Introducing…Paul Grabowsky

Presented by State Library of Queensland.

Guest Speaker – Paul Grabowsky

SPEAKER – VICKI McDONALD

(Director, Client Services and Collections, State Library of Queensland)

Good evening everyone, welcome to the State Library of Queensland, my name is Vicki McDonald and on behalf of the staff at State Library of Queensland I would like to welcome you to this evening's presentation, *Introducing…* and specifically *Introducing Paul Grabowsky*.

As many of you would know we've commenced the *Introducing…* series of talks earlier this year and we've had a very diverse range of topics in that time. We started off with forensic science, we then had extreme weather, social exclusion and the politics of spin so tonight a very different introducing series and a very special, event tonight as I assure you, I am sure you appreciate.

Just a few housekeeping things, if you haven't already done so, could you please turn off your mobile phone. We don't want any competition with Paul this evening and we want to be able to listen to him during the programme.

If you did miss the earlier sessions that I spoke about they are available on our website. We have some web casting of those sessions and we'll also be recording tonight's session as well, so I'll talk to you a little bit about that when we get into the questions section of the evening.

So tonight we welcome Paul Grabowsky and many of you would know that Paul, as a jazz museum, sorry, [pause - audience laughter], sorry, we'll, we'll start that again, so many of you would know that Paul, know of Paul as a jazz musician, which indeed he is having started piano lessons at the very early age of five. He says that his love affair with jazz

began when most serious first love affairs start, at the age of sixteen. Paul has since had a career studying and playing with some of the world's most respected artists and in 2006, he was the recipient of the Bell Award for Australian Jazz Artist of the Year.

He has a catalogue of twenty five recordings, composed of seventeen television series, written two operas and won numerous awards including four ARIAs. But more recently, Paul will be known to many of you as the artistic director of the Queensland Music Festival, and the Queensland Music Festival was actually launched here a month ago in this very space. Now we're eagerly awaiting the commencement of the Festival which is exactly one month from today and starting on the 13th of July, but Paul doesn't want us to talk about that.

One of the most exciting elements of this year's Festival is the Steinway Art Case project and artist, Judy Watson has been commissioned to create Australia's first ever Steinway Art Case piano which is what we have here today. Very fantastic, and I'm sure Paul will talk a little bit about it this evening.

The State Library has had the pleasure of hosting Judy while she's been creating this, this master piece and it will actually be on public display as from tomorrow in the Fox Family White Glass Room on level four, so we invite you to come and have a close look at it, at the piano then. It will then travel to Winton and feature Sunrise Voices at the opening celebrations of the 2007 Queensland Music Festival. But no doubt again, Paul will tell you a little bit about the opening of it in Winton.

The format for this evening is that we'll, Paul will come and talk and play for about forty minutes and then we'll open up the session to questions.

As I said, we are recording tonight's event and it will be available on our website. So when we, go to the question format, I'll just give you some guidelines on how we actually do that. If you have any questions about the recording process, our staff can answer those questions for you later in the evening.

So without further ado please welcome Paul Grabowsky.

[Audience applause]

SPEAKER – PAUL GRABOWSKY

Well I'm so glad to be following dissertations on social exclusion and the politics of spin because they're two things I know quite a lot about, being a jazz musician. Social exclusion is a necessity, something we seek actively as jazz musicians and the politics of spin is what you need to employ in order to convince people of what you do has value, so, not to mention being a museum of jazz [audience – laughter]. I wear that with pride. I'll be fifty soon and I think that's museum status, definitely.

When I asked my colleagues at the Queensland Music Festival what I was expected to talk about this evening, they said, talk about your, your life, yourself, so what artist could possibly turn down the opportunity to talk about the one subject that really holds fascination for them. So sit tight, relax, in fact, go to sleep, as I tell you the story of Paul Grabowsky.

