

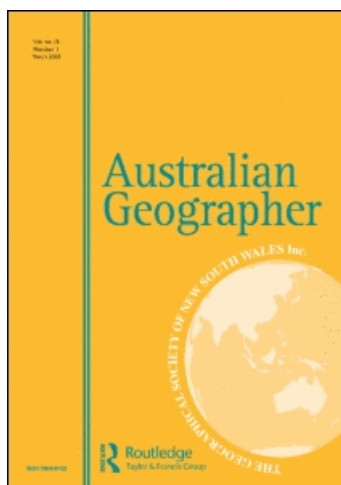
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### Australia's Capital of Jazz? The (re)creation of place, music and community at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival

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# *Australia's Capital of Jazz? The (re)creation of place, music and community at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival*

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**ABSTRACT** *An otherwise little-known country town has become a 'capital' for one creative scene—jazz. The Wangaratta Festival of Jazz plays a significant role in both nourishing the local community and Australian jazz music. The festival creates a unique space for performance, listening and interaction which intimately connects Wangaratta with major cities in Australia and overseas. Despite the fact jazz has no roots in Wangaratta, the town is increasingly significant in jazz circles as the pinnacle of musical excellence and integrity for 4 days of the year. The festival's impact lives on beyond the physical boundaries of the festival through new social connections, recordings and ensembles which are born out of it. In a very real sense, Wangaratta is Australia's capital of jazz because it has built a reputation as the place where jazz belongs.*

**KEY WORDS** *Festival; jazz; music; rural; place-based belonging; Wangaratta.*

You get a fantastic beautiful confusion of inner city bohos and farmers and freaks and drunkards and yobbos and intellectuals and international super stars . . . it is the master stroke that stirs the fires of creativity and is just downright more interesting. Cities are boring on their own, as are rural places. But mix 'em up and you get the Wangaratta Festival which is testimony to the crucible appeal. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

## **Introduction**

The role that music festivals have played in shaping cities and regions, and more immediately lives, is partly due to the ability of music to tap into our hearts and minds. It is also due to the power of music in building a sense of community or belonging within a particular musical style. The growth of popular music festivals around the world since the late 1960s (Woodstock, Monterey and the Isle of Wight Festivals) has produced not only music but also place, space and identities (Duffy 2000). In the genre of jazz, music festivals have created tourism sub-cultures at

international jazz festival sites around the world (notably the Montreux, Montreal, North Sea and Newport Jazz Festivals).

The context within which music festivals occur is revealing. Music festivals define, represent and transform not only physical and material place and space but also the social, cultural and economic relations of people on many levels. The non-musical elements of festivals create spaces for social interaction, entertainment and enjoyment; built environments for the production and experience of music, such as halls and live music venues; cultural identities; and locations for various political and commercial intents (Gibson & Connell 2003). The musical elements of festivals—make-up of band, musicians, performances, tunes and approach—are equally important.

This paper focuses on Australian jazz music and examines the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz. The festival, held in the country town of Wangaratta in the state of Victoria, Australia, is Australia's premier jazz event. The paper draws on research conducted in 2007 and 2009 and offers insights from eminent Australian and international musicians, festival participants and others. It uses a range of research methods including: formal and informal interviews with musicians, festival organisers and local residents in Wangaratta; observations during visits to the festival in 2007 and 2009; and analysis of written material from books, journals and the media. As the festival reached its 20th year in 2009, it is timely to consider how this country town has been and continues to be a 'capital' for jazz in Australia. I suggest that what matters is the space the festival provides for the pursuit of musical excellence and social interactions which shape musical passions and pursuits—engendering different senses of belonging.

### **Making sense of jazz, festivals and place**

Popular music festivals are known and valued for their ability to attract tourists, economic growth and development, and express social and political statements. They are, in the broadest sense, the oldest form of music tourism (Gibson & Connell 2005). Festivals provide places of spectacle and unique experiences, with one-off performances, networks of performers and audiences connected to particular musical genres (Connell & Gibson 2003; Hinton 1995; Gibson & Stewart 2009). However, there have been relatively few studies of jazz festivals (cf. Saleh & Ryan 1993; Formica & Uysal 1996), and none in Australasia.

Jazz first reached Australia in the 1920s and became popular as dance music, especially in the big band swing era. After the Second World War the jazz movement in Australia began to flourish. In December 1946, the inaugural Australian Jazz Convention was held in Melbourne, Victoria, which became a significant place for the development of jazz in Australia. In the early days of jazz in Australia, the music was closely aligned with the broader artistic scene. At the time, jazz was perceived as a radical, unconventional form of music and was an adjunct to the work of artists, painters and poets—the radicals of the time. Early jazz festivals in New South Wales, including the Deniliquin Jazz Festival, first held in 1970, and the Sydney-based Manly Jazz Festival which began in 1977, still draw crowds to the present day.

