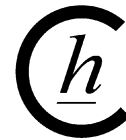


Jazz: For Love or Money



CURRENCY HOUSE

Notes from the seminar convened by Clem Gorman, to examine the problems facing jazz musicians in New South Wales today and seek mutual support.

Currency House, March 13, 2005

Perhaps because of strongly held views about what is or is not 'real' jazz, perhaps because of clashes of personalities, the jazz world in Sydney has been fragmented and characterised by a degree of mutual antagonism. On Sunday, March 13, Currency House held a seminar, convened by Clem Gorman, to examine the problems facing jazz musicians in New South Wales today and seek mutual support.

Leading the debate were Cameron Deyell (President of the Jazzgroove Association), Kate Dunbar (Sydney Jazz Club), Joy Mestroni (Jazz Action Society), Richard Ruhle (Musicians' Union), Peter Rechnievski (President and artistic director, Sydney Improvised Music Association) and Craig Scott (Head of Jazz at the Sydney Conservatorium).

Attendance was gratifyingly large and discussion ranged over such issues as the decline in the number of live jazz venues, especially in pubs and clubs; the poor and fitful remuneration of jazz musicians; the ignorance of jazz among the general public, especially young people, the poor marketing skills of jazz musicians, and the lack of co-ordination among jazz organisations. As speakers pointed out, it was time for the jazz world to present a united front to the wider world, to ensure jazz music is taken into account in future government planning. For our future would become increasingly dependent upon government regulation and funding.

In 2003–04 a series of public forums have been held under the auspices of the New South Wales Premier's Department examining the decline in live venues for music generally. Jazz had not been well represented. Among the reasons for this decline, have been the high cost of public liability insurance, poker machines taking over rooms in pubs previously used for live music, increasingly strict fire and safety regulations for premises that hold live performance licences, and, from the point of view of venue operators, the insistence by the Musicians' Union on full award payments. Add to this the fact that live music faces enormous and growing competitive pressure from home cinemas, pop music gigs and festivals, and from high quality music DVDs and CDs, and it may be wondered how any live music, and in particular the less commercial forms like blues, jazz, or cajun, can survive as public performance.

Joy Mestroni stressed the importance of musicians becoming more adept at marketing themselves. At the very least they should always carry a press kit. Richard Ruhle, Secretary of the New South Wales Musicians' Union, outlined the problems defined by the forums in the issues paper, *Live Music Industry in New South Wales*, released in January 2005 by the Strategic Projects Division of the Premier's Department. and sought for ways to balance the needs of all stakeholders; Craig Scott, Head of Jazz at the Sydney Conservatorium and respected jazz musician, spoke of the special problems of young musicians, and the training of musicians; Kate Dunbar drew our attention to the decline she has observed in the numbers of jazz patrons frequenting a declining number of pubs; Peter Rechnievski was more positive, SIMA having opened a new regular venue at the Seymour Centre recently; and Cameron

Deyell, a leading musician and committee member of Jazzgroove, closed the session with some welcome positive comments about the future of intelligent beat music.

Questions from the audience were forthright and constructive. It became increasingly clear, as the seminar continued, that there had been a lack of communication and cohesion between the different branches of the jazz world. The demise of the position of New South Wales Jazz Co-ordinator might be partly to blame for this. Frank Presley, for example, a jazz broadcaster, drew attention to his website listing jazz gigs and organisations, following claims from a previous speaker that one was needed.

Some of the major issues raised at the seminar, and around which future collaboration would need to revolve, were:

- the reinstatement of the position of New South Wales Jazz Co-ordinator;
- the safeguarding of live music in New South Wales;
- education about jazz in schools;
- more funding for jazz organisations and programs;
- a better sharing of information within the jazz world;
- jazz musicians to become more market-savvy and develop media kits;
- follow-up seminars like this one to develop a lobby on agreed issues to government, the media and the public;
- greater restriction on the number of poker machines in pubs;
- venue to adhere to union award rates;
- a superannuation scheme for musicians; and
- greater public recognition of the sheer skill involved in playing jazz.

To take these issues, and others, forward it was resolved to hold several more seminars with this specific aim: to identify and agree a short list of issues to be pushed in the public arena, including to the New South Wales Premier's Department.

It is a positive sign that something is being done at government level, however slowly and bureaucratically, to maintain live music entertainment, as was the large turnout for this first seminar. But we need to organise, collaborate and press our case. The future of jazz is, ultimately, in the hands of jazz lovers and performers, and we can ensure that future if we act now in a united manner. The chance won't come again. Clem Gorman

To this end, Clem Gorman is convening a Working Party. Its first meeting will be in the conference room at Currency House on Sunday 22 May 2005 at 5.30pm. All interested parties are invited to register their interest with him at clemgorman@bigpond.com, or (02) 4384 2356.