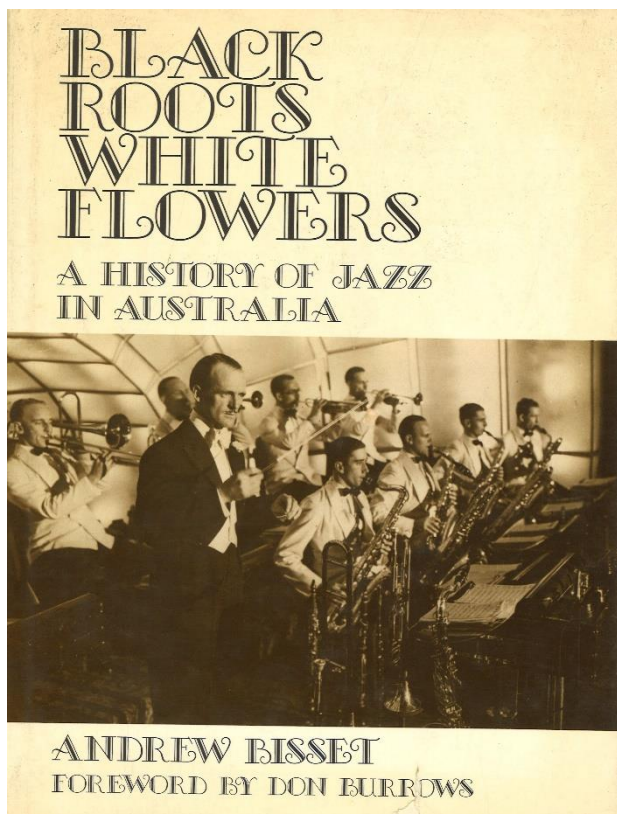


AFTERWORD TO BLACK ROOTS WHITE FLOWERS: JAZZ THROUGH TO THE 1980s

by Bruce Johnson*

Andrew Bisset's "Black Roots White Flowers" was published in 1979. A revised edition, which included Bruce Johnson's "Afterword" was published in 1987 by ABC Enterprises.



Cover of the 1979 edition of the book...

Reading Andrew Bisset's concluding comments to *Black Roots White Flowers* nearly ten years later I am struck by two things: on the one hand, how apposite certain of those comments were in the late seventies; and on the other, how the general picture he describes has altered during the intervening period.

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He refers to the momentum of Australian jazz, and in retrospect it seems clear that from the mid-seventies the music enjoyed what Ron Morey in Perth in 1977 had already called a 'renaissance', the biggest resurgence in activity for more than a decade. It is also true, however, that the general effect of this resurgence was progressively to modify the stylistic mixture of jazz in Australia. In 1979 Andrew noted the conspicuous vigour of traditional styles of jazz in this country. With due allowance for the flexibility of the notion of 'traditional' jazz, I think it has to be said that the 'renaissance' of the last decade has generally tended to alter the balance of things in favour of more progressive styles.



Andrew Bisset: in 1979 he noted the conspicuous vigour of traditional styles of jazz in this country... the 'renaissance' of the last decade has generally tended to alter the balance of things in favour of more progressive styles...

It is very difficult to pick up the threads of another historian's account and attempt to tie them to one's own view of the matter, but these two points — the jazz 'renaissance' and its stylistic effects — make a useful way of reviewing the significant developments since the first edition of this book. To establish a sense of continuity, of historical perspective, however, it is important to see recent developments as growing out of earlier movements. Because Andrew and I inevitably perceive those movements in our own individual ways, I have briefly to go back to an earlier jazz vogue to explain why the events of the last decade unfolded in the way they have. I do this without necessarily subscribing to or challenging my predecessor's version of Australian jazz history up to 1978, but simply in order to create a context for my own version of that history since then.



Graeme Bell and his band, returning from a tour in the 1950s... PHOTO COURTESY BLACK ROOTS WHITE FLOWERS

The essential element in that context is the movement which attained its peak in the early sixties, and which even at the time was being referred to as the 'trad boom'. The word 'trad' was a contraction of 'traditional', and although generally resented by musicians who had come to the music earlier, the diminutive signalled both the main source and the predominant stylistic thrust of the vogue. 'Trad' was an English importation, and referred to an English jazz style ultimately based on the pre-swing jazz of the twenties. Ironically, the ascendancy of that style in England throughout the fifties had been stimulated to a significant degree by the activities of Graeme Bell and his band during tours of Europe during 1947-48 and 1950-52. By presenting jazz for dancing, Bell had helped change the audience for jazz from a rather donnish coterie to young people who simply responded to its energy and unrestrained high spirits. It is reported that within weeks of opening their Leicester Square jazz club in 1948, the Bell band were prevailed upon by the authorities to increase the number of nights so that the waiting crowds congesting the pavements would be thinned out.

The pigeons came home to roost in Australia about a decade later through the music of Kenny Ball and Acker Bilk, and through the film *It's Trad Dad* which opened in

1962. But 'trad', although the most prominent of the newly popular jazz styles, raised public consciousness of the music in general as something separate from other forms of pop. In the same year that Kenny Ball's *Midnight in Moscow* was occupying the hit parades, so was Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*. If a lot of traditional clarinet players began sounding like Acker Bilk, a lot of progressive saxophonists also absorbed the influence of Brubeck's limpid altoist, Paul Desmond. The emergence of jazz into such prominence had a curiously ambiguous effect on the subsequent history of the music. In the short term it actually worked to its detriment. The saturation of the market with scores of barely competent young bands, all sounding much the same in style and repertoire, had the same effect as a similar Australian jazz vogue in the twenties: the music ossified. Furthermore, the very distinctiveness of the various jazz forms as opposed to other forms of pop deprived them of common ground which they might have shared with the fully electrified sound of the Beatles which infiltrated Australian youth throughout 1963-64.



If a lot of traditional clarinet players began sounding like Acker Bilk (left), many progressive saxophonists also absorbed the influence of Brubeck's limpid altoist Paul Desmond (below)... BILK PHOTO DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES; DESMOND PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN



For the first time, jazz bore no resemblance at all to rock 'n' roll, and the ascendancy of the latter thoroughly eclipsed the former. From the mid-sixties the boom fell silent, and jazz entered its worst slump since the onset of the Depression in 1929. In

every city, venues either closed or changed to a non-jazz policy, and the late sixties saw the end of some of the most important centres of activity in the history of Australian jazz. The music did not stop, but it ceased to occupy centre stage and was almost wholly drowned out by the sounds of sixties psychedelia.

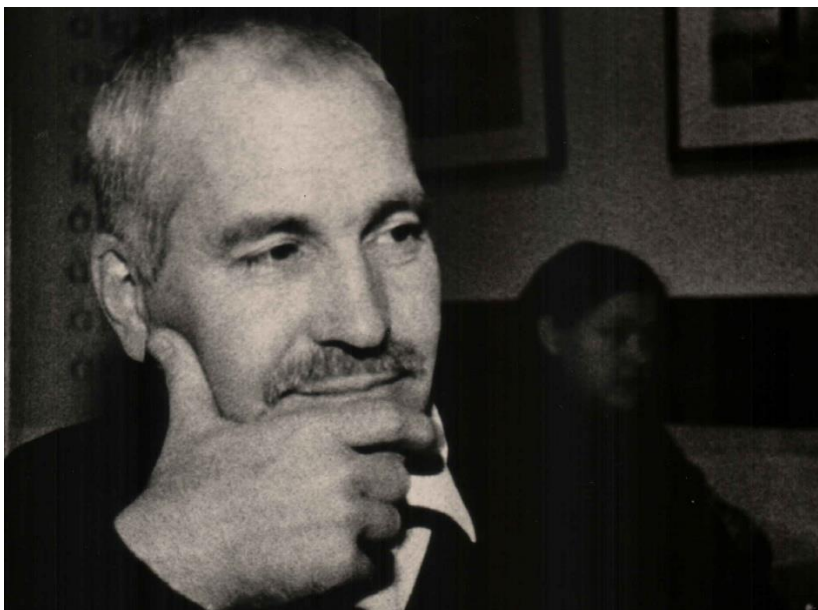
Yet even this slump was preparing the music for its return to public audibility from the mid-seventies. The boom, and the subsequent slump, had one effect in common: they identified and isolated jazz from other forms of popular music. Even into the late fifties, the general public had continued to think of jazz as almost any music emanating from America, having high energy level, and using horns. One could describe thus the rock 'n' roll (or 'rockabilly') of Bill Haley. Indeed, a number of early Australian rockers, including Johnny O'Keefe, performed under the billing of jazz concerts. Discriminating definitions of jazz were generally confined to the group of traditional followers known as 'mouldy fygges', and the flaming youth of the mid-fifties were just as happy to jive in the aisles to *Boogie Blues* as to rhythm and blues.



