

BURROWS AND MORRISON: A RETROSPECTIVE ON A GREAT JAZZ PARTNERSHIP

by John Clare

[This review of two CDs appeared on the Music Trust website on June 2, 2017, at this link <http://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/in-good-company-don-burrows-james-morrison-two-discs/>]

The Early Years. Don Burrows (clarinet), James Morrison (trumpet), George Golla (guitar), Craig Scott (double bass), Tony Ansell (piano), Allan Turnbull (drums). Recorded at Rothbury Estate, Pokolbin, 1983. Then Don Burrows (clarinet), George Golla, (guitar), Craig Scott (guitar), David Jones (drums), Sydney Opera House, 1985. Australian Jazz Orchestra, Brisbane, 1988 and other ensembles.

In Good Company. Don Burrows (alto flute/clarinet/alto saxophone), James Morrison (trombone/bass trumpet/trumpet), Phil Stack (acoustic bass) and a range of excellent ensembles.

Label: ABC Jazz 476 0729

When I returned to Sydney from Melbourne at the end of the 1950s Don Burrows was for me the personification of Sydney. Born at Bondi, he was athletic, good looking, confident, a beach lover, cheerful and clean cut. He played members of the flute and saxophone family with exemplary facility, fluency and precision. He was right, energised and never short of a note or well turned phrase in his solos. I would hear him at El Rocco and a slightly different venue – more middle and upper class and advertising-agency-smart than bohemian. This was called The Sky Lounge. It was owned by a mysterious organisation. It reminded me of airline restaurants and waiting rooms.



Don Burrows the younger, aged 50...

By the time he became a mentor to the young virtuoso James Morrison (an unsurprising alliance), I had discovered an underground cohort of – to me – more interesting players. I never did go nuts over James, though I immediately recognized his high level of accomplishment. I was perhaps childishly annoyed by the fact that his boosters claimed he was the only one who could do certain things (play a horn with a brass mouthpiece as well as one – several in fact – with a reed). Why annoyed? Because he never contradicted these claims. Well, why should he?



Don Burrows (left) and James Morrison... PHOTO COURTESY MUSIC TRUST

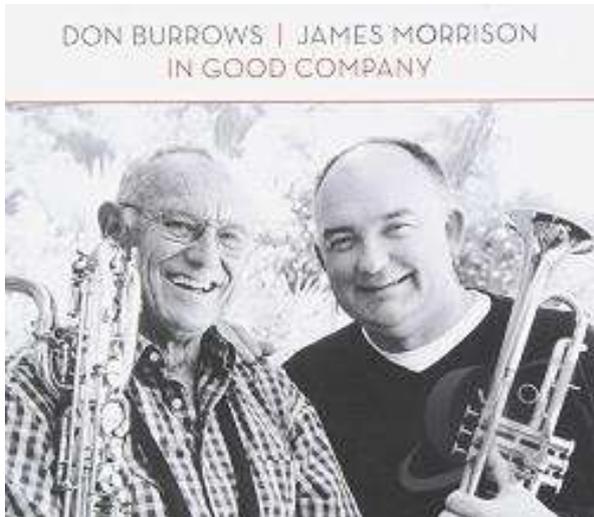
Let's be honest. There was a time when I took the title critic very literally. You certainly don't have to share my tastes. These days, writing is more important to me than evaluating, yet evaluation is part of the process of observation. Here is a comprehensive opportunity for you to do the evaluating.

These two discs have Don and James playing together in early days (*The Early Years*) and regrettably for the last time (*In Good Company*). Both reveal them, in case you had forgotten, as polished and musical partners who suit each other very well. Most of the tunes they play and improvise on are old favourites from the swing era or thereabouts. Some of



James Morrison: he and Burrows are polished and musical partners who suit each other very well... PHOTO COURTESY MUSIC TRUST

course are from Broadway or film musicals. It is mildly surprising to find that the earlier disc incorporates a much greater variety of ensembles large and small. The arrangements are played by a topline cohort of musicians who are brilliant in almost all genres. Jazz enthusiasts will recognize most or all of them. There are originals here by Burrows and Evan Lohning. None but Don or James has a solo, which is a little disappointing.



This might be called middle of the road, or at least very familiar – both the writing and the playing styles. The comfortable and the exciting sit easily side by side – the immaculate and the spectacular episodes of ringing brass. Well, they are actually immaculate too. I like the blending of energy and sharp-edged, clean-lined precision.



Burrows (left, on flute) with Morrison on the piano, in Burrows' nursing home: Don, sadly, is hospitalised and from all accounts in the last period of his life...

It is perhaps a close and fortunate thing that we have this record available – this example of exceptional Australian musicianship. Don, sadly, is hospitalised and from all accounts in the last period of his life.