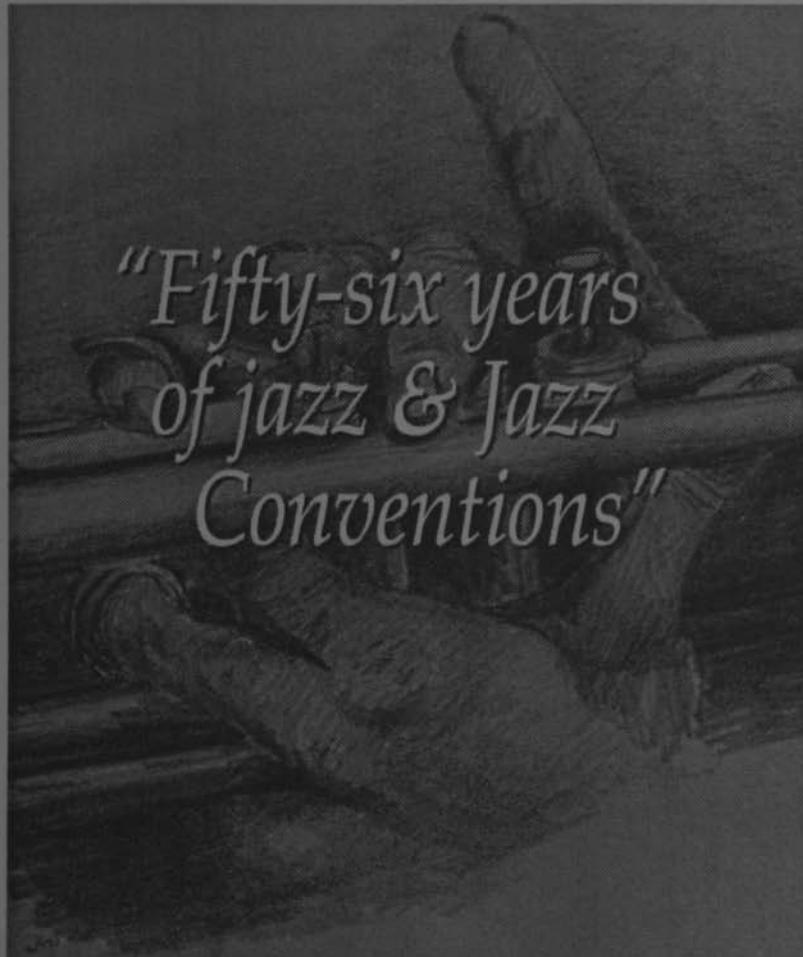


# DOUBLY GIFTED

*The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2002*



*"Fifty-six years  
of jazz & Jazz  
Conventions"*

ILLUSTRATION JIRI KRIEGER

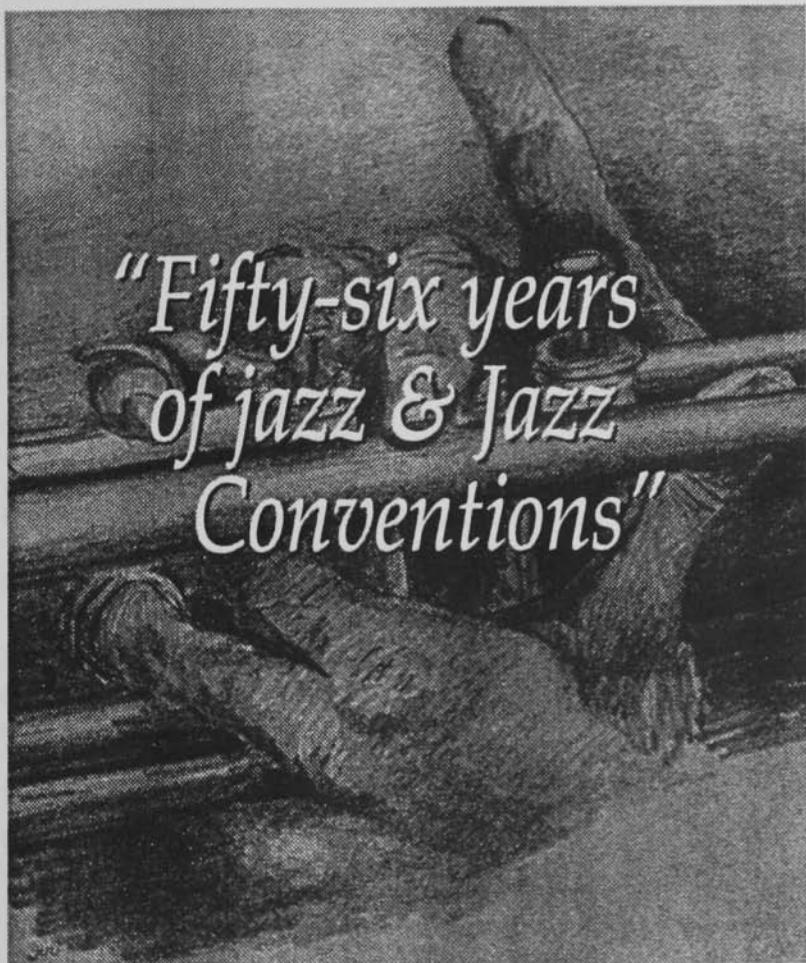
*Bill Haesler*



Introduction

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture Series  
is a joint venture between the Bell Jazz Convention and the Waverley Library.

## *The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2002*



*"Fifty-six years  
of jazz & Jazz  
Conventions"*

ILLUSTRATION JIRI KRIpac

*Bill Haesler*

*The Tenth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture*

*Delivered 14th September, 2002*

*Waverley Library*

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## **Introduction**

The Doubly Gifted Exhibition and the Bell Lecture in Jazz were both initiated by the late Harry Stein, and the Doubly Gifted Committee has continued to present these milestones in Australian jazz history as a tribute to his memory and as a tribute to the great Australian jazz musician, Graeme Bell.

