

1 Many people around the Yankalilla district know you, the black clad saxophonist with the cheery hello. Here's where you truly belong isn't it?

Yes I grew up in Torrens Vale on a mixed farm that produced wool, fat lambs and beef cattle. But as I had asthma the family moved when I was nine to a house in Jervois Road Yankalilla and my father George ran the farm from there. Both sets of grandparents and other extended family lived locally so my roots are deep.

I fondly recall my days at Yankalilla Area School which had a strong music component at the time. While doing well in maths, mostly I remember the social side. After leaving school I worked on the farm for nine years thus strengthening ties to this area.

While married, I lived for a few years in Adelaide, for a time commuting back and forth to work here as a real estate agent. I love this part of the world. I can live here and fly elsewhere, but I still return to this special base.

2 Was music always in your life?

Born in 1959 under the Aquarius star sign like many musicians, I feel I've always heard and played music. My mother Helen was a pianist, and her grandfather was a violinist who played for silent movies in Adelaide picture theatres. My grandparents Jean and Charles Coad were musical and Grandpa, who gave me my first two saxophones, taught me to play aged eight. He impressed me with his example of practising everyday however tired from being a fisherman. My aunts taught music and my non-playing father loved music and amassed records and CDs.

In the 1950s and 60s, many local people had several instruments and played



Kym in flight

American standards in small dance bands, at halls in Yankalilla, Second Valley and Victor Harbor. Often such musos had repertoires to last several hours. In my early teens I began playing too, in a uniform as part of the Victor Harbor Citizens Band, thanks to my father driving me to performances around the district.

I also did solo performances at concerts accompanied by my aunts. I'd be terrified as the lights darkened in a hall of two hundred people and, under a bright spotlight, I had to hit high notes without faltering. That certainly hardened me and helped overcome nerves. As 14-year-old I backed for Janet Seidel in Victor before she became a big name so there were many great moments. All the time I was learning from experience.

3 What instruments did you play and were you paid?

Soon I joined a big band, playing sax and clarinet with the Alex Ambrose Swing Band, which always paid though I was only 14. It played for balls and cabarets in local towns across the South Coast and Kangaroo Island. In my later teens I played in the Misty Mountains Band which included Barry Symonds, Chris Nunn and Jim Rowntree.

4 I don't see any formal music education in there.

After Grandpa taught me the basics I learned on the job. While with the Ambrose Band I was guided by Parawa dairy farmer, Trevor Beer, who also played clarinet and alto saxophone. For two years I went to him for weekly lessons. I watched and I listened as I played with other bands, went to live concerts and played recordings over and over. And I practised and practised, sometimes eight hours a day to learn new pieces requested for a gig.

In my forties Barry Lake, a well-connected master musician, taught me chord mastery and improvisation in twice weekly sessions. He also organised six private jazz lessons with the venerable Hal Hall from the Conservatorium. This guru instructed me in technique, attitude, the philosophy of jazz, and a way to perfect my phrasing.

All the while I was prepared to take risks and take on challenges beyond my comfort

zone and thus expanded my skills and experience, learning all the time.

5 And you've taught music too, how did you do that without formal qualifications?

Yes, I taught at Yankalilla Area School and Investigator College, as well as having private pupils. I sat for certified recognition of my skills through the Australian Music Guild which sent a professor here to do an audition of my playing, followed by my going to Melbourne to have my performances evaluated. Passing with distinction, I was then accepted as a teacher.

6 How much have you played in Adelaide?

After a hiatus in real estate, I formed The Kym Mitchell Jazz Quartet. with Barry Lake as drummer and percussionist, Chris Byrne on double bass, and pianist Lisa Vanden Heuvel. We played the Friday 9pm to midnight shift in the Hilton Hotel for a couple of years. I've played in various other venues including the Governor Hindmarsh, the Adelaide Fringe and Victoria Square events. The quartet also played wineries in the Southern Vales and Auburn. I was honoured that in 2020 Ras Minano asked me to record with his *Hope of Africa Band*, and we received an Independent Artists award for best song in the Reggae/World Music section which was judged No.1 globally.

7 You keep disappearing for gigs in Victoria? Where have you played and why?

Its music scene is large, providing many openings in well-equipped professional venues. I've played in big hotels, bars and trendy clubs around the city and as well as in many regional centres. There are also chances in that environment to sit in with bands for a few numbers, extemporising and riffing and learning all the while. In Melbourne I became part of the Janis Joplin tribute band which performed in the 2020 Adelaide Fringe.

8 And have there been openings for you in other states or overseas?

I've done more than a dozen rhythm and blues sessions at Sax on Strat in Perth, performed in the Royal Perth Freshwater Yacht Club, Black Tom's, private penthouse parties and smaller bars too until covid curtailed playing there. I did go to London to look for gigs but came home



Kym Mitchell

when I caught whooping cough. I'll be back to both cities though and further afield if the health scene becomes less volatile. I retain strong contacts to reactivate. I still dream that one day I'll get to play at Ronnie Scott's in London.

9 Despite those exciting locations you've enjoyed playing locally too?

I've loved playing in the Normanville and Yank hotels and at various functions and wineries, also with Paul Jelfs and Kirsten Annette, Peter Richmond, and Wendy McPhee, and many names I've lost track of.

10 Now that you look back in your 60s, who stand out as musical heroes?

Apart from family and my teachers, so many greats have inspired me: Chet Baker, Louis Armstrong, Oscar Petersen, Don Burrows, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz and Paul Desmond ...an impossibly long list. Jazz is my main interest, but I love so many genres: African music, funk groove, rhythm and blues, and Avant Garde.

Kym, we've run out of space for more names but your music obviously continues strongly. Good luck as music begins to flourish again.