



## TEN PART INVENTION'S TRIBUTE TO JOHN POCHÉE

Reviewed by Eric Myers

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Ten Part Invention, The Great Club, Marrickville, March 12, 2023

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**H**earing Ten Part Invention (TPI) at this performance was seriously uplifting, prompting several important realisations. Firstly, the band has been in existence for 37 years, since its formation for the Adelaide Festival in 1986. Some might consider that a long enough stint and merely a credit to the players who have loyally served over the years. But, in today's world, I believe its survival is as important as ever. Why? Because of the quality of its music.



*Shirley Pochée, speaking at John Pochée's funeral on November 24, 2022... PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*

TPI's book of charts, which runs to some 80 specially commissioned works, written primarily by Sandy Evans, Miroslav Bukovsky and the late Roger Frampton, but also including pieces by other leading Australian composers, contains some of the most interesting and valuable writing for large ensemble in Australian jazz. Secondly, as long as outstanding musicians are available to play this repertoire, as was the case with the line-up featured at this performance at the Great Club, the music deserves to survive, and importantly be performed live in the jazz club or the concert hall. As much as recorded jazz serves to document the music, there is nothing like the thrill of hearing it being played by musicians in the flesh.

If the Americans can have a repertoire ensemble like Mingus Dynasty which survives long after Charles Mingus's death in 1979, surely we can have a Ten Part Invention repertoire ensemble, which survives the death of John Pochée in 2022. Composers like Frampton, Bukovsky and Evans are as important to our jazz culture as Mingus was to American jazz. Let us hope that the arts funding authorities, given a shot in the arm by a new Labor Government, will see their way clear to supporting such a venture. As a non-commercial project, the survival of TPI can only happen through government support.

In many ways, this gig was a visible expression of John Pochée's evolving vision: that TPI should survive well into the future, as a training-ground for younger musicians who would step up to replace the older musicians who have passed on or retired for one reason or another. The presence of two outstanding younger musicians, deputising for two musicians who were unavailable, was testimony to this feasibility: National Jazz Awards finalist Wilbur Whitta, who played electric piano (deputising for Kevin Hunt); and Freedman Fellowship winner Tom Avgenicos (trumpet), who deputised for Warwick Alder (absent owing to a gallbladder operation).



*Two outstanding deps were on hand: pianist Wilbur Whitta (left) and trumpeter Tom Avgenicos (below)...*



TPI's saxophone section has always been outstanding but, with the death of Ken James in 2012, and the retirements of Bob Bertles and Bernie McGann (who died in 2013), it's tempting to say that the current saxophone section – Paul Cutlan, Andrew Robson, John Mackey and Sandy Evans (the sole surviving saxophonist from 1986) - is the ensemble's best ever.

Certainly where I was sitting in the Great Club performance area, I was convinced that I had never heard the group's saxophone section sounding so rich. In fact, the sound of the whole band was absolutely gorgeous. The Great Club's splendid acoustics were such that I experienced separation of sound with unusual clarity. In Sandy Evans's great composition *For Tea Two*, I heard nuances in her arrangement I'd never heard before.

The concert opened with Roger Frampton's arrangement of Bernie McGann's classic *Spirit Song*, the lead being taken by Andrew Robson on alto. To some extent the richness of the live sound threw into sharp relief the rather thin sound of the same composition which was part of the John Pochée film, shown before the concert, and again during the intermission. Robson had a great night, playing with extraordinary passion, not only in this piece, but also in Miroslav Bukovsky's *Folk Song*, and in his own new composition, a tribute to Pochée called *Hymn For John*. I doubt if there has ever been a more passionate alto saxophonist in Australian jazz than Robson.



*Andrew Robson had a great night, playing with extraordinary passion... PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*

Speaking of Miroslav Bukovsky it was also a tonic to hear his compositions *Moon Too Soon*, the aforementioned *Folk Song*, and his classic *TPI Blues*, which I believe dates from the band's original 1986 repertoire. Sometimes one forgets the extraordinary diversity of music created by the three seminal composers in TPI, whose approaches are so different to each other: Bukovsky, Frampton and Evans – three extraordinary visions of how jazz should sound.



