

## ***The Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival – Media Report***

### ***New Harmony for Women's Jazz with festival of their own***

Sydney Morning Herald , Canberra Times, Brisbane Times

November 6, 2012 by John Shand

HAVING not had the easiest time being accepted as equals in jazz, women remain comprehensively outnumbered. The wheel, however, slowly turns, and now a new jazz festival spotlights nine female-led bands, both international and local.

At its inception a century ago, jazz was frowned upon as an activity for polite young ladies. When women did break in they soon counted among its greats, including such singers as Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. But the leading Australian musician Sandy Evans believes singers have been undervalued, contributing to a perception of women being at the margins of the main jazz swell.

In Sydney it has been no different. The outstanding pianist Judy Bailey carried the flame in the 1960s and '70s, before the likes of Evans (saxophones) became role models in the 1980s, and gradually the situation has improved, although it lags far behind parity.

Hoping to aid the cause, the Sydney Improvised Music Association and the City of Sydney are mounting the inaugural Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival. The association has run Young Women's Jazz Workshops for a decade, and meanwhile the annual Jann Rutherford Memorial Award has turbocharged the careers of several emerging female artists.

Among those is Hannah James, whose trio plays in the festival, and who believes women still start out on the back foot. "The dominant assumption is that you're probably not going to be as good a player," the bassist says. While this can be disheartening, she suggests it can also spur one to prove the assumption wrong, and adds that "you don't want to be the one perpetuating that perception".

Although the quality of young women players is clearly surging, Evans longs for the day when the discussion is simply redundant. As to its reasons, she chooses not to reduce such complex gender issues to neat theorising, preferring to try to effect change through education and mentorship.

Evans sees the existence of Sydney's all-women Sirens Big Band as a significant step. "It provides a social context, gives them confidence, and allows them to relax and find their own ways of doing things," she says. "You have to fight your way in the beginning when you're a woman," says festival star Cyrille Aimee, "just to prove you are a musician."

Having jumped that hurdle, the French singer faced another by moving to New York - "Anywhere is easier than New York!" - and a third because she agrees that being a singer makes it even harder to be taken seriously.

Another festival highlight is Trio M, led by Myra Melford. The leading New York pianist thinks it easier for women to break through now in the sense that the existence of exceptional female players is readily accepted, even though the arts environment itself is more hostile.

"There are definitely more women on the scene than when I first started," she says, "and that's very encouraging."

For all the artists, any thoughts of tokenism tend to be swept away in the pleasure of the chance to play. The Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival runs from November 7 to 17 at the Seymour Centre's Sound Lounge, Chippendale.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/new-harmony-for-womens-jazz-with-festival-of-their-own-20121105-28tz9.html#ixzz2O2uO81JM>

### **Trio M - Exhilarating trio in one of the gigs of the year**

The Sound Lounge, November 9

Sydney Morning Herald , Canberra Times, Brisbane Times

November 12, 2012 by John Shand

JUST over 50 years ago the Bill Evans Trio presented the heretical proposition that piano, bass and drums could be three equal voices, rather than a lead instrument with accompanists. It was not, as some have suggested, a blinding revelation on Evans's part, but rather a collective response to Scott LaFaro's radically original bass playing. The idea has since been explored and expanded in bands assembled by such pianists as Marilyn Crispell, Bobo Stenson and Masabumi Kikuchi. But it may never have been so perfectly espoused as it is in Trio M.

The three M's – Myra Melford (piano), Mark Dresser (bass) and Matt Wilson (drums) – are an equilateral triangle, with all the implied perfection of balance and proportion. This is not just a matter of conception and musicianship, but of personalities, with the Americans sharing a selfless inclination to leave space for each other.

The music's melodic foreground perpetually danced between the three instruments. This was partly built into the pieces (all three performers are composers), and partly improvised. Extended techniques were applied by all, with Melford's prepared piano and Dresser's use of two hands on the finger-board both creating eerily kalimba-like effects.

It is rare in any artform for the atmospheric and the earthy, the abstract and the moving, the cerebral and the playful to be intertwined so comprehensively. They created a rarefied sonic domain in which surprise piled on surprise, until we seemed to have entered a parallel musical universe where a state of wonderment was the norm.

Yet what was happening was so natural that they could have been three children hard at play, because, for all its phenomenal sophistication, this was art utterly without artifice.