The Grabowsky family which is, you know, always a source of great embarrassment to my wife, a family of very strange people. We claim, and of course, this is the politics of spin, but nevertheless it's a somewhat substantiated claim, we claim to be descended from the last King of Poland. Who was a gentleman called Stanislaus Poniatowski, he had a mistress, as one did in those days and indeed still does in certain circles, and her name was Elsbeta Grubowska and she bore Stanislaus five children and as those of you who will know, who are students of 18th Century European history, and let's face it, who isn't Poland was partitioned three times during the course of the second half of the 18th Century and the final partition happened in 1791. Now I believe that the Grabowsky children were all taken into exile in Russia, during that time and the next time they re-surface is in Scotland in the mid-19th Century. Now what exactly happened in the intervening period I'm not sure, but low and behold, they built up a trading empire with Russia, and they had vast real estate holdings in Russia and my father, Alistair, great Scottish name, Alistair Grabowsky, we wear the Grabowsky tartan which is the colour of blood sausage, was born in 1909 he's no longer with us, but he used to tell me about his early childhood years, which were incredibly opulent. He was born into unbelievable wealth and, sadly, we don't have the wealth anymore, it went up in smoke when the Russian revolution broke out in 1917. The Grabowsky ships were all in Russian harbours, when the revolution broke out and they were seized along with, of course, with the real estate holdings and having very little left with their last few million, the Grabowsky family migrated to Australia, where they settled in South Gipps Land in 1921. My grandfather who was a father of nine children of who my father was the youngest, was apparently not a very nice man, or my father certainly didn't think so, in fact he was jailed for

a short time by his father for having forged a note with his father's signature, saying, please give my son, Alistair, a hundred pounds, when he was on the run so you know, they didn't get on tremendously well, but the old man eventually went back to Scotland, he really couldn't cut it in Australia and as the youngest of nine children, my father set about the typical Grabowsky pastime of becoming an adventurer and he went to New Guinea in 1930. Spent all of the 1930s in New Guinea with his brother and with his best friend and they were many things in New Guinea, they were pilots and musicians and explorers and all kinds of other things that I'm sure were less sanitary and which they'd only alluded to in very elliptical sorts of ways, but you can imagine, you know, being white colonial sort of buccaneers in New Guinea in the 1930s, I suppose they thought anything was possible. Among his friends were people like Errol Flynn, who was a plantation owner there but Dad went back to New Guinea in 1958 and that's where I happened to be born. Now my brother, Michael, is sixteen years older than me and there are no intervening children, which has led us to speculate that possibly I wasn't really meant to happen, you can imagine, the last thing on a woman's mind in New Guinea in 1958 at the age of forty two, mmm, must have another kid, just feels like the right time, anyway mum, I'm really sorry about that, but here I am. I grew up in Melbourne, in Glen Waverley, which is on the outer suburban fringe, certainly was right at the edge of the outer suburban eastern fringe in those days and my interest in music began very, very early. In fact, my mother says that I didn't actually speak until I was about two and of course they thought, not without reason, particularly, given that she had, was an older person, considerably older for that time that she had maybe given birth to, you know, somebody who wasn't, didn't have all the mental faculties, so they went through this period speculating, about what was going to turn out. Finally, around the age of two I said, craven name filter Michael, and they nodded wisely and knew that at that point that I was totally insane, but what I had managed to figure was that my brother smoked Craven A Filter and my brother was a musician and I'd obviously put together the smoking and the music and figured out that music and substance abuse were necessarily inter-connected and it was already, you know, the first step towards becoming a jazz musician which was an inevitable path.

Interestingly, what I did start to show from a very early age was a phenomenal memory for music and I loved it so much that I wanted to be involved with music much to the exclusion of most other things. My favourite toys were shellac 78 recordings and my mother used to buy them at a store which sold second-hand 78s in Richmond, which is an inner suburb of Melbourne, and she would bring them home and I would attempt to wipe the scratches off them in the wash basin, which I don't think would have helped their sound quality. For my third birthday, my brother, Michael, gave me a set of 78s containing the seventh symphony

