

An academic who's figured out his jazz



Dr Sylvan "Schmoe" Elhay.

THE man the Perth Jazz Society has as its guest tonight could be said to have two identities.

To his colleagues at the University of Adelaide, where he is the dean of the Faculty of Mathematical Science, he is Dr Sylvan Elhay. To people involved in jazz, he is just plain "Schmoe" - a nickname he earned at school and which has stayed with him through the years.

At the time he had joined the school orchestra and he and a fellow clarinet player would stay behind after re-

hearsals to do some jamming.

"One day I was harassing this guy by playing 'The Golden Wedding' and he said 'If you play that again, you're a schmoe'. So I had to play it and after that the name just stuck."

Nowadays, though Schmoe still plays clarinet, he is better known for his work on tenor saxophone. He has been to Perth only once before - as part of a big band backing Bob Hope for a TV special filmed at the Entertainment Centre in 1978.

"But I wasn't playing any

jazz then," he said. "It was just charts, with the odd 16-bar solo."

Tonight will see him on stage at the Hyde Park Hotel with fellow Adelaide musician, pianist Ted Nettlebeck, and they will be joined by a local rhythm section of Murray Wilkins (bass) and Gary France (drums).

Last year Schmoe entered the lofty world of arts politics when he was invited to join the Music Board of the Australia Council. That board has since been scrapped and replaced by a Performing Arts Board which

embraces music, theatre, mime, puppetry and dance.

Schmoe is one of the eight members, four of whom are in music.

"I shall be on the board until the middle of next year," he said, "and that may be extended. Although I am the only person involved in jazz, I don't see myself as pushing any particular field. I am advising the board on jazz matters, but I like to take an Australia-wide view of music."

Back in Adelaide, Schmoe teaches a few hours a week in the jazz course at the

South Australian College of Advanced Education and performs when he can.

"But it doesn't keep me busy," he said. "Certainly Adelaide's jazz society is not as active as yours in Perth."

Was that why he had decided not to pursue a professional music career and had opted instead for the world of academia?

"No, I never looked on it just as a meal ticket," he said. "I happen to love maths as much as I love music and I have never considered giving up on one for the other." - Adrian Kenyon