

THE HISTORY OF JAZZ AUSTRALIA 1985–2015

by Diana Allen OAM



Diana Allen and Graeme Bell with his Helpmann Award, 2006...

PREFACE

Although initially daunted at the thought of writing the history of Jazz Australia and the very thought of going through hundreds of newsletters, once I got started it all began to flow and eventually I hardly knew where to stop. As the saying goes, time goes quickly when you're having fun, but it hasn't all been beer and skittles. I have taken some hair-raising risks along the way and have often gone out on *serious* limbs, but then, I have always been a risk taker!

I am sure most people think I have made a lot of money from my jazz ventures as I charge more than most for Jazz Australia events. However, let me tell you, that no-one, anywhere in the world, apart from perhaps the great entertainer/musician James Morrison, has made *a lot* of money out of jazz. What it really boils down to is *passion*, and, when you have that, you are usually prepared to make sacrifices. I have certainly taken more risks than most in order to tackle my ventures, but from the start in fact it was all done on a shoestring. I have always been adamant about paying musicians well, due to my respect for their talent and hard work, and, as one musician said publicly some years ago, 'Diana has always put her money where her mouth is.' He was right.

I have never sought Government grants, or any other financial assistance for that matter, as I never wanted to risk other's money. I did have a financial backer for a couple of events along the way and decided to use this opportunity to engage a publicist. However not only did this not work but it also cost a fortune and convinced me I was better sticking to my own simple methods, a strong mailing list and direct marketing. Money spent on media advertising has never proven to be a good investment for me, so I've resorted to my own methods and placed more emphasis on delivering excellent products that eventually sell themselves. I have always aimed at offering *good value* and consider that I've succeeded in doing that.

To me, jazz is one of the cleverest art forms, and, when performed well it is in fact *instant composition*, requiring a quick brain to pull it off, and the results are often breathtaking. I have always admired the incredible skill of clever improvisation, and I have always wanted to share and promote it.

When I look at the hundreds of newsletters I have preserved, I am surprised myself at what I have managed to achieve over 40 years, and I do hope that readers of this *History of Jazz Australia* will also enjoy recalling some of these memorable occasions.

I especially want to thank those who have chosen to share much of the great music that I have presented over the years, and also of course the great musicians who have performed it. I also want to thank those who have supported these ventures over and over again and who have saved me from *going under* along the way. I dedicate this memoir to you.

Diana Allen
Jazz Australia, 2016



Diana Allen at the microphone, with Tom Baker...

It is hard to believe that 2015 is the 30th anniversary of Jazz Australia; in fact, I had been presenting jazz in Terang in Western Victoria for ten years prior to that.

My involvement in Terang began in 1974 with a fund-raising project to save its Civic Theatre from demolition. I had been shocked to read in the *Terang Express* that the government had offered the Hampden Shire the money to build a new, modern hall but that funding would not be available to restore the old one. I therefore wondered what it would take to persuade local people to save this not-insignificant old theatre complex with its adjoining Mechanics Institute.

I managed to get myself elected onto the Terang Civic Hall Committee: at that time no other woman had ever set foot there. Once elected, my challenge was to persuade the other committee members to let me try my hand at raising the funds to restore the building which was as solid as the day it was built in the late 19th century; however by 1975 it was in dire need of restoration.

When I first suggested this idea to the committee members, their response was one of incredulity. 'How on earth do you expect to raise the funds?' they

enquired. I said I'd like to try a series of jazz concerts. There were guffaws all round. 'You'll never get the locals interested in jazz; that won't work' was the unanimous reaction. I asked them to give me a year to test the waters and if by then there was no indication of interest, I wouldn't press my proposal any further. Thankfully, but dubiously, they agreed to this proposition.



The war memorial at Terang, at the entrance to the main street...

My first port of call was to the Camperdown-based Shire Engineer of the Hampden Shire to whom I explained what I had in mind. Initially, he was taken aback but then, after some consideration, said that if I were serious, he would arrange for the Shire to match every dollar we raised. This was a great boost to my enthusiasm, and it proved to be a win-win situation for all concerned.

My former husband Bruce Allen had been trombonist in Allan Leake's first band, The Southern City Seven, in Melbourne in the 1950s when they were all teenagers. Frank Turville was the trumpet player in those days. Bruce gave up playing after a few years to concentrate on university studies. As he and Allan had kept in touch, I contacted Allan, by which time he had formed the Storyville Jazzmen. I invited him to bring the band to Terang for a supper dance at the Civic Theatre. We called the event 'Jazz and Jug'.



It turned out to be a huge success, partly due to my intensive promotion, not to mention the cheap tickets at \$8. This, of course, was 1975. I hoped the deal – which included wine, cheese and biscuits – would prove too good to refuse, and I was right. I had wanted to get people along to hear this terrific band and to find out what jazz was all about, and it worked. I still have some of those tickets to this day.

At the conclusion of this first successful event, everyone was eager to know when we were going to do it again. The committee I had formed to arrange these functions agreed to strike while the iron was hot so, a few months later, we did it all again. The second time, however, we charged the same price, but it was BYO everything, and we made a profit. We were on our way. By this time the word had got out, and the numbers increased at each event. The rest, as they say, is a piece of Australian jazz history. For the following ten years we held regular *Jazz at the Civic* events in the main auditorium of the Terang Civic Theatre, which had a great dance floor. It was an ideal venue then and still is to this day.

Not only did we save the historic Terang Civic Theatre from demolition, but we also established a jazz-conscious community and, without realising it, I was serving my apprenticeship in jazz promotion.

I was invited back to Terang in 2015 – forty years later – to a *Back to the Civic* and was asked to organise the music for a fund-raiser for the Terang Hospital; we had Nonie Sadler and her Village Stompers. Piano player Nonie grew up in Terang and so it was highly appropriate to have her heading up the band. Her Village Stompers were Ian Smith, trumpet; Jason Downes, reeds; John Cox, banjo/guitar; Mark Elton, bass; and Richard Opat, drums: a formula destined to succeed. The whole night was a time warp for me. I was asked to introduce the band and say a few words about the theatre that was saved by jazz all those years ago. What a thrill it was to be back in the beautifully restored historic Terang Civic Theatre complex 40 years later, and what wonderful memories that enjoyable night held for me. I certainly had a powerful feeling of déjà vu.



A selection of some of the early Terang event tickets...

During the period 1975 to 1985 we had a great variety of jazz bands on the program. Apart from Storyville, these included the New Harlem Band; the newly formed Creole Bells; three of Tom Baker's Swing Street Orchestras; Geoff Bull's Olympia Jazz Band; the Yarra Yarra Jazz Band; Frank Traynor's Jazz Band; the Bob Barnard Jazz Band; Paul Furniss' San Francisco Jazz Band; the Golden City Seven; and Galapagos Duck, among others. I kept being asked by musicians and band leaders why I wasn't in Melbourne doing what I was doing in Terang. I was even invited to move to Sydney. Eventually, and as the project drew to a close and the theatre was gradually restored to its former glory, I turned my thoughts to how I could best use my new-found skills and contacts.

However, before I get to my move to Melbourne and the eventual establishment of Jazz Australia, there were a number of other very interesting jazz events that resulted from the environment I had gradually created, and are well worth a mention.

One was being asked by Sydney's multi-instrumentalist Tom Baker to arrange a tour of regional Victoria for his new Swing Street Orchestra. I didn't hesitate to agree to this, in spite of the fact I had never done anything like it before. Tom

had become my favourite jazz musician. I knew I had a superb product to promote, and I also wanted *everyone* to hear him. I subsequently arranged three tours of Victoria for Tom and his three Swing Street Orchestras, all of which were incredible ensembles. This also involved an appearance – I think Tom's first in Melbourne – at Chez Jazz, Michael Hancock's first jazz venue in Kingsway, South Melbourne.



Tom Baker's new Swing Street Orchestra, L-R, Pat Qua (piano), Ian Date (guitar), Baker (at back, trumpet & saxophones), Pat Wade (guitar), Don Heap (bass)...PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Then one day, out of the blue, I received a phone call from Sydney musician Paul Furniss who, by that time, I had presented in Terang several times – including in one of Tom's Swing Street Orchestras. He was in Melbourne for a few weeks, performing in the band for the show *One Mo' Time* at the Comedy Theatre. The cast, and most of the musicians, were African Americans. The exceptions were Paul Furniss and Kipper Kearsley; the rest were from New York, Chicago and New Orleans.

Paul told me they would all be in Melbourne for some weeks and he wondered if he could bring them down to me for a weekend in the country so they could see a bit of the Victorian countryside. He also said they would be happy to do a little impromptu concert if I wanted to organise something. Wow! What a fantastic idea, I thought, and what a weekend it turned out to be. So, on a Sunday a

month later, Paul hired a small bus and down they came for two days and a night, and what a night it was. We had lamb on a spit waiting for them for luncheon at our home in Noorat, and we had the most memorable afternoon getting to know each other. They were so appreciative of the hospitality and friendship and also the opportunity to get out of the city. Of course I had invited a number of friends to join in the party.



*Sydney musicians clarinetist Paul Furniss (above) and bassist Kipper Kearsley (below) were the only non-African Americans in the show One Mo' Time...
FURNISS PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ UNDER*



I booked the Hampden Hotel in Camperdown that night for the band to let their hair down, doing whatever they wished, which was a nice change for them from the show. We had a full house. Even after all these years – it was 1983 – people who were lucky enough to be there still tell me it was one of the most memorable nights of music they have ever experienced. It was an emotional night too, as they really did let their hair down; the three gospel singers let us hear what gospel music really is all about.

The line-up was Bill Dillard, trumpet; Paul Furniss, reeds; Rufus Hill, piano; Kipper Kearsley, tuba; Herlin Riley, drums; and three amazing African-American vocalists: Sylvia 'Kumba' Williams, Juanita Brooks (Juanita did her Aretha Franklin favourites) and Wanda Razan. Sadly, most of these musicians are no longer alive. That night there were many in the audience in tears as the singers and other musicians gave so much of themselves to make the night memorable for everyone.



Trumpeter Bill Dillard... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

The following day we took them to a sheep station for another barbecue and to see sheep shearing which they'd never seen. Finally, we had an emotional farewell seeing them off back to Melbourne late in the afternoon. Bill Dillard, who had taken a fancy to one of my friends, told her as he left: 'I'll be back to get ya – in a taxi, honey!' We'd all had a simply wonderful experience. They all wrote messages in my Visitors' Book, which I value to this day, and the pick of these was from drummer Herlin Riley – later Wynton Marsalis' drummer – and it went like this: “Diana, your hospitality was great; your lamb was divine. May we do it again One Mo' Time?”



