonists repeat a circular pattern at great speed, while Malachi Favors (bass) and Don Moye (drums) maintain a continuous sound. Lester Bowie blares over the top on trumpet. Usually this results in a huge crescendo at double fortissimo. Too many of these passages however, can become hard on the ears.

These free ensemble passages generally break into swinging sections in four. Or, they can go into lyrical passages where two flutes might be accompanied by arco bass or, as in the last concert, break into an R & B-type section, reminiscent of rock 'n' roll players like Fats Domino. Invariably the end of these passages drew applause from the Seymour Centre audience but it's possible that applause came out of relief rather than out of appreciation.

Of course many in the audience were weaned on the bland music that has always been popular in our society. To their ears, free improvised music will sound strange, perhaps ugly. Some who felt threatened and offended by this music took a stand and left. The great majority, no doubt sensing the profundity, the absurdity and the energy of the music, were determined to stick through it all, and were ultimately rewarded.



*Shrewd programmer Horst Liepolt (right) pictured here with pianist Serge Ermoll in the 1970s... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ DOWN UNDER*

**Australian groups:** Shrewd programming by Horst Liepolt saw the Art Ensemble supported by three Australian bands from the exploratory, experimental end of Australian jazz: the Bruce Cale, Bernie McGann, and Serge Ermoll Quartets. The Bruce Cale Quartet featured the leader on acoustic bass, with John Conley (guitar), Dale Barlow (reeds & flute) and John Pochée (drums).

Bruce Cale's music, which is serious, cerebral, and unique in this country, needs to be heard with the sound well-balanced, as on his excellent LP for 44 Records, *Bruce Cale Quartet at the Opera House*. John Conley would probably be surprised to know that, at this festival performance, his guitar was set too high in volume, and was continually intrusive on the sound of Bruce Cale and Dale Barlow. Still, the audience quickly picked up the fact that Cale himself was the player to listen to, and it was his superb, singing bass solos which gave direction to the music.



The Australian group which supported the Art Ensemble's second concert was the Bernie McGann Quartet, with McGann on alto saxophone, Bob Gebert (piano), Ray Martin (acoustic bass) and Alan Turnbull (drums). They gave a superb exhibition of hard-swinging jazz, much of it straight ahead in four, reminiscent of bebop. I say reminiscent only, for to describe their music merely as bebop would not do it full justice.

**Neglected genius:** Much writing on Australian jazz in past years has pictured Bernie McGann as a misunderstood and neglected genius of the alto saxophone, playing music that only the hard-core cultists could tolerate. It was therefore a revelation to discover that, at least for this concert, Bernie McGann played music that is much closer to the middle-of-the-road than one would suspect from previous publicity.

The Quartet played a short programme of hard jazz tunes, including some originals, in the Ornette Coleman-Eric Dolphy-Thelonious Monk area, and McGann explored the changes with a rare authority and musical inventiveness. His alto playing was technically fluent and enormously spirited; above all, he reminded us that jazz can swing.

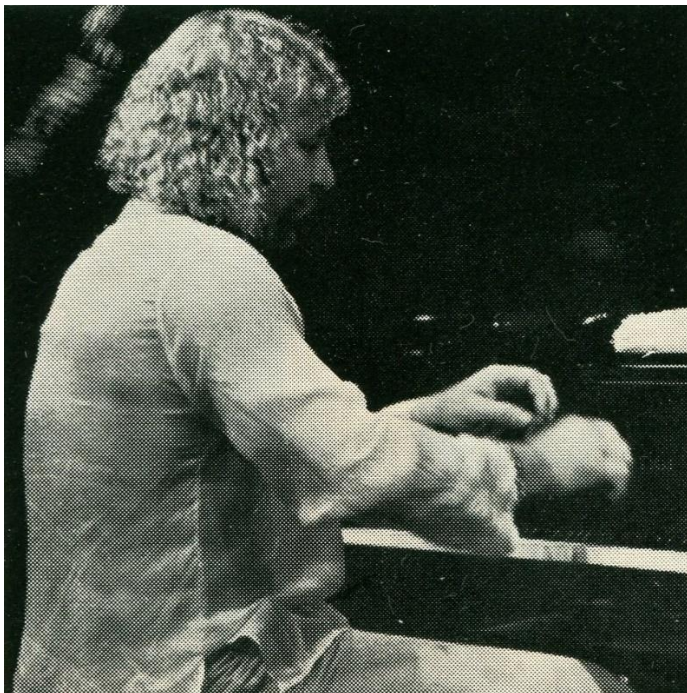
The Bernie McGann Quartet really should play more concerts. They play the type of serious, intense jazz which is enhanced by the sense of occasion of the concert arena. Their music will stimulate listeners who are looking for more than comfortably familiar jazz, yet it is not so avant-garde that it will offend conservatives who like mainstream jazz. One wonders if Leonard Feather, while he was in Sydney, was able to hear McGann.



