

Sandy Evans interviewed by James Nightingale

Tuesday 19th October, 2004

JN: Sandy, could you describe your current musical practice.

SE: I am a performer on Tenor and Soprano saxophone, and a composer, and I also do some teaching. My work ranges across quite a wide range of different ensembles, I've got a jazz trio of my own that I write for; I play in the *Australian Art Orchestra*; I play in *10 Part Invention*; I play in a trio with Koto and percussion called *Waratah*; I play with Roger Dean in *Australysis*, and I've recently formed a new ensemble called *GEST8*, which is a cross section of jazz musicians, Satsuki Odamura on Koto and Greg White on Electronics. I also play in Lloyd Swanton's group, *The Catholics*, so I'm in a lot of bands. They don't all work all the time, most work only a few times a year, by and large.

JN: So the work in each band is quite disparate. Do you feel that you are working constantly, despite working with different things all the time?

SE: Not all the time, no. This year I've done a lot of touring. Probably it is the most that I've felt like I've been working for some time. And I've just loved it. It has made me, sort of, hungry for that feeling.

JN: What kind of resources do you use to maintain your creative work? We've talked a little bit about some of your associate musicians already, but what sort of institutions, technologies, musical resources are you bringing to, specifically, your own projects?

SE: Well, I guess the organisation that would be the main supporter, if I am performing in Sydney, of many of these ensembles would usually be the Sydney Improvised Music Association. I'm fortunate that they ask me to play for them. But it is something that each band can only do a few times a year. So if you want to work more than that, then it is pretty much down to you to do something about it, which at different times in my life I've had more or less energy for. This year I have organised quite a lot of work myself, with assistance from the Australia Council, and this year, for the first time, I've had some assistance from the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts. That allowed me to employ Anna Cerneaz to help me with some of my touring. In the past I've often put in my own money and resources left over from other projects, and I'm sure I'll be doing that again. I am a member of the JazzGroove Association, and play for them from time to time as well. Recently, I've had assistance from the Sydney Opera House, which is a really new thing. I've now done three projects there that have had some input from them. Also, I've received some support from the New Music Network, particularly for the gigs with Roger Dean.

Creatively, I think for me the most important aspect of my work is the interaction with the people that I play with. I feel like that has always been the thing that has stimulated me the most, that has taught me the most. I really value their input more than anything else in artistic terms. It is hard to speak in general terms about my work, because the range of work that I do is so varied. My projects pretty much always involve improvisation and the things that I'm interested in are looking at extending the jazz tradition by, I suppose, looking for ways in which ideas from other musics that I'm interested in can influence the jazz performance that I do. So in recent years those influences

have included Balinese gamelan. When I performed in Paul Grabowsky's show, *The Theft of Sita*, I played a lot with the 'Su lin player' and that gave me a lot of interesting ideas about intonation and ornamentation. Asian influences have been predominant in my experience in recent years, which I'm really happy about. I've also had some contact with South Indian music through the Art Orchestra, through Adrian Sherriff in particular. And then there is my experience of Japanese music through Satsuki Odamura. I suppose the other area that has been creeping in has been Korean music, so I feel more drawn to things from Asia and how they might be able to influence jazz and improvised music in general.

JN: What suggestions do you think that you could make to improving those creative links, to allow you to work more fruitfully with other musicians, to spend more time generating projects?