A number of early Australian rockers, including Johnny O'Keefe (above), performed under the billing of jazz concerts. On the left in this photo is the well-known jazz saxophonist Bob Bertles... PHOTO © RON FALSON ARCHIVE

The boom of the early sixties saw a widening of the radius of jazz circles, until the relatively uninformed public gradually became aware that jazz was a distinct component in the array of modern popular music. It was a distinction emphasised by the passing of one era, and the onset of another. Since the war, jazz had often been bracketed with the kind of popular modern music which had been played in ballrooms, cabarets, nightclubs, and indeed a certain amount of jazz was performed in these settings. But while the new youth music of the sixties was attracting publicity, these tokens of an earlier entertainment era were quietly receding into history. Ballrooms closed, nightclubs and cabaret-restaurants were changing policies and basic functions. The old clientele for these venues was now raising families, consolidating careers, and settling down to an evening in front of the newest entertainment revolution: television. The musicians disappeared into studios, clubs, switched to rock groups, or withdrew into entrepreneurial activities. A major tradition of popular entertainment was fading, and its disappearance left jazz defined in bolder relief.

At the same time, the advent of guitar/drums/vocal groups like the Beatles sharpened that relief even further. A member of the public could fairly easily bracket together a jazz band with a rockabilly group which included saxophones, piano, acoustic bass, and playing a shuffle blues with a boogie line. In Hobart, Tom Pickering accommodated the first wave of rock 'n' roll simply by doubling on guitar. It required however an improbable degree of hebetude to confuse the Beatles singing *A Hard Day's Night* with *Midnight in Moscow* or *Take Five*. The point here is that since the mid-sixties, jazz has been recognized as other than the youth music known as pop — by its ambience, its performers, its venues and, above all, by its instrumentation.



Bruce Johnson: since the mid-sixties, jazz has been recognized as other than the youth music known as pop... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Until the mid-sixties most Australian children were able to identify wind instruments, through the brass and dance band traditions. During the subsequent decade or so, several passed through the school system being able to recognise only guitars and drums. Ray Price's school jazz concerts during this era attracted as much interest in the physical operation of the horns as for the sound of the music and the commentary of the leader. Trombonist John Colborne-Veel was regarded with special fascination, one child asking him how, like a nimble sword swallower, he was able to ingest and regurgitate part of the instrument so quickly.

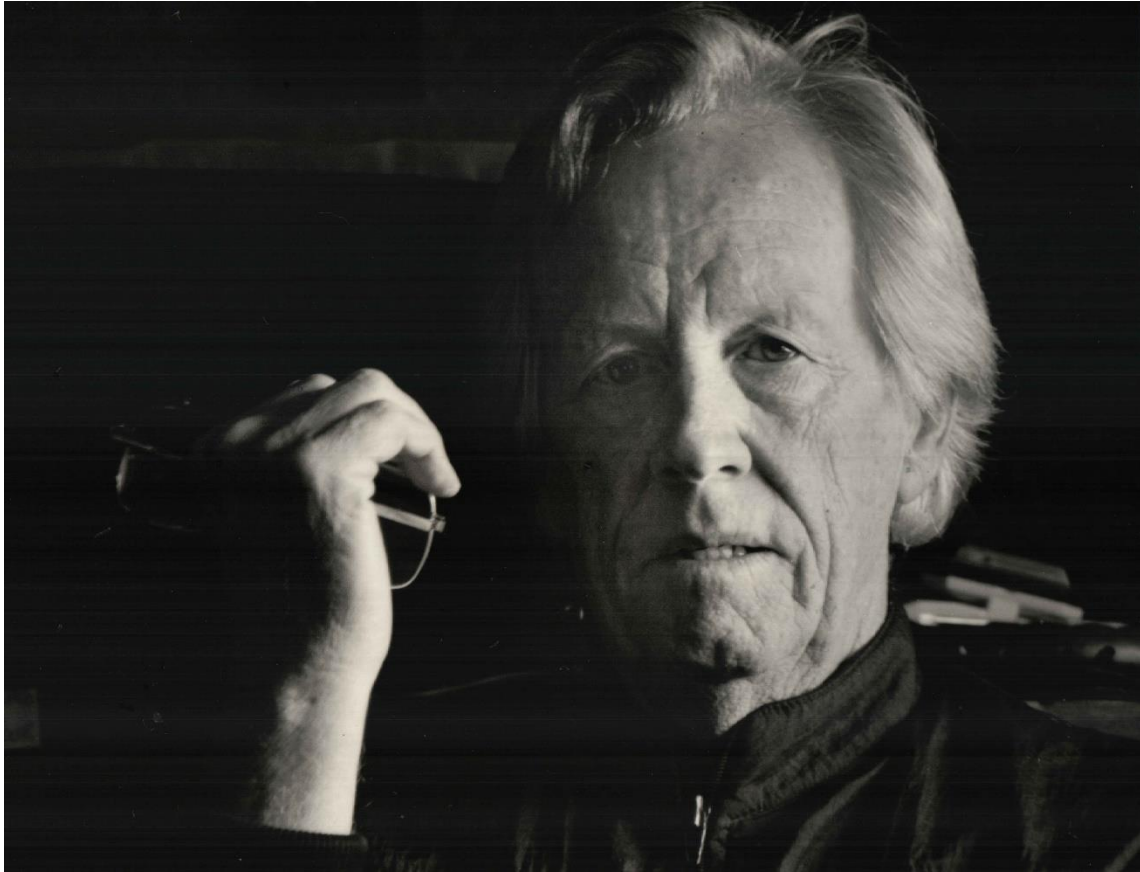


Ray Price (banjo), pictured here performing with Don Burrows (alto saxophone): his school jazz concerts during this era attracted as much interest in the physical operation of the horns as for the sound of the music...



Trombonist John Colborne-Veel (above) was asked by one child asking him how he was able to ingest and regurgitate part of the instrument so quickly...PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH

When Bryce Rohde announced an ABC television programme in 1970 with the title 'Jazz is Something Else', there was an important affirmation inscribed in the hip cliché. The music had new clarity and a new image, and these would determine its development through to the mid-eighties. The image was one of artistic respectability, intellectual seriousness.



When Bryce Rohde (above) announced an ABC television programme in 1970 with the title 'Jazz is Something Else', there was an important affirmation inscribed in the hip cliché. The music had new clarity and a new image... PHOTO CREDIT BRYCE ROHDE

Since its arrival in Australia jazz had been tinged with moral impropriety and artistic triviality in the eyes of the general public and the cultural establishment. At various times radical or 'underground' artistic causes had rallied around jazz as an authentic music in a philistine wasteland — the Contemporary Art Society, the Angry Penguin group, and various individuals with experimental inclinations. For the most part, however, jazz had been regarded as a threat to moral and artistic decorum. This image had been relentlessly cultivated by the media, particularly in films, from the 1919 Australian production 'Does the Jazz Lead to Destruction?' to 'The Crimson Canary' ('Rhythm Cults Exposed!' proclaimed the posters) of 1945, and others. The persistence of this attitude is stridently advertised in the following letter from as late as 1963 in *Music Maker*:

I cannot but boggle at all the twaddle I have been reading lately about this rubbish – jazz. Could not your fine magazine do something towards promoting really good music, such as is played by Lester Laiun's [sic] orchestra or probably more timely as he was recently here, Carmen Cavallaro? These people play music not noisy, untuneful garbage that is churned out of negroes and drug addicts. We do not want our children to idolize such maniacs who are only playing for idolation [sic] and financial gain (unlike Lester and Carmen, who are devoted to their art) so PLEASE 'Music Maker', do something about it, as I want my children to tread the right path in life – the cultural path.

