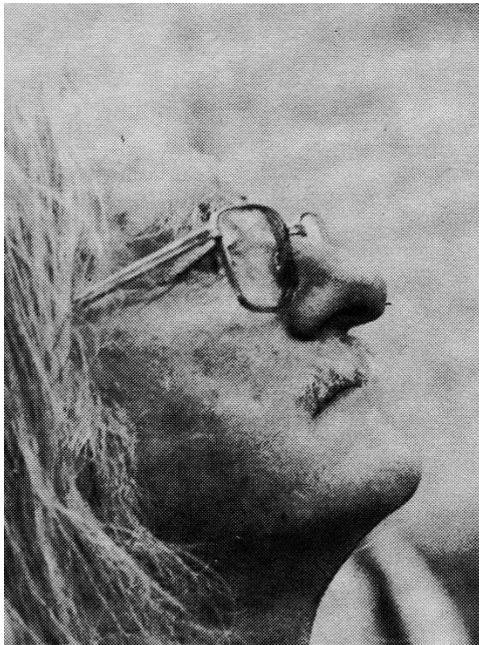


DAVE DALLWITZ: THE CREATION OF A MYTH

by Norm Linehan*

Editor's note: This article appeared in the January/February, 1983 edition of Jazz Magazine. The late Norm Linehan said at the time that it was written towards the end of 1981 when he was not aware that Bruce Johnson was working on the series of articles on traditional jazz in Adelaide which appeared in the March/April, May/June and July/August 1982 editions of Jazz Magazine. "It is not a response to his articles," said Linehan, "and if we seem to have reached different conclusions about similar questions, so be it."



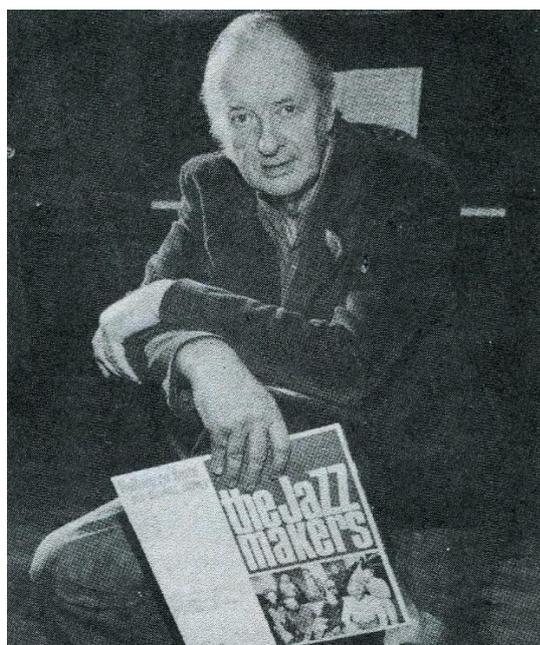
Norm Linehan: the Clunies-Ross essay is a farrago of errors of fact, misconceptions and wrong conclusions... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH

During 1980 there was some controversy in Melbourne about who should be awarded the title of "father" of Australian jazz — a ridiculous proposition, as was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's publicising themselves in 1919 as "creators of jazz", and Jelly Roll Morton's claim in 1938 that "I, myself, happened to be the creator in the year 1902". Several names were mentioned but not that of Dave Dallwitz who was after all a bit of a newcomer.

Some months ago my attention was drawn to a book *Australian Popular Culture*, edited by Peter Spearritt and David Walker, published in 1979. It included a chapter by Bruce Clunies-Ross called "An Australian Sound: Jazz in Melbourne and Adelaide

** In 1983 Norm Linehan was a Sydney freelance writer/photographer, and author of Norm Linehan's Australian Jazz Picture Book.*

1941-51.” While not actually awarding the title to Dallwitz, Clunies-Ross did purport to establish that between 1945 and 1950, with some assistance from Ade Monsborough, Dallwitz created the definitive sound of Australian jazz. This chapter is a farrago of errors of fact, misconceptions and wrong conclusions and while I was inclined to denounce it publicly, it seemed that as in two years since publication it had not come to the attention of the jazz community, it would be better to ignore it and it might go away. Unfortunately it has not done so.



Dave Dallwitz: did he lay the basis for anything?... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

Recently I saw a pamphlet published by the Australian Music Centre in 1981 detailing the life and works of Dave Dallwitz. The author is not named so the responsibility lies with the Music Centre.*The pamphlet contains errors of fact and omission in the biography, the list of compositions and the discography, which need not concern us here and indeed are not surprising as one of the reference sources quoted is Clunies-Ross, along with some others of doubtful value. It is however worth comment that some of the detail is at variance with another Music Centre publication, their catalogue of *Australian Jazz Compositions* (1978). An example will suffice.