of Anton Bruckner. I still really don't like that piece tremendously much and I think that maybe he was over accounting for my interest in music. But as was alluded to earlier, my love affair with jazz did start at a time when you would expect it to. It was in my teens, and I've been fortunate to have started piano lessons quite young. My parents bought a piano when I was four and I started playing it when I was five. I started to have lessons, when I was five, and when I was seven and I was in grade two at school, my school teacher was an amateur church organist and he was a very good friend of a pianist and teacher in Melbourne called Mac Yost, and Mac at the time, was the senior lecturer in piano at the Conservatorium of Music at Melbourne University, a post which he held for many years subsequently, and Mac was a very gentle soul, a really beautiful human being and he'd never taught a seven year old before, he was much more used to teaching University age or at least teenage kids, but he asked me to play and I did and he agreed to take me on as a, as a teacher and I stayed with him for eleven years and the reason why he has, he looms so large in my imagination wasn't just because he was my piano teacher, but because he was a man who taught me many things and one of the things that he really did, kind of, lead, lead me to understand very, probably by osmosis over the years was that music is a metaphor for life, that we can learn as musician a lot about life through the music that we play, that the music is a sort of surrogate language, a language which exists on a plain which words are often unable to really engage in. Of course, music is to do with the feelings and it's very, very strange what music does to us, I mean we actually physically respond to music. I have a very, very dear friend who's actually here tonight. My friend Ken, Ken Eadie, a wonderful drummer, jazz drummer in this town and you know, in my estimation one of the best in the world and we spend a lot of time listening to music together and I'm often amazed by the way that Ken physically reacts to music, he actually hurls himself across the room at certain points of a particularly claris interval is heard or some amazing sort of musical gesture and I mean really understand that because I know that he's mentally ill and, [laughter], no, I don't think Ken. Love you mate. But no the thing is music does make us actually physically react and you know, we don't really understand a lot about what it is in the brain which brings these things on, and the brain of course really is the last frontier of medical science, we, we know very, very little about its inner workings, but one thing we do know is that it does activate the pleasure centres of the brain and that music can send chemicals, you know, and electrical impulses racing through our bodies and causes us to feel different things. Now how that came about I don't know, although we do know from the study of music in indigenous societies that, you know, music is very associated with medicine, with healing, with altered states of consciousness, with heightened experience, it's often associated with ceremony, and it's certainly associated with conditions in which people are trying to escape from one particular mode of existence and passing to another. Now we've as a society have

lost our ability to really experience a ceremony or mode which means a great deal, but nevertheless, the sort of music which we do allow ourselves to enjoy, should be something that elevates the human condition and make us very aware of what it is to be human.

Jazz came to me through really a number of things, I mean one of them was libido quite frankly, I went to an all boys school, Wesley College, in Melbourne, a kind of elite school, I suppose you could say, and I wasn't in the football team, funny about that, because I was a really lousy footballer, I don't know, at least they, they could have picked me as a goal umpire or, but actually in all seriousness, I did spend most of my school years inventing ways not to have to play sport in a school which insisted that you had to, you know, on pain of virtual death, certainly exclusion and I did devise many interesting stratagems, and excuses, very, almost bur rock in their, in their complexity, so that it got to the point where as I approached the sport's teacher, he'll just put his hand up and say, no it's fine, don't even try and explain, but where was I heading with that, oh, yes, girls, my social life took place on the Glen Waverley Line, the train which took me, 7:47 each morning to Richmond station, where I would change onto the Sandringham line and get the train to Prahran and, there were certain stations, I mean I refer to this line as the stations of the cross, at which your pulse rate would quicken. There was the station where the Methodist Ladies College girls got onto the train for example and that would normally induce something close to a catatonic state and we had at Wesley College a jazz band, it was probably one of the first school jazz programmes ever established in Australia, and it's now become something of a, of a feature of that school, but at that time, it was very much a kind of you know, the weirdos played in the jazz band, and I had no idea how to play jazz, but because I could play the piano I was able to join the band and one day we got to play a lunchtime concert at Methodist Ladies College, and that day changed my life in a very profound way because I really felt what it was like to be admired by all those wonderful people. Anyway, there was a more serious side to this of course, and that is the music itself, which I started to listen to on the radio on the ABC, some of you will remember, five nights a week in those days, they used to have a jazz programme called music to midnight, and it was run by various different people, starting with Arch McKerdie and then it was Ian Kneale and then it was Ralph Rickman, and I sort of jumped onboard probably around about 1969, listening to Ian Kneale's very dulcet tones, and I just really got into that kind of thing. I'd finish my homework, go to bed, turn the radio on and listen to what he played, and he used to play what we would now call very mainstream music. A lot of things like Oscar Peterson or the Modern Jazz Quartet or Stan Getz and, oh, there was a lot of Australian jazz, I mean he use to play you know, Don Burrows, George Golla, Bob Bernard, people like that, so I started to kind of understand that there was jazz, there was sort of various different styles of jazz and indeed, there was