This year marks the eleventh year of the Exhibition and the tenth year of the Lecture, and each year we owe a great debt of thanks to The Waverley Library, The Friends of Waverley Library and to Waverley Council for making these events possible.

We have been fortunate to have had excellent lecturers over the past nine years and once again look forward to continuing this high standard with Bill Haesler, a consistent supporter of Australian jazz and a prominent figure in Australian jazz circles.

Bill Haesler, the 2002 lecturer, was a Co-Founder of the Melbourne Jazz Club, a President of both Melbourne Jazz Club and Sydney Jazz Club, and the inaugural Chairman of the New South Wales Jazz Archive Inc. which he continued to lead for over four years before retiring.

His association with the Australian Jazz Conventions also covers many years, as a Committee Member, President, Vice-President, Program Organising Officer and then as Trustee, a position he currently holds.

From his long association emerges an authority on Australian jazz, an authority on classic and traditional jazz, a broadcaster on 2MBS-FM, band-leader and washboard player.

The Doubly Gifted Committee are especially pleased to have this year such a constant figure on the Australian jazz scene and wonderful supporter of Australian jazz as the 2002 Bell Lecturer.

Kate Dubar  
Co-Convenor  
Doubly Gifted Committee



## Bill Haesler

Bill Haesler (born: Melbourne, 20th April 1931) is a well known Australian jazz authority, jazz record collector, discographer, 2MBS broadcaster, writer, washboard player and occasional record producer, specialising in vintage and classic jazz. He became interested in jazz in 1945, an interest which developed into a life-long passion.



## 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.

## Fifty six years of jazz & Jazz Conventions. Bill Haesler

Mandy, Graeme and fellow jazz lovers. It is an honour to address this, the 10th annual Bell Jazz Lecture. Particularly, as I would not be standing here recalling my fifty-six years of jazz and Jazz Conventions if it had not been for Graeme Bell all those years ago. First, an apology from my wife Jess for her absence. She is in the Mater Hospital recovering from a hip replacement. A pity, for Jess has shared fifty of those fifty-six years in jazz.

No one envisaged in 1946, when the first Australian Jazz Convention was being planned, that it would survive more than a few years. In fact, research reveals that it was intended as a one off event, a post-World War II reunion and jam session for jazz musicians from all over Australia. The success of the first Convention demanded a second, then a third, after which the annual late-December celebration was taken for granted. By then the pioneers were encouraging younger musicians and enthusiasts to take over, in the knowledge that it would be in good hands. And so it has been ever since. There were fears at one time that the annual get-together could be taken over by modern groups, but these were unfounded, because of the unique bond between traditional-jazz lovers and their music. Something most other musical disciplines do not have.

Research into the origin of first Convention reveals differing opinions. Graeme Bell, in notes to the first Convention programme, says that Ade Monsborough suggested it in about 1944. Others recall that it went back to 1942. Credit has also been given to C. Ian Turner, Lionel Davies, Dave Dallwitz, Graeme Bell and Harry Stein. Certainly the last four were instrumental in getting it up and running, with assistance from members of the Melbourne jazz circle and (through Harry Stein's association with the Eureka Youth movement) the Australian Communist Party. Direct links with the Party have never been proven and the connection appears to be the use of the Eureka Hall in North Melbourne for the Friday night Uptown Jazz Club run by the Bell band. The logical venue for a Jazz Convention. The League was certainly instrumental in helping the Graeme Bell Band make its first European tour. By August 1948, when they returned, all League connections with Melbourne jazz had been severed.

Australia's First Jazz Convention (as it was billed), from 26th to the 30th December 1946, was a low-key affair, put together by an informal, mainly anonymous committee with a two-page programme included in a special issue of the Angry Penguin Broadsheet, devoted entirely to jazz.

The Convention was an impromptu affair with reports given by Dave Dallwitz, Graeme Bell and Harry Stein, a recital by the Southern Jazz Group from Adelaide, several all-in jam sessions, a New Orleans Riverboat Trip, a record recital and a public concert.

Of the fifty-six Jazz Conventions, I have been to forty-four. My jazz life started in 1946, the year of the first Convention and I am still involved as a Convention trustee.

Gavin Souter, the Sydney journalist-historian, once asked why I had not written a book. My reply was that he had covered my younger days in Williamstown and West Preston, Melbourne in his 1972 book *The Idle Hill Of Summer - An Australian Childhood 1939-1945* and that Dick Hughes' early Catholic school experience, revealed in his 1994 book *Don't You Sing*, was similar to my own.

Like all kids growing up in Melbourne in the early 1940s I was subjected to popular music, swing and what little jazz there was on radio and record. Well, not really records in my case for, apart from my grandparent's battered windup gramophone with its few worn 78s, we did not have a record player.

A friend, Brian Irving who lived a mile up the road from us in Williamstown, not only had a record player, but also owned a pile of records left by his father, an RAAF airman who had been killed in action. Brian and I played the 78s incessantly. Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Bing Crosby, Woody Herman, Fats Waller, Andrews Sisters, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa and Harry James. But, Bing's brother, Bob Crosby was our favourite.

After surviving the St Joseph nuns, the Christian Brothers and Footscray Tech, I started work in January 1947 as an apprentice electrical fitter. I was fifteen. Along with my ex-school mates, Brian and I haunted the local dances. One night Graeme Bell's Dixieland Jazz Band played at Williamstown Town Hall. Brian and I were stunned. Here it was! Real jazz. We were hooked. The Bells were on a farewell tour, raising funds to attend the World Youth Congress in Prague, Czechoslovakia; although I don't think we were aware of this at the time. We followed the Bells everywhere, until they began to nod in recognition. One day at work I was whistling "Royal Garden Blues" when an older apprentice asked me what it was. He knew of course, but needed to know my interest. Before long Brian Sheridan, was filling me in on the Melbourne jazz scene. He and his mates had just been to the first Australian Jazz Convention at the Eureka Hall in North Melbourne.