**Eric Myers, editor of Jazz Magazine in 1983, writes (in 2019): In the March/April 1983 edition of Jazz Magazine, we intended to publish the offending AMC pamphlet, with the permission of the Australian Music Centre. I cannot remember why this was not done; perhaps the pamphlet was no longer available. I should own up however, to the fact that I prepared the brochure on Dave Dallwitz when I was research officer at the Australia Music Centre (AMC) in 1979. When I resigned from the AMC in January 1980, the Dallwitz brochure (among a number of other brochures devoted to Australian composers) was partly completed. The Dallwitz brochure was published a year after my resignation, in January 1981, with a number of amendments to my original manuscript.*

The pamphlet quotes the year of composition of *Tivoli Stomp* as 1954. The catalogue quotes 1977. They agree on the recording of this tune by Pearce-Pickering except that the pamphlet quotes the catalogue number incorrectly; both give the year of recording as 1977. The record cover, which I believe to be correct, quotes the recording date as 24th April, 1975.

The pamphlet, brief and essentially ephemeral as it may appear, assumes a degree of authority because of its origin, and it is for this reason that I take issue with the final paragraph of the biography, which reads, “Along with a handful of other Australian jazz musicians — Roger and Graeme Bell, Ade Monsborough and others who worked together in the ‘forties — Dave Dallwitz can take credit for enabling Australian jazz to develop its own unique idiom, laying the basis for the traditional jazz movement which still flourishes today.”

It appears that in late 1945 or early 1946 Dave Dallwitz became a member of an Adelaide band called the Southern Jazz Group. By the end of 1946 he was the leader of this band which he took to the 1st Australian Jazz Convention. After the Convention Graeme Bell wrote enthusiastically of the style and playing of the SJG and praised Dallwitz for his unity of purpose. But neither he nor the other musicians who heard Dallwitz at that Convention made any attempt to model their styles on that of the SJG. The same is true of the next two Conventions when Dallwitz brought the same band, playing in the same style, to Melbourne.



The Southern Jazz Group at the 1946 Australian Jazz Convention...L-R, Dave Dallwitz (trombone), Bill Munro (trumpet), Bruce Gray (clarinet)... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

There is an indication that the SJG had begun to split up in 1949 and at the Convention that year only some of the original members were present; Dallwitz filled the gaps with Melbourne musicians. The original group, with the addition of Ade Monsborough and a change of drummer, did record until June 1950, but by October 1950 it was known that there was dissension and at the Convention at Sydney that

year the Southern Jazz Group, led by Dallwitz, appeared with new personnel which appears to have been the one that recorded for the Australian Broadcasting Commission in June 1951. This was a short-lived band and by the end of 1951 the Southern Jazz Group had ceased to exist. Dallwitz appeared at the Convention that year with a group called the Southern Jazz Four which included three other musicians not previously associated with the SJG. Eight former members of the SJG appeared variously in two other bands at this Convention.

At the 1952 Convention at Melbourne, Dallwitz appeared with some Melbourne musicians, and won the original tunes competition which he had inaugurated in 1947 and won in 1948 and 1949. Two original members of the 1946 SJG appeared with another Adelaide band. This marked the end, at that time, of Dallwitz's involvement with jazz as a musician and leader and as the pamphlet puts it, he "left jazz for some twenty years". His activity as a composer during these six or seven years may be dealt with briefly. The pamphlet lists 16 tunes composed from 1946 to 1951. This may seem little enough but must be looked at in context and will be dealt with later.

I can now return to the Music Centre pamphlet's assertion that Dallwitz, among others, enabled Australian jazz to develop, and laid the basis for the traditional jazz movement which still flourishes today. I do not believe this can be supported. It is clear from listening to the records that the Southern Jazz Group had a distinctive sound. It is equally clear from listening to records by other Australian bands from the same period in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart that none of them was trying to emulate the Dallwitz sound. Musicians and enthusiasts alike admired and respected the Southern Jazz Group, but there is no evidence that Dallwitz was laying the basis for anything, let alone enabling Australian jazz to develop its own unique idiom, that elusive phantom which Bruce Johnson is the latest to pursue.



