

# JAZZ

## IN MELBOURNE



**The trouble with jazz**, as a word, is that it is redolent with meaning; meaning that is more often than not from another time and place. Whether the thought of jazz evokes smoky underground jazz dives or straw-boater-wearing waistcoated fogies on a band rotunda, it is guaranteed to evoke *something*. And then there's the question of the music itself. Moving away from the swinging tunes that you'll associate with jazz, sometimes you run across tunes that seem tuneless, sounds that almost hurt. At one end of the spectrum of the music known as jazz the familiar grooving standard is a wistful memory.

To the novice, all of this makes jazz easy to stay away from. Music with baggage like that is just too hard.

### LOVE IT OR HATE IT, JAZZ IS COOL

It's almost impossible to have no opinion at all about jazz. Some people hate it, but even the jazz-haters understand this simple fact of 21st-century life: that just a few notes off any song from the Miles Davis' album 'Kind of Blue' and even the grubbiest of laminated cafés can seem like a place to be seen. Maybe because it's always been hip to be a little bit non-mainstream (and jazz is rarely mainstream in the 21st century). Or maybe just because jazz is inherently cool. Even if the only jazz you've every really listened to is James Morrison or Norah Jones, played on some easy listening radio or tuned into accidentally while searching for Shannon Noll or Limp Bizkit, you'll know what I mean. There's just something about it.

Get a little bit closer, though, with a view to participating—to actually walking down the steps into that smoky jazz dive—and it can become intimidating. That's leaving aside the experience of jazz on lawns, in gardens and at wineries, which are a whole other breed of jazz experience altogether.

Let's face it, these are less about the jazz than about the lawn, garden or winery in question—and the rug, and the beverages, and the company you're keeping.

If you start spending time around jazz you'll run across clever people who can hear a bar or two of some solo piano piece and know the pianist, the year of the recording, and a whole lot of other information that doesn't help you enjoy the music. And that can be intimidating too. There's something exciting about jazz but sometimes ... well, even the hardest night owls can be put off by simply not knowing who's who and what's what.

### IF I START TO LIKE IT, WHO WILL I BECOME?

And then there's the other problem that, if you start going to jazz clubs and actually enjoying the music, your friends and acquaintances are maybe going to begin to wonder what's going on. Depending what they think jazz is, they may be worried for your welfare. Are you turning to the dark side? they'll wonder. Are you in the process of succumbing to the subversive effects of jazz? Will you end up being too cool for school? Or are you turning into a complete dork, out of touch with reality?

### BUT HERE'S THE REFRESHING TRUTH

Jazz is a very broad musical genre. It includes the stereotypes and it goes beyond them. And yes, it carries baggage—an albatross around its neck made of history, mystery and assumptions. And yes, some of it is challenging. Sometimes when I'm listening to jazz on a CD or the radio, a piece comes on that I call 'cup of tea' music. Time for me to leave the room and make a cup of tea. When it happens at a club during a gig I'll leave if I have to, but usually after giving it a try for as long as I can.

Gerry Koster, who broadcasts 'Jazz Up Late' on ABC Classic FM on Friday nights, has a brief to play at least some music on his weekly show that's 'out' (jazz code for challenging). He has some good advice for those of us who can only hear noise during those pieces (think 'out' = 'noise'). Gerry suggests that when it comes to challenging music it can be very rewarding to just let the music wash over you, let its possibilities make themselves known. I've tried it and it works... surprisingly often!

More refreshing truth: in the sounds of jazz and improvised music you'll find energy and creativity that is rarely found anywhere else. It's worth pursuing, if only for the adventure!

A little bit of research goes a long way. Experiment by going to some gigs; put your name down on email lists and find out what you like. Some perseverance will stand you in good stead as will an open mind; a general openness. The jazz scene is notoriously bad at describing itself to newcomers, which sometimes has the effect of making everyone who isn't a confirmed, embedded, acknowledged insider feel alienated.

