

RICHARD OCHALSKI'S STRAIGHT AHEAD: BRILLIANT HARD-BOP

by Eric Myers

Richard Ochalski's Straight Ahead
The Basement, Monday nights in February
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Mainstream jazz was first identified in the early fifties*. It was a style based on consolidating the achievements of the bebop era of the late forties, and was the essential language of modern jazz before the introduction of modal music into jazz by Miles Davis and John Coltrane in the late fifties.



An earlier version of Straight Ahead, taken in 1978, with, L-R, Ken Tait (trombone), Peter Cross (trumpet), Richard Ochalski (bass, behind Cross), Bob Bertles (tenor sax), Terry Wilkinson (piano) and Laurie Bennett (drums)...
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

**A short discussion of "mainstream jazz" is inserted at the end of this piece.*

Mainstream music has, for many years, had an extraordinary resilience in Australian modern jazz. One of its leading contemporary exponents is Richard Ochalski's group Straight Ahead, which is appearing at The Basement on Monday nights during February. The group includes Ochalski on acoustic bass, Keith Stirling (trumpet), Bob Bertles (saxophones and flute), Ken Tait (trombone), Tony Esterman (piano) and Alan Turnbull (drums).



Musicians in the 1980 version of Straight Ahead include trumpeter Keith Stirling (above), pianist Tony Esterman (below) and drummer Alan Turnbull (following page) ...PHOTO CREDITS PETER SINCLAIR, JOE GLAYSHER

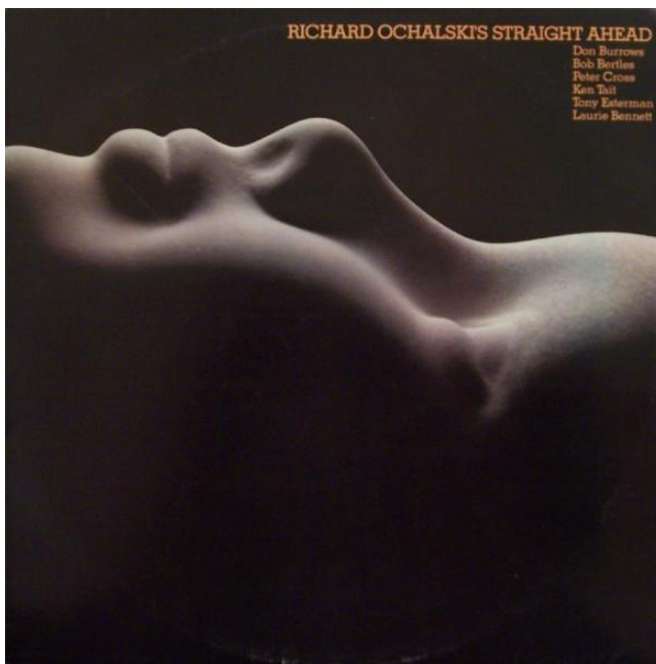




Drummer Alan Turnbull... PHOTO CREDIT JOE GLAYSHER

The arrangements for this sextet are provided by Ochalski and Tait. They feature carefully arranged ensemble statements, utilising standard bebop licks and phrases over chord structures which generally move logically, and are good vehicles for improvisation.

As most of this music is in swinging, four-four time, the result is very close to a foot-tapping, middle-of-the-road jazz which has become, certainly in Australia, a standard language for musicians and listeners alike.



Cover of the LP released by Richard Ochalski's Straight Ahead on 44 Records...

RICHARD OCHALSKI'S STRAIGHT AHEAD
 "I like this band of Richard's. It's a great band to listen to and a real delight to play with. Happy guys playing happy music." Don Burrows



