

## OLD AND NEW JAZZ DREAMS

by Ian Muldoon\*

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American jazz star Tyshawn Sorey - percussionist, drummer, pianist, trombonist - performed and composed a 43' work consisting of one piano note with minor variations. It was part of a double CD *That/Not* (2007). Sorey is a modern leader in the glorious jazz firmament.



*American star Tyshawn Sorey: a modern leader in the glorious jazz firmament...*

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*\*Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York & Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Melbourne. In 2021 he published a collection of essays on jazz subjects, entitled "My Jazz Odyssey: Confessions of a Lifetime Enthusiast".*

In that firmament there have been many comets and meteorites and some stars that may shine forever - Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Thelonious Monk among them. In its evolution, in reaction to the times in which it lived, it went from event music like marches, funerals, work, to entertainment music, most notoriously, that music during Prohibition called The Jazz Age when thousands of small clubs thrived and provided employment. The small group work of Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong became models of polytonality and of polyrhythmic and of improvised music, elements of some of which had been evident in the world of Bartok and Milhaud. Diversions from these models - designated in time "classic jazz" - came to be seen as pollutions which gave rise to the Post WW11 revivalist movement.



*Elements of polytonality and of polyrhythmic and of improvised music, had been evident in the world of Bela Bartok (above) and Darius Milhaud (below)...*



In the swing era jazz became big business and popular, where simple riffs, tightly arranged music, strong melodies, strong rhythm and individual soloists shone. Throughout this evolution, racism played a decisive part. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was all white and of limited talent. White bandleader Paul

Whiteman - spelling correct - was known as the King Of Jazz. White swing bands proved much more successful even though in musical terms, black bands were leading the way, artistically and in sheer talent. Where a “battle” of bands occurred, such as in New York, Chick Webb would be acknowledged as the best swing band by other band leaders, including Duke Ellington and Count Basie and Benny Goodman, even though Benny Goodman was designated commercially as the King Of Swing. Music magazines like *Downbeat* reflected this racist element.



Where a “battle” of bands occurred, such as in New York, Chick Webb (above) would be acknowledged as the best swing band by other band leaders... PHOTO COURTESY RARE JAZZ PHOTOS

The revivalist movement centred on Commonwealth countries like Britain and Australia, proved invaluable through introducing the young to the beauties of “classical” jazz and its major proponents - especially Louis Armstrong who post WW11 was making popular music such as the 1931 song *That’s My Desire* (Dress/Loveday) which he recorded in 1947 - it had been a big hit for Frankie Laine in 1946.

In the USA the most outspoken musician and organiser in prosecuting the joys of traditional jazz was Eddie Condon. He put his money where his mouth was and led such brilliant recordings as CBS *Jammin’ At Condon’s* (1955) one of the finest jazz records of all regardless of genre with the cover featuring the checked socks and right leg of drummer George Wettling. Bob Barnard, Adrian “Lazy Ade” Monsborough, Graeme Bell, Paul Furniss and John McCarthy would all sit comfortably on a

bandstand with these masters which included Wild Bill Davison on cornet, Edmond Hall, clarinet, Bud Freeman, tenor and Lou McGarity on trombone.

Around the same time Lawson-Haggart Jazz Band paid homage to Satchmo and their 10" LP *Louis' Hot 5's and 7's* with Louis introducing the programme himself signing off "red beans and ricely yours, Satchmo". The programme included *Cornet Chop-Suey* (Armstrong), *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* (Lil Armstrong), *Potato Head Blues* (Armstrong), *Gully Low Blues* (Louis Armstrong), *Heebie Jeebies* (Atkins), *Melancholy Blues* (Bloom/Melrose), *Wild Man Blues*, (Morton/Armstrong) and *King Of The Zulus* (Lil Armstrong). The band was bass, and whistling [uncredited], Bob Haggart, clarinet, Bill Stegmeyer, drums, Cliff Leeman, guitar, George Barnes, piano, Lou Stein, trombone, Lou McGarity and trumpet, Yank Lawson.



These musicians were graduates of the great swing bands of the 1930s and 1940s and were masters of their genre. It was the best possible introduction to the glory of Armstrong's compositions and standing and to the Chicago Jazz genre which included the likes of Wild Bill Davison, Jack Teagarden, Vic Dickenson, Muggsy Spanier and Max Kaminsky. The trumpet was the lead instrument. Who knows but that such enthusiasm for classic jazz may have encouraged CBS to record such classics as *Louis Armstrong Plays W C Handy* in 1954 a return to the small group jazz that cemented Armstrong's work as a musical legend. In "classic" jazz the lead instrument tended to be trumpet.