Today, jazz in Australia exists as a distinct scene. There is a focus on the individual pursuits of musicians and few are interested in cross-fertilising with other creative arts. This cultural shift has meant that jazz-oriented venues and scenes

have become more vital to the survival of the music. Pianist Mike Nock suggests that jazz today remains a form of art, but its depth and substance are lacking:

The talent and ability of young musicians coming up is quite astounding. But often, they don't understand the bigger picture. They are not even interested in the bigger picture and what ends up happening is that there is not a lot of substance at the end of it. Everyone kind of loses out. Because this is art. Whether it is folk art or high art it is all those things. In the end it depends on the people. But we are dealing with something a little deeper. For example, the best blues music deals with the very depth of things. It is all about depth. And that's the thing that I find lacking from so much of current trends in Australian jazz. (Nock, pers. comm. 2007)

Within Australian society, for many jazz is associated with the 'elite' or 'chardonnay set' (that is, the upper middle to upper class) in Australia's cities. For example, in 1996, 51 per cent of attendees at the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz were professionals (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2007). Given the income-earning power of this group, it is no surprise that jazz has been a vehicle for economic invigoration in rural towns in Australia (Gibson 2007). My argument here, however, is not so much about the earning potential of a jazz festival, but instead the role of jazz festivals in the creation and transformation of music and place. By creating a space for experimentation and valuing the social networks that underpin jazz, Wangaratta has fostered a sense of belonging, cementing its literal and figurative place in the Australian jazz scene.

#### *Understanding the place of jazz festivals*

While jazz remains primarily an urban phenomenon, the majority of jazz festivals in Australia are held outside major cities (Gibson 2007; Table 1). Cities support scenes and creative industries which form a critical mass of musicians, venues and structures that support the exchange of musical ideas, influences and sounds. Scenes are the infrastructure or mechanics that enable the creation and production of music to take place. Musicians and audiences everywhere reproduce ideas about the uniqueness of local music scenes which are born out of, and thrive in, urban places (Connell & Gibson 2003). Cities have become famous for their local approaches to jazz—from New York to New Orleans to London and Sydney. If urban scenes are a vital part of jazz music, how then, can we make sense of rural jazz festivals?

The objective of jazz festivals in rural and regional Australia has not been to create scenes or creative industries, but rather to establish social and cultural spaces for music to be used as a tourist product. Key to the establishment of these festivals has been the ability of places to market their location as an appealing physical, cultural and social landscape. Rural towns have used their mountains and forests, beaches and cliffs and vineyards and cheeses to create a sense of distinctiveness and attract people to a particular location to experience jazz and other localised cultural activities. Jazz festivals are increasingly woven into place promotion, for example, through the explicit linking of jazz sounds to place imagery, such as jazz 'in the vines' or 'in the pines' or 'on the rock' or in the 'valley' or 'at the farm', a practice that has contributed to the enhanced perception of such places as elite spaces. Whether or not a local scene exists, places have captured the 'sound' of jazz as an

TABLE 1. Australian jazz festivals by city or rural location

Australian jazz festivals	City	Rural or island location
2007 Valley Jazz Festival	×	
21st WA Jazz Festival		×
Articulating Space Festival of Exploratory Music	×	
Bellingen Jazz Festival		×
Big River Jazz Festival		×
Bronte Village Jazz Festival		×
Cool Nights, Hot Jazz	×	
Earthbeat Mildura Jazz		×
East End Jazz Festival	×	
Great Tropical Jazz Party		×
Half Bent Music Festival	×	
Hot Nights, Cool Jazz	×	
Illawarra Jazz Club—Easter Jazz Festival		×
Jazz: Now	×	
Jazz at the Farm		×
Jazz in the Vines		×
Kyneton Trad Jazz Festival		×
Manly Jazz Festival	×	
Melbourne Jazz Fringe Festival	×	
Melbourne Women's International Jazz Festival	×	
Noosa Jazz Festival		×
Norfolk Island Jazz in the Pines		×
Perth International Arts Festival	×	
Rhythm on the Rock		×
Shoalhaven Jazz Festival		×
Stonnington Jazz 08	×	
Sydney Festival	×	
TAC Wangaratta Festival of Jazz		×
Thredbo Jazz Festival		×
Wagga Wagga Jazz Festival		×
York Jazz Festival		×

*Source:* Jazz Australia (2009).

economic, cultural and social resource. Jazz has become a means by which places can be 'put on the map', transform themselves, and enhance their identity.

