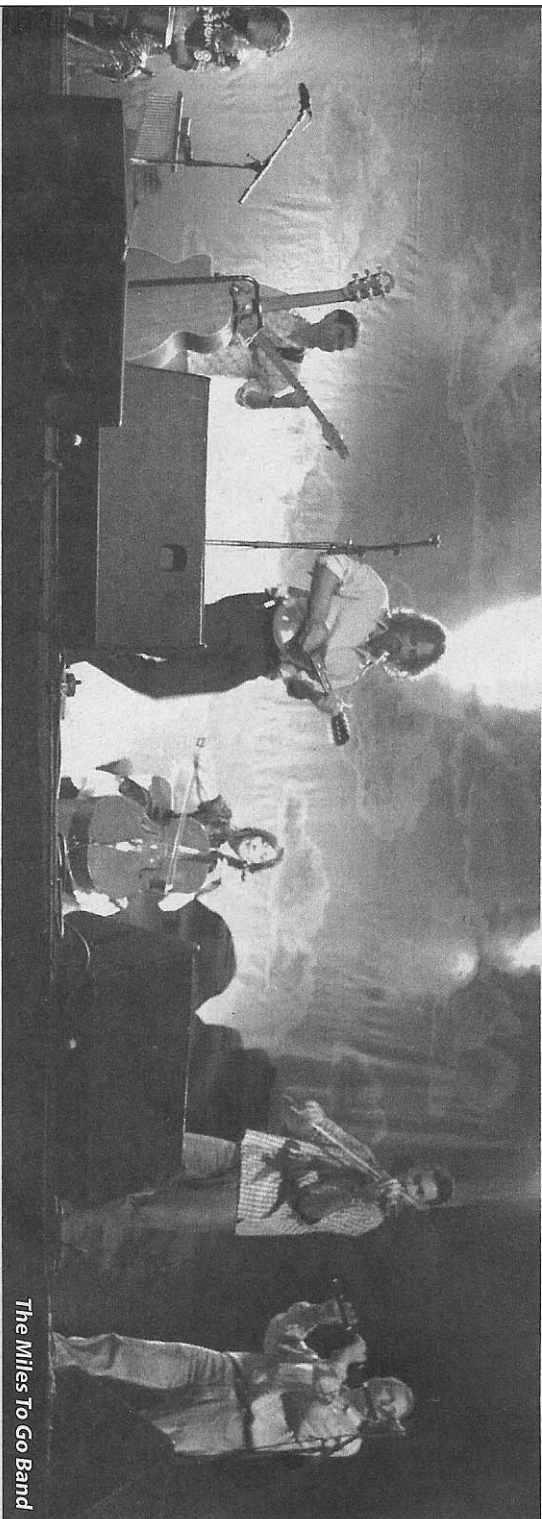


MILES TO GO The Road Less Travelled

David Hyams & The Miles To Go band celebrate 10 years together this Friday, November 6, at Kulcha with support from The Lonely Brothers. BOB GORDON reports.



The Miles To Go Band

Back in 1999, David Hyams decided he wanted to do something different.

Hed played rock and pop music and touched on a well-received folk formula as part of his work in the acclaimed outfit, Devils On Horseback. He had a bunch of instrumental material "lying around," but wanted to do unlike anything else he was doing at the time, or had done before.

"My vision was really just to create an album of beautiful melodies, supported by lush instrumentation, with a lot of textures and layers, where every note had its place," he recalls. "It wasn't something I thought I'd be playing live and so I approached it having the freedom to record whatever I thought would best suit each piece. A lot of pieces were based around fingerstyle guitar, which I had noodled with for a few years but was really still a novice.

"I'd been listening to players of Celtic styles, who were emulating the sound of fiddle and bagpipes in their use of ornamentation on the guitar. Around that time I'd also been travelling in Ireland and Scotland, playing as much as I could with traditional musicians and really trying to immerse myself in that music. That and my travels in the Pilbara and Kimberley had led me to develop

a number of pieces which all seemed to come together with a broadly 'Celtic' treatment, though I didn't want to make just a Celtic album - it was important for the album to have an 'Australian-ness' about it, to capture that feel and the space of the Australian landscape that had inspired much of the music."

When it came to launching the *Miles To Go* album, the free-ranging music required a core eight-piece band (though at one time 11 were on stage) to evoke Hyams' direction. What he didn't know is that it was just the start.

"The first time it really crossed my mind that a band of this size, playing almost entirely instrumental music, might have any sort of life post the album launch, was when Steve Barnes (*artistic director of Fairbridge Festival*) approached me afterwards to say he'd be very interested in booking us for the next festival. Everyone seemed to be pretty keen to perform again, which gave me the motivation to go out there and find out what sort of opportunities existed."

The Miles To Go band was on its way, eventually releasing a second album, *Knowing The Place*, in 2007. Over the years quite a few members have passed through, having come from a diversity of musical and cultural backgrounds, that have all

left their mark on the outfit. Shades of jazz, funk and some Latin and African rhythms slinked into the folksome mix.

"With the melody instrument players, we've had some excellent background - including very strong traditional background - including our front line for the first six years of Dougal Adams and Ormonde Waters, who were players of wind instruments like flute, concertina and bagpipes - so even though what was going on underneath was really different the way the melodies were being played was very true to the source traditions. Then we'd have some little quirky touches, like Andy Copeman's didgeridoo or Nola Formentini's trombone."

While Hyams is the core of the Miles To Go Band, the evolution of the outfit has also centred on his openness to the creativity of all members, allowing compositions to evolve and new material to be drafted in.

"We've started to bring more songs into the line up, so we're less of an instrumental act," he says. "At first the songs were from Andy Copeman, as I'd felt his material really suited the lineup, along with some traditional ones that we'd played around with and put our own stamp on. "It wasn't until three years ago after I'd

had a revival in my lyric writing and was coming up with songs that I felt would suit, that we started to try them out. The trio line up had also emerged around that time, to do some smaller festivals and tours - and this was a great way to ease the songs into the lineup and try them out before they became part of the full band's set. The trio has also taken on a bit of a life of its own, as well."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Miles To Go has become hugely popular at the myriad of folk and roots festivals around the country.

"I think it's partly the unusual mix of instruments and styles," Hyams says of the band's festival successes. "We don't fit into the traditional category but we still have strong Celtic influences, as well as touches of blues and country. A lot of the stories we tell are Australian stories inspired by places that seem to have meaning or relevance for audiences we play to - we get folks coming up and telling us that listening to a piece took them back to the time when they were at such and such a place, that had really touched them. "Festivals are our bread and butter really - we've become very used to playing to listening audiences and so we mostly don't play in pubs. I think there are a lot of festival-goers that are very open to new musical experiences and the combination of styles and players does seem to have found some appeal."

As well as recording a third album embracing new styles (including the hip hop styles embraced in his songwriting/recording workshops in WA jails), Hyams would like to see Miles To Go do some overseas touring in the next couple of years, with an invitation already extended to the *International Folk Alliance* in Memphis in February. Either way, the 10 year anniversary of Miles To Go is a proud achievement.

"It's pretty satisfying to reach a milestone like that, especially for a band that I put together and have driven for all of that time," he says. "I've been in a fair few lineups now and none of them have been going concerns for anything like that long, so you do look at it and think that it really is special to have arrived at this point."

"It's a bit strange as well to look back and think how this had never been part of the plan - it was just a little album project and I didn't give it much more thought than that at the time. Now it's pretty much the major musical force in my life."