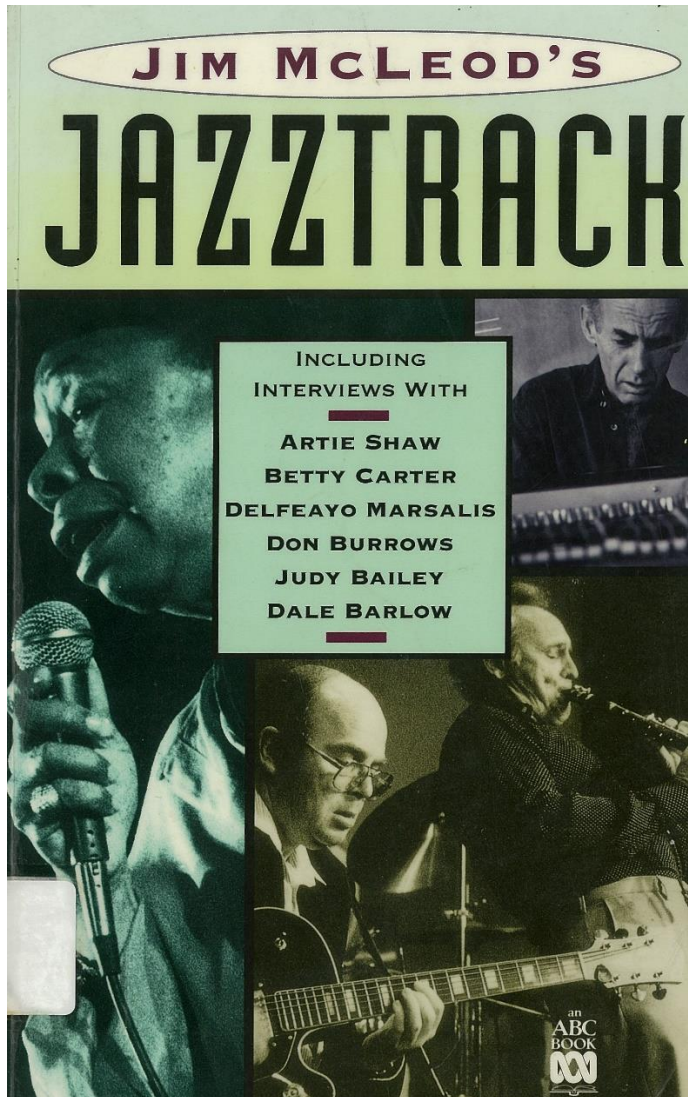


## FOREWORD TO JIM McLEOD'S JAZZTRACK

by Jim McLeod\*

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*The book "Jim McLeod's Jazztrack" was published in 1994.*



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*\*ABC broadcaster Jim McLeod retired in June, 2004 after 48 years. He had fronted Classic FM's "Jazztrack", a two-hour program heard at 5 pm on Saturdays and Sundays for 28 years. In 2000 he was awarded an OAM "for service to the promotion of jazz music through media broadcasts and encouraging Australian music composition and performance".*

**H**ow did you get started with jazz? This must be the most frequently asked question, not only of jazz musicians, but also of me. The trouble is, I don't know. For as long as I can remember my happiest times were spent listening to music and mostly to jazz in one of its forms.

When I was growing up—I was born in September 1939—jazz was a large part of the popular music. The bands of Benny Goodman, with such brilliant soloists as trumpeter Harry James, pianists Teddy Wilson and Jess Stacy; Tommy Dorsey with good soloists and singers such as Frank Sinatra and Jo Stafford; Artie Shaw with his big band successes *Begin the Beguine* and *Frenesi* and the wonderful sounds of the Gramercy Five. The musicianship, the originality and the jazz of these bands. their arrangements and players was everywhere to be heard. That was what we heard coming out of our radios.



*Tommy Dorsey (far left) with the Pied Pipers. Jo Stafford is third from left, with Frank Sinatra fourth from the left... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

The commercial radio stations here had their own bands or orchestras, as did the ABC. These orchestras supported the big quiz shows or variety shows of the radio stars—Bob Dyer, Jack Davey, Roy Rene 'MO' and many others. The band leaders were well-known to the general public. Among the best remembered must be Bob Gibson and Jim Gussey. Their photographs were even on the covers of the sheet music we all bought.