*Alto saxophonist Bernie McGann: he explored the changes with a rare authority and musical inventiveness... PHOTO COURTESY BODGIE DADA & THE CULT OF COOL*

The Serge Ermoll Quartet supported the Art Ensemble's third concert, performing a free jazz suite entitled *Rearmament*. The group comprised Ermoll (acoustic piano), Mark Simmons (tenor saxophone), John Conley (electric bass) and Barry Woods (drums). Of the jazz played in Australia, their music, along with that of Sydney's Jon Rose and Melbourne's Brian Brown, would probably be closest to the American free jazz typified by the Art Ensemble.

It is certainly worthwhile for Australian groups to present free jazz or collective improvisation. Yet, I assume that any performing artist who appears before an audience, wishes to communicate, and cannot enjoy people standing up and unceremoniously leaving while the performance is in progress. This concert suggested that the Ermoll Quartet suffers from an inability to communicate.



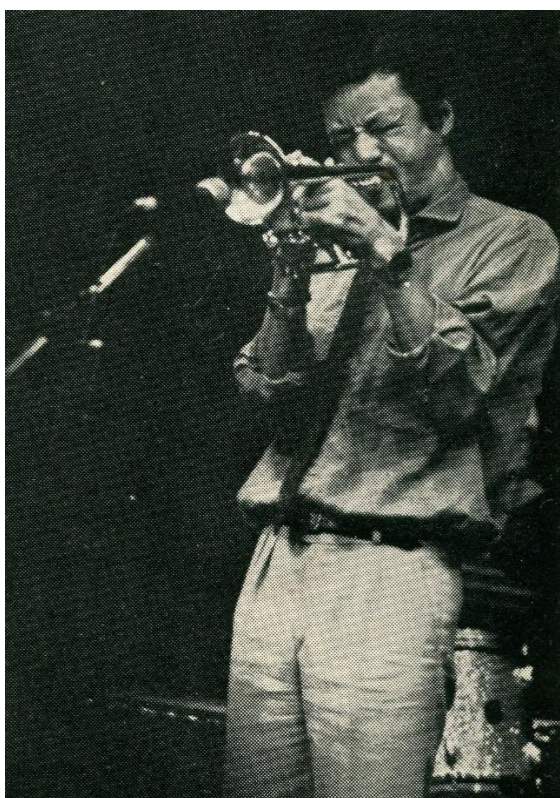
*Sydney pianist Serge Ermoll: his music a good deal less accessible than that played by the Art Ensemble...*

**Less accessible:** Some light can perhaps be thrown on the nature of their music by comparing it in some respects with that of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The Art Ensemble showed a willingness to leave the sound open in many sections of their music, to bring the volume down to the gentlest whisper, to provide musical signposts which served to relate the music to the listener, and to provide precious moments of real beauty and lyricism. On all these counts, the Serge Ermoll Quartet was deficient. Their failure to provide gentle, melodic dimensions to counteract their aggressive, full-bodied sound and long solos suggested a certain self-indulgence, which made their music a good deal less accessible than that played by the Art Ensemble.

The David Liebman Quintet appeared on Sunday, January 20. It featured on cornet Terumasa Hino, a fiery and exciting player who was a pleasure to hear. Their music was characterised by solid themes for saxophone and cornet, richly voiced against the

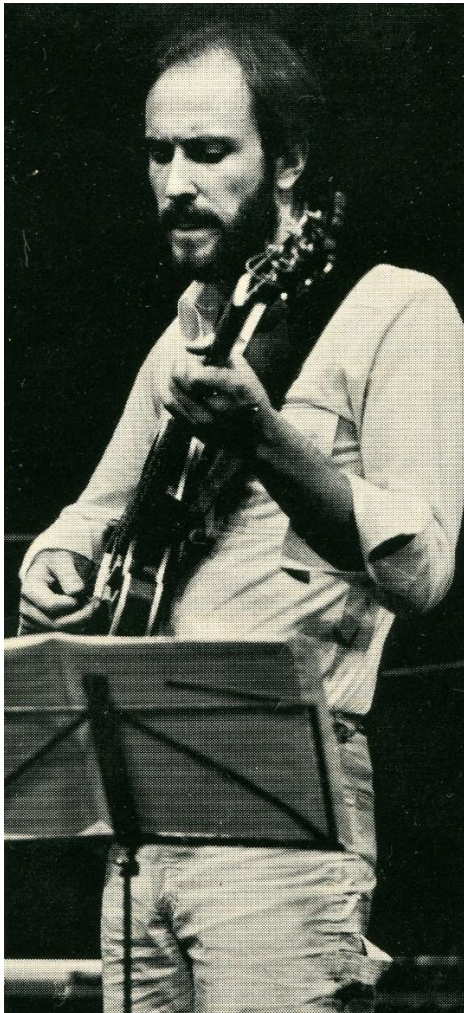


*American David Liebman (above) on soprano sax. His quintet featured Japanese cornetist Terumasa Hino (below), a fiery and exciting player who was a pleasure to hear... PHOTO CREDITS WALLY GLOVER*



