

JAZZ AND THE ARTIST'S BUSINESS

by Ian Muldoon*



“How is it that through music we both find and lose ourselves? How does it at once conjure and dispel the grand illusion?”

-Joshua Redman 2018 (Quoted on the CD cover of *Still Dreaming*)

Like many 1940s childhoods in Australia, mine was a haze of watching, waiting, playing, bike riding, punctuated by the odd moment of intense surfing pleasure or occasional fear from a flurry of arms and fists in a scrambling biff with a playmate, or pain from a damaged big toe kicked by running barefoot down the street and through the bush. My memories of schooling come down to getting six “cuts” for reading a forbidden book, and Mr Furzer giving me an early mark in Year 3 at Manly West Public, and having “adventures” with some like-minded boys.

**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 and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

About the world, I was swaddled in a warm cotton cloth called ignorance. Unlike the terror of bombs raining down on the millions of homes of children in Europe, and elsewhere, the most memorable sounds on the corrugated roof of our home was, at regular intervals, rain. In my memory WW2 was some barbed wire strung along the beachfront at Queenscliff, NSW and visits from relatives dressed in RAAF uniform. The slow awakening to “elsewhere”, the world beyond the reach of my eyes, nose, ears, mirrored my slow awakening to the creative world, the world possible through literature, or art, or music.

The hint of my musical awakening came from a musician with a clarinet who played in our English class just once in second year High School at Balgowlah Boys High. We boys sat in total silence. It was a memorable moment to see a living breathing young person make beauty in sounds that seemed so alive and sweet, so remote from our experience. Two things struck us - the player seemed young, and the playing seemed unusually fine for one so young where we associated mastery with those much older. We were not told it was a particular kind of music, but clearly with the look and respect of our teacher given to our visitor, we took it to be “serious” music not intended to entertain, more to educate and inspire.



A well-dressed Don Burrows featured on an ABC-TV music show at noon on Sundays when television was in its infancy...

The musician was Don Burrows. The music was jazz but somewhat different to that performed in pubs or made popular by the likes of the Cootamundra Jazz Band or Graeme Bell. It was a different sound and different face to what we knew as jazz. It was also polite. And politeness in the 1950s was the sine qua non of acceptability for the Establishment of the day - The Church of England, R G Menzies and Anglo-Saxon descent.

A well-dressed Don Burrows featured on an ABC-TV music show at noon on Sundays when television was in its infancy. He also appeared at the Sky Lounge in Sydney in the 1950s. The last time I saw him was at the Palm Beach RSL in the 1980s in a duo with George Golla. His educational role for the music to me and I suspect thousands of other Australians is unparalleled, his emergence occurring in tandem with Australian TV and the support of the ABC.



Don Burrows (left on alto sax) and George Golla (guitar):

It was great to have any jazz on television, and in clubs. Burrow's music never frightened the public so to speak and was broadly accepted. His looks, dress and manner was an ideal face to put to the music called jazz for the 1950s, or our idea of the 1950s. In musical terms, on the one hand the likes of the Port Jackson Jazz Band seemed like music for pubs and good times, whilst rock and roll had the whiff of rebellion about it, where young people broke away from a Sunday school mentality, and let their hair grow, and smoked, and indulged in sex whilst the pop music just seemed pleasant and easy to whistle to - *Hi Lili ...Hi LiliHi Lo!*

Don Burrow's legacy was built on by John Speight in 1975. He established and directed the Young Northside Big Band. It was Australia's first professional-quality student band, became an institution, recording two albums and playing at the Monterey Jazz Festival. James Morrison, Dale Barlow, Phil Scott, Sandy Evans, Chris

Abrahams, Lloyd Swanton, James Greening and Speight's son Andrew, passed through its ranks.



John Speight conducting the Young Northside Big Band in 1980. The tenor player is a young Dale Barlow...

In March 2015 Morrison opened the James Morrison Academy of Music in Mount Gambier, South Australia – a tertiary level, dedicated jazz school offering a degree in jazz performance. To Don Burrows, John Speight, James Morrison, the Sydney University Conservatorium of Music, Monash University, Melbourne University and the Victorian College of the Arts et al, jazz in education deserves accolades and support for the outstanding work it is doing. Education plays a serious part in taking the music to the young and enlarges their possibilities and that of the music. Education is one thing, and Don Burrows et al provided an entree into the music, but where was the art in all this, the higher level of experience being expressed through the music?



