

OBITUARY: CHUCK MORGAN 1952-2018

by Bill Haesler OAM*

Guitarist Chuck Morgan, who died on 23 August 2018, was a gentle man and an unassuming musician, widely known to Sydney jazz audiences from the late 1990s for his outstanding playing as a member of trombonist-vocalist Dan Barnett's jazz band, and from 2000 with his longtime partner singer/pianist Janet Seidel's touring and recording group up until her untimely death in August 2017.



Chuck Morgan, snapped in front of a photograph of his late partner Janet Seidel...

Richard [Chuck] Morgan was born in Auckland, New Zealand on 28 June 1952 into a Maori-European musical family, a child prodigy who won TV talent shows and was playing semi-professionally from a very early age. His father, Howard, a multi-talented musician, who served with the NZ Air Force in Japan before Chuck was born, taught him to play ukulele when he was five and guitar the next year. When he was nine Chuck's musical education continued under his uncle John Bradfield, a master guitarist who introduced him to European and South American music, popular songs and the jazz repertoire. Later, his younger brother Howie became a sought-after electric bass player in NZ and Australia who worked with Tommy and Phil Emmanuel.

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After leaving High School Chuck completed an electronics engineering apprenticeship by which time he was also a formidable and renowned professional musician with rare and unique abilities who could play any style of music on guitar and ukulele. He joined the Television New Zealand Orchestra and the Auckland Radio Orchestra and worked on recording dates and concert tours with a variety of NZ and international artists including US musicians William Galison, Bobby Shew and Larry Morgan, blues singer Margie Baker, Mavis Rivers, Eiji Kitamura, Matt Catingub, the Four Aces and Rod McKuen.

With no formal qualifications he quickly learnt to sight-read music fluently and became the first-call studio man for Russ Garcia, a famous US arranger who had moved to NZ in the 1970s. He studied briefly with US jazz musician/educators David Baker, Steve Erquiaga and David Liebman when they visited New Zealand with the Jamie Aebersold Music Clinic in 1980 and, impressed by his musicianship, professor Baker offered Chuck a fully paid scholarship at Indiana University – which he declined as he had a young family with six children. He was also a fine electric bass player and during the 1970s and 1980s played guitar and/or bass on recordings for top NZ jazz musicians and groups including Kim Paterson and Andy Brown.



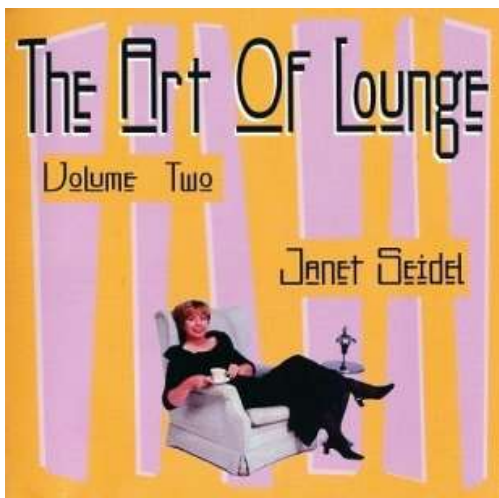
American educator David Baker: he offered Chuck a fully paid scholarship at Indiana University, which Chuck declined as he had a young family with six children...PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Chuck held a popular residency for several years at the Auckland Sheraton six nights a week before moving to Sydney in 1986 where he freelanced, became a music teacher, studied classical guitar and, and in addition to playing with the Dan Barnett and Janet Seidel bands also worked with groups led by Billy Field, Don Rader, Tom Baker, Don Burrows, Paul Furniss, Bob Barnard, Marie Wilson, Graeme Bell and with visiting US artists. His wonderful sense of time, melody and harmony is why the Janet and David Seidel group played frequently without a drummer.



Morgan (left) pictured with Janet Seidel and David Seidel... PHOTO CREDIT JOHN APPELYARD COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN

His fine guitar playing can be heard on CDs recorded by Marie Wilson (*I Miss The Hungry Years*); Dan Barnett (*The Right Track, Point Of No Return, One For C and Through Her Eyes*) and Vol 2 & 3, *DeLovely, Hooray For Christmas, Moon Of Manakoora, We Get Requests, Charade, Far Away Places* and the new posthumous release *You Are There*).



In late 2018 Chuck went into Concord Hospital for heart surgery but suffered a stroke before the operation. A heart attack followed, then pneumonia and he spent over four months trying to recover in hospital before finally passing away in the palliative ward.

A memorial musical tribute for Chuck's friends, family, fans and fellow musicians was held on Wednesday, 26 September 2018 at Paddington RSL Club attended by about 300 people. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm2s4yKK-VI>

Bill Haesler OAM gratefully thanks David Seidel who kindly provided much of the above information and photographs.