S W, Marrickville

This letter is an interesting disclosure of the tenacity of the presumed association between jazz and irresponsible triviality. Although an identifiable residue of this persists, particularly at a conservative academic level, 'S W' of Marrickville was trying to stem a rising tide. As the new wave of pop moved away from jazz, it also took with it much of the odium which had tainted the latter. Although jazz was a major form of pop music during the early sixties, it was primarily for an upper middle-class, undergraduate audience who wished for something that had the slightly rebellious energy of rock, but with some intellectual gravity to offset what was fastidiously felt to be the brute mindlessness of the latter.



Jazz developed an intellectual image, and associated itself with a university atmosphere through band names like the Campus Six. Such a group in Brisbane (left) called the Varsity Five, included drummer Ian Bloxsom (far left) and Mileham Hayes (holding the clarinet)...

Jazz developed an intellectual image, and associated itself with a university atmosphere through band names like the Campus Six, university concerts, and the short-lived Inter-varsity Jazz Festival, inaugurated in Adelaide in 1963. At the same time, to increase its distance from what its audiences felt was the plebeianism of rock, it established alliances with other more 'legitimate' art forms and musical traditions. Don Burrows was a crucial figure in this process, with his high visibility in enterprises like 'The Best of Both Worlds' concerts with symphonic musicians. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra performed with jazz musicians on ABC television in 1962, jazz groups played in conjunction with experimental activities in other arts — galleries, poetry and jazz performances, soundtracks for documentary film. There had of course been attempts to increase respectability of jazz going back to the twenties (Paul Whiteman, Ravel, Stravinsky, et al) and in Sydney the Port Jackson Jazz Band had given an important Conservatorium concert as early as 1948 with the blessing of Eugene Goossens.

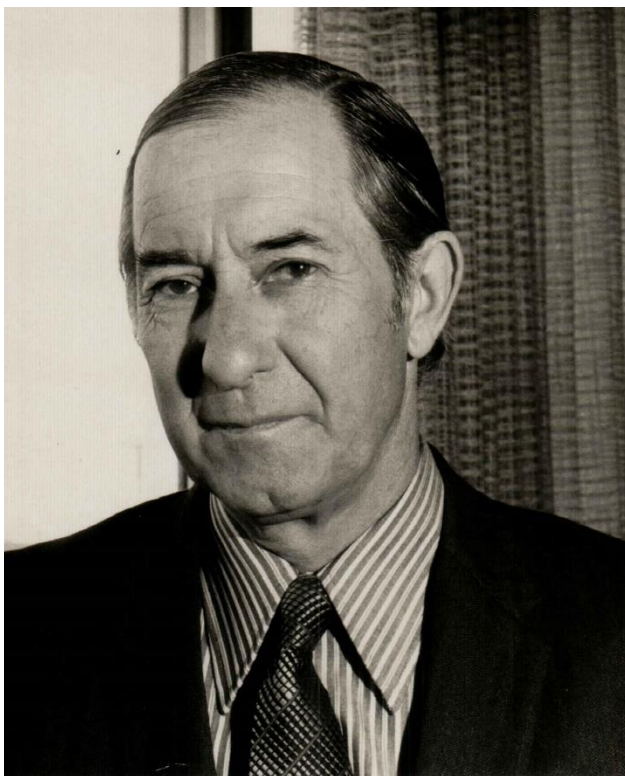


The Port Jackson Jazz Band in a Battle of the Bands, 1948, L-R, Georgia Lee, Bruce Higginbotham, Ray Price, Bob Cruickshanks, Ken Flannery, Clive Whitcombe, Bob Rowan, Jimmy Somerville... PHOTO COURTESY JACK MITCHELL

The legitimising process of the sixties, however, had a decisive effect on the subsequent development of the music: it touched a significant section of that generation of undergraduates who would over the next two decades gradually enter important administrative positions. It is precisely the effect of this, I would argue, that has led to the unprecedented cultural enfranchisement of jazz over the last decade, and which in turn has created the climate in which the newest generation of jazz musicians have enjoyed a degree of material and pedagogical support to which none of their predecessors had access. When we seek to define and to understand what has happened in Australian jazz since the mid-seventies, these two effects of the 'trad boom' of the early sixties cast a long shadow: the emergence of jazz and jazz musicians as fully differentiated items in the landscape of popular music; and the hospitality with which they were received by what would become the teachers, administrators and other 'trustees of consciousness' of the coming decades.

Seen against this background, the beginnings of the resurgence of jazz, as noted by Andrew Bisset in the first edition of this volume, take on increasing significance. Now, in 1987, with a deeper perspective, we can form a fuller appreciation of what was happening and why.

The time scale begins to make sense, for example. The undergraduate population which had done so much to sustain the boom of the early sixties, disappeared from view for the same reasons that earlier generations of jazz supporters had. They ended their youth, they began establishing families, they redirected their energies to laying career foundations. And these careers were in the areas of influence dominated by more or less intellectual upper middle-class sensibilities in Australia: teaching, arts administration, middle level government, journalism, publishing, radio, television, film. To put it simply, through the seventies the cultural establishment of Australia received an unprecedented influx of people who, from their adolescence, had a sympathetic attitude to jazz. Throughout the post-war period, members of earlier generations had been spokesmen for jazz in the establishment. Clem Semmler had been associated with jazz in the forties, and through the fifties and sixties was fighting a rather isolated battle for jazz in the corridors of the ABC.



Clem Semmler, associated with jazz in the forties, was through the fifties and sixties fighting a rather isolated battle for jazz in the corridors of the ABC...

Ron Gates had written reports on the Bell band's first tour, 1947-48, and was now influential in tertiary education. Max Harris, editor of *Angry Penguins* in the forties, had become a voice with influence in the establishment. Jazz musician Greg Gibson was with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Keith Humble, Gordon Jackson, Peter

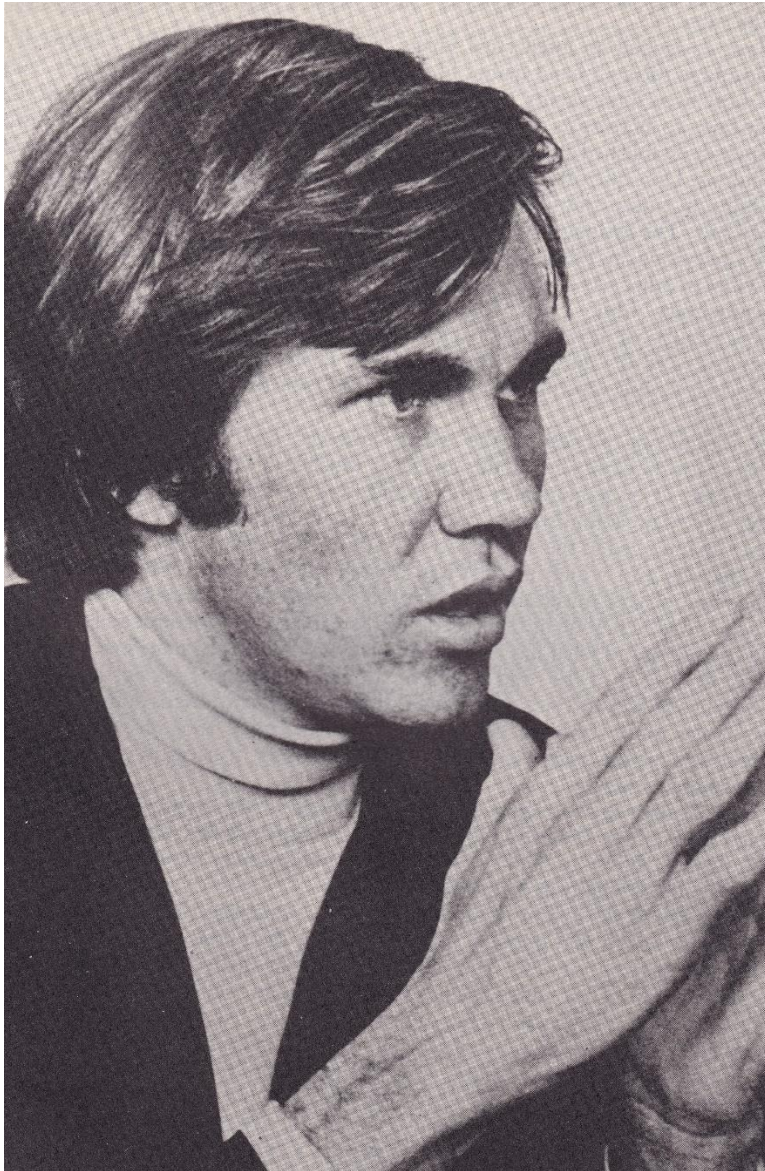
Burgis, Don Banks, Rex Hobcroft were moving into positions of administrative influence, and all had been sympathetic to jazz in their youth.