Australian jazz too, and it sort of sounded a bit different from American jazz. I couldn't quite figure out what it was, but the other music which I was really into at that time was 20th Century Classical Music, and I was really on my own in that regard, I mean, you know, my parents just was like please do you have to play that. The very first album I bought, you know, some people bought Pink Floyd or you know, Deep Purple or Led Zeppelin, my first album when I actually went into a record store and chose a bit a vinyl was two Stravinsky piano concertos and I think the next one after that was something by Cherbourg you know, and the weirder it was the more I liked it, I, I, I just sort of, I got books out about 20th century music and read names like Boulez, Stockhausen, Cage, you know, and the more kind of out there it was the more desperately I wanted to hear it and so this was all I guess my sort of version of a teen rebellion, my think was a sort of intellectual rebellion. I'd decided that I would listen to music that nobody else liked, and I would you know, wave it in their noses and we actually had a really good music teacher at Wesley College, a guy called Tom Brown, who we referred to as Breath and, Tom was pretty switched on and he introduced us to a lot of what I now understand was really, really cool music, but I would just sit there and say, nah, it's not, it's not interesting Tom, this is interesting, you know, Stockhausen, Grupin and he'd just go, yeah, right, okay, you know, whatever, so you know, the thing was after a while I started to actually want to play jazz, it wasn't enough to listen to it and, and I realise that it wasn't just about jazz, it was actually about improvisation and playing music and that really jazz was a place where you could bring all of these things together, you could play nuts music, you could play very cool, very melodic music, you could play music that people really loved, you could play music that would frighten people out of the room, it was all possible and it was all contingent on your ability to really understand a. how to make your music, how to make your instrument work for you and be what it really took to be able to improvise in an effective way, and at some point the penny dropped, if I wanted to be a jazz musician I'd actually have to get serious about it and you can't be serious about jazz without really knowing the history of the music. At least understanding where the stuff that you like actually comes from and at that time, the first jazz music that I started to sort of understand was music of my time, was jazz rock fusion music, this is the 1970s, you know, the mid-70s and my brother who I suddenly had started to realise was my brother and that's, he's not some old guy who was distantly related to me, who at some early stage had moved out of the house, started to take an interest and it was like, he was a musician, and so he started to say, you should you know, maybe check some of this music out and he had records like, Chick Career, Return to Forever, Weather Report the Mahavishnu Orchestra, quite interesting music for me at that time, and I could actually correlate some of the influences from classical music to what you know, some of these guys were doing, so I really got more and more excited by this music and I wanted to play it, but you know, for, as every musician

knows, who's ever tried to play jazz, when you first try to play it you actually have no idea what you're doing, you're just kind of moving your fingers around and hoping for the best, you know, and if you happen to have a lot of technique you play lots of notes, none of them mean anything, but you know, you're able to impress your friends by going bbrrrrrrrrrrrrrr, and they all go wow, you're really good, actually you're not really good, you're just really fast and that can be an absolute liability to playing music. Anyway I, I got together with, I got to learn to know some people, like a great bass player, called Gary Costello and Gary was a student of a double bass player, called Murray Wahl and Murray Wahl was a student of a kind of legendary teacher from New York called Lenny Tristano, and Lenny Tristano had played with Charlie Parker and those of you who know anything about jazz history will understand that Charlie Parker is, you know, one of the sort of gods of modern jazz, one of the kind of really inventors of modern jazz in fact and alto saxophone player and these guys were fairly kind of hardcore purists about the way jazz should sound and for them, jazz rock fusion music was a kind of yuk, they'd just would go argh, you've got to be kidding, you can't play that music, that's not even music, now music is Charlie Parker and Lester Young and a piano player called Bud Powell, unfortunately for the that was all music was, it was contained within this sort of bubble and the rest of history didn't really exist, but for me it was a sort of revelation being introduced to the music which we call bee bop and the first great influence on me as a pianist was this great piano player called Bud Powell. I loved Bud Powell's music and I spent many years kind of transcribing it and getting to know it and you know, in 1980 I actually left Australia for several years and went to live in Germany. This speech has turned into a total ramble, so you'll just have to kind of follow me around as I disregard my script completely. But what I do intend to do is play you piece of by Bud Powell on this piano, which has been converted into what you see before you by Judy Watson. So it's really a Judy Watson now, it's not even easily able to be described as a piano anymore, although it still does function as one, but it's certainly a beautiful thing. So if you'll bear with me, this is a piece by Bud Powell, called the fruit.

