

## JUDY BAILEY IN CONVERSATION

by Belinda Webster\*

---

*[This interview appeared in the May, 2009 edition of Extempore, edited by Miriam Zolin.]*

**B**elinda Webster writes: Judy Bailey is an icon of Australian jazz. For more years than she would care to admit Judy's been giving pleasure to Australian jazz enthusiasts, from the days of El Rocco right through to the present. Until the last two decades she has been the only woman in the top echelons (but won't talk about gender in music) and has forged her own way through her career (without any female mentors). She has spent years writing magnificent music that seems, so far, to have been avoided like the plague by our symphony orchestras. When Extempore asked me to talk to Judy for this issue of the journal I was delighted, first because our busy lives mean we don't get to talk often enough, and second because I have such fond memories of Judy in the recording studio: her professionalism and her sense of mischief, which carried over into this conversation. We talked at length about her formative years and then about her approach to the piano, teaching, improvising and composition.



*Judy Bailey: an icon of Australian jazz... PHOTO CREDIT BRANCO GAICA*

---

*\*When this interview took place in 2009 Belinda Webster OAM was the founder of Tall Poppies Records which had issued 200 CDs in its 19-year history. Belinda functioned as recording producer, engineer and designer. She lived in Kangaroo Valley, NSW and in her spare time loved cooking, gardening and analysing handwriting. In April 2007 she directed her first music festival, Arts in the Valley, and the second was to be held in May 2009. She presented her photographs in seven exhibitions, including five duo shows with potter/sculptor Ole Nielsen and two solo exhibitions in Kangaroo Valley. She had also made several short art films.*



*Belinda Webster: founder of Tall Poppies Records, functioning as recording producer, engineer and designer... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**BELINDA WEBSTER:** How did you get into music?

**JUDY BAILEY:** It first started when my grandmother donated an upright piano to the family home, which was a wonderfully kind gesture on her part because it was felt that I had already exhibited some sort of musical talent; this was when I was nearly 10. From the age of seven, however, I had been madly in love with studying classical ballet.

**BELINDA:** So your first musical experiences were through dance?

**JUDY:** No, apparently from about the age of three I used to stand in front of the huge radio console in my parents' living room and proclaim to the world the song called *Sally, Pride of our Alley*. Do you know that song?

**BELINDA:** No.

**JUDY:** [laughs] I used to sing it full belt.

**BELINDA:** Have you ever played it as a jazz pianist?

**JUDY:** I haven't actually but, come to think of it, it's a waltz.

**BELINDA:** Well, why not?

**JUDY:** Yeah... What a good idea. [laughs] And dedicate it to the three-year-old who didn't have a clue about what she was doing. But anyway, because I loved the dance lessons so much I was less than impressed when my parents decided it was time to put me to the piano because they couldn't afford both... fair enough.



*Judy says that, from about the age of three she used to stand in front of the huge radio console in her parents' living room and proclaim to the world the song called "Sally, Pride of our Alley"... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY*

**BELINDA:** So your parents did this just because they had the piano and they wanted to use it?

**JUDY:** That's right, and also because when we'd gone to visit friends who had pianos I used to try and figure out tunes, which I was able to do, apparently, very quickly and they figured there must be something there.

**BELINDA:** Good thing they did!

**JUDY:** I have to say that I totally forgave my parents after my very first music lesson. I just took to it like a duck to water. It just felt right, you know. So yes, I did forgive them. [chuckles]

**BELINDA:** So you were learning piano technique and...

**JUDY:** Classical piano and theory and counterpoint.

**BELINDA:** And was composition rearing its head then?

**JUDY:** No, except that during that period of time I'd started to play a lot of the songs of the day by ear and started to become very attracted to creating harmony. My father used to love to sing and he also played piano by ear—he'd never been taught—but he seemed to have an unerring ear for the right chords, you know. Eventually I started to accompany him and also play solo things that weren't necessarily classical things, to the point where my teacher, Sister Rita, would sometimes say to me: 'What have you been doing lately?' And she'd get me to play things that I enjoyed—it might be a song such as *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, just typical songs of the day. Later on my parents had a Bakelite wireless on the Formica bench, in the kitchen. And when I finally got to the age of 13 I heard my first broadcast of jazz, although I didn't realise that it was called jazz.

**BELINDA:** So that was your first experience of jazz?

**JUDY:** Well, I have to say that there was a bit of a turning point for me when I was aged 11, because a schoolfriend got me to go round to her place one day after school and she played me a couple of her Dad's records. One of them happened to be Thomas Fats Waller playing *Alligator Crawl*, and I'd never heard anything like that before. I just fell in love with it and asked my parents if they would get hold of the music, and so I learned it. And I still play it.



*When Fats Waller (pictured above) played Alligator Crawl, Judy had never heard anything like that before... PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY TWITTER*

**BELINDA:** Do you really?

**JUDY:** Oh, yeah. I love all his stuff... And then when I was 13 there was another turning point. One day I was in the kitchen listening to the radio, and I'd never heard anything like it before. It turned out to be the George Shearing Quintet, playing a song that I just happened to know; to hear a song treated in that way where they played the first chorus and I recognised it straight away...



*When the George Shearing Quintet (pictured above) played East of the Sun, Judy was puzzled by 'this other stuff' after the first chorus... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**BELINDA:** What was the song?

**JUDY:** *East of the Sun*. After the first chorus they went into doing this other stuff, and of course I had no way of knowing it was called 'improvisation'. It grabbed hold of me, and I remember going to the piano straight after the recording was over, trying to figure out what they were doing and realising that they were basing all this stuff on the...