*Trumpet of Melbourne artist Audrey Powne, Jazzlab, Brunswick, Vic, December 3, 2023... PHOTO CREDIT IAN MULDOON*

Music may be bromide or soup, cocaine or a delightful sonic degustation of the best music - it's what you bring to it. Sonny Rollins said the audience is part of the band. Jazz is like the English language, it takes what it wants from wherever and whomever to make a more beautiful language which reflects the human experience now. Jazz is not preserved in aspic. Thus evolution and good music came together in the genre labelled "jazz". The evolution of the English language, once the bailiwick of gatekeepers such as priests, teachers, governments and writers, changed under the influence of other cultures, other languages, so that now, it's not enough to know the rules of grammar and rail at split infinitives and the absence of the possessive punctuation - in jazz it's not enough to have perfect pitch, or the rules regarding harmony, or knowing how to read music. Some of the greatest artists of the 20th century - including Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Bessie Smith, Thelonious Monk and Art Tatum - were self-taught.

Like the English language, but unlike *Academie Francaise* which regulates the French language - ruling on its correct use - jazz is unregulated but subject to much argument, speculation, controversy and misunderstanding mainly by armchair critics but also by musicians who have emerged with a particular style which proved successful. Some artists may remain steadfast in their style, trumpet players such as Louis Armstrong or Chet Baker, whilst others may change with a changing world, like Duke Ellington and Miles Davis. Producers too, change. Teddy Reig of Savoy records,

a company successfully producing “dixieland” jazz, took a punt on Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis et al and the rest, as they say, is history. CBS too, not only released Eddie Condon, or Bessie Smith in boxed sets, but Dave Brubeck, Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis.



*Teddy Reig (above) of Savoy records, a company successfully producing “dixieland” jazz, took a punt on Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis et al... PHOTO CREDIT WILLIAM P GOTTLIEBE*

The word itself is eschewed by some artists because of its associations, and its connotations. It's a word that seems to suggest fizz, insubstantiality, entertainment, fun and "loose living". It is also black man's music, and being black is, to many in the Western world, especially the shrine of capitalism, the USA, not a matter of celebration. To casual listeners it may be defined as up-tempo loud music stomping in a pub on Saturday afternoon. To most young listeners, it's an unknown world where it's hard for them keeping up with new sounds let alone new voices like Agung Mango or Banjo Lucia or new bands like Katanak or The Shang. Yet jazz is the most influential music of the 20th century and has influenced all other Western music. It was the trumpet that led the way.



*New trumpet star Audrey Powne, Jazzlab, Brunswick, Vic, December 3, 2023...*  
*PHOTO CREDKIT IAN MULDOON*

From an early age I was exposed to good music, including Tchaikovsky, Louis Armstrong, Beethoven, Eileen Joyce, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Port Jackson Jazz Band, The Mills Brothers and Dizzy Gillespie. Through personal ups and downs, through historical events of the first magnitude, through pandemics, recessions, and existential threats to existence on the planet because of global warming, good music has provided not just comfort, joy, and pleasure but inspiration and guidance. And that music called jazz, has been the lode star, not just because of its artistic beauty, but because it is the driven expression of the struggle of a great people from the largest continent on earth Africa, to slough off the horror of slavery and to blossom and thrive and give examples of how life can be lived. A coal delivering grandson of slaves rose to become the most influential artist of the 20th century, Louis Armstrong. Just saying that almost makes one weep, when one reflects on the music and persona of that great artist and his works, and the modest rewards he received over his lifetime considering the great gifts he made to humanity.

Some say jazz is a niche music, an elite music. The thing is that jazz - let's not get hung up on the term or definitions - you know what music I'm talking about - is both elitist and low class. It's elitist because it is the most difficult music to master, and it's low class because it came out of the degradation and horror of the mass slavery of "black savages", and not from the church, aristocracy or opera houses of Western classical music and the "cultured advanced civilisation" of that music's birth.

Jazz is a great many sounds and it is a thief like the native Australian Satin Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) which is obsessed by the blues - well, with the colour blue - and collects anything blue, whilst jazz will steal sound from *inter alia* the whippoorwill, footsteps, traffic, Edgar Varese, Debussy, electronics, a baby's cry or steam from a locomotive to make music. A jazz artist can make a simple note magnificent, majestic, rhythmically powerful - as Louis Armstrong could - or can arrange and orchestrate like Debussy - as Duke Ellington did - or can swing so light, so sweet, like air through your being lifting your soul - as Count Basie did. And now, in 2024, a renaissance in music is upon us with a new generation of artists moving onward and upward from the great innovators of 1940-1970 admitting and changing with the electronic age, some of the finest established artists are from Melbourne, including Andrea Keller, Eugene Ball, and Paul Grabowsky as well as new rising stars like Audrey Powne shown here with the all-female quartet Aura as part of the 2023 Melbourne Womens' International Jazz Festival on stage at Brunswick's JAZZLAB.



