

ALLY at Pratten Park  
April 13, 2021  
5 stars

“The brainchild of saxophonist Gai Bryant, ALLY never quite lets your expectations settle. Spoken-word poetry from Brazilian Australian Dai Moret inhabit the same universe as a Thelonious Monk composition reimagined with a Flamenco bulerias rhythm.

The latter was Monk’s Dream, featuring a James Greening trombone solo in which each note— let alone each line – was an event in itself, having a voluptuousness that would probably be illegal in some countries, before a bristling dialogue between cajon player Julio Candela and drummer Giorgio Rojas.

Pianist Daniel Pliner’s restless solo on Unicorn Girls rocked between clamping the piano to the rhythm section and floating melodic clouds above it; staying inside the harmonic structure and making dissonant little sallies outside.

Charles Mingus’s timeless masterpiece Goodbye Porkpie Hat was superbly reimagined through an Afro-Danzon prism, and Bryant remade Monk’s Well You Needn’t as Spheres that Don’t, combining spoken word, vocals, and a bubbly dialogue between her soprano and trombone, decorated with Allende’s bongos and polished bass playing from Max Alduca.

John Shand, SMH

Review of ALLY  
Paris Cat April 22nd, 2022  
4.5 Stars

Gai Bryant named her latest band ALLY because she sees it’s members as musical allies, uniting their creative resources in pursuit of a common purpose - in this case, exploring traditional Latin rhythms through a contemporary jazz lens.

She could also have named the band Alloy, which would neatly describe the fascinating amalgam of styles and cultures on which the music is based. Peruvian, Brazilian, Cuban and Andalusian rhythmic traditions lie at the heart of Bryant’s compositions, lending the tunes an undercurrent of irresistible buoyancy.

On Friday night at a sold-out Paris Cat, the Sydney sextet filled the room with vibrant Afro-Peruvian festejo, Brazilian maracatu and flamenco bulerias. Percussionist Julio Candela (on cajon and congas) and drummer Ryan Menezes formed an agile twin engine for these polyrhythmic adventures, anchored by Max Alduca’s supple bass and Daniel Pliner’s deft piano. Bryant - on alto and soprano sax - and trombonist James Greening typically laid out the melodic themes in taut unison before harmonising or peeling off into authoritative solos.

On *Cuba* the horns rode in a loping canter over the rhythm section’s intricate, multi-layered pulse. *Sphere’s That Don’t* (a flamenco reworking of Thelonius Monk’s *Well You Needn’t*) featured fluttering cajon to underline the staccato melody, with Bryant’s soprano adding flecks of angularity before Greening embarked on a wonderfully exuberant solo excursion.

On several tunes the band was joined by Brazilian-born poet Dai Moret, whose liquid phrases in English and Portuguese - half spoken, half whispered - added an air of seductive mystery. Most pieces in the generous two-hour show were drawn from the band’s debut album *Drum Junk*. The final tune (a reworking of Monk’s *Bright Mississippi*) was pinned to a Cuban montuno, which not only served as an uplifting finale, but hinted that Bryant and her empathetic allies still have plenty of musical adventures ahead.

*Reviewed by Jessica Nicholas*

## *Review of ALLY Drum Junk*

*Drum Junk* - born from a partnership between percussionist Giorgio Rojas, and Afro-Cuban/Latin/Jazz saxophonist Gai Bryant - gives life and representation to styles not so commonly explored. Ranging from tangos to Peruvian landos and festejos with a waltz between, the rhythmic roots are core to the sound found here.

Gai is commanding on her instruments, both alto and soprano variants, delivering the melody of each tune with authority. Supporting her and alongside Giorgio we have James Greening on trombone, Max Alduca on double bass and Daniel Pliner on piano, forming a tight quintet.

Max and Daniel's contributions are particularly exceptional. One can really feel the force of Max's double bass, which is luxuriating in the additional headroom allowed by the lack of a full drum kit. Meanwhile Daniel's artistic chord choices and flawless solos are reminiscent of Herbie Hancock on "Maiden Voyage" - an exhilarating listen.

A key feature of the album is the arcane spoken word by poet Dai Moret. Far from feeling over rendered or intrusive, the religious, ancient and astrological themes she draws on adds a spice and mysterious allure to the tracks she speaks over.

Presenting sensitively arranged versions of "In a Monk's Dream" and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" nestled amongst triumphant originals, ALLY's *Drum Junk* is an important work in moulding and propagating crucial rhythmic traditions to help ensure their relevance for generations to come.

4.5 stars

reviewed by Josh Underhill for *Dingo Magazine Vol.4*

*Professor John Whiteoak extract from article for UK Routledge Companion*

### **Article: Latin Jazz in Australia for Routledge Companion to Jazz Diaspora (UK)**

A present-day internet search for references to "Latin-jazz" or "Latin jazz" in Australia reveals a vast, perplexing spectrum of musical activity, ranging from ensembles offering "Latin tinges" to fully dedicated Latin-jazz ensembles. Latin-jazz fusion continues in all sorts of ways among Australian world music practitioners and exploration and development of Brazilian jazz fusion of the type introduced to 1990s Melbourne by Ferreira with BrazJaz, and elsewhere by other artists and ensembles, is ongoing. In Sydney, the Afro Cuban jazz and dance collective, Caribé, claims to celebrate the diversity of original Australian Latin-jazz. A recent CD by the eclectic and exploratory Sydney Latin-jazz ensemble, ALLY, is billed as "a little Afro-Peruvian experimentalism, a twist of Brazilian mayhem, and a dash of rumba Monk with your jazz (Peruvian/Brazilian 2022)." ALLY is led by the virtuoso jazz saxophonist, composer and "Queen of Latin-jazz," Gai Bryant, in collaboration with Peru-born percussionist and "Afro Peruvian jazz" practitioner and teacher, Giorgio Rojas (Latin Jazz Opening 2020).

