

JAMES BAILEY

By Gary France



In 1987, my first year in Australia, I had the opportunity to travel to Adelaide, South Australia as a Visiting Artist in Jazz at the Elder Conservatorium. It was during this tour when I first met James (Jim) Bailey. Like most musicians we began our conversations with the usual, "Do you know this person?" and, "Oh yes, I played with that one too," etc. However, after a short conversation, and not too much time, I soon realised that James Bailey was no ordinary drummer.



During my visit, our conversation turned to 4-mallet Marimba literature, the latest discussions on Burton grip vs Stevens grip, Matched grip vs Traditional and international collegiate percussion repertoire. This was the beginning of my 25-year friendship with one of Australia's leading percussionists, educators, instrument designers and genuine trailblazers.

It came as no surprise when recently (2011) I received confirmation, from the Percussive Arts Society International, that James Bailey was to become the first Australian to receive a Lifetime Achievement in Education Award.

Jim Bailey immigrated from the U.K. to South Australia in 1962. As a 16-year-old he commenced studies with drummer Jimmy Latta who also turned James on to the most current LP Jazz records of the day. It was soon after this that Jim commenced studies with Richard "Dick" Smith, considered by many, to be one of the forefathers of Australian classical percussion. While studying with Dick Smith, Jim was introduced to the standard texts by Morris Goldenberg for Keyboard percussion and Snare drum and a healthy dose of the 26 standard rudiments as adopted by NARD. In 1966 Jim experienced orchestral performance on a grand stage playing the Berlioz Requiem with the South Australian Symphony Orchestra for the Adelaide Festival and securing a place in the Australian Youth Orchestra performing for the Queen Mother.

During this same period Jim travelled to Melbourne to study with the 2 founding fathers of Australian drum kit: Graeme Morgan and the late

Billy Hyde. Jim readily credits these masters with not only freely sharing their extensive knowledge of technique and musicality, but also their infectious passion for drums and drummers.

In 1966 Jim and Shirley, his wife, moved to Hong Kong where Jim performed with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the band of the Hong Kong Regiment as well as landing a 6-night per week gig with Hong Kong's leading piano trio at the Peninsula Hotel.

Immigrating to South Africa in 1969 Jim commenced a 7-year residency where he performed, taught music in both public schools and directed an 18-piece Big Band. 1972 saw Jim resuming his passion for life-long learning with a study trip to New York, U.S.A.

To quote Jim, "Soon after landing in New York, I found the iconic Drum Shop 'Franks,' owned by Frank Ippolito where I had lessons upstairs with Jim Chapin (on Elvin Jones's Drumset), Joe Cassatis and then eventually with the legendary Joe Morello!" Jim cites Jim Chapin and Joe Morello as major influences in his career.

Returning to Australia, Jim continued performing and teaching and in 1976 enrolled in a 3-month course of study at the renowned Berklee School of Music in Boston U.S.A. While at Berklee Jim was chosen to play drums in Gary Burton's ensemble as well as for studies with Keith Copeland.

Upon returning to Australia, Jim resumed professional life teaching privately, presenting clinics around Australia for Billy Hyde's and in

1979 commenced teaching for the SA Education Department Music Branch, the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE) (1985) which after several mergers, (1991) (2000) amalgamations and reforms would become the Elder Conservatorium Percussion Department we now know today.

Students studying under James Bailey have achieved national and international positions of significance including finalists for the ABC Young Performers awards, positions in ABC Orchestras, international touring companies such as Cirque du Soleil, and prestigious positions at international universities.

A short list of James Bailey's performance credentials include performances with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Durban Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Youth Orchestra, the Australia Ensemble, Lights, the Elder Conservatorium Wind Quintet, the Elder Conservatorium Wind Ensemble, the Australian String Quartet and on tour in USA with the Adelaide Connection. His festival appearances include the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Barossa Festival, the Manley Jazz Festival, the Glenelg Jazz Festival, The Standard Bank Jazz Festival in Pretoria, South Africa and the WOMAD Living Treasures Festival 2000 in Durban South Africa. He has toured South Africa with the world music group Warkala, performing and conducting master classes and workshops for the Australian High Commission in Pretoria and in fund-raising concerts for the relief of AIDS in children in South Africa.



James Bailey was also the director of the "Hormingo Ensemble" with its unusual front line of Marimbas and Vibraphone played by 2 of his graduate students, Nicholas Parnell and Tim Irrgang. Their performances included a tour of Malaysia with the Department of Trade and Industry where they were guest performers at the 50th Anniversary of the Colombo Plan, concerts for Musica Viva's "Menage Intimate Music Series," and the Elder Hall Lunch Hour Concert Series.