American Herlin Riley, later Wynton Marsalis's drummer: Diana, your hospitality was great; your lamb was divine. May we do it again One Mo' Time?...

I will always remember Bill Dillard saying to me on that Monday morning that he had got up very early in Camperdown, walked up the avenue of elms in the main street and thanked God for one of the most memorable experiences of his life: coming to Australia and having his music so appreciated.



Bill Dillard in the minibus: he thanked God for one of the most memorable experiences of his life...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

I met him a year later in New York at the Village Vanguard and we discussed his returning to Australia to present *The History of American Jazz*. When I returned home, I contacted Ian Roberts at Arts Victoria and it turned out they just happened to be looking for something interesting to tour in the regional areas of Victoria the following year. And so it happened. Paul Furniss again joined the band plus the great African American piano player Gene Rodgers. Both Bill and Gene had been in the Coleman Hawkins band that recorded the historic version of *Body and Soul*.

The tour for Arts Victoria was a great success. The vocalist this time was Mona Richardson, an African American who had migrated to Australia some years earlier. She was a huge success. Tragically, she took her own life a year later.

The tour culminated with a memorable concert at Hamer Hall. A few years later and shortly after I moved to Melbourne in 1985 and, as a result of that tour, I was instrumental in arranging for the piano player Gene Rodgers to return to Melbourne for a season in the Orchid Restaurant at Rydges Hotel in Exhibition Street. This was a fabulous season with Joe McConechy, string bass, and Ron Sandilands, drums. Various front-line musicians including Ian Smith, trumpet, and Fred Parkes, clarinet, swelled the ranks on Friday and Saturday nights. Sadly, Gene died unexpectedly not long after he returned to New York.



While I'm on the subject of the Orchid Restaurant at Rydges Hotel in Exhibition Street, I continued to work as an agent for the hotel for a couple of years during which time we had the African–American piano player Red Richards out from New York. Allan Browne accompanied him and, as a result, Red recorded with the Allan Browne band while he was in Melbourne.

I also enticed vocalist Judith Durham and her husband piano player Ron Edgeworth out of seclusion at Nambour and offered them a season in the Orchid Restaurant. This would have been a huge success had Judith only agreed to sing a few Seekers' songs each night, but she refused to have the name Seekers mentioned in any publicity or to sing any of the songs that made her so famous – not even a few of the popular jazz songs she had sung with The Hottest Band in Town, and Turk Murphy's band in San Francisco. She and Ron had been writing their own material for a couple of years and that was what they both wanted to present to the public, exclusively. It was such a shame and resulted in a reduced season and a big disappointment to those who went to hear them.

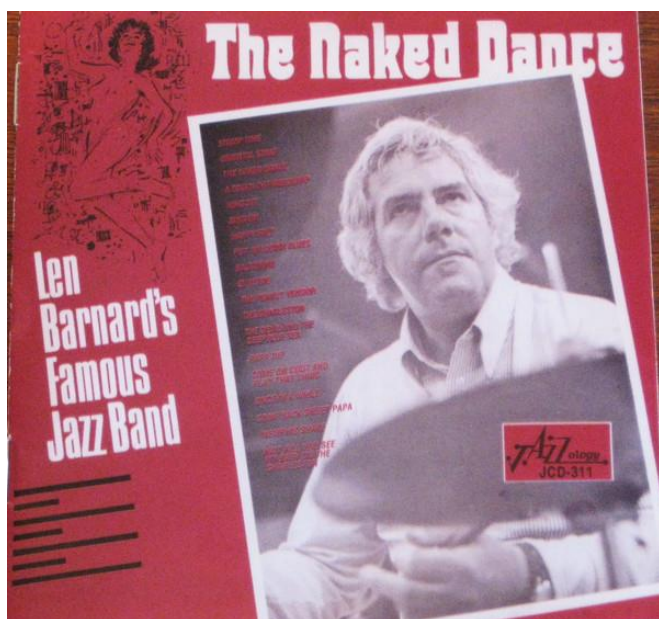
However, after a few more similarly disappointing performances elsewhere, they changed their policy to include the great Seekers' music that had put her on the map and ensured her a place in music history. Once again, Judith became the star she had been in her younger days, and still is.



Judith Durham: enticed out of seclusion and offered a season in the Orchid Restaurant...

However, to backtrack, in 1981 I was still married and living in Noorat, a small town just out of Terang in the Western District. I had met Len Barnard for the first time when I brought Galapagos Duck to Camperdown. He was the drummer at that time in this 'high energy band' as he used to call it. Len had told me how much he wanted to arrange a reunion of the band he had led some years earlier and that had made the famous *Naked Dance* recording made and produced by Bill Armstrong. He told me he (along with everyone else in the band) considered it the best recording the Len Barnard Famous Jazz Band had ever made, that he longed for a reunion of the band and that he'd been trying to get someone to organise it for some years, to no avail. Could I possibly be interested? I had never done anything in Melbourne at that stage but, apprehensively, I agreed. We decided Smacka's Place would be a good venue for such an occasion so I rang Smacka's widow, Fay Fitzgibbon, who jumped at the idea.

I knew nothing about promoting jazz in Melbourne and I didn't have a mailing list in those days. Piano player Graham Coyle, who lived in Canberra, agreed to fly to Melbourne at his own expense for such an exciting reunion; Len and brother Bob Barnard – *both* of whom wanted this reunion to happen – were living in Sydney and they too made their own travel arrangements. The formidable line-up also included clarinetist Fred Parkes (whom I met then for the first time); Mal Wilkinson, trombone; Peter Cleaver, banjo; and Joe McConechy, bass. Everyone was very excited about getting back together again.



It was also exciting for me to be offered the opportunity to be the catalyst to make it all happen. However, as wonderful a musician as Len was, leading a band was not his forté. I was disappointed he gave me so little help with promoting the event, given he was so very keen for it to happen. The only person of whom I knew by reputation and who was involved in the promotion of jazz in Melbourne in those days was *The Age* jazz critic Adrian Jackson. I arranged to meet him and he agreed to do all he could to help with this historic occasion.



Brothers Len Barnard (left) and Bob Barnard, both of whom wanted this reunion to happen... PHOTO COURTESY NIGEL BUESST COLLECTION

The Victorian Jazz Club (VJC) helped promote this great reunion and as a result of everyone pulling together, it wasn't long before I had a call from Faye Fitzgibbon telling me the event on the Sunday night was booked out and that the phone was still running hot. We therefore decided to run the event again the following night and, in spite of its being a Monday, we finished up with two full houses.

I was extremely nervous, however, about how I was going to handle this great and important event and so my husband and I came down to Melbourne from Terang on the Friday so that I could relax a little beforehand and meet the musicians at the airport. On that Friday night, we arranged to have dinner with friends at Sigmund Jorgenson's restaurant Clichy in Collingwood.



Dinner with friends was arranged at the restaurant Clichy in Collingwood, owned by Sigmund Jorgenson (above)... PHOTO COURTESY MELBOURNE JAZZ CO-OPERATIVE

During dinner I suddenly felt ill and went outside on to the footpath for some fresh air. The next thing I knew I was coming to on the pavement! I had fainted and in so doing had hit the side of my face on the bluestone gutter's edge. To cut a long story short, I finished up with concussion in Casualty at the Royal Melbourne Hospital but fortunately was allowed to leave when it was established nothing was seriously wrong or broken.



I finished up with concussion in Casualty at the Royal Melbourne Hospital...

Next morning I looked in the mirror and to my horror was confronted with the worst black eye and bruised face I had ever seen. I had to quickly come up with a solution to this embarrassing situation. With some lateral thinking and, as I was wearing a black dress with gold embroidery for the two events, I asked my husband if he would go shopping for an eye patch, a can of black paint and some gold glitter. He found all three and so the problem was solved. It all worked out 'brilliantly'. I'm just sorry there were no photos to record this 'eyesore' for posterity.

Both events were a great success and the band was on fire both nights. They had all been waiting for this opportunity for years and their emotion was palpable. Two 15-year-old girls asked me if they could sing a couple of songs with the band: one on the Sunday and one on the Monday. Len was delighted to oblige in both cases. In fact, it turned out to be their singing debuts: they were Rebecca Barnard and Nichaud Fitzgibbon. Both astounded the audience with their obvious talent and proved to be the icing on the cake both nights. To this day when I see them, they still remind me of their first gigs at Smacka's Place in 1981.



Two 15-year-old girls made their debut at this event, astounding the audience with their obvious talent, Rebecca Barnard (above) and Nichaud Fitzgibbon (below)... FITZGIBBON PHOTO CREDIT RON JOBE



This successful inaugural experience for me – presenting jazz to a Melbourne audience – encouraged and inspired me to think further about my future. Soon after this, I applied for a Churchill Fellowship to investigate how jazz clubs were faring in the USA. I had two unsuccessful attempts at these fellowships,

which was very disheartening at the time, so I eventually decided I would pay my own way and carry out my own personal investigation. With advice and a list of contacts from musicians such as Hobart reeds player Tom Pickering – who had earlier won a similar fellowship – Tom Baker, Bob Barnard, and various others who'd travelled in the USA and the UK, I eventually set out for almost three months, visiting jazz clubs almost every night all over the United States and London.

My wonderful contacts in each of the cities I visited were only too happy to show me around and answer my questions. I was disheartened to discover that the owners of most clubs gave me much the same advice: *Don't do it!* They all found it difficult to fill their clubs night after night, and this was in the big cities of America. I was imagining how much harder it would be in Melbourne. Jazz has a small following even in America: 2% of the population I'm told. Well, 2% of the population of New York and New Orleans is a bit different from 2% of the population of Melbourne.

In London it was the same. Peter Boizot, who owned Pizza Express and Pizza on the Park, told me both these clubs were heavily subsidised by his 40 pizza parlours. Peter strongly advised me not to run a jazz club of my own because it was a heartbreaking business for a lot of the time, as I suspect it had been for Smacka Fitzgibbon who died at 49.



Pizza Express Jazz Club owner Peter Boizot, London, July, 1991...

The most impressive jazz club I visited in the three months was The Landing, Jim Cullum's fabulous club in San Antonio, Texas. It had been established many years earlier by Jim's late father, clarinetist Jim Cullum Snr. Jim's band was also the most impressive I heard on the trip. Once again Jim advised me against

getting into the jazz club business, and that it was relentless and often heartbreaking for him trying to keep The Landing full, night after night.

