



FULL TRANSCRIPT OF MUSIC TRIBUTE #3 - GRAEME OSBORNE

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(NB: This transcript reflects the content of the streaming audio version. This program was edited for broadcast due to time constraints.)

0:00

Hi, this is Graeme Osborne here, to provide some recollections and some memories of a great friend of mine and of PBS, Mick Geyer. I suppose I should briefly outline how we got together. I got back from the UK where I'd been working in the jazz record and writing business for some time. I came back in '83 and I set up a business here to import and distribute jazz and blues records. Somebody at PBS in their wisdom got hold of this fact and thought that I might be a suitable candidate to join the ranks of jazz presenters on PBS, and went through the initiations that we all did, and started doing jazz programs - I guess that was back in the mid '80's. Little did I know at the time, that lurking in the corridors of PBS was one Michael Geyer, who was always on the look out for allies, for kindred spirits I guess, in his steady assault on mediocrity in all areas. He approached me and we found that we had lots of things in common, musically, in literature, the arts - we generally got on very well, to the point that over the next few years we, on occasions did some 'graveyard shifts' just for the hell of it. They were amazingly eclectic affairs. It was sort of like a 'fly by the seat of your pants' affair. One of us would play a track and that would inspire the other to either play something in sympathy with that track or something in total antipathy to it, and sparks would fly. It was aided I must confess a little by some of CUB's product, which was allowed in those days. I won't mention it now I suppose. Anyway that's it, we got together and Mick at one stage even worked with me, and in 1993 he was my Best Man at my second wedding. So he was a very good friend, a very close friend - I miss him greatly. So, I am going to play some music that, as I say, will bring back some happy memories.

The first track I've chosen was by one of Mick's favourite, if not favourite bands, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and it comes from a Japanese CD called The Alternate (sic) Express, and it's the full line-up of the band. This is a thing called 'Whatever Happens', written by Lester Bowie.

2:45

MUSIC: Art Ensemble of Chicago - Whatever Happens (The Alternative Express)

12:40

The Art Ensemble of Chicago. Another great love of Mick's was Archie Shepp, and yet another was Dollar Brand, so I thought it would be nice to play a track off an album that Archie Shepp and Dollar Brand did as a duo. This is a piece written by Dollar Brand who is the piano player, and Archie Shepp is playing tenor saxophone on this track. Don't really need to say much more about it. Shepp was one of those people that was right down Mick's alley - politically active, passionate about his music, as was Dollar Brand. A great partnership on record and obvious, like magnets to Mick. This is 'Ubu Suku'.

13:32

MUSIC: Archie Shepp / Dollar Brand - Ubu Suku (Duet)

18:04

So thinking about choosing these pieces for our remembrance of Mick Geyer, it occurred to me

that he was really very much a 'tenor saxophone' man. Tenor saxophone, many people believe, and it certainly has a lot of truth to it, is a great channel for the human emotion. It can convey all sorts of emotions and a lot of the great tenor saxophone players listed very highly in Mick's estimations. We were lucky enough to have Dewey Redman here some years back - I'm not going to play a Dewey Redman record right now - I'm going to play a track by Geri Allen who was the piano player in that band, and Michael, as was his want, was particularly taken by Geri Allen both as a musician and as a person. This comes from an album called 'The Gathering' and it is called 'Light Matters'. Gerri Allen's Trio.

19:09

MUSIC: Gerri Allen - Light Matter (The Gathering)

26:05

When Mick was working with me, I was running a business called Jazz Import Services, and apart from just importing stuff, we tried to get involved in distribution of any albums put out by local jazz groups. We're talking about the mid '80's at a time when really there wasn't a great deal of stuff being issued. One of the albums we did handle, was by The Jextet, a band lead by pianist Jex Saarelaht. Mick was particularly keen on Jex's band, because it really played music that reflected what he felt was valuable, passionate music, originals, a lot of music that reflected interest in people like Charles Mingus etc. I mentioned Dewey Redman's name a while back in relation to Geri Allen, well here's a piece written by Dewey Redman which was called 'Roll Over Baby', comes from the Jextet album and features particularly Paul Williamson on tenor saxophone. I'm sure there are many out there who will remember nights spent at the Baden Powell, which we're told on the cover was open until 3am, licensed 'til 3am, by golly! This was actually recorded by our very dear engineers at PBS, Bill Runting and Chuck Seviar. So, here we go, this is The Jextet from 1989, 'Roll Over Baby'.

27:34

MUSIC: Jextet - Roll Over Baby (Jextet)

33:14

It's very difficult to know where to start and stop when talking about Mick's musical interests. I am really limiting myself to playing sort of jazz-allied things. I thought my tastes were small 'c' catholic, eclectic until I met Mick. He swamped me. His tastes and interest in music just seemed limitless, and that was because really Mick I guess at base was interested in the message an artist was trying to convey. And no matter what the medium might have been, if they had an important enough message in Mick's mind and they managed to convey it through a particular musical medium, then that was fine. It didn't matter if whether it was jazz, reggae, gospel, country, classical, whatever. For me, for my part, I came more from a straight jazz background, some would think the 'jazz police'. Well, Mick helped me break that one down. I was not as pure as many people think, as Mick realized from the start. I mean I played a lot of things which weren't jazz; western swing, gospel, things like that. But Mick certainly opened my eyes to a lot of other things, and one person he reminded me of that I hadn't listened to for a long time was Nina Simone, someone who we both went to hear in Melbourne, and he was a staunch Nina Simone fan. Not everything Nina does... I mean she was an amazingly variable quantity. And I've dug out something that comes from a series of live performances, I must confess it's something I don't have full details of, and it's a track I've only just discovered in trying to find something to I'd like to play to remember Mick. This is a thing called Isn't It A Pity. It's a lengthy performance, and Nina really gives it the works.

