

Getting to Know...•Anita Harris

What are your earliest musical memories?

Sitting by the piano listening to dad play (and sing), "Your Feets Too Big", which he did many times at the insistence of myself and my siblings. Come to think of it, he was in the exact situation many musicians who become associated with one or two tunes are in; he couldn't sit down to play the piano for us without his audience (albeit four small, noisy, pre-pubescent children in this context) without having those tunes requested. All these years later I find myself understanding that on a whole new level...

My own early forays into music were at that same piano, where I would sit, and play, sing and write for hours.

What was your first gig?

I probably had a few sit-ins before the first official outing, but interpreting this as "gig for which money changed hands", it was in a reception band at the Wattle Park Chalet. There were a couple of jazz tunes in the book (which, these days, has now lovingly become known as "The Forbidden Book) but it was predominantly pop, rock and roll and other tunes intended to do the impossible – entertain an audience whose musical tastes were as diverse as their ages.

First jazz gig was a different thing though. In 1993, with a very small jazz repertoire, I headed to Merimbula to see if I could do the jazz thing. It was very much a family affair back then. Dad was on piano, my brother Evan on bass, Alan Richards on drums (with us from the very beginning) and me up the front battling nerves but hoping I'd do okay. Thankfully it went well, and was so much fun that we wanted to repeat the experience. And we did, many times. And for me, it was the beginning of a lifelong love of jazz.



1993, the original Anita Harris Quartet, Merimbula



Anita Harris and Kim Harris (aka Dad) at Port Fairy.

What are the highlights of your musical journey since then?

The first album was a memorable milestone. By the end of the 90s the jazz repertoire had grown somewhat (thought not to the heights it's reached today), there were regular gigs and festivals and the most frequent question I was being asked (apart from, "Will you sing Laura?") was, "Do you have a CD?" So in 1998 we headed into the studio to record. We had no idea what we were doing, but fell into good hands and **Moments in Time** was born. We released it ourselves, but were thrilled when the run sold out and it was reprinted and picked up by Newmarket Music. That label has continued to support and promote us since then, picking up three subsequent albums.

Being able to perform with dad is something else entirely. A joy. A blessing. And over the years music has afforded me the opportunity to work with many other great musicians: Graeme Steel, Ron Trigg, Leon Heale, David Taylor, Ron Anderson, Helen Jowsey, Pippa Wilson and

those one-off sets with people like Tom Baker, Paul Furniss, Dennis Ball and others. Life is good!

Who are your musical influences?

Every composer who contributed to The Great American Songbook; love jazz standards, jazz verses and particularly enjoy finding those musical gems that are performed less frequently. Carmichael, Porter, Ellington, Gershwin, Jobim, Arlen, Warren, Mancini, Berlin, Kern, Van Heusen, Stein, Weill, Bernstein, Rogers & Hart... so many!

In terms of performers, Rosemary Clooney is a personal favourite, although I'm drawn to many of the jazz ladies and lads of the swing era for different reasons. Like many vocalists, I worship at the alter of Ella, (and listen to Mel T and Tony B all the time) but again, there are too many to list.

What are you up to these days?

Ah, this and that. Some favourite festivals at which I'm a familiar face include Marysville, Eltham, Port Fairy and Inverloch (all highly recommended!) and crop up in venues and jazz clubs here and there doing all sorts of shows. In recent years, "Clooney Tunes" and "Gershwing" were fab events, and the twice-a-year (somewhat chaotic) collaborative show with Pippa Wilson is always interesting.



The Anita Harris Quintet, entertaining the Phillip Island Jazz Club in 2018, The Bass Room, Ramada Resort. Left to Right: Kim Harris, David Taylor, Anita Harris, Alan Richards and Graeme Steel.

The website (<https://www.anitaharrisjazz.com.au/>) or facebook page (Anita Harris Jazz) are always a good way to see what the band has going on!