### **Wangaratta: (re)creating place, music and community**

It's amazing when you go to this town, suddenly it becomes jazz land for four days of the year. (Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009)

The Wangaratta Festival of Jazz is located in a small town situated in north-east Victoria (see Figure 1) and is centrally located to Melbourne (2½ hours' drive), Sydney (7 hours' drive) and Canberra (4½ hours' drive). The festival has been acknowledged as a Tourism Victoria 'Hallmark Event' and Tourism Australia's 'most significant regional festival' (Rural City of Wangaratta 2009). The Rural City of Wangaratta, which encompasses the Alpine Valleys of the King and lower Ovens Rivers, has a total population of approximately 28 000. The town is one of Victoria's



PLATE 1. Sign at the entrance of the Rural City of Wangaratta.

growing regional provincial centres, through its industrial, retail and tourism sectors (Rural City of Wangaratta 2009). The urban centre of Wangaratta comprises 18 000 residents (Rural City of Wangaratta 2009). The region is known for its mountainous geography, gourmet food and is home to 35 of Australia's top wineries.

The festival was established in 1989 by a group of volunteer business people from the local community who sought to establish a landmark cultural event which would attract tourists to the town and boost the local economy (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2007). The event was not based on any pre-existing local jazz history or interest in jazz music, but was born from a feasibility study. The primary motivation of the organisers was to establish a credible event that provided the youth of the city



PLATE 2. Wangaratta town centre during the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz in 2009.

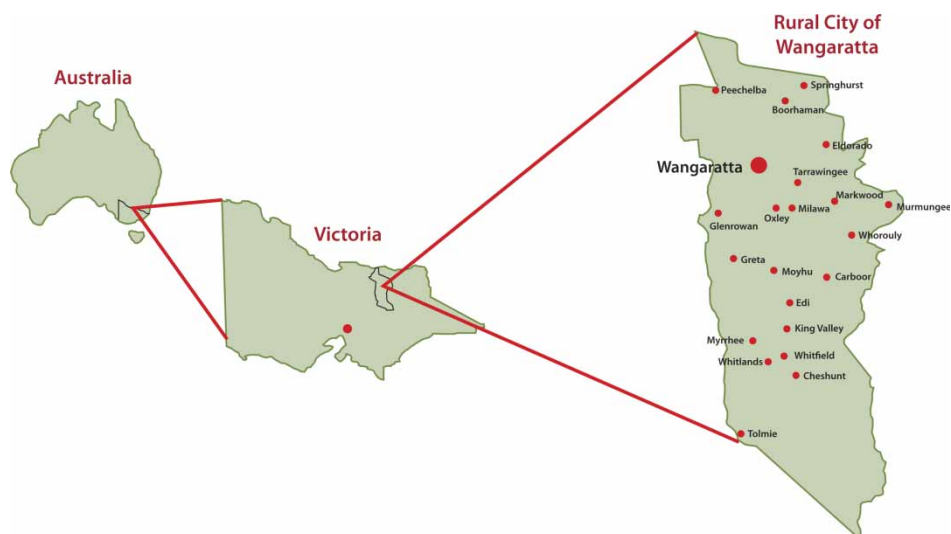


FIGURE 1. Map of Rural City of Wangaratta.  
 Source: Rural City of Wangaratta (2009).

with musical and tourism-related experience, while also generating revenue for the local economy through increased tourism (Clare 1999).

The festival is supported by various regional, State and Commonwealth government bodies and private businesses and organisations. Its major partners are the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), Arts Victoria, Tourism Victoria, the Rural City of Wangaratta, the Australia Council and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2009b). The most visible of these partners has been TAC, from the branding of festival umbrellas on Reid Street to its advertisement in the festival program of a jazz musician playing a breathalisher like a trumpet. In what clearly was a creative move by festival organisers to keep festival goers safe, TAC has provided free breath testing and a public awareness campaign for festival attendees since 1993 (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2009a). The festival is also sponsored by Brown Brothers, Friends of the Festival (local businesses), the City of Stonnington, the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) and the Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (AMCOS) (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2009b).