Back **Top** **Don Burrows** **Tom Robinson**

Leanne Bennett **Don Cross**

Richard Ochalski

1979

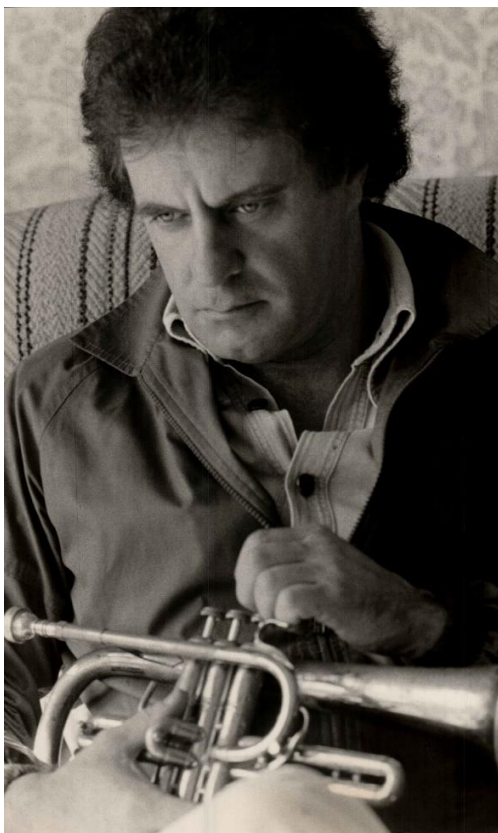
BACKSTAIRS	0:00
BLOO HOO	0:08
LYNS TUNE	0:46
NASTY'N BLUES	1:15
1979	
BASIC BASS BASS BLUES	0:10
ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE	1:38
COLD WATER CANYON BLUES	0:20
HIGH FLY	7:00

DON BURROWS Alto, Baritone Sax, Flute
JOE BERTER Yamaha Flute, Sax, Baritone Sax
PETER CROSS Trumpet, Flute/oboe
LEANNE BENNETT Trombone
TONY ESTERMAN Acoustic Piano
RICHARD OCHALSKI Leader, Bass Violin
LAURIE BENNETT Drums
 Richard Ochalski and Don Burrows arranged all the music on this album.

Produced by Horst Leopold
 Recorded November 26, 1978 and February 6, 1979
 and Mixed by Ross Kirkland at Earth Media
 Recording Company, Sydney
 Photos by Zolt Bakstokov
 Cover Illustration by Malcolm McCulloch

"All The Things You Are" is one of those great spontaneous saxophone battles, except this time it features two Baritones - Don Burrows (left channel), and Joe Bertier (right channel).
 It is completely improvised, and may be the first time that the crossing of two Baritones has been recorded anywhere - you know it the way it happened.
 It was Producer Horst Leopold's idea, and it was one of those rare moments when it occurs in one off-camera take.
 Don Burrows appears with the courtesy of Cherry Pie Records and plays Flute on "Lyn's Tune".
 Baritone Sax on "All The Things You Are", Alto Sax on "Cold Water Canyon Blues".
 Distributed in Australia by PolyGram Records Pty. Limited
 1979 PolyGram Records Pty. Limited
 632722
 Price Code 09

Having said that about the general nature of the music, it is only fair to say that the jazz played by this group last night at The Basement was an exhibition of fiery, hard-bop music, brilliantly played. The lengthy, improvised solos were often broken up by breathy riffs and punchy brass punctuations contributed by the non-soloing horns, providing colours which continually caught the listener's attention.



Keith Stirling: one Australian jazz musician who has indisputably found his own voice...

Keith Stirling is a relative newcomer to this group, having replaced Peter Cross. His trumpet playing was burning, exploratory, fiery and mature. He is one Australian jazz musician who has indisputably found his own voice.

Similarly, Tony Esterman on piano shone like a bright light throughout.

The interesting thing about Straight Ahead was the way in which the players, many of whom are experienced in more avant-garde jazz, continually stretched the limitations and conventions of the bebop idiom which the group is apparently concerned to emulate.

If you feel some nostalgia for the days when you could tap your foot in time to modern jazz and not get lost, then you will enjoy a night with Straight Ahead.

Richard Ochalski's Straight Ahead has a recently released LP available on 44 Records, where its music can be heard to advantage.



*Don Burrows: a guest appearance on the Straight Ahead album...PHOTO CREDIT
PETER SINCLAIR*

An added bonus is the guest appearance of Don Burrows on three of the eight tracks, playing flute, alto saxophone and baritone saxophone.

**Eric Myers writes: With the benefit of hindsight I now know that my use of the term “mainstream jazz” here was clumsy. Wikipedia defined “mainstream jazz” as “the popular jazz music of an era”, and I was applying it to the music of Straight Ahead in the sense that their music approximated that definition. I was aware that the term was originally coined by the British music journalist and historian of the swing era Stanley Dance in the 1950s. He applied the term specifically to the swing era, and many jazz enthusiasts have subsequently understood that the term applies to musicians whose music did not incorporate bebop. The quintessential mainstreamers were therefore considered to be musicians such as Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges and Roy Eldridge. To quote Wikipedia again, “the definition changed with the evolution and progression of jazz music. What was mainstream then would not be considered mainstream now. In a general sense, mainstream jazz can be considered what was most popular at the time”.*



British jazz journalist Stanley Dance, pictured here with pianist Earl 'Fatha' Hines...PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA
