

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture 2012

*'How many of you are there in The Jazz
Trio?'*



Clare Hansson

*The Twentieth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
Delivered 22 September 2012
Waverley Library*



Introduction

For the Twentieth Bell Jazz Lecture, in the year 2012, the Committee once again thanks the Waverley Library and the Friends of Waverley Library for their continued support, without which the presentation would not be possible. The Bell Lecture was initiated by the late Harry Stein to honour the contribution to Australian and the world's jazz by some of our most prominent musicians.

The Committee is delighted to have invited Dr. Clare Hansson to Sydney, as she is most certainly Queensland's best-loved jazz musician and is regarded as Queensland's First Lady of Jazz.

However it wasn't until the 1976 Australian Jazz Convention that Clare was inspired to pursue her improvisational piano skills. She began with a classical education at school and although she had some interest in jazz, her early career was spent in a more commercial style of music.

Since that time she studied intensively and in the 1980's became active with her own and other groups. She was the founder President of the Queensland Jazz Action Society and has backed a number of visiting overseas performers including Jimmy Witherspoon and Ernestine Anderson.

Her subject chosen for a doctoral thesis was Marian McPartland, another jazz pianist, and she travelled to the United States to interview the lady personally. Clare's music also inspired the Sydney poet Betty Briggs to write a tribute work which she called "Nocturne". Clare's contribution to Australian jazz and her enthusiasm is infectious and the Committee her lecture certainly demonstrates this.

Kate Dunbar
Bell Jazz Lecture Committee



Clare Hansson

Clare Hansson is one of Australia's best loved musicians. She is treasured as a pianist, accompanist, composer, educator, writer, recording artist and mentor to young musicians.

Since 1980, she has forged an identity within the jazz scene as leader of The Clare Hansson Trio, which celebrates 21 years in one residency in 2013.

In 1989, Clare composed a score *Thanks Girls and Goodbye* for a documentary about women in the Land Army during World War 11. Later she also created jazz scores for five silent films and accompanied them live.

In 1990, Clare's 12-piece jazz suite, *Azimuth*, for six musicians received its world premiere amid critical acclaim at the Queensland Art Gallery.

In 1996, Clare was the first person to graduate from the Queensland University of Technology with a Master of Fine Arts, majoring in Jazz Studies.

In 2006, Clare completed a PhD at QUT on the jazz career of Marian McPartland, pioneering the format of a website for a biographical overview of a jazz artist. Clare is the first and only Australian jazz pianist to be a guest on Marian's radio programme *Piano Jazz*. She has recently been chosen by author Paul de Barros and St Martin's Press to preview the October release of his biography on Marian McPartland.

In 2010, Clare was the only jazz artist among 25 arts practitioners to be recognized when the Queensland Performing Arts Centre celebrated its 25th Anniversary.



Graeme Bell

This lecture series on jazz was inaugurated in 1993, in association with the second of the Doubly Gifted Exhibition of art works by Australian jazz musicians. It has been presented on annual basis since then.

The purpose has been, and continues to be, to honour Graeme Bell's outstanding contribution to jazz in Australia over a lifetime, which sadly came to an end on 14th July this year.

Graeme was an outstanding pianist, excellent band leader, composer of note and an ambassador for Australian jazz overseas. He will always be missed, but we hope to perpetuate his memory through the Bell Jazz Lecture series.

‘How many of you are there in The Jazz Trio?’

Good afternoon. I am deeply honoured to be invited by the committee to present the 20th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, and I pay respect to the nineteen erudite essayists who preceded me, including Graeme himself. Given his delight in getting out and about to numerous jazz events, I had a vision of Graeme being in the audience when Kate Dunbar first approached me. But the hand of fate decreed otherwise. A giant among jazzmen, there is a communal sense of sadness and loss at his recent passing.

However, his vast contribution to jazz music and the visual arts looms large as his legacy. Since I first met both Graeme and Roger at the Geelong Jazz Convention, I have been influenced by their generous encouragement. Over the years Graeme and I became musical soul mates sharing a love of J. S. Bach and exchanging compositions and recordings. Today I wish to dedicate this lecture to the memory of “the most influential jazz musician Australia has produced in terms of participating in events which have altered the history of music” *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz*.