Since its initiation in 1989, the festival has been run primarily by volunteers: an honorary management board and hundreds of local residents who mobilise during the event. It commenced in 1990 as a 2-day event and has grown to be a 4-day event of jazz and blues, showcasing more than 350 young and established Australian and international artists. Bob Dewar, who was closely involved in planning the festival, described its establishment as follows:

We just thought that Wangaratta, the whole area, needed a kick, an infusion of money, some event . . . you know of course that North East Victoria is a food bowl. Quality wines, meats, vegetables. Good food, good wines, good music. It all seemed to go together. When we decided on a jazz festival my idea was to appeal to the musicians, not the public! That may sound funny, but I felt that if it received credibility from the



PLATE 3. Performance by Sylent Running at the Performing Arts Centre, featuring winner of the National Jazz Awards at Wangaratta in 1990. Pianist-composer Barney McAll, Melbourne vocalist Gian Slater and United States guitarist Nir Felder, along with Chris Hale (bass guitar), Dan West (laptop) and Ben Vanderwal (drums).

musicians the people would follow. They followed the musicians. That was how it would gain a reputation ... we would have a festival of credibility. (Dewar cited in Clare 1999, p. 38)

From modest beginnings, the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz has become the largest cultural event in north-eastern Victoria and is recognised nationally as Australia's premier jazz event.

The festival was created at a time when contemporary Australian jazz music was gathering momentum. Artists like pianists Barney McAll and Sean Wayland, guitarist James Muller, saxophonist Sandy Evans and trombonist James Greening were approaching jazz from a diverse and fresh perspective. Australian artists who have performed over the years at the festival include Don Burrows, James Morrison, alto saxophonist Bernie McGann, pianists Mike Nock and Paul Grabowsky and young artists such as singer Michelle Nicolle, saxophonist Matt Keegan, bassist Phil Stack and trumpeter Scott Tinkler. A range of established international artists and young overseas artists have also played at the festival.

The festival is held in several venues within the town, including a performing arts centre, a Blues marquee, local hotels and wineries, and a free stage on Reid Street. The majority of visitors to the festival in 2006 were from Melbourne (35 per cent) and elsewhere in Victoria (20 per cent) (see Figure 2). In the same year, over 30 000 individuals attended the 120 performance events at the festival (Wangaratta Festival of Jazz 2007). Growth in revenue from ticket sales from 1990 to 2007 has been impressive. In 1990, sales were approximately \$25 000. By 1994 they had reached \$80 000 and more than doubled to \$190 000 by 1998. In 2006 the festival achieved its highest ticket sales in the history of the event, generating nearly \$280 000. Revenue in 2006, including government grants, corporate and private sponsorship, and commissions from venues in sales, totalled \$644 000.

The festival has also tapped into the region's rich environmental attributes, including wine and gourmet food. In 2006 the Milawa Gourmet Region, part of the Rural City of Wangaratta, used the area's reputation as a cultural centre to attract

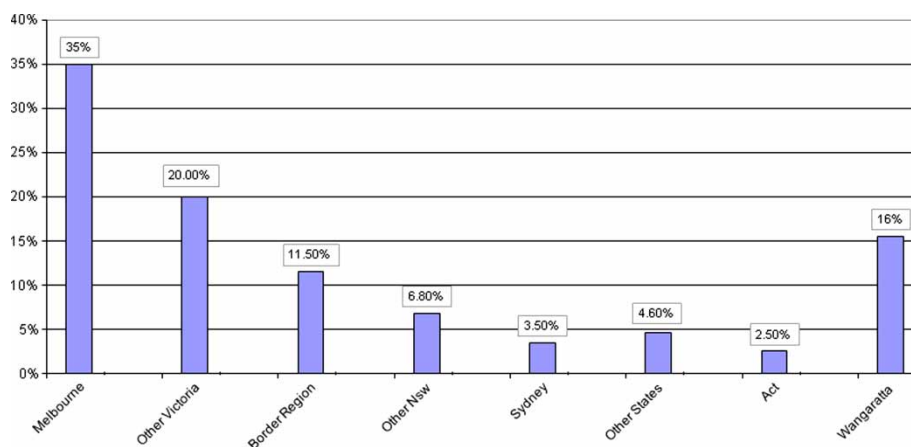


FIGURE 2. Place of residence by region of attendees at the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz in 2006.

Source: Wangaratta Festival of Jazz (2007).

tourists to their very own 'Beat the Winter Blues 'n' Jazz Weekend'. The event took place in local wineries, cafés, restaurants and country pubs and its success can be attributed in large part to return visitors from the Wangaratta festival (Jackson, pers. comm. 2007). What matters most is the manner in which Wangaratta has fostered a sense of place and belonging through its jazz festival.

