

JUDY BAILEY'S ANOTHER JOURNEY: MUSIC FOR SYMPHONY AND JAZZ ORCHESTRAS

Reviewed by Eric Myers

Various orchestras and jazz bands, recorded live over the years 1995 to 2015. Large unlisted assemblies of musicians.

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Judy Bailey's extraordinary album *Another Journey*, requires a number of complicated shifts in perspective for the unsuspecting jazz critic.

Firstly, there is a lot of music on two CDs: four works for jazz ensemble and symphony orchestra: *Two Minds, One Music* (three movements); *Another Journey* (three movements); *Out of the Wilderness* (three movements); and *Unity* (one movement); plus three works for large jazz ensemble (known in jazz as the big band): *Contrasts, Catapult and Conversations*. The four symphonic works take one hour 53 minutes, and the big band tracks 24 minutes. In total, two hours and 17 minutes of music. A thesis would be required to analyse all of this comprehensively.

Secondly, I am by no means an expert on "third stream" music, the conventional term for experiments in combining jazz with classical music. The big names in this genre have been John Lewis, Charles Mingus, Leonard Bernstein and Gunther

Schuller. I am dimly aware of their past works, but their music is of only marginal interest today.

Having said that, I believe that, from the evidence of *Another Journey*, there still remains much to be explored in this rather alluring genre. Judy Bailey has entered an arena where, on the one hand, angels fear to tread but, on the other, there appear to be limitless possibilities.

Let's start with a few general observations. The composer's agenda here is particularly important, if not crucial, and Judy Bailey has provided helpful liner notes. She clearly articulates her aims, which give the listener conceptual frameworks within which to appreciate the music. In many ways, her declarations are more valuable to the potential listener than anything that might be said by a critic.

A notable feature of the album throughout is the brilliance of the writing. I have no doubt that this is the result of Judy Bailey's lifetime of writing for large ensembles, constantly contemplating what combinations of instruments are likely to produce the richest sounds. Her compositional techniques have been honed and road-tested through vast experience.



Judy Bailey at the piano: her compositional techniques have been honed and road-tested through vast experience...

Contrasts

With such an array of instruments and colours available in the symphony orchestra and the large jazz ensemble, the composer is confronted throughout with a myriad of choices in the writing process. Many examples of Bailey's such choices could be given but here I note a simple example in the big band composition *Contrasts*. All the band playing here is notated. The piece has only one soloist, Judy Bailey herself. As this is the only track on the album where Judy Bailey is at the piano, it is worth spending some time on it. It is solid testimony to her artistry at the keyboard. It begins with a rubato solo piano introduction. The music goes into tempo in slow four (with a gentle eight feel) and the trombone section on several occasions answers the piano lines. At one point, in one short eight-bar passage, Judy replaces the trombone section with the saxophone section to provide the answering phrase. This choice provides a distinct, pleasing contrast between the trombones and saxophones. A small thing admittedly, but the rich sound of the saxophones jumps out at the listener. I tender this as one example of scores of clever choices made by the composer throughout the album.

Bailey returns to the trombone section for a similar eight-bar phrase, before the band drops out entirely. Bailey then plays an unaccompanied 16-bar piano solo in a moderately slow tempo. Her angular lines and attack at the keyboard suggest a thorough internalization of the insights of Thelonious Monk. Note in particular her cadenza at the end of this piece, where the sense of fun in the music is contagious. This is the kind of fun that Duke Ellington himself found addictive. I sense that, during this live performance, Judy Bailey experiences a similar feeling.

In the other two big band tracks, *Catapult* and *Conversations*, Bailey is conducting, and is not at the piano. In the symphonic works of course she is even further away from the action – a spectator only, neither playing nor conducting.



Judy Bailey with some performers on Another Journey...

Catapult

Catapult, the second work for big band, is a brisk, flagwaving composition taken at breakneck speed. Its theme is one that Charlie Parker might have applauded. It includes exciting, full-blooded solos from Evan Harris (soprano saxophone) and Yutaro Okuda (guitar). I mention the names of these two musicians with the qualification that, owing to the long period over which these recordings were made – some 20 years – it has not been possible to identify most of the soloists throughout the album, although educated guesses are possible in some cases.