He had cleverly located his club in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Antonio with a captive audience staying at the hotel nightly boosting his numbers. The hours, he said, were very long, and it was hard to find staff he could rely on. Jim Cullum himself is a born marketer as well as a great cornet player - a rare combination. He and his father before him ran The Landing for 40 years. Jim eventually sold it in 2013. He still, in 2015, plays five nights a week. Jim is an extraordinary person: a one-off. He's also had a radio show for 23 years featuring his band. His energy is extraordinary*.



This shot, taken in 1964, includes the front-line of the Jim Cullum Sr Band, L-R, Gene McKinney (trombone), Jim Cullum Jr (cornet), Jim Cullum Sr (clarinet)...

During my investigatory trip, I went to New York; Washington DC; Orlando, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; San Antonio, Texas; San Francisco, California; Minneapolis where I visited The Emporium of Jazz and the Hall Brothers Jazz Band with Butch Thomson on piano and/or clarinet; Boston Massachusetts where I heard the fabulous New Black Eagles led by trumpeter Tony Pringle at the Sticky Wicket; and then on to London.

I was very disappointed in most of the clubs I visited, particularly in New Orleans. However, I later discovered I had missed some of the better ones such as Snug Harbour. I certainly didn't enjoy the famous ones in the Crescent City. As much as I enjoyed this whole trip and all the people I met, it certainly put me

**Editor's note, writing in 2020: Jim Cullum died suddenly aged 78 in August, 2019.*

off purchasing Smacka's Place on my return. It had been on the market for years and I had seriously considered it. I was, however, pleased I had done this tour of investigation – as a novice – before launching into such an enterprise. I made the right decision in not going ahead with it, sad though it seemed at the time.

At the same time as the Terang Civic Theatre project was drawing to a conclusion in 1984, my marriage of 25 years was doing the same. My three sons had flown the coop and were very happily and successfully out in the world making their own way. And so, my husband and I decided it was time to move on in our different directions: his in agriculture – mine in jazz.



Back to Terang: above is a shot of Terang Church. As the Terang Civic Theatre project was drawing to a conclusion in 1984, my marriage of 25 years was doing the same...

As I hadn't been in the official workforce for 25 years, I decided that rather than brush up on my earlier secretarial skills, I would move to Melbourne and try my hand at establishing a monthly Sunday Jazz Luncheon Club. My research had established there was a niche market in Melbourne not being catered for. This market consisted of jazz enthusiasts who didn't want to go to smoky pubs – they all were in those days – and who were prepared to pay for something more stylish. So I decided to give it a go, and initially this resulted in Club 177.

My first venue for this Sunday Jazz Luncheon Club was the Danish Club at 177 Beaconsfield Parade: hence the name. It was in a fabulous location overlooking the sea at Albert Park. Regretfully however the manager spent the next twelve months trying to get rid of me. I shouldn't have stayed as long as I did but, because it was such a great spot and had a wonderful grand piano (and also I didn't know where else to go), I hung on.



Stephen Grant, Club 177, Danish Club...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

In those days and, because of a liquor licensing regulation, I was not allowed to use the name of the Club in any advertising. Regardless of their reputation for excellent food, the manager of the Danish Club served sub-standard food for Club 177 luncheons. I found out later he didn't really want to open on Sundays. In spite of the great location, the great music and the great piano, I was eventually forced to move on. In fact, over the next 15 years I moved many times. It is very difficult to find a room in Melbourne to seat up to 200 people – that has a good piano, that provides an uninterrupted view of the band for patrons, that has a pleasing outlook and that serves good but not expensive food. The cost of the food was important as I still had to pay the band and advertising – and there had to be something left for me at the end of it all. It is a very tall order and it has been my biggest problem for over 30 years.

My next Sunday Jazz Luncheon venue was Belmaré in Beaumaris, which had formerly been The Didgeridoo. This was far more successful, and I remained there for about two years until it was demolished. Kevin Hocking of the ABC recorded a couple of the concerts I presented at Belmaré. One was with Ian Smith on cornet; clarinetist, Fred Parkes; trombonist, Bill Howard; Graham Coyle on piano; Leon Heale on bass; and Len Barnard on drums. I remember Smithy's (Ian Smith) parents attending that luncheon; it was the only time I met Ian's father who died suddenly soon afterwards. The line-up was so good that many famous old musicians came out of the woodwork. Len Barnard was always a big attraction, of course and because he'd moved to Sydney, he rarely appeared in Melbourne.



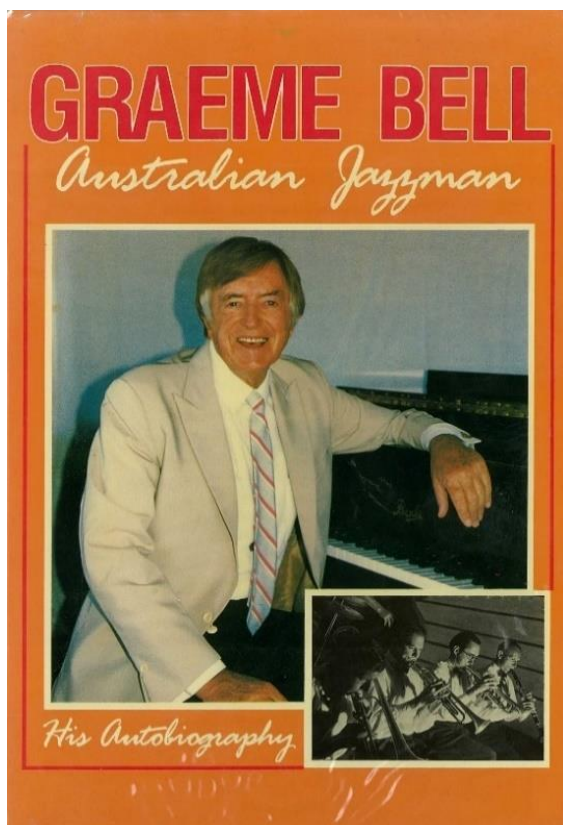
Len Barnard, Club 177, Kooyong, 1991: always a big attraction and, because he'd moved to Sydney, he rarely appeared in Melbourne... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

Another Club 177 luncheon I recall at Belmaré was with the young James Morrison on trumpet and the remarkable Virgil Donati on drums. I could afford them both in those far-off days: this was before they were demanding high fees. Virgil moved to the States soon after and is still there, I believe.



James Morrison (above) appearing at Belmaré, Beaumaris in May, 1993...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

When Belmaré was demolished two years later, I moved my operation to Rialto Receptions in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. This was an amazing room and I presented many great jazz events there, including the Melbourne launch of Graeme Bell's autobiography on September 17, 1988, a reunion of the Red Onions, a reunion of New Harlem, Ralph Sutton and Kenny Davern, A Tribute to The Bobcats, A Tribute to Benny Goodman, and many others.



Rialto Receptions in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, was an amazing room where I presented many great jazz events, including the Melbourne launch of Graeme Bell's autobiography...

It was at this time that Graeme Bell asked me if I'd become his Melbourne representative. That was the beginning of some simply incredible events involving Graeme over the next 25 years, until his death. All three of his wives attended his book launch! That was the sort of man Graeme was: he got on with everyone!

Soon after this book launch, one of the first great projects Graeme and I collaborated on was the 50th anniversary of his original band at his original jazz club, The Uptown Club in Errol Street, North Melbourne. I had looked at that run-down old building for years and fantasised about putting Graeme on there again, but it was so dilapidated that it would have been impossible. And then one day I drove past and found it had been restored. So when Graeme and I eventually decided to organise this big event, I went along and knocked on the door.



Graeme Bell with his first wife Margo Byass in 1942: All three of Graeme's wives attended his book launch in 1988... PHOTO COURTESY GRAEME BELL: AUSTRALIAN JAZZMAN

It had been beautifully renovated to become the headquarters of the Legion of Mary, of all things. I explained to the staff the historic importance of this building and how wonderful and significant it would be to celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of the most famous jazz bands in Australian jazz history, led by Graeme Bell AO MBE. They agreed to give the matter serious consideration and would let me know in due course. A couple of weeks later I received a letter from them telling me they had decided we could use the hall for this historic occasion and that they would completely clear it for our use, so long as we left it in as good a condition as we had found it.

Graeme and I were overjoyed at this incredible news. I then set about planning the event. I engaged a group called Prickly Pear. They were students who were party organisers and came highly recommended. They did some thorough research on the band and the Uptown Club and got right into the spirit of the whole event. What they achieved is thankfully on film, as we received a grant to film the night from the Australia Council who considered the occasion worthy of recording and maybe televising. The sound, unfortunately, didn't work out well due to various problems with such a huge crowd; but in spite of that, it is a wonderful record of a wonderful event, with various important speeches and interviews and some nostalgic music.

