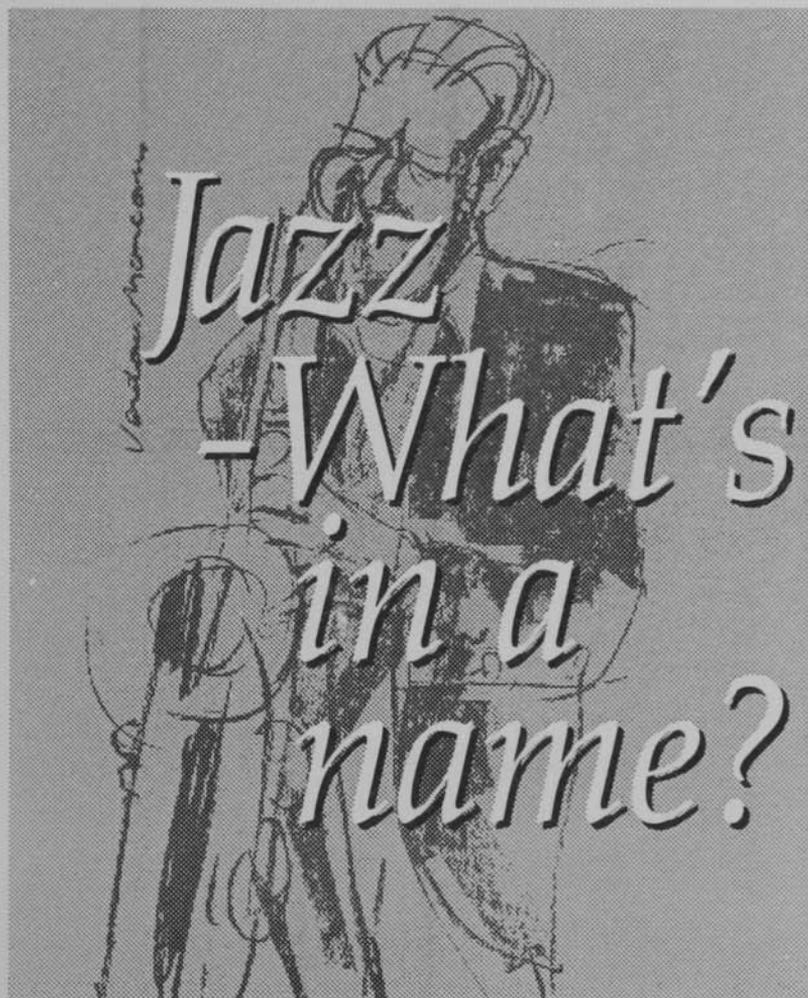


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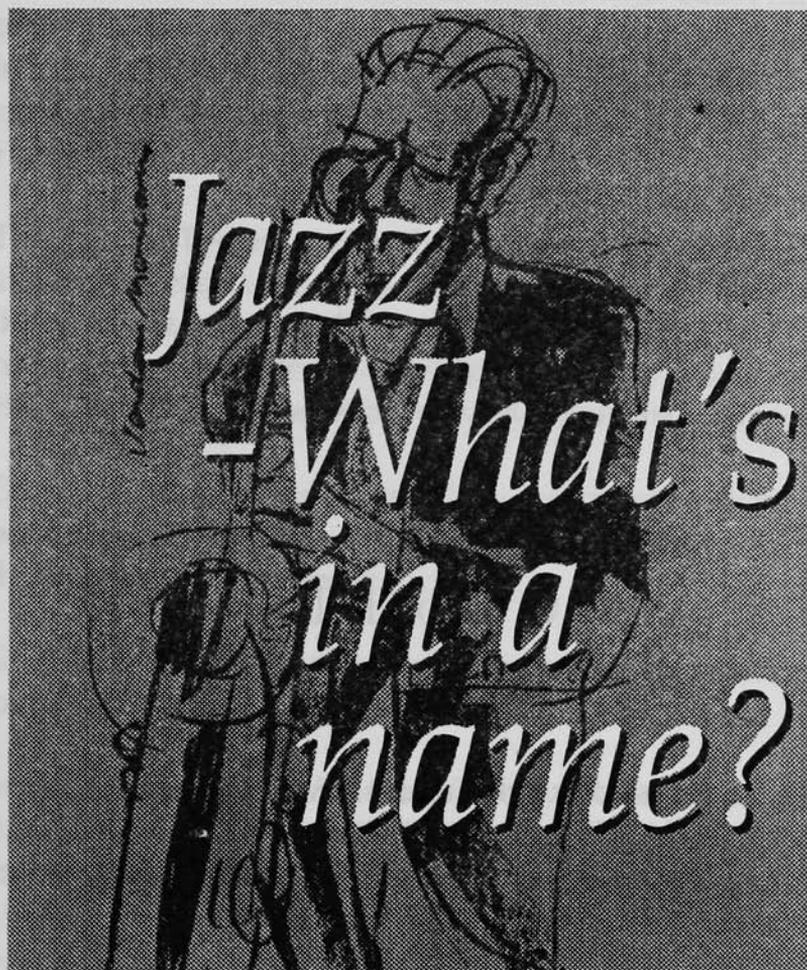
The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 1998