Conversations

The third work for big band, *Conversations*, is the most challenging of the three. On first hearing I wrote rather flippantly in my notes “a whimsical exploration of everything”. Here the composer can speak for herself: “This is a work inspired by the concept ‘Music is Language and Language is Music’”, she writes. The musicians respond to appropriate text and the result is “an instrumental, written dialogue between the sections of the band, leading eventually to a series of improvised ‘conversations’ involving ‘paired’ soloists throughout the entire band, and supported with written accompaniment.”



Bailey: the four works for jazz ensemble and symphony orchestra, which dominate the album, provide most interest...

The three works for big band are impressive but, of course, the four works for jazz ensemble and symphony orchestra, which dominate the album, provide most interest.

Two Minds, One Music

In the case of *Two Minds, One Music*, (three movements over 53 minutes, the longest work on the album) Bailey declares that it “seeks to sustain development of a simple 3-note motif (heard with the entry of the French horn in the 1st movement).” This obvious organising principle unifies the whole work. Bailey says that this work “attempts to trace, in miniature form, the growth of African American folk music, spawned from the coupling of African tribal rhythms and European classical harmony – and that’s JAZZ!” So, to some extent, it’s a treatment of various stylistic developments in the history of jazz. It’s an ambitious ask.

After a fiery introduction from the drums, meant to represent African music, the first part of the first movement is notable for the interaction between the French horns and the strings. A lyrical theme, including the unifying three-note motif is stated by solo French horn, accompanied by soft sustained notes from the strings. This lovely melody has an ambience reminiscent of sections of Dvorak’s *New World Symphony*. The 3-note motif is then strongly articulated by the string section, before the French horn re-enters. As the movement proceeds the accompanying strings become more rhapsodic and interaction with the French horn more complicated. Variety is achieved in many ways, for example by using the trombone section with the French horn melody on top, and also the French horn section. At a key point, a startling high trumpet phrase is played rubato at the top of the trumpet’s range. The late Dick Montz, onetime Director of Jazz Studies at the Sydney Conservatorium, is playing here. His contribution is no more than a short cameo, over sustained notes from the orchestra, but it adds lustre to the music.



The late Dick Montz: a startling phrase played rubato at the top of the trumpet’s range...

Shortly after there is a 12-bar burst of New Orleans-style jazz, a reminder that this sort of traditional jazz is, for many people, the sound of jazz, and has a revered place in its history. In performance this style is normally improvised by jazz musicians. It is interesting to note that here this section is fully scored, but so cleverly written that it sounds genuinely improvised.

Shortly after there is a bright theme in four, before the entry of a slow – but swinging – theme in four, which is every bit as effective as big band classics from the swing era such as Count Basie's *Lil Darlin'*. This is not a bridging section, but a composition in itself. It features a superbly well-played alto saxophone solo. A short Latin theme, reminiscent of Dizzy Gillespie's famous bebop piece *Manteca*, follows, until at a certain point the music breaks into a medium tempo four feel.



Bailey's short Latin theme is reminiscent of the piece Manteca, made famous by Dizzy Gillespie (pictured here)...

The latter is a good example of one of the most pleasing aspects of this album: Judy Bailey's natural affinity with the straight-ahead swinging feel in four, an aspect of the music often marginalized in contemporary jazz, but which is prominent throughout *Another Journey*. If jazz is about tension and release, then the tension that might arise through classical conventions is often released in Bailey's music simply by bursting out of the classical mode into a swinging four tempo. Certainly this can lift the listener's spirit, particularly if a soloist is improvising over a rich bed of sustained notes from the strings, a signature sound that recurs throughout this album.

After a thoroughgoing treatment of a swinging jazz interlude in four, strong chords are sounded by the whole band, juxtaposed with a short burst from the symphony orchestra, and the movement ends with full-blooded commotion once again from the drummer, before the movement ends with recapitulation of the three-note motif from the French horn.