**BELINDA:** On the chords that belonged to the tune...

**JUDY:** Yes. And lo and behold, a week later—and this really capped it off for me—I heard the Stan Kenton Orchestra. I still get shivers up the spine remembering the feeling I had when I was listening to it.

**BELINDA:** Can you describe that feeling?

**JUDY:** I was totally overwhelmed, overtaken with what for me were indescribable sounds... a world of sound that I'd never experienced before but which spoke to me immediately. Oh, it was just sensational. And that recognition of something that was

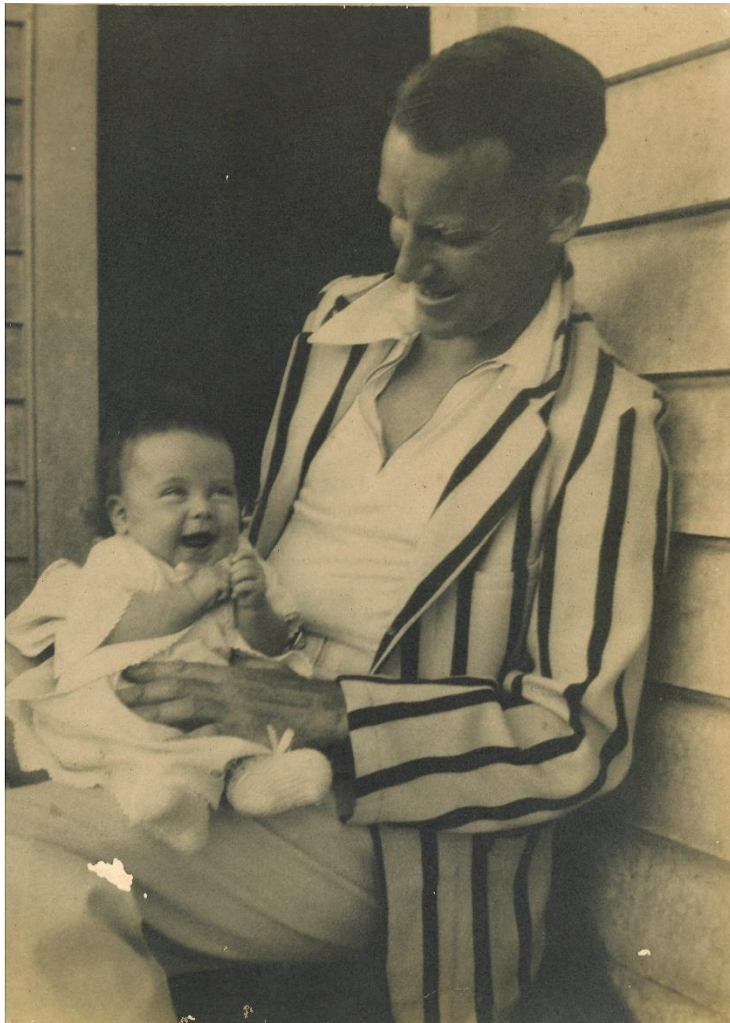
totally unfamiliar and yet familiar, if I can describe it that way... It just absolutely resonated right at the core of my whole being.

**BELINDA:** So how long was it before you took those resonances and internalised them and started doing it yourself?

**JUDY:** In the sense of writing, do you mean?

**BELINDA:** In the sense of playing and realising that's where you were going to go.

**JUDY:** Well, interestingly enough, looking back, I had already started on that harmonic journey. And from then on I was inspired to explore more and more. When I was about to turn 14 I arrived home from school and was amazed to find my father's car in the driveway, because normally he was at work. I went inside and I said, 'Oh, gee, what are you doing home at this hour?' and he said, 'Don't ask questions; just put down your bag and hop in the car.' And so here I am, in school uniform, I've chucked the Globite school case down, hopped in the car and we drive down town, and we enter a part of the town...



*Here's a shot of Judy with her father Robert Bailey. It was he who took her as a 13-year-old to the local radio station in Whangerei to audition for the opening night of the new Radio Northland station... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY*

**BELINDA:** This is Auckland, is it?

**JUDY:** No, this is Whangerei. Little old Whangerei is about 100 miles north of Auckland on the way to the Bay of Islands. We finally pull up at a building I've never seen before, and it's immense to my eyes. He ushers me inside and we meet Johnny Joyce (a DJ at the radio station who went on later to become Head of Television in New Zealand) and Jack Prendergast (the Radio Northland Programme Organiser), and they ushered me into a huge room and inside this room was a grand piano. I'd never played a grand piano before and they asked me to sit down and play something. So I did. I didn't know it at the time, but it turns out that they were auditioning for the opening night of the new Radio Northland station. And so I was accepted for that and it's interesting how things turn out, because on the night they had other performers, of course, and there was a fellow singing in the style of Al Jolson, who was to sing two songs. His accompanist for some reason didn't turn up and there was a bit of an emergency, so they said to me: 'Do you happen to know these songs?' As luck would have it I did, because my father had sung them at various stages. This fellow was Paul Newbury, and everything went beautifully. Meeting up with him led me into a most unusual situation. Paul and his twin brother Peter were 10 years older than me so it meant at nearly 14 I became involved with an older set of people and it was a marvellous education for me. Paul and Peter were the sons of the local undertaker and they helped their father with the business. They lived in this rather large residence that had a very large driveway and adjoining the large driveway was another large building which housed a chapel, and behind the chapel was what they called the laying out room... (which I wasn't allowed into and I didn't want to go in there anyway, because it stank of formalin). They had another, smaller room where they kept all their weight-lifting equipment, [laughs] and then they had this huge room with a 30-foot high ceiling; it was a magnificent room. The walls were lined with shelves, with curtains discreetly covering all the coffins that the brothers had made themselves out of New Zealand Pine. When people came through they didn't want to see all these reminders of everyone's inevitable mortality. This room also contained a player piano with wonderful player piano rolls, and I spent many happy hours pedalling like buggery (pardon the expression) and having a great time. They also had huge mats that were used for all the acrobatic work they used to do. And they had a slack wire set-up in there... basically, in addition to their undertaking activities they ran an entertainment acrobatic troupe, and song and dance were all part of it. The point I'm leading to is that my association with them basically was as musical director. They used to stage a big show annually in the town hall, which used to run for three nights and one matinee. It was quite a large affair in those days; they had a little trio playing and I was in charge of the music. That continued for a few years... [laughs] Quite apart from the musical association, I also had the chance to be involved with a lot of the other stuff they did. I got to learn adagio dancing—which is a very acrobatic form—and tumbling, and I even tried to do a bit of juggling... and a bit of slack wire stuff which was very difficult, and hand-balancing, of course.