On the following three pages, a number of photographs taken by the late Richard Hunt, document the "Back To the Uptown Club" event, which took place on June 19, 1993:



“Back to the Uptown Club”, June 19, 1993, L-R, Neville Stribling, Lou Silbereisen, Ade Monsborough, Graeme Bell...PHOTO CREDIT RICHARD HUNT



L-R, Steve Waddell, Lou Silbereisen, Roger Bell, Neville Stribling, Ade Monsborough... PHOTO CREDIT RICHARD HUNT



L-R, Jack Varney, Lou Silbereisen ...PHOTO CREDIT RICHARD HUNT



Here I'm pictured on the night with Graeme, with his gift for the occasion, a piano telephone. He quickly ran off 'The Saints...' on it, and brought the house down... PHOTO CREDIT RICHARD HUNT

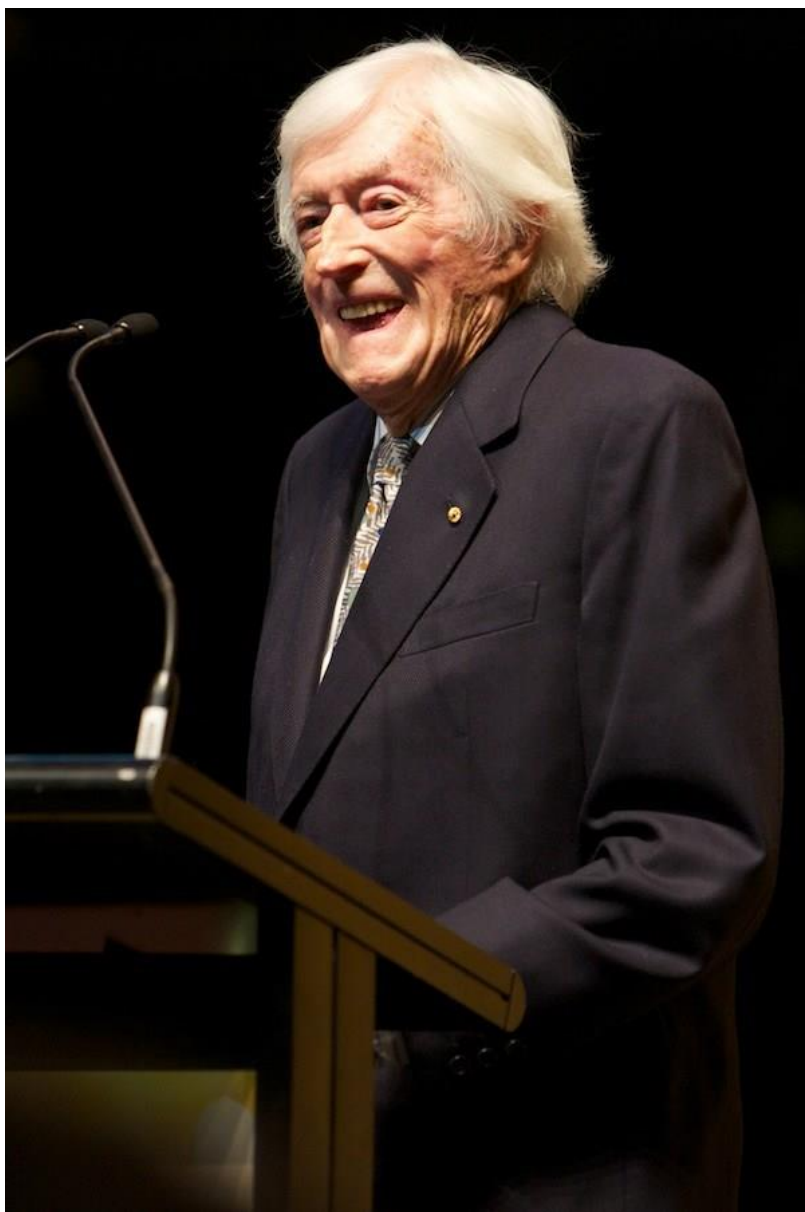


*Graeme was in his element and as self-effacing as ever ... PHOTO CREDIT
RICHARD HUNT*

Graeme was in his element and as self-effacing as ever, giving everyone else the credit for the band's fame and never any for himself. It was, however, quite evident that the only reason the hall was packed was because of him. Most of the old band was there, except their original drummer Russ Murphy who was ill. This was in the early '90s and it makes me very sad when I look at this film now to realise none of them are any longer alive. Even Neville Stribling who joined the band for the night is gone. There was such wonderful spirit in that old hall that night and even a few members of the Legion of Mary who attended agreed and were so pleased they'd given us the go-ahead. We were not charged for the use of the hall as they told me it had been a privilege to have been able to assist with such an important occasion. They all knew who Graeme Bell was. I did, however, give the Legion of Mary a generous donation for their incredible hospitality.

Other memorable ventures in which Graeme and I collaborated included his 80th birthday party at Mietta's. A contingent of Japanese arrived from Japan to join in the celebrations which lasted a couple of days. Their appearance was a wonderful surprise for Graeme who had worked with them on recordings.

Ten years later there was, of course, his 90th birthday, held at the Assembly Hall in Collins Street. Graeme had hoped I would organise it at the Athenaeum Theatre where I had presented the 100th Centenary Tribute to Bix Beiderbecke with The New Wolverines from Sydney. This had been a great night also but had cost me a fortune to present. I vowed I'd never do anything there again. So the Assembly Hall it was and it was lovely.

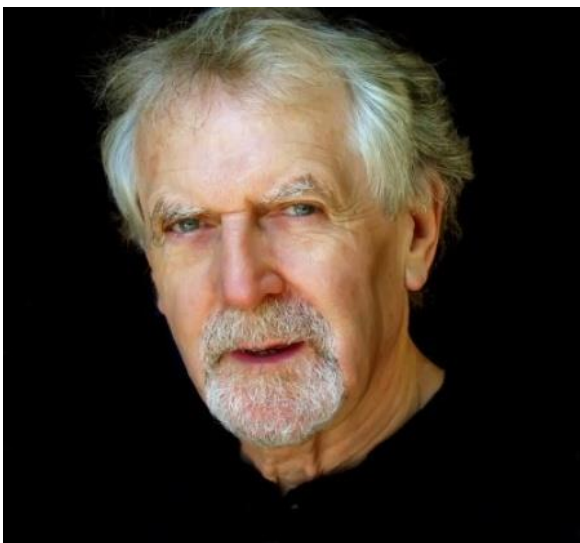


Graeme Bell on the occasion of his 90th birthday, celebrated at the Assembly Hall in Collins Street...

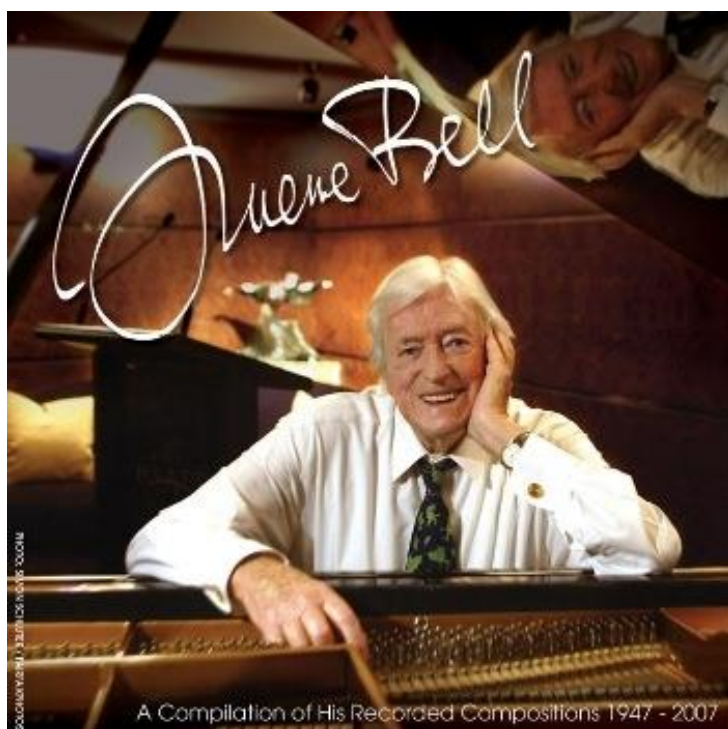
Once again people came out of the woodwork for Graeme. One of them this time was Dame Elisabeth Murdoch; another was Tony Gould; and yet another, surprisingly, was Paul Grabowsky. Graeme has always had widespread appeal. I think part of this was due to the fact that he never remained bogged down in the past.



People came out of the woodwork for Graeme Bell, including Dame Elisabeth Murdoch (above), pianist Tony Gould (below), and surprisingly, Paul Grabowsky (far below)....



In fact Graeme didn't like playing the famous old tunes of the original band over and over again; he had moved on. A great example of this is the double CD he made when he was in his 90s, *Graeme Bell: A Compilation of His Recorded Compositions 1947-2007*. Every tune on this amazing recording produced by Newmarket Music was composed by Graeme and many are played by him, including all his old tunes. The later tunes performed by Stephen Grant on this recording are indeed remarkable. Graeme said that just to hear, and have Stephen playing, those compositions was worth the effort of the whole recording. It was the biggest selling record for Newmarket in the year it was produced. I do hope every jazz enthusiast in Melbourne has a copy of this remarkable double CD.



Graeme said himself it was the best recording he had ever made. One early track is *Czechoslovak Journey* which he composed in 1944 for the first famous trip the band made to the Eureka Youth Festival in Prague, and which is the first jazz recording I ever heard: a 78 rpm of course. This recording was what captured my interest in jazz initially when I was 15. I had no idea who Graeme Bell was at that stage. Although, I lie: I actually recall my mother pointing him out to me on a tram in Kew when I was around 10 or 11. His picture had obviously appeared in the paper often enough for my mother to have recognised him. He was, in fact, a household name around the world in the 1940s.

One of the last two big events I arranged for Graeme after he'd turned 90 was his farewell concert at Scotch College when there was a full house to say goodbye to this great jazz legend. Graeme had chosen Michael McQuaid's Red Hot Rhythmakers for this concert in which he played piano throughout. Once again it was a full house and people came out of the woodwork to hear this much-loved Australian jazzman for the last time. Once again he had everyone in

stitches with various jokes; among all his other attributes, he was such a comedian. The band was in its element and it was all a huge success. It was filmed by the ABC to use for their program *Talking Heads* when he was interviewed about his life and career by Peter Thompson. It is a great interview.



At his farewell concert at Scotch College, Graeme once again had everyone in stitches with various jokes...