[Paul played the piano]

[Audience applause]

We come now to 1959. No we don't, look I spent most of the first half of the 80s in Europe and my reasons for doing that were complex, but of course they involved a girl and I ended up being a jazz musician, which is probably secretly what I really wanted to be all along. Through a various you know, various chains of circumstances, I ended up in Munich playing in a lot of different bands, working with some very interesting and some notorious people. I had encounters with Chet Baker during those years and with the great trumpeter, Art

Farmer, and Johnny Griffin, great tenor saxophone player, but I also played with a lot of great European musicians and for me it was a fantastic period, because I got to play a lot of different styles of jazz and I began to realise that jazz isn't one sort of music actually and you know, ?? Winton Marcellus who definitely says that jazz is a certain sort of music, it isn't. Jazz is what you want it to be and for me the word jazz has two kinds of meanings. You can look at jazz as a noun which is tantamount to saying jazz is this and with a definition attached to it or you can look at it as an adverb, as a way of doing things and that's pretty much the way I prefer to see it. For me jazz is a living thing, it's a breathing thing, it's a thing which, if you look at its own history evolved out of a number of different sort of sources and confluences which have come together, right at the beginning in New Orleans, there were many different things which comprised jazz. Jazz was the blues on the one hand, it was European sort of parlour piano music, it was what they called the Spanish tinge, there was a sort of influence coming from, from the Caribbean, from Cuba, there was this kind of, just a melting pot of black and white and, and every single cue in between and I think that jazz has always been something which essentially is very embracing. It's, it's more than just a type of music, it's almost like a philosophical expression and if you look at jazz's influence in the 20th century, it's been something which has done a strange thing, it's gone from being a very popular music to being a sort of an underground music, but most importantly, it's been something which has gone on to influence, virtually every other sort of music that it's come into contact with. You can't imagine a single type of western music which hasn't been in some way effected by jazz and in a way it's the inversion of the racial paradigm because of course, black people in the United States have found it incredibly difficult, to struggle to be recognised as equal citizens, and even today I think it's true to say that, if you look at the statistics about people in jail or the socio-economic sorts of information which are current, black people still are undeservedly in the bottom half or over-endowed with bad statistics, but their music has been the great kind of triumph of black culture and jazz is the greatest example of black music. See it's the highest achievement. It's a music which truly marries intellect and passion. You can't play it effectively without knowing an awful lot about your instrument and about music in general and you can't play it convincingly without being incredibly passionate about it. The other thing about it of course, is that it is a music which exists in the moment and the moment is everything in jazz. The moment is why you are there listening to it and the moment is why somebody is there playing it for you. It's that thing about improvising, but improvising is something which turns on the head of a pin and that jazz really exists in that very fragmentary utterly fragile moment, which spins past you, it is a music of real time and there's so much to be learnt from that. It's also a music of process and one of the other things that I've learnt in my years in Europe was, if I was going to be in this for the long haul I had to understand that you know, as you change the music

will change, but it's that process of change which is the most important thing. I was listening for some months to some recordings that I had made with my trio at the time, this was you know, when I was in my early mid-20s, and I became very depressed listening to these recordings, because I'd, I said to myself, that doesn't sound like Keith Garrett, that doesn't sound like Paul Blade or that doesn't sound like Herbie Hancock or Bud Powell, there must be something wrong with it. I thought I was not up to the task of playing this music and then after a while it dawned on me, no it doesn't sound like those guys, for better or worse that's your sound. That's you. So you'd better get used to it otherwise you're going to spend a life time of bitter unhappiness kicking yourself and you don't sound like Keith Garrett, you know, and I think that every creative person needs to come to that realisation at some point, in fact, let's face it, every person needs to come to that realisation, but music and particularly improvised music gives us the opportunity to understand that it's the music itself which is shaping you or reflecting the changes that go, that cause you to be the person that you are, and that day that the penny dropped I think was a very, very important day in my life and when I realised that, yes, you are the owner of your sound and the processes, the musical creative processes that you go through is essentially your life process, and that you have to love that in order to be able to do it successfully. You can't hate it, there's going to be days where you think it's better than other days, but as a rule you have to actually embrace that process and look after it and love it, warts and all. That was a very important moment for me and I think that is very central in my philosophy about what jazz is as a process, so there I was, in the mid-80s, thinking about, well actually thinking about coming home at that stage, and I'm referring to my notes now, because I know I want to play you another piece of music, but I couldn't remember what it was, but now I do. I came back to Australia in 1986 and started to do various musical projects and one of the people that I had encountered, one of the Australian people that I had encountered in Europe and we became very good friends was a great saxophonist called Dale Barlow, and Dale is one of the few Australian musicians who can claim to have played in the band of a truly great figure in American jazz and that is the drummer Art Blakey, he's a number of bands over the years called the Jazz Messengers and to be a Jazz Messenger was you know, I mean, you were in a kind of extraordinary lineage there of people including Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter, Benny Golson, it's the list is endless, Horris Silver, Bobbie Timmons, and you know, Dale was fortunate enough to be in Blakey's band, one of the last Blakey bands, I mean you know, it was towards the end of Blakey's career but nevertheless, it was great thing. Anyway Dale came back around the same time as I did and we realised that one of things that we needed to really overcome in Australia was the bitter feuding which was going on between the Melbourne and Sydney jazz worlds, they had virtually nothing to do with each other, except you know, make snide comments about each other and I realised that if the Australian jazz