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The 1950s, on the surface, in our daily lives, even for we “less-well-off” families of which there were very many, for most of us coming of age, the 1950s were pleasant and easy. In films where everyone wore suits and ties and dresses even around the house such as in the 1950 film *Father of the Bride* with Spencer Tracy, and the TV Shows such as *Accent on Strings* or *Give us this Day* impressed upon us the image of an ordered, anodyne, saccharine world where nothing was wrong. The corn was as high as high as an elephant's eye and Chips Rafferty, whom I met at a garden party at Kirribilli House (it was a Xmas party for employees and their families) was a tall loveable rogue.



Chips Rafferty, pictured above (centre) in The Overlanders, was a tall loveable rogue. .. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

But there was another side to the 1950s. There was a rebellion of sorts to the world of the *Mickey Mouse Club* and *Leave it to Beaver*. The real rebellion was a lot more than something as anodyne as long hair and casual sex or riding a motor cycle and wearing a leather jacket and declaring, “What have you got?” in response to the question asked of Johnny (Marlon Brando) by Kathie (Mary Murphy) “What are you rebelling against Johnny?” The real rebellion was in the arts, not least in music.

Aboriginal dispossession, the “lost generation”, government and police corruption, the atomic bomb, the gulag, lynchings, apartheid, let alone backyard abortions, alcoholism, domestic violence and child abuse were not in our purview, but some of these issues were reflected in the various arts of the time in many different forms, literature, film, visual arts, and in the music called “jazz”. I had eyes and I read. I had ears and I listened.

It was hard to miss the sound of Louis Armstrong. Louis Armstrong's trumpet had a sound that seemed majestic, yet sad, strong yet vulnerable, solid yet quivering with life. There was a world of difference in sound to the technical bravura of Harry James which did not quiver with life, and Louis Armstrong. And today, Wynton Marsalis, has the knowledge, skills, musicianship, education, but lacks that something that makes the "art of jazz" or so it seems to me. Scott Tinkler the Australian trumpet player, is much more moving, interesting and "life quivering" than Wynton Marsalis - and please forgive my inadequacies in trying to put feeling experiences of music into words.



Wynton Marsalis (above) has the knowledge, skills, musicianship, education, but lacks that something that makes the "art of jazz"... The Australian trumpet player Scott Tinkler (below) is much more moving, interesting and "life quivering"...
PHOTO CREDIT LAKI SIDERIS



Similarly, Eugene Ball transcends the drift into familiar licks, and seems to be actually exploring as he plays - as if to say, “what about this?” or “this”? He connects.



Eugene Ball: he transcends the drift into familiar licks...

Cecil Taylor remarks that

*jazz improvisation comes out of a human approach. Stockhausen’s (music for example is) essentially like a meticulous, slow worker who knows each instrument, but he doesn’t create any music. He never has created any music. He’s created, like, colours, but any music that’s resulted from his creation has been accidental; not even incidental, but accidental.**



Guitarist Charlie Christian: the leap from (just) music to another experience...
PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES

* A B Spellman, *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, 1967, p 35

Some giants of music like Les Paul, also recognise the leap from (just) music to another experience. Les Paul, impressed by a young Charlie Christian, invited him to sit in with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys in 1938 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He realised Christian was very good, but he thought “What I’m doing was so much harder than what he’s doing!” Christian was impressed with Paul and his technical ability but Paul realised how tough it was to come down on that one *note* in the right place, and how much more of a drive Christian had. Paul claimed that Christian “had that ability, like Lionel Hampton, to take a note, one ‘A’ and just pound it into your head until it was the greatest note you’ve ever heard.” Maybe there is even more to it than that - back story, narrative, life experience, life view? The blues may be one part of that back story, both musically and sociologically.



American guitarist Les Paul: impressed by a young Charlie Christian he invited him to sit in with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys in 1938 in Tulsa, Oklahoma...

In his introduction to his novel *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison defined the Blues as “an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism”. Ellison sees complex connections between history and consciousness and the “task of making ourselves individuals”. It seems to me that such consciousness informs certain musicians’ impulses and drives their creativity to create art out of their chosen music of jazz.

Even so, a foundation in the blues is not a necessary condition for artistry in the music at its highest levels as Cecil Taylor demonstrated. But, I would argue, an

awareness of the world, a higher consciousness of the amazing range of the depths to which it can descend, and the heights to which it can go, is crucial to the artist. In Australia, in 2016, Jeremy Rose found inspiration after reading *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes - more on this later.