The headliner of the inaugural Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival, which continues until November 17, Trio M was easily the highlight of the international acts from this year's

Wangaratta Jazz Festival to pass through Sydney, and probably the jazz concert of the year. Exhilarating.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/exhilarating-trio-in-one-of-the-gigs-of-the-year-20121112-2973h.html#ixzz2O2xA0kYG>

***The Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival is featuring some of Australia's rising stars* SBS World News**

16 Nov 2012

By Michelle Hanna

While singers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday may be among the biggest female names in jazz, traditionally there aren't many women known for writing or playing jazz music.

But women are breaking new ground. The inaugural [Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival](#) is featuring some of Australia's rising stars. They are not just tickling the ivories, but writing the tunes.

Cuban-born, Brisbane-based Marialy Pacheco arranges popular songs from her homeland. "I always like compositions, so I always like to do my own thing, and I think that's the start of getting into jazz that is mostly improvising and mostly being yourself and being creative," says Ms Pacheco. She is challenging not just industry stereotypes, but cultural stereotypes as well. "It is hard, just because of the cliches. For example, when you are Cuban you are supposed to be dancing and singing and I get it all the time," she told SBS.

"People assume things, they assume I am a singer all the time or an actress or anything, but not a piano player. You probably have to prove twice as much that you are great."

She was the first female to win the solo piano competition at the Montreux Jazz Festival this year. And there are others making their mark in jazz in increasingly significant ways, not just as pianists and singers but as composers and instrumentalists.

Australians such as double-bass player Hannah James, composer Andrea Keller, and vocal improviser Gian Slater are just some of the women breaking through in a new jazz environment.

"There's been a focus certainly here in Australia where we've been trying to focus our energies on nurturing young women as they are coming through their music studies so that they can learn to improvise in a safe environment with other women," says Amy Curl of the Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival. "And we've certainly seen that's had a very beneficial result," she added.

Andrea Keller – Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival

**Jazz stalwart Andrea Keller teams up with a new quartet for a special ladies-only jazz fest**

Sydney Time Out

**15 October, 2012 by Jason Catlett**

Born in Sydney in 1973, Melbourne-based jazz pianist Andrea Keller is one of the most respected musicians in the country, with three ARIA Awards and three Australian Jazz 'Bell' Awards to her name. While on an Australia Council Fellowship she wrote and recorded a four-part suite 'Affectations' for prepared big band; it won Jazz Work of the Year at the 2012 Art Music Awards. While waiting for her new work at the Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival, we tried to find out what this formidable artistic achiever is striving for.

**Andrea, you're probably best known for the quartet that bears your name. We're fans... but where's the bass?**

Once upon a time there was a bass, but he moved to New York City at a time when the 'who' was more important than the 'what', so I decided not to replace him and instead shifted the music around the diminished line-up. To me, the music has opened up and there are infinitely more possibilities because the 'box' has been torn open.

**At the Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival you will be in a different jazz quartet: Phil Slater on trumpet, Evan Mannell on drums and Jonathan Zwartz on bass, plus Gian Slater on vocals. How will this quintet sound compared to the AKQ?**

More than the obvious differences in instrumentation and personnel, jazz is a very personal music – the music that comes off the stage is being created spontaneously by a bunch of individuals who come together to share themselves with each other through a medium that they all deeply love and value. Every musician up there has spent their life pursuing and perfecting this craft and so they bring with them an enormous amount of individual and unique tools with which to make this 'conversation' happen. We share a lot of the same knowledge, but we all have a different take on it.

**What's it like to work with Phil as a musician and a composer?**

Phil is one of my favourite all time musicians. He's got such a strong concept in his playing and writing – it's incredibly focused music. He also has one of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard.

**Reviewers often praise your originality, for example in your album *Angels and Rascals* (2005). Were you trying to do or be original? What is it that succeeds in being interesting?**

I think if you 'try' to be original, everything will flop! No, I'm driven by a search for the 'spark' in music. I'm trying to find sounds and ways of organising an ensemble performance that resonate within me and ignite some sort of 'good' feeling. For this to happen for me it can't be a re-hashing of something I've heard a million times before, it's got to have that certain freshness for me to be interested in it – this is what makes music interesting to me. Also, at the base of it all, is that I'm constantly trying to make myself a better player and composer, so I create music that pushes me and expands my thinking.

**You've performed for audiences across Australia and around the world, including Europe, the UK and Japan. Do you find audiences respond to the same or different things?**

Audiences respond if they can feel you're giving them something real: a real piece of you. I'm not into virtuosity or showmanship, so I don't have those to hide behind. Instead, I choose to just bare myself honestly and hope that this resonates with people. I once heard someone say that improvising in performance is an incredibly generous act, and I really think that's true: people who are drawn to this music as listeners and performers value that generosity and honesty.