electric guitar, with the rhythm section playing freely, understating the time. Once the improvisations started, one noticed the level of intensity which these players favoured. This was apparently contemporary jazz as it is being played today in New York, and we welcome the opportunity to hear it. But I was struck by the contrast between this type of music —heavily based on technical fluency and high energy — and the type of music played by the Art Ensemble and, later in the week, the Abdullah Ibrahim Quintet — music based more on understated, warm feelings.

**Technical brilliance:** I had a similar feeling the following night, at the Guitar In Jazz concert, which featured the American jazz teachers Steve Erquiaga and John Scofield, who played the second half of the concert on two unaccompanied electric guitars. Their music was a serious exploration of the essential repertoire of modern jazz. Their performance suggested that they were not so much artists in their own right (although the technical brilliance of their playing was astonishing) as students of the great African American musicians whose music they interpret.



*American guitarist John Scofield: playing jazz classics written in past years by great African American musicians... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

Although they played some original contemporary material, the bulk of their program comprised John Coltrane's *Mr PC*, George Cables' *Think On Me*, Thelonious

Monk's *Monk's Mood* and Sonny Rollins' *Oleo* — all jazz classics written in past years by great black musicians.

The more I listened to these two extraordinary young American players, who make their living, not only as performers but as educators in the colleges and conservatories, I was struck by the great irony that we are sitting breathless at the feet of white players who are essentially derivative. While they are performing and teaching us the music, the great originals of African American jazz are rarely heard in this country. These players present the literature of African American jazz, and they perform the music at a high-energy level which is often draining on the listener, while enabling them to display their prodigious techniques. It is at this cold level — brilliant technique and high energy — that these white players prefer to approach the music, and I feel there is a substantial difference between their music and the warmer black jazz which inspires them.

**Meditative mood:** The two concerts played by the Abdullah Ibrahim Quintet were in contrast. The dominant mood was a meditative, ruminative one as the group passed through an amalgam of musical styles: Latin-rock pieces voiced for the horns, suggesting happy African folk-melodies; laid-back gospel themes which were stated sparsely on piano and then played with reverence by Carlos Ward (reeds & flute) and Craig Harris (trombone); long sections of solo piano which were alternately exploratory, peaceful and dissonant, suggesting the influence of Monk and Ellington.



*Members of the Abdullah Ibrahim Quintet, L-R, Ibrahim, Carlos Ward, Craig Harris... PHOTO CREDIT WALLY GLOVER*

Abdullah Ibrahim (previously known as Dollar Brand) appeared just as comfortable on the soprano saxophone as on the piano. Also, against a continuous bass figure, he contributed a wordless vocal which was not so much a song as a meditative North African improvised wail. During the first concert he played wood flute, humming in unison with his own melody, providing a fascinating exhibition of individual polyphonic playing.

Carlos Ward proved to be an outstanding soloist on the reed instruments, at times recalling the tone of Johnny Hodges on alto saxophone, at other times playing with the savagery of the avant-garde. On flute, his music was lyrical and beautiful. Craig Harris on trombone provided a different kind of appeal. His playing seemed to be unconcerned with conventional fluency and technique, yet his solos were continually exciting; his percussive and aggressive style was an admirable foil for Carlos Ward.



*Abdullah Ibrahim: an attention to dynamics from a whisper to thunderous exclamation... PHOTO CREDIT GRANT SMITH COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE*

**Attention to dynamics:** The music played by these five men from the US (Abdullah Ibrahim is now based in New York) was distinguished by an attention to dynamics from a whisper to thunderous exclamation, a reverent commitment to their music, a simple reliance on relaxed feeling and expression, and seemingly little awareness of any need to display brilliant technique. Because of these things, their music was meditative and hypnotic.

Lack of space precludes me from commenting on the various fine Australian groups who appeared at the Festival: the Keith Stirling Quartet, Don Andrews & Friends, Bob Barnard's Jazz Band, Marty Mooney's Mainstreamers, the Errol Buddle Quintet, the Judy Bailey Quintet, Dick Hughes, the Graeme Bell All Stars, Mike Hallam's Hot Six and others. Some of these groups were unfairly criticised in the daily press by reviewers who seemed unaware of the history and state of Australian jazz.

The jazz presented at the Sydney International Jazz Festival was certainly more diverse and stimulating than the more commercial music presented at the rival Music Festival at the Regent Theatre. No doubt the latter made money for its promoters and sponsors, but the jazz programs provided by Horst Liepolt at the Seymour Centre will probably do much more, in the long run, for Australian music.