scene was ever going to really grow one of the first things that we had to do was overcome the tyranny of distance the whole kind of ongoing problem in Australia about separation and separation anxiety which I think is probably at the heart of it all. So we formed a band called the Wizards of Oz which was you know, co-led by us and had various different rhythm sections over the years and we made a recording which in those days was very unusual because very little Australian jazz was being recorded in the 1980s and prior to that also. There was a bit of a boom in the early 60s and you know, trad-jazz or traditional Dixieland style, styles of jazz were being recorded on some sort of semi-regular basis but not modern jazz, very, very few recordings and we were actually recorded by a major label, which was Polydor at that time and things just sort of built from there and you know, I think, I look back now at the 80s and understand that was the beginning of what I would describe as the flowering of modern jazz in Australia. There was a generation of people growing up who went on to become real leaders and trailblazers in the field and you know, they cover a wide variety, but I think of people like Vince Jones, for example, the singer, as being immensely important, in being at the vanguard of that movement. Certainly one of its godfathers was the great alto saxophonist, Bernie McGann from Sydney, a person we all looked up to tremendously, but amongst that younger generation there've been all sorts of, very talented people to emerge and it's helped, certainly helped me over the years to be able to embark on some of the various projects that I've been fortunate to, to embark on. Now I know that many of you will then be aware that in 1990 I became notorious on a television show on the Seven Network called Tonight Live with Steve Vizard and, yes it was me, that's true. Steve and I were friends from University days and I've known him since the late 70s and, when I came back from Australia, I actually employed him as my lawyer, which I think now is rather ironic. There you go, you never know what's ahead. And Steve went on to become a film and television producer and you know, had a very, very like incredibly meteoric rise to success and I was sort of part of that phenomenon I guess I mean I had absolutely nothing to do with, with it per se but I was certainly happy to go along for the ride and you know, we all found ourselves to be TV stars there for a minute, which was very weird, but you know, you can imagine doing live television five nights a week is utterly exhausting and at the end of three years I have really had enough that I never want to see a television studio again as long as I live, I thought, and went back to playing and writing music and the other thing of course, that I've been doing a lot of over the years is writing film music, and I had started doing that in the 80s as well and continued it well into the now, so, yeah, one of the things about being a musician in Australia is that you have to be very versatile, you have to be prepared to go wide and do as many different things as you can. I hope I'm not boring you because I starting to think that this thing about talking about oneself is utterly, who I'm getting a five minute call, thank god for that, because I would have had me by the hook well

and truly by now, it seems like a good time however, to play another piece of music, that's what it was missing, was a piece of music and, another piece that I would like to play for you, a piece that I wrote around about that time, was when my first child was born, and her name is Isabella and her mother's name was Margaret and, yeah, Isabella was of course, you know, incredible when you're first child is born or when any child is born for that matter and I was just watching her playing around the house one day and I wrote this piece. Now the reason I'm playing this is because it falls into this particular period that we were talking about the early 90s, but also because, you know, it was for me, really important to be always writing new music for my band, is most of the music that I've played all my life, has been my own music and this is one of my own personal favourites, it's called Isabella's Dance.