### **The significance of Wangaratta as location and social and cultural landscape**

To understand how the festival may shape, and be shaped by, place and space, I explore its context—local musical practices, social institutions and cultural behaviour. Music plays a significant role in facilitating notions of community and collective identity, grounded in physically demarcated urban and rural spaces (Whiteley *et al.* 2004; Connell & Gibson 2005). According to pianist Mike Nock, music is only half of jazz, the other half being the social and cultural context in which jazz takes place (pers. comm. 2007). Wangaratta brings these elements together.

The festival plays a significant role in shaping local community relations across cultural, economic and social spheres. The launch of a new multimillion-dollar performing arts centre in October 2009 as the festival's primary venue, replacing the old Town Hall that served as the previous festival hub, is symbolic of how the festival has progressed since its inception.

The establishment of this new venue signifies the emergence of a new performing arts consciousness in the community and offers a gateway to a heightened sense of belonging and community in non-festival periods. Festival participants are not only an audience for the music but also of the local environment (people, venues, cafés, wineries and bars).

The festival is said to uplift the community, with the whole town getting involved in recognition of the festival's role in bringing life and business to the town (Clare 1999; Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009). Questions remain, however, about the extent to which the festival has a lasting local or regional impact in relation to jazz music. As co-Artistic Director of the Sydney-based Jazzgroove Association John Hibbard

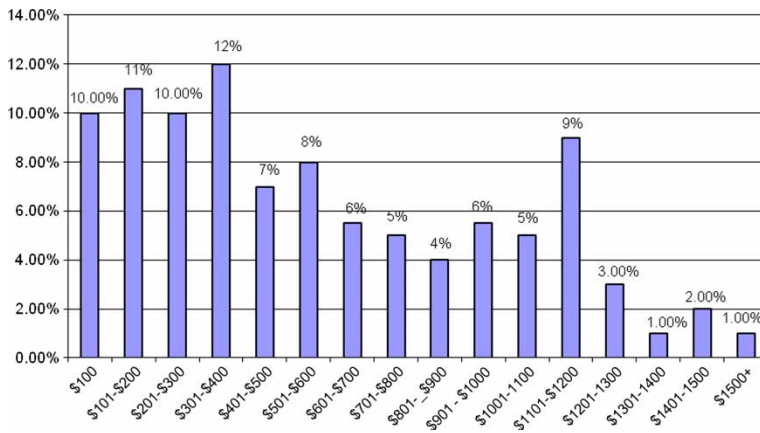


FIGURE 3. Estimated expenditure of attendees at the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz in 2006 (excluding festival passes and tickets) on accommodation, food, fuel, shopping, souvenirs and local products and produce.

Source: Wangaratta Festival of Jazz (2007).

explains: 'I expect it is very much like a circus, it arrives and then leaves and no one takes up juggling' (pers. comm. 2009). At a local level, the festival has encouraged more music programs in local schools but these programs have not focused explicitly on jazz music. Arguably, the festival has had a larger non-musical local impact through educating primary school students on road safety through its TAC sponsorship. Festival organisers have in the past attempted to shape local music culture through regular jazz performances in local pubs, without success. Moreover, a TAFE program was established in a nearby regional town as a centre for music excellence in jazz, but was forced to fold owing to lack of local interest. As Festival Artistic Director Adrian Jackson asserts: 'In the beginning the locals were passionate about the festival. They were not in it for the music; they were in it for Wangaratta' (pers. comm. 2007). At a broader regional level, there is a performing arts presence through a strong concert band music camp tradition north of Wangaratta and music education and dance in Corowa (Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009).

The Wangaratta Festival of Jazz has had a significant impact on the local economy in the Rural City of Wangaratta. In 2006, 50 per cent of festival attendees spent more than \$500 at the festival (excluding festival passes and tickets) on accommodation, food, fuel, shopping, souvenirs and local products and produce (see Figure 3). The Wangaratta festival, however, has not been central to the creation of a local cultural economy centred on jazz (in the sense of economic activity supporting the production and distribution of music). This is in stark contrast to Byron Bay in the Far North Coast, New South Wales, Australia, where its identity as a musical mecca and 'alternative' lifestyle location was born out of the annual 'Blues & Roots Music Festival':

Music has been central to the creation of a unique cultural economy in Byron Bay. This has been bound up in a demographic shift—as migrants move to the region for lifestyle and amenity, constituting a new market for cultural products. (Gibson & Connell 2003, p. 182)

The emergence of an organic music movement, accompanied by a cultural industry, has become fully integrated into Byron Bay's character and local landscape. It is an international site where music is played, produced and lived. By contrast, in Wangaratta, jazz music is otherwise largely absent from the place of Wangaratta. But this does not mean the festival and its location are any less significant. Co-Artistic Director of the Sydney-based Jazzgroove Association Matt Ottington believes the festival's success is inextricably linked to the place of Wangaratta:

The success of the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz is due to the fact it is in Wangaratta. Because it is a national jazz festival. If it was in Sydney or Melbourne, its successes would not be the same. (Pers. comm. 2009)

In other words, Wangaratta is unique and distinctly identified with the festival. Because Wangaratta is a small place the festival both absorbs many more townsfolk than at other times of the year, and has placed the town on the map.

