

The City of Light has long been a siren for those with jazz in their veins. A new generation of Australian musicians now calls Paris and its hot jazz clubs home.

PARIS & LE JAZZ

WORDS RUBY BOUKABOU PHOTOGRAPHY CARLA COULSON

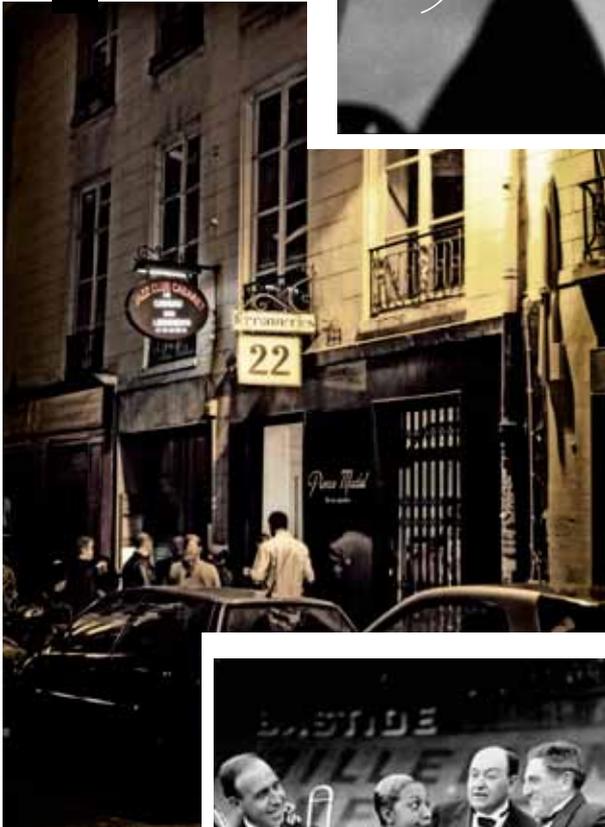
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Violinist
Melissa Cox

TO THIS DAY, PARISIANS HAVE A STRONG APPRECIATION OF LIVE MUSIC, GENEROUSLY THROWING EUROS INTO A HAT – A COMMON PRACTICE IN PARIS BARS



IT MAY BE more famous for its architecture and art, but no trip to Paris is complete without taking in some jazz. Options range from the once smoky and still-crowded clubs of St-Michel and St-Germain-des-Prés in the Latin Quarter to the more sophisticated establishments of Rue des Lombards in the 1st arrondissement. For something a little more spontaneous, jazz lovers seek out one of the many bars and brasseries in the 20th.

Among the internationals on the scene are some highly respected Australian musicians. But then, jazz in Paris has always been something of a multicultural affair. It was first introduced during World War I by African-American soldiers, many of whom played in army bands. Embraced by the French, they received recognition and respect unimaginable in the US, where they still had to use backdoor entrances to the clubs they played. In the 1920s, US jazz clarinetist Sidney Bechet became famous in Paris, as did singer and dancer Josephine Baker.

French writers and critics became huge supporters of the new sound and in 1934 the Quintette du Hot Club de France, featuring Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt and French violinist Stéphane Grapelli, was born. The French answer to American jazz, the band recorded prolifically and became world-famous. African and Arab influences, a legacy of French colonialism, added to the diversity. After WWII, Miles Davis, Kenny Clarke, Bud Powell and Dexter Gordon visited Paris, influencing another generation of French jazz musicians. Clarke and Powell stayed.

To this day, Parisians have a strong appreciation of live music, generously throwing euros into a hat – a common practice in Paris bars – while unemployed musicians are supported through the Intermittent du Spectacle system, a government benefits scheme that helps them survive between gigs and indirectly assists in the creation of new work.

Paris offers dozens of jazz concerts nightly, in all kinds of styles. Pick up a copy of listings guide Lylo or visit www.lylo.fr to learn more. ➤



From top; Sidney Bechet, 1935; Caveau des Legendes jazz club; Josephine Baker, 1926

HERE, SIX AUSTRALIANS FIRMLY ENSCONCED IN THE JAZZ NETWORK SHARE THEIR STORIES & FAVOURITE PARIS STAGES.

ALEX STUART

GITAR

In 2005, packing an Australian National University School of Music jazz degree and a new album, Alex Stuart arrived in Paris. He'd lived there for four years as a child and again while travelling at 19, but this time planned to stay and forge a career in jazz. Having won the most prestigious French jazz award, the Jazz à Juan Révelations, in 2011, the 29-year-old is doing just that.

"I had decided after I finished my album, this was the place to be," says Stuart over a drink at La Sardine in Place Sainte Marthe in the 10th arrondissement. "I'd considered New York, but decided on Paris because of the diversity of the jazz and proximity to world music. There is a lot of immigration that infuses the French jazz scene with various mixes. I was in love with the city itself: the food, the wine, the respect for culture."

At the beginning, Stuart and Tim Willis, a fellow expat who came with him, accepted a gig for free beers and a meal. He has since explored multiple genres and now plays with a variety of performers and bands. "The level is so high here - it's raised my game."

