

From the Back Verandah

Have you seen the marvelous Aardman Studio's *Chicken Run* yet? It's a sort of "Wallace and Gromit with Feathers", enlivened by the voices of Julia Sawalha and Mel Gibson. Well, whether you have or not, here's your chance to be in on the ground floor of an urban myth.

Chicken Run actually grew out of a surrealist novel called *Off the Beaten Egg*. Written by Sandy Cheok Lim, it was a failed contender for the 1998 Pullet Surprise for Vixen.

It relates the story of an energetic cockerel known to his friends as Rufus the Unruffable who pursues Penny, a shy and unassuming hen, around a Launceston farmyard for six months, only to be chased in turn by a fiendish fox called Maynard who has quite separate designs on both birds (to say nothing of

his ravenous plans for several others).

At first our hero has enormous trouble when he tries to outwit the vulpine marauder. Things start changing for the better, however, when he is given flying lessons by a gang of twenty-seven renegade talking porkers, who remind him that "if pigs can fly, so might fowls".

Ultimately Maynard is lured by Rufus and Penny into an existential appointment with a menacingly serene furrier. At the end, the two cluckers take off into the Tasmanian sunset, ceremoniously waved goodbye by a sea of cloven hoofs.

There you have it — *Bikwil's* own rumour. Please spread evenly, after adding your own savoury seasoning to taste.

— Fizzgig

BIKWIL

The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms

Editor: Tony Rogers

ISSN 1328-7842

No. 24

March 2001

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“More Puzzled Than the Egyptians in Their Fog”

The above line is from Act IV of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

Perhaps, in the present context, it’s a bit of an exaggeration. Yet if the small amount of feedback we’ve received in the office is any indication, the quotation would seem spectacularly to draw attention to the reaction of readers to our last little brainteaser (*Five Easy Pieces* in Issue 22, November 2000).

A shame really, and any of you who attempted it but were not

successful may well kick yourselves when you see that it isn’t impossible after all. Like all puzzles, it just requires perseverance and some lateral thinking.

For those few who care, the solution will be found on page 17.

All things considered, ’twere probably best were we to postpone our next puzzle challenge for another eighteen months or more.

Or even let sleeping dogs lie?

Colophon

Bikwil
18 Pembury Ave.
NORTH ROCKS. N.S.W. 2151.
AUSTRALIA.

www.bikwil.zip.com.au

Annual Subscription (Six Issues):
Posted (airmail): \$A10 Australia
\$A15 elsewhere
Sent via email: Free worldwide

info@bikwil.zip.com.au

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Back Issues Are Still Available

*Listen, someone's screaming in agony.
Fortunately I speak it fluently.*
Spike Milligan

*I don't like my music, but what is my opinion
against that of millions of others?*
Frederick Loewe

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

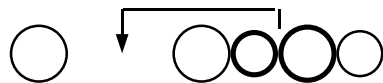
*How do I write? I just put the words
down on paper, and then push them
about a bit.*

Evelyn Waugh

*I've been on a calendar, but I've never
been on time.*
Marilyn Monroe

*In America most people now have an
annual check-up every month.*

Sir Peter Ustinov



Newsworthy

Much is said and written in Australia that is critical of the United States (its splendid gun culture, for instance), but having long since renounced negativism, *Bikwil* is not the place for expounding such censorious views. Rest assured, then, that on the subject of things American I intend here to say something quite complimentary.

What I want to applaud is the TV programme *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, which is put to air by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). It is televised in Australia on the SBS channel every weekday at 5 pm.

After many decades of exclusively commercial broadcasting in America, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (of which PBS is the chief manifestation) was set up by Congress during the Johnson administration. Its charter is to create a forum for national discussion and supplemental education.

Jim Lehrer joined forces with Robert MacNeil in 1973 to anchor public television's unprecedented, gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Senate Watergate hearings, which earned the team an Emmy Award.

Thus began the most enduring and respected journalistic partnership in U.S. television history. The weeknightly *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* (originally called *The Robert MacNeil Report, with Jim Lehrer*) had its debut in 1975 in New York. With the name change came national distribution by PBS.

For the next seven years, each half-hour show focused on a single issue. *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* set a standard for TV journalism and won more than 30 major awards. In 1983 the two men took the risk of transforming the show into *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*. It became America's first and only hour-long nightly broadcast of national news.