35:10

MUSIC: Nina Simone - Isn't It A Pity (Emergency Ward)

46:24

Isn't It a Pity - Nina Simone - live.

Of course Mick in his warehouse at home, you'd have to regard it as that, of books, records, videos, whatever, almost anything you could think of, Mick Geyer would either have, or would

know where to find it. And amongst his vast record collection he used to throw surprises at me, particularly on these 'graveyard shifts' we used to do together, I'd be playing some wildly modern thing, and Mick would reach into his box and pull out something like this next track, not particularly this track, but this artist, Fats Waller, another great favourite of his, and this is... I mean, what do you choose? You could choose one of probably 100 tracks, all wonderful, equally wonderful, irreverent, and great fun. This is Fats' Spring Cleaning.

47:17

MUSIC: Fats Waller - Spring Cleaning (Handful of Keys, Disc 3: The Joint is Jumping)

49:44

Yet another tenor saxophone player, this next guy, if there is a giant voice still around in jazz, for my money he's probably 'it', David Murray I'm speaking of. It's a bit difficult to come to grips with the vast amount of stuff that he's poured onto the market over the years. This next track comes from an album that I'm not sure if Mick ever heard. If he did I'm sure he would've loved it. It is one of those things that he was always on the lookout for, mixing different styles of music with fresh results. This comes from an album called 'Speaking in Tongues' - David Murray's take on gospel music. On this track he employs the services of one of the great voices, coincidentally someone who worked with The Art Ensemble (of Chicago) in many cases, Fontella Bass, and this is a track called 'How We Got Over' - David Murray from 'Speaking in Tongues' with Fontella Bass.

50:50

MUSIC: David Murray with Fontella Bass - How I Got Over (Speaking in Tongues)

56:28

Michael was also a great fan of the Duke Ellington Band, and particularly of a man who played tenor saxophone, here we are again with the tenor saxophonists, for only a few years, but left an indelible mark on the band and on jazz's history, Ben Webster. There's an amazing video, about a 2 hr program on Ben Webster called 'The Brute and the Beautiful'. If you ever get a chance to see it, have a look and you'll understand I think why Mick was so entranced by this man. I am going to play something which people would think, .. well Danny Boy .. not everyone's favourite piece of music, and I've just noticed on the back of the CD re-issue of this album, Norman Grants talks about Ben Webster, and it sums it up perfectly, for my money anyway. "I'm not so sure that there's another tenor saxophone player today, yes, and I include Coleman Hawkins himself, who can play a ballad with such beauty and such feeling and soul and still retain the guts that a jazz artist needs." And that really is very true. This track will demonstrate it I think. In most people's hands it would become maudlin. Not with Ben Webster, and if you knew the man you'd understand why. Mick loved him. I love him. Here he is playing Danny Boy.

57:48

MUSIC: Ben Webster - Danny Boy (King of the Tenors)

61:25

This next track is from one of Mick's legendary compilations, actually a CD. He'd do this. He'd send you these things with track titles only, no information about who the recording artist was, and the rest was up to you. This is very recognizably Miles Davis and I think Mick included it on this particular compilation because he felt that this was a period of Miles that I wasn't paying enough attention to. So here it is - Miles' version of Cindi Lauper's song 'Time After Time'. Not having the album from which this comes, I can't tell you exactly when it was, but I guess it was mid '80's and sure enough, I started listening to Miles of this period and suddenly finding that I did quite enjoy a lot of it, not quite the giant of days previous for my money, but none the less, still a whole lot better than most other music that was out there at the time. So, here we go.

62:22

MUSIC: Miles Davis - Time After Time (You're Under Arrest)

65:50

Time After Time - Miles Davis.

This next musician was genuinely one of Mick's God's, Charles Mingus. He approached life head-on and ruffled a few feathers in his time. The track I am going to play, actually doesn't have a note of Mingus playing bass on the whole album, 'Mingus Oh Yeah'. He employs Doug Watkins to play bass on the album while he himself plays piano and on several tracks, sang. The track I'm going to play however, features another great musician who Mick was also very fond of, Roland Kirk, Rasan Roland Kirk. Two enumerable musicians, serving each other's purposes beautifully. No more need be said really. Here it is, Charles Mingus' Hog Callin' Blues.

66:46

MUSIC: Charles Mingus - Hog Callin' Blues (Oh Yeah)

74:08

The last track I have chosen of this selection of music I will forever associate with Mick Geyer, comes again from one of his compilations. I remember the first time I heard this - Mick stuck it in the CD player at my place and said, "Have a listen to this." We were sitting over dinner I think, and for the life of me I couldn't figure out who this was. In fact it's Little Jimmy Scott, someone who Mick discovered very late in his life. I think he first got to know Little Jimmy Scott's music and the man himself, when he was involved in the production of Nick Cave's Meltdown in London. I wouldn't swear to that, but I think it was, certainly Little Jimmy Scott took part in the event. So this is someone Mick discovered late, kept on discovering, and thanks to him, I now have again turned around... I was always aware of Little Jimmy Scott from the 40's and I was never particularly taken with him, but here's another man with a very personal take on music, and .. I guess I'd like to finish the whole thing off, by saying that Mick Geyer touched me, along with many, many other people in this world, and we're all the better for it. So, here we go, this is 'Nothing Compares to You' - and this is for you Mick.

75:36

MUSIC: Little Jimmy Scott - Nothing Compares To You (Holding Back The Years)

Total Duration 81:56



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