Geoff Bull

Introduction

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The Sixth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture

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Telephone: (02) 9389 1111

Fax: (02) 9369 3306

Introduction

1998 marks the sixth presentation of the Annual Bell Lecture in Jazz held at the Waverley Library. Once again the Doubly Gifted Committee extends thanks to the staff of the Library and to the Waverley Council for making the Exhibition and Lecture possible.

The Bell Lecture in Jazz was initiated by the late Harry Stein and the present Doubly Gifted Committee continues to present this Lecture in association with the Annual Art Exhibition as a tribute to the great Australian jazz musician Graeme Bell and to the memory of Harry Stein.

This year the Lecture is given by Geoffrey Bull who is well-known and highly respected both in Australia and abroad. Geoff was introduced to jazz in the late 1950s and he has remained consistently faithful to the New Orleans style of jazz since that time. His Olympia Jazz Band, formed in 1962, remains active today.

Geoff Bull brings to his lecture a long association with jazz and his personal experience as a performer and band leader throughout Australia and the world.

Geoff Bull will be introduced by Kevin Jones, jazz broadcaster and journalist.

In association with the lecture, Waverley Library's loan collection of jazz CD's, which was acquired with the assistance of the jazz community, and in particular Bill Haesler, will also be launched.

Kate Dunbar

Co-Convenor

Doubly Gifted Committee



Geoff Bull

Geoff Bull was introduced to jazz records in the late 1950's. He began trumpet and attended Sydney Jazz Club workshops in 1959, forming his first Olympia Jazz Band in 1962 with Geoff Holden, Peter Neubauer, Dick Edser and others. They played jazz club functions at the Brooklyn and Orient Hotels. He toured England and New Orleans 1966-67, recording with Alton Purnell, Barry Martin, and Cap'n John Hardy.

His desire to hear the music first hand resulted in many trips to New Orleans where he made lifelong friends amongst the musicians who welcomed him. Geoff was personally responsible for several tours enjoyed by Australian lovers of jazz; tours made by some of the great and prominent musicians such as Alton Purnell, Topsy Chapman, Chester Zardis and a number of others who dominated the New Orleans.



Graeme Bell

The Doubly Gifted Committee and Waverley Library have named this lecture series on jazz, the Bell Jazz Lectures, in honour of Graeme Bell's outstanding contribution to jazz in Australia and abroad over the last fifty years. He is an outstanding pianist, excellent band leader and composer of note. Graeme is also a talented artist who has exhibited in the Doubly Gifted exhibitions of visual art works by jazz musicians, as well as contributing to other exhibitions.