With nothing to play them on, I started to buy jazz records. My first purchase was almost Woody Herman's "Fan It". But I wasn't sure. Muggsy Spanier's "Hesitating Blues" sounded more like the what we were hearing from the Bells, so I bought it instead. Wise choice. It set me on my path of discovery. Jelly Roll Morton's "Doctor Jazz" followed and, immediately they were issued, the Graeme Bell band Regal Zonophones, recorded in April 1947. I began spending time with Brian Sheridan and met his mate Tommy O'Brien and their friend, Gordon Walker. But they were 'big kids' and more independently financial than I was. My mother took my apprentice's pittance and dolled out pocket money, which I supplemented with a weekend ice round (complete with draft horse and four-wheeled

cart) and by delivering bulky purchases, on a bicycle, for the local hardware shop.

The 2nd Convention in December 1947 loomed large on my horizon. But Brian Irving and I had already agreed to spend Christmas on my cousin's farm in Finley, NSW. When we got back and heard the Sheridan account we could have wept.

1947 and 1948 were good years for Melbourne jazz. Brian Irving and I attended jazz concerts at Brunswick and Melbourne Town Halls and the Frank Johnson Fabulous Dixielanders' Saturday night dance gig at Collingwood Town Hall. The big band played the main hall while the Johnsons were whipping up a storm in the supper room. What started out as a six week engagement for them, in May 1947, lasted for nearly ten years. I also managed to buy a record player and, with help from an older apprentice at work, built an amplifier. At last, I had jazz at home in addition to the jazz radio programmes. I wrote letters to the *Listener* in radio newspaper and the jazz broadcasters.

The 3rd Jazz Convention in 1949 was held at Prahran Town Hall and Brian Irving and I were part of it. We met people our age, helped on the door and mingled with the musicians at the pub over the road. Brian Irving began to question my jazz obsession and I spent more time with Brian Sheridan, listening to and talking about the music. I bought records at Suttons and Brashs and haunted the secondhand bin at Bob Clements' music shop where I discovered his Jazzart records, Bill Miller's Ampersand releases, the Adelaide-based Southern Jazz Group Memphis discs and purchased every available issue of the magazines *Jazz Notes* and *Australian Jazz Quarterly*. I borrowed Brian Sheridan's books and bought what I could afford, including *Shining Trumpets* and Mezzrow's *Really The Blues*. Another source of jazz records was John Clements' shop. A tight little room on the second floor of a building in Little Collins street. Mr Clements was a stern ex-opera singer who catered for classical buffs. He wryly tolerated us, probably thought us mad, but still imported the English Brunswicks, HMVs and Parlophones we ordered. I lived for his little card in the letterbox advising that records had arrived, and could not sleep until I had picked them up.

In 1949 the Battle of the Bands concerts were held in Melbourne, with the Johnson band winning three in a row, by popular acclaim, against all comers including the Graeme Bell band. They were young, and exciting to our eager ears. Frank had opened the Sunday Afternoon Jazz Club (also known as The Melbourne Jazz Club) at the Maison Deluxe Ballroom. He also had a radio programme, the 3UZ Australian Jazz Club of the Air, for over a year and featured monthly live sessions which we attended. Concerts, town hall dances and Collingwood filled my non-working life. For a while I even rode my bike to the Maison Deluxe at Elwood.

My mother tolerated it all, but my step-father (who had given my younger sister and me the Haesler name in 1940) banned jazz while he was at home. Fortunately this was usually Sunday, for as a maintenance fitter at a brick yard

he worked lots of overtime. Years later dad and I bumped into Pixie Roberts (Graeme Bell's clarinet player) at an Oakleigh pub. Pixie had been a turner and fitter and they got on wonderfully. When dad asked where he fitted in, I explained that he was the clarinet player with Graeme Bell's band. "Well he's still a nice bloke" dad said.

To overcome my father's objections, I used sharpened matches instead of steel gramophone needles to confine the jazz to my bedroom. But when I decided to play trombone, all hell broke loose! No practicing at home! I did my best and persevered with the Williamstown City Brass Band for nearly four years.

I met Tony Standish at the 1949 Convention and got to know him better in 1950 at the Southern Jazz Society. Tony was a hip character, jazz-wise beyond his years and a wild influence on my lifestyle. Through him I met Bob and Len Barnard. Len was one of the 'big kids' and Bob, a bit younger than us, had that indefinable talent, even then. Tony, Bob and I became inseparable and I overnighted regularly with them on weekends. Jazz was all we thought about. Tony showed me how to import records and is still one of my best mates.

The Bell, Johnson and Newstead musicians and friends drank at the New York Hotel in the city on Fridays and it was here that I finally met solicitor, Bill Miller. The patriarch of Oz jazz, founder editor of *Jazz Notes*, editor of *Australian Jazz Quarterly* and producer of Ampersand records. He liked us and patiently put up with naive questions about records. Bill had a legendary collection and one night he invited me over to a record session. Paradise. Everything I have read about was there and more. Other evenings followed and he became my mentor, but probably didn't realise this. It is no coincidence either that Bill was one of our earliest Melbourne washboard players. Although, my early influences (apart from Jasper Taylor and Jimmy Bertrand on the classic records) were Roger Bell and Len Barnard. They still are.

The Southern Jazz Society, started in August 1949 by the remarkable Shirley Wood (later House), was a rallying point for young, enthusiastic record collectors. Once again I became involved. The Society held regular record sessions and hosted social functions for about 10 years. The Barnards were the house band for functions and we even had the Tom Pickering band over from Hobart. More lasting friendships. I can't recall its demise, but the social role was picked up by the Melbourne Jazz Club in 1958.