*The band leaders were well-known, among the best remembered being Bob Gibson (left) and Jim Gussey (below)...GIBSON PHOTO COURTESY STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA; GUSSEY PHOTO © RON FALSON ARCHIVE*



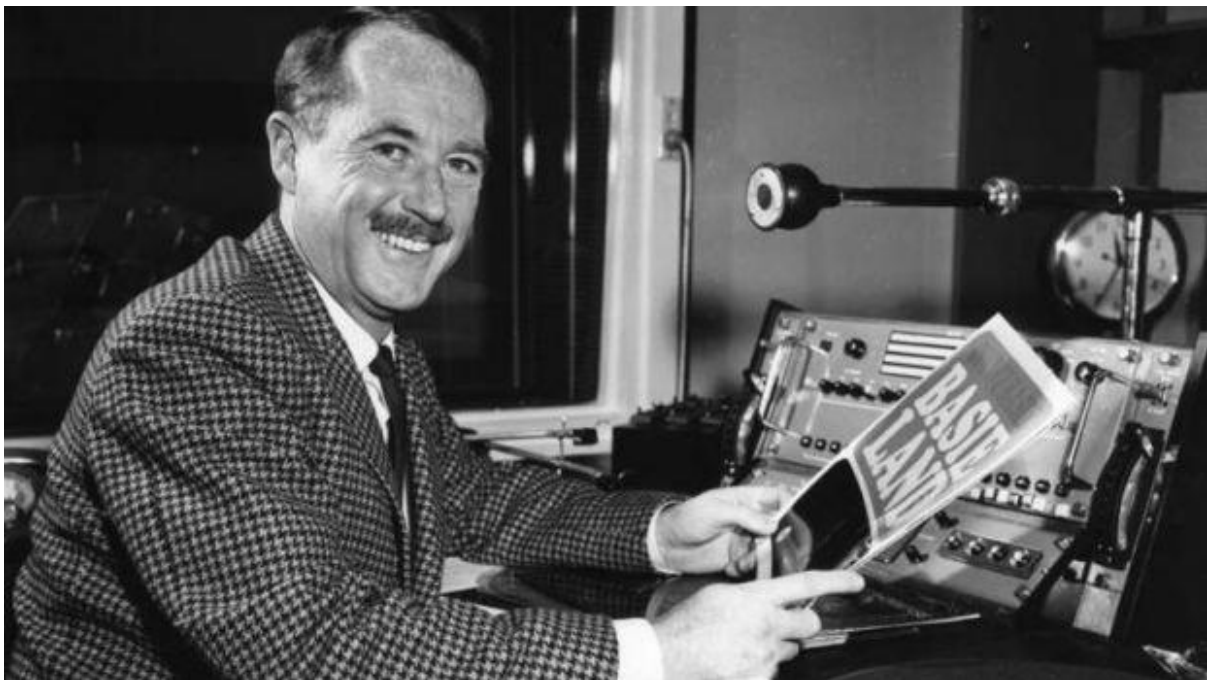
Very early in life I decided that I would like to be a radio announcer. That would have been at a commercial station because I had not even heard of the ABC which was beyond we 'workers' out in the western suburbs of Sydney. I hope this unfortunate feeling has, to some extent, limit away these days. It denies many people a richer experience of ideas and expressions not found elsewhere on radio. I didn't cotton on to the ABC until my early teens. While 'dial twisting' on my radio one Saturday morning in search of music that I wanted to hear I found Eric Child's *Rhythm*

*Unlimited*. It was the best program I had ever heard. I can still remember some of the recordings I heard on Eric's program for the first time. Some have a special nostalgia evoking memories of sitting at home on Saturday mornings long ago.



*ABC broadcaster Eric Child: evoking memories of sitting at home on Saturday mornings long ago... PHOTO COURTESY RALPH POWELL AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM.*

A few years later, on 2UW, I first heard my favourite broadcaster and, consequently my greatest influence, Arch McKirdy.



*Arch McKirdy, Jim McLeod's favourite broadcaster and, consequently his greatest influence... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

At high school I was fortunate to make friends with other students who liked jazz too. One of them has for years led his own New Orleans Jazz Band taking the name Nat Oliver. Partly to get away from the 'riff-raff' in the playground, we had a jazz club that met occasionally in the Music Room to listen to records. We had a music appreciation class about once a week—music was not taken seriously at that school—and for the last year or two that I was there the teacher who took those classes was a Mr Daniels. He played pretty fair stride piano as I remember. Elwyn Lynn, the painter and art critic was teaching history and English and I remember him coming to hear our records once. For some reason the record I most remember from those days is a 78 which I bought of *The Big Crash from China*, Bob Crosby and the Bobcats with drummer Ray Bauduc.