I would like to thank you all for being here today and for your interest in this annual event. I am honored to have been chosen to deliver this lecture, as I am to have had a long association with Graeme Bell both musically and personally. He continues to give longevity a good name and is an example to all of us. I hope my chosen topic strikes a chord with him and I am sure he has been asked this question.

What do you do?

I'm a Musician.

What sort of music do you play?

Jazz.

Oh! (followed by a querulous look)

I, along with Graeme and others here, have been asked that question innumerable times and I always find myself thinking - I wonder what they think I mean by that?

I'm sure if I asked 100 people I would get 100 different answers, including a wide divergence of styles of music that have been lumped together under the one vaguely homogenised label.

How has this come about?

That's what I would like to explore today.

"JAZZ - What's in a name?" is a comment on the journey of a word from it's adoption as the definition of a specific and unique style of music, through a succession of distortions, dilutions and mis-uses up to the present, where over-use and over-generalisation has rendered the word virtually meaningless.

At the outset, I want to make it perfectly clear that there is no suggestion that other styles of music, whether closely related to **JAZZ** or not, are to be regarded as inferior, or indeed superior, simply as different.

Just last month, Madeline Allbright made the observation here in Sydney that the United States was an "Immigrant" country.

For the past 2 hundred years the U.S. has been and continues to be the spawning ground for a number of different and often unique styles of music, all as a result of it's immigrant make-up. These immigrants from all parts of the world brought with them musical traditions and these were modified in various ways to produce the American styles.

The amount of change that occurred to these previous traditions varied, for example, the American Music Hall - Vaudeville (Broadway Musical) was not a lot different to the British Music Hall tradition, whereas music like Bluegrass was a major transformation from it's roots in Irish and Scottish folk music.

There is a major sub-group of these original American forms of music, and that is the group that includes African musical traditions. **JAZZ** is one of these, along with Gospel, Country Blues, Ragtime, Rhythm & Blues, Swing, BeBop, Soul, Motown, Fusion, Funk, Avant Garde, Rap, Hip Hop etc., etc.

In the beginning, these different styles of music tended to develop in specific areas as a result of combinations of historical, geographical and cultural factors and before the advent of mass media technology they remained localised.

The 20th Century changed all that, and with the advent of the telegraph, the telephone, radio, recording, movies and television,

many of these "localised" products became nationalised and internationalised. In most cases this resulted in sweeping changes to the localised product for commercial motives.

JAZZ was not the only one of these musical forms that suffered from commercial exploitation. If you look at what has happened to Country & Western music and even more so to Blues, it is clear that what is served up today has very scant connections with the original product.

We are however, interested here in **JAZZ** and it's fate, so we'll examine that more carefully.

There is little argument these days that **JAZZ** originated in New Orleans and it did so because of the unique circumstances there. I don't want here to go into an exhaustive explanation of the birth and development of **JAZZ**, but a brief explanation will help to set the scene.

The first unique feature of New Orleans was that it was a French, then Spanish, then French again colony before becoming (via the Louisiana Purchase) a part of the United States. The result of the quite different and more liberal Latin temperament was an integral part of the development of the music. Another important factor was the early arrival in the region (via Plantation Slavery) of the African musical traditions.

The more liberal Latin treatment of slavery was evident as early as 1724 when the "Code Noir" allowed for slaves to be granted freedom. This along with a good deal of racial intermixing led to the development of a distinctive social group "Creoles of Colour".

This group attained a level of social and financial respectability that gave them access to formal musical training and this, combined with the African influences, created music which whilst maintaining many of the European traditions, was quite different.

The African slaves, on the other hand, had a very different experience, with quite strict monitoring and censorship of any form of artistic expression. The abolition of slavery gave them that freedom of expression, but the prevailing social and economic conditions were severely limiting.

The line of distinction between the Creoles and Blacks became somewhat blurred after reconstruction and was all but obliterated in 1898 by a constitutional convention in Louisiana that effectively made both groups one largely disenfranchised community. This was, in turn, a pivotal point in the emergence of **JAZZ**, because the two previously separated groups were forced to inter-mingle socially and musically. This gave the Blacks access to musical training, as well as exposing the more legitimised Creoles to a freer improvised approach.