In about April 1951 I organised a dance at the Williamstown Yacht Club with Len Barnard's Jazz Band. Early the next morning the club burnt down due to a smouldering cigarette butt in a sail locker, a favourite spot for a sneaky drink. At this time grog was banned in public places and was either smuggled into dances, consumed illicitly outside in a car, in the bushes or at the back of the hall. Which is why a lot of the music at Conventions was played in pubs close to the event. At the Dubbo Convention in 1970, we organised a liquor license for the hall and from that point on pubs lost some of the action, unless included as official venues. A

pity in my opinion. Drunken delegates in the hall can compete with the music. But it is all too late now.

Another influence on my record collecting in 1950 was Bill Davis, also still a mate. A well-off kid, whose grandfather, a radio ham, had a fine record collection. Bill was something of a junkshopping wheeler-dealer himself and bought secondhand 78s in bulk, sold the rubbish, kept the jazz and flogged the surplus to friends. When he married and eventually retired from jazz, I bought most of his 78 collection.

Bill was a member of the Southern Jazz Society clique and also tried his hand at trombone. Something he returned to later in life, at Conventions and with Melbourne and Gippsland bands. Bill was in my first washboard band, The Jazz Occasionally Rippers, which I registered for the 12th Convention in Adelaide in 1957.

I met Dick Hughes at this time when he sold me a Blind Willie Dunn item on Biltmore. We were both seventeen and he played piano in the Jelly Roll Morton style, to our great delight. Dick also patronised the New York and Metropole hotels, but belonged to the Newstead, Bell, George Tack and Willie McIntyre circle. We knew them all, but were closer to the Johnsons and Barnards. It was a big family then, as now. Musicians and collectors with a common bond. Dick went overseas in 1952 and it was several years before we caught up with him in Sydney.

This was also the era of the legendary Allan Watson week-long parties, but as an apprentice, with a limited income, living at home on the other side of Melbourne, I missed out on much of the action there. John Sangster covers it, in some detail, in his 1988 autobiography *Seeing The Rafters*.

In August 1949 Rex Stewart came to Australia to play with the Graeme Bell band. We were horror struck. What was Graeme thinking? But we were too involved with ourselves to really care. After all, Rex was an ex-member of the Duke Ellington band and we knew that Ellington did not play jazz. We went to the concert at the Exhibition Building and sat through the Convention sets later in the year, unimpressed. Ah, the arrogance of youth!

Although Sydney was proposed for the 5th Convention at the open discussion (later to become the Annual General Meeting), some Melbourne diehards were reluctant to give it up. A letter in the January-February 1950 *Jazz Notes* objected to a Sydney Convention, compared its ownership to the Melbourne Cup and warned that if "we create the precedent of giving it to Sydney, we must then be prepared to hawk it all over Australia, as all States will then have a claim". How right he was! The writer, the late Bill Linton (another washboard player) also predicted that "jazz will be a failure in Sydney....and three years from now will be virtually out of existence". How wrong he was!

A rift was forming. Us against the jazz establishment. Or so we thought, at the time. And Bill Miller was quietly fostering it all by encouraging us to write for *AJQ*. Tony had the gift. Still has. I persisted.

The 1950 Jazz Convention was held in Sydney and Brian Irving and I drove up in his little ute. We hit Sydney early morning on Boxing Day wondering how to get to Ashfield when an MG with Convention posters on the back and sides passed us. We followed it to Ashfield Town Hall where the belligerent driver wanted to know why we were following him. It was Norm Linehan with whom I had corresponded a few times. Another new friend and contact. It was my first taste of Sydney and I loved it. By now I was known to the Melbourne jazz crowd and they introduced me to the Sydneysiders whose music, about which I knew very little, was more swing based (or so I thought at the time). What a Convention. Jazz every day and night. A harbour cruise and a disastrous pub crawl along George Street to the Harbour Bridge. (I made it to the Brooklyn Hotel, about six pubs short of the goal - and regretted it next day.) I also met and teamed up with trumpet player Alex Frame and his University Jazz Four from Adelaide. Another lifelong friendship.

The Adelaide Convention in 1951 was another highlight. The kids were taking over. I even sat in on trombone, on stage, with Alex's University Jazz Band. By the time I found the key for the first tune, "Perdido Street Blues", it was all over. The rest of the half-hour set seemed like three hours and I never attempted to play jazz on trombone again. I had met Jess listening to the Johnson's at Collingwood Town Hall and started taking her out in 1952. She was to occupy a lot of my time and I eventually handed the trombone back to the Williamstown brass band in 1953.

When it was proposed that the Convention return to Melbourne in 1952 we were ready. The jazz cliques at this time comprised the Southern Jazz Society crowd in their late teens, the Bells and Newsteads in their early 30s with the Johnsons and a lot of unsung, lesser known jazz musicians in between. I knew them all.

Conventions were increasing in popularity and we sensed that the 7th in 1952 would be a big one. It certainly became the first to be involved in controversy. I was joint secretary, with Brian Sheridan, and handled all the correspondence and most of the running around during the year. Brian took his holidays in December and tied up the loose ends.

The committee was composed of young, mainly non-musician record enthusiasts from the Southern Jazz Society, with behind-the-scene advice from veterans of earlier Melbourne Convention committees. There had been some criticism in Adelaide that the Convention was being run by record collecting amateurs and that musicians were losing control of their annual function. What our critics did not see was our youthful commitment to the Convention ideal, which we were determined to prove. We arranged regular meetings with bandleaders including Graeme Bell, Frank Johnson, Ross Fusedale, Geoff Kitchen, Smacker Fitzgibbon, Doc Willis, Tony Newstead and Len Barnard which enabled us to incorporate their wishes. In return, we kept them informed regarding planning and progress. The 7th Convention made a massive profit, and the committee was castigated.