I am indebted to dear friend Sydney poet Bet Briggs for her gift each year of the Doubly Gifted printed booklet, a rich source of inspiration for this lecture. Each lecturer selected an area of speciality, and today I have chosen to focus on the jazz piano trio, that heady combination of piano, double bass and drums that enticed me into this style of jazz. This has been my passion and my musical voice for the past thirty-two years. I follow Graeme’s lead in composing his “Leader of the Band” lecture by including cameos and anecdotes from my own career, along with small quotations from reviews to give validation to the story. First, I propose to touch on the early history of the jazz piano trio then share with you how jazz captured me as a child. Next, I will trace the evolution of my own trio during the most fertile period of intense jazz activity that Brisbane has ever witnessed – the glory days of the 1980s. To me, the allure of jazz is that it is a constantly changing music where improvisation requires musicians to live dangerously to create the unexpected sound of surprise.

What might be called chamber jazz (that is the small group format) did not catch on in the first decade of recorded jazz. In the 1920s, violinist Joe Venuti’s Blue Four developed a chamber music quality hitherto unknown in jazz. In the 1930s, clarinettist Benny Goodman formed a trio to feature pianist Teddy Wilson and drummer Gene Krupa in his first combo studio session as a leader. As well as breaking the colour barrier, this small group musically put the spotlight on Teddy Wilson. Without a double bass player,

Wilson's distinct style of smooth walking tenths and fleet right-hand melodic lines changed the sound of jazz piano.

In the 1940s both the Nat 'King' Cole Trio and the Art Tatum Trio used double bass and guitar to create that chamber jazz sound. Wilson's melodic runs, Cole's sparse but sparkling style, and Tatum's advanced harmonic sense inspired pianists waiting in the wings. In the early 1950s, a Canadian pianist influenced by both Art Tatum and Nat Cole formed a trio of enormous significance. Oscar Peterson also used a line-up of piano, double bass and guitar. His trio, with Ray Brown on double bass and Herb Ellis on guitar, displayed a highly sophisticated use of that instrumentation. They recorded constantly from 1953 to 1958, and the unison or harmony lines woven by Peterson and Ellis, with Brown's supple support, produced a group sound of seamless unity. Rising to prominence a decade after Peterson was the introspective trio leader Bill Evans. He brought a sensitivity and lyrical beauty to modern jazz piano. His 1959 to 1961 trio, consisting of Scott La Faro on double bass and Paul Motian on drums, is significant for the impeccable dialogue between all three musicians. From this tradition, today's jazz trio leaders have stamped their individuality on the freedom and vitality of the jazz piano trio.

From age 3, I was hooked on jazz. My paternal grandmother's wind-up gramophone was a thing of wonder to me as I watched the little HMV dog spinning around. I was enchanted by the hypnotic rhythms of what I later discovered were the big band sounds of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. My childhood overflowed with music but the sounds of jazz pouring out from the radio attracted me more than Mozart and Beethoven. Our upright piano was my playground, jazzing up *The Teddy Bears Picnic* and *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. Later I soaked up repertoire through sing-a-longs around the piano at home, or in my uncle's hotel where he always had sheet music hits hot off the press. As a teenager, I spent my pocket money on albums of Fats Waller, Duke Ellington and Art Tatum in a determined attempt to sound like them. On radio the popular music of the day oozed from the honeyed lips of Peggy Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Rosemary Clooney, Doris Day, Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong. At 14, I was in jazz heaven, and doubly blessed that Sister Mary Oliver, who was grooming me for the pianistic honour of ATCL, was a jazzy nun. Like naughty schoolgirls, we played duet arrangements of *Kitten on the Keys* and *Dizzy Fingers* and *Stardust* when none of the other nuns were within earshot. Yet when it came to my music lesson my teacher was ruthless with the ruler! Her eyes sparkled like diamonds when the Trinity College examiner from London awarded me the highest mark for ATCL that he had ever given anywhere in the world.

My girlfriends spent lazy Saturday afternoons around the piano as I played jazz, and at teenage parties I played the latest romantic songs from the hit parade as couples smooched. I even attracted my first boyfriend who loved *Bumble Boogie* and *Black And White Rag*. But a young woman in suburban Brisbane had little chance of forming a jazz combo in her garage, or of seeking fame in some small, smoky dive. A miracle happened through reaching the finals of the radio program *Amateur Hour* and my name was suddenly in lights on the books of a bow-tied cigar-smoking theatrical agent. At age 15 I played the first of my solo gigs after school, out of the beige uniform into the cocktail gown to play dinner music at the National Hotel, which later fell into disrepute. I had such an enjoyable time playing that I hid behind a potted palm rather than accept filthy lucre.