.....

***The walls were lined with shelves, with curtains discreetly covering all the coffins that the brothers had made themselves out of New Zealand Pine. When people came through they didn't want to see all the reminders of everyone's inevitable mortality.***

**BELINDA:** So you started life in the circus!

**JUDY:** Well, basically, and it's interesting because a lot of their relatives belonged to a circus that used to travel around, so their background was a very colourful one. The father was a devotee of palmistry... a most fascinating family. I was fortunate enough, so fortunate, to be included in all of this. So, wow!

**BELINDA:** In terms of your life, that one trip in the car with your father...

**JUDY:** ...led to all this. But it also led to something else. When I'd finally turned 14 the radio station actually gave me and a very lovely soprano, Wendy Adams, our own half-hour weekly radio show. We played the popular songs of the day. Isn't that amazing?

**BELINDA:** What an opportunity! So you had to learn half an hour's repertoire every week for the broadcast?

**JUDY:** Yes.

**BELINDA:** Live to air?

**JUDY:** Yes, it was wonderful. And the programme was called... *Always Nervous*... no, the programme was called *A Date with Judy and Wendy*. [laughs] Isn't that twee? Then there was another thing that was part and parcel of my involvement with the radio station. Both Jack Prendergast and Johnny Joyce were jazz lovers; they recognised something in my playing, and would invite me in for jam sessions every so often. They allowed me access to their library. I can't believe how lucky I was...

**BELINDA:** Were you aware of how lucky you were at the time?

**JUDY:** I accepted it as it came, and was just overjoyed to be involved with all of this. They'd suggest certain recordings that I should sit and listen to.

**BELINDA:** So there's a whole musical education going on... and all this time you're learning classical piano?

**JUDY:** Yes, and far from being critical of my interest in this other music, the nuns at St Joseph's used to encourage me to play a few things because they were interested in how I went about it. They knew that I was doing it by ear.

**BELINDA:** Can you pinpoint the time—which must have been in that period—when you decided that this was what you were going to do?

**JUDY:** Ahh... when I'd finally attained my first set of letters I then was expected to go on and study for my next leg, which was LTCL Licentiate. I thought it might be fun to do that—to have a paper to say that it was okay to be licentious. My teachers and my parents all were hoping that I would pursue a classical career. Even though they loved the other stuff, they thought that classical was the way I should go... However, I was experiencing little niggling doubts that were starting to creep in. But I still loved the classical music, you know, loved the lessons, loved the whole thing. As part of getting the first set of letters I did the performer's strand of the LTCL, which means



you have to get a higher mark as far as performance is concerned but you don't sit the 'Art of Music' paper.

**BELINDA:** What were your niggling doubts?

**JUDY:** They were to do with whether I really wanted to spend such a huge chunk of my life practising, when there was this other sort of music that contained so many exciting challenges...

**BELINDA:** And that probably came more naturally to you...?

**JUDY:** And that I didn't have to sit and practise in the same way that I did for classical music. I had a couple of years off from formal lessons, during which time the interest in the other sort of music grew. But then I was approaching 18, and pursuing classical studies to gain the LTCL would enable me to be able to basically fly the nest. I learned that one of the Trinity College examiners, Oliver Harris, was actually going to move from London to Auckland, because when he'd come out on his examining tours he'd loved New Zealand so much he'd decided he wanted to bring his family over to live. So that duly happened, and I wrote and asked if he would take me on as a student. He agreed and so it was arranged. I was allowed to go to Auckland to live. My parents made sure they found a family that I could board with, and for six months I studied with Oliver Harris. He used to do the same thing that the sisters of St Joseph's used to do. He'd say to me: 'What have you been working on this last week?' Then he'd say: 'Play me a little bit of what you've been doing.' [laughs] So I'd launch into this other stuff, you know. Anyway, at the end of six months I realised beyond any doubt that my heart was no longer in pursuing a classical career and that the pull of the other music had become too strong; so Oliver Harris and I parted company, agreeing that we were wasting each other's time. But we parted company on very good terms.

**BELINDA:** So were you still doing your half-hour broadcast and your work with the undertakers?

**JUDY:** No, that had gone on for a couple of years, and then it had run its course and that was it. I was still being musical director for the entertainment troupe, but of course all of that finished when I went to Auckland.