Jazz musician Greg Gibson (left) was with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Don Banks (below) amongst others, was moving into positions of administrative influence; all had been sympathetic to jazz in their youth...GIBSON PHOTO CREDIT GORDON BENJAMIN; BANKS PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON



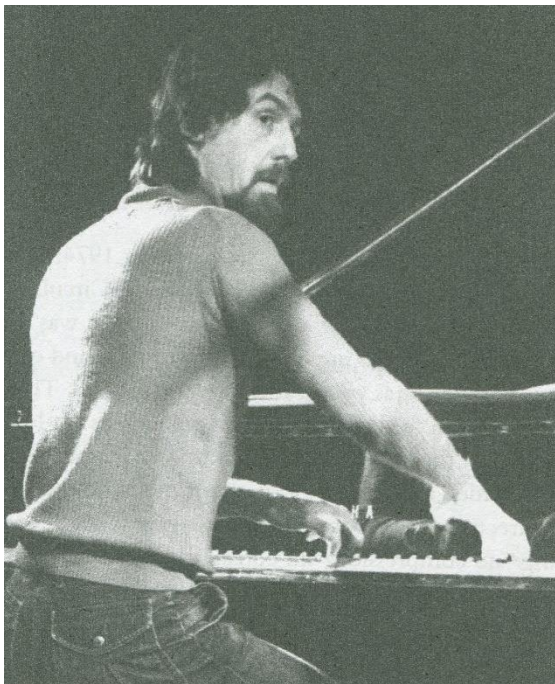
Until the early seventies, however, such individuals were isolated instances. With the arrival of the baby-boomers who graduated through the sixties, the general climate altered, the context for administrative initiatives changed. Individuals like Barry Conyngham and Martin Wesley-Smith, who have influential teaching positions at Melbourne University and the NSW State Conservatorium respectively, are representative of the rising tide of academically accredited and influential composers/musicians/teachers, who came through the boom of the early sixties and brought with them a respect for jazz.



Barry Conyngham in 1973: one of the rising tide of academically accredited and influential composers/musicians/teachers, who came through the boom of the early sixties and brought with them a respect for jazz... PHOTO COURTESY BLACK ROOTS WHITE FLOWERS

The period of jazz quiescence from about 1965 also generated unforeseen benefits for jazz. The pop culture of the sixties was a time of radical reevaluation of received notions, but at a level which was accessible to a non-academic mind. In the 1960s there was a persistent compulsion to reassess the conditions of life. Part of this naturally expressed itself in the form of iconoclasm and de-categorisation. The established authorities were questioned, down to their most fundamental and cherished assumptions, and the conceptual components of the culture — political, religious, artistic, historical — were rearranged in new hierarchies. Artists were discouraged from sealing off their thinking, notions of artistic seriousness were challenged, and all this became a pervasive habit of consciousness, not simply a sectional doctrine. Whatever you were engaged in, if you had any general receptiveness to the mental climate of the sixties, it affected that activity.

Bearing a new sense of the intellectual or artistic moment of the music, jazz musicians carved out new channels during this subterranean period of its history. Commentators lamented the conservatism of some areas of the jazz fraternity, but the fact that such comments were made in itself signals the emergence of radical perspectives. Extensive experimentation was going on in order to force a revision of attitudes. If much of this was pretentious, that was the price to be paid for an essential prising open of the categories sealed shut during the boom. Roger Frampton was an important force in this process, with presentations like the performance experiment 'Telejazz', sponsored by the avant-garde 'AZ' agency in 1972. Even during the slump in visible jazz activity, the music in its underground channels was being redefined, infused with a new creative energy in readiness for its imminent resurfacing. If the psychedelic sixties occluded jazz, they also established an ambience from which it profited.



Roger Frampton(left): he presented the performance experiment 'Telejazz', sponsored by the avant-garde 'AZ' agency in 1972... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRAL JAZZ

The foregoing isolate the more distant roots of the recent resurgence of jazz activity; there are several more immediate causes which are difficult to quantify statistically, but which have progressively manifested themselves during the eighties. These have been particularly apparent to musicians who have been closely and continuously involved in the jazz scene since the sixties. They are to do with the glacial movement of different generations of musicians into new stages of their creative lives. In the seventies, pop culture entered its own period of exhaustion. Youth style in general and youth music in particular lost momentum, and has been faltering between the increasingly rapid recycling of the energy of the sixties, a shrill cynicism in search of form, and occasional attempts at originality which conclude in illogicality. The revolution of the sixties has cast as much of a shadow over the future as over the past. Jazz has profited from this enervation of pop music in the same way that it did in the decade following the war. The young musicians who have been coming to technical maturity during the last ten years include a large number who have moved into jazz simply because pop was no longer able to challenge them. The relative proximity of jazz (as an adjacent and indeed overlapping 'folk' form) has inevitably attracted their interest, a circumstance catalysed by the increasing accessibility of jazz skills through formal educational programmes, as discussed below.

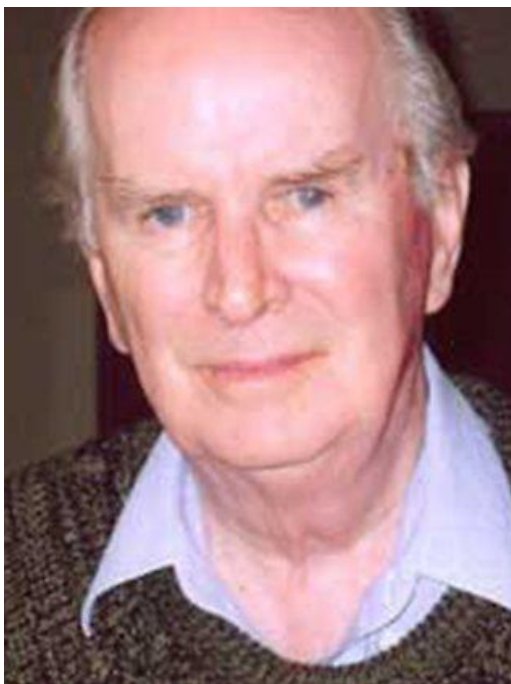


For the first time bassist Cliff Barnett (on the left, pictured with vibist Pat Caplice and unidentified guitarist) played on New Year's Eve only to see all the merrymakers leave before midnight...PHOTO COURTESY DAN BARNETT

At the other end of the spectrum of generations, the last decade has seen a substantial number of older musicians returning to the jazz scene. I mentioned earlier that many of the nightclub musicians from an earlier era retreated to the licensed clubs and the television studios when the post-war jazz scene contracted. In New South Wales in particular, the licensing of poker machines in 1956 ensured revenue which would make the sporting clubs the biggest employers of non-symphonic musicians, musicians who were in most cases able to improvise in the jazz idiom. From the early eighties, two developments in Australian leisure caused a contraction in club music opportunities: the introduction of random breath testing began to discourage people from alcoholic entertainment outside their homes, and the arrival of home video gave them a safe

alternative. In addition, musicians who had spent much of their professional lives in the well-paid, but musically constricting atmosphere of the clubs, were often reaching an age at which, with children having grown up and left home, and mortgage commitments diminishing to zero, economics were no longer such a powerful determinant of where they worked.