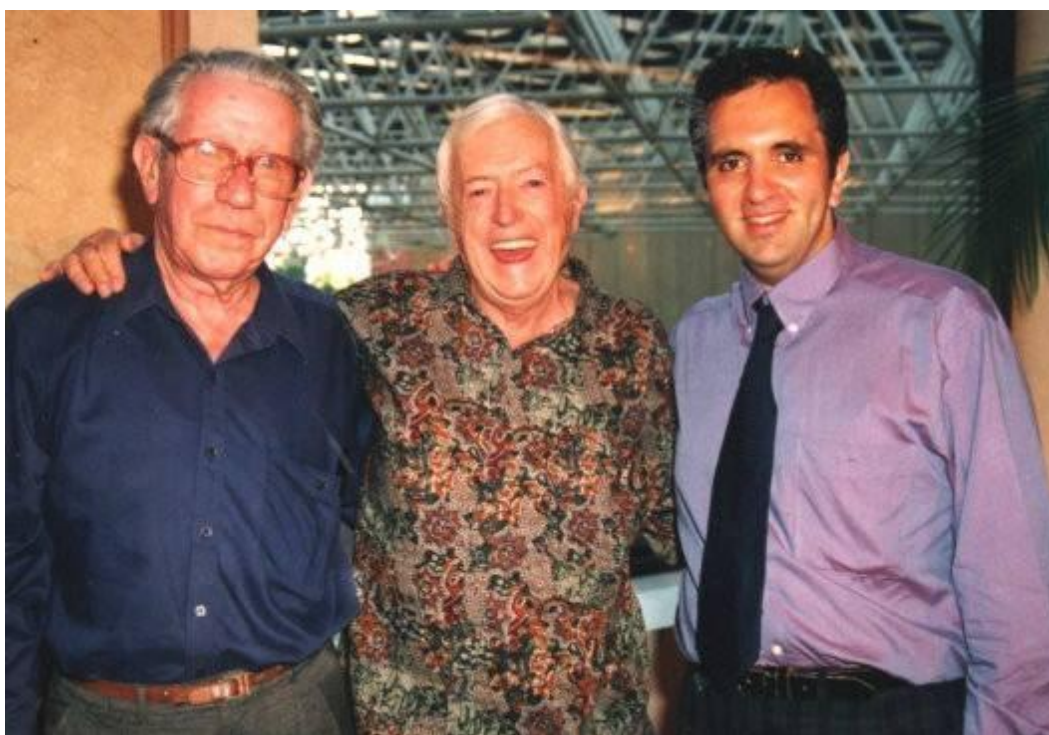
The other event was his last hurrah when we launched his double CD at the Bentleigh Club. This was also a full house. Graeme did not play, but he compered the event. It was recorded and filmed by Nigel Buesst. I love showing bits of this film, with Steve Grant playing Graeme's compositions and Graeme talking about the music and telling jokes about incidents relating to them such as *Is He Back Yet?*



Graeme with his wife Dorothy, on the occasion of their Silver wedding anniversary, in Beijing, China, December 2, 1986: I put them up at a very flash hotel in St Kilda Road... PHOTO COURTESY GRAEME BELL: AUSTRALIAN JAZZMAN

For me, though, this was also a sad day as I knew it had been a struggle for Graeme to make it to this event from Sydney. I put him and his wife Dorothy up at a very flash hotel in St Kilda Road which they were thrilled about. This was the only time Graeme had chosen not to play any piano; he just wanted to enjoy listening to Steve Grant and Tony Gould playing his compositions. It was a moving day and I'm so glad Nigel Buesst recorded it for posterity. It has also enabled me to reminisce about this great man and the great times I had working with him. It gave me such pleasure and I will always remember those times I spent with him for the rest of my life. He played a very big part in my own career and life. He called me 'my own impresario' and I enjoyed that.

Another incredible occasion was the Tribute to Graeme Bell at Dallas Brooks Hall when the Creole Bells played early Bell material in the first half of the evening, and the All-stars played the band's later material. This band consisted of the great Bob Barnard, cornet; Paul Furniss, reeds; Brian Kelly, trombone; Ian Pearce, piano; Joe McConechy, bass; and Lawrie Thompson, drums.



The All-stars included Ian Pearce on piano. Here's a shot of Ian (left) with Graeme (centre) and pianist Joe Chindamo (right)... PHOTO CREDIT RON JOBE

All night Graeme sat in a beautiful leather chair on the stage with a remote in his hand and showed us a series of photos of his musical life on a huge screen. The chair was donated by Moran furniture and called a Melba chair. Quick as a flash Graeme, on discovering this, told the audience that this meant he could keep making comebacks. He regaled us with the story of his life, aided by the photos while the band played the music that illustrated it.



The All-stars included the great Bob Barnard (cornet), pictured here performing in 1997 in Melbourne with, L-R, Graeme (piano) and Paul Furniss (clarinet, also one of the All-stars) ... PHOTO CREDIT JOYCE EVANS

Brian Kelly, the former leader of the wonderful Hotter Than Six band, collaborated with me on this project and we worked very well as a team. It was a hugely successful night, with a full house, and the Australian Jazz Museum was a beneficiary of the proceeds in exchange for their assistance. We were inundated with congratulatory phone calls, emails and letters afterwards, all of which I still have.

I must add here that throughout my career as a jazz presenter, I have frequently received correspondence from patrons who have appreciated events I've organised. One phone call after the Bell tribute was from the late Campbell McComas, who asked me to let Graeme know he could not recall ever having enjoyed a night of entertainment so much. What a compliment to Graeme, and all of us; it really was a great night and we were all on a high for a long time afterwards. It had been an enormous amount of work.

At Adrian Jackson's invitation, we ran it in conjunction with the Melbourne Jazz Festival. Graeme was an extraordinary and unique man, highly intelligent, a born marketer and a communicator par excellence. I believe we will never see the likes of him again. The only downside of this night was the poor filming of the event that was out of focus. To this day, I find it very hard not to feel hostile towards the one responsible for the absence of a record of that incredible night. This has since been resurrected but is still in need of further editing and is with the Australian Jazz Museum.

Getting back to the story of my constant search for the perfect Melbourne venue, it was around this time that I put the Sunday Jazz Luncheons under the umbrella of Jazz Australia. Following a couple of years at Rialto Receptions, I approached Studley Park Receptions in Walmer Street, Kew. This had originally been La Brochette, Smacka Fitzgibbon's first jazz club. Later, when he opened Smacka's Place in Chetwyn Street, North Melbourne, Frank Johnson took over the ownership of La Brochette. This is where many Melbourne musicians got their first gigs; among them was Steve Waddell.



I never met Smacka Fitzgibbon (above), who died well before the Naked Dance reunion at Smacka's Place, but my editor Eric Myers feels that a photograph of Smacka is appropriate here...

Vocalist Beverley Sheehan – a waiter at La Brochette at the time – also got her start there. When I took my clientele to the venue in the early '90s it had had a few face-lifts. It had a lovely outlook over the golf course to the city, a good grand piano, and the food was very good without being great. They were pleased to have my monthly business and so, many great jazz events once again took place at Studley Park Receptions where I stayed for two or three years. These days it is The Boulevard.

Then there was The Rig in City Road, South Melbourne, where I engaged Topsy Chapman from New Orleans along with Geoff Bull's wonderful Olympia Jazz Band. Two days later I presented them again at All Saints Church, St Kilda, where they performed superb gospel music. I also presented the great English tenor saxophonist Danny Moss and his vocalist wife Jeanie Lambe at The Rig.



New Orleans singer Topsy Chapman: I engaged her at The Rig along with Geoff Bull's Olympia Jazz Band... PHOTO CREDIT ELIZABETH DOBBIE

The Cotton Club in Toorak Road, South Yarra, was the next venue. This is where I also presented Danny Moss and Jeanie Lambe, and the great Chicago pianist Jon Weber - one of the great jazz pianists of our time. It was a colourful venue but it didn't last long. I also presented Jon Weber at Bennetts Lane when he did a program I requested which we called 'From Joplin to Jarrett'. That was a show stopper. I recall Meg, the Maitre'd at Bennetts Lane, told me they'd never had anything like that concert at their venue. She was impressed. It certainly was different from the usual style of jazz presented there and they had liked it. Surprise, surprise!

The only time I've ever presented a concert at Hamer Hall was when I put on Gypsy Swing with the financial assistance of Harry Hua, a successful Vietnamese businessman who wanted to assist various Russian musicians who were in the band. It was a fabulous event with the great guitarist Doug de Vries, Russian violin virtuoso Igor Oskolkov, another wonderful Melbourne guitarist Sam Lemann, bassist Howard Cairns, and a brilliant Russian balalaika player, Yurihy Mougerman. This was a superb concert and we filled the stalls.



Jazz artists I presented at the Cotton Club in Toorak Road, South Yarra, included UK saxophonist Danny Moss (above), and the American Jon Weber (below) one of the great jazz pianists of our time ...



A twilight event at Werribee Park came next, again with Gypsy Swing. That was a delightful outdoor event one mid-summer evening. It was complicated however, with marquees and lighting so on, so I didn't attempt it again. In between all these events, from time to time there were river cruises which went to such places as Hobson's Bay. I still recall the stunning sight of the sun setting and reflecting on the sky scrapers of Melbourne.

For three years in the early '90s I thoroughly enjoyed presenting Christmas Candlelight Jazz in St Paul's Cathedral, when the proceeds went to the Motor Neurone Disease Association. Allan Leake's Storyville Band with Beverley Sheehan and Nina Ferro were a highlight.



Allan Leake's Storyville Jazz Band, with vocalist Beverley Sheehan (seated). Others L-R, John Murray, Ian Walker, Tony Orr, Ross Anderson, Derek Reynolds, John Adams, Leake...PHOTO COURTESY BEVERLEY SHEEHAN

Then there was The Continental (Café), an upstairs club in Greville Street, Prahran, where I presented The Swedish Jazz Kings (SJK) plus Neville Stribling's band. The Swedes came many times to Australia and always loved playing in Melbourne where they had lots of friends. As a result, their manager Irene Biermans and I became close friends, and have remained so, travelling together several times in Europe over the years. Those days of the SJK are sadly over. They were always invited to perform at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival on their visits to Australia, and I was always permitted to present them in Melbourne afterwards. I still have very happy memories of those occasions with that wonderful band and their various members over many years. Since then I've toured the great English pianist Martin Litton and banjo virtuoso Spats Langham. I first met Martin when he toured Australia with the SJK; he is a

remarkable musician in his own right and I've enjoyed catching up with him in the UK over the years.

An early jazz venue I used many times was Doctor Jazz in Swanston Street, Carlton, where I had the Swedish Jazz Kings and also the great American stride piano player Ralph Sutton.



The great American stride piano player Ralph Sutton: a very funny incident occurred on one particular night with Ralph...

A very funny incident occurred on one particular night with Ralph, which I don't think multi-instrumentalist Steve Grant will mind my relating after all these years. (I have been presenting Steve since he was 18 and he's now in his 40s, so we go back a long way.) He in fact played at my 50th, 60th and 70th birthday celebrations.



Steve Grant (foreground), pictured here with the Perth ragtime pianist John Gill: you never knew just how Steve would look when he turned up...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

Anyway, this particular night at Doctor Jazz when Steve was around 19, I really wanted Ralph Sutton to hear this talented young musician and I knew the audience would love the experience. So I asked Steve if he'd like to play trumpet for one set with Ralph. However, you never knew just how Steve would look when he turned up. He's much better these days, but in those days I simply *had* to make sure he was going to look the part.