*Bob Crosby (left) who led the Bobcats, which included the drummer Ray Bauduc (below)...  
PHOTOGRAPHERS UNKNOWN*



The same school group (without the music or English teachers) used to meet up on Saturdays and head for the city, for Sydney and the jazz club which operated down near Circular Quay. The Paramount Jazz Band was the house band at the Ironworkers Federation Hall in George Street.



*The Paramount Jazz Band, pictured in 1953. L-R, Peter Towson (piano), Dan Hardie (clarinet), Don Hardie (banjo, guitar), Trevor Pepper (trumpet), Bob Leggett (drums), Tony Howarth (trombone), Harry Harman (tuba)...PHOTO COURTESY HARRY HARMAN*

Other bands played there too and I remember vaguely a trio one night which seemed very modern to me. The drummer wore glasses which were tinted and, I suppose, that added to the image of modernity. I think his name was Ralph Stock. I learned later that he was involved in the decision to have jazz at the El Rocco! He deserves a medal for that. More of that later.

At the time what my friends really wanted to hear was traditional jazz. When I look back on that period, I think our group of four or five fifteen-year-olds was probably in grave moral danger mixing with the life down at that end of town. But now I view it with the eyes of a parent, so my perspective has altered. It simply never occurred to us that we should be careful. Dancing went with jazz too in those days and so there was a space, you could not call it a dance floor, behind all the stack chairs which were set up facing the band for the serious listeners.

But dancing almost took over for a time. The fabulous Katherine Dunham Dancers were performing at the Tivoli. After the show on Saturday nights, some of them would come to the Sydney Jazz Club and dance. You would think they might have had enough of dancing by that hour but ... oh no. They appeared exotic to lads from the western suburbs. They wore elegant, outrageous clothes and added an excitement

of their own to the atmosphere. In a hall as plain as could be, I don't think any nights since have been more exciting than those new, youthful adventures.



*The fabulous Katherine Dunham Dancers, then performing at the Tivoli would come to the Sydney Jazz Club after their show and dance. They appeared exotic to lads from the western suburbs...*

I cannot precisely remember the first time I went to the El Rocco or

who was playing at the time. My earliest, clear memories are when pianist Bryce Rohde had his quartet with George Golla (guitar), Ed Gaston (bass), and Colin Bailey (drums). I learned much about jazz from Bryce Rohde who had then not long returned from a successful extended working time in the United States as a member of the Australian Jazz Quartet. Still the most successful ensemble of Australian jazz musicians to work overseas.



*The Bryce Rohde Quartet, L-R, Ed Gaston, Colin Bailey, George Golla, Rohde... PHOTO COURTESY JOHN SHAND*

Consequently, whenever there was a visiting group from the United States, the chances were they would visit the El Rocco because they knew Bryce. I recall visits from Herb Ellis and many others. But the most amusing was when the Dave Brubeck Quartet came to Sydney. At this downstairs jazz cellar El Rocco we were enjoying the Rohde Quartet when suddenly everyone was aware that important visitors had arrived. Look up and who should be there but three-quarters of the Brubeck band—Paul Desmond, bassist Eugene Wright and drummer Joe Morello.



*Three-quarters of the Dave Brubeck band, L-R, altoist Paul Desmond, drummer Joe Morello and bassist Eugene Wright arrived at the El Rocco... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS*

As it happens, Joe Morello was a particular favourite of Bryce Rohde's excellent drummer Colin Bailey (now himself a big success in the US). Most people will have heard Morello play pieces with Brubeck on which he plays the melody by means of applying hand pressure to the side drum while striking it. He is expert at this. This was a device which Colin Bailey also employed on *920 Special*. Seeing Morello in the audience, Bryce announced the next number would be *920 Special*. Bailey threw his sticks in the air and said, 'He must be kidding!' He did it though, and well. I can't report any reaction from Joe Morello I am sorry to say.