Bass player Cliff Barnett's experience typified that of many other musicians. He had dropped out of the casual jazz scene years before, but by the 1980s was beginning to notice that club and session work was thinning out. The situation had not been helped by a strike by television studio musicians over the award rate, leaving employment in that area stagnant at best, contracting at worst. On 31 December 1982 he had a gig at a suburban sporting club. Whatever else was happening in the music industry, the New Year's Eve gig was traditionally a well-paid and exuberantly cheerful event. Random Breath Testing had recently been introduced amidst much cautionary publicity, however; the evening began on a subdued, almost furtive note, and declined from there. It finished up being the first time Cliff, and many other musicians, had ever played New Year's Eve only to see all the merrymakers leave before midnight. The band played *Auld Lang Syne* for the bar staff and the janitors.



Rex Hobcroft: discussions between him and Don Burrows led to the establishment in 1973 of the jazz studies courses at the NSW State Conservatorium...

The most visible effects of all the foregoing developments have been various forms of institutionalisation of jazz, with an increasing corps of young musicians available to take advantage of the fact. The most important pioneering development in this area took place in time for inclusion in the first edition of this volume: that is, the establishment in 1973 of the jazz studies courses at the NSW State Conservatorium as a result of discussions between its new director, Rex Hobcroft, and Don Burrows. The ripples of this initiative have spread across Australia, and while there exists

considered controversy over the effect of these courses on the music which is actually played from week to week in the country's jazz venues, there is no doubt that some of the most publicised young musicians and groups to emerge since the late seventies have come through some version of a tertiary jazz studies programme. By the end of 1986 there were at least sixteen conservatoria, universities, colleges of advanced education or similar government-funded tertiary institutions, in which jazz studies could be taken as part or all of a diploma programme, covering every state except the Northern Territory. Jazz education is gradually percolating into the secondary school system also, and the movement has expanded so rapidly in the eighties that, following a series of exploratory meetings, in March 1987 an executive committee of Australia's first Jazz Educators' Association was established in Sydney.

In the new bureaucratic and administrative energies which developed out of the sixties and which broke through the political surface with the election of Gough Whitlam's Labor government in 1972, jazz has gained formal recognition from numerous government and other institutional sources which once regarded the music with condescension. As long ago as 1967, the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) commissioned compositions from Judy Bailey, Bernie McGann and John Sangster. That rather bold move is today more commonplace, and jazz receives a certain amount of funding from the Australia Council, from Arts Councils, and other state and municipal authorities in forms including funded workshops and concerts.



As long ago as 1967, the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) commissioned compositions from Judy Bailey, John Sangster (both pictured above) and Bernie McGann...

It is the Music Board of the Australia Council which has played the most conspicuous role in this institutional support for jazz. Two prominent jazz musicians, Judy Bailey and Sylvan 'Schmoe' Elhay have served on the Board. In addition, the Board established in 1983 the national Jazz Co-ordination programme. Under this scheme, six salaried Jazz Co-ordinators were appointed, each with an advisory committee, to fill the posts in the state capitals. The Co-ordinators have acted as lobbyists, as clearing houses for the dissemination of jazz information, as publicists, and have generated numerous important initiatives in education, performance, patronage and sponsorship, from the establishment of the West Australian Youth Jazz Orchestra in Perth to the setting up of the Sydney Improvised Music Association.



Prominent jazz musicians Judy Bailey and Sylvan 'Schmoe' Elhay (left) have served on the Music Board of the Australia Council, which established in 1983 the national Jazz Co-ordination programme... PHOTO COURTESY SA JAZZ ARCHIVE

Each Co-ordinator has had to form an individual appraisal of local conditions and needs, and the path has not always been an easy one. Jazz followers frequently have only the haziest notion of the labyrinthine operation of institutional administration, and they often find polemical fictions more comfortable than carefully researched conclusions. The Co-ordinators have had to tread a difficult line between their governmental creators who are practised in the Byzantine world of policy administration, and the jazz fraternity who are likely to find consolation in a more simplistic and anecdotal version of things. Factionalism in Brisbane terminated the post of Queensland Jazz Co-ordinator at the end of 1985. In the meantime, the Music Board continues to take jazz into its considerations, even if comparatively marginally. Its Medium Range Plan released in October 1985 included proposals for the development of jazz enterprises with reference to such matters as concerts, venues and the encouragement of composition as well as performance.

Other important entrepreneurial bodies which have taken jazz more seriously from and through the seventies, include the state Arts Councils. These are private bodies operating with the assistance of government funding. They have helped to organise tours for jazz groups, but since these are usually in response to specific requests from rural areas, these activities tend to favour the groups and musicians who are best known. Consequently, while they are bringing live jazz to the attention of more geographically remote audiences, they tend also to perpetuate the existing jazz establishment, and have little direct effect on the development of new or relatively unknown musicians. Musica Viva is another private group operating with government assistance. Established in 1945, it is now the world's largest chamber music organisation. Since the early seventies it has increasingly given attention to the administration of jazz tours ranging from those by Bob Barnard to more contemporary groups, in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Music Board.



Musica Viva has increasingly given attention to the administration of jazz tours ranging from those by trumpeter Bob Barnard (above, pictured with L-R, Greg Foster, trombone, Steve McKenna, guitar, & Claire Bail, clarinet) to more contemporary groups... PHOTO CREDIT HARDY ALHAUS

The increased receptiveness of government funding bodies to jazz activities has arisen partly out of the lobbying energy of other private organisations, above all, the new style of jazz club which has evolved since the establishment of the first Jazz Action Society (JAS). Since the advent of Swing in 1935-36, there have been clubs devoted to various aspects of modern popular music in Australia. Many of these

presented recitals (live and on record) of a wide range of styles, from Latin American to novelty material, with jazz or swing also given some prominence. Other activities of these clubs included simply providing a focus for socialising and courting for young people of the day.

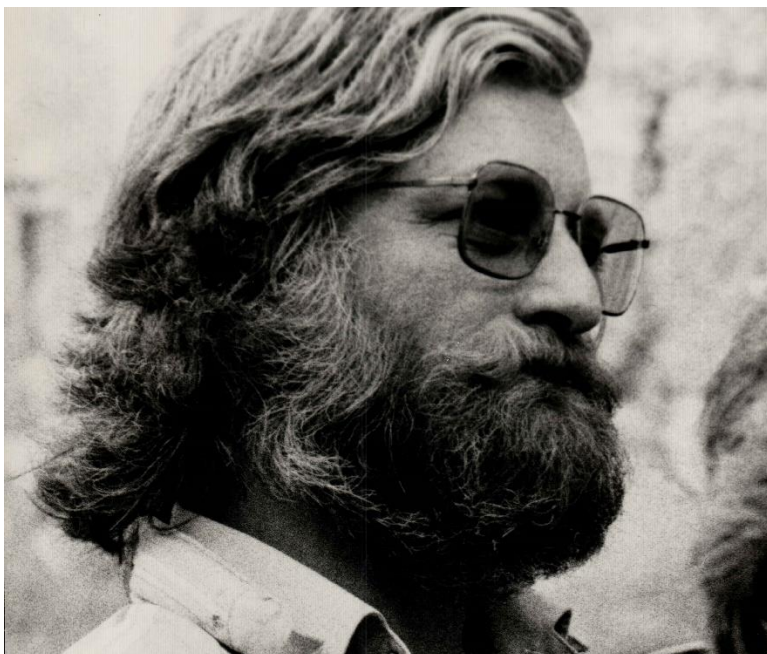
Within the general category of modern music societies, however, there emerged a series of clubs with an almost evangelical fixation on jazz in particular, and in the early phase of their history, the emphasis was most frequently on traditional jazz. The longest surviving of these is the Sydney Jazz Club which, with changes in its legal status, has operated since 1953. The launching of the Jazz Action Society of New South Wales in 1973 represented several important variations on this tradition, however, resulting in the JAS movement eclipsing the earlier jazz clubs as a national phenomenon. The JAS differed in, first, seeking consciously to promote later styles of jazz and, second, in developing itself as a political lobby, with the result that it was able from the outset to attract government support for its music. Although they are not affiliated in any way but their name, there are about a dozen Jazz Action Societies throughout the country, including in Darwin and northern Tasmania. They have not always found the local soil hospitable, however, and the Melbourne JAS in fact has withered. They have nonetheless established a sense of national solidarity which had earlier been the property of the traditional styles. This has particularly benefited post-traditional jazz.