[Paul plays piano]

[Audience applause]

There's a whole lot more but I think that's, I've said most of what I wanted to say, except that, you know, the Queensland Music Festival is where I find myself now and it is in many ways an expression of my beliefs of music and you know, a festival, what is it? It's a whole lot of gigs, but it's so much more than that, it's an opportunity to speak to a very broad audience about what I believe is important about music and why I think music is really important and why I think it's important that people should go and expose themselves to it with an open mind and allow it to touch them and there are so many things in this festival that I could spend hours talking about because there is not one thing in it that I don't feel very strongly about, but one thing's for sure, it certainly expresses my interest in music as a language which brings the human family together. There are projects which you will see which will be unforgettable. Things like the collaboration between the songmen of Ngukurr in South Eastern Arnhem Land and the Australian Art Orchestra, a band with, that I have something to do with, having actually founded it some thirteen or fourteen years ago, but equally you know, the choir which is coming from Papua New Guinea to perform a new work by an extraordinary young musician from, from Papua New Guinea, but now resident in Melbourne and New York called Aaron Tulli, and this piece, We Don't Dance For No Reason, extraordinary, you know, a piece for jazz sextet and sixteen choristers who have never left the immediate environs of their Island off the coast of Papua New Guinea. This is the sort of stuff which a festival is in the position to create. This piano is another example of that, The African Childrens Choir with the Queensland Youth Orchestra, Richard Mills' new opera, The Love of the Nightingale, all of this stuff you have to check out. All of it, I mean I would stop doing anything between the 13th and 29th of July, and just go to our festival, believe me you will be really tired at the end of it, but happy. Tired with smiles on your faces

and thinking oh that was fourteen days well spent, do we have any money left, no, but hey, who needs it. Yeah, it's a real, it's a real privilege to be able to be a part of such a wonderful project and a privilege to work with the people that I do. Who share my vision and, and help me to realise it. Just as it, as it has been a real privilege to be able to speak to you tonight. I hope my ramble hasn't been too self-indulgent and, if it has stuff it [audience – laughter] …it's done now. It's out there. So, I guess if you have any questions, now's the time.

[Audience – applause]

SPEAKER – VICKI McDONALD

Thanks Paul and as I mentioned earlier, Paul's indicated a willingness to take a couple of questions, so if we have time for just two questions. Oh, well, people can stay afterwards. So we have staff on each side and what we ask if you could raise your hand if you would like to ask a question and the staff will hand you the microphone, because we are recording the sessions it's best to capture the question as well and if in asking a question, if you can be as succinct as possible in doing that so … any questions?

Question: Just wondering what you think defines Australian jazz as a type of music?

Paul That's a very good question and of course it's one which is almost impossible to answer really, but whenever I reflect on it, I think well what is Australian jazz or why is Australian jazz so good is another question, another way to put it, because a lot of it is really very good. And one of the reasons for that must surely be that jazz is a music which suits Australians as a mode of expression. It is an improvise in form, it involves a sense of humour, it is by its nature a kind of democratic music. It's a music which insists that every person in it has some kind of, more than just a role to play, but they have a, they have what is the word I'm looking for?, like share a responsibility to look after everybody else in the group, because what anybody plays in a jazz group is completely dependant on what somebody else is doing. You know, you can't just single one person out. There is a type of music in jazz which is more like that, but even in that music we've got a kind of a rhythm section which does a role behind a soloist. For that to be good, the people in the rhythm need to be feeling that they can be utterly creative too. So you know, we pride ourselves in this country for better or worse and sometimes unnecessarily or wrongly, but nevertheless we think of ourselves as infinitely resourceful people and I like to think of Australia as a nation which has kind of

improvised itself into being because you know, we've had to put up with so many and continue to put up with so many difficulties, which you know, European or North Hemisphere countries really don't have to deal with, just in terms of the type of place this is, but ingenuity has been one of the things which has really got us through and jazz is nothing if not ingenious so what singles out Australian jazz, individuality, but very, very good collective musicianship, and ideas which capture your imagination, where you think, wow I've never heard of something quite like that before.

Vicki Any questions?

Paul Don't be shy now! Sure.

Question Paul, you speak of improvisation and the importance of improvisation, the role it plays, at what stage in improvisation and, and, and it's wonderful when you listen to a group and they're improvising, but at what stage does a perfect piece being set in stone so they let it play again and again and do you listen to something and say that's the way it's got to be?