MacNeil and Lehrer share a history in journalism that includes covering the birth of the Berlin Wall, the death of John F. Kennedy (both were with the President's motorcade that day), the Cuban Missile Crisis, Watergate, and every major story since. More remarkably, perhaps, both are successful creative men of letters. Their published work comprises many romans à clef, mysteries, personal recollections and novels. In 1995

MacNeil, who is now nearing 70, retired to write books full-time, leaving Jim Lehrer to manage and anchor the programme alone.

So what exactly is *The News Hour*, in Australian terms? It's not a news broadcast, though there is always a brief summary of the day's news. Nor does it provide investigative reporting in the *Four Corners* manner. Is it a current affairs show? Well . . . yes — a bit like the better parts of the Channel 9 *Sunday* programme, I suppose. Or ABC Radio National (e.g. *Background Briefing*). It achieves this chiefly by dint of its in-depth interviews and panel discussions, conducted by regulars like Jim Lehrer, Elizabeth Farnsworth, Kwame Holman, Gwen Ifill, Ray Suarez and Margaret Warner.

Emphasising content instead of image, these debates are notable for their non-sensational and even-handed style, a tone not often achieved in Australian current affairs programmes, which never seem to allow an individual participant to have a full say without interruption. A “respect for complexity”, as Robert MacNeil once put it. Particularly effective is the educative slant to everything *The News Hour* deals with. How often we hear the jargon-busting suggestion by a moderator, “Explain that for the viewers”.

No, there's no dumbing down here. The Kosovo crisis, for instance, was handled by *The News Hour* admirably, with knowledgeable and sober analyses. I learned more about the historical perspective from *The News Hour* than anywhere on Oz TV. I was impressed too by its informed scrutiny of the 1999 Denver school massacre and its implications. The recent Israeli-Palestinian flare-up was also handled with clarity and fairness. Likewise the remarkable, bitterly contested 2000 U.S. Presidential Election. (Jim Lehrer, incidentally, was chosen as the moderator for the three Presidential Debates.) And the day the Presidency changed hands, the coverage of “the Clinton Legacy” was just magnificent, with no fewer than nine commentators interviewed.

Indeed, when it comes to purely American topics, it is always useful to hear the American pros and cons, instead of the oversimplified summary we often get here in Oz. Not that the problem is confined to the Australian media: witness the reporting in Britain of the results of our Republic referendum.

I particularly enjoy Political Wrap with Mark Shields and Paul Gigot in each Friday programme. Both are very experienced political analysts, in print as well as on TV — earnest but witty.

To Phrase a Coin or Two

The “Five Coin Puzzle” states:

There are five coins lying in a straight row, all touching — three 20-cent and two 10-cent pieces.

When you start, they are positioned so that the coin types alternate, with a 20-cent coin on the left. Your goal is to arrange them in the fewest moves so that the 20-cent coins end up together on the left, then the 10-cent coins, again with no gaps between.

Thus, starting with this:

20 10 20 10 20,

you have to get to this:

20 20 20 10 10.

Here are the rules for moving:

- ◇ coins must be slid, not picked up,
- ◇ two adjacent coins (always of different types) must be moved each time,
- ◇ at least one of the pair moved must touch a third coin after the move,
- ◇ the coins moved must not change their left-to-right orientation (e.g. 20 10 must not be twisted to 10 20).

As you will see from the diagrammatic solution on the next page, as few as five moves are required. The fourth and fifth moves are the crucial ones.

Readers interested enough can extend the puzzle to any similar combination — say, four 20-cent coins alternating with three 20-cent coins, or five 20¢ and four 10¢, or even six 20¢ and five 10¢.

And then, if you're really enthused, you might like to predict how many moves it will take for any given case. Will the seven-coin case take seven moves? (Sorry, it will take 14 moves.) What about the nine-coin and eleven-coin cases? (Answer: 30 and 55 moves, respectively.)

Is there a pattern here? Yes there is, and for those of you who remember any algebra, this is the elegant formula that embodies it:

$$\text{number of moves} = \frac{n(n+1)(2n+1)}{6}$$

where n is the number of 10-cent coins (*not* the total number of coins).

