

# Julien Wilson Quartet review: Pushing the horizons back



By [John Shand](#)

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**JULIEN WILSON QUARTET**

**Springwood Presbyterian Hall, September 6**

★★★★

Musicians are like children. Some of their cries come from the heart and some are merely for attention. Julien Wilson's only cry is the polar opposite of grandstanding. You hear it instantly; instantly feel the connection of a warmth of spirit reaching out.



The Julien Wilson Quartet digs deep across the jazz gamut. *Credit: Peter Karp*

Wilson's importance in the pantheon of Australian music continues to grow. This is not just due to his stature as an improvising saxophonist or a composer (although either would be reason enough). It's partly due to his keen sense of being heir to such Australian pioneers as Mark Simmonds, Bernie McGann and Allan Browne. It is also due to his Browne-like idiomatic openness, so the playground is the whole gamut of jazz, from its earliest New Orleans roots to the golden tenor saxophone era of Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster; from bebop to free jazz and jazz inflected with rock, funk and diverse music from around the globe.

This quartet can dig deep anywhere across that gamut. Guitarist Craig Fermanis can bring older, more conventional idioms to life with complete conviction and consummate use of dynamics, and then, on *Weeping Willow*, craft a spitting solo that it was like looking at the blues through a dissonant kaleidoscope. Electric bassist Christopher Hale and drummer Hugh Harvey apply a similar breadth of knowledge, influences and imagination, with one of this generous concert's highlights being Harvey's fluttering brushes-solo of sighs and whispers on *I Believe This Belongs to You*.

However diverse the material, the common core was the warmth and majesty of Wilson's sound, especially on tenor. What is potentially quite a boisterous band adroitly adjusted itself to this revamped venue's acoustics, allowing ample scope to absorb his sound more or less acoustically, although one aspect of this project is his sporadic incorporation of such digital effects as a harmoniser and delay, used with typical acuity.

Then again, if I made such lavish sound on a saxophone – whether soothing, rapturous or ferociously bruising – I should be content to revel in all its organic glory.