

Getting to Know... John Curtis - Pianist

What are your earliest musical memories?

I started learning classical piano at the age of 5. As the eldest in the family it fell to me to get out of bed first to practise. As my younger brothers and sister became old enough to practise this meant getting up earlier and earlier. When the last one started I was up at 5am. We lived on a farm well out of Armidale NSW and it was necessary to travel into town before school started. It was brutally cold early in the morning in winter. The old one bar radiator did wonders for my back but my hands were always freezing.

What was your first gig?

My first real gig occurred in my final year at school playing lead guitar in my group "The Electrons" (I was keen on science as well as music) at the picture theatre in Armidale. We were a Shadows cover band and this was our big break. At University my band "Sounds Intoxicated" also performed the hits of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, amongst others. We were also very much into Rhythm & Blues. This led to performances on the local radio station and we had lots of gigs playing at college balls and various woolshed parties. We also won the local chapter of Hoagley's Battle Of The Sounds and performed, somewhat ironically, at a local folk festival as a folk group. Interesting times!

What are the highlights of your musical journey since then?

External musical performance, with the exception of a few pub performances in Perth playing rock n roll at pubs, took a back seat during my working career mainly due to the demands of my work. However when I retired I decided to learn jazz as I had absolutely no experience or capability in the genre. I took lessons firstly with Chris Sommerville, then Steve Sedergreen and Mark Fitzgibbon and attended jam sessions at the old Dizzy's in Swan Street, Richmond near the railway overpass. I was taken under the wings of a delightful woman, Celestine McDermott, a singer with a repertoire almost as extensive as Annie Smith's. Celestine taught me how to accompany her singing the standards. At the cost of much early embarrassment I eventually felt comfortable enough to form a group with some of my fellow jammers including the wonderful singer Deborah Burnett. Happily the gigs followed and we got a lot of valuable experience. Over more recent times it has been my privilege as well as great fun to perform with a number of friends at jazz festivals, ShowBiz and various other venues.

Who are your musical influences?

There are too many to mention them all but people like Bill Evans, Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, Peter Martin, Cedar Walton, Diana Krall, Eliane Elias, Enrico Pieranunzi, Kenny Barron and McCoy Tyner are some of my favourite pianists.

What are you up to these days?

No major projects, mainly just working at improving my performance skills, my repertoire of interesting music and my musical interaction with the broader musical community.



John at the Bentleigh Club, 2012



John at Halls Gap Jazz Festival with Annie Smith on vocals



John Curtis with Smooth As at the Port Fairy Jazz festival 2018