After leaving school, I was in demand for a variety of solo gigs, and group work with crusty old male musicians who played front-line instruments and drums. There was never a double bass player. These men could move easily between jazz and commercial gigs, but I had no entrée into jazz. I was familiar with hundreds of standard tunes, and usually someone in the band would call tunes from a tattered volume called *All Hit 1001 Songs* with shockingly bad chord changes. A female singer would be booked to do a cabaret 'spot' or two. Other acts we backed included jugglers, performing dogs, gumleaf, or nose flute players, magicians, dancers, acrobats, comedians, yodellers, country singers, a dancing horse, puppeteers and even the Bee Gees before they became famous. The nearest thing to charts were chords scribbled on backs of envelopes with instructions like "Walkin' Bass, Baby!"

When I first heard the sound of the double bass it filled me with rapture, like a first kiss. I saved up my working girl's wage to purchase a record player. My turning point came when a saxophone player who recognised my burning desire to play jazz loaned me Oscar Peterson's *West Side Story*. I fell head over heels in love with Ray Brown's sound. His fat velvety tone and his rhythmic pulse that surged right in the middle of the beat beguiled me. I rushed to Palings and it was like gold when I found *We Get Requests* and *Night Train*. Now I had to work out how he and Oscar created their hand-in-glove rapport. Did Oscar control the tune from the piano or did he feed off Ray's choice of notes? Eager to unpick the mystery, I found a book of Oscar Peterson arrangements from these very records. Now I could practice what Oscar played and hopefully sound like him. But playing them solo fell flat, and there wasn't one double bass player among the musicians I knew.

Out of the blue, I was invited to fill in for the pianist at the Coronation Motel, which had a resident three-piece six nights a week. The double bass player was Bernie Hansson, regarded as one of New Zealand's finest bass players and now freelancing in Brisbane. We clicked musically and personally, but compared to him I was a novice in the world of jazz. Eventually we married and to support our respective offspring we took a duo residency in the Raindrop Room at the Zebra Motel. This expanded my repertoire enormously and to my delight Bernie had also spent his teenage years trying to sound like Ray Brown. We had the same Oscar Peterson records, along with the trio recordings of George Shearing, Nat 'King' Cole and Dudley Moore. Bernie knew the bass lines of these tracks off by heart and after a gig we would often enjoy a nightcap and listen over and over to these well-worn discs. We formed a trio for the 1976 Jazz Convention in Brisbane with my son Philip on drums, and that was when I first felt the tantalising togetherness that I had heard on recordings. Without warning, Bernie's untimely and tragic death in 1979 left me bereft and grief-stricken as the loss of my twin soul and musical partner shattered my life apart.

Luck intervened when reeds player Tony Ashby was invited to form a band in 1979 at Gary Balkin's Melbourne Hotel. Tony and Bernie had been colleagues in Auckland's jazz scene, and through Bernie's reputation I was offered the piano chair with Bob Barnard fronting the band on Friday nights. This was a golden opportunity as traditional jazz had passed me by during my obsession with piano trios. Bob was enormously encouraging, even loaning me his chord books as I strove to expand my knowledge and repertoire. This invaluable apprenticeship enabled me to voice more sophisticated jazz chords, taught me how to accompany Bob's soaring solos and Tony's mellow clarinet and sax, and how to be more adventurous in creating an improvised solo. During this time other musicians who joined us at the Melbourne were Ken Herron, Errol Buddle, Johnny Nicol, John McCarthy and Dick Hughes. This stint followed on from the magnificent *On Jazz* ABC-TV series, hosted by Ken Herron in the late 1970s and broadcast nationally but, unfortunately, not archived.

Trombonist Ken was also a very competent pianist and on four occasions in Brisbane, after hearing me play, he gave me stylistic pointers about comping behind the different instruments. More encouragement came my way at my first interstate Convention at Forbes in 1980. John McCarthy and Paul Furniss had planned a duo clarinet partnership with the name *Canary Conference* and their pianist was unable to attend. Knowing I was working with Bob Barnard, they auditioned me by rehearsing in a church hall. Their charts with excellent arrangements were the epitome of classy small group jazz, and with Harry Harman laying down bass lines I was catapulted into the collective energy and

spirit. When Dave Dallwitz bestowed his approval on us after our set, I was truly in the presence of the jazz hierarchy. I learned so much from these master clarinetists who included me in many future festival performances of *Canary Conference*. Paul spends hours in his lounge room fine-tuning chord changes to standard tunes so that they flow effortlessly to satisfy the knowing ear.

