

NEVER underestimate the power of country hospitality. James Morrison was so impressed by the enthusiastic welcome of Mt Gambier's locals when he first played there in the 1980s that he's now moved in – permanently.

The world-renowned jazz virtuoso has touched down in the Blue Lake city, private plane and all, and he's planning a trumpet fanfare for next week's opening of his tertiary music school dedicated to jazz.

It's a year-round band camp with all the bells and whistles – a landmark heritage building, a high-profile American artist-in-residence, and special guests jetting in from around the globe.

The James Morrison Academy of Music, affiliated with the University of South Australia, has already lured 50 students from around the nation for its opening semester, with that figure expected to triple in the next few years.

As head of school, James Morrison is the headline act in every sense of the word, juggling interstate and international performance commitments to bring his biggest dream to life. "My goal is to be at the academy every week – I plan to surprise them by coming in, trumpet blaring, and joining the jam," he says.

Midway between Melbourne and Adelaide in the state's South-East, Mt Gambier is a fair hike from anywhere when it comes to keeping up appearances. However Morrison and his family say they are amazed by the location.

They have swapped life on Sydney's



JAZZING *up the*

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Mt Gambier is ready to blow its own trumpet now that world-famous musician James Morrison has moved in with his university of jazz

North Shore for somewhat smaller digs on the volcanic slopes of South Australia's largest regional city, and they're loving it.

"We have bought three houses – one for us, one for my mother-in-law and one to accommodate visiting artists – and while a lot of people imagine we will be giving up a lot, the only thing we can think of ... is a whole lot of traffic and a lot of wasted time in transit," Morrison says. "You don't spend most of your day getting where you want to be, as you are already there."

"Even though we're really busy, the thing (wife) Judi and I comment on every time we come to town is how relaxing it is – it's just easier and nicer living in a city like Mt Gambier rather than a metropolis like Sydney; we love it here."

The couple's sons Harry, 17, and William, 19, had their own country dress rehearsal last year, when they spent 12 months completing their Diploma of Music through Mt Gambier's Tenison Woods College under the academy's new director of studies, Graeme Lyall.

"They rented a house and they loved it," Morrison says. "They've actually just been in New York, and they both said they couldn't wait to get back to the Mount. I love the fact that someone is in New York and can't wait to get back to the Mount."

Yes, he's even adopted the local lingo. And fair enough, because Mt Gambier adopted James Morrison long ago. He and his musician brother, John Morrison, first visited in the late 1980s, when they were invited to take part in a new concept called Generations in Jazz.

"We came and played with what was then a very small, nice gathering of people who like jazz," he says. "They seemed very passionate about music and told us they wanted to grow the concept a bit and perhaps introduce a scholarship for students."

In a single weekend, they won Morrison over. "I've had all sorts of offers from all over the place but you can't do them all, and the people of Mt Gambier were so passionate and proactive," he says. "I teach

and do things around the world, but I wanted a base where I could donate my time and do something special, and Mt Gambier was it, because of those people."

Fast-forward almost three decades and Generations in Jazz has reached extraordinary proportions – this year's festival from May 1-3 will attract up to 3700 of Australia's most talented musicians, along with international artists. High school and tertiary students from nearly 100 schools around the nation will compete in the Stage Band Awards inside a 5000-seat big-top pavilion set up in the middle of a paddock, while individuals will vie for one of Morrison's highly coveted scholarships.

"I think I have missed one year of Generations in Jazz in nearly 30 years; I wouldn't miss it just for the chance to hear what's going on," he says. "There is an amazing amount of talent – great young players in this country – and so many of them are here on this weekend."

Now, 50 are here to stay, after successfully auditioning to become the

inaugural students of the James Morrison Academy of Music @ UniSA. Premier Jay Weatherill will travel to Mt Gambier on Tuesday to officially open the state's newest educational facility.

"I predict that this will place Mt Gambier on the national stage as Australia's jazz capital – just in the same way that Tamworth is known as the nation's home of country music," Mr Weatherill says.

The State Government contributed \$500,000 towards the set-up costs, with the Morrisons matching it dollar for dollar. The Mt Gambier City Council has also been supportive. It supplied expert staff during the set-up, and has given the academy the best seat in the house – the town hall complex in the heart of the main street.

"It made perfect sense, and we were very fortunate that the existing tenants agreed to move out because they could see the benefits to the city," Mayor Andrew Lee says. "I think it's a sign of the times that we need to take a key leadership role to find avenues to boost our economy and craft our own future beyond traditional avenues, and we have grasped this opportunity to help build and develop an internationally-recognised cultural hub."



TOOT SWEET

THE James Morrison Academy of Music @UniSA is in Mt Gambier's Old Town Hall complex on Commercial St.

It offers a full-time, one-year Diploma Course and a two-year Associate Degree accredited by the University of South Australia, with plans to offer a full three-year Bachelor of Music degree next year.

Students receive daily hands-on experience and tutelage from a variety of professional musicians and international guest artists during a 13-week semester and a 14-week semester.

Up to 50 students have enrolled for this year, and a majority of them are aged 18-21.

Enrolments are projected to grow to 140 by 2017, and inquiries have been received from musicians in the US, UK, South Africa, Switzerland and Germany.

The academy has helped all current students to secure fully-furnished rental accommodation in Mt Gambier.

The Old Town Hall, Commercial St,
Mt Gambier, SA 5290
jamesmorrisonacademy.com

When Clayton was the same age as most of the academy students, he was touring the world with Stevie Wonder. He has also collaborated with Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Frank Sinatra. Earlier this month, he performed with Morrison at the Newport Beach Jazz Festival in California, and Mt Gambier was the biggest topic of conversation backstage. "The talk was all about the Academy and 'Jeff Clayton is going where?'," Morrison grins.