At the same time, a parallel development in the jazz club tradition has become evident: that is, the sudden and vigorous regionalisation of the phenomenon. Never before has there been such a proliferation of jazz clubs in areas outside our capital cities as over the last decade. Of the three dozen or so jazz clubs throughout Australia which I have on file, about one third are outside capital cities, including in a centre as remote as Kalgoorlie (bearing the appropriate name the Goldfields Jazz Society). A surprising number of these, like the Deniliquin Jazz Group, the Central West Jazz Club and the Down South Jazz Club, have established highly successful annual jazz festivals and have stimulated regular local jazz activity where before it had been so unfocussed as to be invisible.

The case of the Jazz Action Societies indicates how the cause of jazz has been advanced by the development of energetic pressure groups outside the traditional channels of influence. Nowhere has this been more evident than in broadcasting. To whatever extent jazz has enjoyed exposure on air in the post-war period, the ABC, or more correctly a few dedicated individuals within the Corporation, are primarily responsible. Since the sixties, jazz on ABC radio has become increasingly marginal in terms of quantity, slotting times and quality (invaded as it is by the category of music often known as 'easy listening'). The advent of the series *The Burrows Collection* on ABC television should be noted and applauded, even though it is pushed into a late night slot. In terms of jazz broadcasting, however, the ABC now has very powerful competition in the form of the community FM radio stations. Since the establishment of the first of these, Sydney's 2MBS-FM, in 1974, these stations have

proliferated in much the same way as jazz clubs, although not with the same exclusivity of function. The community FM stations serve a variety of needs — religious, ethnic, educative — and are unquestionably the most important media development towards providing a genuine community service rather than a covert ideological forum for large corporations through programming and advertising. Many of them carry regular jazz programming and the most fully developed, like 2MBS-FM, record gigs, promote and broadcast concerts, commission and record original works, and issue their own recordings, frequently with the assistance of government funds. Along with Jazz Action Societies and other clubs, with whom they often co-ordinate their activities, these stations have been particularly important in fostering lesser-known musicians, and to that extent they have opened up the jazz scene in ways that even the more mainstream media are having to recognise and to some extent follow. Dedicated jazz followers frequently note that these media — newspapers, radio, television — concentrate on fully established names and ignore the 'street' scene, the less glamorous venues where the music is sustained from year to year. Throughout the last decade JAS concerts and FM community radio have done much to clear this log-jam in the public perceptions of jazz.

In print, jazz has found its situation marginally improved over the last decade, above all through the national magazine *Jazz*, which began life under the editorship of journalist Dick Scott before passing into the hands of Eric Myers. The magazine has tried to maintain a bipartisan, national coverage and, unlike much mainstream jazz journalism, has maintained a well-informed and critically rigorous standard.



The national magazine “Jazz”, which began life under the editorship of journalist Dick Scott (above) before passing into the hands of Eric Myers, has tried to maintain a bipartisan, national coverage and, unlike much mainstream jazz journalism, has maintained a well-informed and critically rigorous standard...

That it has had to contend, not always successfully, with the apathy of its own audiences, causes one to wonder if, finally, jazz followers get what they deserve. It is hard to imagine, however, what they have done to deserve some of the hopelessly ill-informed and stereotypical coverage provided by the daily newspapers. Occasionally acute pieces appear in these journals, but often the idea of jazz criticism is an afterthought and the job farmed out to someone almost wholly ignorant of the subject. One writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the early eighties, signing himself David Lin, had what could be safely described as a curious view of the English language, which led to some extremely opaque discussions of the local jazz scene. It is difficult to know what to make of the following extracts from a review of Graeme Bell's band:

While trad-ragtime may not have a popular multitude of adherents, we can safely say it's the way a jazz song was intended to be played, no ifs or buts... The trick to the Allstars must be in each band master's maturity despite their belief that the Saints will come marching in over South Sydney. Everyone has paid their dues over the years, without having to labour over their own personal satisfaction in playing their music.



The Graeme Bell Allstars, L-R, Bob van Oven, Ken Herron, Laurie Thompson, Bell, Bob Barnard, Graham Spedding: in reviewing this band, the SMH's writer David Lin had what could be safely described as a curious view of the English language...

Lin had been appointed some months after the newspaper terminated the services of Eric Myers, who had been their first regular jazz critic. The reasons given for this termination were that the paper wanted someone 'more independent of the jazz world', and the position was offered to a number of journalists including the industrial editor. Only the most bloodthirsty mind would care to imagine what would happen if the same policy (with equivalent results) were applied to sports writing.

Even putatively specialist journals of the arts tend still to treat jazz as an inconsequential afterthought — the glossy magazine *Performing Arts* carried an article by Ginette Lenham (No 3, Dec/Jan 1985-6) on Bernie McGann, in which Ms Lenham spoke of McGann's apprenticeship during the fifties as being the time of the swing era. It is difficult to imagine how someone could become acquainted with the term 'Swing', and yet situate it historically so inaccurately, rather like calling Robert Browning a Renaissance poet. When the press carries such blithely unconcerned nonsense, it is little wonder that the jazz community, and musicians in particular, retain a strong contempt for jazz commentary.



A writer Ginette Lenham spoke of Bernie McGann's apprenticeship during the fifties as being the time of the swing era. When the press carries such blithely unconcerned nonsense, it is little wonder that the jazz community, and musicians in particular, retain a strong contempt for jazz commentary...

Jazz has become increasingly 'administered' since the first edition of this book. It is this process which more than any other has wrought change in the national jazz movement since the mid-seventies, and in general represents jazz's entry into the official notion of culture. But how in practical terms has this affected the actual music played and heard throughout the country? For historical reasons, reaching back beyond the scope of this chapter, one of the distinguishing features in the post-war jazz landscape has been the chasm which has divided the traditional styles from what have been loosely termed the modernists. The term 'modern', as applied to jazz, is problematic. Scholarly definitions of the term differ from each other, and also from the lay understanding. In any event, it has evolved a sense not consistent with its literal meaning, and it is probably time that this, and other stylistic terminology, was re-evaluated. However irrationally, the terms 'modern' and 'traditional' are generally used to refer to a perceived bifurcation of the jazz tradition between pre and post-bop styles. Naturally, scholars will introduce more subtly discriminated stylistic shades, but when reviewing the impact of jazz developments on the general public perception, it would be precious to pretend that those discriminations are common currency. For purposes of this discussion, 'modern' jazz is to be regarded as jazz inflected by developments leading immediately up to, and since, the bop movement of the forties. If we attend to the balance between these two categories of the music, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the institutionalising process has more frequently favoured the later (though not necessarily the latest) styles.



In October 1983 Julie McErlain (left) organised the first Woman and Jazz Workshop at the Victorian College of the Arts...

The reasons for this lie partly with the changing cultural ambience of the period, and partly with certain attitudes which have often characterised the traditional movement. Regarding the former: as I have described above, the developments in the popular (and academic) consciousness of the sixties and seventies were broadly in the direction of reevaluation, rather than re-affirmation, of traditions.