Ralph Sutton and the American jazz stars who visited Australia, always dressed immaculately and were all a picture of sartorial splendour, so I took the bull by the horns and asked Steve to please make sure he wore a suit for this very special occasion and look spruce. Well, he turned up with his long hair all over the place and, although he was wearing a suit, it looked as if it had been slept in. We'd all got used to Steve turning up with green hair, or no hair, or long hair or a Mohawk, and no-one really cared: he played like a dream and his appearance was soon forgotten. However, this was different and, when I introduced Ralph to Steve, I knew exactly what the former was thinking: 'What on earth has this woman done to my gig tonight, putting this dishevelled young fellow on the bill?'

Well, the set began and I watched Ralph's reaction, and I could tell he was astounded by the fascinating playing he was hearing. After a couple of very successful and interesting tunes, Ralph asked Steve if he would like to choose the next one, and Steve chose *The Way You Look Tonight*. Ralph, with a wry smile on his face, responded with, 'But Steve, I don't like the way you look tonight'.



Ralph Sutton: but Steve, I don't like the way you look tonight...PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

It brought the house down, as you can imagine; it was what we had all been wanting to say to Steve for some time (and for that matter, quite often since). It was however, one of the funniest things I can ever recall happening at one of my events. As usual, Steve had got away with it owing to his brilliance and his self-effacing way and he was, of course, once again forgiven. He even saw the funny side of the quickwittedness of Ralph Sutton.

Steve is one of my favourite musicians of all time, particularly his piano and piano accordion playing. I recall him talking to Jim Cullum, whom he was about to accompany at the Victoria Club on the 44th floor of the Rialto Building – another of my venues – in the early days of this century, and I mentioned to Jim that trumpet was in fact Steve's first instrument, not piano. Steve corrected me and said 'No, it's bass'; which I had not even heard him play. He has always seemed oblivious of his huge talent, [and his appearance for that matter]; what he looks like is the least of his concerns!

While on the subject of Steve, I also recall asking him – when he was around 19 – to put a band together at the Richmond Social Club; he called this band The Mouldy Fygges. His brother Alisdair, who played trombone in this band, went overseas to live soon afterwards, never to be seen on the Melbourne jazz scene again.

I had several great evening jazz events at The Victoria Club, in the Rialto building and one was Michael McQuaid's first concert in Melbourne. I flew him down from Canberra after hearing him at one of John Buchanan's Classic Jazz concerts. The concert Michael did for me was a Tribute to Ade Monsborough with Smithy and friends. I think this great evening was the catalyst in Michael moving to Melbourne soon afterwards.



Michael McQuaid: flown down from Canberra for his first concert in Melbourne...

Rupe and Judy Blake managed the Richmond Social Club during my tenure there. They had sold the Emerald Hotel in South Melbourne in the late '80s. I had been going to the Emerald twice a week for a couple of years to hear the Allan Browne band on Thursday nights, and Fred Parkes' New Rhythm Kings on Saturday nights. I had organised both these gigs for these bands, as I did many years later for Stevenson's Rockets on Sunday nights which is still in full swing. Fred was also in Allan's great band along with Peter Gaudion, Bill Howard, Richard Miller (reeds), John Scurry (banjo/guitar) and Leon Heale.

This was soon after I arrived back in Melbourne to live. These were halcyon days for me. The music was simply superb and Fred Parkes and I had very happily 'teamed up'! He taught me a lot about jazz during the following six years.



Fred Parkes (clarinet), pictured here with Peter Gaudion (trumpet). Allan Browne (drums) is just visible... PHOTO CREDIT RON JOBE

My next venue was the Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club. We had some wonderful events there over the following three or four years: many with Graeme and Roger Bell, the Barnard Brothers, Tom Baker, and a group of visiting Japanese musicians. Also, every February we had what I called Ade's [Monsborough] Birthday Bash. It was always popular and resulted in many very happy events, with great music from a variety of great musicians. Neville Stribling was often involved in these. Kooyong had *most* of the credentials I sought in a suitable venue for jazz luncheons.

We had one birthday bash for Ade at Echuca over a long weekend with moonlight river cruises, lovely meals and great music. It involved a coach trip from Melbourne and it was all great fun. There were quite a few of Jazz Australia excursions for Ade's birthdays over the years.



This was the occasion of Ade Monsborough's birthday bash at Echuca in 1992, over a long weekend with moonlight river cruises, lovely meals and great music. Ade is holding the tenor sax. Others in the background are drummer/washboard player Ian Smith (left) and Graham Coyle at the piano...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

Then there was a visit from Pat Yankee from San Francisco. She had been Turk Murphy's vocalist for 20 years or so. John Buchanan in Sydney (of Classic Jazz fame) and I brought her to Australia. John had engaged her for his Classic Jazz Festival and I presented her at the Peninsular Jazz Festival singing with the Creole Bells, and at the Danish Club with Jo Stevenson and Graham Coyle et al. She knocked everyone out with her great raunchy jazz vocals and was the next best thing to a 'red hot mamma'!



Pat Yankee from San Francisco, who had been Turk Murphy's vocalist for 20 years or so...

Another memorable event was a truly fabulous concert at Melba Hall, at the University of Melbourne. The first half saw John Gill and Steve Grant on two pianos plus interspersed solos, which was superb and memorable. The second half was Tom Baker's Sydney Allstars starring Eric Holroyd trumpet, Paul Furniss, Tom on trombone and tenor sax, Steve Grant again on piano, John Bates, tuba, and Len Barnard. That was a fantastic concert and fortunately one that was recorded.



Tom Baker's Sydney Allstars in 1985 included L-R, John Bates (trombone), Tom (trumpet), Eric Holroyd (cornet) & Paul Furniss (clarinet)... PHOTO COURTESY ROGER BEILBY

I am so lucky to have had good recording technicians for most Jazz Australia concerts over the years, Mark Mayle specifically and I have been able to produce two great CDs with excerpts from various concerts as a result. The first, *Swing Brother Swing* – are highlights from Club 177 concerts. A thousand dollars from the proceeds of this double CD was given to the late trombonist Bill Howard's two sons who were sadly left orphans following Bill's death as his wife Carol had died a couple of years earlier. As Bill is featured extensively on this recording, along with his great musical collaborator Fred Parkes, *and* Bill's photo is on the cover, I wanted Oscar and Theo Howard to share in the spoils of this production and to have the recording by which to remember their father's exceptional trombone prowess.



Trombonist Bill Howard: I wanted Bill's two sons Oscar and Theo who were sadly left orphans, following Bill's death, to share in the spoils of this production... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

The second recording some years later is *Moments in Time* of which I'm also very pleased. A beneficiary of this was the Australian Jazz Museum. I've sold out of both CDs now, but they are available on the Jazz Australia website.

15 years ago I decided it was time to turn my Jazz Luncheons into seasonal events which meant only four a year, rather than ten. I was getting tired of sending out monthly newsletters, which was a demanding and constant hands-on process in those days. Folding and labelling hundreds of newsletters for snail mail in the early years when not many people had email was also expensive. Now I send out about 15 by ordinary mail and the rest are emails. What a breakthrough the internet has been!

My 100th Sunday Jazz Luncheon at the Danish Club featured Hotter Than Six before they tragically broke up. This was such a fantastic band and I had a lot to do with them in their heyday. I presented them at Decanters Jazz Club at the Hilton Hotel in Melbourne for a while on Friday nights and every other opportunity, including with the Barnard brothers at Kooyong with vocalist Rebecca Barnard. Wow! I loved that high energy band of flaming youth. Jo Stevenson of course was one of the front line and Smithy was eventually the drummer. It was led by the New Zealand trombonist Brian Kelly who found it hard to say 'six' of course, so he was always the one made to introduce the band which was always good for a laugh.



Ian Smith at Club 177 in 1992: he was eventually the drummer in Hotter Than Six...



My 100th Sunday Jazz Luncheon at the Danish Club featured Hotter Than Six before they tragically broke up. Here, they are L-R, John Withers (banjo), Howard Cairns (bass), Graham Coyle (piano), Simon Stribling (trumpet), Jo Stevenson (reeds), Ian Smith (drums), Nina Ferro (vocals), Brian Kelly (bandleader, trombone) ...

Decanters was the most sophisticated jazz room in Melbourne in my opinion. However it only presented jazz initially on Saturday nights and was expensive. I was appointed Musical Director and we presented a different quartet every Saturday night, usually with a vocalist. This was predominantly mainstream and sophisticated jazz. One of the pianists we had on the program was Joe Chindamo, with his trio. He has rocketed to stardom since then.



Pianist Joe Chindamo was on the program at Decanters: he has rocketed to stardom since then...

Also on the program was the great American piano player/clarinetist from Minneapolis, Butch Thomson and vocalist Edwin Duff and Dick Hughes both from Sydney. It was a beautiful and intimate room and was frequented by a sophisticated audience. It was very sad when it suddenly disappeared two years later due to a redevelopment of the area. It had a wall of decanters in glass compartments and the clientele had their own keys: a novel idea.

Around this time – 1990 – I persuaded Allan Leake, Musical Director of the Montsalvat Jazz Festival, to consider bringing the outstanding Jim Cullum Jazz Band out from America. This was probably the best jazz festival in the world in its day. I remember Don Burrows and several American musicians saying just that. But it only lasted for around ten years before it tragically was wound up over ‘politics’. The Cullum Band was to have also included Sydney, but the twelve-month air strike intervened just before they arrived and so they could only come to Melbourne. Two of the program highlights of the festival that year were the Cullum Band with Bob Barnard on second cornet, performing *Super Satch* in the Great Hall. On another evening they (minus Bob) presented a unique version of *Porgy and Bess*. These were both brilliant performances. Fortunately, the ABC recorded *Super Satch* which I still enjoy watching on video.



Around 1990 I persuaded Allan Leake (above), musical director of the Montsalvat Jazz Festival, to consider bringing the outstanding Jim Cullum Jazz Band out from America... PHOTO COURTESY BEVERLEY SHEEHAN

After the festival I was given permission to present the band in the Hilton Ballroom the following Friday and I called it At the Jazz Band Ball. It was a black-tie affair and a memorable night. Fred Parkes' New Rhythm Kings was also on the bill and the whole night was a magical success. We all stayed at the Hilton for a few nights and the following day the band flew back to San Antonio Texas. They had enjoyed their great adventure down under and their visit was hailed a huge success by one and all. It never happened again unfortunately; it was too expensive an exercise.

An off-shoot of this fabulous visit of the Cullum band was that Jim and I decided we would put together a jazz tour in America six months later. We had been talking about it since we met in 1983; in 1990 we decided to go for it. We had a great time planning every detail, all by landline, and fax!