**BELINDA:** You must have found new opportunities in Auckland?

**JUDY:** Oh yes. I'd met up with a few musicians in Auckland, and one thing led to another and I started getting professional work offered to me.

**BELINDA:** Well, you were already a seasoned professional by any standards. How many 18-year-olds have that much experience?

**JUDY:** Well, that's true.

**BELINDA:** You were obviously able to get up in front of anybody and perform.

**JUDY:** Yes. [laughs] I used to get nervous then, and I still do today... My decision not to pursue the classical career came as a great disappointment to my family. Years

later, my father showed me a letter that Oliver Harris had sent to my parents, because my mother had sent a letter to him expressing her disappointment. He wrote a marvellous letter back saying, 'Don't worry about Judith; she's going to...' [pauses] If I may quote... 'She's going to excel in whatever she decides to do...' It was very kind of him, and it was a great comfort to my mother.



*Oliver Harris's letter, where he wrote, 'Judith is going to excel in whatever she decides to do' was a great comfort to Judy's mother Lillian (pictured above)...*  
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

**BELINDA:** What did happen then?

**JUDY:** I just continued doing various bits of work. I was actually working in a bank... operating what used to be in those days a Burroughs machine and typing. At 15 I joined the bank.

**BELINDA:** So this was getting yourself a career together, or at least earning your keep?

**JUDY:** Well, my good father had arranged the job for me, and...

**BELINDA:** And were you able to transfer within the bank when you went to Auckland?

**JUDY:** Yes.

**BELINDA:** So you were working in the bank by day and playing music at night?

**JUDY:** Well, not so much in Whangerei but certainly in Auckland; and not working every night, you know. I just gradually started to build up, to the point where I was able to give the bank job away and sustain myself purely on music.

**BELINDA:** What sort of gigs were you doing?



*Judy Bailey at the piano in New Zealand circa 1959, L-R, Bart Stokes (tenor), Ray Edmondson (drums), bassist unidentified, Neville Blanchett (trumpet)... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY*

**JUDY:** A few commercial gigs; others were little jazz gigs... it gave me a chance to get to try my hand at my first bit of writing, because there was what they used to call the 'radio band' in Auckland. It was much the same sort of set-up that used to exist in the ABC when they had their own show band in Sydney and in Melbourne. I was really, really lucky to be able to have some things that I'd written for big band accepted and broadcast by the Auckland Radio Band. That was my first venture into writing... I think, from memory, there was no original composition—they were just arrangements of other people's material—but it gave me a chance to discover what it was like to actually put pencil to paper and produce something that I had not been taught to do, but instinctively went ahead and did. For me, the proof of the pudding is always in listening back to what you've done; you can tell straightaway if it works

or not. And fortunately for me it worked. It wasn't until I came to this country that I wrote my first composition, and that was for my very first trio recording.

.....

*He picked up the first bolt of cloth. He had a few pins in his mouth. He just when whhhooosh and the first swathe of cloth went around the body of this woman, then another swathe of cloth went around the other side. Pinned, very deftly, and oh, there's a creation.*

.....

**BELINDA:** At the time, in Auckland, did you think of yourself as a professional musician?

**JUDY:** Not totally. For a little while, to have a bit of a change of pace but also to supplement earnings, I worked for the Kiwi Bacon Company.

**BELINDA:** The Kiwi Bacon Company?!



*The Kiwi Bacon Company in Auckland, can be seen in the foreground of this aerial shot, located at 319 New North Road... PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY NEW ZEALAND*

**JUDY:** They were almost just across the road from where I was living. By this time I'd moved out of the place where I'd been boarding and was living in a little place on my own; so I'd just hop across the road to work. I was doing accounting and typing.

**BELINDA:** How did you end up in Australia?

**JUDY:** I just decided that it was time to spread my wings a bit. I'd entertained a few thoughts of going to London, because by this stage I'd started becoming interested in film music.

**BELINDA:** Why? I mean, that's not necessarily a normal career progression.



*Judy Bailey in Sydney circa 1965: a growing awareness of composition, formal composition, structure, the architecture of writing... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**JUDY:** Looking back, I think it was probably the beginnings of a growing awareness of composition, formal composition, structure, the architecture of writing. It had always fascinated me how movement, colour, shape, form wedded to sound; that whole process was fascinating to me. Actually, now I think of it, there's an image

that's very strong in my memory. My parents took me to a performance when I might have been about nine or ten, around about the time I started to learn piano. It was what you'd describe as a variety show, and one of the acts in this show absolutely caught my attention. It was a fellow who... by the way, my father was a draper so an interest in texture and colour and textiles was something I'd grown up with... had huge bolts of cloth of varying description, and he asked for three volunteers from the audience, lady volunteers. They went up on stage and became his mannequins. There was music, a background soundtrack going... and he proceeded to weave—to my eyes at that age—what seemed like total artistry in motion. He didn't speak, he just went into action. The music started. He picked up the first bolt of cloth. He had a few pins in his mouth. He just went whhhoosh and the first swathe of cloth went around the body of this woman, then another swathe of cloth went around the other side. Pinned, very deftly, and oh, there's a creation. He's holding the bolt with one hand, whhhoosh with the scissors, the bolt goes down neatly on the floor, final pin, voila! I still am just boggle-eyed about what he did. And this woman is standing there in all her glory. Then he moved on to the next woman. Whoosh! Same thing... The most surprising designs emerged, shapes, with all this colour and this movement. It was fantastic! Isn't it amazing how things like... just one event... can go thwack...?



