***DADDY'S PRACTISING AGAIN: AN AUSTRALIAN JAZZMAN LOOKS BACK AND AROUND**, by Dick Hughes. Published by Hutchinson Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, Victoria, 1977. ISBN No 0 09 130441 5 Paperback, 205 pp.*

Reviewed by Eric Myers

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I first heard a traditional jazz band live in 1962, during Sydney University's Orientation Week. It was the Port Jackson Jazz Band, with Ray Price (banjo), Ken Flannery (trumpet), John McCarthy (clarinet), John Costelloe (trombone), Wally Wickham (bass), Alan Geddes (drums) and on piano — Dick Hughes.

I remember thinking that Dick Hughes (who also sang raspy vocals) may have been more at home in the seedy, smoke-filled, alcoholic haze of a jazz cellar, rather than the concert stage. He had that dissipated look.

Dick Hughes: raspy vocals with the Port Jackson Jazz Band... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Some months later he arrived at the University Jazz Club to give a series of lunchtime lectures on the history of jazz. This time, he appeared in the role of journalist, in suit and tie, and gave an erudite talk, which could barely be heard above the din of the students' chatter. This was the pre-Vietnam generation of students, which seemed to care about nothing, including jazz.

It is clear, from his recently-published book, *Daddy's Practising Again* that, although he is both a jazzman and a journalist, his heart is well and truly in the world of jazz. Jazz and journalism are, of course, not unrelated — both are hard-drinking worlds, inhabited by people of great vitality and energy. Yet, journalism is apparently

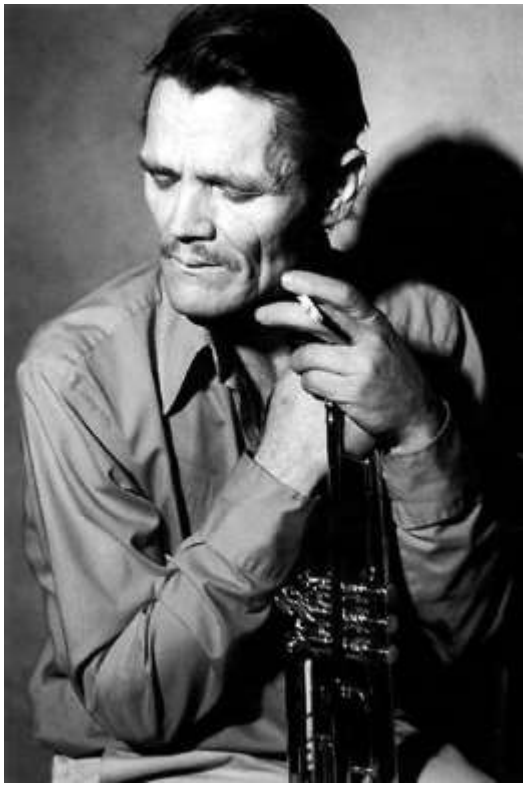
relatively straight — he regards his work at the *DailyTelegraph* as being "in the C Major of this life".

Dick Hughes' book is a valuable document for anyone interested in the traditional jazz sub-culture in Australia over the last 30 years.

Here is an Australian musician who understands the life-style, and the jazz consciousness, and I hope that other jazz musicians will be talked into writing their memoirs, or getting their stories out in some way, so that future generations of Australians can gain an insight into what was happening in jazz during these years.

For me, the joy of the book is Dick Hughes' immense armoury of delightful stories about the jazz greats, which he recounts with verve and wit. He has a reputation for being a great raconteur in jazz circles, and this book does not harm that reputation.

For example, one story concerns the American trumpeter Chet Baker, who played with Gerry Mulligan in the early 50's, and was known for being vague and preoccupied. In the late 50's, he was in Italy and was introduced to Romano Mussolini, the jazz pianist and son of the late dictator. "How are you, Chet?" asked Mussolini warmly. Chet replied: "Mmmmm. . . mmmmm. Oh, I was sorry to hear about your father."



American trumpeter Chet Baker: he was known for being vague and preoccupied...
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

The story of Dick Hughes is very much the story of a man walking amongst his heroes — the jazz greats of the past, rather than the present — and, to his credit, he has retained a child-like passion for the music which he first heard as a schoolboy.

