

OBITUARY: ADE MONSBOURGH 1917-2006

by Dick Hughes*

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Ade Monsborough was singing *I've Got What It Takes* on a riverboat trip on the Yarra in Melbourne in February 1947, about the time of his 30th birthday. His trumpet in one hand, he dipped into his fob pocket with the other and produced a £1 note which he affected to hand to his bandleader, Graeme Bell, who was accompanying him on piano.

It was a typical laconic gesture by one of Australia's greatest jazz musicians, who was known as both "Lazy Ade" and "Father Ade", and who has died at 89 at Nathalia, near Echuca in Victoria.



Ade Monsborough, pictured in 1995... PHOTO CREDIT RON JOBE

* When this piece was written in 2006, Dick Hughes was a professional journalist and jazz pianist who published his autobiography *Daddy's Practising Again* in 1977.

"I majored in lethargy," he explained on a Graeme Bell radio series, when compere Terry Dear asked him about the bachelor of science degree he earned from Melbourne University. As for Father Ade, Monsborough was always ready to encourage young musicians, such as the Red Onion Jazz Band, the late Neville Stribling, Stribling's [trumpeter] son Simon, and [clarinetist] Michael McQuaid, renowned for his mastery of Monsborough's hundreds of compositions. He also taught music for some time in secondary schools, and manufactured recorders for NSW and Victorian schools.



Ade Monsborough playing with the group Red Onions & Friends at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival in 1996... COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA PHOTO CREDIT BRENDON KELSON

Monsborough had what it took - and more by far - to be recognised as the most versatile of all Australian jazz musicians of his era. James Morrison is his only challenger for versatility in any other era.

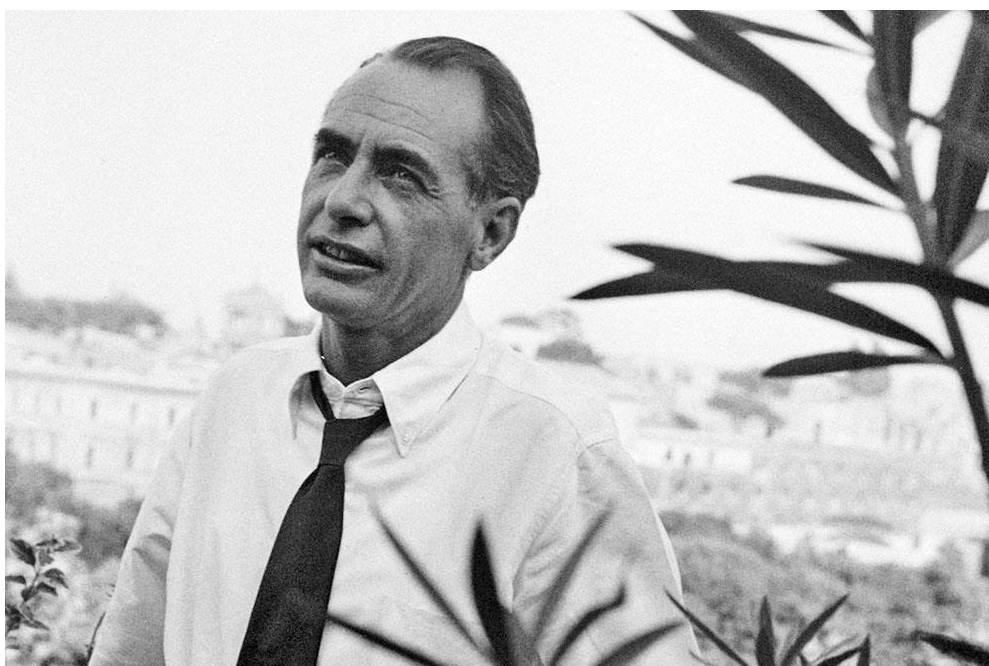
The era of Adrian Herbert Monsborough was the earliest time of revivalist jazz in Melbourne, when musicians of about the same age and of similar backgrounds were trying to play the music of the New Orleans pioneers such as King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton and - a particular favourite of Monsborough's - Clarence Williams.

But his era extended beyond that to the full flowering of revivalist jazz in Britain ("trad", sometimes justifiably dismissed as "traddy pop"), where jazz musicians and even casual listeners and dancers thronged to hear and cheer the Graeme Bell band in 1947. Monsborough was the star, playing not only valve trombone, but also clarinet, and singing in a hot and rasping style that echoed Armstrong and Williams. He also played trumpet, alto and tenor saxophones, piano, violin and recorder.



Monsborough on valve trombone in the Leicester Square Jazz Club, 1947: he was the star...PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

Born in Melbourne, Monsborough played mouth organ as a child and took piano lessons from the age of eight. His upper middle-class family lived in Kew, next door to journalist and author Alan Moorehead. In the same suburb were what was termed the lunatic asylum and Raheen, the residence of the Catholic archbishop Dr Daniel Mannix.



Monsborough's upper-middle class family lived in Kew, next door to journalist and author Alan Moorehead (pictured above)... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Monsborough was educated at Carey Grammar School then Scotch College, where he met Roger Bell, younger brother of Graeme. At Melbourne University, he helped start the Melbourne University Rhythm Club, with George Tack, Willie McIntyre and Tony Newstead.

He enlisted during World War II as a gunner in the RAAF, where he met and influenced Kelly Smith, the clarinettist. On leave in 1942, Monsborough led a group to play at a Rhythm Club concert - and called it Ade Monsborough and his Riff-RAAF.

He joined Graeme Bell in 1943 and was with him on the historic tour of Czechoslovakia, France, the Netherlands and Britain. He was with the band on its second tour in 1950-52, when they worked in West Germany with the African-American blues singer-guitarist Big Bill Broonzy, who enthused about the leader's piano and Lazy Ade's saxophone. It was on this tour that an instrument company presented three musicians with a special model plastic alto saxophone. They were Charlie "Bird" Parker, Johnny Dankworth and Ade Monsborough.



When they worked in West Germany with the African American blues singer-guitarist Big Bill Broonzy (pictured above with Graeme Bell) Broonzy enthused about the leader's piano and Lazy Ade's saxophone...

Not that there was anything plastic about Monsborough. The English jazz master Humphrey Lyttelton, who wanted Monsborough to join his band, said that the music from the Australian's alto saxophone was one of the most moving sounds to emerge from the entire worldwide jazz revival of the mid-1940s to mid-'50s. Monsborough also worked in the 1950s with the Barnard brothers, Len and Bob.



English jazz master Humphrey Lyttelton (far left) wanted Monsborough (far right) to join his band: others pictured here are L-R, Lou Silbereisen (bass), Keith Christie (trombone) Wally Fawkes (clarinet), and Pixie Roberts (tenor sax)... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

The last time I saw him was in the music room of Melbourne University at the 50th Australian Jazz Convention. We had both been "delegates" at the first Convention in 1946 - I was the youngest; he was Father Ade. We shook hands in mock solemnity. As parting words, he quoted the title of one of his earlier compositions: *Tell The Boys You Saw Me*.



Monsborough (right) in 1993 with his wife Joan, who survives him...

Monsborough became an officer in the Order of Australia (OA) in 1992, for services to music. He is survived by his wife Joan, daughter Fay and her family, and stepdaughter Susan.