A letter from Paul Mason

Golden Days Radio audiences may recall that over the past decade my wife Elaine and I have presented the Saturday night program “Stepping Out With Memories”.

Unfortunately, this is now at an end as the last show was broadcast on 8th November. After nearly 40 years as a volunteer presenter at many Victorian community radio stations, I have reluctantly resigned due to my somewhat advanced age making the commitment involved harder and harder to fulfill. My wife Elaine and I jointly completed 550 shows on 3GDR since July 2003, and with the other stations at which I have worked since Community Radio started in Australia we have clocked up nearly 3,000 programs. I am also currently contributing at 96.9 3NOW in Hatfield, and will continue there for a short period while I “ease out” of radio completely.

Community radio is a valued and essential social service activity, bringing to small minority groups the music and interests that they hold dear, but which are NOT catered for by the major media interests who are aiming at high volume markets that are seen to offer high profits in advertising benefits.

Elaine and I have had great pleasure from the involvement over the year, making many friends in the process, both in the volunteer groups at the stations and in audiences that have been very appreciative. It is a big “BUZZ” to be acknowledged, and so pleasing to know that we have given pleasure to others. We hope to maintain closer contact with our friends at Golden Days functions.

We were very pleased to be farewelled at a “get together” at the station, and our thanks go to those involved in the organisation.

Editors note: We also farewelled Barry Day at the same “get together”.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY – HISTORY

The program featured on Golden Days every Sunday night at 8pm and presented by Alex Hehr has an interesting history. The name was given to Alex by Janet Machliss, wife of the late Bob Machliss, former President of the Victorian Bing Crosby Society.

Bob conducted “Thanks for the Memory” on Melbourne’s 3DB radio, now defunct, until ill health forced his retirement. Following his death Alex purchased much of his Crosby collection and at that time he decided to honour his name by calling the new program on Southern FM (88.3), “Thanks for the Memory”. The first programme debuted at 8pm on 16.10.1994 and initially ran 4 hours.

(The first 3 items played were:- Christy Minstrel Medley – Troise & his Banjoliers, Let’s all go down the Strand – Stanley Holloway and My Hat’s on the side of My Head – Al Bowlly and Ray Noble orchestra)

Edition 100 went to air 08.09.1996. Alex left Southern FM in late 1998, and took the program with him. In June 1999 Alex moved to Golden Days Radio after travelling abroad for some 4 months. Running time of the program had been cut down to 3 hours due to his ill health in 2002 and to fall in line also with the finishing times for all other nights on GDR.


Alex estimates that the number of requests played up to Prg#1000 will be 16,970 and the estimated number of items played up to Prg#1000 including requests 49,000. Of course each week is the Sunday Night Special and by the time edition 1,000 comes around in February next year you’ve guessed it, 1,000 specials would have been played.

Well done Alex on an outstanding contribution to community radio.

Editors note:

Our first publication is now available free of charge from our studios in Glen Huntly or from our major sponsor the East Malvern Community Bank 300 Waverley Road East Malvern. It’s thanks to our sponsor for providing the funding by way of a grant so that we could produce this book.

Called “What’s in a Name” it features the history to many of Melbourne’s suburbs and is also heard on Golden Days every Thursday afternoon at 4.07pm.
Remembering Acker Bilk

Bernard Stanley "Acker" Bilk was born on the 28th January 1929 in Pensford, Somerset United Kingdom. He was a clarinettist and vocalist known for his trademark goatee, bowler hat, striped waistcoat and breathy, vibrato-rich, lower-register clarinet style. He earned the nickname "Acker" from the Somerset slang for "friend" or "mate". His parents tried to teach him the piano but, as a boy, Bilk found it restricted his love of outdoor activities, such as football. He lost two front teeth in a school fight and half a finger in a sledding accident, both of which he claimed to have affected his eventual clarinet style.

On leaving school Bilk joined the workforce of a cigarette factory staying there for three years putting tobacco in the cooling room and then pushing tobacco through a blower. He then undertook his three years national service with the Royal Engineers in the Suez Canal Zone. He learnt the clarinet there after his sapper friend, John A. Britten, gave him one bought at a bazaar and for which Britten had no use. The clarinet had no reed and Britten fashioned a makeshift reed for the instrument out of scrap wood. He then borrowed a better instrument from the British Army, which he kept with him on demobilisation. On returning home after national service, Bilk joined his father's back-smith business and qualified in the trade.

Bilk played with friends on the Bristol jazz circuit and in 1951 moved to London to play with Ken Colyer's band. But, disliking London, he returned west and formed his own band in Pensford called the Chew Valley Jazzmen, which was renamed the Bristol Paramount Jazz Band when they moved to London in 1951. Their agent then booked them for a six-month gig in Düsseldorf, Germany, playing in a beer bar seven hours a night, seven nights a week where Bilk and the band developed their distinctive style and appearance, complete with striped-waistcoats and bowler hats.