Bruce Johnson: chasing the elusive phantom of Australian jazz developing its own unique idiom... PHOTO CREDIT YVONNE DALY COURTESY OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

Johnson's recent research has suggested that Dallwitz had considerable influence in Adelaide but the facts are against this too. In 1946 there were two bands in Adelaide, Malcolm Bills and Dave Dallwitz, perhaps three if you include Maurice le Doeuff but I think his was of a more modern persuasion. At the 1951 Convention at Adelaide five local bands were registered and it could be argued that this was the result of Dallwitz's influence but there is no way of knowing whether it might just as well have happened without him. Some of these musicians were playing jazz in Adelaide earlier than he was. Memory suggests, and there is a little contemporary evidence to support it, that these new bands were apostates rather than apostles, and Dallwitz's abrupt departure from the jazz scene after 1952 indicates that the leadership now ascribed to him may not be warranted. With his broad background in art it seems unlikely that he would be "disheartened by lack of public support for trad jazz" as the pamphlet has it. It is much more likely that he left because the Adelaide musicians were unable or unwilling to accept his leadership.

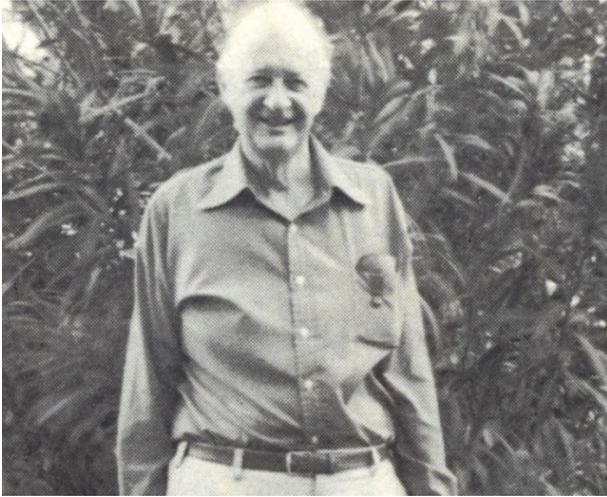


*The Southern Jazz Group at the 1948 Australian Jazz Convention in Melbourne, L-R, Joe Tippet(drums), Dave Dallwitz (trombone, leader), John Malpas (banjo), Bill Munro (trumpet), Bruce Gray (clarinet), Bob Wright (tuba), Lew Fisher (piano)...
PHOTO COURTESY BLACK ROOTS WHITE FLOWERS*

The next Convention to be held at Adelaide was in 1957 when ten Adelaide bands were registered, and here is a clear indication of the growth of jazz in the absence of Dallwitz. Four of the bands, variously, included seven former members of the SJG; nine other former members were not there. The program listed 39 Adelaide names who had not been in the 1951 program, including three completely new bands whose members had no previous connection with the SJG. Some of these are still with us, some are gone but not forgotten, and some remain only as names in a Convention program. They all stand, as evidence that the jazz scene in Adelaide continued to grow without Dave Dallwitz.

It could be argued that the early influence of Dave Dallwitz carried through the years, but recordings of several Adelaide bands from the 1957 Convention show no sign of

the earlier style of the Southern Jazz Group. It could also be argued that Dallwitz's contribution has been as a composer rather than as a musician or bandleader.



It could be argued that Dallwitz's contribution has been as a composer rather than as a musician or bandleader... PHOTO CREDIT BRUCE JOHNON

In case there are some who would see this as an attack on Dave Dallwitz, it is not. It is an attempt to strangle, if not at birth at least early in its life, the establishment of a myth which I believe to be as unfair to Dave Dallwitz as it is damaging to the history of Australian jazz.

Editor's note: The following letter to the editor in response to Norm Linehan's article, was published in the March/April, 1983, edition of Jazz Magazine:

Sir,

Norman Linehan seems to think that nothing can appear in print relating to Australian jazz without his passing comment on it, whether he knows what he's talking about or not. Over the past few months in different publications, he has passed judgement on a record series he has never heard, taken issue with a WA writer for daring to have an opinion regarding George Melly, and now in JAZZ has informed us in Adelaide that Dave Dallwitz has had no influence on our traditional jazz. The whole article is just unsubstantiated invention. He says for example that there is no way of knowing whether registration of five bands at the Adelaide Convention was related to the work of Dallwitz. There is a way of knowing, and anyone who calls himself a historian should know it. You ask the people involved. Anyway, his assumption that the condition of Adelaide jazz can be gauged simply by reference to a convention programme is short-sighted. Linehan's sweeping and arrogant pronouncements even contradict the available sources. He refuses to believe the reasons which Dallwitz himself gives for leaving the jazz scene, but gives no justification for doing so. It would take more time than it's worth to list all his absurdities. It's enough to say that his description of the Clunies-Ross article would have been better applied to his own, "a farrago of errors of fact, misconceptions and wrong conclusions." With an article like this he loses all credibility as a historian. If he wants to be taken seriously in future he really must ask himself why he's going into print; to contribute substantially to jazz history, or just to hear the sound of his own voice.

J A HENDRY, Plympton, South Australia