

Happy Hunters with a sound to die for

STEVE HUNTER GROUP
Reviewed by John Shand

Side On Cafe, September 20

The evidence shouts at you like a bloody knife at a crime scene: Miraculous Music Currently Being Made in Sydney. But, because it lacks the steam-rolling marketing overdrive of Opera Australia or Kylie Minogue, many people are deaf to it.

The Steve Hunter Group is one of several bands to offer this dare-I-say "world-class" level of creativity. Its music reflects the sum of the parts that is Hunter - virtuoso bass guitarist, imaginative composer, astute band-leader

- as well as being blessed with the scope to balloon out of his personal musical world thanks to the input of all involved.

In many ways this is the real art of composition in jazz: the composition of the band rather than of the pieces. Miles Davis and Duke Ellington were masters of this art, and Hunter has as good a handle on it as anyone in town. There is no purpose in attracting such gifted collaborators as Phil Slater (trumpet), Carl Dewhurst (guitar), Matt McMahon (piano) and Nick McBride (drums) and then corralling them into playing only your way. Hunter has written music which specifically encour-

ages them to play their way, and what a way it is: by turns fiery, soulful and crystalline, all captured to startling effect on the recently released *Local World* (ABC). It is remarkably open-ended music being played highly cohesively, which is getting close to a reasonable definition of jazz.

Immeasurably aiding that cohesion is Hunter's conception on the bass and, above all, his sound, which boasts not only sumptuous fullness, but also such clarity that, in filling the bottom of the sonic spectrum, it never smothers the lower reaches of the drums, piano or guitar.

Highlights included Hunter massaging us with a glorious solo

improvisation and Slater scorching across the rollicking *Kiss the Rain*, akin to a helicopter gunship blasting a village wedding celebration. The concluding vamps were universally a treat: the rhythm section supple, the soloists conversing freely, whether in spirited or in poignant mood.

Hunter readily acknowledges his influences - Davis, Weather Report and Chick Corea, among them - but what has changed with this band and the new repertoire is that those influences are now utterly sublimated. Forget the ugly "f" word: the only fusion going on here was that of five musical spirits.