Once the words jazz and Brisbane would rarely have been uttered in the same sentence, but from 1980, when jazz took the city by storm, we were on the way to cultural recognition. It took a sporting event, the Commonwealth Games in 1982, for Brisbane to be promoted to the world and round-the-clock entertainment flourished. Previously visits from jazz greats had been few and far between, as impresarios concentrated on southern cities. Luckily, jazz-inspired promoters toured Don Burrows, the Great Guitars, Peter Nero, the Glenn Miller Orchestra led by Buddy de Franco, the Daly-Wilson Big Band, the Ronnie Scott Jazz Quintet and Blossom Dearie in the 1970s. Some groups appeared earlier at Festival Hall, a cavernous boxing stadium where even Benny Goodman, Dave Brubeck, Judy Garland and Ella Fitzgerald had graced the stage. I remember vividly seeing the Jacques Loussier Trio in Brisbane's City Hall, in sombre dinner suits when mirror balls and fluorescent monkey suits were the norm. This concert, along with the Swingle Singers, sparked my belief that jazz and the classics were legitimate bedfellows. By 1980, enterprising hoteliers and shrewd venue owners recognised that jazz was the answer to filling their coffers and kick starting the local music scene.

Visionary hotelier Gary Balkin in March 1980, purchased another hotel in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley, which he jazzed up by painting it red white and blue and christening it Bonaparte's. He trusted me to put a trio together to launch the new venture and the Clare Hansson Trio was born, with David Croft on bass and Jim Howard on drums. Sparks flew from the first note we struck on Friday evenings, and we attracted a huge crowd of late night fans after other venues closed. With the room packed to the rafters, Gary agreed to expand the trio to include trumpeter Rick Price and sax player Frank Tyne and we became known as the French Connection. As the bandleader, I wrote arrangements for the 5-piece, and always arrived early to set up the sound system and amplify the upright piano. Neville Meyers in *Jazz magazine* describes the band's hard-blowing mainstream impact in the crowded room claiming that "As always Hansson will become the group's musical centre...and it's Hansson who'll play that much harder to generate those extra sparks reaching the dedicated listeners' ears." Unsure about the tag 'Hansson', I was happier that he acknowledged in my playing a "keenly, instantly recognisable technical mix of her major influences – Peterson, Nat 'King' Cole and, above all, Evans; lastly

the emergence – slowly and painfully – of a true Hansson style.” To develop this, I had spent every waking moment listening.

This ‘Hansson style’ came into play through good fortune and the entrepreneurial talents of Dr. Mileham Hayes as he presented an avalanche of jazz greats in Brisbane during the heyday of the Cellar Club in Adelaide Street. Perfect for the presentation of jazz, the Club was underground and furnished with rustic oak barrels and huge sepia framed pictures of jazz luminaries enhanced by moody lighting. This was truly the smoky dive I had imagined. For me, it was a case of being in the right place at the right time with jazz five nights a week. On Tuesdays, I was on piano for both the Rick Price Be-Bop Revival Band and vocalist Sue Wighton’s group What Four. As well, I worked with Mileham in a mainstream quartet on Thursday nights and with a six-piece traditional group on Saturday nights. Each group set me up with a double bass player and a drummer, and I had to be familiar with bebop, accompanying jazz voice, cool mainstream and hot traditional jazz and shape each trio stylistically. As well as wearing those different hats, I played solo piano at lunch times at the Cellar Club hosted by the charming Sue Hayes. Mileham staged an International Jazz Festival in October 1980 featuring Scott Hamilton, Kenny Davern, Jimmy Witherspoon and Teddy Wilson.

I grabbed at the opportunity to back Jimmy Witherspoon. Mileham arranged a rehearsal at his home, and ‘Spoon’ called blues tunes in every key. Ears wide open, I set up a groove with Ian Cocking on double bass and Ron Rae on drums, and Jimmy laid right back to create that ‘in the pocket’ vibe. Later I met him at the Nice Jazz Festival and he recalled the night with pleasure, especially recording *Spoon In Australia* with the Peter Gaudion band. During this Festival, Mileham also entrusted me with being Teddy Wilson’s chauffeur, protecting him from photographers and autograph-hunters, shepherding him in through the back door. A fellow-Libran, this humble man shared many stories from his exceptional life. To be in the presence of this legendary great whose style profoundly influenced future generations of piano players was awe-inspiring for me whose small hand can barely reach a tenth! I treasure a letter from Teddy after he suffered a health scare and received telegrams from musicians all over the world, even Frank Sinatra, wishing him well.