Yet it had been musician driven. They wanted public performances promoted at the expense of closed functions. The programme was also broader in its jazz content. Graeme Bell and Dave Dallwitz presented a twelve piece big band playing in the Ellington-Henderson style, John Sangster's group was exploring modern trends, Geoff Kitchen's Quintet had a Benny Goodman flavour, the Doc Willis Band was influenced by Louis Armstrong's All Stars and Charlie Blott with Splinter Reeves were into bop.

We were slammed at the AGM! Too big. Too modern. Too commercial. Too much emphasis on profit. Cedric Pearce, the Hobart drummer, summed it up in a *Music Maker* article in February 1953 when he said "A series of public concerts was presented in the hall. The Convention was held in the hotel across the road." We were stunned. Never again! Bugger 'em.

My apprenticeship had concluded in July 1952 and I was seconded to the drawing office. I retreated into my record collection, discography and developing contacts with jazz collectors overseas. Jess was also an important part in my life. The 1953 Convention almost wasn't. The 1952 AGM had directed that the 8th Convention return to the original format and be held in Tasmania or Sydney. By April that year, with no moves from Sydney, the Tasmanians decided to take charge and settled on Hobart. In spite of reservations expressed regarding accommodation because of the Sydney-Hobart yacht race they were optimistic, no doubt urged on by the Melbournites who wanted a small Convention. However, the support was less than enthusiastic and only ninety-four registered participants attended the four-day Convention.

Why the Melbourne musicians failed to show up is still a mystery. There were rumours in mid December of the cancellation of the Convention, but the source was never satisfactorily located. I had decided not to go and, like others on the 1952 Melbourne committee, was disillusioned following our strenuous, if misdirected efforts the year before. Some even vowed never to attend a Convention again. But what happened to the critics of the 7th, given their urging for a small Convention? The Cootamundra Jazz Band made the trip and with Tom Pickering's Good Time Music and Ted Herron's Jazzmanians formed the nucleus of the smallest Convention ever. There was no printed programme and the Original Tunes Composition was not held for lack of entries. At Hobart it was agreed that the 1954 Convention be held in Sydney to be followed by Cootamundra in 1955. The only two Sydney delegates, both from the Sydney Swing Music Club, ensured that the Convention would be held there. If they had not been there, the continuity may have been broken and the whole idea abandoned. But Conventions have a way of surviving.

Bill Miller decided to close down *AJQ* unless he could find another editor. He specifically anointed me and my first issue came out in December 1954 and included the Sydney Convention programme. I was by now engaged to Jess and planning to build a house on our Huntingdale block, get married and go overseas

to Britain and Europe. Bob Barnard was also romantically involved, so Tony Standish took off to Canada and finished up in London where he became an editor of *Jazz Journal*.

Jess and I married in March 1955 and moved into the two-room bungalow at the back of Jess's parents' house. It was a great period for marriages. John Kennedy, Bill Davis, Lou Silbereisen, Frank Traynor and Bob Barnard.

In April 1955 I joined APM as an electrical draftsman and commenced the night-time electrical diploma course at Melbourne Tech. I worked next to the architectural division and eventually transferred over and switched courses. An architect was one of the things I had wanted to be, but up to that time did not know how. Jess encouraged and supported me in the decision, even though she was ill at the time. A worry, until we found out what was causing it. A honeymoon baby. We cancelled the plan for an extended overseas trip and I started building the Huntingdale house. It only took three children and twelve years to complete.

The Sydney Jazz Club opened in August 1953, an initiative of Harry Harman and his Paramount Jazz Band. The Adelaide Jazz Society commenced in December 1954 with monthly meetings and other social functions. In Melbourne, there had been jazz clubs and societies. But what Melbourne needed was one based on the Sydney model.

Apart from my night-time study, the day job and building the house the Haeslers stayed at home, with friends over at weekends for record sessions in the little bungalow. By now a few of us had settled into parenthood. But the dream of a Melbourne Jazz Club kept cropping up, with a lot of urging from trombonist Frank Traynor's wife Pat. We tossed it around regularly until Frank (ever impetuous) decided that he and I should go to Sydney to find out how they did it. We spent the weekend here although, apart from a party at Kate and Eric Dunbar's house, it was all a blur.

On 6th June 1958 the Melbourne Jazz Club opened at the RSL Memorial Hall in Richmond with a band put together by Frank Traynor and me as president. The Club never looked back and continued through to the mid 1960s, by which time the jazz boom was all but over. But that, and the regular parties at Huntingdale, are another story. It is significant though that the Melbourne Jazz Club supplied Jazz Convention committees for years.

Over this period there had been Conventions in Cootamundra in 1955 and 1959 (which I missed for family reasons), Melbourne in 1956 and a great one Adelaide in 1957. They were, apart from the one in Melbourne, getting bigger and better each year.

I was balancing architecture, jazz, family and completing the house. *AJQ* had to go after the April 1957 issue. It was time consuming and costly. Bill Miller had been right. No one was interested in scholarly jazz criticism any more. He had hoped new blood would help, but it didn't. Square dancing was the rage and,

apart from some Sunday dances including the Barnard's Mentone Life Saving Club gig, jazz was losing audience appeal.

After about five years I resigned as president of the Melbourne Jazz Club and can well remember the final committee meeting. I carried on with ideas and directions for about an hour and a half. When the minutes, taken by Margaret Anderson, came out they said that, after noting my resignation with regret, "Bill Haesler spoke at length about the future of the club". None of the erudite thoughts had been taken down!

I am not sure when the Melbourne Jazz Club closed, as we left Melbourne in 1966, but the Victorian Jazz Club was formed in 1968 and still provides the stimulus for jazz in Melbourne.