*Andrea Keller and the Gian Slater Quartet play the Sydney International Women's Jazz Festival.*

## **Arts Hub**

For ten days this November some of the most sensational women in Jazz today will be headlining Sydney's first International Women's Jazz Festival at The Sound Lounge and Courtyard at the Seymour Centre in Chippendale.

"The program has an amazing line-up which will appeal to both a broad music audience as well as committed jazz fans", says Programme Director Peter Rechniewski. The international component, which is presented courtesy of the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz and Blues and is particularly impressive, is composed of bands which are not only considered outstanding performers but are making their first visits to Australia.

As well, there will be FREE Courtyard Concert featuring artists such as the Zoe and the Buttercups and Jess Green and the Pre-Loved, which is sponsored by the City of Sydney ensuring that everyone can enjoy this noteworthy Festival.

Performing along the visiting musicians will be Australian Artists such as Sandy Evans and Andrea Keller who are well known to jazz fans here but not so well known is Cuban/Australian Marialy Pacheco. As winner of the Montreux Jazz Festival Prize this July (2012), her 'star' is definitely in the ascendant.

"Marialy Pacheco delivers commanding performances of pure musical joy, whether solo performances or as for the SIWJF, as part of the Marialy Pacheco Trio Steeped in the rhythms of her native Cuba and influenced by her love of the jazz tradition Marialy infuses a vibrant spirit and unwavering passion for the music of her birthplace" says Rechniewski

Myra Melford who co-leads the collective Trio M has a reputation as one of the most important composers and improvisers of the last twenty years, who encompasses both jazz and composed music. She has been called a fearless musical adventurer and by critic Francis Davis as "the most original pianist/composer to emerge from jazz since Anthony Davis".

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New York based French singer Cyrille Aimee is making heads turn in both the US and Europe with her fresh sound and wonderfully communicative style. Since making the finals in the

prestigious Thelonious Monk competition in New York, she has become one of the most talked about new faces in the jazz vocal stable. Possessing a warm, enchanting voice that she uses with great control whether singing ballads or more up-tempo numbers, Cyrille communicates with audiences across genre boundaries with an ease usually found only in veterans.

German band No Tango Quartet, led by Cologne based saxophonist and composer Christina Fuchs, are a genre bending and blending group that combines contemporary jazz with ethnic music and new music. The band represents an important current of European jazz that seeks to create new sounds fashioned from sources beyond the American tradition.

Also appearing is Singer Kristin Berardi, who has been lauded for possessing a voice "warm like a Queensland summer and honest like a country town." At the SIWJF she performs as part of a duo with renowned jazz guitarist James Sherlock.

In 2006 Kristin won the Montreux Jazz Festival International Voice Competition (with Al Jarreau as panel chair). She has recorded with the likes of Jim Pugh and Kenny Werner in New York, and the West End Composer's Collective, her own band as well as the Jazzgroove Mothership Orchestra and Kate Miller-Heidke.

Sandy Evans is one of the most important jazz musicians who emerged in the 1980s. A mainstay of Australian contemporary jazz, she has led or co-led some of our most innovative ensembles such as Women and Children First, Clarion Fracture Zone, the Sandy Evans Trio and Sextet. Evans has won numerous awards most recently and notably, a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to Australian contemporary jazz as a composer and a musician: a rare honour for a jazz musician.

Originally from Sydney, Melbourne based pianist/composer/band leader Andrea Keller is probably the most formidable female jazz talent to emerge in Australia after Sandy Evans. She works across a wide variety of formats from solo piano to duets with bass (or recorder – with Genevieve Lacy), her own quartets and quintets, and the Bennett's Lane Big Band. At the SIWJF, the Andrea Keller Quartet will be joined by Melbourne improvising vocalist Gian Slater. The two have worked together many times in Melbourne but this will be the first time they have performed together for a Sydney audience.

Also appearing will be the Aberdeen Youth Festival touring band aka The Alex Silver Quintet who will perform a short set. The band consists entirely of young Australian women jazz musicians led by trombonist Alexandra Silver who directs SIMA's annual 'Young Women in Jazz' workshops with the Sydney Conservatorium.

7,8,9,10,16 & 17th November at the Seymour Centre.

<http://au.artshub.com/au/whats-on/australian-capital-territory/festivals/sydney-international-womens-jazz-festival-134600>