As Senior Lecturer and Director of the Elder Conservatorium Percussion Ensemble, Jim has been associated with many events in Adelaide and overseas. Some of these include a cross-cultural exchange with the Institut Seni-Indonesia Yogyakarta in Indonesia at the invitation of the Helpmann Academy.

Like many percussionists, Jim possesses an inquiring mind and inventive 'can do!' attitude when it comes to instruments, mallets and accessory percussion. I was amazed to discover that Jim not only plays an astonishing array of percussion instruments, but he also makes them.

Over the years, Jim has continued specialized study tours abroad where he pursues the latest

research into the historical practice of keyboard percussion instrument design, manufacture and tuning with Chris Banta, Bill Youhaus and the charismatic Del Roper. Jim recalls seeing Del Roper innovations such as the first 5-octave Vibraphone and Marimba bars using composite materials such as aluminum and rosewood in the same bar! During the past 30 years Jim Bailey designed and built over 40 full-sized Marimbas, sourcing Honduras rosewood from Guatemala, and 4 Vibraphones. Jim also designed and incorporated a 'pick up' system for Marimba and Vibes that are still in use today. Other instruments included Xylophones, Crotales, Glockenspiels and - of course - Drum Kits! Jim Bailey's drum kits were designed from the ground up, including all wooden shells and hardware made from either brass or bronze. There were 4 Jazz kits with 18" bass drums as well as larger Rock kits. As far as mallets and sticks Jim, of course, produced a wide selection of versatile products that are still widely used by percussionists through out the world.

Jim has been involved with tuning, building and restoring many such instruments in Australia, including the original Marimba used by the composer Percy Grainger in 1925-35 and now

located in the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne and the restoration of a 4-octave Marimba for the Penang Symphony Orchestra, a goodwill gesture from the department of the Lord Mayor of Adelaide to its sister city Penang, Malaysia. He was also commissioned by Australian composer Jonathan Mills to design and build 2 quarter-tone Marimbas for the production of "The Ethereal Eye", a collaborative work of instruments, voice and dance, which had its world premiere at the 1996 Adelaide Festival of Arts.

Other major programs included the 2001 Elder Concert Series production "Dance'n'Percussion" with dance graduates from the Adelaide Institute of TAFE and the world premiere of Robert Cossom's piece, "Concerto Grosso" featuring 7 low-E Marimbas, a Bass Marimba, Glockenspiel and Crotales all of which were designed and built by Jim Bailey.

In 2008 Jim commenced a move towards retirement and now teaches part time mentoring our next generation of percussionists in ensembles such as the Adelaide Youth Orchestra.

James Bailey is the Treasure of the Australia Chapter, Percussive Arts Society International.

How do you view the percussion scene here in Australia compared with programs around the world?

Although substantial improvement has been achieved in the past 20 years, mainly at the institutional level, when one compares percussion activity in Australia to the USA and Europe, we still lag behind, not because we don't have capable teachers, who are aware of international trends, but because very often their efforts are hampered in trying to move substantially forward due to a lack of support at the administrative level.

The US in particular has embraced a total concept of percussion, where it is possible to study and be involved in activity that not only encompasses the traditional European orchestral approach, and jazz studies, but now has a very comprehensive world music program. All these activities are properly funded with the appropriate staff and facilities. Regrettably in Australia, with a few exceptions, this is not the case.

The solution to elevate the standard and involvement of percussion needs to commence at the primary and secondary level in education. This is not news, as teachers have been aware of this for a long time. To accomplish this at a satisfactory level requires a fundamental shift in attitude and value of music in general by the education and government departments concerned. It is very noticeable when listening to student ensembles performing overseas that the whole process and outcome is taken at a very serious level, not just as a recreational activity. This significantly produces fine soloists and ensemble players across the range of percussion instruments feeding all activity e.g. ensembles, orchestras, jazz and pop groups and world music performers which will have a profound effect on cultivating a very positive percussion environment in Australia

A very noticeable point is the support given by manufacturers to education and performance overseas. In fact, PASIC would not exist were it not for sponsorship by manufacturers. Again, we need to look at this much closer in Australia, as only a few retailers actively participate in this process (which is greatly appreciated). It is not difficult to understand that the more people that are participating in percussion will increase sales in this area, benefiting everybody.

Finally, yes, we have produced many fine players in all styles and this will continue to happen, but if we are serious about being seen as a major player on the world percussion stage, then the above issues need to be addressed. Our attitude needs to be more open-minded and not just focused on drum kit playing in the pop idiom (don't get me wrong, I love drum kit, but it is not the whole tree, it's just one branch!) There is so much good playing going on around the world today that it just makes good sense to allow your playing to be influenced in as many creative ways as possible.

Do you have any advice for young people wishing to pursue a career in Percussion?

Firstly understand that the music business is not an easy one if you intend to make a career out of it. Another consideration is that most performers, certainly in Australia, earn a large amount of their income by teaching, because there is not an

abundance of live playing, so you need to be aware of this, which is another complete topic on its own, therefore qualifications e.g. degrees are required more and more, not only by tertiary institutions, but in many cases the education system. You need to be passionate, patient and work darn hard over a long period of time. A good teacher is your first requirement, and their contribution can never be underestimated. They are worth their weight in gold.

Unless you are that rare individual who has an abundant of talent in one specific area, and can be good enough to earn your living doing just that, you will end up doing what most players have to do, which is anything and everything you are called upon, so whatever your particular interest may be, e.g. instrument or style of music, you need to be multi-skilled on a whole range of instruments, at least at a basic professional level. That means vibraphone, marimba, tympani, hand percussion, drum kit etc. Needless to say reading is pre-requisite in both classical and jazz style. A professional



attitude is very important, which simply means be prepared, presentable and on time to do the job. Student percussionists today are extremely fortunate due to the web and access of abundant information and there is no excuse for not being aware or informed. I am constantly amazed at the information on Y-tube etc on every aspect of percussion both current and historical.

Another very important attribute is listening to all forms of music. Get your head out of just what currently interests you. Take every opportunity to participate and gain experience in all activities, even if it means you do it for nothing!

Take the opportunity to take advice from experienced players, in most cases they have been where you are trying to go, and above all, love what you do, because you will be spending many hours alone in a practice room, and then slowly but surely things start to happen.

Can you please provide an update on your activities in 2012?

Since retiring from the Elder Conservatorium I have been back doing some part time teaching in the Jazz course, tutoring the percussion section of the Adelaide Youth Orchestra combined with

a percussion ensemble and conducting master classes at the University of Nevada. I have played the occasional gigs on kit, and doing some overseas travel. Next year I have been invited by Gary France, Head of Percussion at ANU to be Artist in Residence in July. I have also agreed to be Treasurer of PAS Australian Chapter and generally spending a lot of time developing my own musical skills and mentoring some of my past graduate students.

Can you please tell us about your long list of talented students and what they are doing around the world?

Well the list is long, and many teach in the private school sector, but here are a few:

Amanda Grigg is currently Head of Percussion at Elder Conservatorium and first call percussionist with the Adelaide Symphony, along with Jamie Adam, Peter Overall (also Police Band), Tim Irrgang, and Nick Parnell. (Nick is a soloist percussionist, twice finalist ABC Young performers)

Jamie Adam – teaching classical percussion Elder Conservatorium, 2001 winner of the David Galliver Memorial Award given by the University to its most outstanding student. 2002 Finalist in Young Performers Award, 2005 Runner-up at first International competition for marimba in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2006 winner of the Adelaide Bank Award for outstanding achievements among the state's major artists.

Ben Todd is in Japan and Paul Butler is in Paris, both with Cirque du Soleil.

Conrad Nilsson, Principal, State Orchestra, Victoria, John Zak - drummer in Zep Boys based in Melbourne Duncan Archibald & Paul Joseph – jazz drummers based in Sydney

Ronnie Ferrella - jazz drums in Melbourne

Roderick Grieg - freelance percussionist in Melbourne

Alex Stopa - Las Vegas, part time instructor at UNLV and pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree there. He has been a featured marimba artist and clinician at PAS Days of Percussion in South Dakota, Nevada and Montana. Has worked with Las Vegas Philharmonic, Nevada Pops, Nevada Ballet, Theatre Orchestra Las Vegas Wind ensemble, Aire Flamenco, NEXTET, and many Vegas shows including as worked HaPhantom of Opera, The Lion King and Latin Grammy awards. In 1990 and 2000 he won 2nd and 3rd prizes in Australian National Marimba Competition, 2004 was in the 2nd round of World Marimba Competition in Belgium and in 2007 was 1st prize winner of the James Huntziger Concerto Competition and 3rd prize winner in Reno Chamber Orchestra Concerto Competition.

Dr. Tim Jones - co-ordinator under-grad program UNLV

Ryan Simm - masters at UNLV, freelance percussionist

Katie Seaman, Nicole Weepers and Paul Backman - Matsuri Taiko Japanese Drumming Ensemble Kerry Schiller, Fleur Green, teaching

Kevin Tuck, Jim McCarthy Simon Varga & Tim Irrgang - Rhythm Works

Andrew Weiring - graduate of Conservatoire in Linz, Austria, finalist in ABC Young performers

My apologies to the many others, all equally deserving who I have not been able to include.