The example of feminism is the most visible and potentially far-reaching example of the tendency. It is also apt because its effects have trickled into the jazz movement, particularly at its 'administered' level. There have always been women who have played jazz in Australia, and indeed in the twenties they were probably more numerous than in subsequent periods. It seemed not to be considered even a novelty for a woman to lead a jazz group. It is only in the eighties, however, that the relation of women to jazz has become a specific issue. Julie McErlain organised the first Woman and Jazz Workshop at the Victorian College of the Arts in October 1983, and

in March 1984, following an initiative by the NSW Jazz Co-ordinator Eric Myers, the establishment of Sydney Women in Music (SWIM) led to the first of several workshops for female jazz musicians, assisted by Music Board funding. Other related enterprises have included a National Womens [sic] Music Festival organised by the Lismore Womens [sic] Music Collective in October 1985. The bands led by the gifted composer/ saxophonist, Sandy Evans, have presented audiences with the image of women playing jazz which is fully authentic on its own terms, as opposed to the sexist novelty of some of the all-women bands of the forties.



Bands led by the gifted composer/ saxophonist, Sandy Evans (above), have presented audiences with the image of women playing jazz which is fully authentic on its own terms...

Apart from the inherent interest of such developments, they are also significant symptoms of the kind of revisionary consciousness which is exercising influence in the arts. When that influence extends to jazz, it is not surprising it should encounter less resistance in more contemporary styles: after all, contemporary jazz is itself the expression of a willingness to reassess conventions. And across the full spectrum of styles, it is equally unsurprising that the slowest to register such changes would be styles rooted most tenaciously in tradition. Traditional jazz has frequently projected an image in which a locker-room beer-drinking sexism is latent (if not overt), and we are now living in a climate of awareness in which the authority of this image is very much under question.

More superficial, but palpable, gusts across this new climate of consciousness include a degree of nostalgia for the fifties. Youth fashion has recently displayed this revival, particularly in Melbourne, where Vince Jones and more recently Kate Ceberano have projected something of this image.



Youth fashion has displayed a degree of nostalgia for the fifties, an image projected in Melbourne by jazz artists such as Vince Jones (above)...

The release of the cultishly successful film *Round Midnight* has given impetus to this revival. It is sometimes a mild shock to remind oneself that the interval separating the revivalists of the late fifties from the classic jazz of the late twenties is the same as that which now separates emerging young musicians from the fifties. That is, what to traditional players of thirty years ago was (and is still residually) regarded as 'modern' jazz is now itself the subject of a kind of antiquarian revivalism. On a recent gig with two musicians in their early twenties, they and I were finding it difficult to establish that margin of common ground necessary to make the music work. During the break, a tape was playing of a Charlie Parker recording of *52nd Street Theme*. The young players stood listening intently, staring at the floor and, I assumed, sharing my awe at this reminder of how audaciously the Bird had pushed the music of his day forward. Thinking that this might be the common ground, I approached them as the track finished. The comment one made to the other, however, opened up the gulf even wider: 'Gee, they played fast in the old days, didn't they.' The fact is that bop itself is now so thoroughly accommodated in the succeeding conventions of the last forty years, that it has become 'revivalist' music, and is riding on the crest of fifties nostalgia.



Charlie Parker's recording of "52nd Street Theme" prompted a response from a young musician in his twenties: 'Gee, they played fast in the old days, didn't they'...

The enormous spread of jazz education has also favoured post-traditional styles. The central thrust of jazz studies courses in Australia is towards the performable aspects of the music — harmony, ensemble work, improvisation and basic instrumental tuition. The way in which these characteristics of jazz relate to the cultures which have produced them is something of a blind spot. The history of the music and its socio-political matrix are touched on in some courses (La Trobe University in Victoria is exceptional in prescribing a mandatory unit in Jazz History), but the general tendency of jazz education has been not only to neglect these areas (particularly Australian jazz history), but by doing so to imply that a knowledge of it is of negligible significance to a musician: in other words, to legitimise historical ignorance.

The Australian suspicion of any knowledge which cannot immediately be translated into visible (or in this case audible) effects, has thus engendered serious blind spots — call them prejudices — in most of the students who have passed through its jazz studies programmes. Post-traditional styles are favoured, partly because they are not embedded so deeply in the past, and partly because mastery of their conventions more easily enables the student to do the only thing which our society believes confirms the validity of learning: to get a job. It is also true that the overt intellectual challenge of post-bop conventions gives more obvious validity to its study; it is far more difficult to present history in a way that discloses the vital importance of the subject.



Judy Bailey in 1987: she was able to deliver a passionate reply to the misapprehension that a future Bob Barnard performance was not worth attending, because his music was 'just dixieland'... PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON

For all these reasons, formal education courses have tended to emphasise more modern jazz movements, and in one or two regrettable cases, its spokesmen have positively devalued Australia's highly influential pre-bop tradition. At one of Judy Bailey's concerts during an interstate tour in 1985, among those present were the director of one of the local jazz studies programmes and a number of his students whom he had encouraged to attend in order to hear the featured group. At the end of the concert, the teacher thanked her and then noted that among the musicians scheduled for future performance was Bob Barnard (who is internationally regarded as one of the most gifted creative exponents of his style in the world). But that style is pre-bop, a compound of traditional and mainstream. Characterising Barnard's music as 'just dixieland', the teacher suggested that his students not waste their time attending, a recommendation not only to miss a musician without peer, but also to carry into their careers a conviction that this essential stylistic link in the history of the music was of negligible significance. Fortunately, on this occasion, Judy Bailey delivered a passionate reply that disabused the young tyros of this misapprehension.



Trumpeter Bob Barnard (right, pictured here with clarinetist John McCarthy) is internationally regarded as one of the most gifted creative exponents of his style in the world... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY

The manifestation of such myopia makes it difficult, even after nearly fifteen years, to assess the possible long-term effects of these education courses on the development of the music as an organic component in our culture. In jazz as in the other arts, it is almost invariably true that the most creative innovations appear from outside the institutional framework. One can teach students how to play licks developed by Armstrong, Parker, Coltrane, but what 'institution' taught Armstrong, Parker and Coltrane? They produced what they did because they were fully immersed in a local culture which spontaneously expressed itself through jazz. Lift a learner out of such an environment, place him in an institutionalised context, and all one can guarantee

is that competent students can be taught competent musicianship. The 'hothouse' conditions under which young talent blooms in the insulated context of formal institutions certainly shortens the period of technical apprenticeship to a degree which earlier generations of jazz musicians can only wish they had had available. The theoretical foundations of current jazz improvisation have now been codified, freeing younger players from a slow and extended period of exploration by trial and error, and permitting the most gifted to enter sooner into that creative phase of their careers which actually advances the music.

At best, in the larger centres, there exist parallel opportunities for the formally tutored musicians to exercise themselves in the stress of field conditions. There is for the student an unforeseeable difference between learning and playing jazz in an environment structured for that purpose, as opposed to performing amid the distractions of a public jazz venue. The co-ordination between the jazz studies programmes at the NSW Conservatorium and seasons at The Basement in the mid-seventies provided an exciting stimulus to the music, a point of incandescent contact between engineered development from above and spontaneous development from below. It is true also that the most visible exponent of the bop tradition to emerge in the last decade, James Morrison, was in part a product of the jazz education system. As an emissary of the music, Morrison's flamboyance is making the kind of impact that points to his becoming a successor to Don Burrows as the individual most closely associated with jazz in the public eye.



James Morrison in 1987: his flamboyance is making the kind of impact that points to his becoming a successor to Don Burrows as the individual most closely associated with jazz in the public eye...