Stuart has played at most of the city's better jazz venues including Studio de l'Ermitage and Sunset-Sunside, the latter of which is his favourite for the calibre of "modern jazz-fusion and groove groups" it attracts. Sure, he misses the ocean and feels claustrophobic at times, but while Australia is still home, "the future feels like France".

www.alexstuart.tk



SÉBASTIEN GIRARDOT

DOUBLE BASS

Sébastien Girardot is perched on the terrace of a bar in swank Saint-Germain-des-Près. "This is a great place to talk about jazz," he says, pointing across the street to Hotel Louisiane. "This is where all the American musicians used to stay - Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday. Miles Davis lived here for six months or so and there were about eight jazz clubs around the corner."

Girardot, 32, grew up in Melbourne, but is half-French, great-nephew to the famous French singer Lily Pons, who sung the French national anthem *La Marseillaise* next to Charles de Gaulle when France was liberated at the end of WWII. At 18, he was invited to play double bass on a European tour with the Louisiana Shakers, a New Orleans-style band from Melbourne. He felt a deep connection to Paris and decided to stay put. Completing a degree at the Paris



campus of the University of London, he supported himself by gigging around town. Upon graduating, he realised he had clocked up enough hours to qualify for Intermittent du Spectacle status and decided it was as good a career as any.

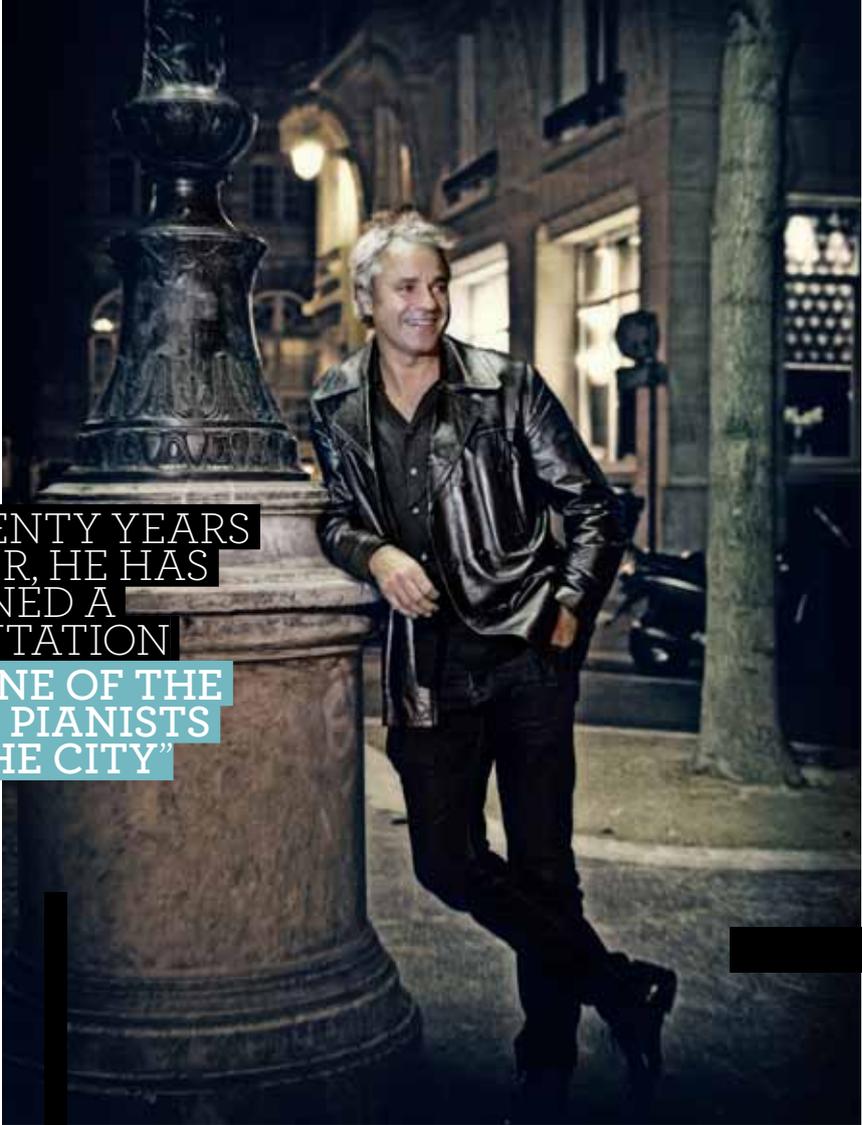
His current band with clarinetist Evan Christopher he describes as "Django à la Créole". Its album *Finesse* was named jazz album of the year in 2010 by *The Sunday Times*.

"The music is so diverse in Paris," says Girardot. "If you want to find a Cuban drummer or a seven-string Brazilian guitar player, you can."

www.sebastiengirardot.com



“TWENTY YEARS LATER, HE HAS EARNED A REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE BEST PIANISTS IN THE CITY”



WENDY LEE TAYLOR

VOCALS

Beneath chandeliers, a full house of well-dressed Parisians and delighted tourists are being served Champagne and foie gras. The curtains open to reveal a six-piece band, which breaks into a brassy rendition of Herbie Hancock’s *Cantaloupe Island*. Front and centre is a tall redhead with a full-length black gown and a winning smile. She is Wendy Lee Taylor and the setting is the Lido on the Champs-Élysées.