*The band Aura with Audrey Powne, trumpet; Flora Carbo, alto saxophone; Helen Svoboda, double bass; and Kyrie Anderson, drum set; performing on the opening night of the Melbourne Women's International Jazz Festival 2023, Jazzlab Brunswick, Vic December 3, 2013... PHOTO CREDIT IAN MULDOON*



Jazz is the most difficult music to play well. The main reason for this is the nature of improvisation. With classical music composition the realisation of the score to best mirror the composer's intentions is the main goal. In jazz, the player is the composer. If we take a well-loved standard like *Alone Together* (Schwartz/Dietz) its major/minor ambiguity has an appeal to improvisers. Artie Shaw did a dark version with strings. The version by Dizzy Gillespie was also sombre with string accompaniment and the version by Miles Davis (1955) owed much to bassist Charles Mingus. Mal Waldron, Sonny Rollins, and Wallace Roney have all put their own unique stamp on the piece, as has Brad Mehldau (2000) whose urgent, brilliant, turbulent, up-tempo rendition makes the melody almost unrecognisable but not quite.

In short, jazz artists take an established composition as a starting point to place their unique voice on its structure, and melody. Nina Simone's up-tempo romp of *Mood Indigo* (Ellington/Bigard/Mills) originally a ballad featuring the voicings of a high register trombone, and low register clarinet and trumpet, was given by Simone at mid-tempo, a piano and voice outing with Jimmy Bond, double bass and Albert "Tootie" Heath, drums. It was a remarkable opening work of what became an iconic album called *Little Girl Blue* (1959) Bethlehem Records.



*Helen Svoboda, contra bass, Jazzlab, Brunswick, Melbourne December 3, 2023...*  
PHOTO CREDIT IAN MULDOON

An art's audience sometimes resists the new as happened during WW11 when the new jazz of Charlie Parker *et al* arrived. Such moments for artists is captured in *Septology* by the Norwegian writer Jon Fosse (Giramondo) 2022, page 411, where the painter protagonist Asle has been offered hanging space for an exhibition based on the knowledge of his former output, but the space owner is taken aback by his nine new works which are so different to his former subjects of studies of barns and houses. Similarly painter Asle doesn't believe in words or what he thinks in words, but when he paints a picture well it is the distinct unity of form and content in one - like the spirit - which is invisible in the picture whilst the picture is visible. And music too is about that unity as it is not the notes, the chords, the changes learned, and it's not the content, the idea, but the unity of matter and form and soul that becomes spirit - that's what good music is. It is common for music lovers, jazz lovers, to be taken aback by the evolutionary steps of the art of music, just as they were taken aback by Beethoven, Bartok, Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk, Steve Lacy (his transition from dixieland to free jazz), Ornette Coleman, The Necks, Cecil Taylor, or John Zorn and now Tyshawn Sorey.



*The Norwegian writer Jon Fosse...*

Like many, many others, born in the 1930s, the music called jazz was a pervasive sound on the radio, in film, on records, and at clubs and sometimes on the Manly Ferry. It was a musical education of a kind where one encountered swing on radio programmes like Juke Box Saturday Night; Duke Ellington on film; Fats Waller on 78" records; and the Cootamundra Jazz Band in that town on a Saturday night with Eric Costelloe on trumpet and John Costelloe on drums or trombone. Every home had a radio. My own home was a rented one yet we owned an upright piano. I was given a wind-up record player, a number of steel needles, and a few 78 rpm bakelite records including a 12" edition of Fats Waller with *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Waller/Brooks/Razaf) on Side A and *Blue Turning Grey Over You* (Waller/Razaf)

on side B. The fact that I can in 2023 recall this detail amongst the thousands of events out of those 12 years of my life up to 1951, says something about the impression it made on me amongst the wealth of jazz music available at the time. Music by Dizzy Gillespie (*Things To Come/Two Bass Hit*) and others fuelled my interest in the variety of sounds called “jazz”.

Then came the 10” LP and I particularly recall two Ellington albums, one was called *Duke Ellington Masterpieces (Ko Ko etc)* and the other called *Ellingtonia Volume 2 Creole Rhapsody – Part 1 and 2*, recorded January 20, 1931; *Tiger Rag – Part 1 and 2*, recorded January 8, 1929; *Yellow Dog Blues*, recorded June 5, 1928; *Tishomingo Blues*, recorded June 5, 1928; *Jazz Convulsions*, recorded September 13, 1929; and *Awful Sad*, recorded October 10, 1928. This latter programme was like my first kiss of a beautiful Balmain girl in 1952 and its glory has stayed with me since. When meeting Bob Barnard in 1980 I asked him what he was listening to, and he replied very quickly “Early Ellington.” Particularly memorable to me was the solo clarinet of Barney Bigard on *Tiger Rag* (Edwards/LaRocca/Ragas/Sbarbaro, Shields) Part 1 and 2. It’s hard to explain the effect on one’s heart and mind that this music had. But the moment I remember well whilst millions of other moments are lost to the fog of my childhood.