—TR

young woman casually closes her magazine and puts it into her bag. She draws the water bottle from her bag and takes a brief sip before standing.

The crowd begins to move slowly toward the alighting area of the platform. Excited children eager for a glance at the approaching train dance dangerously on the edge of the platform. Smokers suck desperately on their cigarettes in an attempt to fulfil their craving for the duration of the trip. An elderly couple stand in silence, taking time to enjoy the simpler aspects of life, while words of warning flow from worried parents' mouths. As the train nears the stationmaster's voice booms over the loudspeakers informing the crowd of the details of the approaching service.

Only the youth remains seated, avoiding the physical strain of standing until the last minute. He swigs the last drops of coke from his can, crushes it underfoot, lifts his body from the seat and strolls toward the train.

Parents now cling to their children as the train pulls into the platform. The crowd surges forward in groups around the opening doors. When a path is clear passengers board the train.

The businessman boards and his face breaths a sigh of relief. The young woman boards, surveys the occupants of her carriage, sits and opens her magazine. The youth boards last and meanders toward a seat.

From the end of the platform the guard raises his flag and signals to the driver. The doors close with a hiss and the train lurches away from the platform. When the noise of the train dies down Bob Seger once again drifts from the old grey speakers. The few passengers who alighted from the train make their way toward the exit.

The long platforms seem to relax after the flurry of activity. Between the platforms the rails stretch in a confetti of cigarette butts toward each shimmering horizon. The station once again sleeps in silence and the tiny never resting ants run wild on the concrete.

As the afternoon heat fades a gust of wind sweeps the platform. On a bench at the far end of the platform an old man whom everybody failed to notice cuddles his whisky and tries to get back to sleep.

— Lachlan Drysdale

But lest you get the impression that it is entirely a show about war and politics, I want to touch upon several other extended parts of *The News Hour*. These include its Essays, which are thoughts on various issues by contributors such as Anne Taylor Fleming, Roger Rosenblatt, Clarence Page and Richard Rodriguez. And at the relevant time of the year we get interviews with Pulitzer prize winners. All reminiscent of the best of England's Melvyn Bragg, but more concise.

One feature I miss is the now suspended series of David Gergen Dialogues with newsworthy authors (e.g. with Oz-born historian/educator Jill Ker Conway, or with emotional intelligence researcher Daniel Goleman, or with Simon Winchester, much in the limelight not so long ago for his biography of the friendship of James Murray and William Chester Minor).

Another segment sadly now discontinued was that of Robert Pinsky, the then current Poet Laureate of America. Sometimes he read his own verse, sometimes someone else's. Fortunately, he still makes the occasional appearance.

If there are any conceivable criticisms to be made of *The News Hour*, they might be that

(a) it exhibits a "very American" outlook [unavoidable],

(b) it is just a "boring" succession of talking heads [but what intelligent heads] and

(c) it is "sycophantic" to its interviewees [the word "well-mannered" would be better, but the passion for truth shows through the restraint, anyway].

Not surprisingly, *The News Hour* has its own Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/>). This includes the news of the day, plus the text of selected Dialogues and Essays. Transcripts of some of the Shields and Gigot discussions are also available.

Take a look, too, at <http://www.emmys.org/hof/macneil-lehrer.html>. This admiring evaluation is well worth reading, particularly for the detailed background it provides of Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer.

I realise that many Aussies are still at work at 5 pm, but take my advice and every so often set the VCR for *The News Hour*. You can't fail to be impressed.

Just be mindful of the timing, especially on Mondays: Australia gets it a weekday later than the United States does.

— TR

In March Time

Early that morning, first
of autumn, grey with rain,
just a walk away from work,
without warning I was cast
in a crazy peak-hour show
at Broadway:

a chorus line
of cars panted at the crossing,
wipers tossing rain from screens
like dancers dashing sweat from eyes
and faces when they pause;
while the line fretted for the green,
a rival *corps de ballet*,
kerbside players kerbed too long,
as fretfully began to scamper
from sodden wings to centre stage,
there to shuffle, strut and stomp,
all together in foul weather,
converge and cross,
up-tempo and up-temper
in the steady rain.