“I have a great life,” says the 41-year-old singer. “I work at one of the most famous cabaret clubs in the world and have my days free for musical and personal projects.”

Born in Melbourne, Taylor enrolled in university to study languages, but left after a year when offered a professional performing contract in Japan. Following that, she sang and tap-danced her way through the Australian production of *42nd Street*. Another musical she’d been cast in was canned, so a friend suggested that she send her CV to the Lido in Paris “because they love tall dancers”. She was offered a contract.

Taylor hasn’t looked back. She has released two albums with her quartet – *Let’s Do It* (2006), which features Chris Cody on piano, and *All You Have To Do* (2011) – and has now been the Lido’s resident singer for a decade. “After the Lido, I’ll often go and sing at the Caveau des Legendes in St-Germain-des-Près. It’s a gorgeous cabaret/jazz club featuring top Paris and international talent.”

www.wendyleetaylor.com

CHRIS CODY

PIANO

Chris Cody fell under Paris’ spell at an early age. His mother, a French teacher, listened to the *chansons* of Jacques Brel, Edith Piaf and Georges Brassens, and houseguests included a university professor who taught French and also played jazz piano, particularly Fats Waller. With the discovery of Sartre, Camus and existentialism at 16, Paris was confirmed as a destination. “This literature spoke to me like nothing else had. I formulated a dream of being a pianist on the Left Bank in Paris.”

Cody studied French and music at the University of Sydney before moving on to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. During this time he met instrumentalist David Lewis, who was already living in Paris. Spurred on by Lewis’ musical tales, Cody bought a one-way ticket there in 1990. His first

job was playing piano in a little bar in Les Halles, where he was also expected to sing. “I’m not a singer,” says the 47-year-old. “I had to learn *My Funny Valentine* in a few days. I forgot the words, so I just made them up and hoped the audience wouldn’t notice.”

Twenty years later, he has earned a reputation as one of the best pianists in the city, playing alongside Rhoda Scott and Glenn Ferris (trombonist for the late Frank Zappa and Stevie Wonder). His jazz skilfully fuses modern, classical and North African influences, and he can be found performing in some of the best jazz venues including Caveau des Legendes and Duc des Lombards.

While he misses the sunlight of Australia, Cody feels right at home. “Hearing Miles Davis played down the aisles of a supermarket in Paris is still pretty damn cool.”

www.chriscody.com



“I HAD A FANTASY VISION OF PARIS BEFORE I CAME HERE. IN MANY WAYS, IT DOES LIVE UP TO THE FANTASY”

DAVID LEWIS

TRUMPET/KEYBOARD

David Lewis, 53, has a residency on the first Sunday of every month at Lou Pascalou, a cafe in Ménilmontant in the 20th arrondissement. He arrived in Paris to study at the age of 22. “My mum has always been a Francophile and I loved Debussy and Maurice André.” His first gig after graduating from the conservatory involved playing in a blues band for a Chantal Thomass lingerie fashion show. After that, he took on as much as he could – “from subbing in *Cats* to the Folies Bergère, Jewish weddings and big bands. At one stage, I was in five different big bands.”

His group, Paris Combo, grew out of a gig at Cabaret Sauvage (Paris’ Spiegeltent) and became a global hit with its hybrid of eclectic

jazz, lounge, swing and Gypsy jazz, infused with Latin and Eastern European influences. “People mix jazz with other musical tendencies,” he says. “Because jazz is about swing and rhythm and improvisation, it’s a passport for going in other musical directions.”

He has now spent more time in Paris than Australia, but Lewis likes to keep a foot in both camps. “The thing that’s hard about Paris sometimes is the lack of open space, but a 20-minute walk and you’re at Notre Dame. I had a fantasy vision of Paris before I came here. In many ways, it does live up to the fantasy. There’s a magical quality even after being here for three decades.”

www.pariscombo.com



MELISSA COX

VIOLIN/VOCALS

“You can play pretty much any night of the week in the bars of Paris if you’ve got a small line-up and don’t mind passing the hat,” says Melissa Cox at Oxydbar jazz cafe (11th arrondissement). “It gives you the opportunity to workshop fresh material and play all the time.”

Cox, 35, performs at least once a week with Paris-based Australian blues/folk legend Chris Kenna, as well as an Irish folk group, several jazz outfits, a Moroccan fusion band and her own electropop project,

Black Sesame. Hailing from Sydney, Cox studied jazz at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music before embarking on a six-month residency at the Tokyo Hilton.

She won a trip to Paris in 2008 in an online competition. On her second day, she hooked up with Australian bassist Jimi Sofo and Cameroon musician Francois Essindi, who invited them to gig with her the following night. Now she is performing several times a week while completing her film composition studies at l’École Normale de Musique and the city feels like home. “I love looking at rooftops outside my window. I love the cobbled streets.”

www.melissacox.com.au



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