Here are some handy tips to get you started:

- A gig at a club will usually be two sets of about an hour each, with a break of 'around 20 minutes' in between. The length of the break can vary and will depend on the band leader, how relaxed the night is, and how many friends are in the audience who need to catch up with band members.
- A club (like Bennetts Lane, for example) says its doors open at 8:30 pm, but don't expect the music to start until around 9:30.
- Pay your entrance fee—show your support for the venue and the musicians.
- Respect the music and the musicians. Some musicians are quite precious about audiences chatting while they're doing

# a guide for the nervous novice

their thing up onstage. Others don't care as long as everybody is having a good time. But at a live gig a bit of respect goes a long way—and makes it easier to hear the music too! If you're meeting a friend for a big deep and meaningful, a jazz club may not be the best place to go. And do not EVER take or make calls on your mobile phone in a jazz club. Not only is it disrespectful, it can also interfere with the sound system.

- Be open to what's going on. Try not to walk into a jazz gig being completely sure about what you like and what you don't like. You could be in for a nice surprise!
- Clap at the end of songs. Some people will also clap at the end of a solo. Some people don't. It's up to you. Get into the moment and do what feels right.
- There's no rule about what to drink or what to wear. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise.

## STILL HESITATING?

Don't worry, hundreds (maybe thousands) of people have been there before you. Don't worry if you don't know anything. Like so many things in life, the mere ability to look relaxed in your environment will convince others that you belong.

You have to find what you like and seek it out. I love the melancholic some nights and the fiercely colourful on others. You'll figure it out, and you'll probably have a great time in the process. Just put your mobile phone on silent, open your ears and step into the darkness, down the stairs and past the velvet curtain... ■



**Miriam Zolin** is a writer currently working on her Masters in Creative Writing. She also runs the National Jazz Writing Competition and can be seen lurking around jazz clubs in Sydney and Melbourne, in between chapters of the dreaded minor thesis. Her web address is [www.miriamzolin.com](http://www.miriamzolin.com)



## A FEW LOCAL VENUES

Melbourne is blessed with a good number of live music venues. Here's a small selection of some of them that feature jazz.

### 303 [www.303.net.au](http://www.303.net.au)

303 High Street, Northcote

303 consists of a front bar and a back room; it's a shop front in High Street, Northcote, next to the famous Lambs kebab bar. Sometimes the audiences are so small that they put the gig on in the front bar which is cool, like you're a member of the élite! Monday nights are 'Lebowski's', a musician-run music night with a very reasonable cover charge and some very cool music. 303 has a mailing list (easy to join from the website)

### BAR OPEN [www.baropen.com.au](http://www.baropen.com.au)

317 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

Grungy bar with a range of film and live music events upstairs. In terms of jazz, you'll hear music that ranges from a jumping-up-and-down experience listening to the Hoodangers right through to weird 'noise' nights with the Make It Up Club that will put your head into the perfect space to attack the dreaded third chapter of the minor thesis. Gigs here start at 10 pm.

### BENNETTS LANE [www.bennettslane.com](http://www.bennettslane.com)

25 Bennetts Lane, City (off Little Lonsdale Street)

Bennetts Lane is probably the best-known of Melbourne's jazz clubs. Open seven nights a week and dedicated to jazz, its website is up-to-date and informative. Go on a Friday or Saturday for the more straight-ahead sounds or vocalists. The rest of the week, you'll hear music by local and interstate musicians, from the well-known to the unknown. Residencies allow you to hear favourites week after week. Don't plan to eat out here, although alcohol, chips and Toblerone are available in useful quantities.

### MANCHESTER LANE [www.manchesterlane.com.au](http://www.manchesterlane.com.au)

36 Manchester Lane, City (off Flinders Lane)

Regular jazz (check the very useful website) and other styles of music as well. They do a range of music and you can eat there too. Expect jazz here to be more straight-ahead than challenging.

### PARIS CAT [www.pariscat.com.au](http://www.pariscat.com.au)

6 Goldie Place, City

Relatively new (as these things go), but it feels established. Not far from the fabulous Hardware Lane. You'll find this place is full of suits on a Friday night. Free entry on Paris Cat Jam Nights on Mondays. Speaking from my own experience, jazz jams are a great way to get familiar with the local scene. This is a bona fide, walk-down-the-stairs-into-a-dingy-basement type of a place.

### THE APARTMENT [www.theapartment.com.au](http://www.theapartment.com.au)

401 Little Bourke Street, City

A range of music; some jazz, including the Daryl McKenzie Jazz Orchestra as a regular event.

# POSTGRADUATE *review*



## ***my life as a fake***

*imposter syndrome, or should I be here?*

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