

## **OBITUARY: GRAEME BELL 1914-2012**

**by Bill Haesler OAM\***

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*[This obituary appeared in the now-disconnected Jazz In Australia website in 2012.]*

**P**ianist/bandleader/composer/artist Graeme [Gay] Emerson Bell AO, was born in Melbourne, Victoria, on 7 September 1914, and died in Sydney NSW on 13 June 2012.

Graeme studied classical piano as a child and was introduced to jazz by his younger brother Roger. They formed a dance band in 1935, played for local dances and functions until jazz took precedence and, in 1941, with like-minded friends, formed Graeme Bell's Jazz Gang.



*Graeme Bell with his younger brother Roger Bell in the background. It was Roger who introduced Graeme to jazz...*

WWII broke up the group and he worked for the American Red Cross in North Queensland. On his return to Melbourne in 1944 he and Roger established

Graeme Bell's Dixieland Band (later renamed Graeme Bell's Australian Jazz Band) a local leader in the emerging worldwide jazz revival.

In December 1946 it and other enthusiasts organised the First Australian Jazz Convention. The band toured Czechoslovakia, France and Britain in 1947-1949, made a second tour of the UK and Europe in 1950-1952 and, by mutual consent, broke up in September 1952.



*Graeme Bell (at the piano, obscured), with his Australian Jazz Band at the Supraphone recording studio, Czechoslovakia, 1947. From left, Russ Murphy (drums, at rear), Pixie Roberts (clarinet), Roger Bell (trumpet), Lou Silbereisen (bass, facing away from camera), Ade Monsbourgh (trombone), Jack Varney (banjo)...*

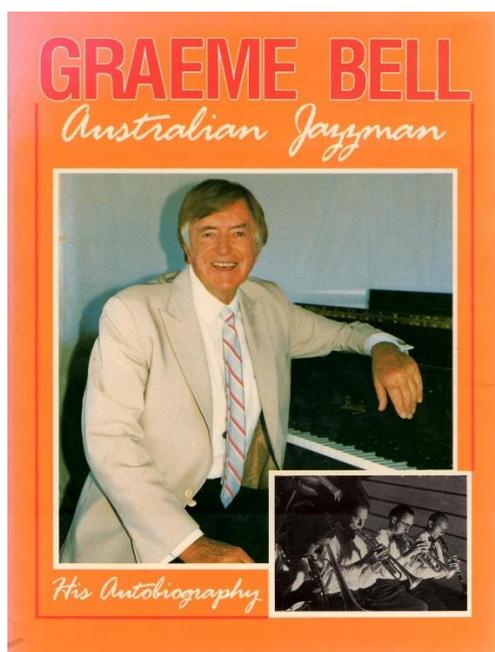
For the next ten years Graeme was a show business personality assembling groups for concerts, stage shows and functions including a Combined Services Entertainment concert party tour in 1954-1955 entertaining the troops in Korea and Japan. He led bands in Brisbane, moved to Sydney and its commercial music scene, taught piano and opened an art gallery.

Graeme returned to jazz in June 1962 with his All Stars, a Festival Records contract, a TV series and long residencies. For the next forty years his All Stars recorded, broadcast and played festivals and concerts throughout Australia, PNG, New Zealand and China. He also made guest jazz appearances in Europe, Britain, USA, Canada, Czechoslovakia and Japan.



*One of Graeme Bell's last All Star bands in Melbourne in 1997, L-R, Bell (piano), Paul Furniss (clarinet), Bob Barnard (cornet), Ross Anderson (bass), Eric Holroyd (cornet)...PHOTO CREDIT JOYCE EVANS COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA*

By 1999 he decided to slow down musically apart from special appearances and concerts. The Graeme Bell Reunion Band (an augmented All Stars) was formed in 2003 for festivals, concerts and recordings. During his 90th birthday celebrations the next year he announced his final retirement and organised a farewell tour with the band.



Graeme Bell's career was documented in the 1988 autobiography *Graeme Bell: Australian Jazzman* (Child & Associates).