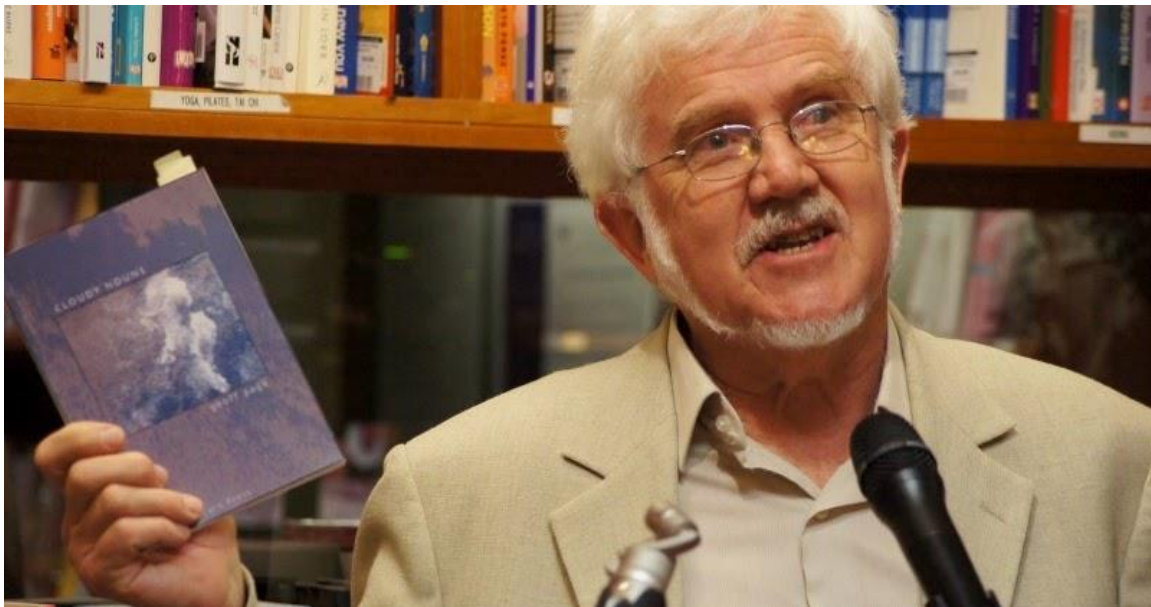


AFICIONADO: A JAZZ MEMOIR by Geoff Page. Picaro Press, Cardiff, 2014.
132pp, \$20.

Reviewed by John McBeath*

[This review first appeared in The Weekend Australian on October 18, 2014, under the heading "Fan trumpets the history of jazz" but cannot be found on The Australian's website.]

At some time most of us have developed a consuming teenage passion, one unfamiliar to our puzzled parents, and so can identify with these opening lines: "It's only a phase, my mother said. He'll grow out of it." What the 16-year-old had discovered was jazz and that "phase" for Canberra academic, author and poet Geoff Page has lasted more than a half century.



Geoff Page: he discovered jazz at the age of 16...

Aficionado traces Page's evolution of his love for the music, beginning with two school friends at an Armidale, NSW, boarding school. He re-calls their "arcane knowledge" of jazz was no use with the local girls, who were enthusiastic about Bill Haley and Elvis Presley. Why jazz and not rock? Page says it was because they realised that "compared to the subtleties of Gerry Mulligan or Dave Brubeck, Elvis and Bill Haley were relatively one-dimensional". At the same time he realises "we were, and ... still are, musical snobs".

**When this was written in 2014, the late John McBeath was The Australian's jazz critic.*



Compared to the subtleties of Gerry Mulligan (above left) or Dave Brubeck (above right), Elvis and Bill Haley were relatively one-dimensional...

Inspired by drummers, Page gravitated to playing a snare drum in the cadet corps band. He remembers that the 4/4 swing of Benny Goodman's big band recordings, with drummer Gene Krupa, was able to offset the bleakness of school time after classes. Reading LP liner notes, the trio sensed that improvisation was important: "To play the same music over and over again ... would never cut the mustard with us. We wanted individual expression."

By his last year of high school Page's mother had abandoned her "phase" diagnosis and gave him a Bud Shank Quartet LP for Christmas, an album he has listened to for more than 50 years.



The "Bud Shank Quartet featuring Claude Williamson" LP (left) was given to Page by his mother in 1957...

The 1960s brought a rich period in jazz history and during this time Page, studying at the University of New England, expanded his knowledge of the music and its practitioners, especially the modern jazz drummers. He acquired a set of drums and worked his way through instruction books. Although his technique was "depressingly minimal", he played for student dances in a trio and joined a trad band for gigs at a "rough hotel".