Combine this with the continuing European influences and you have the mixture that led to the development of a very specific and unique style of music that was to become known as **JAZZ**.

What then were the elements that made this music different and indeed unique?

JAZZ is an African interpretation of predominantly European melodies and harmonies performed on European orchestral instruments. The African influences changed the European material so profoundly as to produce a product very different from

either African or European music, though containing definite elements of both. The most noticeable African elements are the use of complex rhythms and the vocalisation of musical sounds.

Perhaps the most radical innovation was the concept of melodic, along with rhythmic collective improvisation. Whereas African drumming had always included rhythmic collective improvisation, here for the first time was the freedom for some or all of the instruments in a band to change their melodic line as well as rhythmic emphasis, in response to something that some other member of the band had just played. The player is thus freed from the restriction of having to play a pre-conceived written part.

All this requires spontaneity. One of the most important concepts in defining this music, is the ability to adjust (or change) what you were about to play in response to the other players and by doing so achieve a more interesting and more exciting outcome.

In the case of the music we are discussing, this "freedom" is not unrestricted. It had to operate within the harmonic and meter restrictions of the composition being performed. Another essential characteristic of this style of music is the presence (or at least recognition) at all times of the melody line of the composition being performed. Improvisations often begin as variations on the melody and develop from there. New Orleans musicians have always referred to the melody line as the "lead" and thus the variations and improvisations take their directions from there. In **JAZZ** bands, the "lead" is most often taken by the trumpet, but can be taken by many of the other instruments and swapped back and forth. In other words, if you walk in during a performance, you should be able to recognise the song being played within a few bars.

There is a definite co-relation between swapping the lead and what has become known as "solos". In many cases it consists of one player taking a more assertive role or "getting into the spotlight" and quite often the other musicians are still playing, but in a more subordinate and supportive role.

So we have a style of music with a great deal of freedom for the individual, but with freedom comes responsibility and that is, each player is required to adapt his own contribution in such a way as to produce a cohesive combined sound. This cohesive collective improvising around a melodic lead is an indispensable characteristic of **JAZZ**. Solo playing on the other hand, whilst common and often effective, is not essential.

The importance of the rhythmic elements cannot be over-emphasised. As mentioned, it is the major African component and results in a strong, propulsive, almost hypnotic beat, designed to create excitement.

Repetition with variation - the concept of "getting in a groove" and increasing the excitement whilst staying in control. This characteristic, whilst absolutely essential to **JAZZ** is not peculiar to **JAZZ** and exists in other types of Afro-American music. All of the African influenced styles have a number of common elements and some have more characteristics in common with the music we are calling **JAZZ** here, but they all have their own unique characteristics and should therefore be differentiated.

There are a few defining developments in the culmination of **JAZZ** that occurred in New Orleans during the late 19th Century that are worth mentioning here. Perhaps the most important is the invention of the Drum Kit. Orchestras up to this time (in the symphonic tradition) consisted of percussion sections with separate

musicians playing the Bass Drum, Snare Drum and Cymbals. The Marching Bands in New Orleans first adopted the practice of attaching a Cymbal to the Bass Drum to be played by the Bass Drummer with his other hand while marching. In the 1890's a New Orleans drummer named DeDe Chandler perceived the idea of playing the Bass Drum with his foot whilst playing the Snare Drum simultaneously with his hands, thus inventing the Drum Kit. This had a profound effect on the development of a more cohesive rhythmic sound that led to what we now call a rhythm section.

Another important development was that of the much more common use of pizzicato on the String Bass. Legend has it that this was the result of one of the early Bass players breaking his bow and having to complete the gig by the use of pizzicato. It's more likely that the extra percussive effect of pizzicato was the natural cause of the reduced use of the bow.