\_\_\_\_\_Hearing the inexhaustibly inventive Gai Bryant at Melbourne's Night Cat backed by Latin rhythm and other accompaniment of astonishing virtuosity, textual density and distinctiveness leaves no doubt why she is described this way.

None of the post-1960s examples discussed can be characterized as simply the "export" of Latin-jazz to Australia and all, in some way, represent examples of it "being invented in the process of being disseminated." Even Latin American-born musicians, such as Pertout or Rojas, gained much musical knowledge through Australian tertiary music study and musical contexts. Australia is now a "migrant-majority" and proudly multicultural

country and the ever-evolving nature of “Australian decontextualization” has reached a phase where social, cultural and artistic fusion are both natural and desirable outcomes. Latin-jazz as music and dancing is a more appropriate vehicle than ever for these fusions.

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## **Endorsements for Spare Parts Tours**

### **Caribe: Lismore Lantern Parade**

When Gai Bryant and Caribé visited the Northern Rivers Conservatorium this year during the Lismore Lantern Festival, flood reclamation works were still being undertaken in our building and beautiful Lismore was still reeling from the shock of the February 2022 catastrophic floods. Having Gai and the musicians work with our Youth Jazz Orchestra senior and junior players in a workshop, performance and in the parade itself held particularly special meaning this year as the community gathered under the banner of creativity and culture to reclaim our spirit and sense of hope through music.

*Anita Bellman - Director of Northern Rivers Conservatorium Dec 14, 2022.*  
02 6621 2266

### **Caribe: Mid-West Tour**

I worked as a tour manager/promoter for Caribe's trip to Kandos, Wellington and Gulgong. This trip was organised and promoted twice due to the impact of Covid and was tailor-made as it's not an existing tour circuit. I engaged closely with local individuals, groups and networks to make this possible and initiated conversations, distributed posters and nurtured partnerships with arts, tourism and community organisations. Gai Bryant organised promotional materials, radio and newspaper interviews, and a social media campaign.

There were at least ten local teachers at the evening shows. Our gold coin workshop with Kandos High was hugely successful. The response and feedback to Caribe was overwhelmingly positive. I'm proud of the joy we brought to these three small towns, the quality of the music, the sound itself, the presentation and warmth of hosting. For small towns getting 100 people to each venue in a Covid-cautious and natural disaster affected environment was an achievement. Nothing short of miraculous!

*Meg Benson - Director of Music Hunter, Dec 20, 2022.*  
0425 270 632

### **Palacio de la Rumba: Club York and Bellingen Muse Festival**

For the past several years I have had the fortune to be involved with Gai Bryant and Palacio de la Rumba, both with rehearsing and conducting her beautiful Latin ensemble. Gai's arrangements are exceptional, easily up with the best in the world, and so important for music in Australia.

Her love for and knowledge of this music is joyfully felt by music students, as I witnessed at Qld. Conservatorium in Brisbane, recently at Bellingen Muse, by teachers, and by the professionals who play it. It has been a rare treat to see audiences enthusiastically enjoying practicing Latin dancing!!!

*John Hoffman - trumpeter and conductor, December 21, 2022*  
0472 722 464

## **Caribé Review Sydney Arts Guide**

Oct 10, 2022

Caribé performed next. This group melds musicians and a dancer from Sydney's Cuban, jazz and Latin communities. Titled 'Havana Return', projections of archival footage of Cuban musicians immersed the audience in dancing and chanting. Saxophonist Gai Bryant's compositions blend traditional and classic Cuban forms into a contemporary sound. The percussion and rhythm section was Giorgio Rojas, Julio Candela, Cesar Marin, and Daniel Pliner. The dancer was Cruz Vazquez Borges. "The enthusiasm and spontaneity of Lee McIver, James Greening, Gai Bryant, Tim Clarkson and Nick Barnard punching out melodies to move to and producing fiery solos is impossible to resist."

*reviewed by Carol Dance*



**Lloyd Swanton** is with **Giorgio Rojas** and **5 others**.

August 5, 2022 · 🧑



I was excited and honoured to be asked by Gai Bryant to produce the debut album of her new Jazz/Latin project, ALLY.

I've worked with Gai for years. I've always felt she was one of Australia's most original jazz composers, and I was delighted to include tunes of hers on Bernie McGann's albums Bundeena, and Blues For Pablo Too, both of which I produced.

But ALLY is a whole different kettle of fish.

In recent years Gai has thrown herself head-first into the world of Afro-Latin music, and puts it all together on Drum Junk with a special emphasis on the wonderful Afro-Peruvian tradition.

The result is a jazz album with the pulsating textures of Giorgio Rojas' percussion mastery absolutely foregrounded.

Added to that you have Gai on alto and soprano saxophones, James Greening on trombone, Daniel Pliner on the piano, young gun Max Alduca on acoustic bass, and Dai Moret on spoken word on three tracks.

I am so delighted with how this album turned out! Such great performances from everyone involved. I hope it really turns some heads.

Do check it out on your favourite platform, via the link below.