To this day those who took part in that incredible jazz tour say it's the best holiday they've ever had; just ask Jazz Museum stalwart Gretel James. There were 22 in my contingent from Australia, and Jim had 78; so a hundred all up. The Aussies began their leg of the tour in San Francisco where clarinetist Richard Hadlock put on a wonderful concert for us, which included Leon Oakley, trumpet; Richard Hadlock, reeds, and Norma Teagarden, piano. The luncheon in our honour also coincided with Centennial Jazz Day, so a great time was had by all, including the San Francisco Jazz Club. We spent three days in San Francisco which included a lot of sightseeing by day and jazz in the evenings. Following this great start (when we had all got over our jet lag) we flew to San Antonio Texas, home of the great Jim Cullum Jazz Band, and we were absolutely feted from the word go.



To this day those who took part in that incredible jazz tour say it's the best holiday they've ever had; just ask Jazz Museum stalwart Gretel James (pictured above)...

Jim went out of his way to organise great local events for us: a special morning jazz performance in the Music Room of a beautiful historic house featuring clarinetist Herb Hall, John Sheridan piano and a bassist; trips to Mexican missions; and three nights at his Landing Jazz Club where they made a huge fuss of the Aussies. Herb Hall was the brother of Edmond.



Clarinetist Herb Hall (brother of Edmond) & his wife, with myself, Jim Cullum & his cousin Maria, in San Antonio, Texas, 1990... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

The Landing, which closed a couple of years ago, was the longest running jazz club in the world and the best jazz club I've ever experienced – and I've been to a lot. It held about 150 people: 100 on the ground level and 50 in the balcony. Jim designed it himself, even though it was in the lower level of the Hyatt Regency Hotel and fronted onto the beautiful winding Riverwalk. One entrance to it was from a patio on the river's edge and the other from the hotel itself. The walls were covered in framed photographs of all the great musicians who had played at the three Landing Jazz Clubs: Louis Armstrong with Jim playing cornet, Jack Teagarden, Bobby Hackett and so on.



A shot from 1965, L-R, John 'Curly' Williams, Jim Cullum Sr, Willson Davis, Louis Armstrong, Harvey Kindervater, Jim Cullum Jr, Gene McKinney... PHOTO COURTESY JIM CULLUM JR

The tables were simulated 78 rpm jazz classic recordings, seating up to six and on the stage was a beautiful Steinway grand piano. The walls were dark blue and the backdrop on the stage wall was a model of a grand piano made from an American flag. The band was always well dressed and The Landing itself was and still is the most stylish jazz club I've ever experienced. It had functioned in its three different locations for over 40 years. Jim's father, clarinetist Jim Cullum Snr, established it and, following his death, Jim used his great marketing skills to turn it into one of the most successful and longest running jazz clubs in the world, open six nights a week.



A recent Jim Cullum Band, L-R, Mike Pittsley (trombone), Ed Torres (drums), unidentified bassist, sitting in for Jack Wyatt, Howard Elkins (guitar), Allan Vaché (clarinet), John Sheridan (piano) is obscured... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

We had not joined forces with the American contingent of our jazz tour at this stage, so Jim devoted himself to the Aussies and made a great fuss of us. He said he'd never met an Aussie he hadn't liked! He organised a wonderful breakfast at an interesting grain mill for us one morning, and cocktails one evening at the exclusive Club Giraud on the San Antonio River where his mother was a member. We were taken for drinks and canapés by boat to this beautiful and historic sandstone precinct, situated in majestic grounds. When it eventually came time to leave, we boarded the boat again to find it had been set for dinner with a Mexican meal.

As we boarded, Margaritas were served all round as we slowly drifted down the river and a jazz duo entertained us until we arrived at The Landing for yet another night of, arguably, the hottest jazz in the world. This night the band played the best arrangement of *Waltzing Matilda* I've ever heard and a most amusing thing happened. When the band finished to great roars of applause, a lady came over to me and asked me why it was that Australians don't stand for their National Anthem!



The Delta Queen paddle steamer: the most perfect four days and three nights steaming on the Mississippi...

The following day we all flew to New Orleans and met the seventy-eight Americans who were waiting for us and the band. We had two days and two nights of revelling in the Crescent City: a street march organised by Jim in which we all joined in; and a barbecue at the stately home of a friend of Jim's. On the following day the 100 of us boarded the *Delta Queen* paddle steamer for the most perfect four days and three nights steaming on the Mississippi.

The weather was very warm in July, the Cullum Band was in full flight every night, and we had wonderful forays into fascinating parts of the bayous in Louisiana by day. Each night on board the *Delta Queen* a story teller regaled colourful Mark Twain stories of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer: so appropriate as we drifted along the Mississippi, the settings of all the stories. It was perfect. The whole thing was a magical experience and the Americans were so hospitable. One of my group, the late Ean Downing, was a serious ballroom dancer; the American women loved him. He could dance all night. So as soon as one dancing partner had had enough he swooped on another of the American women and they loved it. Ean never stopped talking about this trip till the day he died. He actually rang me a few years ago, not long before he died, to thank me again. Sadly, at least half of the 22 in the Aussie group are no longer with us. It was the trip of a lifetime and Jim and I were very pleased with the great outcome. The year was 1990: twenty-five years ago.

After arriving back to New Orleans, the Aussies went out on the town for one last fling and we all voted it the best time we had ever had. We couldn't do this trip happen again, unfortunately. Hurricane Katrina put a stop to one of my proposed tours. Now, it's all I can do to get *myself* on an overseas trip, let alone accompanied by 22 delegates. At the time, however, it was well worth the effort involved.



Jim Cullum and I have always kept in touch and have visited each other several times since then...

Jim Cullum and I have always kept in touch and have visited each other several times since then. I have organised Aussie tours for Jim and Bob Barnard on the occasions Jim has visited Australia, when they call themselves Cornet Copia.



Cornet Copia: Jim Cullum (left) with Bob Barnard... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

Throughout all these gala events I continued to stage ten Jazz Luncheons a year until the year 2000 when they became quarterly events. I have very seldom presented working bands, as I've always much preferred to put together special ensembles for special tributes, or invite one particular musician to put together a group they fancied performing with. I've also tried to use themes so that audiences would have some idea of what they were going to hear. My events have often involved visiting overseas musicians or singers. After all, Jazz Australia audiences could listen to working bands any old time. I have always liked the idea of presenting unusual line-ups of musicians; the audiences have, by and large, enjoyed this aspect.

The most recent of these was the great African American jazz and gospel vocalist Marilyn Keller from Portland, Oregon. She trusted me to put a line-up of musicians together to accompany her and so I chose five of who I regard as the best: Perth trumpet player Mat Jodrell who has recently moved to Melbourne to enable him to fly to Mount Gambier four days a week to head up James Morrison's Academy of Music; Adelaide clarinetist Jonathan Hunt who has also recently moved to Melbourne; the one and only Steve Grant on piano; the wonderful bassist Michelle Scully from Geelong; and the inimitable Ian Smith on drums. Marilyn was thrilled with this ensemble.



The great African American jazz and gospel vocalist Marilyn Keller from Portland, Oregon. She trusted me to put a line-up of musicians together to accompany her, which included the trumpeter Mat Jodrell (below)... JODRELL PHOTO COURTESY JAZZCHORD



Another Jazz Australia gig I held for five years in the '90s was the provision of the music at Government House on Australia Day: the day Government House is thrown open to the public. The Drawing Room and the Ballroom each sported a grand piano where visitors were able to file through to hear the performances. Some of the piano players were Bob Sedergreen, Graham Coyle, Luke Howard, Jon Weber, Tony Gould, the late brilliant Will Poskitt, and various other piano graduates from the Victorian College of the Arts whom Tony Gould recommended to me.



Pianists presented at Government House on Australia Day included Graham Coyle (above), Luke Howard (below) and Tony Gould (far below)...



The pianists I invited to take part on Australia Day were always delighted to participate and so many an enjoyable event was shared by all. This job for me was in an honorary capacity. I felt it an honour to be invited to present my services on Australia Day. As a result, and in gratitude, I was invited to attend – and take a friend – to other musical events at Government House during the years.

Another wonderful event I presented as a fund-raiser for the Australian Jazz Museum was a two-night Tribute to Frank Traynor at 45 Downstairs. We had a different vocalist on each of the two nights; both had formerly sung with Frank's early bands: the late Helen Violaris and Judith Durham. Both nights were sell-outs and each was a huge success in every respect. Peter Gaudion, a former member of Frank's band, played trumpet one night and Ian Smith the other; they revived the music of one of Melbourne's most legendary band leaders. Frank's widow attended one night and was moved by the tribute.



Trumpeter Peter Gaudion (left) who was a member of Frank Traynor's Jazz Preachers, is pictured here performing with Traynor...

Throughout 30 years of Jazz Australia events Ian Smith, or Smithy as he is affectionately known, has been a constant: as a musician who also usually took responsibility for the sound, and as a colleague. I couldn't have managed as well without him. Not only is he everyone's favourite drummer, but he is a great jazz musician in every sense of the word. Although he thinks I'm a controller (and he's right), we have always got on well.



Ian Smith: a great jazz musician in every sense of the word...

When I first moved to Point Lonsdale to live in 2009 he said to me, 'What are we all going to do now?' He was of course exaggerating, but it was a compliment and I appreciated it. However, since my move to the Bellarine Peninsula he has continued to play a large role in my business, and always will. The gig he and I have collaborated on at the Amora Hotel in Richmond every Sunday, lasted for 25 years. I honestly can't think of anyone else who could have held that gig down for so long. He is the reason it has been a great success, in spite of the ups and downs with the food. The late Fred Parkes used to call Smithy 'a musician's drummer' and he was certainly Fred's favourite.

Fred Parkes played a big role in my jazz life in Melbourne for the first six years. When I first met him on the set of the *Naked Dance* band reunion, he was barely working, having experienced a catastrophic 'round-up' experience with his goldfish farm a few years earlier which also instigated the break-up of his

first marriage. At the time, my marriage had also recently broken up and we were not only supportive of each other but both had a powerful fascination with jazz. I got Fred going again musically and we finished up sharing more than just music for six years.



