

NO MUSIC BETTER EXPRESSES THE HUMAN SOUL THAN JAZZ

by Rhys Muldoon*

This is the Foreword which Rhys Muldoon wrote for his father Ian Muldoon's book, published in 2021, "My Jazz Odyssey: Confessions of a Lifetime Enthusiast."



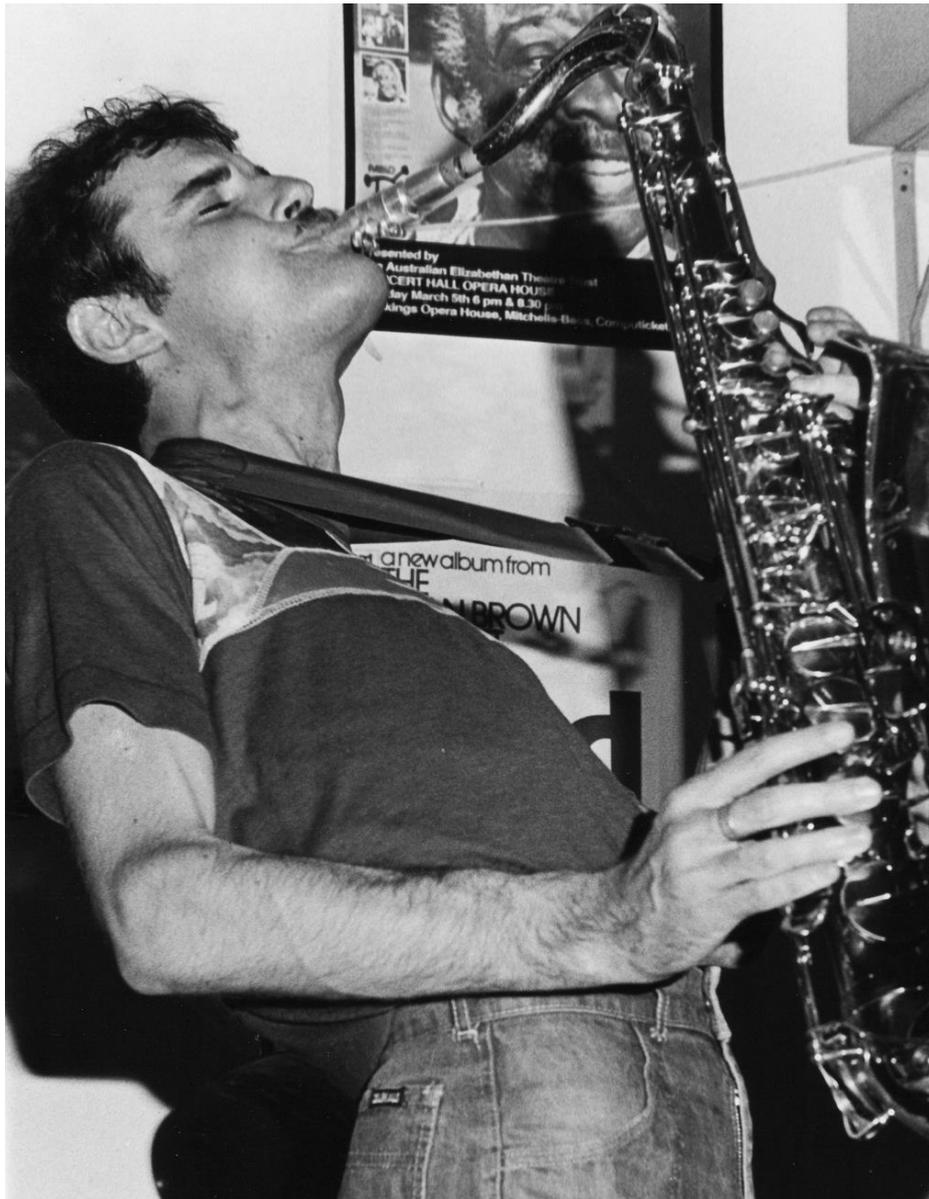
Rhys Muldoon (pictured above) quotes Lou Reed: "One chord is fine. Two chords are pushing it. Three chords and you're into jazz."