Another friend from those early days was Nevill Sherburn. He had been involved with jazz from about 1947, took piano lessons from Graeme Bell in 1948, formed his Rhythm Kings in 1950, and was another enthusiastic record collector. In June 1954 he purchased the Swaggie record label from the Graeme Bell band co-operative and began issuing Australian jazz EPs. I was invited to contribute cover notes to some of these in the late 50s. Our association became another lasting friendship and I pushed Nevill to reissue 1920s classic jazz material, up to that time ignored by the major Australian companies. Together we produced the 7 LP Swaggie Jazz Collector series. Nevill supplied the expertise and sales initiative and I advised on the content, wrote the notes and provided the earlier source material. I had no money, so could not contribute financially. To see the jazz classics available locally was reward enough. As is well known, Nevill used the profits to record Australian jazz. Without Swaggie, we would be the poorer and my mate Jack Mitchell's Australian discography, *Australian Jazz On Record*, would be a lot thinner. I have continued to write many of Nevill's notes ever since.

Other writing commissions came as a result of the Swaggie exposure and have included magazine articles and LP and CD notes for EMI, ABC Records, Castle Communications, *Stomp Off*, GHB, W&G, Festival, Jazznote, Heritage, Jazz Club, Picture and *Jazz & Jazz*. Never a lucrative occupation, but great for the ego.

Nevill ran the small 11th Convention in 1956 (referred to earlier) and in spite of my resolve not to get involved, I could not stand there and, at the last minute, helped out for the week's activities. It lost money and was the antithesis of 1952. Although (apart from Cootamundra) I continued to attend Conventions, there was no need for my involvement until 1960, the first at the new Kew Civic Centre. It was a huge success and redeemed those of us left from 1952. The Melbourne Jazz Club was in full swing and we had lots of enthusiastic help. Nick Polites was president of this 15th Convention and I was his vice.

In the early 1960s I was working with an architectural firm which handled GJ Cole's work (variety stores and the newfangled supermarkets) all over Australia. When Coles extended the large store in George Street, Sydney, I was given the

task of coordinating planning and construction for the three stages. This meant regular trips to Sydney, which at that time was alive with jazz including the Paramount Band at the Ironworkers, Ray Price at Wooloomooloo and the Ling Nam, and Graeme Bell at the Chevron. I stayed over at weekends frequently and arrived home on the last plane on Sunday, worn out. The friendships made through the Jazz Convention meant that I was a family member.

At the 1961 Convention in Adelaide it was decided that, after sixteen years, the organisation needed a formal structure. Profits were being made and already there had been some dodgy accounting. Nothing major, just a feeling that some individuals were benefiting at our expense. Not honest, but not surprising. The late Norm Linehan once told me that he had identified all the tainted Conventions in detail, but never, to my knowledge, disclosed this information. A Trust Fund was set up with three trustees from the major Convention centres. Alex Frame (Adelaide) Jack Qua (Sydney) and myself (Melbourne). I resigned as a trustee when I came to Sydney in 1966. In 1979 following a resignation, I was again appointed a trustee, by which time state representation was not an issue. I resigned the position at the Sydney Convention in 1988, but was reappointed at Launceston in 1997. A position I still hold.

But back to the 1960s. After a successful debut at Newcastle in 1964 (which I regret missing, even though we were holidaying in Sydney) the Convention returned to Melbourne for the 20th, with an executive of ten and a committee of about sixty. Those were the days. On the night ten o'clock closing was introduced to Melbourne, we adjourned a meeting early and adjourned to the corner pub to celebrate the event. The sleepy bar was suddenly full of thirsty jazzos. A bonanza for the amazed publican, but never repeated.

Eventually the opportunity came to form a small architectural practice in Sydney. We sold the Huntingdale house, packed up and in June 1966 drove to Sydney in the Mini with the kids and a car full of records. We arrived on the Friday night and on Saturday afternoon were listening to Geoff Bull's Olympia Band at the Orient Hotel in the Rocks. The architectural commission fell through and my two partners and I found work elsewhere.

We bought into Balmain in late 1966 and, hopefully, they will have to carry me out. It seems incredible that I have spent half my life in Sydney, yet people still say I'm from Melbourne.

Prior to leaving for Sydney a new generation of jazz musicians had taken over. The Melbourne New Orleans, Yarra Yarra and Red Onions jazz bands were packing their dances and supporting Conventions.

I was immediately invited onto the Sydney Jazz Club committee, which became a long association. When public larrikinism and the threat of violence forced us to close the packed Sydney Jazz Club Ironworkers Hall venue in George Street in November 1966, I was part of the small group which later kicked-started it in a small hall over a chemist shop in William Street, East Sydney. We formed a

washboard band which handed over to sit-ins immediately the working jazzmen arrived after pub gigs. Our jazz privacy had been rescued from the public chaos of the "Ironworkers".

I joined Rod Lawlis and the Robbers Dogs doing regular pub work in about 1970 (all a blur). In 1971 Adrian Ford suggested that we form a Classic-New Orleans band. We convinced the publican at the Royal George Hotel in Sussex Street, Sydney to take us on and, using my name, were there for well over two years. When the pub changed hands Bill Haesler's Washboard Band moved to the Cricketers Arms Hotel at Moore Park then, after another two years, to the Glenmore Hotel in the Rocks. The band also played other venues including French's Tavern and the Unity Hall and Star Hotels, appeared regularly at Jazz Conventions and concerts and was used by the Sydney Jazz Club for the Friday night function at the Abraham Mott Hall in the Rocks, the Berry Island picnic and the annual Berrima halfway-meet with the Canberra jazz people. All part of the busy jazz scene at that time. The band also started the Friday night jazz policy at Soup Plus in mid 1975 and was there for over two years. After numerous personnel changes, I decided to disband in 1983. It was a happy and popular run, we made several records and lots of friends. But the fun of playing is hard to shake and, in 1984, I put together the Strohkorb Syncopators with Peter and Trevor Rippingale and the Robbers Dogs' rhythm section, Ken Tratt, Terry Fowler and myself. I was content to sit in the back line for four years.