Cecil Taylor: jazz improvisation comes out of a human approach...

That “near tragic, near comic lyricism” Ralph Ellison refers to, echoes what I feel when I listen to the genius of Louis Armstrong’s trumpet.

The art of jazz, improvised music labelled “jazz”, has changed music forever. It has influenced all other music with which it has come in contact. It has taken from any other music to which it has been exposed. But its power and influence, and elevation to the greatest of the musical arts, has been driven by its back story rooted in the blues and its emphasis on, and encouragement of, the individual artist being obliged to tell their story in their own way through improvisation. And the artists of this music continue to be denied a fair pay for the contribution they make to our society. Consider for example, the notion of musical celebrity.



Michael Jackson: in 2009 someone paid US\$350,000 for his crystal-encrusted white glove...

In 2009 someone, or some organisation, or museum, paid US\$350,000 for Michael Jackson's crystal-encrusted white glove. In 2008 another paid US\$300,000 for Elvis Presley's peacock jump-suit. And in 2010 John Lennon's toilet sold for US\$14,740. Justin Timberlake's leftover French toast sold for US\$3,154 in 2000. These were musicians of varying talent and they became, through management, marketing, and popular appeal, celebrities. I recall a TV spot showing James Morrison jumping out of an aircraft playing a trumpet.

Cat Stevens retired at 29.

Cecil Taylor, pianist, improvising artist, one of the most important musical figures in the last 100 years, worked as a dishwasher in New York until he was "rediscovered".

I once attended a venue in Sydney called Jenny's Wine Bar in the mid-1980s. The Bernie McGann trio was playing. I was the only audience member on that Friday night. McGann played as if the house was packed. He never gave an inch. His playing that night cemented for me my opinion that McGann was a true artist of this music. I heard Mike Nock grappling with a piano at the Bellingen Golf Club one night, an upright that might not have been tuned for 20 years. Nock is a major artist whose contribution to the music worldwide would be hard to quantify, yet here he was. He did not walk out that night.

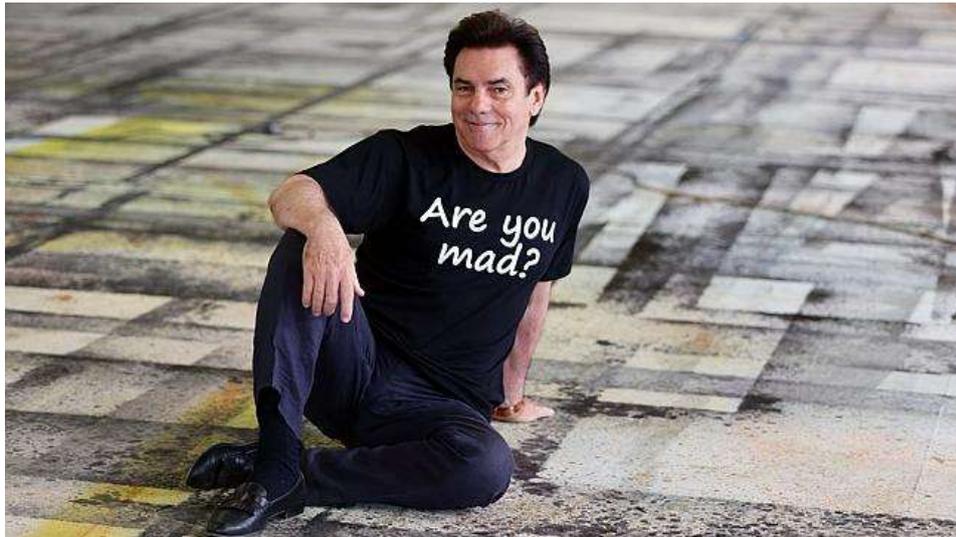


Bernie McGann: he played as if the house was packed. He never gave an inch...

I attended a benefit for Bernie McGann to help defray costs associated with his hospitalisation in 2013. On 29th August 2018 musicians came together to raise

support for Mike Nock who was seriously injured when hit by a four-wheel drive while crossing the road at a pedestrian crossing.

In August 2018 Opera Australia artistic director Lyndon Terracini boasted that “We’re the only opera company in the world where more than 50 per cent of our total turnover comes from the box office. Unless 50% of your income comes from the box office, then *you’re just not connecting to enough people.*” He went to say that “every arts organisation... that receives money from government, needs to be extremely responsible in the sort of work that you’re delivering.”*



Opera Australia artistic director Lyndon Terracini: unless 50% of your income comes from the box office, then you’re just not connecting to enough people...

Opera is, in my view, blockbuster entertainment for those who can afford to pay. Which is not to say I don’t enjoy opera or appreciate the musical ability of Virginia Ziani, or Hilde Gueden or Maria Callas, or the works of Verdi. But the scale of opera, its overblown sentimentality, and its melodrama leave me relatively speaking, unmoved. Its sociological elements, that is its association with the so called “upper classes” and so called “high art” make it an attractive proposition for “prestige” companies and sponsorship, as well as support from the wealthy for the same reason.

It seems to me that this important music jazz is - despite its huge influence and impact on the 20th century, and on our lives - poorly supported by the people and by government. It mirrors the treatment the major practitioners suffered in the land of its birth. But worse than even those musicians that devote their energies to musical education, or playing “safe” are those that are considered “artists”. Leroy Jenkins (violin, 1932-2007) commented “I’m not so much of an *artist* as I was, because that’s a strike against you. Being a musician, white or black, that’s a strike against you, and being a black man - that’s three strikes against you. So I figured I’d better cut some of these odds down. I cut the artist part out. Now I say I came here

**Sydney Morning Herald, Friday, August 17, 2018.*



American violinist Leroy Jenkins: I had wanted to be famous, but after seeing Ornette and what fame had done to him, I cut that out...

primarily to make money. I had wanted to be famous, but after seeing Ornette and what fame had done to him, I cut that out. Fame doesn't help man. You can be famous and poor as hell. You lose a lot of friendships too, being famous - and broke. And the landlord'll put you out of the house faster."*

It seems bizarre to me that Kendrick Lamar wins the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2018, yet in 1965 Duke Ellington was denied the Pulitzer recommended by the jury, because the board refused. In his *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture since 1989*, (University of California) British critic Tim Rutherford-Johnson ignores the lineage of free jazz including Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and Anthony Braxton, which I believe, detracts from the authority of his work.

Well, that story I reckon is a familiar one to jazz artists in Australia still, in 2018.

Like the USA, Australia is a materialistic society where elections are won and lost on economic issues. Yet in Australia there are contradictions. More people attend art museums than attend sporting fixtures. Even so, many would argue that if you choose to be an artist, then you take your chances. Contradictions arise here too, because if you choose to farm on semi-desert with hooved animals that degrade the land then you take your chances as well. In the latter case, the Government becomes

* Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life*, 1977 Quartet Books, p 150

quite generous in its support responding to the myth of the “battler” on the land. One never hears about the battler jazz musician, or artist.

Strangely, as it seems to me, and contrary to the above, I have never been so optimistic about the future of jazz as I am now. Whether it's seeing the Trio Apoplectic perform one Sunday afternoon in a small cafe, in the small town of Sawtell a few years ago, or attend the Opera House in 2002 to listen to Sandy Evans perform her own tribute to Charlie Parker called *Testimony*, to learn on 12th September 2018 that Jeremy Rose has composed a 70 minute, 11-part work called *Iron in the Blood*, with its echoes of detentions on Nauru (“Jazz being the perfect vehicle to tell this story” says Mr Rose) to be performed in Parramatta on September 23rd, or to witness the heartfelt, beautiful and glorious tribute to Louis Armstrong by the Australian Art Orchestra at the Wangaratta Jazz Festival in 2014, is to feel a deep satisfaction that this most significant music is being performed by such multi-talented artists as Paul Grabowsky, and embraced by so many young musicians of talent.



Jeremy Rose: he has composed a 70 minute, 11-part work called Iron in the Blood, with its echoes of detentions on Nauru...PHOTO COURTESY SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

My experience has been that visits of young jazz musicians to schools is important; that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation provides a vital role in propagating the music; that music departments of universities having dedicated degrees in Improvising Music and Jazz History is hugely important; that through the Australia Council much more should be done to fund the music in a way that supports need rather than popularity - to subsidise the wealthy to attend the Opera parallels funding private schools, and we are the only OECD country to do so; and the tax system be reformed to give serious relief to performing artists whose income can vary markedly year to year.

It is incontrovertible, the extent to which a society supports its arts, is directly related to the well-being and health of that society.