Meanwhile, Australian trumpeter Mat Jodrell is giving up his prestigious faculty position at New York's Juilliard School of Music to become one of the academy's core lecturers, while director of studies, Graeme Lyall, has been another huge drawcard.

"Graeme is not only one of the best but one of the most loved educators I have ever met; students all over the world who have studied with him sing his praises and say that he helped them discover jazz," Morrison says.

Morrison, now 51, plays trumpet, piano, all the brass, saxophones and double bass. He was a child prodigy starting on piano at six, moving to brass at seven, forming his first band at nine, and playing in nightclubs professionally at 13.

His musical network is impressive, and a star-studded procession of overseas artists will fly in for mentoring sessions.

"When I've got international guests coming through to perform in Australia, they will always come to the academy to teach the students – I think it's vital that they don't just study with the same people no matter how good they are, because jazz is very personal, and there's many different

Mount

Lee describes the academy as "the most positive thing to happen to the city in a long time" and says Morrison has picked the right location. "He travels all around the world, so he knows what opportunities are available, and the fact that he has chosen to set up here doesn't surprise us at all – our city is the best in my view."

Morrison clearly agrees. "It's got some fantastic restaurants and cafes and it's a beautiful area but the first thing is the people – for me, that has always been the biggest attraction of the place," he says.

"Whenever I meet new people here, it's always the same attitude of 'what can we do to help and how can we make it happen?'"

Now some serious music legends are about to be added to the Mt Gambier social mix; this year's artist-in-residence, alto saxophonist and multi-reed instrumentalist Jeff Clayton, arrived this week from Los Angeles.

"You couldn't ask for better people than Jeff Clayton," Morrison says. "He is a professor at five universities in the US, including UCLA, and has absolutely no reason to leave America to go anywhere, but when we talked about it, he said 'This is the place that I want to teach, I want to be there ... now where is it exactly?'"

perspectives on it," he says. Morrison believes that Mt Gambier's regional setting will offer the best learning environment for students.

"In a big city, there are too many distractions, but if you move away from home, particularly to a place where almost everyone else doing the course is also 'away', then there is an immediate momentum towards forming a 'community'," he explains.

"When class ends for the day, instead of all going their separate ways, the students can hang out together and maintain the jazz atmosphere. It's not that there is nothing else to do – it's that the hippest thing in town is the academy."

An out-of-town associate recently asked Morrison a question he found perplexing: How long do you plan to do this for?

His reply?

"Forever!"

"Judi and I have already hung the honour board for academic excellence inside the building, and we're looking for somewhere to hang the second one, as the first one will only last 50 years," he says.

"When my kids are old men, I expect them to be invited to the graduation ceremony of their dad's academy." ●



MARK DAPIN

NO ESCAPING FAMILY TIES

MY YOUNGER BROTHER is surprisingly ungrateful to me, considering all the things I did for him when we were kids.

For instance, we used to play a game called "Houdini", in which my brother took the role of the famous escape artist and I humbly assumed the part of the forgotten bloke who devised his traps. Any fair-minded reader would agree that an escapologist is only as good as his captor, and I did my best to hone my brother's getaway skills by tying him up and taunting him.

But it wasn't enough for Houdini to escape from a barrel, he had to get out while rolling down the Niagara Falls. We didn't have a waterfall in our yard – though next-door had a fish pond – but there were a couple of bricks, which I used to drop on my brother while he was tied up, in order to improve his motivation to wriggle free.

Memory is a funny thing. Rather than marvel at my ingenuity, and the lengths I would go to help him learn, my brother chooses to focus on the fact that one of the bricks landed on his hand, crushing his thumb, and forcing him to go to hospital to have his (obviously defective) thumbnail removed.

In a similar spirit, I once knocked out his tooth with an apple. This was a salutatory experience for him in many ways. It taught him not only that apples were not always good for his teeth, but also that platitudes cannot be trusted, and an apple a day may not actually keep him out of medical hands.

Of course, we all have expendable teeth when we are young, and no doubt the tooth fairy was especially generous that night. But don't ask my brother: he doesn't remember. He always focuses on the negatives.

For his part, he taught me a lot.

For example, had I been an only child, I might never have realised that my head was harder than a tennis racquet, and that, when hit with

murderous force, my skull was sufficiently robust to break the rim. That was the day he learned he could outrun me. In later years, he held the district 100m record, which was surely a result of my energetic pursuit.

In a similar way, I gleaned from my brother the prevailing exchange rate for my beloved teddy bear, which had been given to me by my dad on the day I was born. He traded it with a boy down the street for a single boiled lolly, leading me to realise the meaning of the phrase "only of sentimental value".

My own children, now six and 10 – about the same ages as me and my brother in our Houdini phase – love to hear the stories of my youth (or perhaps it's just they've got no choice but to listen, since they only have one dad) and they too have resolved to instruct one another on the ways of the world.

For instance, my daughter regularly takes the opportunity to attack my son when his back is turned, thus improving both his defensive strategies and his environmental awareness. It's a bit like watching Clouseau and Cato in the *Pink Panther* movies, except my daughter is more determined.

My son, meanwhile, seems intent on giving his sister an idea of what life is like for an oppressed minority, deriding her colourful customs (such as the Tea Ceremony and the Dance of the Naked Barbie Dolls) shunning her touch, and screaming "I hate you!" with the outraged passion of a man who's just had a brick dropped on his thumb.

When I see my kids fight, it makes me realise everything's OK. These days, an angry word never passes between my brother and me. And, if it did, we wouldn't hear it, because we're both deaf in one ear. I like to think we got all our aggression out of our systems in those early years. One day, my brother will probably thank me for that.

When I finally untie him.



WHAT IS THE **WORST CHILDHOOD PRANK** YOU PULLED ON A SIBLING?

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