On return to Britain and now based in Plaistow, London, the band played the London jazz club scene. It was from here that Bilk became part of the boom in traditional jazz that swept the United Kingdom in the late 1950s. In 1960, their single "Summer Set" (a pun on their home county), went to number five on the UK singles chart, and began an 11-week run of hit singles. In 1961 "Acker Bilk and His Paramount Jazz Band" appeared at the Royal Variety Performance.

Bilk was not an internationally known musician until an experiment with a string ensemble and a composition of his own as its keynote piece made him one in 1962. Upon the birth of his daughter, he composed and dedicated a melody entitled "Jenny" (her name). He was approached by a British television series for permission to use that melody, but to change the title to "Stranger on the Shore". He went on to record it as the title track of a new album in which his signature deep and quavering clarinet was backed by the Leon Young String Chorale. The single was not only a big hit in the United Kingdom, where it stayed on the charts for 55 weeks, gaining a second wind after Bilk was the subject of the TV show This Is Your Life, but also shot to the top of the American charts at a time when the American pop charts and radio playlists were open to almost anything with a "British" style. As a result Bilk was the second British artist to have a single in the number one position on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart. (Vera Lynn was the first, with "Auf Wiederseh'n Sweetheart" in 1952.) "Stranger on the Shore" sold over one million copies, and was awarded a gold disc. The album was also highlighted by a striking interpretation of Bunny Berigan's legendary hit "I Can't Get Started". At the height of his career, Bilk's public relations workers were known as the "Bilk Marketing Board", a pun on the Milk Marketing Board.

Bilk has been described as the "Great Master of the Clarinet". His clarinet sound and style was at least as singular as had been those of American jazzmen such as Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw and "Stranger on the Shore" — which he was once quoted as calling "my old-age pension" — remains a standard of jazz and popular music alike. Strangely though in 2012 he said that after 50 years, he was "fed up with playing that most famous tune. Bilk continued to tour with his Paramount Jazz Band, as well as performing concerts with his two contemporaries, Chris Barber and Kenny Ball (deceased), both of whom were born in 1930, as the 3Bs. Bilk also provided distinctive vocals on many of his tracks, including on "I'm an Old Cowhand", "The Folks Who Live on the Hill", "White Cliffs of Dover", "Travellin' On" and "That's My Home".

Bilk married his childhood sweetheart, Jean, with whom he met in the same class at school. The couple had two children, one a daughter, Jenny, after whom a composition was named. His son is named Pete. In 2000, Bilk was diagnosed with throat cancer, which was treated through surgery. Subsequently he had eight keyhole operations for bladder cancer and suffered a minor stroke. He died on 2nd November 2014 aged 85.

Message from the President- Larry James

Our patron Mr Neil “Nobby” Clark AO advised us recently that he wishes to retire from all positions at the station. Not only has he been patron of Golden Days since July 2006 but has also been a member of our Development Fund. This fund was established a few years ago to attract tax deductible donations and is registered by ROCO (Register of Cultural Organisations) in Canberra.

The Committee of Management accepted his resignation with regret and unanimously passed a resolution by acclamation expressing its heartfelt thanks for his tenure as our revered Patron. Thank you Nobby.

We had a very successful seniors week during October starting at Federation Square with a local broadcast for most of the day. A number of our presenters came along and assisted to make the day a fun one. Even Peter Hitchener from Nine News in Melbourne paid us a visit.

We also had a presence in the Lower Melbourne Town Hall for the week handing out information such as program guides, calendars and other items. On the Friday night we sponsored a jazz and swing night with singer Grace Knight. This was a great success. Of course a lot of planning went into this week and we thank all volunteers who participated in the activities.

Our website has been undergoing some changes to make it more readable. The home page has been updated and we now have a “listen now” button for our streaming. We’ve also been talking for quite some time about on line memberships and donations. Well we’re working on this thanks to volunteer Robert Finch. We’ve now got Pay Pal established as the first part to enable this to happen so watch over the coming months for further announcements.

On behalf of everyone at Golden Days I extend my greetings to you for a joyous festive season.

From the Station Manager’s Desk... Alex Hehr

The year 2014 has been a busy one for all of us at the station, with a number of varying matters occupying our time. Our three studios continue to provide listeners with quality broadcasts 24/7. During the year we welcomed some new presenters to the team and sadly said farewell to others.

Incoming phone calls to the station remain steady, and these are being supplemented by quite a number of emails from listeners to our streaming service from throughout the world. Clearly, more and more people are finding Melbourne’s Seniors’ Broadcaster on the dial and are calling to thank us for “Playing Yesterday’s Music – Today”.

There has been a large increase in the number of people listening to GDR “on line” (the internet). In March 2011 there were an average of 1060 people listening weekly and in Sept 2014 we were at 6600. This is most definitely a growth area for us, which I believe will continue to grow. I was involved midyear with the development of our very own “app” for mobile devices and this has added to the ways that people can now access Golden Days programs anywhere, anytime.

I would like to thank all our volunteers for their efforts this year. GDR is a wonderful example of how volunteerism works at it’s very best. To all volunteers, members, listeners and our valued sponsors and families, I send seasons greetings and hope that 2015 brings you everything you wish for and above all good health.