There are other, and highly creative, musicians like saxophonist Dale Barlow, who are making major contributions to jazz, but in a way that is less publicly visible. While Barlow himself also came through the jazz studies programme, some have found that programme less congenial. There have been, indeed, important creative initiatives which have emerged outside the institutional frameworks. These have involved individual musicians, bands, informal co-operatives, and venues. The Keys Music Association and the Paradise Jazz Cellar in Sydney were crucial incubators from the late seventies, particularly in nurturing musicians like Mark Simmonds and members of the group which became The Benders. In Melbourne, similar energies issued from such groups as Pyramid, Odwala, and in the group Onaje an earlier generation of musicians advanced convincingly into more contemporary areas. There is debate regarding the causal connection between formal jazz studies and public jazz performance. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the institutionalising process of the last decade has coincided with the biggest influx of youthful musicians, fully versed in relatively contemporary jazz canons, to appear since the sixties.



The Keys Music Association and the Paradise Jazz Cellar in Sydney were crucial incubators, particularly in nurturing musicians like saxophonist Dale Barlow (above left) and bassist Lloyd Swanton (above right), who became members of the quartet The Benders, and Mark Simmonds (below)... PHOTO CREDITS PETER SINCLAIR



The same cannot be said of the traditional movement. In the history of our musical culture, the traditionalists have been much more significant than is now widely appreciated. The existence of an Australian jazz style, while a matter of contention locally, is an accepted fact for many overseas writers and musicians. It is a style based on the traditional idiom transmuted into Australian terms during the forties and fifties, particularly by the bands of Graeme Bell and Frank Johnson. In the history of Australian jazz, it is the traditional style which has had the greatest international impact, in terms of modifying the development of the music in other countries. The authority of the traditional school in Australia during the immediate post-war period was such that the public generally made a simple equation between 'jazz' and 'traditional jazz', and even many musicians playing in more progressive styles in the late forties hesitated to think of themselves as jazz musicians.



In London's Leicester Square Jazz Club 1948, L-R, British trumpeter Humphrey Lyttelton, his first wife Patricia, Jazz Journal editor Sinclair Traill, Graeme Bell and Roger Bell: in the history of Australian jazz, it is the traditional style which has had the greatest international impact, in terms of modifying the development of the music in other countries... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

The developments of the last ten years have seen a significant reversal in the balance of that authority, and for many reasons. The emphasis of the jazz studies courses obviously points to clear advantages for the state of post-traditional forms. At the same time, traditional jazz, in suffering something of an eclipse, is experiencing the consequence of one of its own initiatives back in the fifties. At that time there

developed a strong purist consciousness within the young traditional jazz fraternity, by which its members sealed themselves protectively within a relatively narrow definition of their music. At at least one Australian Jazz Convention, for example, musicians playing ideologically unsound styles were ordered from the stage, and even Graeme Bell was criticised for using arrangements. Through the seventies and eighties some of this exclusivism persists, effectively disenfranchising traditional jazz from the benefits being accorded to other forms. If this style is being neglected in the institutionalising process, it is also itself putting less into that process. In 1978, Ray Price stopped leading his band for school recitals, and while they were continued throughout the next year by his clarinettist Jack Wiard, then his trombonist John Colborne-Veel, from 1980 they ceased altogether. From that time, until 1987, traditional jazz had virtually no sustained national visibility to the new generation of students. When the Sydney Jazz Quintet began presenting school concerts it provided an admirable service in bringing jazz to the attention of children, but its emphasis was on mainstream to bop. Not until the advent of the 'Jazzin' Around' lecture/ recitals in 1987 has traditional jazz returned to a wide range of school children.



Clarinettist Jack Wiard continued Ray Price's school recitals when Price withdrew in 1978, but by 1980 they had ceased altogether...

This lack of visibility is aggravated by the advancing age of traditional jazz musicians and their followers. Not since the trad boom of the early sixties has there been a significant wave of young traditionalists, and there is not even any individual musician in the style who has entered the scene since the seventies who has achieved the national prominence of veterans like Graeme Bell and Bob Barnard, or of post-traditional players like James Morrison. Nearly all the traditional groups in Australia include veterans from the early sixties. Traditional jazz has developed a late middle-aged image, in a society in which narcissistic youth dominates popular entertainment. The twenty and thirty-year-old techniques of presentation, the jokes,

the rhetoric, simply have no meaning to young audiences, let alone glamour. A Melbourne musician tells the amusing story against himself of taking a break during a gig in the late seventies. Approached by an attractive young woman at the bar, he recalled the halcyon days of the sixties and 'thought his luck had changed'. While she enthused about the atmosphere, his ego and his expectations became tumescent, to be deflated by a comment which she intended as a compliment: '... and I love watching you play. It's just like one of those old documentaries.'



Sydney Jazz Club identities at the Australian Jazz Convention held in Sydney in 1958: from the left trombones include John Parker, Bob Learmonth and one other, trumpets are Vince Ford & Eric Curry, clarinets Graham Spedding & Peter Neubauer (obscured), Doug Lampard, banjo, possibly Jack Connelly, sousaphone, and Neil Macbeth (drums). The young woman in front is unidentified... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN CONSOLIDATED PRESS, NEIL MACBETH COLLECTION

There are always exceptions to any tendency and, particularly in Melbourne, there are younger musicians enlisting in the traditional movement. To maintain a 'movement' as such requires more than a trickle, however. In the absence of a major influx, the core of the traditional scene continues to be the trad boom veterans. That core is contracting as its musicians retire or, in many cases, develop stylistically into other areas, leaving behind those followers whose preferences have not broadened. In the last few years the Sydney Jazz Club has reassessed its own function in relation to this problem but, again, there is a limit to how far entrenched public attitudes can

be changed through policy decisions. During a private party in Sydney in 1977 a jam session developed, involving a number of musicians who had been associated for years with the traditional scene. As developing players they had inevitably absorbed aspects of later styles and increased their fluency, but were still playing an accessible mainstream approach. They were loudly berated by one of the listeners, who indignantly demanded, 'Why don't you play something we can understand?' If audiences refuse to 'understand' anything more recent than sixty years old in a music still well short of its centenary, then they must expect to become bewildered. Many modernists show little grasp of what went before, but it is equally stultifying that many traditionalists have no grasp of what came later.



A scene from the 30th Australian Jazz Convention, held in Balmain, a suburb of Sydney, in 1975: the history of this Convention is a seismographic record of the history of traditional jazz in Australia since 1946...

The strengths and the weaknesses in Australian traditional jazz are summarised by the condition of its major annual event, the Australian Jazz Convention, which is still held after forty-one years. The history of this Convention is a seismographic record of the history of traditional jazz in Australia since 1946. Wherever it is held, it produces a surge of local interest in the music which gives impetus to the movement.

Conventions held in Brisbane (1976), Hobart (1977) and Fremantle (1979) have provided local momentum which has sustained the music for years afterward. More recently, the Convention has reflected the tendency of jazz to regionalisation, with seven out of the last ten being held outside of capital cities. There has been some extension of its stylistic tolerance over the last ten years, but the event is still primarily a traditional affair. Attendances have generally continued to increase, running over the thousand mark, and consisting mainly of people of middle age and middle class, a relatively affluent group who inject considerable funds into the area where the Convention is held. At its best, it still generates unexpected sparks of brilliance, but the advancing age of the delegates and musicians is increasingly evident in the predictability of much of the music. Like Australian traditional jazz in general, the Convention continues to manifest all the vital signs, but with less youthful energy than in earlier decades.

If these reservations cast something of a shadow over the music, it is nonetheless the shadow of an indisputable statistical fact: Australian traditional jazz is not being revitalised on a significant scale by young musicians. The graph is unremitting — the average age of the exponents and followers of traditional jazz is increasing, and until some new factor enters the equation, only one extrapolation is possible: that the generation carrying the standard of the music will in the foreseeable future die and not be replaced. It is only by recognising that harsh possibility that it can be averted. Unless its adherents wish to subscribe to the view that an art form kept alive by artificial means does not deserve to survive, they must develop administrative structures and youth-oriented promotional programmes similar to those which have revitalised more progressive jazz styles. It is imperative, however, that the music become invested with a deeper respect for and appreciation of its own local history — for without that sense of continuity, whether expressed as renewal or reaction, Australian jazz cannot develop as an authentic component of our folk culture.