Jazz. Is there a more misunderstood genre in music? If you're reading this book, chances are you understand. Let me ask another question- is there a type of music that better expresses the human soul? No. There is not, and don't bother arguing with me.

Jazz, as a category, is so extraordinarily wide and deep, that to say "I don't like jazz" is akin to saying "I don't like the ocean". From the lyrical delicacy of Bill Evans to the frontal assault of Mark Simmonds, jazz has it covered. I grew up listening to brutal, primitive punk rock, yet I've never heard anything as sonically savage as John Zorn's *Torture Garden*, an album the author (and my father) sent me one fine day. It was a father to son "you think YOUR music is intense" throwdown. Yes, he won.

**Rhys Muldoon (born 17 October 1965) is an Australian actor, writer and director who has worked extensively in film, television, music, theatre and radio. He has written for various publications, including [The Monthly](#), [The Spectator](#), [The Sydney Morning Herald](#), [The Age](#), [Jewish News](#), and [Inside Football](#), where he has had a regular column for a number of years. His essay "A Coup by Any Other Name" for [The Monthly](#), about the [removal](#) of [Kevin Rudd](#) as Prime Minister was named "an essay of the year".*

I remember attending a jazz festival at the Esplanade Hotel in St Kilda, Melbourne. As I walked into the Gershwin Room, there was a band with boater hats and matching waistcoats playing *When the Saints Go Marching In*. Just as I began to doubt my decision to attend, they finished. On walked a guy with a saxophone and a few ne'er do wells as his band. He took the microphone and said "This is for the Mujahideen. It's called *The Assassin*". They then proceeded to blow the hat off the house. It was Mark Simmonds and the Freeboppers. Everyone in a waistcoat left. I began going to every gig of his I could. Every time the band was different. One time the line-up was saxophone, harp and two drummers. That's quite a combo.



Saxophonist Mark Simmonds: he and the Freeboppers proceeded to blow the hat off the house... PHOTO COURTESY JULIEN WILSON

That's the thing about jazz. You'll be forever surprised. Everything is new. All the time. If you weren't there, you missed it. It's now in the ether. Those notes never caressed your ear, nor danced through your mind, nor sat in your lap. But if you were

there, no one can ever take it away. You heard things no one else has ever heard. Not in that combination. It's like being in the baking tin with the bread as it's being baked.



Rhys Muldoon (centre), pictured with his sister Kelly Muldoon (left), and his father Ian Muldoon (right)... PHOTO COURTESY IAN MULDOON

The etymology of the word jazz is probably just as salacious as you fear, and why shouldn't it be? It wasn't invented for uptight prudes who worry what the neighbours think. It was invented by black people for black people. Thankfully that most important gift has been shared. The least we can do is honour this extraordinary legacy and never try and tidy it up. Jazz, I would argue, should never be too nice. Miles Davis certainly knew that. You don't see Miles smiling very often. But then you see the brilliant Louis Armstrong smiling all the time. You know what? Forget I said anything. Jazz is jazz is jazz. It can be whatever it damn well likes.

Here's the thing: wherever you're at, wherever your life is at, wherever the world is at, jazz will be there, guiding you through like a dishevelled genius with a bad habit and a heart full of hope. Jazz understands, better than any form of artistic expression, that we lie somewhere between gods and animals. There's tension there. That's where this magnificent art sits, comfortably. Words can dance and sing so beautifully across a page, but when the unspeakable, or unsaid, or unknowable is required, there sits jazz, playing with us, playing for us, whilst simultaneously, being us. Jazz is the musical word for poetry. Just as loved, just as important, just as

profound, and sadly often thought of as elitist, or needing a special understanding. The truth is, of course, the opposite. All you have to do is listen.



Louis Armstrong & Miles Davis: you don't see Miles smiling very often. But then you see the brilliant Louis Armstrong smiling all the time. You know what? Forget I said anything. Jazz is jazz is jazz...

Just before I hand over to the author, my father Ian Muldoon, I must praise him. He gave me the gift of jazz. For that, I am eternally grateful. This book, these essays, are about jazz as a journey. Yes, it's personal, but like all great writing, it is also universal. All you have to do is listen. Enjoy.