In this
frenzied dance of hours
with others, I was the novice
unrehearsed, out of step and class;
compelled by a different drumming,

she takes a bottle of water from her carry bag and takes a fashionable sip. She replaces the lid slowly, flicks some tiny flecks of fluff from her skirt and returns to her magazine.

From the entrance a carefree youth strolls in, pausing momentarily at the ticket window to purchase a ticket. He then eases his way toward the platform kicking a plastic bottle along the ground in front of him. As he reaches the steps he hoists his leg on to the handrail and slides roughly down the rail. His rubber-soled basketball shoes land with a soft thud on the concrete and he collapses into the nearest seat as if the recent physical activity has left him drained of energy. He has yet to be noticed by the other occupants on the platform. After a minute of staring thoughtfully at his feet the youth gets slowly to his feet and ambles toward the drink machine.

The sound of coins dropping alerts the others on the platform from their daze. The young woman glances up immediately from her magazine and looks at the youth without expression. The perspiring businessman takes a little longer to respond and glances up to see the youth retrieving a can from the bottom of the machine. A look of disgust passes over the

man's face as he takes in the long hair and scruffy clothes of the youth. The youth drags himself back to his seat and proceeds to open the can. He raises the can to his lips but suddenly stops and further to the disgust of the businessman, takes a large portion of chewing gum from his mouth and sticks it to the underside of the seat. The youth then raises the can to his lips and takes a satisfying swig.

The sun burns, the businessman perspires, the young woman reads and the youth drinks.

The platform clock reaches the hour and the drowsy station begins to awake. Travellers have now covered the platform and an idle chatter drowns out Bob Seger. The sleepy guard has emerged from the station office and is looking less than happy at having to wave his flag. He leans against a pole, sweating in the fluoro orange safety jacket he is required to wear, and watches the smoke curl from the end of his cigarette.

Suddenly the train appears and its approaching presence sweeps the travellers from their positions. The businessman grunts in relief and moves quickly to stand at the edge of the platform in order to gain quick entry and a seat. The

The Station

A lone gust of wind tosses an empty chip packet down the platform. As the wind dies the packet comes to rest, balancing dangerously on the edge of the platform. In an instant the gust is back and the packet is tossed over the platform edge floating in a flutter of silver to the ground.

From an old grey speaker the distorted voice of Bob Seger floats loosely into the lazy afternoon. The sun burns down from a clear sky, not allowing any object to escape its intense heat; it pushes its fiery golden arms into every crack and corner. As the small shrubs bend and wilt, tiny black ants run wild on the concrete.

An air of boredom and languor hangs like a hot blanket over the small uneventful station. Four long concrete platforms lay side by side like unmarked graves in a barren graveyard. Between the concrete platforms two weathered tracks lay motionless on wrinkled wooden sleepers and together they bask in the scorching midday sun. On the platform itself the heat seems to melt the paint on the red and white benches. A faded station name is barely decipherable under the mat of graffiti and scratched initials.

At the main entrance two rail employees reside in the office. Old white fans speckled with dirt wobble and squeak in an attempt to stir the air in the ticket office sauna. In the far corner one of the guards snores loudly, his grease stained shirt pulled tight over his ample stomach. At the ticket window a female guard flicks through the weekend paper, her feminine features coarse from endless hours spent in the sun. Both appear at ease with the dirty cluttered office.

On the far platform a businessman swelters in the baking sun, his dark suit drawing and trapping the heat. Sweat beads in silver speckles on his balding forehead and his heavy eyes squint to avoid the glare. On his lap he nurses a black briefcase on which his fingers drum a nervous tune of anticipation. He checks his watch for the second time in a matter of seconds and his lips curse silently.

On the next seat a young woman lights a cigarette and draws long and hard. Flicking casually through a magazine on her lap she pauses occasionally to survey her surroundings from behind dark glasses. Appearing much more at ease in the extreme heat

my stride inelegant and rough
I madly improvised escape
to the green roominess
of Victoria Park,

off-stage
just in time to see, on cue
the chorus line brake off
into its routine:

up front,
sleek new model hi-tech
superstars anticipating green
and a clear way leapt ahead
of middle-of-the-road performers
patient and obedient to every cue,
and last, the oldest players,
veterans of too many shows,
grown sluggish, idling too long
were caught again on red,
once more to form a chorus line
to fret and pant at Broadway.