Relocating to Sydney in 1963 for his first year as a high school teacher, Page had access to many now legendary Australian jazz musicians, often at the fabled El Rocco where he first heard pianist Mike Nock, who, four decades later, has supplied a cover blurb for this book. There were also opportunities to hear famous overseas artists: Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey, Duke Ellington.



Four decades after Page heard Mike Nock at the El Rocco (left on piano, with Freddy Logan on bass), Nock supplied a cover blurb for Page's book...

He moved to a teaching position in Canberra in 1964 and despite modestly dismissing his drumming abilities, he was invited to play in a trio at The Pendulum, Canberra's jazz cellar. Married by now, he also played with young blues musicians, one of whom eventually ran off with his first wife and her share of their record collection, leaving gaps that lingered on in her ex-husband's mind "for long afterwards".

His second wife was not a jazz fan -- "a pair of headphones was indispensable" — as Page settled into family life, teaching and writing, publishing two poetry collections by 1975. The advent of jazz-fusion following Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew* left him unimpressed; he was more interested in Blakey and especially Charles Mingus, whose recordings outnumber all others in his collection.



Page was unimpressed with the advent of jazz-fusion following Miles Davis's Bitches Brew (left); he was more interested in Blakey and especially Charles Mingus (below), whose recordings outnumber all others in his collection...

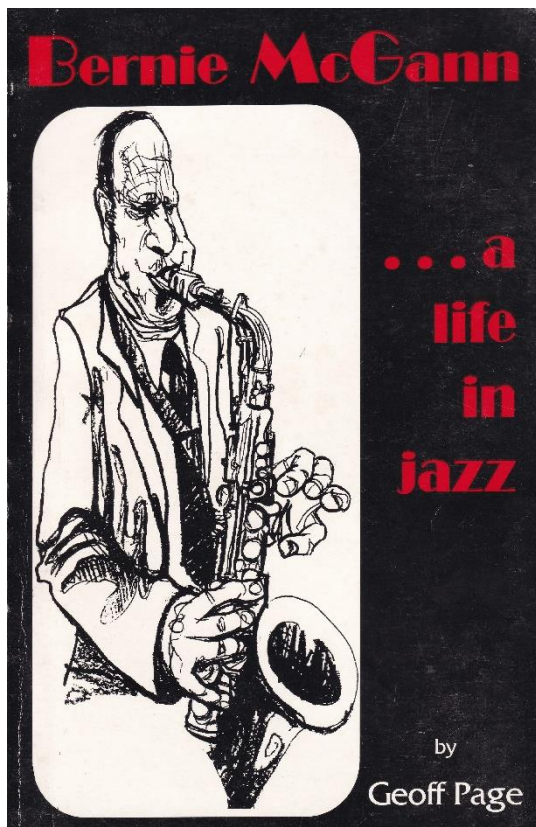


By 1980 Page countered a midlife crisis by buying a vibraphone that he played in groups with students and friends. Overseas it was the decade of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis busily reviving earlier jazz traditions. In Australia a new generation appeared, many as graduates of the Sydney Conservatorium's jazz program.

Page put most of his spare time into writing, publishing nine books, and in 1985 participated in an Australian Poets' recital tour of the US including a week in New York to hear several famous jazz names. The book notes the advances of Australian jazz in the 1990s, and lists some of its venues and foremost performers. Having retired from full-time teaching, Page began staging jazz concerts in Canberra in 2003, and still continues, with participants reading like a who's who of Australian jazz.

There is much informed musical analysis in this slim volume, in addition lists of reference books and recordings, as well as opinions and anecdotes. As Page charts his journey of discovery, he's also compiled a history of the genre, globally and locally, making this an interesting reference for other aficionados and an introduction for newcomers. The memoir concludes with a listing of great historical jazz figures: "And the list goes on — as does the music."

Part two of the book features eight of Page's many jazz poems. He is author of 22 collections of poetry and five verse novels. *Aficionado* is dedicated to legendary Sydney saxophonist Bernie McGann (1937-2013), whose biography Page published in 1997.



The cover of Page's biography of Sydney saxophonist Bernie McGann (1937-2013) published in 1997...

Other articles on this website which may be of interest:

Ted Nettelbeck, review of Geoff Page's book "Aficionado: A Jazz Memoir" in the BOOK REVIEWS folder, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews-10>

John Shand, review of Geoff Page's biography of Bernie McGann "A Life in Jazz" in the BOOK REVIEWS folder, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews>