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Transcript of an interview with  
Mace Francis

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## **SLWA Perth Jazz Oral Histories - 02 - Mace Francis**

**Interviewer: Adam Trainer**

**Recorded 8th August 2023**

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### **Adam Trainer**

This is an oral history with Mace Francis recorded at the State Library of Western Australia on the 8th of August 2023. The interviewer is Adam Trainer. So Mace can we begin with your full name and your date of birth please?

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, it's Mace Francis, 23rd of the eighth, 1978.

### **Adam Trainer**

Great, and you were born in Geelong?

### **Mace Francis**

Yes, born in Geelong. One of four kids. Yeah. And brought up with artist parents in, you know, in suburbia, suburban Geelong.

### **Adam Trainer**

What kind of art did your parents make?

### **Mace Francis**

They started off as well, yeah, ceramicists, they made ceramics and then sort of went to sculpture. My dad's a sculptor now and my mum's a painter. Yeah, and they, and they do collaborative projects as well.

### **Adam Trainer**

And they're career artists?

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah. Yeah. They, they quit. My dad was working in a bank. My mum was a nurse, and then when they had my older sister, they just sort of drop, you know, quit their jobs and decided to sort of live the artistic lifestyle, bought a Kombi van. They bought some land down on the coast, which Dad ended up making the house about 35 years later. He finished it. But yeah, four kids all raised on sort of art alone. So that was very, it was a very inspirational and sort of a journey which I then sort of followed.

### **Adam Trainer**

And where do you fall within the four?

### **Mace Francis**

I'm the second, second eldest. My, my sister is eight years older than me. And then there's a younger sister and then a younger brother.

### **Adam Trainer**

And was it always music for you?

**Mace Francis**

No, no, not really. A lot of my youth was spent sort of being quiet sport or, you know, a national level competitive gymnast, so I was flexible and fit at some stage, so yeah, that was, that was a focus, you know, all my brothers and sisters were into gymnastics and kind of kept us fit and healthy and kind of, sort of got a good work ethic, I think, through that sort of reflecting years later. But I got into music when I was in high school. My sister was dating a guitar player at the time, and I was getting into music and my sister and I would listen to a lot of music together. So, my musical journey has sort of gone, started, and sort of gone through my older sister and got a few lessons, got a guitar, started a band, a punk band.

**Adam Trainer**

This is in Geelong?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, in Geelong at high school. So, I was about 15 when I sort of started playing guitar and yeah, and then got into it really quickly and sort of it sort of became the thing that I wanted, wanted to do. I wanted to drop out of school and go to either university or there was a great TAFE course, in Geelong, but I did stick with high school, and then went to this TAFE, it was a two year TAFE music course at the Gordon Institute, and the two people that ran the course were very into jazz and I met a lot of people there and then just started doing lots of gigs and, you know, sort of very formative time, sort of just after high school in going into this course.

**Adam Trainer**

Were the gigs that you were playing, were you playing jazz?

**Mace Francis**

I was playing a little bit of jazz, yeah. We would do some like cafe duo gigs with a friend of mine, a bass player. But then we also had this kind of funk band we played at a venue. There was a pub there called the National Hotel, and it was sort of great timing that sort of when, when, that pub opened or got sort of redeveloped, the people working in the management were into jazz. They'd also done the TAFE course, so there was this sort of jazz clique working there. They had a band room at the back and they'd get a lot of great jazz groups from Melbourne coming down. Like you have Michelle Nicolle and James Sherlock and Decoy and Peter Knight, all these, you know, great jazz musicians are still in the Melbourne scene and, and they had local bands playing there. So we had a funk band residency on the Thursday in the, in the band room, and then a jazz kind of residency there on a Sunday afternoon and so yeah, it was just a lot of gigs. I think I was doing like four or sometimes five regular gigs a week.

**Adam Trainer**

With different bands?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, well, sort of the same kind of group of people, but we'd form different combinations like Funk Band without the keyboard player would be the jazz group, and

then the bass player and me would do a duo thing. And so yeah, it was always sort of a group of about five or six people forming different things, different bands, and stuff.

**Adam Trainer**

And do you feel as though those different iterations of or incorporating different people from that particular scene and having those different approaches, so you would play funk as well and I imagine, well, having played punk music and having that rock influence allowed your - or informed your - approach to jazz maybe in a different way than if you had just been focused on that style?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, I think I was quite open to being, um, versatile and just trying different things. You know? I'd much rather play in a band playing any style of music than washing dishes, which I did for a long time. So I think that's sort of that idea came from my parents as well. You know, you've got to be if you're going to focus on an art form, you can't be too - or you can be idealistic in some capacity - but you do have to be open and go, yeah, I can play, I'll play in the country band. Or, yeah, well, we'll do that gig and play whatever you want because it's then you're able to earn, you know, a living doing that. So yeah, there was a good time and the people I was working with, they were all open to those different styles and, and trying different things. And it's fun you play in a funk band one night and then you're doing, you know, a lounge playing, you know, bossa nova in a lounge and then you're doing a sort of jazz duo in the background of a cafe somewhere. Yeah. So, it was a lot of fun.

**Adam Trainer**

What is it always on guitar?

**Mace Francis**

Guitar and bass. I sort of dabbled on the bass and a little bit of, well, we formed this like Latin mambo kind of orchestra called Kiss Me Mambo and I played a bit of percussion and stuff as well. So yeah, we were just trying everything.

**Adam Trainer**

And when did you land in Perth, what was the impetus for coming here?

**Mace Francis**

Well, I was, so I did the TAFE course and some people who were in the year above me came to Perth. I don't know how they heard about it. Oh no, I think we went to Wangaratta Jazz Festival and there was an ensemble of WAAPA, they were either WAAPA or WAYJO musicians like Ben Vanderwal, Pete Jeavons, I think Tom O'Halloran, maybe McGregor I can't remember his first name - a trumpet player, and they played and we were like, 'Oh my God,' we sort of never heard. I guess we hadn't sort of heard jazz in that in that way. And they're all very, very, young back then in the late or mid-to-late nineties. And the friends I was with were like we've got to find out what's going on over there because they're all amazing. So yeah, friends of mine went over, they did their first year, they had an amazing time, and they were like, you know, audition, audition, you should come over, come over, and they used to - and they might still do it - hold auditions in Melbourne and Sydney. So I was weighing up either going to the Sydney Con or over to WAAPA. I can't remember if I had to go to Sydney

to audition for the Sydney Con, so that didn't happen. Yeah, auditioned, got in and came over in 2000.

**Adam Trainer**

So you auditioned in Melbourne?

**Mace Francis**

Yep. Yep. Yeah. You'd have to do, you know, a set piece and do the audition and you had to sit like an exam as well. Yeah, and then so you did fairly well on that and luckily, you know, with the two years of the TAFE course, sort of, yeah. I kind of knew a lot of it. So it was good. It was a really good bridging course. And then I came over in 2000.

**Adam Trainer**

I'm intrigued by what you said about hearing those Perth musicians at Wangaratta Jazz Festival and feeling that you hadn't really heard jazz in that form before.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, it was. It was very different. I remember thinking that it was very different, and I think it was, I mean it was a long time ago now, but I think it was a little bit more, not traditional, but a little bit more kind of bebop focused or whereas in Melbourne, there was sort of the education - I guess the university education was the VCA - and that was a lot more about creativity, finding your own voice. It was more of an improvisation course than a jazz course. Some really great jazz musicians came out of that course, but the focus was on improvisation. So the scene in Melbourne especially was, yeah, kind of a little bit more fluid. There wasn't, yeah, there was more focus on originality. But I think seeing the WAAPA band was like, I think it was the technical proficiency that sort of really struck us. Yeah, you know, fast high trumpets and, you know, Ben just going like the clappers. Yeah, yeah, they were just, you know, just very technically proficient and at a really young age as well. So, whereas I think the Melbourne scene was more focussed on creativity and the individual voice. But as a younger person, I think you were really impressed by that technical facility. Not that it wasn't in Melbourne, it was just there's like six or seven young people doing it really well all at the same time. And it was like, woah.

**Adam Trainer**

And I guess that would be really formative for someone who is still at the start of their career thinking, well, I need to be able to learn how to play instrument really, really well. And here we have this band where they're clearly doing that.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, yeah, it was and so I want to go where they teach that. Yeah, yeah.

**Adam Trainer**

So, you landed here in 2001?

**Mace Francis**

2000.

**Adam Trainer**

Having been involved at WAAPA as a student and obviously as an academic after that, do you feel WAAPA is the best pathway to the jazz scene in Perth?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. It's not the only way, but it's definitely you come in, you have a year level, everyone's got the same focus. You play together a lot, you go and see gigs together. You just, you get that, you go straight into the scene. And that, yeah, that for me was. Yeah, it was. I mean, it was all the things I learnt and are still learning from that course, but it was the friendship group and just getting sort of straight into the scene. I think that is the best thing about a university environment. And yeah, it was, and it was intense. You know, I hadn't lived out of home before, so it was just you're living at home, jump on the plane, you're not living at home, and you just going to gigs and you're meeting new people, and you're just playing your instrument all the time. Like that's the only focus - is just music. Yeah, it was sort of the best way to get into the scene here for sure.

**Adam Trainer**

And I imagine you were able to pick up gigs once you got here as well?

**Mace Francis**

Well, yeah, eventually, and that was through, you know, there was a lot of, you know, at WAAPA during that time, there was this place at WAAPA called The Wall - the Jazz Wall - with in-between classes, everyone, all the year levels would just go and hang out, you know, have a coffee or have some lunch and, and you just sit on the wall until you had a class. You know, there's no mobile phones. I think mobile phones were just coming in. I didn't have one, but that's where you'd sort of, you'd network. You would meet people from other year levels. If you were around and someone needed - Oh, what are you doing tomorrow night? Can you do a gig? It's like, yep, sure. Sort of that was, that was our social networking there. And you'd go home and check your answering machine, right? Seems so quaint now. Yeah, so they started doing gigs with my year level as well. I had some really great musicians in my year level who were, you know, gigging sort of before they went to uni as well. So, they were kind of in the scene and doing gigs anyway. And then because I'm playing in the ensemble, I got into sort of playing straight away.

**Adam Trainer**

You mentioned WAAPA being the pathway into the scene because it essentially kind of threw you into it. Was it the scene in terms of the music and the people? Or was it also the way that the industry works and the way that, you know, was there much learning or has there been, over your time at WAAPA, a greater focus on how to actually sustain a career as opposed to just being a musician?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, I mean it doesn't - - it gets talked about a little bit, yeah, sustaining a living, I mean when you're at uni. Well, when I was at uni, there was, you know, I was on what was it called - AusStudy or something like that - at the time, which was amazing. So you could just focus on doing that and then sort of the reality only kicks in what you leave uni, once you get to, you know, find ways to pay rent and things, but, I think I've drifted from the question.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, I'm wondering whether there's a focus at WAAPA at all on how you sustain it. What the things are to build a career as a musician, whether it is a focus on, you know, having mentioned seeing those WAAPA graduates playing in Wangaratta and going, wow, they're incredible at their instruments, is the focus just on, on building that musical virtuosity or is it complemented with some learning about sustaining the career - whether that's through how to get gigs or how to get grants or how to find your way, what touring looks like?

**Mace Francis**

There wasn't when I was there, but there is certainly a focus on that now. There are classes now. Our lecturers, you know, did talk about those things. We had a really great arranging teacher, who is quite influential on me, Keith Van Geysel. Had him for first and second year, and he was always talking about what you had to do to be professional and keep working. You know, you had to be all these things – you had to be creative on tap, so you had to be able to meet a deadline. You had to make sure that your work was at a professional standard at all times. If you used any liquid paper on your work, he'd fail you, you know, everything had to be on proper, ready – we had to go and buy proper part paper – and you had a calligraphy pen to copy out the parts and it was always about the highest professional level. And that was really good. And the lecturers as well, they were doing a lot of gigs and, you know, we'd always go and see our lecturers play at the PJS at Hyde Park and they were doing a lot of gigs so there was a lot of learning through seeing them do it. And also, I was lucky, yeah. In the year level that I was in that a lot of people were doing and were quite active and motivated and that got me active and motivated. Yeah.

**Adam Trainer**

And while you were at WAAPA you discovered Big Bands?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, yeah. I never really listened to them or knew what they were. And the two people I was living with, they were both doing the composition course, and they were like mad on Big Bands. They were always playing Big Band music in the house. They joined WAYJO as well. And so yeah, I was kind of curious on all that sort of side of things. I auditioned for WAYJO – I think I did in my first year – but didn't get in, but then did in 2001, and got in. And then once I was in the band, yeah, I'd sort of kind of got hooked on the sound. You know, especially the modern Big Band stuff, which I had never heard before. That was really eye opening.

**Adam Trainer**

Can you explain the difference between the more traditional Big Band and more contemporary or modern approach to it?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, well, I'd sort of -- I mean, I'd heard big band music before, but it was sort of always associated with like old timey old school stuff like Glenn Miller or, you know, even I thought the Count Basie and Duke Ellington stuff was a bit sort of hokey and old back then. But yeah, my housemates they were playing music for modern composers, and it was very unusual textures, you know, a lot of like harmonic colours, which I'd never heard before. There was a lot of dissonance, there were everything from like

rock and funk, and sometimes heavy metal grooves, with all these horns and instruments over the top and flutes and it just didn't sound - - it sort of sounded classical to me, but cool. So, so yeah, I mean, I was exploring a lot of different - I'd just been listening to lots of guitar stuff. And yeah, it was just this whole new kind of world and the fact that there were my two housemates, Michael Wallace and Michael Barnes, that were writing music sort of in that style, and then I was hearing WAYJO play their music. It's like, Oh my God, okay, there's a direct - - we're listening to it. You're kind of copying it, you know, you're being influenced by it and it's being played by that band. That was a real - - that made sense to me and that was like an achievable thing rather than just playing guitar and practicing guitar all the time and never sounding like John Scofield or never sounding - - you know, that just seemed so unattainable. So, yeah, at that time, yeah, that sort of shifted my whole sort of perspective. And I changed when in third year at WAAPA, at the time you could do performance, or you could do composition. So, I chose the composition route and it sort of stayed on that journey ever since.

### **Adam Trainer**

I suppose the element of the Big Band that it sounds like you've been - - that you found some interest in or inspiration in was the - - I guess the versatility. If you have so many different elements then that really opens up the possibilities for what you're asking - - you can actually do in terms of, as you say, texture or rhythm or including elements of dissonance where you can have certain parts of the Big Band playing together and others playing perhaps in opposition or contrast, for example?

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, and that's still my - that's still what keeps me so interested, is that you've got this huge broad palette of colours that you can use. Yeah, very different to a piano trio where it's like it's piano, bass and drums for the - - you know, the whole set. And that's amazing, that can be amazing. But I do kind of crave, usually crave, a little bit more texture and the versatility of all those horns, you know saxophones, trumpets, and trombones with a rhythm section. Yeah. I mean, it's endless, really. It can be overwhelming, but it's also very exciting about all the possibilities. So you can have a little trio and you can be playing at trio level and then "bang", you've got this like huge dynamic range as well. So, from very, very, loud where everyone's playing really loud all the way down to very quiet. And that really excites me, that dynamic and colour possibilities.

### **Adam Trainer**

At the time that you started at WAAPA, what you said you began playing in WAYJO the year after in 2001. What are your recollections of the organisation at that time?

### **Mace Francis**

There were three bands, three Big Bands at the time. So, there was a band called The Swing Band, which was run by Roger Garrod. There was the Big Band, which at the time was run by Mike Cartwright, and then there was a Composers Ensemble, which I was in, which was run by Graeme Lyle and that was a sort of a standard Big Band plus extra things. And that sort of fluctuated every year. It was sometimes some classical percussion, a woodwind section of, you know, flutes and clarinets and sometimes oboes and bassoons. Linda Oh, first played in WAYJO playing bassoon, which was pretty cool. And there was a string section in some years. Some years there was like

four French horns and a tuba. And so yeah, it sort of - - it was the idea of that studio orchestra. And the main purpose of that ensemble at that time was to perform the music by the WAAPA composition students. So, it was a great time to be involved because for my recital I was able to use way WAYJO plus string orchestra and percussion and woodwinds and getting the opportunity for a 50 piece, 60 piece, ensemble was amazing. And so, yeah, it was like that for quite a while until Graham left. And yeah, the bands were - - the composer's ensemble was, you know, was a very good quality. We had all the, you know, amazing musicians in it, you know, they were amazing then, and they've gone on to great things now. The other two bands sort of weren't ever as strong, and they didn't do as many performances at that time. So it was definitely the focus was on the Composers Ensemble and the other two bands were almost sort of seen as just sort of like training bands to kind of get into the main ensemble. And that's sort of was the focus of the organisation at that time, sort of in the early 2000s.

**Adam Trainer**

So with the focus on the Composers Ensemble was there - - did that follow to a focus on promoting new original voices?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, it did in some ways. I mean, it was sort of - - because Graham was at WAAPA and WAYJO was definitely - - WAYJO was used as the vehicle to promote WAAPA's composition program. And they did it very well. I mean, that got me excited about the music. People came over from the eastern states to study there and use the ensemble for their recitals and things. So, there was a lot of composers going through the program at that time, and they all had about ten minutes to rehearse each because it was so many composers. Vanessa Perica was there that time. Yeah, so there was a real strong focus on using the ensemble as a vehicle for composers. And you know, sometimes it was jazz-like, and other times it was sort of more classical or New Music or - - there was a real range of personalities and that was a good thing about the composition course at that time - - is that you sort of had to find your own way through it. So, you sort of found your voice and what you were into at the time.

**Adam Trainer**

Were the other WAYJO ensembles more focused on standards?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, it was the standard repertoire. The Big Band sort of focused on sort of middle of the century sort of style, and the Swing Band focused on sort of the early swing band stuff.

**Adam Trainer**

With MFO [Mace Francis Orchestra] as a Big Band, how have you navigated that relationship between standards and originals?

**Mace Francis**

Well, I mean, MFO is my creative vehicle. So, the focus is really original things, mostly of mine. There have been band members in the past who have contributed repertoire. But yeah, now it's just sort of my compositional vehicle and - - yeah, I do. I did a standards album a couple of years ago and it was sort of my perspective on standards.

So, they're sort of more like re-compositions of taking apart and, yeah, just giving a different perspective on jazz standards. But, yeah, the focus of my band is definitely original music.

**Adam Trainer**

Was that album the one that you worked on during your residency at Gallop House?

**Mace Francis**

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So that was an album called 'Love Songs I Love'. So, they were, you know, romantic jazz standards kind of made to sound quite ugly and dark. So, taking your happy songs and making - - changing perspective on them. I used that year at Gallop House to work on that and also a lot of other material which then came out over years after that.

**Adam Trainer**

We're jumping around a little bit, but we might as well follow through on it – did Gallop House as a place where you were located for, you know, for that yearlong residency – did that impact or shape the material in any way?

**Mace Francis**

I'm not sure if the actual house did or, you know, the location. I mean, the location was amazing just sitting on that balcony looking at the river going, Oh my God. Hardest thing was getting inside to do some work. I mean, it was just having that flexibility. And because you get a year of not having to pay rent and just not having that financial stress, which, you know, which I didn't realise how stressful it is until it goes away for a year. I'm like, Oh my God, I write like it's always there. It is niggling at you. So when that's removed, you do get to, yeah, you've got the freedom to make choices. It's like, oh, I'm not going to do that because I don't have to. You've got more time. And also just knowing that there's an organisation or you've been gifted this thing and you're trusted to like - - we support what you do. There's trust in the music that you're creating. So here it is and go for it. So that was a very lovely gesture.

**Adam Trainer**

Really validating?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, Yeah, totally validating. Which again, sort of didn't - - you don't realise you need it until you get it. And then, you know, it was a very special, special, year.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, let's go back to WAYJO and talk a little bit about PJS as well. In 2008, you became the artistic director of WAYJO?

**Mace Francis**

Yes, yes, so I'd been involved in WAYJO as a musician, then I became too old. So 25, I might have been 26 actually. And then, I was like an assistant music director. So just helping out in rehearsals, I'd take some gigs, plans some programs, and just get involved there. And I was a representative on the Board as well for a period of time. That was, again, that was very eye opening and, you know, there's this whole organisation doing all this work to make sure that we can rehearse and play music. So

that was, you know, I'd never seen that that before. So that was also very inspiring. And then Graham left to go to South Australia and the position was advertised and I went for it and got it and been very thankful for that and tried to keep, you know, the focus all about giving young people the best opportunities through this musical vehicle, because I felt I got a lot of great opportunities and things I was able to do through the organization. So now being in a position to be able to give those opportunities. And there was also a lot of things like, "Oh, I wish we could have - - I wish we could do this when I was in the band. Oh well, why are we doing it this way? I'd love to do it this way."

**Adam Trainer**

Such as?

**Mace Francis**

Just the way the bands were used, I mean, you know, I thought there was a lot more opportunity for performances playing in different venues. I thought the other two bands should have got more opportunities to perform because if you've got nothing to work for, there's nothing to improve on. So the bands kind of got quite stagnant. Also, you know, there were some things, you know, the way auditions were held and things like that. I just thought that could be kind of tightened up and neatened up and there were things that I wanted to commission - - more young composers, which I was able to start that program in 2008 - 'Composer in Residence'. And it's been going every year. And it's been amazing. It's kind of a dream gig for someone who really loves Big Bands. I get to work with bands every week, get to play in programs - - of being able to meet some of my compositional and Big Band heroes, and get them to come to Perth and work with us. Yeah, it's been a dream. A dream gig.

**Adam Trainer**

So those two elements that you talked about - implementing the emerging composer commissions and the guest artist programs as well, I guess are sort of two sides of the same coin in a sense. In terms of developing the skills of young jazz musicians or composers. Is there a sort of a symbiotic relationship between those two elements?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, there is. I mean, the guest artists that we get to come and work with WAYJO often there's a focus on they are composers or they perform and compose. Because we've found that when a composer is working with the band, you know it's their music and they're talking about the music, how they want it. And the band really responds and gets the most out of that. So that often, you know, can sometimes get them excited about composing for the ensemble. So that sort of self-perpetuates. The Composer in Residence program, you know, people that have been the young emerging composer in residence have come back years later as a guest. So that's always great to see those sorts of things. But yeah, I think the musical performance elements of WAYJO, you know, playing in a large ensemble, being able to work together, being diplomatic, you know, being out of tune, playing time with each other, all those performance aspects are very important. But then also creating new music for this ensemble of this musical vehicle I think is very important as well, because we've got this great history, this sort of American based history. And then, you know, we can take this music and we can, we should be moving it forward or, you know, with our voice, our perspective here in Australia and WA.

**Adam Trainer**

And I get the impression that that's informed some of your Ph.D. research.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. That was - - the Ph.D. research was - - I kind of felt like I was in a compositional rut. Sort of was doing - - felt like I was writing the same music all the time. You know, you get in that sort of habit. So that was a sort of a way to shift the perspective and do something quite different for me.

**Adam Trainer**

So what was the thesis topic?

**Mace Francis**

The thesis topic was using architecture as musical compositional material. So using the physical spaces to be part of the ensemble rather than - - sort of because, you know - - with jazz, you kind of - - you get a band and you stick it in a room and you just play like you would anywhere. And I guess the trigger for the research was we were playing at the convention centre and we're playing a 16th note kind of groove thing, and it was bouncing back in triplets and it was like, this is so confusing. But, you know, if it was a way that you could write a piece to use that, then you're writing music for that particular space. And then it was, you know, four years of exploring that sort of idea of how the musicians and the actual space could work together to, you know, to make a piece of music together.

**Adam Trainer**

We might come back to that because we are jumping around a little bit but did want to pull it back to you talking about the emerging composer programs. At WAYJO, how important is original composition to the jazz scene, and how has it had an increasing importance as opposed to maintaining standards - - the standard repertoire?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, I think the - - I mean the standard repertoire is important but I don't think it's - - well, this could be controversial - -

**Adam Trainer**

Bring it on.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, no, I don't think it is as important as it used to be. So I think, you know, people would learn jazz through a common repertoire and, you know, people would battle it out at jam sessions. And there was this everyone had to know these particular tunes and, you know, so I guess it's a form of communication. So you could go anywhere, you could call a tune and then everyone would know it, and then you could play together and you'd learn from each other that way. But music is getting learned differently now through different education systems or programs and I think people are more interested in expressing themselves and finding their voice and I think the best way to do that is writing original music that you then can express yourself with rather than sort of using a common repertoire. So, yeah, definitely going through the WAAPA course, it was - - you know, learning all the tunes - - you had to learn a certain amount

of tunes every couple of weeks. And that was great because there's so many, so many things you learn other than just that song. You know how to learn a song, how to memorize chord progressions, how to hear chord progressions.

Just the process of learning and memorising things is a good process in itself. But, you know, I just think it's a different time. And, you know, people want to put their own music into the world. And also, I mean, it's quite daunting if you had to play a version of 'Body and Soul,' you know, it's been done so many times by so many masters and there's so many seminal recordings where everyone copies that recording, and you doing your own one is also pretty daunting. You might as well write a song kind of similar and be able to - - you've got that freedom to express yourself. You're not being compared to the kind of the history. I think that and I think that's why we're lucky in Australia because we're not tied to that sort of really strong history. I think it's the same with a lot of artforms. If you're doing marble sculptures in Italy, you know, you're going to be judged very differently there because of the history of marble sculptures compared to making a marble sculpture here.

### **Adam Trainer**

So that feeds really nicely to my next question, which is, you know, this idea I guess, at finding your voice - - do you feel as though there's a particular style or approach or even a sound that epitomises the music that comes out of Perth or the WA jazz scene? Is a distinct or different to what happens elsewhere? I mean, you spoke about, you know, that experience of seeing Perth musicians in Wangaratta, but in terms of the music that's composed here, I mean ideas or through-lines?

### **Mace Francis**

That's a hard one to articulate, very hard one to articulate.

### **Adam Trainer**

Because it is such a broad - -

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, but it is - - it is different I think, you know - - when I go back to Melbourne and you hear the ensembles there, yeah, it sounds very different to the music that's being played in Brisbane and Sydney. I think it's probably just the group of - - I think it's just the individuals. I know every place has a - - because everyone in Perth, they don't sound the same. But there's some, like, key individuals that have sort of influenced that scene for a long time. So I mean the influence of Roger Garrod is, you know, the saxophone - - the saxophone scene here has been amazing because you had this key person who educated saxophone players for decades and he was, you know, a great Bebop player. So, you know, people have a really strong understanding on that sort of Bebop style. And even though he's been teaching, officially for a long time, that legacy is left through all the people, the individuals, other states have those kinds of people that have kind of left that legacy. So, I think Perth has a good original sort of music like jazz scene.

And I definitely go to get a sense of people. Yeah, bands are writing their own music rather than just standards. You know I was in Brisbane, I don't know, when was it, last year - - and I'd notice, yeah, a lot of the gigs, people just playing lots of standards. They were playing it really well but it was like, "Oh, I hadn't heard that for a long time."

Yeah if you go to the Ellington, there's going to be more bands playing well, you know, original jazz bands playing their own stuff rather than just a whole set of standards. Hmm, hard question.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, your answer has fed into something else that we wanted to talk about. And you've obviously already mentioned Roger and noting that we're recording this only a couple of days after his passing. What do you think - - you've spoken a little bit about this - - but why was Roger so important to the scene?

**Mace Francis**

Well, he was just such a great player for so long. He, you know, he came from the UK and he just brought, I guess this real, like, this sort of Bebop fire to the city. He was also a really great flute player and a really good teacher. And I think that legacy is what he's left on the WA jazz scene. I think it would be a very different scene without Roger. You know, he's taught anyone who is good at the saxophone who is in Perth or, you know, grew up in Perth, you know, Roger taught in in some way, he was also just a really kind and caring person. Sorry.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, there are a few other folks that you mentioned, contributions from - - Do you want to take a moment?

**Mace Francis**

Just a moment. Yeah, if that's all right.

**Adam Trainer**

It's obviously pretty fresh. Yeah.

**Mace Francis**

Damn, that nice guy. Okay.

**Adam Trainer**

So we could talk about the contributions of some of the other significant folks who have shaped the West Australian jazz scene. So someone else that you mentioned is Garry Lee.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah Garry's been a very - - he's a vibraphone player and a guitarist, and he's been very active not only in the scene but also organisationally and administratively. He was involved with WAYJO, he was involved with Perth Jazz Society, WAAPA as well. He came from Sydney, and he was very active in getting things happening, putting bands together, organising commissions and recordings and things like that. And he's still, you know, he's still actively playing, but he's, he's very focused on education and getting sort of - - he's producing really great young guitar players - - amazing young musicians just because we see them all the time at WAYJO, they're like so young, like they're just like teenagers and they're playing like they're, you know, they've been doing it for decades. It's quite amazing. And the reason why they are so good so young is because there's so many great musicians teaching and it just kind of keeps sustaining itself. It's when young people come in for WAYJO auditions now versus 20

years ago, the level is so much higher because the people that have gone through WAYJO have learned those skills, know what's required to be playing in a great big band. They're now teaching kids that at a younger age. So the band just kept getting better, better, and better. So it's just such a great scene here.

**Adam Trainer**

How about Mike Nelson, someone else that you mentioned?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. And I mean, yeah, Mike, you know, he's just one of those guys that has just been playing for forever. Well, you know, as long as I've been in Perth, he was always playing with, you know, the really good players. He was playing with Roger, playing with Ray Walker. I can't think of anyone else at the moment, but he was always playing at the Perth Jazz Society. Also writes a lot of music. Composes for, you know, large ensembles and things like that. And it just has been just one of those guys that just is just doing it, you know, just working hard as a musician and has raised a family as a musician. And I respect that a lot.

**Adam Trainer**

Leading by example.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. Yeah, totally. And just no hoo ha about it, no "Look at me, look at me, look at me", just doing it. And I think that's very admirable.

**Adam Trainer**

You mentioned a few younger and female composers, and I guess key industry personnel in Kate Pass.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. Kate, I mean, Kate's been an amazing thing for the jazz scene and just, you know, seeing her go through WAAPA and then, you know, her time in WAYJO finding her voice through her Kohesia Ensemble. But then also just being a really great bass player, like a freelance player and just playing with everyone. Just a lovely person, easy to work with, very competent, is always prepared, and is doing a lot of selfless work. Making sure that PJS is still as strong as it is and it's so good to see her now sort of going off and like pursuing her thing even further in New York. I think it's just "good on her" because that's a hard thing to do – to make that decision when you are doing a lot of great things in a place, and you are sort of courtable in a way.

**Adam Trainer**

Entrenched.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, yeah, and it's like it's sort of those things that we dream of being able to do. You doing all the gigs, you're putting out albums, you've got your band. But then to go, actually no, I've got to go and pursue something further. I think, good on her, it's amazing. Yeah, very cool.

**Adam Trainer**

You also mentioned Alana McPherson.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, Alana was - - I remember when she first came in for her first WAYJO audition. Roger was like, she's going to be excellent and she's going to be playing lead alto in your band in a - - you know, *my* WAYJO band in a couple of years. And we were like, oh, yeah, sure. You know because she was, you know, just a little high school kid. And he's like, no, there's something special about her. And you know, he was then teaching her and then she became this great saxophone player who played in my WAYJO band. She played in my band for a little bit and then got into composing and did the composition sort of stream at WAAPA. I was her teacher for a year and she wrote some really amazing music. And then again, sort of went off to Europe and pursued a Masters over there and is now just being an awesome composer and saxophone player in Europe and having a great time. It's just so good to see her making her mark, doing what she wants to do in Europe. It's amazing.

**Adam Trainer**

We'll come back to the last one that you mentioned in a second, but something popped up in my mind as you were talking there. How do you teach composition? Do you teach it differently to teaching someone to play an instrument?

**Mace Francis**

Yes. I mean, there's some this kind of - - what's the word? There's some craft things that you can teach or like different exercises. I mean, I'm probably not the best composition teacher because I didn't really go through a very structured - - I wasn't taught very structurally. It was very free, you know, "listen to this, try this, write it, hear how it sounds, if you like it, keep doing it." If you don't change it - - that sort of thing. And I've tried to be a little bit more structured where, you know, we do some emulating, "What is that thing that you like? Try to copy it, see if it works." So if it doesn't then I guess it's trying to figure out what they're wanting, and finding a way to guide them to find that - and that's sort of different for every person because every person wants something different. Everyone's different to different types of criticism or, you know, constructive criticism. People are open to different types of guidance. So yeah, it was different for everyone. But I guess that's music though in that you've gotta find your - - you're going to have to make those decisions eventually. Yeah, there's a lot of books out there with all the kind of structure.

You know, get some information from here. Get that information from there. They're the rules. Now, do with those rules whatever you want, you know, that person broke them in that way. That person uses the rules perfectly. And it sounds like that because that person breaks the rules like that. And it sounds like that, you know, and then you start to combine all those things and try to create your sound through those.

**Adam Trainer**

So you're almost guiding someone's intuition?

**Mace Francis**

Yeah. Because I find it very hard when someone brings a tune and you go "That's wrong, like, that chords wrong," because, I mean, you can write anything, right? It's like anything's possible. It's just, you know, maybe I would have done that differently. Or

this concept says that - - you know, maybe that isn't in this concept. That's not correct. But, you know, "What were you trying to go for?" Like, "oh, maybe try this or we can stick with that. We just need to change a few things around it to make it flow a little better or, you know, if you want it to sound like that." I don't like it but you can go for it, you know, and that's fine. You know, there's a lot of music I don't like. There's a lot of people that don't like my music, you know? It's all so subjective. I think that's been my very loose approach.

### **Adam Trainer**

The last person that you that you mentioned specifically that you wanted to talk about their contribution to the scene was Gemma Farrell, who obviously was from here, spent some time away, and has come back.

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah Gemma - - I sort of knew because Gemma was involved in WAYJO at a similar time. I'm not sure if she had a great experience in WAYJO and part of the reason why she left were, I mean, there were some - - because being probably the only female in any of the bands she ever played in and at uni at that time, she didn't have a great time with that. And she went off to Brisbane and to the Netherlands and studied there and when she came back to Perth, we sort of got to know each other and it was sort of around that time that we - - yeah, on reflection, kind of looking at WAYJO programs that had been we sort of realised we hadn't programmed any female guest artists that wasn't a singer, like an instrumentalist, like probably ever or, you know, for decades anyway. And then looking at the jazz scene and, you know, there was no one kind of on - - you know, over the age of 30 that was female in the jazz scene as an instrumentalist - - was there either younger just out of uni and then often left. So with Gemma and with the Sydney Improvised Music Association, SIMA, who have been running a young women in jazz program for a long time, we kind of franchised it, with their support.

And Gemma had done that program in Sydney and knew how it ran. Started that in 2014, and that's been growing really, really well. Influenced a lot of young female and gender diverse musicians into participating and hopefully staying in the jazz scene or the music scene in some way. We've changed the name of the program this year to Progressions just because - - just for it to be more inclusive. The young women in jazz, was a little too narrow for what we were wanting to achieve. So yeah, Gemma has been involved in that capacity. Her starting the Artemis Orchestra has been amazing. She just does so many things. She's got her quintet, you know, constantly doing albums. Artemis. She started a nonet. She's writing Big Band music. She's got three kids, she's doing a PhD, she teaches. I mean, she's a force to be reckoned with. And she's very passionate about the gender issues in the scene. And it's really great to be working with her to help in some way. And especially with WAYJO being able to do that, has been really great. And we're making contact with international organisations and they just had a - - there was a group of Perth participants from the Progressions program this year and an organisation in New York called Powerhouse Jazz. And where - - it's a program called Chicka Power, it's all young women, and they had like a dinner breakfast together.

So in New York they had breakfast at WAYJO they had dinner and they were online and just kind of talking and getting to know each other and - - there's those sorts of

things are just, are very exciting because it feels like we're opening up to the world. You know what we're doing - - people share - - people are doing great things everywhere and we're just trying to connect more. And I think out of COVID, you know, Zoom and all the teams and all those things, it's sort of like you can connect a lot better now than that horrible Skype that we used to have to deal with. And yeah, it feels like an exciting time. And Gemma has been a real driving force of that.

### **Adam Trainer**

Sounds like the jazz thing is opening up to be more inclusive and also opening up to the world in the sense that there's greater connectivity and greater capacity to - - that perhaps Perth isn't quite as isolated as it used to be, or that it's perhaps a little more connected to what's happening elsewhere?

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, I think so. I mean, we just think what the students have access to now compared to when I was at uni - - we had the library, we'd go to the library, the uni library had a great record collection. I used to get the records and copy them onto my MiniDisc player so I could then burn it onto a CD at home. You know, you'd borrow the one copy of a CD if you're playing songs in your ensemble, and then - - or you'd have to pay 30 bucks for a CD. And you know students now that access so many things and then you think the people in the generations before that, you know, you'd have to order a record in, you know, get it here, transcribing, you know, with a record. Oh, my goodness. And I think also that would be access to everything is also very overwhelming. And I think that's - - I think young people are - - yes, they've got access to everything but it's almost sort of - - what is it - - you sort of get paralysed by it. So what am I supposed to be listening to?

I can actually listen to everything, but what is it that I should be doing? And the easiest thing to do is just scroll TikTok or Instagram instead, because it's kind of overwhelming. I still listen to albums rather than just the single track thing - - does my head in. So, you know, it's just an old person thing. I could rant about, but I won't.

### **Adam Trainer**

So something else that you mentioned before we started recording was that there appears to be a strong collaborative relationship between the jazz scene and the New Music scene. And you obviously were a part of, perhaps, a previous generation of that. Your PhD research led to a commission for New Music ensemble Decibel. But you mentioned specifically the work of Tone List and their PJS collaborations as well. But I am interested in the connections between jazz and New Music as two both very open forms of music that are trying to create or find new forms or new possibilities, I suppose.

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, it does feel like a sort of a resurgence. I mean, I'm sure it's - - I mean it's always been there, but I think yeah, Tone List and people like Justin. Yeah, I think that collaboration between Tone List and Perth Jazz Society is a really great one. It's sort of found - - I think with the Ellington opening up the Perth Jazz Society sort of - - because they were the presenting organisation, it sort of that they had to find their thing and yeah - - I think these two sort of, well, niche genres kind of working together and there is a lot of similarities between the New Music side of things and jazz. I mean,

it's funny to think that jazz is often considered like the, you know, a very open, free form. It's improvising so people do whatever they want. But in many ways it's very structured, working within chord progressions and, yeah, very structural forms and things like that. And yeah, the New Music side of things, you know, coming from the other side, where there's a lot of free form and just using sound and noise.

And I think there's just so much to explore there and there's a lot of musicians willing to explore those two sides. And I think there have always been - - there is always that interest. I know when you - - well for myself as well - - you get into jazz and you sort of learning about the chord structures and then, you just kind of start drifting into, yeah "I can actually play anything. We can all play anything together." And then you explore that for a little while. But yeah, I guess there's - - I think people are just little bit more open minded for that sort of side of things and just collaboration is a fun thing. And yeah, I think people are just more willing to do it. And there's also these organisations that have this kind of structure behind putting things together, putting people together, putting on a concert. There's nothing like That's a great idea, but you have to perform it next Wednesday." It's like, "Oh, okay, well, we've actually got to organise something," and then that makes it a thing. So yeah, Tone List and Perth Jazz Society have been very good in kind of holding people accountable for their ideas. "Oh I've got this idea!" "Great. You've got a gig." "Oh no we need a band name and a photo and some actual music to perform now." But that means that now there's a band.

### **Adam Trainer**

How about your own ideas? Where do you see yourself headed as a composer and as a musician?

### **Mace Francis**

Feels like I do a lot more administration now than I ever thought I would. I mean, yeah, as a musician, I haven't really played a gig on guitar for probably about ten years or longer, maybe I've got into playing trombone, but that's no - - it's a hard instrument and I'm still learning. I surround myself with very good players so they can kind of cover me up.

### **Adam Trainer**

And that's the Oompah project?

### **Mace Francis**

Yeah, I play in some of my larger ensembles too, just supporting roles. I say I play rhythm trombone, not lead trombone. But yeah, I guess definitely the focus has been on composing more so since probably about 2005, 2006. I mean, in my own band, we recorded a new album in December last year and that will hopefully come out at the end of this year our 10th album. And it's, yeah, almost, it's 18 years old this year, the band. But yeah, I guess with WAYJO and the jazz festival that sort of does take a lot of my time. But it's also, I realise I like making things so it's either making a composition or making a festival program or making an artistic program for WAYJO or an annual program, all those sorts of things. At least I'm still making things and putting people together, kind of orchestrating the people in program. So I'm not upset by it, but, it's just that kind of journey that - - I mean, I moved to Perth thinking I was going to play guitar. Now I'm into Big Bands and now sort of doing less composing and more

programming and yeah - - so it's just the journey and I'm still involved in music, so that's all that really matters.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, that feels like a pretty great place to finish. Unless you have anything else that you wanted to add?

**Mace Francis**

No, I can kind of bang on all day but we don't have the time.

**Adam Trainer**

Well, thanks, Mace, thanks very much for your time.

**Mace Francis**

Yeah, thank you. Yeah. Thanks for the great questions.