The African instinct to produce a wide range of vocalised sounds led to the use of various devices such as cups, buckets and bottles etc., to alter the sound of notes produced on the Brass instruments and this led to the development of what we now call mutes.

And so, by the early part of the 20th Century a body of musicians in and around New Orleans had evolved a way of playing, not a repertoire of musical compositions, but a way of interpreting a wide variety of musical compositions. It was a localised product and the locals understood it. But what happened when it went on the road?

(It's a bit like vegemite. We're all used to it, but serve it in Paris and all hell breaks loose).

But before we take the music on tour, lets have a look at the origin and connotations of the word itself.

JAZZ - Music and Dance of U.S. Negro origin with characteristic harmony and ragtime rhythm; noisy or grotesque proceedings - discordant loud in colour, rude, burlesque;

JAZZ BAND - of such combinations as Piano, Trumpet, Saxophone, Banjo and Drums.

The impressions of a casual bystander? Unfortunately not. It is, in fact, the definition published in a late 40's edition of the Oxford Dictionary and presumably unchanged from it's first appearance some time earlier. Not off to a very good start are we?

Interestingly, by the 1976 edition, the definition had changed:-

JAZZ - (N) Music of U.S. Negro origin, usually characterised by improvisation, syncopation and regular or forceful rhythm; pretentious talk or behaviour (V) brighten or liven up.

I'm focusing on this, because it is my contention that the early misconception of the true meaning of the word is directly related to the same early misconception of the new style of music that it came to signify.

The first definition is totally derogatory and dismissive. It is also inaccurate and incomplete. It suggests that the music in question is totally lacking in form, discipline, beauty or interest, let alone any artistic endeavour. It also suggests, an inextricable link with unacceptable and immoral behaviour.

The later definition is somewhat less haughty, but hardly complimentary. The one thing that does not change is the total

attribution to Black Americans. It seems that the British academia did not want to admit any European involvement.

These definitions appear to be simply a reflection of the commonly held belief that JAZZ was a dirty word, associated with salacious and promiscuous sexual behaviour, that was endemic to African culture (the same "Black Piston of Africa" that Spike Milligan lampooned some years ago). In fact, some early JAZZ books quoted the word as meaning copulation.

Another contributing factor to the widely held belief that JAZZ represented all things "unwholesome" was also a misconception, albeit based on coincidence. During the germinating period of the music, New Orleans was the only city in the U.S. that had a legally designated "Red Light" district. The argument was that JAZZ was "Born and Bred" in the brothels. In fact, the brothels only ever hired solo Piano players and bands were rarely, if ever employed.

It is true that there were bars in the "District" where small groups performed, but to assume that prostitution had any relation to the development of JAZZ would be wrong. It must be said however, that this whole topic was just a microcosm of a much wider and more generally accepted myth of Black African male sexual prowess that has fueled the race debate for centuries and I suspect still does.

There was yet another factor that influenced the perception of the word and that was prohibition, which as we know, produced precisely the opposite result that it had envisaged. The effect was far more profound later, in the Northern cities, where the music along with all forms of entertainment were unavoidably linked with bootlegging and the Mob.

Ironically though, part of the misconception can probably be traced back to the real meaning of the word. The most plausible and reliable explanation of the origin comes from the author and linguist, Lafcadio Hearn, who carried out studies on African communities in the Southern states of America, including studies in New Orleans of Creole patois, in the late 19th Century. The word is indeed African and was in common use on the Gold Coast of West Africa, precisely the area where many of the slaves bound for the U.S. originated. **JAZZ**, meant to generate energy and excitement, to "heat things up" or "speed things up" and referred to the ritual music and dance that is an integral part of African culture and to their practice of creating self-induced euphoria as part of that ritual. To the African, this was totally natural, wholesome and healthy behaviour. To the 18th and 19th Century European Christian however, this uncivilised, pagan ritual with its often explicit and uninhibited behaviour was immoral and unacceptable. This, of course, did not stop the frequent and incessant "Midnight Creep" to the slave quarters that was carried out by apparently the majority of plantation owners.

