

## KEITH JARRETT MOVES IN TOP GEAR

by Eric Myers

---

*[This was the only interview in Australia given by the American Keith Jarrett on his Australian tour in March, 1982. This article appeared in early editions of The Sydney Morning Herald on Wednesday, March 10, 1982 but, by the time the morning edition of the paper hit the streets, it had been replaced on the Arts page by a theatre review from H G Kippax.]*



*Keith Jarrett: he spends much of his performance crouched beneath the keyboard of the piano, emitting groans of ecstasy...*

**K**eith Jarrett, the 36-year-old piano virtuoso, does not have an orthodox repertoire. He improvises his music from the first note, so that what is produced is a totally spontaneous creation. Apparently in a trance, he spends much of his performance crouched beneath the keyboard of the piano, emitting groans of ecstasy.

Those who attended his performance last night at the Sydney Opera House might well ask: did we hear a piano recital, or witness a profound spiritual experience?

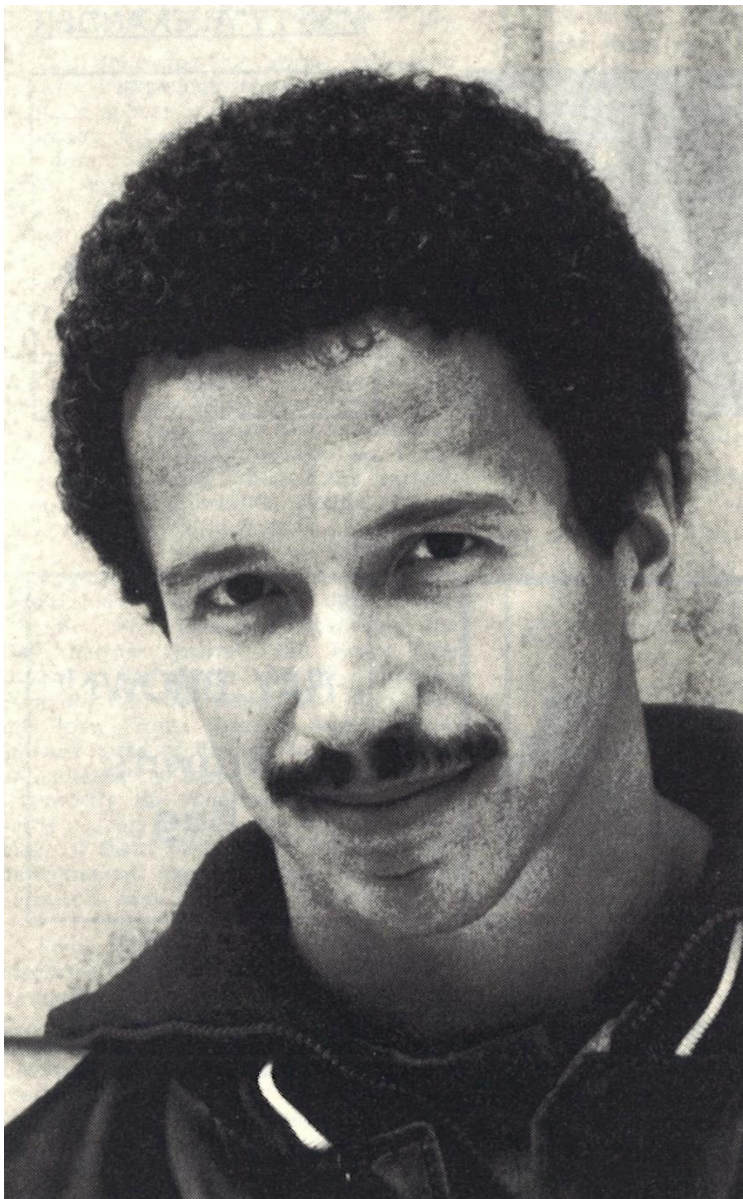
Jarrett himself states categorically that his music comes from a higher source. "Or, you could call it a lower source," he says, enjoying the paradox. "Put it this way, it doesn't come out of my head. I'm not quick enough. There are billions of decisions to

make in each concert, and I don't think a human being, all alone without any help, is capable of sitting there and doing it.

"What is important is that there are other energies that are subtler than mine. They've told me everything I needed to know so far. I have trust in them, so it turns into faith, it turns into what someone would call religious experience."

The creative process which Jarrett employs in performance leads him into a state of unusual relaxation and vulnerability, so that something as apparently trivial as a nervous cough in the audience can bring his highly strung performance to a dead stop.

"A nervous cough is not only irritating, it's murder," he says. "In fact, the best thing for the music would be just to walk off."



*Jarrett: a petulant and testy performer, who has been known to lecture his audience for inattention...PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE*

Jarrett is a petulant and testy performer. He has been known to lecture his audience for inattention, and to stop playing until the piano is tuned to his standards. Latecomers are not admitted to his concerts until the interval, and photographers are absolutely forbidden. Still, he has never failed to complete a concert.

"I'm a professional musician. I haven't been able to shake that fact, that it's a responsibility to complete a concert. Whenever I shake that, I won't get hired," he says, again with a laugh. "That would be perfect justice for me, I guess. I wouldn't have to worry about nervous coughs anymore."



Face to face, Keith Jarrett is shorter than he appears on the concert stage. A wiry man, with bandy legs, he appears nervous and edgy. He hates interviews and gives them rarely. He is notorious for lecturing writers on the futility of words, and the uselessness of their questions.

At this interview - the only one he will give in Australia — he is co-operative, although he has a chronic habit of reacting negatively to a question, and turning it back on the questioner. "How do you feel after a concert — drained?" you ask. "How long after?" he retorts.

Jarrett frames his answers tortuously. Pedantically, he double-checks his own words for hidden entendres and semantic ambiguities. He laughs often, particularly at the verbal puzzles in his convoluted answers. It is hard to work out if it is a nervous laugh, or a hysterical one.

Still, his laughs punctuate the whole dialogue. It is easy to laugh with him. Despite his serious and intense views on music, he has the subversive sense of humour one finds in jazz musicians. The arrogance which is said to be his major quality is, at least in this encounter, dissipated by his impish wit.

Jarrett is reluctant to search for explanations of his music. Take the *Sun Bear Concerts*, his monumental set of ten LPs, the sum total of five concerts recorded live in Japan in 1976. (This sells for \$89.90). Even the pianist himself does not claim to understand the extraordinary music he produced at that time.



"Before The *Sun Bear Concerts* were released, I was convinced how important the recordings were. So far, they haven't even been reviewed properly, because of the amount of music there. I still haven't grasped half the things on them. The importance of it -- whatever that is — certainly won't be realised for years."

In a conversation lasting over an hour, he comes back often to one of his key concepts: spontaneity. It underpins his being. "I don't think there is anything but spontaneity," he says. "Spontaneity at its deepest is the only kind of life there is. Everything else is preparing for something that won't happen."