Like Miss Christie's *Mousetrap*
The Peak-Hour Show plays on and on:
repeat performances by no command
I know: the show's already cloned,
endless rounds of action replays
on all the Broadways of the world.

It's not the lack of chorus master
 I deplore — I'd rather be my own —
 something fundamental is amiss
 and missing: there's no joy, no sense
 of celebration, this global dancethon's
 an ancient rite gone wrong,
 St. Vitus must be turning,
 turning in his grave.

As for this
 misfit missing mainstream's
 beat, the dancer in the wrong routine,
 out of step with the pulse of urban
 life, the rhythm of the times,
 I'll leave the fast lane, centre stage
 to upbeat, high-speed trippers.

I prefer an old soft shoe,
andante moderato,
 shuffling to the natural rhythm,
 the easy rhythm that's my own,
 with a partner if there's one
 or solo in the rain and sun,
 in step with the tempo of the universe,
 the well-tempered music of the spheres.

— Bet Briggs

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

A couple of issues ago (No. 22, November 2000), I presented the solutions to some anagram puzzles that had appeared in Issues 10 and 15 (November 1998 and September 1999). I am taking the chance today to offer a small handful of further anagrammatical treasures unearthed for your appreciative wonderment.

(Thanks to occasional contributor Katisha for drawing my attention via the editor to some of the following.)

First let me introduce you to a few Bikwilians who might need putting straight, if one could only figure them out:

Olive Conduit
 Spud Money
 E. Roy Strong.

Now, how about a quartet of anagram-generating names from further afield:

glib tales (= Bill Gates)
 genuine class (= Alec Guinness)
 is leaping milk (= Spike Milligan)
 I paint modern (= Piet Mondrian)
 that great charmer (= Margaret Thatcher).

Next, some miscellaneous rearrangement magic:

dormitory (= dirty room)
 desperation (= a rope ends it)
 dyslexia (= daily sex)
 eleven plus two (= twelve plus one)
 Parliament (= partial men)
 semolina (= is no meal)
 the eyes (= they see).

Here's a truly amazing one, if a bit confused in its tenses:

A thin man ran; makes a large stride;
 left planet, pins flag on moon!
 On to Mars!

It comes from this:

That's one small step for a man,
 one giant leap for mankind. (Neil A. Armstrong).

Finally, believe it or not, the following epic:

In one of the Bard's bestthought-of tragedies, our insistent hero, Hamlet, queries on two fronts about how life turns rotten.

derives from no less famous a passage than:

To be or not to be: that is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

— Harlish Goop

volunteers at Northwestern University, Chicago, and comprises the following areas of interest:

- Styles of Jazz
- Artists
- Performance (venues, festivals)
- Media (radio, TV, press)
- Jazz Art
- Jazz Education and Musicianship
- Jazz Labels on the Net
- Other Jazz Resources on the Net.

Take the last named section, Other Jazz Resources on the Net, for instance. Among a selection of over 30 links is one to What Is Jazz? — a site well worth a visit. This too is digitised audio you can listen to through your computer. It consists of a series of four enlightening lectures on the history and nature of jazz presented by pianist and educator Billy Taylor. Another of those 30+ links I appreciated was that of the Wolverine Antique Music Society, dedicated to the preservation of 78s.

Speaking of jazz education, I recommend you pop into *Outside Shore Music*, a site that is particularly useful for the full text of a primer on jazz improvisation.

This work has been read and appreciated by tens of thousands of musicians around the world, and is used as course material in improvisation classes by several major universities. It covers the basics of jazz improvisation and accompaniment, as well as more advanced theoretical topics, yet it can also be used by non-musicians who wish to gain a deeper understanding of jazz.

The author, Marc Sabatella, also sells lessons by email.

Finally, if these sites fail to point you towards information on your favourite jazz musician, style or instrument, just type the name or phrase into your search engine, and you're off and running.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

- <http://www.magna.com.au/~georgeh/ozjazzhp.html>
- <http://www.birdland.com.au/>
- <http://members.aol.com/AJSExec/ajs.htm>
- <http://www.apassion4jazz.net/>
- <http://www.npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/>
- <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/>
- <http://www.nwu.edu/jazz/>
- http://town.hall.org/Archives/radio/Kennedy/Taylor/bt_lect.html
- <http://www.shellac.org/wams/>
- <http://www.outsideshore.com/primer/>

Interesting Origins

The Latin word for “a shade” is *umbra* and in the Mediterranean countries umbrellas were used mainly as a protection against the sun. The ending of umbrella, *ella*, means “little” and so an umbrella literally means, “a little shade”.