Names come thick and fast as I recall artists I heard and in some cases – Richie Cole and Scott Hamilton – jammed with late at night. Earl Hines, Art Pepper, Kenny Davern, Nat Adderley, Ted Dunbar, Frank Foster, Al Cohn, Sonny Stitt, Ralph Sutton, Ruby Braff, Milt Jackson, Phil Woods, Cal Collins, Warren Vache, The Ellington Orchestra, The Jazz Giants. The powerhouse trio of

Monty Alexander, Ray Brown and Herb Ellis held me in absolute thrall on a hot summer's night. Ray and Herb dubbed me 'Maggie Hawthorne' because I was the spitting image of a renowned LA journalist. Never did I dream that it would fall to me to back silky songstress Ernestine Anderson who had re-ignited her career in the 1970s through Concord recordings, and I had been captivated by her vocally strong performances on ballads and blues like *Never Make Your Move Too Soon*. Neville Meyers again raved about an incredible jazz evening with standing room only at the Club in December 1981. With bassist Geoff Kluke and drummer Geoff Proud, the trio was firing, hard and driving. "Appropriately that evening, Clare's biggest fan was Anderson who allowed her pianist to stretch out, often leading the applause on her behalf." It may have been that special rapport between we two jazz ladies that encouraged Mileham to present Ernestine for a repeat concert.

In 1996, after Mileham was awarded an OAM, I wrote to congratulate him. He replied that "You are the only musician to have written – perhaps I didn't pay enough?" Anyway, he went on to say "You were always a professional and a delight to deal with – others I felt they thought they were doing me a favour? So I'm glad you still remember those days with affection." Mileham was fearless and unstoppable in his drive to shine the brightest spotlights on Brisbane's jazz scene.

Six blocks away, a voluptuous Danish woman with stylish ideas, Bodil Bossy, launched a venue in Brisbane right opposite Festival Hall. Bozarts beckoned with a smorgasbord of Danish delights, and resplendent in the bar was a white grand piano. Word had spread, and Bodil invited me to install a jazz trio on Wednesday nights. This I did, with Geoff Kluke on double bass and Lorrie Webb on drums. Her largesse extended to bringing in a local guest artist/musician to feature each week. Bodil had media connections and arranged for a newspaper journalist and photographer to do a feature article. And so we come to the title of today's lecture. It was this mathematically-challenged journalist who got her words mixed up when she asked "How Many Of There Are You In The Jazz Trio?" Obviously unprepared, she blurted out "Who started jazz?" The photographer chipped in with "The blacks". I was mortified that the sentence "The blacks started jazz" was printed as coming from my lips. Not insisting on proofreading the article prior to publication was a big lesson to learn so early in my career!

As I was the founding President of the Jazz Action Society in Queensland, I was honoured to lead the first Queensland group to be invited to perform for NSW Jazz Action. In September 1981, Rick Price, Geoff Kluke, Jim Howard

and I headed south with eager anticipation and the concert was a roaring success. Mileham, in his Spring 1981 newsletter *Jazz Australia*, pointed out that Queensland had been employing interstate musicians for the past decade and such reciprocity was very timely.

The Brisbane Jazz Club, founded by the Pacific Jazzmen in 1972, also presented interstate musicians. I was intrigued by this sloping rowing shed when Bernie worked with the Jazzmen in the 1970s. Their annual May Jazz Carnival over three days programmed over thirty bands in the Club and the adjoining park. In 1982, my trio was invited to back Don Burrows and George Golla during the Carnival. Being a band leader requires many decisions which were not my call during my apprenticeship with Mileham and other band leaders. When news got out about the Burrows/Golla appearance, the drummer with the Brisbane Jazz Club Big Band phoned up and demanded that he and the band's resident bass guitarist should be the other members of my trio. I was all set to offer this prestigious gig to Geoff Kluge whose reputation spread Australia-wide. However, the drummer turned the screws and I yielded. On arrival in Brisbane, Don and George expressed deep disappointment at not working with Geoff, and here was another lesson about being more assertive and putting the music first before personalities. For future May Jazz Carnivals, my trio was invited to support artists of the calibre of Errol Buddle, Johnny Nicol, Ed Wilson and Tom Baker.

1983 was my first trip overseas beginning with the Nice Jazz Festival. I seized every opportunity to hear top jazz pianists and trios in working situations during travel in the northern hemisphere in the next seven months, and I sat in with bands in Switzerland and Denver, Colorado. In Germany, I jumped at the chance to sit in with a jazz group in Munich where an Australian jazz pianist was living at the time. On this particular Sunday night he had not shown up and the piano stool in front of the grand piano was empty. Clutching my handbag under my armpit, I slid on to the stool and joined in on *Stella By Starlight*. The musicians looked up with delight, and to test me out they called a Blues in H! It turned out to be Bb and my ears helped me out. From my background working with Rick Price, I knew every tune they called, and they begged me to record with them the next day. Sadly I had to pass that one up as I was heading off on the glamorous Orient Express towards Vienna!

