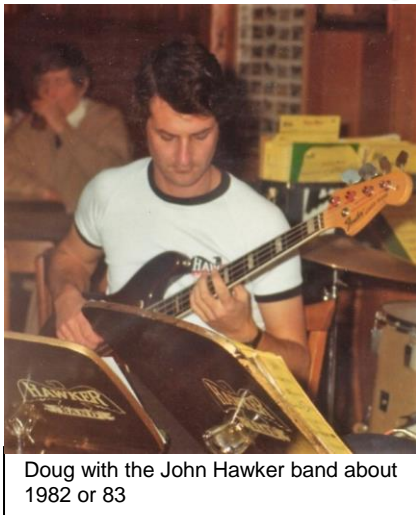


## Getting to Know... Doug Kuhn - Bass Player



Doug with the John Hawker band about 1982 or 83

### Doug's Musical Memories

My first exposure to jazz was at about age 3-4 when my parents visited friends. They had an upright piano and I still remember being enthralled watching and hearing my god-father play in the style of Fats Waller, Teddy Wilson and Erroll Garner. He had a great record collection too and I would be listening while he and my father discussed the merits of the new hi-fi system (or whatever it was called in the mid-50's).

By the early 60's I was a big Red Onions fan. The first jazz LP I bought was by the Red Onions and they had a weekly gig near to where my family lived so I was allowed to ride my bike up to the Oakleigh RSL and listen outside as long as I was home by 9pm.

Then in the mid-60's pop music just seemed to arrive – The Beatles and all those other bands – and almost every friend at school was learning guitar. Bands formed and all needed a bass guitarist. I liked the bass sound so bought a cheap second-hand bass and got started. One guitarist friend offered to show me the notes if I helped him convert an old radio into a guitar amp and I was happy to oblige. One school band wasn't too bad and it included an alto sax player. We did a short set at the school dance and two performances on 3UZ Radio Auditions where we played **Midnight in Moscow** (a big hit for Kenny Ball at the time) and Dave Brubeck's **Take Five**. So I was playing jazz almost from the beginning.

In the early 70's a guitar-playing friend from school took me down to the Musicians Union where they ran a workshop big band. We sat on the sidelines for a few months just watching the charts as others played but eventually got to participate. One gig I did with this band was at the Myer Music Bowl on a fine Sunday afternoon. Around this time I started playing in amateur musical productions but continued to play with a number of pop groups that never went anywhere. One memorable one was **TRAMM** that comprised 3 male and 3 female vocalists, trumpet, sax, trombone and a rhythm section. This line-up needed arrangements so I started to write a few. **TRAMM** got a lot of well-paid corporate gigs but the best one of all was a Moomba concert on an outdoor stage in the city on the corner of Elizabeth and Bourke that faced north up Elizabeth and east up Bourke. We played a set of our own material then backed Marcia Hines and Normie Rowe (who were King and Queen of pop that year) to a crowd of more than 50,000 and televised live. These city streets were closed to traffic and there were people as far as I could see in all directions from a stage at least 10m above street level.



1972 Working with vocalist Patsy O'Neill

I saw a very small ad in 1975 in a local newspaper "Jazz guitar lessons – ring Bruce Clarke" so I did. I asked him if he could recommend someone to teach jazz bass. He took me on, taught me a lot and also got me a lot of gigs. One of these was with the MSO at the Melbourne Town Hall under conductor Iwaki. Another was with a big band led by drummer Max Causen which worked regularly including a monthly gig at The Bentleigh Club. One gig we had was as support band for the Duke Ellington Orchestra at Dallas Brooks Hall. This band also in need of some new fresh arrangements so I picked up the pen again. I asked Bruce Clarke if he could help me with arranging but he referred me to John Hawker which proved very fruitful.

One Friday night John Hawker called me – "my bass play hasn't turned up at our gig, can you get here?" He had never seen or heard me play bass. I filled in and it must have been ok as has asked me to leave my gear set up and do it again the next night. The following week I joined the Hawker band and worked 5-6 nights a week for about three years backing a wide range of floor-shows from interstate and overseas.



With Anita Harris at the Bentleigh Club, 2018

Late 80's I started travelling overseas a lot for my day job with Telecom/Telstra so music took a back seat for a few years – I even sold all my equipment including my cherished Fender Jazz Bass. Then I bumped into an old musical acquaintance who encouraged me back into playing bass. I didn't want to go back to bass guitar so bought the double bass in 1991. I had met Barry Buckley (bass player with Bob Sedergreen and Brian Brown) a few times on gigs and he just happened to come into the shop when I was trying out basses. He helped me chose the right one, showed me how to fit it into a sedan car and got me started with the basics. It's the one I still use.

It took a while to get back into the music scene – a lot of players I worked with in the 80's had either stopped playing, moved away from Melbourne or departed this world. It was really only when I retired from Telstra that I started to play regular gigs. Now I've discovered the jazz festival scene and have developed a whole new group of musical associates. The ShowBiz Club is a valuable networking opportunity and has led me to joining the Groovin' Easy Orchestra.

One highlight of my musical career was at a recent Australian Jazz Convention in Ballarat. After playing a set with a few other ShowBiz members I was tapped on the shoulder and asked to play with another band later that night. It turned out to be a few of the surviving Red Onions! So after first hearing and enjoying them 45 years earlier I finally got to meet and play with them. The first tune called was **Diga Diga Doo** (Jimmy McHugh & Dorothy Fields 1928) and I had never played it or even heard any band play it except the Onions. No chords on my phone either so I relied totally on my musical memories of listening to it repeatedly in 1962.