Thus we have a word directly related to the differences between racial groups and ripe for abuse and distortion.

It is not known when the word **JAZZ** was first used to describe the music and curiously enough, it seems to have been used by White bands before Black bands. The earliest use I've been able to find, goes back to 1911. In an interview done in the 60's the drummer Monk Hazel remembered a business card he had been given in 1911 for Fischer's Ragtime Military **JAZZ** Band. None of the early Black bands appear to have used the word (perhaps because of its connotations) and it seems to have come into common usage after

the success of the Original Dixieland **JAZZ** Band in 1917. We have said that **JAZZ** was a localised product and had it remained in its own environment, the story would probably have been very different. Before the beginning of the 20th Century, most of the musicians who contributed to the development of the music were not full time musicians and thus did not depend totally on music for survival. New Orleans as a part of the economically depressed South, did not offer great income potential to musicians. By the turn of the Century there was emerging a group of musicians who had no other training and thus depended totally on music. Many of these musicians found full time work on the Riverboats that traveled north on the Mississippi, though it should be noted that the music played on those boats included very little **JAZZ**. Others, who were unable to read, had to supplement their income with very menial labour.

The reason that so many musicians left New Orleans was overwhelmingly economic. There was much more money to be made in the more affluent parts of the country and as early as 1911, The Original Creole Orchestra had embarked on a series of nation wide tours of Vaudeville theatres. By 1917, a number of New Orleans based bands both White and Black had played residencies in New York and Chicago. The music was initially greeted with skepticism and even scorn. Ironically it was the Original Dixieland **JAZZ** Band, the first band outside New Orleans to use the word **JAZZ** in its title that became an overnight success, recorded and started the craze.

The speed with which commercial exploitation seized upon this new fad was alarming and so-called **JAZZ** bands were suddenly appearing everywhere. There are probably a thousand examples of the mis-use and mis-conception of the term in these early years, but two such examples should illustrate the level of distortion that the

music had undergone.

In 1927, the first talking picture was released. The movie "The JAZZ Singer" was the story of a Jewish Cantor's son, rebelling against religious censorship to sing popular music. It could hardly have been further removed from JAZZ. In addition, the first nationally declared "King of JAZZ" was Paul Whiteman, also someone who could hardly have been further removed from JAZZ.

In fact the 20's became known as the "JAZZ Age" more so for the implications of gangsterism, bootlegging and illicit behaviour associated with prohibition, than for the effect of the music.

The process has continued over the years to include not only a variety of styles of music, some similar, some offshoots and some almost entirely unrelated, but also styles of Ballet Dancing, Physical Exercise and more recently Perfume.

The end result is a word so generalised as to have virtually lost any meaning unless qualified.

Now lets look at what happened to the music itself when it was taken out of its localised environment.

The music that came out of New Orleans in its purest form was not well suited to the theatrical demands of the entertainment industry in the north and in fact had a very short life. The spontaneity so important to the style was not well suited to the three minute recording or the lavish night club floor shows. In fact within a very short time most of the New Orleans musicians who settled in the northern cities were making their living in bands that had limited opportunities for playing what we are now calling JAZZ. Even in the recording studios the trend was to larger bands playing written

orchestrations with limited freedom for improvised spontaneity.

King Oliver's Creole JAZZ Band, generally regarded as the pinnacle of the spontaneous improvised style, only lasted a couple of years. Louis Armstrong moved on the Fletcher Henderson's large dance orchestra in New York, while King Oliver himself had to keep up with changing tastes and fronted a large orchestra playing written arrangements. The pattern, in fact, was set very quickly and continued for many years; Professional musicians made their living playing in large Dance or Theatre orchestras and only had the opportunity to play in the freer improvised style after hours, or in small recording groups.

With the growing popularity of Big Bands, music was changing and the increasing use of written arrangements led to the emergence of a quite different style that adopted the name SWING. This music whilst having been influenced particularly rhythmically by JAZZ is a quite different approach to playing.