I began finding out more about contemporary jazz. Working at the ABC, I met Joe Cramey who was to become the ABC's first real jazz producer. Joe was a passionate man who loved jazz. He gave me records to listen to which frightened me, really frightened me, so different, fierce and impassioned was the music—but fascinating too. Charlie Mingus and Eric Dolphy, then Ornette Coleman and his quartet.





*The music of Charlie Mingus and Eric Dolphy (above), and Ornette Coleman (below) was so different, fierce and impassioned...*



Now several years later, as a broadcaster, especially with the national service, I feel a particular responsibility to cover all areas of jazz. That is the dilemma for the public-funded broadcaster. How to cater for all tastes. Everyone feels they own it. Some feel that any broadcasts not to their taste should not be on air. Many want their desired listening at just the time they wish to hear it. We are a remarkably conservative lot.

A policy I have employed with the selection of material if it is unfamiliar to me, or not precisely to my personal taste, is to take heed of respected critics, or to give time to performers or performances which are getting attention in concerts or through discussion. *Jazztrack* tries to bring a range of experiences in the jazz form to the listeners, even if it has been sometimes after midnight when the 'adventurous' gets to air. Most people have a recording facility of some kind at home these days and, I believe, quite a few use that to take down on tape what they will audition later.

As a broadcaster I am in a very privileged place in life. I am being paid reasonable, if not generous, amounts of money to listen to a music that I love; to read about and research that music and its practitioners; to go to concerts and meet the musicians and personalities in the world of jazz—really to live a large part of my life involved in the music that I enjoy most of all the arts.

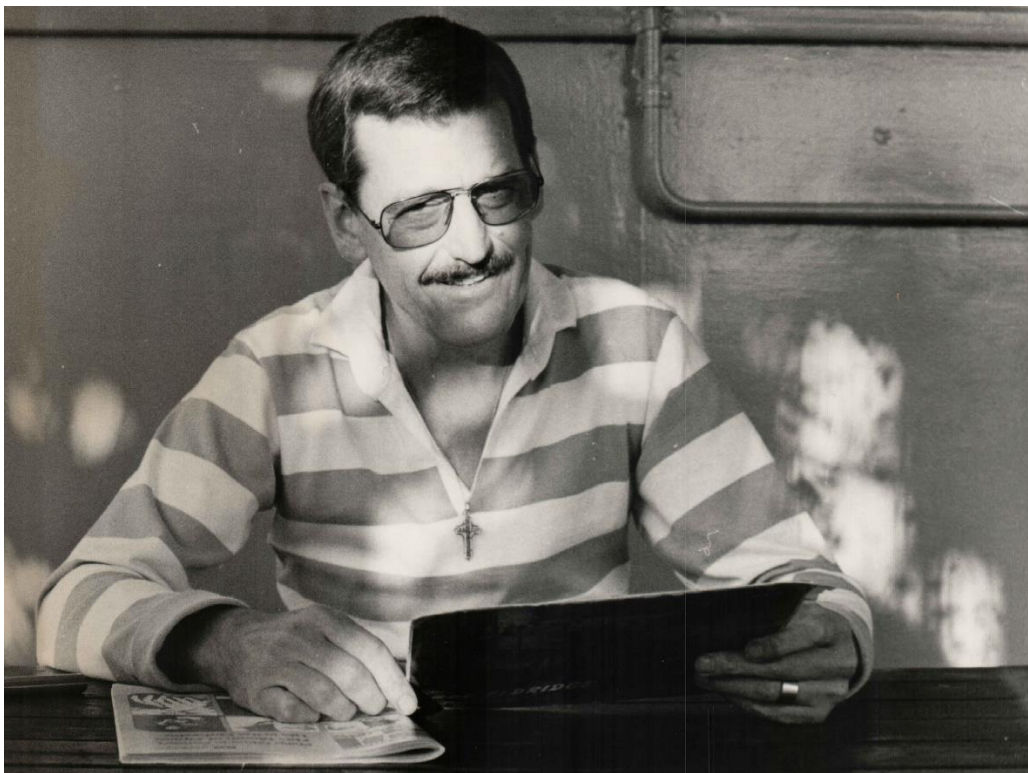


*McLeod: in a very privileged place in life... to go to concerts and meet the musicians and personalities in the world of jazz. Jim (third from left) is pictured here in 1989 with L-R, Roger Frampton, Mike Nock & Bob Barnard... PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD*

Then to present the programs on the national ABC Classic FM Stereo network. On *Jazztrack*, I am in the fortunate position of getting to record 'live' music in clubs, concert halls and, importantly, in the studio. These recordings are one of the most important parts of my operation as they record a special creative, artistic life in Australia. Over the past couple of years more commercial records of Australian jazz have been released, but they still do not, nor could not, cover all that is happening in jazz—the living, of-the-moment music. ABC Radio cannot cover it all either but makes a large contribution to retaining an otherwise transitory music for history to judge and enjoy.