### **Music matters**

It is a very special festival. It is the only festival in Australia that I know of that has such high music credibility. Most of the festivals are not run with this kind of integrity. (Nock, pers. comm. 2007)

The great thing about it is that the organisers have given me [the Artistic Director] full creative power, within the allocated budget, to do whatever I like musically. They do the local community part, which I have nothing to do with, and I do the music. The two are mutually supportive of each other. (Jackson, pers. comm. 2007)

Does the music matter in Wangaratta? While the music's local impact is uncertain, what is clear is that for city-based jazz musicians, the festival has a sacred quality as a type of 'homeland' owing to the connective properties of jazz music. It bonds musicians in a similar way to diasporic populations, and the meaning and significance they share through an imagined spiritual homeland. Notwithstanding the obvious lack of a local scene, it is considered within jazz circles to as a special place not only for the creation of music but also as a kind of tribal meeting point where musicians can talk together, listen together, perform together, and drink together (Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009; Ottington, pers. comm. 2009). It is 4 days of the year when musicians gain an injection of inspiration and form enduring social and musical relationships. As Matt Ottington points out: 'it is closer than New York' (pers. comm. 2009). For pianist Barney McAll, Wangaratta is a place where musicians can catch up:

Musicians are a strange lot and tend to isolate themselves in the sense that you might make a significant recording with some musos and then, never see them again, or you might go on the road all over the world and then when the band finishes, that is it. The 'family' is broken. However, at Wangaratta you can have a true catch up. (Pers. comm. 2007)

In this sense, through its commitment to artistic freedom, Wangaratta has enabled those within the jazz community to feel that they belong at this place and at this event, catalysing non-musical relationships and a sense of belonging in a way that further cements the event's reputation.

The festival's identity as a celebration of modern and contemporary jazz, combined with its reputation for musical excellence, has meant that it has acquired a competitive edge over other Australian jazz festivals and most credibility among artists. Musicians do not have to 'sell out' or 'water down' their music (Nock, pers. comm. 2007). The creation and implementation of the festival's musical identity by Artistic Director Adrian Jackson is widely considered critical to its ongoing success and credibility (Nock, pers. comm. 2007; Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009; Ottington, pers. comm. 2009; McAll, pers. comm. 2007). Beyond this the musical success of Wangaratta is underpinned by three key events. The first is the National Jazz Awards, an annual competition between young musicians in a given instrument. These awards distinguish Wangaratta from other jazz festivals by being recognised as the most important and prestigious jazz competition in Australia. The awards also provide a valuable opportunity for young musicians to meet, share ideas and receive exposure and recognition nationally. Second is the National Jazz Writing Competition, which showcases writing about or inspired by or responding to the music. Third is a series of youth workshops designed primarily for secondary-level students and other visitors in town for the festival. These events aimed at young musicians and writers form a critical structure through which the exchange of musical ideas takes place.

Additionally, the involvement of mainstream media, such as Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) radio, plays an important role in the credibility and attractiveness of the festival. The festival was not a natural success according to Artistic Director Adrian Jackson:

Initially I didn't think it was going to work. I didn't think there would be a huge demand for modern and contemporary jazz in rural Victoria. In the first year we lost \$50,000, although we received positive feedback. Some people believed in it and were willing to bank on its potential. (Jackson, pers. comm. 2007)

To the trained ear the music at the festival is considered 'authentic' and 'real'. According to Pianist Mike Nock at Wangaratta there is a pressure to play at your best:

To me, I always have felt, ever since the beginning of Wangaratta, and I have been there since the beginning, that basically it is a place that demands that you give your best without any commercial considerations. That's how I have treated it. Not everyone would of course. It's a part of a contract you enter into with the audience. I feel totally that it is a space where musicians can be true to themselves and the music. (Nock, pers. comm. 2007)

Thus within the festival context, it is not in the musicians' interests to adapt their sound for tourists. They are 'true to the music' and are ambassadors of their own approach to jazz and advocates for the jazz movement as a whole.