Note that in modern times and in cooler countries, the umbrella is thought of as a useful implement to protect a person against the rain.

— R. K. Sadler

Web

Last issue's article by Clare Hansson (*Jazz — a Womanly Thing?*) has prompted me this time to explore Internet coverage of jazz. At the outset I should remind you that the topic has already been covered very fully in George Howell's column *Jazz on the Internet*, a regular feature in Eric Myers' Australian publication *Jazzchord, News & Information from the National Jazz Co-ordinator* (ISSN 1039 7795).

Trying my best to avoid duplicating the places mentioned in that column, I will nevertheless start with Howell's own site, *Oz-Jazz Worldwide*, "a free information service dedicated to bringing Australian jazz to the Net". Ongoing sections include Musician Profiles, Festivals (local), On-air (radio) and Bookshelf.

Overall a useful site, but maybe one not kept as current as one would like. It also has links to other sites (e.g. Sydney's jazz venue The Basement).

Special mention is due for the Where Do You Get It section. Among other listings this includes



Line

a link to that Sydney Mecca for jazz CD explorers — Birdland — where the shop's current catalogue is available for your perusal.

Jazzchord itself is represented, and the most recent issue is reproduced in full. Subscription details are provided.

A good way to start surfing the Net for jazz is to type the word "jazz" into the search engine Yahoo. Not only do you get about 80 sites already linked for you, you also are presented with a series of subcategories like Big Band, Bossa Nova, Dixieland, Magazines, MIDI Files, Radio Programs, Ragtime, Reviews, Theory.

From Yahoo's links and groupings your exploration possibilities open out into a whole variety of styles and geographical locations.

That's how I stumbled on to a strong site called *American Jazz Symposium*. Sadly it also is out of date in places (e.g. its record reviews section), but overall I have found it pretty useful, especially its Internet links section, AJS Presents Jazz on the Web. For example, the Jazz Bands and Artists section,

though selective, gives a good coverage of such legends as

Bix Beiderbecke
Benny Carter
John Coltrane
Eric Dolphy
Duke Ellington
Bill Evans
Herbie Hancock
Charles Mingus
Thelonious Monk
Pee Wee Russell
Cecil Taylor.

There are subsections for trumpet players, trombonists and guitarists. As well, many minor instrumentalists have entries.

The site with the best name is, of course, that run by D.C. DowDell he calls *A Passion for Jazz*. I wholeheartedly recommend it to all Bikwilians. With commentary, history and education as its aims, this enthusiastic site is open-minded about all styles, from Dixieland to Acid Jazz, and a feeling for its spirit can had by reading this:

Jazz is not the result of choosing a tune, but an ideal that is created in the mind, inspired by one's passion and willed next in playing music! Jazz music is not found on websites or in books or even written down in music script; it is in the act of creating the form itself that we find Jazz.

Evolution, Etymology, Music Instruction, Basic Musicianship, Jazz MIDI Files — these are just some of its subsections.

An equally convincing site is *NPR Jazz Profiles*. This is based on the weekly (U.S.) National Public Radio's series of the same name whose objective is to "document the careers of living jazz masters, through their own voices". In other words, the radio show is a series of interviews with the musician(s) concerned, and the Web site reflects this admirably. Apart from a text outline of the career, we are given a selection of "live" audio extracts for your Internet browser to play through your computer speakers. Topics so far covered, or in the planning stage, include these — plus loads more:

Dave Brubeck
Chicago: a Jazz City
Erroll Garner
Jon Hendricks
MJQ
The Violin.

While I'm at the Public Broadcasting Service, I must mention the Ken Burns *Jazz* phenomenon. *Jazz* is a ten-part TV series being screened in 2001 on PBS channels. It promises to be as provocative as Burns' *Civil War* and *Frank Lloyd Wright*. (I hope we see it in Oz soon.) Very full details are available at the PBS site.

Another effective site based on a radio station is *WNUR-FM Jazz Web*. This is maintained by