These last two years I have also been writing about aspects of jazz for magazines—particularly *24 Hours*, ABC Radio's program guide and journal of the arts and current events.

I have been accused of being too soft in reviewing, which really means, I think, being too fair. Now that is a curious thing. I have always been wary of my role as a critic. It seems egotistical to me, to really attack and destroy another's creative work. This is not to say that I do not have personal and strong feelings about the music, its presentation and the musicians. Nor does it mean that I do not appreciate the worth of critics. I get a lot to think about from some of them. Perhaps I tend to look for every possible angle.



*McLeod: I have always been wary of my role as a critic. It seems egotistical to me, to really attack and destroy another's creative work. This is not to say that I do not have personal and strong feelings about the music, its presentation and the musicians...*

There must be some worth in most expressions of any true artist and they must have the right to express their artistic self. If I do not like it then I would rather say nothing but let other individuals decide for themselves. If I find some music difficult, then I try to find an explanation of it in interviews, or in other writings on the musicians involved. I may not finish up wanting to hear any more but I will have tried to understand why. I still may not think it has much worth, outside of the particular artist's world. But I still think they have a right to that expression. These feelings affect me whether I am in doubt, when choosing to play a certain record, or

even whether we should record a specific artist. I will seek reviews, opinions of others I respect, and look at the amount of attention the artist is receiving and the wishes of my audience.



*McLeod (foreground) is pictured here in 1978 with L-R, bassist Bruce Cale, drummer Alan Turnbull, saxophonist Bob Bertles and pianist Paul McNamara...  
PHOTO COURTESY BRUCE CALE*

What I try to do in writing about records is to 'review' them rather than 'criticise' them. I try to give a reader some idea of what is on that record (or in that book, or on that video), so that they can make up their own mind whether they will want it, and how it compares to previous works by the same artist. Currently the numbers of jazz records being released is relatively high. There are too many to review all of them. I leave out the albums that I do not like. But some critic friends, in other fields, say that this does not allow my readers to know where I stand. Every serious reader of reviews has critics they admire. They can pick around their known prejudices and personal tastes. I try not to have prejudices and am convinced that, as a broadcaster, I should attempt to avoid bias. I certainly have personal tastes which I consider fairly broad, but is an airing of 'what Jim listens to at home or in the car' something which will be of interest? Apparently it may help or otherwise you would not be reading this now, and the publishers would not have asked me to write it.

As well as finding myself in a privileged position, I also think I have a responsibility to the radio audience—to let them hear what they desire, but also to reveal to them new music and musicians they might not otherwise hear; to the musicians involved in jazz and all of its forms—traditional, modern, contemporary, to mention a few of the labels jazz has acquired; to myself—to give an honest, considered and helpful coverage of an important area of music; and to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation—to support its desire to serve Australia and Australians.

The ABC is an easy target quite often for people to accuse of all manner of neglect and incompetence. I knew practically nothing about the ABC, except Eric Child's jazz programs, when I joined the staff in April 1956. Needless to say, it has been through tough times since and changed considerably. ABC Radio and Television are something we would be much poorer without—in my case, physically as well as spiritually. If it stumbles please don't judge the intentions of its broadcasters and management. Decisions have to be made on which program goes where or what kind of jazz should be heard and so on. Just make sure you keep listening, with a mind open to new, exciting sounds and challenges and feel free to let us know your opinion of what we are doing.



*McLeod: make sure you keep listening, with a mind open to new, exciting sounds and challenges... PHOTO COURTESY JIM McLEOD'S JAZZTRACK*

It is another great privilege for me to be writing this book. It is about the wonderful world of jazz and some of the enormously talented, creative people who make it so exciting. It's as much about the people of jazz as the music itself.

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***Reviews of the book “Jim McLeod’s Jazztrack” on this website:***

*Eric Myers reviews the book at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews-4>*

*John Shand reviews the book at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews-5>*