*Judy's relationship to the piano: "I conceptualise the piano in two ways. I have a concept of it as a percussion instrument, but also as a voice, as in singing"... PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ*

**BELINDA:** Those little things can keep resurfacing through your whole life. There can be some little thing that you see, then you think about it later and...

**JUDY:** It processes and transforms itself, yes.

**BELINDA:** Could we talk a bit about your relationship with the piano? I always think of the piano as a percussion instrument. Do you?

**JUDY:** I conceptualise the piano in two ways. I have a concept of it as a percussion instrument, but also as a voice, as in singing. So that's like a double whammy concept.

**BELINDA:** They're contrary concepts in a way...

**JUDY:** They can be contrary to each other, but they can also be immensely supportive in the sense that it creates, in my mind, a balance. I guess the best way to sum it up is that I'm hearing all the wonderful melodic possibilities inherent in the instrument—the singing voice—underpinned with the percussive element; and the combination of those two streams goes on to produce that absolutely fantastic textural harmonic component which then, conceptually speaking, becomes three streams. So that brings us right back to the basis of music: melody, harmony and rhythm. That becomes a complete whole in the Gestalt way of thinking of it.

**BELINDA:** When you are playing the piano, are those three things uppermost in your mind?

**JUDY:** Definitely, they're interlinked. I can't separate them. Just as when I'm thinking about human beings I can't separate mind from body.

**BELINDA:** Again there's that holistic aspect to it.

**JUDY:** Sure, if one is pursuing a certain line of questioning, reasoning, observing a specific aspect of a human being, one is seemingly concentrating purely on a physical aspect, or whatever. Similarly, if one is pursuing a line of enquiry that is dealing specifically with the brain/mind, then one seemingly is ignoring the physical aspect of the human being—but in a very general sense I find it difficult to conceptualise the human being in such a way that there's separation. For instance, medicine for so long tended to bring about a separation between mind and body and that seemed to me very strange. Thank goodness that way of thinking about things seems to have changed.

.....

***You can be open to the possibility of it, and you can take steps to free your mind from clutter as much as possible to remain open to the process, but in the end, whether it happens or not is in the lap of the gods.***

.....

**BELINDA:** So in the times when you've been playing, and you've had what you may have thought of as a 'transcendent moment': is that when you've been able to forget about the physical aspects of playing and the intellect that one brings to bear on playing the music and just get lost in the music?

**JUDY:** Yes.

**BELINDA:** How often does that happen?

**JUDY:** Not as often as one would like! [laughs]

**BELINDA:** In what sort of circumstances does it occur?

**JUDY:** It could be anywhere, anytime. One never knows, one can't plan for it. There are certain steps of mental preparation and hopefully physical preparation. As far as reaching that transcendent state, that's not something that one can really prepare for, save to say that one can be aware of the possibility of that happening before one goes to play and one may make a conscious decision to clear one's mind and allow this process to happen. Because I believe it is a process of allowing it to happen, rather than making it happen or trying to cause it to happen or force it to happen. You can be open to the possibility of it, and you can take steps to free your mind from clutter as much as possible to remain open to the process but, in the end, whether it happens or not is in the lap of the gods.

**BELINDA:** Are these moments important to you?

**JUDY:** They're absolutely significant... they can be overwhelming, but only in retrospect because while it's happening you're not conscious of the fact: you're in the moment. That raises an interesting point: *in* the moment. If one was to formulate a philosophy of living, I guess in my mind that would be one mantra to be aware of, to keep in mind, those three words: In The Moment. I believe that if we were able to live our lives according to that, to live each and every second in the moment, then to me that would probably be almost—if there's such a thing—an ideal way to live.

**BELINDA:** Can you describe one of your transcendent moments?

**JUDY:** Sorry, beyond description! I don't believe one can.

**BELINDA:** Have any of these moments been associated with the process of sitting down and writing music?

**JUDY:** Yes. That's quite extraordinary because, funnily enough, unlike the experience of playing—and I'm going to contradict myself now—there have been rare moments in the middle of playing when I've thought, 'Oh wow, this is very special.'

**BELINDA:** When that happens to me, that's when I fall off and it all goes away, because self-consciousness is contrary to it.

**JUDY:** Exactly. Because recognition of a certain state takes you out of that state straightaway. There have been rare moments when, just for a split second, I've had conscious recognition that this is special. It's often been when the music has been on the verge of going into a bass solo, and I know that I've got conscious time to be aware of what's going on rather than still be totally unconscious of the whole thing. It's a split-second thing and then I'm back into the moment. So I guess that's a lucky thing. I'd experienced the transcendent state with playing on and off, but with the writing... that was something that came upon me unexpectedly. After having done quite a lot of writing I'd be involved in what I was doing, but I'd have to stop because there was something else that demanded my time. And I might feel that the work was humming along or that it was bogging down a bit—where do I go from here? But increasingly there have been times, particularly with longer works, where I've worked



in a really concentrated fashion on a certain segment of the work and pushed through until it has reached its natural conclusion. Then I've known I can safely leave the work and go on to something else that demands my attention. And I've emerged from that period of total concentration with a feeling of completeness, with a feeling of joy. That segment of the work was sitting right, and I have a feeling of satisfaction. That can come in varying degrees. There have been times when I'd describe it as a state of transcendence, where the music was almost writing itself.

**BELINDA:** When you write music, are you sitting at the piano?

**JUDY:** No, I sit at the kitchen table.

**BELINDA:** Does it feel like taking dictation? Or is it a struggle?

**JUDY:** It can be either-or. I tend to do a lot of preparatory work in my head. It is like I'm learning a new song or a new piece, but practising it in my head. I don't like to sit down and write until I've got a pretty clear picture in my head of where the piece wants to go.