His great love for the music has enabled him to enjoy an empathy with most of the legendary jazz figures that he has met: Sidney Bechet, Duke Ellington, Eddie Condon, Bud Freeman, Buck Clayton etc and others, including - of course — Louis Armstrong.

In the pages of *Daddy's Practising Again*, Armstrong — who came to Australia many times during his long career — comes alive beautifully, and the book is worth reading for this alone. Dick Hughes enjoyed a warm relationship with the legendary Armstrong, and he refers to one of Louis's fundamental musical beliefs; "Play it pretty, Pops. You gotta play it pretty for the people."

Louis Armstrong: Hey Pops, did you hear about the man who couldn't spell FUCK?
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Armstrong's spontaneity and vitality are illustrated by the story which Dick tells of a dinner one night at the Buona Sera restaurant in Kings Cross. The wine was flowing, and Dick had just told Louis a bawdy Stiffy and Mo joke, which concerned the "magic word". Louis exploded with laughter, turned to some friends at another table and, to the consternation of others dining in the restaurant, shouted: "Hey Pops, did you hear about the man who couldn't spell FUCK?" Dick says of the incident: "It was time to leave . . . GOOD EVENING, EVERYBODY."

Jazz entrepreneur and publicist Horst Liepolt: der dames, dey don't dig der jazz…PHOTO CREDIT CLARITA LIEPOLT

Another of the book's delights is the discussion centred on women and whether jazz means anything to them. I suppose jazz musicians know as little about women as any other species of male, but Dick Hughes has kindly devoted a chapter of his book to the subject, and it may well be invaluable to others involved in the struggle. He names the chapter after a beautiful remark made by the jazz entrepreneur and publicist Horst Liepolt who remarked, when Dick said that his new girlfriend was not keen on modern jazz: "That's so right, man. Der dames, dey don't dig der jazz."

Perhaps Dick Hughes would agree with the respected *New Yorker* critic Whitney Balliet, who called jazz "a peculiarly male music . . . [for which] most women lack the physical equipment — to say nothing of the poise." Dick's scepticism may get him into trouble with the new generations of feminists, but he is willing to put his cards on the table: "I have. . . come to the reluctant conclusion that there is something in the feminine psyche that finds jazz repellent or, possibly, too competitive."

Dick Hughes (centre) with his wife Fay (left) and his father Richard Hughes in Hong Kong, 1966... PHOTO DADDY'S PRACTISING AGAIN

All musicians know how their wives (and girlfriends) feel threatened by the music, and it is Dick Hughes' belief that this is the basis of orchestra wives' tendency to sit together at gigs and chatter on together, completely uninterested in the music — as he says, "talk, talk, talk, talk . . ."

Further evidence of the dismal record of women is provided in the story which Dick recounts of a party at the home of the American Consul in Sydney in 1972, when Duke Ellington was gracious enough to play piano for the gathering. People talked continuously while perhaps the greatest figure in the history of jazz played for them — something which astounded those present. Not only that, a charming lady approached Ellington and requested him to play *Twelfth Street Rag* which, the writer remarks, "was like asking Beethoven to play a piece by Victor Sylvester." Ladies, you'll have to do better.

Duke Ellington: a charming lady asked him to play Twelfth Street Rag…

One more interesting fact which emerges from this book is that, apparently, the jazz scene is surprisingly non-erotic. The wowsers (and wives) who have always associated jazz with drunkenness and declining moral standards will be reassured by the light which Dick Hughes has thrown on the jazz fraternity. It is, according to him, quite puritanical: "Never get the idea that jazz is sexy. I often used to think it should be played in monastries — in moderation naturally — as a distraction from the temptations of St. Anthony which may from time to time plague some monks."

Daddy's Practising Again is recommended to anyone who wishes to read a delightful book by one of this country's most engaging musicians and wits. As the only son of the legendary journalist/foreign correspondent Richard Hughes, Dick Hughes comes from distinguished lineage, and he reveals a wide knowledge of imaginative literature which amplifies his passion for jazz.

You have to admire a man who, like the great Erik Satie, went back to music lessons at the age of 46 (in Satie's case, it was 40), and can write: "I don't read music; I spell it out laboriously".