### **Australia's capital of jazz?**

Wangaratta's location is a serendipitous master stroke on Adrian Jackson's part. Being between Melbourne and Sydney makes it perfect as a neutral place and the rural setting means you can actually play in a more open way. You are less laden with city life and complications and in a small way

I feel this is apparent in the music played at Wangaratta. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

One cannot overlook the fact that there is little jazz in Wangaratta outside the festival. But what Wangaratta does have is the power to capture musical credibility, authenticity and a sense of belonging for 4 days, in the one place, at one time, in a musical style that is facing threats to its survival in Australia and overseas. As John Hibbard explains:

I noticed coming into Wangaratta that there are signs up saying it is Australia's jazz capital. It just can't be. Only for one week. But the amazing thing is there is probably more hard-core jazz going on there in that week than anywhere else, certainly regionally anywhere else in Australia, at any other time. (Pers. comm. 2009)

The musical experience at Wangaratta is insular and thoroughly urban. Jazz is played by musicians for musicians and on the whole by city people for city people in a type of musical vacuum which is not accessible to the average person who is not educated in music or jazz (Hibbard, pers. comm. 2009; Ottington, pers. comm. 2009). It is constructed as a festival of musical excellence, not a festival of easy listening. In other words, creating and filling a place with specific musical sounds (and the signs of credibility they convey) is crucial. The festival is a soundscape: a sonorous environment in which bodily, affective responses to sound are prioritised (Brant *et al.* 2007).

In musical experience, creative acts of perception engage the world, play a role in the social life of music and, to varying degrees, help to constitute society as a whole. Experience can be understood as the contents of consciousness: the ideas thought, the emotions felt, the sounds heard, the fragrances smelled, the textures touched and the colours seen (Berger 1999). Musical experience does not exist solely in performance or listening to sound but in the full range of settings (composing sessions, rehearsals, and listening events) where musical life is carried out and emotional relations established (Wood *et al.* 2007). The creation of musical phenomena is actively achieved through social practice, powerfully informed by the situation, the participant's goals in the event, and a potentially endless range of larger cultural contexts (Berger 1999).

To understand the musical experiences of listeners and performers at the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz is to make sense of its roots in jazz. Jazz music, by definition, is never performed live the same way twice. It is spontaneous or, in musical terms, improvised. Jazz contains new interpretations of the music based on the lived experience of the performer and how they experience the tune (emotionally, physically, on the stage). Improvisation can be understood as playing music from one's own perspective. In practice, it constitutes a new interpretation or approach to playing a tune loosely based on its original melodic or rhythmic form. Music is imagined and then communicated via improvisation—it is not read from a page (as in the case of classical music). As Pianist Mike Nock explains: 'I see myself as a painter. I don't start out with chords. I use colours and textures and let the music write itself, because it always tells you where it wants to go' (Nock, pers. comm. 2007).

Improvisation is the reason why people listen to jazz and why jazz is musically distinctive. It explains why musicians do not adapt their sound to meet tourist expectations and why listeners and performers engage with each other in a social

context to share their perceptions of sound and its meaning. Improvisation also actively organises affective communication between the performer and the listener. Barney McAll describes that at Wangaratta this experience is intensified:

Adrian Jackson has bridged the gap so that audiences can be happy with what they experience and the musicians are top notch and never compromise their sound. The wide variety, yet high quality, of musicians is key here. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

The event is thus experienced beyond the physical boundaries of the festival. The role of the festival space is matched by its role in the articulation of symbolic notions of belonging, community and musical experience which go beyond both place and time. The experience is 'here and now' and simultaneously within other places and times. As one example of one person's listening to one song on one night, the focus is on a particular listener's experience of the formal and emotional aspects of the song, the stage moves of the musicians, the taste of beer, and any other elements of the event that the participant concretely grasps. The participant's constitution of these experiences is influenced by his or her purposes in attending the event (the desire to get out of the house, to hear intricate and diverse music, to support the local festival) and his or her perceptual skills (listening skills, knowledge of music). These in turn are informed by past musical experience (years of listening to jazz, an interest in the Australian scene, music classes) and non-musical experiences (local environment, a good day), as Barney McAll elaborates:

Wangaratta is a place where the psychological forecast can be told. Musicians travel around a lot and when they congregate and play they are describing their travels and experiences in abstract terms. That is why audiences often close their eyes at Jazz concerts. They are not as interested in the visual as they are in the story being told. The global update. The local issues in musical form. The bush poetry. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