*Miroslav Bukovsky (right) with his colleague James Greening looking on... PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*

Shortly before the Great Club gig Paul Cutlan wrote on Facebook:

*I was about 24 when Ten Part Invention visited Tasmania [during 1988], the Bicentennial celebration year. Having already seen a host of amazing Australian performers I'd never encountered [before] in the Australian Jazz Orchestra, TPI introduced me to many others. Common to both ensembles were Bob Bertles, Bernie McGann, and Warwick Alder. Prior to seeing Bob Bertles, I had no idea there were Australian sax players who could play bebop with the precision and speed of Charlie Parker: I watched Bob Bertles play and I could barely see his fingers moving!*

*Fast forward to ten years later, John Pochée was calling me a few times a year to dep for Bob in TPI: I didn't own a baritone sax, so I had to borrow one. The horn didn't come naturally to me. For some reason I kept getting asked back. Maybe about 10 years ago, give or take, Bob retired from the band and I became a permanent member, although by that time TPI gigs became rare - maybe two a year.*

*Yet this band continues to define such an important generation of original, creative and indomitable jazz heroes for me, who became my friends and colleagues. Some 18 years after Roger Frampton died, I bought his soprano saxophone off John, got it fixed up (totally rebuilt by Steve Giordano) and play a couple of Roger's parts when we play. I have John Pochée to thank for all this.*



*Paul Cutlan: Ten Part Invention continues to define such an important generation of original, creative and indomitable jazz heroes for me, who became my friends and colleagues... PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*



*Roger Frampton's soprano sax, which Paul bought off John. Paul had it rebuilt and now uses it to play some of Roger's soprano parts when TPI performs...*

In the case of Sandy Evans we also heard her tune *Tall Stories*, as well as the aforementioned *For Tea Two*, and of course, the Frampton pieces, *Jazznost* and *And Zen Monk*, as well as the aforementioned *Spirit Song*. It was an exceedingly well-balanced program.



*Sandy Evans (above): at this performance we heard two of her compositions, “Tall Stories”, and “For Tea Two”, as well as three compositions by the late Roger Frampton (pictured below), “Jazznost”, “And Zen Monk”, and “Spirit Song”... EVANS PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST; FRAMPTON PHOTO COURTESY EMILY RYTMEISTER*



I was very glad that Paul Cutlan thought to document the nature of his transition from a young impressionable musician in Tasmania to his current status in Sydney, 35 years later, as one of the country's leading multi-instrumentalists. His membership of TPI, along with other groups, is testimony to that status.



*Paul Cutlan: he has documented his transition from a young impressionable musician in Tasmania to his current status in Sydney 35 years later, as one of the country's leading multi-instrumentalists... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

However, it's extremely unusual for a jazz musician to write something of this nature, and I wish that more musicians would take the trouble to do so. The history of Australian jazz is extremely important and that history can only exist if musicians record their memories in one way or another. Yesterday's memories are tomorrow's history.

Occasionally a jazz musician puts something onto social media which documents an important event; when this happens it's a valuable exercise. But Facebook is not an archive. It's here today, gone tomorrow. My website, the purpose of which is primarily to document Australian jazz history is, on the contrary, permanent. The good news is that it is now preserved for posterity and will exist long after most of us are dead and gone, on PANDORA.

For those not familiar with PANDORA, it is Australia's web archive, a collection of Australian online publications, established initially by the National Library of Australia in 1996. Its acronym encapsulates its mission: Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia. It is now being built in collaboration with nine other Australian libraries, other than the National Library, and cultural collecting organisations.