**BELINDA:** And then it's like taking dictation, because you know where the piece is going and it's a matter of getting it down on paper before it disappears.

**JUDY:** Exactly. Now, that's an interesting way to use the phrase 'before it disappears'. Because it can be so transitory, so fleeting, these ideas that come, particularly when you're putting the piece together mentally, or emotionally...

**BELINDA:** Is there a difference?

**JUDY:** I can't separate them. It's an intellectual process, but also a spiritual process. It's an organic process. It's all of that. There are times when certain phrases come into the head and I know, because of the way I feel in my gut (and I do tend to trust my gut), that it's worth bothering to write that phrase or succession of phrases down.

**BELINDA:** So the gut feeling is really telling you that there's a possibility for being excited about this.

**JUDY:** Definitely.

**BELINDA:** What are the things that really annoy you as a musician?

**JUDY:** How long have you got? Gosh. Nobody's ever asked me that before. It could open up a whole can of worms... People who don't listen. When I talk about listening, I'm not just talking about the way we tend to go about hearing things. I'm talking about the sort of concentrated, focused, truly alert listening in the moment. As far as musicians go, that applies very much. A lot of my work is with students, and I think part of the job is to try and encourage them to become aware of how important it is to be focused in what they do. It's not just about listening, but about everything that they do.

**BELINDA:** How do you teach that?

**JUDY:** With constant reminders. First of all, bringing their attention to bear and then, hopefully, enough constant reminders so that eventually it becomes part and parcel of the way they function.

**BELINDA:** How do you demonstrate it?

**JUDY:** I think it's possible to indicate when that process is going on. When a class is in progress and certain music is being performed, one is able in one's role as a teacher to pinpoint certain musical things that have occurred during the performance, and to draw their attention to what are often tiny little things that will have escaped the attention of the people involved. I see it as part of my job, and part of my passion for music, to help other people become capable of listening and paying attention—the alert listening, as opposed to the common-or-garden everyday listening. We all do have the inherent ability to carry this out. It's just a case of having it brought to people's attention and then constant reminders. After a while, the students start to realise the benefit of applying themselves in this concentrated, focused way.

.....

***the best way to rehearse is to do so in the concert set-up. To be able to hear each other, to be as close together as possible, with enough eye contact, so that it will be balanced and they can achieve an ensemble.***

.....



*Belinda Webster: I'd play them slabs of Keith Jarrett.. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**BELINDA:** You only have to remind them that animals in the wild have to have this quality, otherwise they will perish!

**JUDY:** Can I use that?

**BELINDA:** Sure! And I'd play them slabs of Keith Jarrett. He sometimes inhabits an amazing place of listening. A transcendent place.



*Keith Jarrett: he sometimes inhabits an amazing place of listening, a transcendent place, according to Belinda Webster... PHOTO COURTESY TWITTER*

**JUDY:** Mind you, one would have to be very selective, otherwise one could fall asleep! [wild laughter]

**BELINDA:** So what else annoys you?

**JUDY:** Walking into a space when I've been invited to take a class, knowing that the participants are not inexperienced and observing that they're set up in such a way that if they were to present themselves like that at a concert, they wouldn't have a

hope in hell of presenting a good concert. I'm talking about walking into a room and finding the drum-kit in one corner of the room, the bass in another corner, and way across in the other corner the guitar or the piano. One has to turn that scenario into something positive by indicating that the best way to rehearse is to do so in the concert set-up. To be able to hear each other, to be as close together as possible, with enough eye contact, so that it will be balanced and they can achieve an ensemble. This happened not so long ago. It makes me cross.

**BELINDA:** So it's a lack of preparation?

**JUDY:** It comes back to alert listening. They should have realised that they weren't hearing each other properly. The other thing that annoys me is lack of loyalty and respect, which can take many forms. Not the least of which is the obvious one of not tunnelling, not taking someone else's work by underhand methods. Dishonesty. Undercutting for financial recompense and dropping the price so that a job is gained at someone else's expense. That's bad human behaviour, a lack of ethics and morality. It's common in business, and it infiltrates right down through the levels of human activity. I've observed this going on. It's not necessarily personal. Things like in rehearsals, where people arrive late. There are often bona fide reasons but there are also people who are habitually late. This shows lack of respect and lack of loyalty to their colleagues. As Dick Montz used to say: 'It comes back to bite you in the bum.' To me it also denotes a lack of self-respect, and it's really sad.



*Dick Montz: it comes back to bite you in the bum... PHOTO COURTESY SYDNEY MORNING HERALD*

I'll talk about another thing that annoys me... I have a deep abiding concern for the well-being of students, and musicians in general. It seems to me there is a focal point that is not touched upon in the way that it should be, in helping students prepare for life-long careers in music. To put this in context I need to start by establishing a concept, which is that you're an instrument, I'm an instrument, all of us are instruments. Those things that we play in music, those things that we pick up and hold, or sit in front of and manipulate, or sit behind and hit, are really extensions of

each and every one of us. If we take it as a premise that we ourselves are the instruments, then we need to apply the same care in looking after ourselves as most of us apply in looking after our so-called instruments. It seems to me that a lot of the injuries sustained by musicians in the course of their playing could be avoided altogether, or certainly minimised, if they were taught or encouraged to first conceptualise themselves as being the instruments, and then be taught how to take care of themselves, how to prepare themselves before playing. For example, if you ask a pianist 'What do you normally do before playing the piano?' they'll invariably say, 'I warm up first.' Warm-up, to most players, means playing a few scales or arpeggios, exercises for warming up the fingers. For me, if you're going to warm up the instrument, that literally means warming up yourself before going anywhere near the instrument you are going to play. You do that with a variety of very simple physical exercise. Breathing—highly important. It takes no more than a few well-applied minutes to warm up the body; to get the blood running; to get the muscles warm and relaxed; to stretch the tendons; to do some deep breathing. It need not take very long at all. The deep breathing helps get rid of toxicity in the blood, which is what tires us, and promotes a greater flow of oxygen to the brain. Those simple measures guarantee that when you finally, physically, start to play the instrument, you're going to be playing it already having prepared yourself. I've had personal proof of this, not just with myself but with students from whom I've had enough feedback to know that this definitely works.

