



Pottering around with sound of 10



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There is not much music written for the tentet these days — or any other day. The combination of 10 musicians has always seemed an odd one. We're familiar with the quintet, the septet, the octet — and even Miles Davis' experiments with nine musicians, the noctet.

If you prefer another kind of collective noun, then the tentet could be called a big band. So what is the difference, I ask jazz composer and saxophonist Chris Potter in a phone call to his New York apartment as he prepares to come to the Perth International Arts Festival?

Potter sounds bemused by the question and confesses he doesn't really know.

"All I know is that I wanted to create music for a set of instruments," says the softly spoken saxophonist. "I wanted to give myself a wider tonal palette than is possible with the jazz quartet format. It is a way of exploring compositional themes more fully and exploiting different sounds."

The result of Potter's musical exploration is his recently released album, *Song for Anyone*, which will be performed at his Festival concert.

It will feature Potter on saxophone with his small-group rhythm section — Adam Rogers on guitar, Nate Smith on drums and Scott Colley on acoustic bass.

Filling out the tentet combination will be six Australian musicians, most of them drawn from the ranks of Perth's classical and jazz scene. The score requires the services of the violin, (Paul Wright) clarinet (Adrian Cunningham), bassoon (Peter Moore), flute (Dale Barlow), viola (Kathy Potter) and cello (Zoe Knighton).

The 10 are rehearsing this week in Perth before Potter's *Song for Anyone* gets its Festival hearing — only the second time the work will have been performed in public after its New York premiere.

"The only local musician I'm familiar with is Dale Barlow, who will be playing flute for me," says Potter. "I happen to know Dale and when we were both playing in the Vanguard club in New York recently, he told me he would be in the band in Perth."

Song for Anyone might more accurately be described as an orchestral jazz suite, though Potter prefers to call it a collection of songs that explore a



number of themes, with room allowed for jazz improvisation.

"There is no over-arching theme like a symphony," he says. "I've brought together a collection of tunes that work well together but there is enough variety so that the listener can experience all kinds of moods. There's a little bit of everything — some free jazz, some pretty parts."

When he is not bringing together 10 musicians, Potter spends most of his time touring the world with his Underground quartet — a harder-edged jazz ensemble with funk and groove sounds.

"We'll be performing some of the music from the Underground combination in the first part of the concert," says Potter, who released an album of quartet music, called *Follow the Red Line*, simultaneously with *Song for Anyone*.

The 36-year-old Potter, who has been called the finest saxophonist of his generation, grew up in Columbia, the capital of the southern state of South Carolina. By the age of 13, he was playing gigs around his home town with local musicians, beginning to store up the influences that range from Charlie Parker to John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins.

"I was exposed to a musical culture that was very rich in all kind of influences," he says. "As a kid I was playing in a lot of different styles, whether it was gospel gigs in churches or hard bop in clubs. We could be a little more adventurous in our playing, and I guess I've carried that aesthetic of variety and diversity into my career."

At the age of 18, Potter studied jazz in New York, which he has now made his home. "I've got an apartment in Harlem but there is a lot of travelling to be done. When we play at the Festival, we will be in the middle of a European tour, so we'll be interrupting that tour to come to Perth."

Chris Potter performs at the Concert Hall on Saturday.