In 1979, cultural historian Bruce Johnson wrote that Australian jazz history and what he termed “its socio-political matrix” were very much neglected in the jazz education courses around the country:

*The general tendency of jazz education has been not only to neglect these areas (particularly Australian jazz history), but by doing so to imply that a knowledge of it is of negligible significance to a musician: in other words, to legitimise historical ignorance.\**



*Bruce Johnson (left) in 1978, performing with Roger Bell... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN*

More on this in another forum, but I have to say how encouraging it was to hear the verbal testimonies of many musicians (and non-musicians) in their tributes to John Pochée, not only at John’s funeral but also at this tribute at the Great Club. Unfortunately, most of this testimony has gone into thin air. Is there a team of documentationists out there, not only interested in Australian jazz history, but also interested in accessing the recordings of such testimonies, which are in existence (come in Peter Nelson), and transcribing them for posterity? Somehow I doubt it.

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*\*See Bruce Johnson, “Afterword to Black Roots White Flowers: Jazz Through to the 1980s”. Revised edition of “Black Roots White Flowers: A History of Jazz in Australia”, 1979.*



There were some anecdotes which resonated with me, particularly from Sandy Evans. To some extent they are already documented. For example, having recently left school, circa 1978, Sandy was living in Singapore and studying music there. Visiting Kuala Lumpur she noticed that the Judy Bailey quartet, then on tour for Musica Viva, was performing. She attended and has described this as “one of the first jazz concerts I saw, I thought it was incredible!” In that band were three Australian musicians who would figure prominently in her future life: Judy of course, but also drummer John Pochée and saxophonist Col Loughnan.



*The Judy Bailey Quartet in the 1970s, L-R, Col Loughnan, Bailey, John Pochée, Ron Philpott... PHOTO CREDIT LEON SAUNDERS*

Sandy referred to this brief encounter when introducing a composition by Col Loughnan *The Strongest Man in Indonesia* – the one work on the program not written by the TPI composer triumvirate. This composition came about as a result of the Bailey Quartet performing in Indonesia. Apparently a worker at the airport saw Pochée carrying a set of drums, and declared “You’re the strongest man in Indonesia!”

There were some other anecdotes on this gig which to some extent have faded in my memory. Steve Elphick related a story concerning John Pochée and Roger Frampton on the Engine Room tour of the Soviet Union in 1989 which, although interesting

and entertaining, is probably best left to those who were in the audience and heard the story live. Some anecdotes, no matter how revealing, are perhaps best left undocumented.



*John Mackey on tenor, with in the background Steve Elphick, who told a story about John Pochée and Roger Frampton, on the Engine Room tour of the Soviet Union in 1989...PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*

Dave Goodman also delivered an entertaining talk covering the events which led to his assuming the drum chair in Ten Part Invention, at the invitation of John Pochée. While Goodman has a style that differs substantially from that of Pochée, I believe he is an indispensable part of the current TPI sound. As we all know the character of a jazz group comes primarily from the drums – change the drummer and you have a new band. Goodman might provide a lighter, more unobtrusive time-feel than that of the legendary Pochée, but he still provides the current TPI with the sort of beautiful time-feel which inestimably sustains the soloists.



*Dave Goodman: he delivered an exceedingly entertaining talk covering the events which led to his assuming the drum chair in Ten Part Invention, at the invitation of John Pochée.... PHOTO CREDIT CARL DEWHURST*

On the day drummer Alan Turnbull died, on August 28, 2014, Dave Goodman wrote a unforgettable tribute “In Memory of Alan Turnbull, 1943–2014”, which I reproduced on my website\*. It’s a very personal and sensitive piece, which indicates that Dave is an extremely capable writer. He had also written a splendid account of the recording of Jann Rutherford’s final album, *The Scented Garden*, which took place in 2003, some six weeks before Jann died in New Zealand\*\*. If he has the time, I believe he should write more.

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\*See David Goodman, “In Memory Of Alan Turnbull, 1943–2014”, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/obituaries-page-32>

\*\*See “Recording Jann Rutherford’s *The Scented Garden*”, written in 2003, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/essays-page-92>