Fred Parkes, circa 1985: he and I were not only supportive of each other but both had a powerful fascination with jazz...PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

These were very productive years musically for both of us and you only have to listen to the two recordings I produced to hear how superbly he contributed to what I was presenting to jazz enthusiasts in Melbourne. These recordings are testimony to Fred's prodigious input over the years we were together. He was one of the most ingenious and creative musicians I've worked with or heard. He told me once that he tried never to play the same thing the same way twice, unlike many musicians who play things the same way over and over again and constantly use clichés, Fred never did. He also worked hard on stage at enhancing what other musicians were doing, and never trying to grab the limelight for himself. That was not Fred's style. I learnt a lot from him and we'll never see *his* likes again either. He was a true individualist in every sense of the word.

My final resting place in Melbourne, so to speak, was the Bentleigh Club, where I stayed for 15 years. It had all the qualities that I had always looked for in a venue, an excellent grand piano, good acoustics, good visibility for *everyone*, good food at the right price, excellent parking facilities and always great function managers.

I have gone out on a limb a number of times over the years, particularly with overseas musicians when the overheads have been very high. I've been reluctant to put my price up too much, and just hoped I'd be supported by the jazz fraternity, which has not always been the case. However, I've had some *truly* wonderful and loyal stalwart supporters over the years and I've greatly appreciated them.

I've virtually never had any help from the Press. For very many years now it has seemed that *The Age* jazz journalist was not in the least interested in promoting classic jazz, other than reporting or reviewing something occasionally *after the event*. This has been very discouraging considering I've spent thousands on advertisements, particularly with the Age. I have never sought grants and only seldom sought financial assistance. I've simply pressed on hoping my clientele would be supportive when I've gone out on a limb to bring interstate and international musicians to Melbourne for their pleasure, and most of the time they have.



Diana: I've virtually never had any help from the Press. For very many years now it has seemed that The Age jazz journalist was not in the least interested in promoting classic jazz... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

The biggest job I've ever undertaken was the York Jazz Festival in WA. This was in 1994–95 when I was offered the job of Artistic Director. Graeme Bell was the Patron. The brief I received was to recommend the best line-up of the eastern states' musicians for this festival. I went way over the top with a dream program consisting of what I considered to be the best bands from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in the classic and mainstream jazz genre. I was expecting it would be greatly cut back. However, to my great surprise, not only was nothing cut back but the organisers added James Morrison and his band, Tommy Emmanuel, and also Grace Knight with her 12-piece orchestra.



Grace Knight & her 12-piece orchestra, and others such as James Morrison and Tommy Emmanuel, were added to the York Jazz Festival program...

To be honest, I was shocked and worried about what seemed to me to be overkill. How on earth were they going to make this work? A group of local businessmen had taken over the festival in York and this was their first effort. I was flown business class to Perth and driven to York twice during the ensuing year and again for the week before the festival. It was a huge amount of work and the actual programming was a nightmare. These days it would all be done electronically but in those days it was done by hand.

York is an historic and picturesque little town about an hour from Perth. The owner of The Settlers Arms Hotel was the President of the Festival Committee and the festival was based at the hotel. I hasten to add that one third of the

program was Perth bands. Huge marquees were erected around the town. Accommodation was difficult with so many musicians to house. It was a tall order from woe to go and, although the music was sensational, it was a financial disaster as I suspected it would be. If they had pruned my ambitious programming back and not added the other expensive artists I am sure it could have been a goer.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the whole project was that the Perth Jazz Club decided to run their own festival on the same weekend, the result being that both were disasters. However it was an amazing experience in many respects. The highlights were Tom Baker, Graeme Bell, vocalist Kerrie Biddell, James Morrison, Paul Furniss' San Francisco Jazz Band, the New Wolverines, the Allan Browne Band and Hotter Than Six from Melbourne. It was an extravaganza of the first order.

They did it again the following year and I doubled my fee as I didn't really want the job, and I didn't get it! My successor tragically died unexpectedly soon after the next festival. Again it was a financial disaster and was abandoned after that. I've never had any desire to be an Artistic Director of a jazz festival again I have to say, and I admire Adrian Jackson for his long and successful years in this role both at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival and Stonnington.



I admire Adrian Jackson (above) for his long and successful years in the artistic director role both at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival and Stonnington...

One other disaster I weathered many years ago was when I booked the Sydney ferry The South Steyne – newly arrived in Melbourne – for a luncheon jazz cruise in Port Phillip Bay. This historic ferry was brought to Melbourne in time for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth to launch as an ongoing pleasure vessel. This was in the late '80s if I recall correctly. I thought it would be a wonderful way to spend a Sunday: a jazz luncheon cruising Port Phillip Bay. So away I went. Well, there were problems from the start and, just prior to the cruise date which was fully booked, I received a phone call from the proprietors saying it would have to be postponed as they were having mechanical problems. It transpired that the problems had actually first occurred with Her Majesty on board! They offered me Menzies Hotel as an alternative venue for my event and the South Steyne for the following month. Everyone had to be contacted and the whole event was rescheduled, which was a time-consuming business. Nevertheless, Menzies Ballroom all went well and there are photographs to record the day, with Geoff Brookes singing with the band.

The new cruise date duly arrived with another band led by trumpet player Dick Tattam which included Alex Hutchinson on clarinet. Everyone came on board, and drinks and canapés were served. We all waited for the boat to leave the wharf. Lunch was served and still everyone waited, listening for the engine to start and the long-awaited cruise to begin. But the South Steyne didn't leave South Wharf that day or any other day. I still remember one of the guests coming to me and saying 'Look, I know a lot about boats and ferries and I can tell we're not leaving South Wharf today'.



The Sydney ferry South Steyne: it didn't leave South Wharf that day or any other day... PHOTO CREDIT JOHN COWPER 2016

At this news I began to get seriously worried, but tried to stay calm as I was very concerned about the reaction from the full complement on board. After an hour or so I spoke to the captain and was given the bad news: due to mechanical problems we would indeed not be cruising that day – once again. The guest who

had warned me said he suspected the crew knew all along they had a serious problem that wasn't going to be fixed that day, but they decided not to let me know until everyone had enjoyed lunch and a few drinks! I dreaded making the announcement so I went to see Dick Tattam and asked him if the band would play *Abide With Me*. This was hopefully to soften the blow. I knew there were angry people on board who felt they had been badly let down, twice! I then made the necessary announcement.

Although it was not my fault, I was the scapegoat. I lost clientele that miserable day, but at least the problems didn't occur at sea; that would have been worse. I refused to pay the company, one of whose owners was a very prominent Melbourne lawyer. I knew I was in for a difficult time with him. I engaged a solicitor to deal with him and he was very helpful. If I remember correctly, I finally agreed to pay a portion of what I owed which compensated me in some way for the loss of business that ensued. It was a learning curve, I suppose; such an experience was unlikely to ever happen to me again. And it hasn't. The *South Steyne* was not a success in Melbourne and disappeared soon after.

An event I very happily remember was bringing the Pearce–Pickering Barrelhouse Jazz Band from Hobart to Melbourne to Le Chateau, a very nice venue in Queen's Road. I think it was the only time this band ever came to Melbourne, which is disappointing considering they were only a short plane flight away. About a year later Tom Pickering had a stroke and never played well again. I did bring Ian Pearce to Melbourne again for the Tribute to Graeme Bell at Dallas Brooks Hall. However, considering the Pearce–Pickering Barrelhouse Jazz Band was one of the most distinctive bands in Australian jazz history, they should have appeared in Melbourne more often.



Tom Pickering (left, on clarinet) & Ian Pearce (right, on electric piano): they should have appeared in Melbourne more often... PHOTO CREDIT STEVE ROBERTSON

I've always had great support from my front of house gals. The main one has been Gretel James who has done a fantastic job for most of the 30 years I've been presenting jazz in Melbourne. Jean Leake was my first assistant and saw me through the early years. Gretel then joined forces with her as numbers increased. Nonie Sadler supported Gretel for some time, followed by a school friend of mine, Lois Bennett. I would like to acknowledge their great assistance to me over very many years; I could not have managed without them. They have always been only too willing to do whatever has been required of them; they have been indispensable and supportive and have never once let me down.



Two of my front of house gals: Gretel James (left) and Lois Bennett at the Bentleigh Club... PHOTO COURTESY DIANA ALLEN

On 15 November 2015, Jazz Australia's 30th anniversary, I finally wound up my regular jazz luncheons. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined it would last for so long. I'm very appreciative to the thousands of jazz enthusiasts who have supported my efforts to bring a high standard of classic jazz to the Melbourne market place in the hundreds of jazz concerts I've presented. My patrons don't talk during these concerts, which makes them enjoyable for everyone. I couldn't have done it without my loyal supporters and I'm very grateful to them for enabling me to keep going for as long as I have.

When I look at photos of events and realise how many of my stalwart supporters are no longer with us, I feel very sad but, at the same time, very grateful for the support they've shown me and how much pleasure I'm aware I've given them. Many of them let me know quite regularly the extent of their appreciation for

the good times I've provided and I have always valued their acknowledgements. I also feel very privileged to have been able to showcase the great jazz talent we have in Australia.

The Mission Statement that has guided me for the past 30 years has been to promote, present and preserve the very best classic jazz in Australia in the most appealing way.

I have so many wonderful memories of some of the extraordinary musicians and people I've met during my 40 years as a jazz impresario. My visitors' books bring so many people back to mind. I enjoy reminiscing as I leaf through them, as I do my copious photo albums. They bring back times that can never be repeated.

In August 2009 I moved to the Bellarine Peninsula where many people have retired. I have discovered a new audience of jazz enthusiasts here. So I haven't actually hung up my shingle yet. It's only an hour-and-a-half from Melbourne – a great place for a weekend away and I'm hoping that some of my Melbourne clientele will continue to attend my events down here from time to time. Actually, a lot of them do this already. If you would like to be on the Bellarine Branch of Jazz Australia's mailing list I can always be contacted at diana@jazzaustralia-vic.com or on 03 5258 3936. As you know, there is no obligation being on a mailing list. At least you'll know what is going on and what you might like to sample 'once in a while'.

It has all been great fun and I've enjoyed it so much, and, as the saying goes, 'It ain't all over till the fat lady sings!'



Web editor Eric Myers writes (April, 2020): Above is a shot of Diana Allen, pictured in 2018, on the occasion of the OAM Award for her services to jazz in Australia. This history was originally published in three instalments in the Victorian Jazz Club magazine, Jazzline: Vol 48, No 2 Spring/Summer 2015; Vol 49, No 1 Autumn/Winter; and Vol 49, No 2 Spring/Summer 2016.