Returning from my overseas trip, it was a dream come true to see the Queensland Art Gallery completed. A fluid space filled with light and water features was the ideal ambience for special concerts themed to exhibitions. My trio was a perfect fit for this elegant setting, and for solo performances I

shaped programs to highlight the theme of each exhibition. Brisbane now had a world-class venue, and jazz was now an integral part of its entertainment policy. I was proud to be at the forefront of this initiative, and we performed regularly for spectacular opening nights.

A new connection opened up for me with Allegro Restaurant, owned by Garry Redlich who showcased classical music. In 1984 he introduced Jazz Dinner Concerts, featuring my son Philip Hansson on double bass and myself on grand piano. Philip had graduated from Toowoomba University in 1984 with a Diploma in Creative Arts, majoring in double bass.

Interestingly, Bernie had played bass there with a classical violinist, and here was his beautiful instrument involved in jazz interplay again in the same venue. During this series of successful dinner concerts, we backed Sue Wighton, Hazel Phillips, and John McCarthy. One evening Julian Lee and Craig Scott dropped by after a concert, and offered a master class as we jammed on *The Gentle Rain* with them.

1985 was another milestone year in Brisbane's artistic development with the opening of the Queensland Performing Arts Centre at Southbank. Across the road from the Art Gallery and the Museum this complex encapsulating the Lyric Theatre, the Concert Hall, and the Cremorne Theatre was an impressive architectural centre of excellence bringing to the people of Queensland the best that entertainment could offer. The distinctive Brisbane landmark was officially opened in April 1985 by the Duke and Duchess of York. I was engaged to perform many pre-concert performances with my trio in the Upper Minstrel Gallery amid the buzz of anticipation of concert-goers. In the Concert Hall, as members of the Rick Price Quartet, we supported the Dutch Swing College jazz band and our lively traditional jazz garnered as much applause as the international visitors.

Another door opened in 1985 when hotelier Michael Drum opened up the back bar of his Caxton Hotel for Friday night jazz. The outdoor deck was already popular for Saturday afternoon traditional jazz, but Michael was looking for a more intimate ambience on Friday nights. On the raised stage was an old pianola that had been painted pink with a brush, and to amplify the sound I simply opened up the doors to the piano-roll mechanism. I engaged double bassist Horsley Dawson and larger-than-life drummer Bob Watson, both of whom worked with the Vintage Jazz Band and had been part of the rhythm section for Ken Herron's *On Jazz*.

To make announcements we simply called out to the captive audience who crammed into the space. Despite singers wanting to sit in, we had no microphone. Even when Johnny Nicol dropped by with his daughter Emily

(Chloe in *A Country Practice*) he serenaded the audience without amplification and brought the house down. The Caxton Hotel became the place to be on a Friday night and the atmosphere was electric with fans sitting on the floor tuning in to every note the trio played. With the cash registers clinking Michael decided to jump on the bandwagon and record the trio. A fan named David Whan set up the recording logistics for the session, so I composed a blues in his honour named *Whan for David*.

The recording took place on October 8, 1986, in an upstairs room with a hand-picked audience and an 88-note Roland keyboard. The Clare Hansson Trio *Live At The Caxton*. With Horsley's health failing, this was followed by the release of *All Blues* recorded in a studio at the University of Queensland. 16 tracks recorded on two cassettes, the lasting legacy of a trio with three hearts beating as one and so much feeling in every note. Horsley's energy to fire the trio was superhuman.

It was renowned ABC broadcaster Eric Child who instigated *All Blues* when I was chosen among five musicians to be interviewed for a Qantas Jazz In-Flight Special. Imagine how privileged I was to be in the company of Graeme Bell, James Morrison, George Golla and Dave Dallwitz.

Interviewees were required to take along one of their own recordings and that set the project in motion. Tracks from both cassettes were played on Qantas all over the world. Eric became a dear friend, and interviewed me on several other occasions. I had been addicted to Eric's Rhythm Unlimited radio program for years, and he was also a fan of Marian and Jimmy McPartland. So it was with Eric's approval that I sent off the *All Blues* cassette to Marian in New York. Amazingly it reached her and she replied with the words "You play beautifully!" Thus began a long correspondence that led to my being the first and only Australian pianist to be a guest on Marian's long-running radio program, Piano Jazz, in 1999. Meeting her for the very first time seated side by side on two grand pianos gave me goosebumps. Instinctively we tuned into each other, conversation flowing and duetting like regular piano partners. That the show has been rebroadcast three times is a tribute to our instant empathy and rapport.

