

OBITUARY: TONY NEWSTEAD 1923-2017

by Mark and Steven Newstead*

[This obituary appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 23 February 2018, and can be read at this link <https://www.smh.com.au/national/tony-newstead-expert-in-telecoms-and-the-trumpet-20180223-howjho.html>.]

Over the course of his 94 years Tony Newstead lived a full and rewarding life, marked most evidently by his stellar contributions to his professional career in telecommunications and as a pioneer of jazz in Australia.



Trumpeter Tony Newstead, an expert in telecoms and the trumpet...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Tony's father Julius Newstead served at Gallipoli, where he contracted dysentery and so met and married an English nurse from Kent, Tony's mother Eleanor-Sarah Culmer. Born on October 1, 1923, Tony grew up in a large house in Malvern, Melbourne and enjoyed a happy childhood with elder brother Gordon and sister Adel (Adelaide).

Music was strongly imprinted in childhood. His father was a good classical pianist, and music and their new wireless radio playing all day undoubtedly provided the foundation for a later intense love of music, especially jazz.

Tony matriculated from Hampton High and by 1939 went straight to work with Customs at the Market Street building that is now the Immigration Museum, as well

** Mark and Steven Newstead are sons of Tony Newstead...*

as studying science subjects at Melbourne University night classes. But his greatest passion was for jazz, abetted by his first instrument, a cornet trumpet as a 16th birthday present from his brother.

At work, he was befriended by a drummer, Don Reid, who aroused Tony's interest in jazz chords and structures. Reid was the resident drummer with Graeme Bell's Jazz Band and Roger Bell, Graeme Bell's brother, befriended Tony.



Don Reid is on drums here along with Bill Dempsey (left, on guitar) and Ken Ingram (right, on trombone) in Sydney in 1950... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

The circle widened to include "Lazy" Ade Monsborough and Willie McIntyre, who became members of Tony's own Southside Gang group after World War II.



Pianist Willie McIntyre: he joined Tony's Southside Gang group after World War II... PHOTO COURTESY WILL McINTYRE & OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

In 1942 Tony became eligible to join the war effort. He aspired to follow his best friend Alister, who had signed up a year earlier to become an RAAF pilot. But the week before he was due to enlist, Tony received the shock news: Alister had been shot down in a Spitfire over the English Channel. Tony's mother's distraught pleas against Tony meeting the same fate meant that he chose instead to enlist for a ground staff role in RAAF Radar.

After experiencing a 100-plane Japanese raid in his first days on duty at Port Moresby, he was stationed inland. This involved being seconded to the US forces anti-aircraft radar units and the chance to mix with American servicemen, some with first-hand exposure to jazz.

By 1946 Tony re-enrolled for his science studies at Melbourne University and a paid cadetship exposed him to a wide range of internal training, including time-off to attend university.

In 1946 he also participated in the first Australian Jazz Convention, a tradition that created the longest-running continuous jazz event in the world.



Tony Newstead's Southside Gang circa 1950, L-R, David Ward (trombone), Newstead (trumpet), Don Reid (drums), Ray Simpson (guitar), Will McIntyre (piano), George Tack (clarinet), Keith Cox (bass)...

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE SUTCLIFFE & OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

In 1949 he married Pauline Tacey, a journalist. By 1950 Tony had completed his cadetship and became an engineer in the PMG. With sons Mark and Steven born by 1952, the family settled into a War Savings Home in Glen Iris with a purpose-built sunroom designed to accommodate the many jazz parties.

In 1957 Tony was fortunate to earn a Commonwealth Government scholarship for overseas studies in network planning and completed a postgraduate diploma at

Imperial College, London University. Returning to Australia via New York in 1959 enabled him to play with jazz greats, his personal highlight being a night playing with the Eddie Condon band.



Newstead's personal highlight was a night playing in New York with the band led by Eddie Condon (pictured above)...

In May 1959 he was promoted to national headquarters planning branch, whereby Australia adopted the Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) codes.

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the longest-established agency of the UN, adopted the plan in the 1960s when Tony represented Australia at their study groups.