Conventions were still held in Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart but also moving further afield. Ballarat, Dubbo, Queanbeyan, Brisbane and Fremantle in the 1970s; Toowoomba, Forbes, Wollongong, Armidale, Perth, Newcastle and Geelong in the 1980s. To detail each would be boring and keep us here all day.

Delegates were outnumbering musicians about six to one, with some of the inner circle fearful that the Convention could be hijacked by gatecrashers. I wasn't too worried. To direct the AGM is one thing but the implementation of unpopular decisions would never happen while we were around. But Norm Linehan was not convinced following the "crud" problem at Adelaide and Sydney in 1961 and 1962. (The cruds were unpleasant, non-jazz yobbos who registered as delegates and free-loaded at the private Convention functions.) So, Norm registered the Convention in his name in each state. When the danger passed several years later, he transferred ownership to the Trustees.

At this time Conventions were attracting supporters in the 1000s. In 1946 the ratio of musician to delegate (as the wives, girlfriends and fellow travellers came to be called) was about equal. This moved from 3:1 (delegate/musician) to about 7:1 in the 1960s-70s. After all, if you liked jazz, it was a cheap holiday. All you could take for five days for a \$10 fee. Which is how we attracted the cruds. A great word! The advent of jazz festivals and the introduction of a \$70 registration fee for non-musicians returned the ratio to about 3:1 with attendances now static at around 1000-1200 depending on location. The 50th in Melbourne was an exception and attracted nearly 5000 registrations plus 1000s of one day attendees.

I suppose Norm Linehan was right to be concerned and well remember the lengthy 1972 AGM in Adelaide when a small group decided that Kyalite (near Mildura) was an ideal location for the 28th Convention. It was small, quiet, and handy to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. They talked-up this one-motel, one-pub town all week and stacked the AGM carrying 'Kyalite' balloons and placards. Queanbeyan and Melbourne were the other contenders, a division was required and in panic the Kyalite spokesman announced that it was all a hoax and withdrew. The meeting exploded in uproar. Queanbeyan, backed by the pro-Kyalite faction, won by three heads. It was meant in fun, but highlighted the possibilities.

Convention goers at this time were baby-boomers and many an hour was spent at AGMs discussing creche facilities. Some delegates even attempted to resurrect the idea years later when they became grandparents.

The annual Convention has always been run by local committees, with complete autonomy, directed from the floor at the AGM. We found that it was taking longer to organise venues and began appointing host locations two years ahead. Eventually, in 1987, a Steering Committee of concerned conventioneers was set up to assist the trustees and the annual committees. Controversies? Including the setting up of the Steering Committee, only a few.

We had to hose down a few complaints after we reunited the Graeme Bell Australian Jazz Band for the 25th in Dubbo in 1970. To achieve this it was necessary to assist with some fares and accommodation, but there were, contrary to some rumours, absolutely no fees involved.

The hiring of fifty-four year old ex-Ellingtonian trumpet player Clark Terry for the 1974 Convention at Dorset Gardens in Melbourne caused a stir, to say the least. Once again we discovered a down-to-earth musician willing to take part in whatever was thrown at him. Including an after-hours limerick session and on one occasion (at Clark Terry's request) a set with the Bill Haesler Washboard Band.

The 33rd Adelaide committee broke the rules in 1978. They had already engaged the Turk Murphy Band from San Francisco but decided to include an Australian guest band. This has always been considered a big no-no, which I agree with for obvious diplomatic reasons. It was a committee indiscretion and poor Bob Barnard and his band took the brunt of that one. Unfairly in my opinion, and I said so at the AGM.

With the possible exception of the 50th in Melbourne, the 43rd in Sydney in 1988 was the most lavish of the Conventions. It was the finale to Australia's Bicentennial year celebrations and some Sydney jazz people were determined to make it the biggest ever. And they achieved this. The biggest loss for any Convention. There were recriminations and accusations but, after a thorough investigation, we established that, in their enthusiasm, the committee had over-estimated the income, and squandered it.

However, most Conventions are relatively problem free, with only minor hiccups. The 30th in Balmain in 1975 was too close to home for me, so I will not elaborate other than to say that I did not enjoy the working pressure. Bud Freeman was the official guest, brought out though the efforts of Dick Hughes. Bud, a great jazzman and charming old world gentleman, did not really understand what we were about. Unlike Dick Cary at Brisbane and Art Hodes in Ballarat, who both mingled freely. Bud was used to jazz festivals world-wide and, to him, this was another one, albeit on the other side of his world.

The 1989 Convention in Perth was disrupted by an Australia-wide airline strike which, surprise, saw the cancellation of discount airfares. It was jokingly suggested that it would be cheaper to fly via Hong Kong with a stopover in Perth on the way home. And that is what the Haeslers and McCarthys did. Our six days in Hong Kong, including accommodation, cost an extra \$50 each over the then Sydney-Perth return fare.

Hobart has hosted four Conventions, all good. By nature of its location these have been relatively small and self contained, which, after all these years, still appeals to some of us. Launceston with two down and another one this year is maintaining the hospitable Tasmania tradition.

Finding suitable venues and people prepared to run a Convention has always been a worry, and getting harder each year. But at the last moment we seem to cope. Fortunately Conventions tend to run themselves, once started, and most musicians are considerate in keeping to the on-stage timetable.

A permanent venue has been proposed several times, and indeed many years ago Jess found an advertisement for the sale of a Victorian country town. Only about £100,000 but big bickies in those days. There was also a serious scheme to hire a P&O cruise ship, but it was scuppered by the quarter-million dollar deposit required three months in advance.

Overseas guests have already been mentioned. We have had Ken Colyer, Alton Purnell, Dick Cary, Bud Freeman, Kenny Davern, The World's Greatest Jazz Band, Sammy Price, Art Hodes, the Turk Murphy Band, Danny Moss and Digby Fairweather.