The cover of Judy's LP My Favourite Things from 1965...

The second movement of *Two Minds, One Music* is notable mostly for the writing for strings. It begins with a written passage for the double bass section, then passages are played by the cellos, followed by the violas, then the violins. A sense of real menace is created by the basses, before the entry of a vigorous improvised bass solo, brilliantly played (probably this is the Canberra bassist Mike Majkowski). There are



A vigorous improvised bass solo is brilliantly played, probably by the bassist Mike Majkowski (pictured here)...

two highlights in this movement: a beautifully written, ethereal theme for the whole orchestra in the unusual time signature of 11/8, which builds to a magnificent climax;

and a slow piece in 5/4 towards the end of the movement, over which one of the loveliest solos on the album is played on flugelhorn. The use of these time signatures reflects the Dave Brubeck era of the late 50s and early 60s, when such innovations revolutionised the music. The orchestral writing here in both sections is stunning, in my view among the major achievements of the album.



Dave Brubeck, circa 1960: Judy's use of 11/8 and 5/4 time signatures reflect the era when his innovations revolutionised the music...

Before going on to the third movement of *Two Minds, One Music*, I refer to a conversation with Judy Bailey about the composer's general mode of working. One can note how complicated this is for the reviewer. Judy has said that passages played by classical musicians here are generally written, while passages played by jazz musicians are generally improvised. However, there are times throughout the various compositions when the classical players, even if they do not improvise in the way that jazz musicians do, are nonetheless accorded considerable freedom as well. They may have, from time to time, a written phrase which they are free to play in whichever way they choose (without articulation instructions such as staccato or legato). Sometimes the tempo of a passage can vary depending on the whim of the player. Or, in the passages which sound like free improvisation, the classical players might be given a note to commence on, and a finishing note. Between those two notes they can play what they wish.

A reviewer cannot be categorical about this mode of operation because of the obvious diversity of approaches that are possible throughout the various pieces, and given

also the large number of musicians available. To complicate matters, it is also apparent that Bailey has strong ideas as to the final musical product and, in many instances, writes out passages which are designed to sound like improvisation to the casual listener. Bailey has that freedom available to her, and I believe that, from time to time, she exercises it.

However, what appears to be truly innovative occurs in the third movement of *Two Minds, One Music*. Here the conductor is given the opportunity to improvise. He or she is free to bring in certain players at will, and therefore has to exercise judgment as to when it is best to do so. Can the conductor of a symphony orchestra who may or may not have experience of jazz or improvisation, handle this sort of flexibility? It's an extraordinary thought. But, from the evidence of the music here, it appears to have worked.



A young Judy Bailey, pictured during the El Rocco era in the early 1960s... PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDY BAILEY

In the third movement of *Two Minds, One Music*, Judy Bailey gives so-called “free jazz” a comprehensive workout. It begins once again with the 3-note motif mentioned above. There is a tension-building interlude for the violins, taken at breakneck speed, establishing a sense of urgency, before the sudden emergence of a vigorous boppish straight-ahead jazz tune in four, of about 32 bars in length. This is

immediately deconstructed, with a sequence of massive chords at double fortissimo, which decrease in volume, out of tempo, until the section ends. What follows is a series of short unaccompanied solo statements from various instruments – soprano sax, flute, trombone, oboe, tuba, piccolo etc – the typical sound of “free jazz”. Presumably this is constructed by the conductor’s selecting individual players and inviting them to contribute. Eventually there are several instruments playing at once, accompanied by punctuations from the percussionists. The music builds up in complexity, and the conventional rules underpinning four key areas of music – rhythm, harmony, melody and structure – are dispensed with. After some momentary mayhem, a vigorous written jazz theme in four commences, but while the rhythm section continues in tempo the music quickly morphs into collective improvisation with many instruments contributing at once. At a certain point, every instrument available is playing and increasing in volume. Here is a faithful representation, warts and all, of “free jazz”.