By 1967 Tony was elected to chair the World Study Group of the ITU for a three-year term. This involved him in much international travel with regular meetings held in Mexico City, New York, London, Sydney and Geneva. At official dinners, he made an impression as the trumpet-playing leader of the Australian delegation.

By 1969 the World Bank made overtures to Tony to come to Washington DC. The job entailed appraisal of loans being requested by governments to build telecommunications infrastructure and involved travel to the largest borrowers, from India, Iran and Thailand to smaller projects in Fiji and Costa Rica.

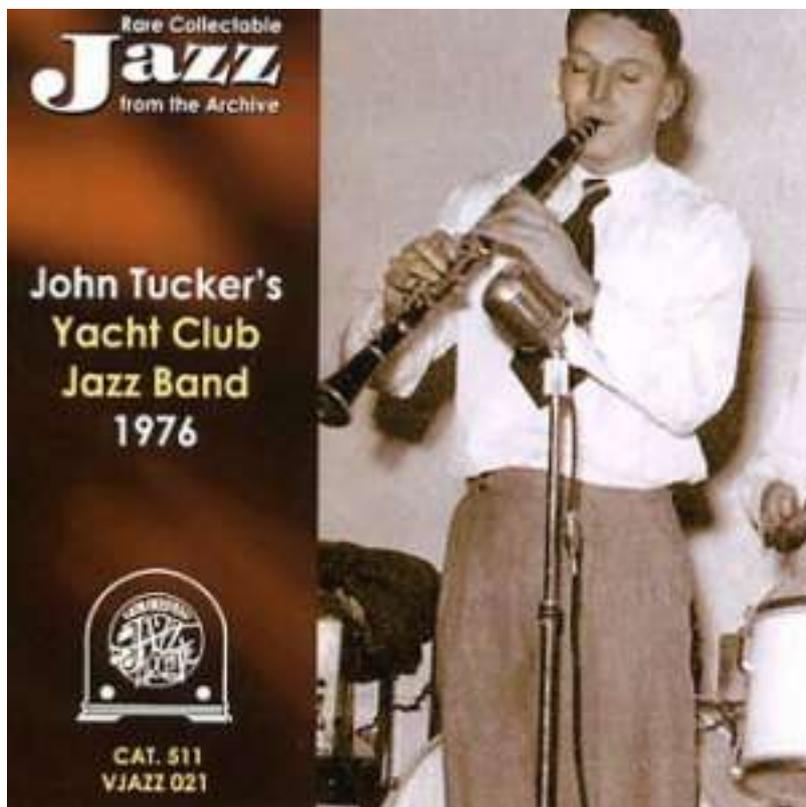
After the sudden death of his wife Pauline in 1969, Tony met Njoman Soelaksmi from Bali, a recent Colombo Plan graduate in electrical engineering and first female graduate in that discipline from Monash. They married in 1970, and elected to take up the Washington DC posting, to start their new life together.

Soe and Tony had their first child, a daughter Astini, born in the US and later her brother Simon in Melbourne. In Washington Tony thoroughly enjoyed access to many jazz clubs and venues and soon found a niche, as evidenced by the fact that he

had played on more jazz records released in the US than he did in Australia. He played regularly at the Potomac River Jazz club and in 1972 and '73 he was invited to the annual Manassas Virginia Jazz Festival.

On his return to the PMG in 1973, Tony was soon invited to head up a taskforce that had as its reference a wider view of the economic and social implications of new technologies. The 18-strong group of professionals covered the fields of telecommunications research and engineering, economics and finance, social psychology and science history. Because of his planning background and overseas experience Tony was appointed in December 1973 to lead the team. The report had a 25-year time frame and was published as Telecom 2000, the crowning achievement of his work in Australia.

The taskforce was encouraged by the Whitlam government to forecast Australia's long-term infrastructure needs. The report was well received and was used for a long time as a teaching and reference tool in many countries and academic courses.