I cannot close without mentioning the Original Tunes Competition. For the 2nd Convention someone (believed to be Dave Dallwitz) hit on the idea of a competition. It was apparently reasoned that as Roger Bell, Tom Pickering, Dave Dallwitz and Ade Monsborough had already contributed and recorded their own jazz compositions, that others should be encouraged to do so. The only incentive was honour, acclaim and a small prize. For the first six years founder members of the Convention carried off the award. From then on it has been unpredictable with relatively unknown musicians frequently taking first prize. Which confirms the value of the competition as an encouragement and contribution to Australian jazz. In 1947 the competition was formalised with a special programmed spot and (apart from Hobart in 1953 due to lack of entries) has been an important feature

of the Convention week ever since.

Gradually the number of entries increased and over the years the competition has varied from one hour to a marathon six hours. The early rules precluded well known and previously recorded compositions, which explains why now recognised tunes composed by early Australian jazzmen do not appear in the list of winners.

Over the life of the Competition there have been allegations that modified jazz standards have been awarded the Convention prize, but no hard evidence exists of a deliberate attempt to win under false pretenses. The variety of submissions each year is the surprising aspect of the Competition ranging as they do from stomping jazz to delicate and sensitive piano and guitar solos. Over the years we have encouraged the presentation of Australian jazz compositions and some Convention bands have been specifically formed for this purpose. Apart from the production, in 1969, of a loose-leaf folder of some early winner's manuscripts, the most ambitious project to date has been the release by the Trustees of all the original tunes on CD and the publication of a book of these tunes transcribed and produced by Bob Pattie and Eric Holroyd.

For me the preparation of this lecture has been a trip down memory lane, involving as it has the rereading of *Jazz Notes*, *AJQ*, *Quarterly Rag*, *Melbourne Jazz Club News*, Convention programmes and correspondence. However, the memory did not always respond as readily as it should. As a kid I knew that I would remember everything, and did not make notes. Oh, how silly I was.

My jazz life has been a happy one. A few stumbles, but a lot of pluses including twenty years of presenting the Classic Jazz Era and other jazz programmes on 2MBS FM; devising jazz lectures for WEA and the Sydney Jazz Club; music consultant (with Adrian Ford) for the 1974 Hal McElroy Australian film *Between Wars* starring Corrin Redgrave; producer and assistant for lots of historic Australian jazz recordings including the reissue of the Famous PIX and Wilco Sessions on CD; involvement in setting up the NSW Jazz Archive; and advising on the content of the Waverley Library jazz collection. And, because cancer knocked out the Robbers Dogs founder, clarinetist Rod Lawlis, about two years ago, I am once again a bandleader.

What of the future for Conventions? Don't ask me! I was wrong about the Melbourne Jazz Club and again in March 1981 when David Walsh and I moved to disband the Sydney Jazz Club. Fortunately, I was proved wrong in both cases.

Australian Jazz festivals (big and small) occur, on average, about once a fortnight, which has had an impact on Convention attendances. Remember when there was jazz in a dozen or so pubs in inner Sydney? Now there are three hotels featuring jazz with our Robbers Dogs Jazz Band playing in one of them! And clubs featuring jazz can be counted on one hand.

But I have faith. When young people are exposed to the happy sound of traditional jazz they love it. In Melbourne the sons and daughters of the third

(1960s) generation of jazz musicians and singers are leading a revival. OK, so they have adapted the style to cater for the moment, but it is still there. The young people are attending Conventions, although keeping to themselves. As we teenagers did in the late 1940s.

**Australian Jazz Conventions and official guests. \* Bill Haesler absent.**

- 1.\* 1946 Melbourne
- 2.\* 1947 Melbourne
3. 1948 Melbourne
4. 1949 Melbourne first of 5 days duration
5. 1950 Sydney
6. 1951 Adelaide
7. 1952 Melbourne
- 8.\* 1953 Hobart
- 9.\* 1954 Sydney
- 10.\* 1955 Cootamundra
11. 1956 Melbourne
12. 1957 Adelaide
13. 1958 Sydney first of 6 days duration
- 14.\* 1959 Cootamundra
15. 1960 Melbourne
16. 1961 Adelaide
17. 1962 Sydney. Ken Colyer
18. 1963 Melbourne
- 19.\* 1964 Newcastle
20. 1965 Sydney. Alton Purnell
21. 1966 Melbourne
22. 1967 Hobart
23. 1968 Adelaide
- 24.\* 1969 Ballarat
25. 1970 Dubbo. Graeme Bell Aust. Jazz Band
- 26.\* 1971 Hobart
27. 1972 Adelaide
28. 1973 Queanbeyan
29. 1974 Melbourne
30. 1975 Balmain. Bud Freeman
31. 1976 Brisbane. Dick Carey
32. 1977 Hobart. Kenny Davern
33. 1978 Adelaide. Turk Murphy & Bob Barnard bands
34. 1979 Fremantle. World's Greatest Jazz Band
35. 1980 Forbes

36. 1981 Geelong
37. 1982 Toowoomba. Danny Moss, Digby Fairweather
38. 1983 Forbes. Sammy Price
39. 1984 Wollongong
40. 1985 Ballarat. Art Hodes
41. 1986 Adelaide
42. 1987 Armidale
43. 1988 Sydney
44. 1989 Perth
45. 1990 Launceston
46. 1991 Newcastle
- 47.\* 1992 Geelong
48. 1993 Adelaide
49. 1994 Gold Coast
50. 1995 Melbourne
51. 1996 Bathurst
52. 1997 Launceston
53. 1998 Geelong
- 54.\* 1999 Perth
55. 2000 Forbes
- 56.\* 2001 Adelaide
57. 2002 Launceston

Don't forget.....

**The 11th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture  
will be presented by  
Len Barnard  
*Drummer and raconteur*  
September 2003**

General enquiries or further information  
may be obtained from:  
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