This is highly entertaining. I think that Judy Bailey chooses to close this work, which is the signature work on the album, with this particular genre because for many it is still the sound of the avant-garde (even though such sounds have been around since the 1960s). Certainly it is the one genre that affords jazz musicians the most freedom to play whatever they wish, and here it is expertly represented. The care, and attention to detail, with which Judy Bailey’s “free jazz” is put together testifies to her skill as a composer and arranger.



Bailey at the piano: in the third movement of Two Minds, One Music, Judy Bailey gives so-called “free jazz” a comprehensive workout... PHOTO COURTESY OF JUDY BAILEY

Unity

Unity is the second-longest track of symphony orchestra/jazz ensemble on the album: a little over 29 minutes. Bailey describes this as “a new mixed-genre work featuring players in an integrated formal music setting, while at the same time,

providing scope for individual creative expression. Conceptually, the basis for the composition rests entirely with the practice of ‘tuning’ – establishing a musically pitched point of reference in order to produce harmonic unity.”

Much of this work consists of various instruments being brought in by the conductor either to play written notes or to improvise. There is little straight-ahead jazz here; the work is rather a comprehensive treatment of multiple sounds. About a third of the piece is taken up by the ruminative sounds of many solo instruments – usually unaccompanied – contributing in turn, where the organising principle appears to be the extraordinary variety of sounds that emanate from a whole range of musical instruments. At least that’s how it sounds to the listener, even if there is a declared esoteric *modus operandi*. I suspect that Judy Bailey, like many jazz composers, is concerned to comprehensively survey the enormous variety of sounds available.

About a third of the way through, the drums enter, and a gentle rock feel ensues, with a fine tenor solo. After the sounding of several sharp chords at fortissimo some truly gorgeous orchestral writing is presented. Here the music is very moving, with the sort of harmonic progressions, full of depth, hope and optimism, that one might find being played at the end of an emotionally moving film. Then a lovely waltz is played – testimony once again to Bailey’s melodic sensibility – over which a beautiful jazz solo is played on flugelhorn. To my mind this is jazz at its best. A little later the music goes again into a relaxed swinging four with several solos, including one on double bass (possibly played by the eminent Craig Scott).



Bassist Craig Scott (left) pictured here with Judy Bailey: it is likely that Scott is featured in the composition Unity...

Connecting these sections with the end of the piece is an extensive section of writing for the strings, over a period of about two minutes, which is a fascinating tour de force. Then, after a flute introduction, accompanied gently by other instruments,

there is a final ballad-like section in slow 4. The music here is thoughtful and ruminative, with a certain melancholia and a hint of dissonance. It provides a very beautiful prelude to what can only be described as a fierce ending, which commences with the startling re-entry of a theme by the trumpets. A concluding passage with a rock feel then features a passionate soprano sax solo over the top (likely to have been played by Col Loughnan), before a turbulent, fierce ending.



Judy Bailey conducting her group The Jazz Connection...

Another Journey

Another Journey, just under 17 minutes, is described by the composer as a “musical travel experience”, inspired by “a variety of musical and global influences.”

The first movement (Middle Eastern) which lopes along with a gentle 16 rock feel, is mainly notable for the interaction between the jazz orchestral passages and the strings. Two full-blooded, impressive jazz solos are played on baritone saxophone and guitar.

To represent European music in the second movement, Judy Bailey composes a stirring ballad, the most exquisitely lyrical piece on the album. It includes a lovely piano solo. Backed only by a bassist and drummer, such a piano solo can sound merely decorative. The difference here is the lush orchestral bed of strings under the piano sound, which amplifies the strong element of romanticism in Bailey’s music. It is so consummate that, on first hearing I thought the pianist could only have been Judy herself, but I later discovered that the soloist here is the outstanding young pianist Harry Sutherland.

