



David McClymont

explains how to become a keyboard warrior

Way back in primary school, a fellow student used to boast about the fact that he played the piano. He was such a boastful sort of fellow that I thought, I am not going to cop that. I am going to learn the piano and I am going to be better than you.

But after a while I started to realise that I quite liked it, so I started classical piano first when I was eight. My first teacher was a local lady from West Wollongong and I can thank her for teaching me how to read music. When you start out you really do need to learn classical. If you are going to do it properly you need to learn the basics of fingering and of classical technique.

My next teacher had short stubby little fingers but he could move them. I used to watch him and think, this is just astonishing, look what he can do. Then one time he played me an album

of Fats Waller and I remember saying to him: That's it, that's what I want to do. Show me how to do that.

When I was in my earlie twenties I went to the Wollongong Conservatorium, and I started playing with Don Harper who was a jazz violinist who had been everywhere and done everything. I played with the big band at Wollongong Conservatorium until I went to England.

I went to England in 1988, and while I was with the big band you had to read the charts, so again reading [music] was important. If you want to be a full time musician you have got to read. Over that time I played in a lot of rock bands; I paid my way through university by playing in a band. Pubs, clubs, weddings, parties, anything.

In the pubs we just played pop rock, whatever was on the radio. We just learned it and played it. I had an electric piano like Roger Hodgson from

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Supertramp who used a Wurlitzer so I used one of those. It never really cut through, I could hardly ever hear myself. The guitarist and the band were so loud.

The drummer, he'd had an accident at some stage and he couldn't hold the sticks in one hand, so he'd put the stick in his hand and then gaffa tape his hand up so the stick would stay there.

I got to realise that I didn't really want to play in a rock band. When I was in my late teens or early twenties I heard Fats Waller and Ella Fitzgerald. When I first heard Ella I thought that's so beautiful, I can't believe how beautiful that is. She was the best of the best.

Then I heard Oscar Peterson, and he just blew me away like, "I gotta do that". So I have been trying ever since.

The important thing for people who are musically inclined is to keep trying. Keep playing and learning. Learn the harder stuff, extend yourself. Don't keep playing the easy stuff, learn something challenging. I think that's the key, because that makes it interesting, to me.

I sit down with transcriptions of George Shearing and Oscar Peterson and Bill Evans and people like that, trying to play what they played, and I cannot, but some of it rubs off and after a while you think ok, I can do that. Learn the scales until they become second nature and you don't have to think about the scales any more. Learn chords; you have got to learn chords.

When I was younger we never went to a club or a pub that didn't have live music. If there was no music, we didn't go. We knew who the bass player was, we knew who the guitarist was, we knew where the album was engineered, the name of the engineer, we were really into it.

But people don't know these things any more. I found, just casually talking to some of the kids about music, they would mention a band, and I'd ask who is the guitarist, and they don't know, they don't know the names of people. They don't seem to idolise the musicians; they idolise the image, they idolise the sound, but mainly the image. You know, they look good, it's all part of the video packaging — not the individual musicians, they don't seem to take much notice of them.

And I think that's sad.

MOVING TO THE BUSH ON A STRING AND SOME AIR

Nicole Vieser and Philip Wilson

New musicians arrive in the region

Nicole leads off ...

My grandmother and mother were both pianists and I used to sit at the piano when I was a toddler and pick out nursery rhymes. My grandmother heard me doing that one day and told mum I should learn the violin. I started lessons when I was six.

I began with the Suzuki method where you learn to play by ear, then I moved on to the traditional method of learning to read music. I studied all through primary school and high school, then went on to complete my Bachelor's Degree at the Sydney Conservatorium. I remember getting this very fat theory book, like a children's activity book, on how to read music and write music and I enjoyed doing that.

I think there should be more music in schools; there certainly should be more music education and it should be an integral part of the school curriculum. When I went to school I was the only person who played a musical instrument, there was no music class and there was no opportunity to learn an instrument. I think it is really important that schools, and kids, have that opportunity because it can help in so many ways.

I think every kid should have at least a chance of singing or playing an instrument.

Some kids will not be musical, but at least they have had a go. I just think it is very very important, and we don't have enough of it in schools.

I teach at a public school in Lane Cove on Sydney's north shore. I have been there for seven or eight years now and have helped the string programme to blossom so to speak. It was not very big at the time when I arrived, but now it's developed really well and we have three different ensembles.

It's kids from kindy to year six, and we have a beginner string group, an inter-

mediate string group and an advanced string group.

I teach violin, piano and cello at Bungendore public school and I have started teaching at St Bede's in Braidwood as well this term. That's going really well. At St Bede's, we'll have a little music concert at the end of the year. I want the kids to perform at any, or every, festival and function that happens. Get them out there, having fun, spread the word.

I don't play anymore in orchestras, and I miss certain repertoires from my orchestral playing days; playing some of the symphonies that have great string parts. I certainly miss certain symphonic works, and being a part of a large orchestra and having sound all around you.

I learned fiddling in Galway in the late '90s. I have a couple of fiddling students as well, and we did some busking outside the Fickle Pickle on a Sunday morning, in the courtyard. We are planning to get some Irish session

musicians together and do sessions at the pub on a Sunday afternoon or something like that. It would be nice to connect with other like musicians who play that sort of music.

Philip takes up the baton ...

I work with the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra which performs in Sydney at the Opera House. I have been doing that for twenty-five years, and like Nicole, I teach in Sydney at several schools including the Conservatorium High School, and I have a private studio where I teach on Saturday mornings and I'm hoping to eventually get the same here. The rest of the time I spend down here in delightful Mongarlowe.

My parents both learned the piano and hated it so they thought I should do something else. They had quite a good range of recordings of classical music, we were always playing those recordings at home and I really enjoyed the sound of the French horn, in particular recordings like the New World Symphony by Dvořák.

That fired my attention, so when in primary school, I did those little tests to see whether you were suited to any instruments.

I did quite well in that and they offered me the French horn which my parents were very happy with because it was free.

When I left school I continued to play in some small ensembles, and sought tuition from a very fine tutor, and he