In this way music then plays a significant part in the way that individuals author space, with musical texts being creatively combined with local experiences and sensibilities in ways that tell particular stories about the local, and impose collectively defined meanings and significance on space. Barney McAll is adamant that the music at Wangaratta is a description of life:

The music at Wangaratta and the music I play is a description of life. Often musicians get caught up in rehearsing the potent music of the 60s in the United States but I feel many of the Australian groups are finding a new original voice. Adrian Jackson has picked up on this and presented it as jazz. The leather elbows and jazz stiffs can go and enjoy it too. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

A lot of the greatest music festivals all over the world are in little out-of-the-way places. You have to go somewhere to get there. You kind of get sequestered for the time in a different world. If you go from listening to one gig to another in the city it does not have the same intensity. Every year it is always great and the bar is constantly being raised. You will hear things that you will not hear anywhere else. (Nock, pers. comm. 2007)

The festival synthesises locally acquired musical knowledge from different scenes into a common place where music is articulated and shared amongst individuals within a collective identity. This ongoing process of music-making and listening is symbolic because at Wangaratta it achieves the status of a quasi or imagined scene in its own right. It is not a scene embedded in place but an imagined scene that transcends place on one level (a collection of scenes), but relies on it on another (the place of Wangaratta). When this is seen in the context of the struggle to find supportive venues for the expression of jazz in Australia's cities it becomes even more significant. The rich experiential settings in which the festival takes place overlap and intertwine to the extent that sounds produced by musicians in given local settings (i.e. their cities of origin) are deemed to have resulted from their sharing of music at Wangaratta. One of the festival's roles is to facilitate such diverse musical experiences. Australian jazz music is increasingly being played in a way that is more distinctly Australian and original. The festival has grown with more people and high-profile international groups participating in performances. Barney McAll describes this trend as follows:

It is just deeply about music. It is the best festival to play at for this reason. There is no sense of compromise; of sucking up to corporations; it is just legit and I think people register and appreciate this fact. I would just say that Wangaratta becomes a barometer for me in a sense. I have played at the festival every two years since its inception and I get a vivid gauge of how my music has changed every time I play. I have also created more and more fans through playing Wangaratta and Adrian has been very supportive of all my whacked-out ensemble ideas. There is nothing that makes me prouder than playing the Town Hall when it's full of people who really enjoy my music and it feels like a net below a tightrope that I can never injure myself on. (McAll, pers. comm. 2007)

## **Conclusion**

Jazz music is not indigenous to Wangaratta, yet Wangaratta is the lifeblood of Australian jazz music. The Wangaratta Festival of Jazz has become the means for an otherwise little-known country town to become Australia's jazz capital, and to develop into a mecca for jazz in Australia, whereby the music is re-routed from cities to the country for '4 days of peace and music'. The festival can be credited for creating and fostering musical and social relations between city and rural populations in Australia and internationally. It offers freedom for people to perform, talk, and 'do what jazz musicians do'. The festival's impact lives on beyond the physical boundaries of the festival through new social connections, recordings and ensembles which are born out of it.

The festival simultaneously enables community, stimulates creativity and encourages hybridity without compromise and without tensions between the musical and local communities. At a local level it plays a key role in community building and economic invigoration. At a broader level, it provides an event where performers and listeners can experience jazz in an intense and uninterrupted environment. The event allows for music-making across scenes (usually defined by their location within cities) and in turn leads to an imagined scene where ideas and concepts can be exchanged and experienced. Critically, it provides a place for the

spontaneous and high-level production of music and acts as a source of inspiration to Australian jazz musicians.

As the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz shows, the role of festivals in connecting major cities with remote and smaller places is important and requires more credit from scholars of creative industries. It also challenges us to gain a better understanding of the interactions between tourism and jazz, and tourism and popular music festivals. Local music scenes in cities are constructed conceptually, socially and symbolically and, as in Wangaratta, involve linkages to festivals in remote and smaller places. This paper also highlights the need for scholars writing about creative industries to give more attention to music and how it is affectively experienced (Wood *et al.* 2007). Jazz music is a sonorous experience—it is about complex musical theory, imagination, spontaneity, and improvisation. Recent work blending insights from the social sciences, particularly human geography, with musicology, the perception and phenomenology of musical experience and insights from performers provides a model for such future research (e.g. Brant *et al.* 2007). Progress in this regard will be critical if we are to unpack how musicians work within particular spaces and places and how imaginative and emotional worlds shape and are shaped by specific musical practices, social interactions and sites.

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