The third movement (Afro American) is once again notable mostly for the use of strings in relation to the jazz passages. An exuberant, full-blooded percussive jazz



A lovely solo in Another Journey from this outstanding young pianist Harry Sutherland (pictured here)...

theme is the basis of the track. It is juxtaposed on two occasions with eight-bar rhapsodic interludes played unaccompanied by the strings, out of tempo. After various improvised solos, usually played over a bed of sustained notes from the strings, Bailey returns to the head of the tune. Note once again the composer's clever choice. This time she replaces the previous rhapsodic strings interludes with written bebop-style interludes played brilliantly in tempo by the violins, accompanied now by the rhythm section. Touché. The sound of classical string players articulating such literate jazz lines is refreshing, underlining the jazz sensibility which informs the music.

Out of the Wilderness

All the symphonic works on the album are played by the Sydney Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, with the exception of *Out of the Wilderness*, which is beautifully played by the Sydney Conservatorium High School Orchestra. This is a relatively short work in three movements, taking a little less than 14 minutes. It is the most "symphonic" work on the album and, to my ears, the most moving work here. I suspect also that it is the most personal work on the album for the composer. Note that there is no jazz ensemble here, instead just "improvising soloists". Here can be found the richest example of Bailey's orchestral writing.

Once again Judy Bailey's liner notes are an essential guide.

The first movement *Searching* "is allegorical", writes Bailey, "in the sense that the music attempts to reflect and define the various exploratory and developmental aspects contained within the young person's search for identity." The biting dissonance in this movement, particularly amplified by menacing passages played by the double basses, creates an aura of dread which reminds me very much of Shostakovich.

The second movement *Discovery* “brings with it a gradual blossoming of the young person’s personality and a growing awareness of their place in the world around them.” Once again the writing for strings is arresting. Certainly, during this movement there are times when one thinks – as one does in the case of composers like Mahler – what has the composer been through, to inspire her to write such gravely moving music? This movement includes one of the rare improvised solos in the work, on baritone saxophone.

The third movement *Celebration*, brimming with bright optimism, features a strong Latin-type rhythm in four. According to Bailey, it “reflects the joy that may be experienced by the young person with the realization that many obstacles have been overcome and life deserves to be embraced.” A somewhat raucous brass theme with vigorous percussion accompaniment underlines the positive message here. Note, once again, the writing for strings near the conclusion of this piece. When it ends, there is a stunned silence, before applause erupts from the live audience.

Conclusion

One of the notable characteristics of this music is that it was recorded over many years, often by orchestras which included promising students, who were either studying at the time at the Sydney Conservatorium or perhaps were discovered through Judy’s activities as an educator, particularly with her long-standing suburban big band project, The Jazz Connection. It is worth noting that, peppered throughout the two CDs, a number of fine young jazz musicians are playing who have become major names in the music since these recordings were made. They include Simon Sweeney (trumpet), Jeremy Rose (saxophones), and Dane LaBoyrie



Trumpeter Dane LaBoyrie: one of a number of fine young jazz musicians playing here who have become major names since these recordings were made...

(trumpet). Also, it is a fact that some faculty members from the Sydney Conservatorium participated in some of these performances. Particularly in *Unity*, it is likely that leading professionals such as Col Loughnan (saxophones), and Craig Scott (double bass) are featured. Such musicians may not be formally listed on the album cover but they are certainly present on this album from time to time, underlining the fact that excellent solos are a distinctive aspect of the album.

Everyone knows how difficult it is to capture the true sound of the symphony orchestra on record. The live sound in the concert hall is always so much lighter, so much more musical, and with better separation of sound than on a CD. On one's small speakers at home the strings in particular can sound unusually strident. Considering the armory of instruments that had to be recorded here, the sound of the symphony orchestras on *Another Journey* is creditably acceptable.



Judy Bailey: Another Journey feels like the crowning achievement of a lifetime in jazz...

In conclusion, one has to admire Judy Bailey's music here. So much intelligent thought has gone into this music over many years, and I strongly believe that these compositions are a real work of the imagination. *Another Journey* feels to me like the crowning achievement of a lifetime in jazz.

For further information on *Another Journey*, go to the website <http://www.judybailey.com.au>.