The increasing popularity of the larger orchestrated bands and conversely the decline in popularity of the smaller improvised bands led to a backlash, which produced a new species "the purist". By the late 30's, JAZZ books such as "Jazzmen" and "Shining Trumpets" were published and purists such as Rudi Blesh argued that real JAZZ was a specific narrowly defined way of playing and any music that did not adhere to those narrow specifications could not be JAZZ and shouldn't be called such. Whilst there may be some merit in the arguments put forward by these academic idealists (none of whom were ever working musicians), the reality was never that simple.

Improvised JAZZ had evolved out of written music and the two have always been able to cohabitate. It is the amount of freedom for improvisation and the amount of written orchestration which

produces the end result.

From the earliest days of recording the time restrictions of 78's required a pre-arranged structure for each performance which could limit the amount of freedom for collective improvisation and so the end result was a mixture of written or learned sections with freely improvised parts in between. Two perfect examples of this are the "Jelly Roll" Morton - Red Hot Peppers and the Armstrong - Hot Five and Seven series of recordings. In these there is a great deal of freedom for collective improvisation, interspersed with short arranged passages.

This is a quite different approach to the larger orchestras like Duke Ellington, Count Basie or Benny Goodman, where a much larger part of the performance consists of written arrangements and any freedom for improvisation is given to solo instruments and includes little or no collective improvisation.

In latter years other styles of music developed, often also having been influenced by **JAZZ**, but quite distinct in their own right. Charlie Parker, Dizzy, Monk and Miles along with many others wanted to get away from previous developments and go in another direction. When they did, I'm sure that they wanted their music differentiated and thus adopted a name for their new music - BEBOP. Many other variations of style have come along since and will continue to do so.

Its interesting that all of these different methods of playing, initially had their own specific titles and it wasn't until sometime later that

they all started to be lumped together under the general heading **JAZZ**.

The point that should be made here is that the situation we find ourselves in today is not helpful to anyone. No one is a winner! I am sure there are people in the audience, and certainly in the wider community, who would be horrified if they thought that the picture conjured up by the answer given to our original question was "Oh! He plays a similar style of music to Johnny Dodds, Wooden Joe Nicholas and the Firehouse Five", as indeed there would be others of us who would be equally horrified if they thought that the picture was "Oh! He plays a similar style of music to Dave Brubeck, Chick Corea and the Firehouse Five".

We can however, start to see some reason for the querulous look. The ambiguity of including such a wide spectrum of musical endeavours under one banner is bound to lead to uncertainty. The problem is deeper, because even if we go to great pains to explain what sort of **JAZZ** we are referring to, the listener often seems none the wiser. The appalling lack of even a rudimentary knowledge of any of the styles involved is a result of 50 years of not only neglect, but of seemingly active antagonism on the part of all areas of the media. I'll leave the examination of the reasons for that and the methods (if any) of changing that reality to a much braver man than me. I simply want to point out its relevance here to our querulous expression.

In the long run, it is the music itself, not the name which makes the real communication, so if we have to spend time painstakingly trying to explain exactly what sort of **JAZZ** we play, then I'm sure we will continue to live with it.

I would like to conclude with an actual example of the level to

which the over generalisation of the word can lead to a breakdown in communication.

In the 70's "Kid" Thomas Valentine, a trumpeter from New Orleans, born in 1896 and active in music since before 1920 was being interviewed in France where he was performing at a JAZZ Festival. The interviewer asked him what he thought of "Free-JAZZ" - He answered emphatically, "No, No, No, shit man! Never play for nothing".

Don't forget.....

**The 7th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture will be
presented by Jack Mitchell,
Australian jazz writer & discographer.
September 1999**

General enquiries or further information
may be obtained from:
The Secretary, Doubly Gifted Committee,
Jeannie Mc Innes, 5 Lodge Avenue,
Old Toongabbie, 2146

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