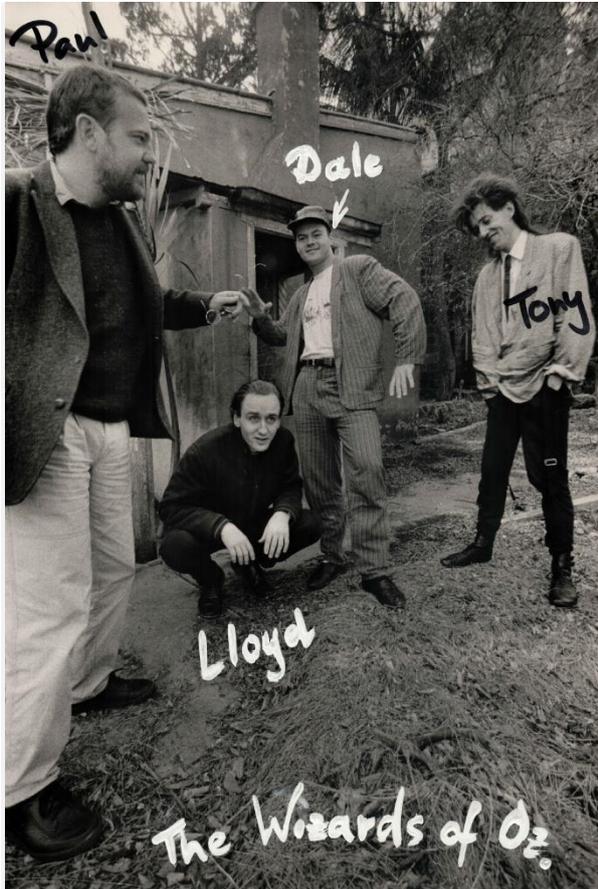


# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## Barlow's brainchild a must for modernists



*The Wizards of Oz: (L-R) Paul Grabowsky, Lloyd Swanton, Dale Barlow, Tony Buck. The drummer Buck was replaced by Alan Turnbull for this performance at The Basement...*

### **JAZZ**

The Wizards of Oz

The Basement, Sydney

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### **ERIC MYERS**

This performance will be remembered primarily for the brilliance of the Melbourne pianist Paul Grabowsky. He stood out forcefully on an evening that featured some of Australia's finest contemporary jazz musicians.

The Wizards of Oz is the brainchild of the Sydney saxophonist Dale Barlow, who on returning to Australia after four years in the competitive jazz worlds of Europe and the US

wanted to form a quartet that could reflect the very best of Australian modern jazz.

On the evidence of this performance, this ideal has largely been achieved. Barlow's own talent, as the most thrusting – the hungriest - tenor saxophonist in the country, has been effectively matched by Grabowsky, who is probably the most literate of our modern pianists. Together the two men are a riveting combination.

Still, for all their strength and virtuosity, Barlow and Grabowsky by no means outclassed the rest of the quartet: Lloyd Swanton (bass) and Alan Turnbull (drums). Both men played with the sort of authority and maturity that only comes from years of experience in the music. It was instructive to hear a rhythm section whose musical direction was never in doubt.

Two other factors contributed to the success of this performance. Firstly, in an era where the local jazz repertoire is still based on old-fashioned American popular standards, it was stimulating to hear a repertoire of superior original compositions (other than the opening standard *It's You Or No One*, which the group effectively redefined). The titles of these compositions are self-effacing — Barlow's *Nothing's Enough* and *None Of The Above*, Grabowsky's *Second Chances* and *Horace*, for example — but they are clever and knowledgeable works, revealing a welter of modern jazz influences.

Secondly, The Basement has to be commended for enabling the music to be presented through an excellent sound system. When I last heard Grabowsky play in Sydney at another venue he used a tame little upright piano, which could be heard only by listeners in the front row. Here, with the benefit of The Basement's amplified grand, the full power of his playing could be experienced. The sound was relatively loud overall, but well balanced.

The performance by the 11-piece Bruce Cale Orchestra — one set to finish the night — was a disappointing one, through no fault of the band.

When this performance began — close to midnight — the audience was talkative, if not rowdy, and in no mood to savour Bruce Cale's music which, in essence, is very subtle.

Under those circumstances, the music could not be regarded as subject for review. The Wizards of Oz play again tonight at The Basement, supported by Steve McKenna's group, *Stepping Out*.

It is not an overstatement to say that the Wizards are now the pacesetters in Australian modern jazz. They really should not be missed by anyone who wants to hear — for a change — contemporary jazz that would not be out of place in New York.