

# UN's Jazz all-stars descend on Australia

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*Image: James Morrison and William Barton; ABC Jazz*

UNESCO and the Herbie Hancock Institute put Australia in the spotlight this week for International Jazz Day, writes Jessica Nicholas from ABC Jazz.

It could almost be the Olympics of jazz, with elite performers from around the world gathering in one place.

Except that International Jazz Day is not about competition; it's about communication and cooperation. The musicians aren't out to dominate, but to participate, share and exchange. And there are no medals on offer.

On Tuesday April 30 in Melbourne, renowned jazz musicians from over a dozen countries came together for the All-Star Global Concert, the centrepiece of this year's [International Jazz Day](#) celebrations. UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador (and bonafide jazz icon) **Herbie Hancock** was among them, as performer and speaker, and was equally compelling in both roles.

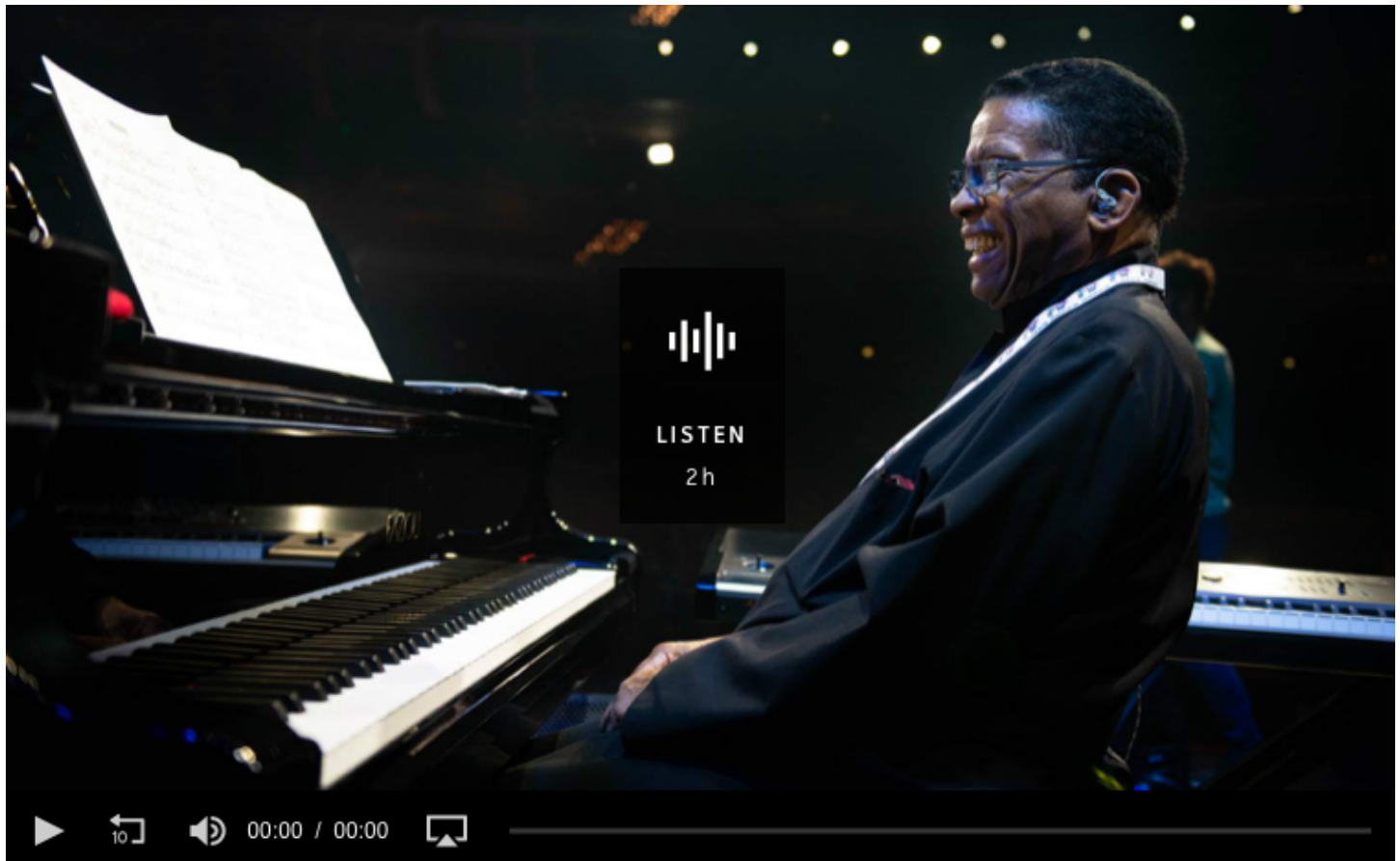


Image:

Herbie Hancock; ABC Jazz

It was Hancock who initiated International Jazz Day in 2011 — under the auspices of UNESCO — as a way of highlighting the ability of jazz to unite people, encourage intercultural dialogue and promote freedom of expression. In the lead-up to Jazz Day on April 30 each year, concerts, educational programs and community outreach events take place in 195 countries, embracing every continent on the planet — including Antarctica (where earlier this week, a [Facebook video](#) was posted featuring a vibraphone-playing fire lieutenant at a US Antarctic research station).

The culmination of these worldwide activities is an ambitious All-Star Global Concert, held in a different host city each year. Previous venues have included a historic theatre in St. Petersburg, a Byzantine church in Istanbul and the White House in Washington D.C.

This year it was Australia's turn, and — for a few hours, at least — the stage at Melbourne's Hamer Hall became a microcosm of the open-hearted, culturally diverse societies that Jazz Day aims to nurture.



Image:

James Morrison; ABC Jazz

Herbie Hancock and Australian multi-instrumentalist **James Morrison** (the concert's co-artistic directors) arranged more than 30 performers in constantly shifting line-ups, with the focus on collective creativity rather than individual showmanship. Still, it was hard not to marvel at the artistry of 79-year-old Hancock as he took a solo on *Mercy Street*, or the soul-drenched vocals of **Somi** as she soared over a dazzling 14-piece band (led by musical director **John Beasley**).

Morrison featured on trumpet in two of the night's most striking numbers: a mesmerising *Welcome to Country* with didgeridoo player **William Barton** (pictured above), and the Persian-inspired *Melody in Esfahan*, teaming Morrison with musicians from Iran, India, China, Australia and the US. He also addressed the world-wide audience (below).

After a few final, potent words from Hancock, who urged the audience to "*put [their] heads, hearts and energy together, and join forces to ensure the health and wellbeing of the world,*" the entire cast squeezed onto the stage for a poignant rendition of **John Lennon's** *Imagine*. The audience joined in "as one", reflecting the spirit of optimism radiating from the stage, and confirming that the Jazz Day message had well and truly made its mark on Australia.

**Watch the International Jazz Day Global Concert on ABC TV and iView, Sunday May 5 at 4:30pm.**