Mileham's fervent push to present jazz was stymied during 1986 when his rent tripled in the inner city and he moved lock, stock and barrel to the Pelican Tavern, where the Varsity Five had earlier enthused traditional jazz fans. Renamed Sweet Patootie, the low-set venue became the meeting place for more jazz of the highest calibre. Mike Nock, then living in Brisbane and teaching at the Con, was a solo performer on many occasions. My vivid memory is of jamming with American guitarist Cal

Collins in the wee small hours. Gigs at the Sunshine Coast were prolific during this time, and Horsley's final opportunity to play with Bob Watson and me was during a poignant farewell at Moffatt Madness restaurant. Surrounded by so many he loved, it was a deeply sad experience for us all as tears flowed to see Horsley's fragile body caressing his double bass Ella for the last time.

Following Horsley's passing, Philip featured in all the Clare Hansson trio performances and the trio continued to draw enthusiastic crowds at the Caxton. In Sydney, undoubtedly the prestigious Don Burrows Supper Club was Australia's state-of-the-art jazz venue. In 1986 an invitation to perform two nights in this intimate room with John McCarthy, Darcy Wright and Alan Turnbull elevated me to the pinnacle of jazz. I saw the New Year in at the Adelaide convention in 1987, and a highlight was backing Adelaide's star vocalist Penny Eames in her soulful sets. Occasionally top-flight American jazz artists like Wynton Marsalis appeared in the Concert Hall, and I was disgusted at the garb of a support group from the Con. Ripped jeans, daggy T-shirts, sneakers, disgruntled expressions and no announcements screamed their disrespect for the occasion and the illustrious band to follow. I attended the event with saxophonist Clare Bail, and we left the locals to their undignified wailing and drew solace from a glass of fine wine or two until the main event commenced.

For the March 1987 concert for Sydney's Jazz Action Society I was honoured to be the featured interstate guest, and doubly honoured to be billed with four seasoned Sydney swingers John McCarthy (tenor saxophone and clarinet), Bob Henderson (trumpet), Dieter Vogt (bass) and Laurie Thompson (drums). I quote from a review "This pianist is one who listens and responds to what her fellow musicians are doing and is accordingly stimulated to produce that something extra in her own performance. A case in point was the interpretation of Dave Frishberg's *Dear Bix*, an affectionate homage to the legendary Bix Beiderbecke. Henderson sang a Frishberg-ish vocal on this and was feelingly backed by the simpatico Hansson. A highlight of the evening was provided by McCarthy's clarinet work, particularly on *Topsy*, which showed his fluid technique and gorgeous tone to the full."

It was during this visit that an advertisement was placed in The Sydney Morning Herald to draw attention to another gig. The ad began with the words "Scintillating Q'ld pianist appearing tonight." Think Qld without the apostrophe and no tail on the Q and it read "Scintillating Old pianist

appearing tonight"! Also in 1987, Sydney Jazz Club invited me to take part in a Piano Summit along with Judy Bailey, Verdon Morcom and Adrian Ford, accompanied by Darcy Wright on double bass and Ian Bloxson on drums. Pianists I had admired forever along with a dream rhythm section.

1988 was Australia's Bicentennial Year, and I was invited to appear at the Monsalvat Jazz Festival for the first time. As I flew over Sydney, a flotilla of small craft decorated the Harbour and I was on the edge of my seat about Monsalvat. Penny Eames and I were billeted in an attic room and as we stepped out for our first engagement the light went out and I plunged down three steep steps in high heels snapping my Achilles tendon. I didn't even make it to the artists' colony, instead having my leg plastered in hospital and embarrassed at having to be forklifted out of the plane in Brisbane. It was tragic to miss the first reunion in 35 years of the original Graeme Bell Australian Jazz Band there.

1988 was also Brisbane's turn to host EXPO and musicians of all styles were inundated with work. But first it was our turn to be entertained. To herald the EXPO year, Brisbane audiences were treated to two unforgettable concerts. The first was the duo of John Sangster and Tony Gould displaying their quirky eccentricity like peacocks. The second was my first opportunity to hear and see my hero George Shearing live, accompanied by his long time bassist Neil Swainson. Sublime piano playing with his feather-light touch and classical extemporisation transported me. With a leg in plaster I could not be a walkaround musician, and luckily the work for the Clare Hansson Trio revolved around daytime stage appearances. One significant event for us was the launching of the largest EXPO entertainment space, the Suncorp Piazza in the heart of Southbank. The Queensland Performing Arts Trust in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation heralded its South Bank Spectrum Series in March 1988. An innovative program billed as FOUR SEASONS with CLARE HANSSON PIANO was recorded and broadcast by the ABC, with each season celebrated with five themed pieces. How delighted I was when Graeme Bell heard this concert on radio in Sydney and wrote to me to proclaim it an entertaining and musical triumph!