*L-R Stefan Karl Schmid, tenor; David Helm, bass (obscured); Shannon Barnett, trombone; and Fabian Arends (obscured), drums, Jazzlab, Melbourne International Jazz Festival, 26th October 2023.. PHOTO CREDIT IAN MULDOON*

In retrospect the 1950s were a golden time for jazz lovers when musicians were bursting with pent-up creativity. The booming economy was driven partly by the newly invented teenager who had oodles of discretionary money. Then came rock and roll. For decades the “death of jazz” was predicted. Big bands became untenable. Record sales of many rock and roll bands' documents, concerts and cinema saw jazz clubs fade away, fusion and jazz/rock displace jazz leaders, and leaders in jazz also taking the advice of record producers into jazz/rock as Miles Davis did when with CBS when advised to do so: the result was the revered *Bitches Brew* (1970).

The 1970s also saw Keith Jarrett become a noteworthy jazz pianist. In Sydney, in the 1950s the Sky Lounge, and El Rocco provided succour to many jazz lovers, with youngsters Don Burrows leading the push along with Lyn Christie (bass), John Pochée (drums) and Bernie McGann (alto sax). The venue acquired legendary status amongst jazz lovers enamoured of Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis who were making large musical waves at the time. In my view, since the turn of the 21st century, there has been a renaissance of jazz, one small sign of which is the appointment to Harvard University of Professor Vijay Iyer, modern jazz pianist and composer.



*Modern jazz pianist and composer Professor Vijay Iyer: his appointment to Harvard University is one small sign of a renaissance of jazz since the turn of the 21st century...*

Australia has been making a major contribution to this renaissance through the involvement of women artists. Judy Bailey pianist and both Andrea Keller of Melbourne University, pianist and composer, and Dr Sandy Evans, tenor and

soprano saxophones, University of New South Wales, have been leaders in the music for many years and are distinguished role models for young women considering a career in improvised music (jazz). Others working overseas include bassist Nicki Parrott and her sister Lisa Parrott on baritone and alto saxophones and bass clarinet. Our most distinguished jazz vocalist Chris McNulty, whose career spans 50 years, relocated to Australia from New York in 2016, and now resides in Ballarat.

More recently bassist Linda May Han Oh has impressed New York with her brilliance, and has been formally embraced by some of the greats including Dave Douglas, Vijay Iyer, Joe Lovano, Pat Metheny, Tineke Postma and Terri Lyne Carrington as a member of their recorded groups. When I attend live performances and witness a young girl playing jazz I can't resist a feeling of joy that the young are embracing this great art, a joy just as in 1952 I first heard trumpeter Bubber Miley on record, or in 1981 Paul Furniss live on clarinet in Armidale, or bassist Reggie Workman live at Sweet Basil, New York, 1996. Post COVID I've heard live some young women that are undoubtedly the future leaders in this music.



*Tessie Overmyer, alto saxophone, Jazzlab Brunswick, Melbourne, October 26, 2023... PHOTO CREDIT IAN MULDOON*

I believe, rightly or wrongly, we live in one world and that the days of nationalism with its libidinous shout for “our country” should be buried deep in the living earth and turned to dust. The young musicians I’ve heard in the recent past are not of one country but of the world. Even though they may call Australia home, their cultural

background may be varied but their music is universal and they are so good they can play in any country - Russia, Japan, Sweden, Croatia, Italy, USA - and be recognised instantly as great practitioners of their art. And they are so young still. The future of the music seems to be entering a glorious time, and gives hope for humanity's collective thriving.



*New female artists who call Australia home whom I have heard in the recent past that make my heart sing include Hilary Geddes, guitar (above), pictured with bassist Jonathan Zwartz; PHOTO CREDIT SHANE ROZARION; and Chloe Kim, percussion (below)...*



These are the new female artists who call Australia home whom I have heard in the recent past that make my heart sing: Hilary Geddes, guitar; Chloe Kim, percussion; Tessie Overmyer, also saxophone; Helen Svoboda, contra bass; Hannah James, contra bass; Shannon Barnett, trombone who is amongst the finest I've ever heard on that instrument; Holly Connor, drums and percussion; Phillipa Murphy-Haste, clarinet, violin; Emma Stephenson, piano; and Nat Bartsch pianist. With recognition and support, the musical world may be their oyster. Jazz lives still Bird!