Paul No the answer to that is never. Improvised music is never set in stone, otherwise it's not improvised. If any improvised piece of music, you know, is repeated note for note, then it's not an improvised piece anymore, it's become something else and improvising musicians do not seek that in their music, I mean a very good example of what I'm alluding to would be something like there's a very famous recording by Keith Garrett, the pianist that I mentioned earlier, called the ?? Concert, which is a concert that he did in Cologne in 1977, 78 something like, or 76 maybe, but anyway it's a long time ago, it might even be 74, it's, it's old now. It is the largest selling piano record ever made. So it out-sold any classical piano recording and it's so loved by so many people that it has been completed transcribed and you can buy the sheet music of this concert, exactly as played by Keith Garret in the same way that you can buy the 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven. But so what, really, is, is my response to that, I mean it's okay to sit down there and there and play it I guess but that's really not the point about that music. The point is that he played that once, it was evitably repeated phenomenon, you know, he went in there and played that music and walked off the stage knowing that it would never be the same again and he probably went on the next night to play, I don't know, in ?? or Duisburg or somewhere in the neighbourhood of

Cologne and probably played something completely different, but we don't have the Duisburg concert of Keith Garrett, we've only got the Cologne concert you know, so who knows the Duisburg concert might have even been better, but the one they recorded was the Cologne concert and that went onto become the you know, the multi-million seller that it has and that's the beauty about improvised music, you know, you could never, I mean you could give the music to one of the great you know, Andre Schiff, or you know, Marta ?? or somebody and say, why don't you play this at your gig, you know, and she says, okay, we'll play the Cologne concert by Keith Garrett, but do you think it's going to be the same as hearing him do it improvising? I don't think so. I mean we know that J S Bach was a great improviser, you know, imagine hearing him play, imagine that, now we know the music that he wrote down, but my god, imagine hearing him improvise, that must have been something else and most of the great composers, you know, were, were great improvisers. Mozart, you know, used to organise his own subscription concerts in Vienna whenever they were running out of money Constansa would say you know, Wolfie, it's time to, you know, you've got to go out play man, you know. So they would, he would book a string section and you know they would circulate leaflets all around Vienna and the programme would consist, the first half would consist of Mozart improvising on a theme chosen for him by a member of the audience, so they'd say you know, play, you know, that song, play a Billy Joel song, I Love You Just The Way You Are, you know and he would take some popular tune of the day and play on it for forty minutes, you know, he would basically improvise a set of variations. Now that takes confidence and ability, no doubt about it and of course, you know, the, then the second half of the concert was the new piano concerto probably the ink still wet on the page, there are the string parts, no piano part, improvised, condenser improvised, so it was only later that he would go and actually say, well the publishers need a version of it that people can play now so, okay, write it down, but you know, this thing about spontaneous music making, which has sort of disappeared from classical music now, much to my horror, because it really should be a part of every musician's ability, basic ability, should be to improvise something, you know, the idea that a person that can play a musical instrument well, but not without music in front of them is kind of evidence of some deeper ?? society to me, but you know, that's for the next speech [audience – laughter] … thank you very much for coming

ladies and gentlemen, drive safely, and I look forward to seeing you at the Queensland Music Festival between July 13 and July 29.

[Audience – Applause]

SPEAKER – VICKI McDONALD

So Paul I think we've all enjoyed the opportunity to share with you in your life, our music and your passion.

Paul We only got up to 19 …

Vicki Just save the rest for another year.

SPEAKER – VICKI McDONALD

So thank you once again for coming along and I know that it has been a fantastic experience and we've really enjoyed the presentation today. Before you go though, we've got some things we'd like you to do. At the door we have some feedback forms, and we're very interested to hear what you would like to hear more about, so if you could, like to fill those forms in, that would be great. We also have researched the whole subject of jazz for you, so our research librarians have done some research for you and identified resources that would be of interest to you, so if you go to our website and go to Hot Topics you'll find some information on that and of course, tonight you've been told to come, so this is the programme for the Queensland Music Festival. The State Library is very proud to be a partner in the programme this year and some of the events will actually be held here at the State Library of Queensland, so we have copies of the programme outside, so if you'd like to pick up a copy before you go, I know, Paul would be very pleased for you to come along to the Festival. So once again, Paul, thank you very much and thank you for sharing with us tonight, thank you.

[Applause]