SE: That's the biggest issue that those working in this broad field of new music face. Basically you've got to make a living and you've got to have some way of organising performances. I feel that there is room for more infrastructure support to enable groups to organise tours and concerts and to help with grant applications. It seems to be a fact of life that a lot of this music requires some degree of funding, from somewhere, I think that's, maybe, just the nature of it, but you can get really fed up spending all your time writing grant applications and reports. Much as it is extremely good to have that avenue of support, I would like help and most musicians that I work with don't apply nearly as much as they would like to because they're so busy with all the other activities that they do, and they don't have time to get the necessary applications completed. Mostly they are busy doing things that they are quite happy doing, like teaching, but there are only so many hours in the day and to really do your creative work well, you need to have some remaining energy when you sit down to do practice or administration. Doing it after a long day's teaching is maybe not the ideal circumstance. In the jazz scene there used to be the Jazz Coordination Association, which had its problems, but I feel like there could be some way to give musicians more administrative support. But it's a tricky problem, because you have to find the right people and who share the right objectives, or perhaps the musicians have to control the objectives. So assistance with grant applications, assistance with organising concerts, tours and recordings, and assistance with promoting concerts, tours and recordings. I would say those things are badly needed.

JN: Have you ever had a manager or worked with a manager?

SE: I've never had a manager as such. What I've done, from time to time, is employ someone to help me. That began with Clarion Fracture Zone where the piano player and co-bandleader was Alistair Spence, and his wife, Sue, who was a dancer had to stop working due to health problems, and she was looking for something else to do. So we said, 'OK, would you help us?' And we used to just pay her as best we could and she was fantastic. She started from having no knowledge at all and organised four or five international tours over the years. And she works at the Australia Council now, sadly, for us, she got too good for us. And now she has a stable job. What we need is to be able to keep people like her. But, of course, she needs a regular income and good on her, she's gone a long way with it. So we lost her because she got too good, and since then I've had two other people, one of whom was really quite young and had just started. So managers or assistants have been people that I employed. I looked around and I said to myself, "I need help with this tour as there's no way I'm going to get it together myself". The other manager/assistant has been Anna Cerneaz, who is fantastic, she also is incredibly busy. What she's doing is amazing, it's like we need a million of her.

JN: From your experiences of touring around Australia, do you find that your music is accepted wherever you go?

SE: That's a really interesting question. I've done a lot of different projects. The first thing I did was a band called *Women and Children First*. We bought a bus and drove around Australia, it took seven months, and we had very mixed experiences. It would depend on where you went. You don't get the same response everywhere. It depends where you go, and on what the music is. Some of the music that I play is quite challenging for an audience, and some of it is quite accessible. So the nature of the music has an impact. Last year I did tour around Australia with my trio and I was really pleased with how the music was received, because it's not the most accessible group that I play in. (It's maybe not the most inaccessible group that I play in either but it's certainly not a commercial line up). I felt that what helped us was that we organised the tour through existing jazz networks. It was great to utilise these pre-existing networks on the ground all around the place. Sometimes that network can consist of just one enthusiastic person who gets it in the papers, gets it on the radio, tells their friends and generates a good feeling about the tour. And that's happened to me all over the world. It just makes things possible. I feel that enthusiasm from a person who loves the music and is prepared to work for it is just so wonderful. We should get all those people and, you know, give them a lot of money, because usually they do it for nothing.

JN: Do you think that the new music scene or the reception for new improvised music is different to how it has been in the past? Is it still more or less the same? Is what's happening better? Of higher quality?

SE: If I talk across the whole range of music that I'm involved in, I hesitate because some of it is experimental. I guess it is all experimental in nature, but some of it is more adventurous. But I'll talk about it all. Number one, there's a hell of a lot more happening than I remember when I was starting out. There was a particularly fertile period in the 1980s as a result of the Keys Music Association in Sydney that was a result of Jon Rose living here. There was a very strong, small but really strong, thing that was happening. Then it sort of petered out for a while, Jon left and the Keys Music Association fell apart. Then, gradually during the 1990s it all started to build up again.

I'd say that the standard of playing is really high now. I'd say that the standard of conceptual thinking is really high too. I think there are more people doing more things now. The impact of technology has been significant as well. So I have seen a development in the scene and I think there's definitely been an improvement in quality and an increase in the amount of activity that is going on. The ability to actually make a living out of it hasn't really improved, however, and I feel that more support is needed. And more venues, more venues definitely.

JN: Thank you very much Sandy.