**BELINDA:** I'd like to talk to you about the process of improvisation. It's a process that fascinates me, and...

**JUDY:** It fascinates me too!

**BELINDA:** If you mention jazz to most people, they will say something about improvising. But it is also being able to play a good tune, and then take off into another sphere. You're going with the rhythm and the harmonies from the tune and creating another whole being within it.

**JUDY:** Exactly. If I can just make this one point: we need to make a distinction between the sort of improvisation where one is working to a road-map, a pre-set system, and the other sort of improvisation which people refer to as 'free impro'... I think of free impro as not having to pay when you go in to listen. [laughs] But seriously, I've had a lot to do this with as both performer and teacher. I run classes at the Conservatorium dealing with this form of impro, where there is no pre-set formula, as it were. Both areas of impro are absolutely fascinating, and that aspect of music-making is what drew me into jazz in the first place. I was a very young teenager and I didn't know it was called improvisation, but I knew they were doing something fascinating and I wanted to know about it. So it's gone from there.

**BELINDA:** How do you go about teaching it?

**JUDY:** For a start, it's a mysterious process. At its best, it can take the player and the listener somewhere else—to a mysterious place, which is wonderful, sometimes almost scary but always exciting. At its worst, it can be a pathetic parody of the art of extemporisation.

**BELINDA:** Do you mean where someone has all the riffs and the licks down but doesn't know where to put them in relation to each other?

**JUDY:** Yes, even to the point where—this is a slightly different scenario—you can sometimes get very clever players who have very efficiently practised a whole heap of licks to the point where they can pour it on like there's no tomorrow, but there's no heart or soul in what they're doing. They're playing to a pre-set formula they've created for themselves, and in practising their set of licks they've been doing what other people do when they go through scales and formal exercises. What they then come up with is clever, trite, and soul-less.

**BELINDA:** It's the sort of playing that says. 'Look at me, how clever I am' rather than, 'I'm listening and contributing something in response.'



*Judy Bailey on improvisation: that aspect of music-making is what drew her into jazz in the first place... PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ*

**JUDY:** It's two things: it's conceited, and it's play-safe playing.

**BELINDA:** Do you get a lot of that at the Conservatorium?

**JUDY:** Occasionally you'll get players who resort to this way of doing things. Sometimes I wonder if it's because they're afraid to let go of what they know and venture into the unknown.

**BELINDA:** Seeking the mystery...

**JUDY:** Indeed. Don't get me wrong—I'm not condemning them, because for some people there's a fear of venturing into the unknown. Those players are creating a comfort zone for themselves and that's totally understandable. And regrettable. Because they're denying themselves that wonderful risk-taking element that is absolutely essential, I think, not just in music but in life!

**BELINDA:** One of the people who springs to my mind in this context is James Morrison. He's a great creative artist in many ways and has technique to burn... absolutely staggering. I've heard him play quite a few times and find myself wishing he'd stop playing the same kind of thing all the time!



*James Morrison: in front of a knowledgeable, discerning audience, it'd be a different story... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**JUDY:** This is really sad, and I desperately feel for James because he's capable, I believe, of doing everything. And make no mistake, he's able to go to that other place if he wants to. But what I think has happened over the years is that he's been pigeon-holed into the sort of role-play it's thought the public expects. There are so many 'entertainers'—musicians, actors—who get painted into a corner. They feel under an obligation to the paying public to deliver the goods, and they know what is expected of them. If you placed James in front of a knowledgeable, discerning audience, it'd be a different story. I'd bet on that, and I hope I have an opportunity to witness an event like that because I think we'd be amazed—provided he could break out of habit, flick the switch and enter another zone. I think he could do that.

**BELINDA:** One of the things that you've been labouring with, and succeeding with, for ages is writing music for classical and jazz musicians to perform together. Why is this such a passion of yours?

**JUDY:** Because I *love* classical music and I *love* jazz music. With all due respect to a certain reviewer, I think he really didn't understand the work that he reviewed all those years ago when he heard *Two Minds One Music* in its entirety. Sure, it wasn't played perfectly, but it was played well enough for anyone astute enough and informed enough and alert enough to understand the musical process that entered into in the work, and it deserved a far more favourable review than it got. It was simply describing, in musical and sometimes theatrical terms, sometimes seriously and sometimes light-heartedly, the journey of Afro-American folk music through a 100-year period. That's a long journey to undertake in around 50 minutes. But it was all there for the discerning listener. And I long for the day when it will get a second performance...



*Judy Bailey: concerned with creating a synthesis between classical music and jazz... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**BELINDA:** What is it about the bringing together of classical and jazz idioms that excites you?



**JUDY:** Hopefully creating a satisfying synthesis. But I'll probably go to my grave not having heard these works.

**BELINDA:** I sincerely hope that is not the case. But you are, nevertheless, getting some satisfaction out of writing the music. Is seeking that synthesis enough to drive you?