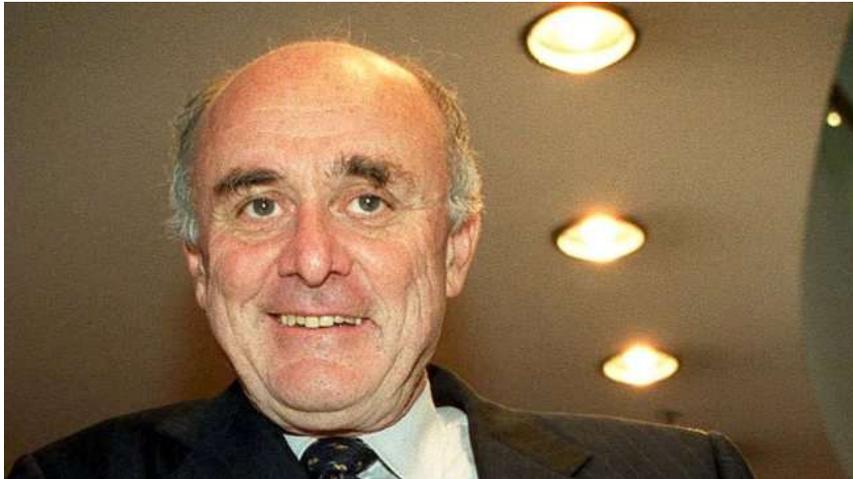
Cover of John Tucker's Yacht Club Jazz Band album of 1976, on which Tony Newstead plays... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Shortly after its publication, Tony was told that the private Hong Kong Telephone Company was quietly searching for a chief engineer. He went on to serve two three-year terms, on secondment from Telstra. Before leaving for Hong Kong, he recorded an album with John Tucker's Yacht Club Jazz Band.

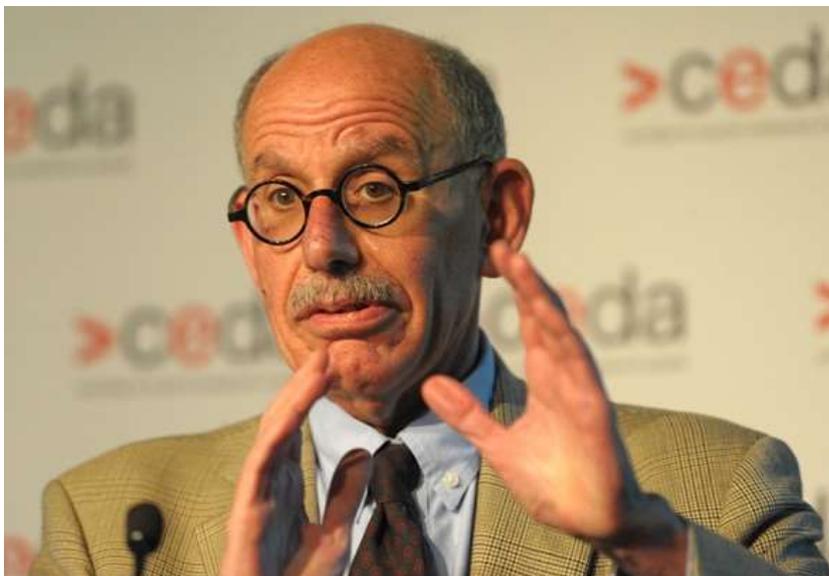
On returning in 1984 he decided to set up a consultancy to address an emerging suite of opportunities. He soon gained work from the Victorian and NSW state

governments and in the 1990s was invited to head up the Victoria's state telecommunications company VISTEL.

Always mindful of the social implications of the technology changes, he joined with Professor Alan Fels and economist Henry Ergas at a new research unit, MONICT (Monash Information and Communications Technology).



Newstead joined with Professor Alan Fels (above) and economist Henry Ergas (below) at a new research unit, MONICT (Monash Information and Communications Technology)...



In 1999, aged 76, he retired from active professional work and enjoyed some years of retirement in Melbourne, Sorrento and Sydney, with tennis, jazz and life with five grandchildren.

He and Soe also travelled to Bali, to escape the more acutely felt cold of Melbourne's winter at Soe's family compound at Sanur Beach.

Tony Newstead died on November 6, 2017. He is survived by his wife and his four children.