At the end of 1988 the Queensland Arts Council sponsored regional tours by the Clare Hansson Trio throughout Queensland. The first with Bob Watson and Derek Capewell found us trekking from Weipa to Winton over three weeks, with concerts and workshops along the way. With some towns starved for entertainment, locals demanded return visits by the trio right through into the 1990s. I recall nights outdoors under sapphire star-studded skies, concerts in upmarket resort hotels, tiny community halls decked out in

cabaret, even two Conservatoria with grand pianos. We criss-crossed Queensland sharing our brand of jazz in adventurous programs that captivated the rapt audiences. Approaching a remote mining town, we were highly amused by a hand-written sign outside a motel reading “Clare Hansson Trio NOT on here tonight”. We were playing in the RSL Club instead!

In February 1989, the Clare Hansson Trio teamed with singer Chris Young in a three-night cabaret at the Cremorne Theatre. The affinity between the singer and the trio was palpable in this intimate setting and we played to a full house. Reviewing these nights, jazz broadcaster Barry Ralph claimed that “As someone making her living playing jazz fulltime, Clare is without doubt the most successful of the local jazz pianists.” The Green Room was always a fascinating meeting place and when we shared a table with Barry Humphries I resisted the temptation to ask him to sign my table napkin! The Cremorne was again the setting for a concert in 1989, featuring acclaimed singer Kerrie Biddell with the Julian Lee trio, in a night of sheer artistry. Kerrie’s contribution to jazz voice is unsurpassed.

I was challenged as a musician and a composer when artist Dr Irene Amos was artist-in-residence in the Queensland Art Gallery during EXPO in 1988. I first saw Irene’s ‘painting-in-progress’ in the basement of the Gallery as she created patterns and lines and swirls of colour. I was filled with the desire to transpose through music the rhythmic energy, and melodic curves, the meditative spaces and the eloquent harmonies within the painting. The Gallery gave their blessing to the project and the jazz suite *Azimuth* was born. Arranged for piano, double bass, drums and percussion, voice and reeds, the work interweaves colours and moods that spring to life in the dazzling improvisations of talented and creative jazz musicians. Enhanced by special lighting effects on the backdrop of the painting, *Azimuth* was premiered in the Queensland Art Gallery in May 1990. Many gallery performances gave further exposure to the suite, but the recording needed a sleek makeover.

In 2003, the project of re-mixing, re-mastering, re-formatting from cassette to CD demanded the input of Bet Briggs who immersed herself in the painting and the music to create six evocative poems. Bet has written a detailed account of her creative process for *Bikwil* magazine published in November 2003. The re-packaged CD cover is visually colourful in its design and the booklet opens up to display the six poems like jewels on red velvet. The re-launch at Brisbane Jazz Club was celebratory with people from the Gallery, the original musicians and Irene Amos in attendance.

My trio is my instrument. We are more than three people playing separate instruments. We communicate closely through what might be called emotional synchronicity. A memorable trio experience came about when bassist Jack Thorncraft and drummer Ron Lemke supported me in my Master's recital *From Ellington to Evans* at QUT in 1996. We performed compositions by Ellington, Basie, Monk, Powell, Brubeck, Tatum, Garner, Shearing, Peterson and Evans, concluding with Ellington's *Reflections in D*. Truly a pianistic panorama! Jack and Ron offered me high-quality musicianship, joyous camaraderie, and together we created exquisitely close moments of music-making that completed something in me that I had always been striving for in my heart and soul

To conclude, the greatest compliment I can pay to Graeme Bell, Father of Australian Jazz, is to play two of his compositions. The first is *Rocking Horse Rag* written in 1951. Perhaps you have heard the magical story of how Graeme was on tour in Germany in 1952, and out walking one morning he came upon a small bandstand and found an orchestrated part for LE CHEVAL A BASCULE by Graeme Bell – Tempo di ragtime! The second is *Fairy Nights*, based on a poem by Priscilla Bonham-Carter. Graeme sent this to me in 2006 when I completed my PhD with the inscription "To my dear Clare, Congratulations on your great achievement, Fondest wishes, Graeme Bell." For you, my friend