**JUDY:** Yes. But I'm trying to create that synthesis because, in some strange way, it fulfils a need inside me. Wanting to—symbolically, through music—indicate to as many people as possible that it is possible, and in fact highly desirable, to bring about harmony between previously conflicting parties or entities. I'm talking about a perception which I think has existed for a long time, that there is a line of demarcation between classical music and jazz. That is representative of all other lines of demarcation—between this religion and that religion, or this country and that country, or black and white people. There are so many frightening, immensely sad instances of conflicting entities and, for me, the business of trying to bring together two possibly conflicting entities in music is a way to symbolically indicate, 'Hey, it can be done. They can come together and exist happily.'

**BELINDA:** Part of the solution is education. One of my big gripes in the world of music education is that people who are taught to be classical musicians are never exposed to improvisation, and to the possibilities for creation and self-expression.

**JUDY:** Which is why I get such a huge satisfaction from taking the classes at the Conservatorium, because a large percentage of the class is classical students. It's an elective class, but compulsory for the composers.

**BELINDA:** That's terrific, but it should start much earlier!

**JUDY:** It is changing gradually.



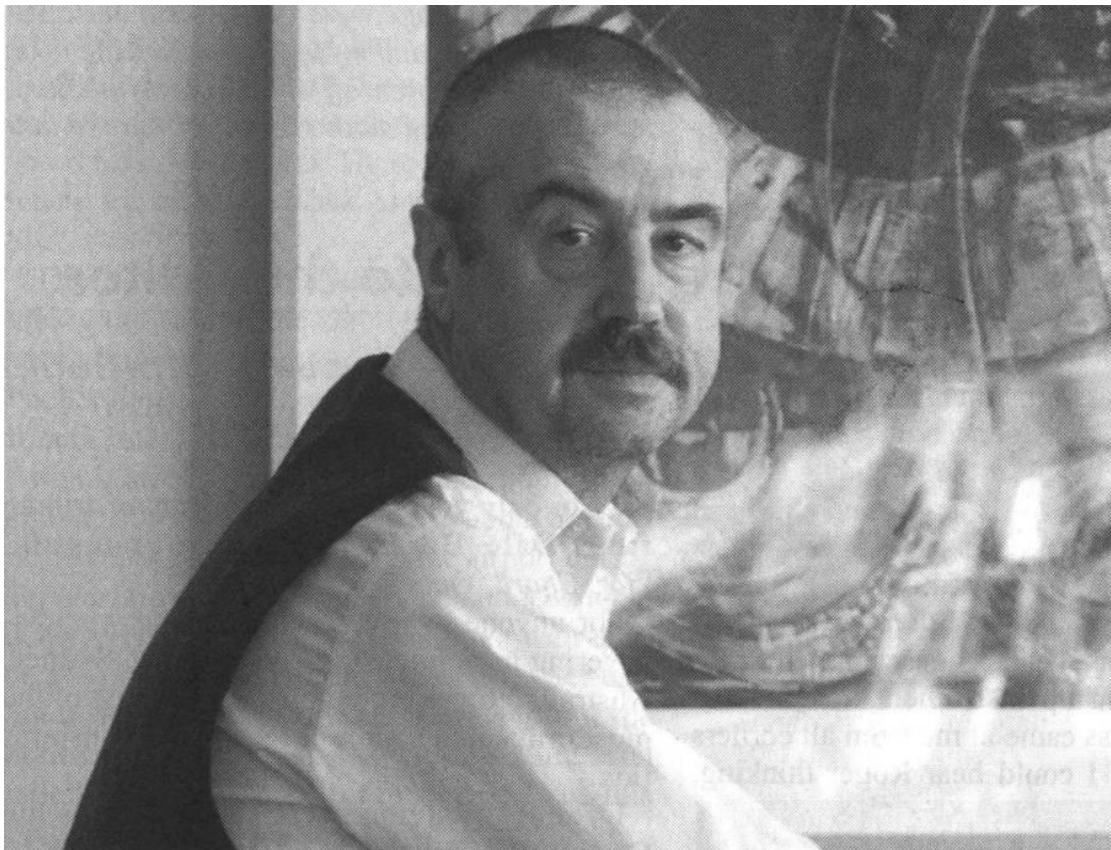
*Judy Bailey (right) with John Sangster, whom she misses, pictured during the El Rocco era... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY*

**BELINDA:** But not fast enough. And when it has changed, that's when your music will have an informed audience!

**JUDY:** I can't wait around that long... I'd die happy if I had one good recording of my music for symphony orchestra and big band.

**BELINDA:** Of all the people you've worked with, who inspires you the most?

**JUDY:** Straight away two people come to mind whom I value immensely, and both of whom I miss sadly. One is Johnny Sangster and the other is Roger Frampton.



*Roger Frampton: he and Johnny Sangster were both human beings who had an immense curiosity about everything; about the world and all the people who live in it, or on it... PHOTO CREDIT ROBERT PEET*

John was a one-off. A wonderful musical colleague and a wonderful friend. To be feared when he was in his less lucid moments, and to be absolutely loved for just being him, and for the immense influence he had on me and on the general music scene. John's interests ran wide, as did Roger's. They were both human beings who had an immense curiosity about everything; about the world and all the people who live in it, or on it. Both were immense musical inspirations to an immense number of people, and both had a way of viewing the world and of viewing humankind that was as diverse as it was compassionate, humorous, informed, perceptive, and always interesting—never boring. And that's quite something, isn't it?