

THE AUSTRALIAN

Adelaide kid scaled heights of American jazz



OBITUARY: ERROL BUDDLE

Saxophonist. Born Adelaide, April 29, 1928. Died Sydney, February 22, 2018, aged 89.

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ERIC MYERS

Clive James once wrote, “The most daring thing you could do in Sydney in the late 1950s was listen to Errol Buddle at the El Rocco”. The subject, one of Australia’s greatest jazz musicians, has died in Sydney of heart failure.

Buddle was 16 in 1944 when he heard Adelaide’s most prominent jazz saxophonist Bobby Limb, and was mesmerised by the music. Two years later, when Limb left Adelaide for Melbourne, Buddle was good enough to step into his shoes: three radio shows and a number of dance band gigs. At 18, Buddle was one of Adelaide’s leading musicians.

For some years, Buddle worked in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney doing dance band, jazz and cabaret work. In 1951 he was at Chequers' nightclub in Sydney every night and doing recording sessions during the day. Attracted to the sound of the bassoon in Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* and *Firebird Suite*, he studied the instrument in Sydney and Adelaide, hoping to join a symphony orchestra.

In 1952 Buddle aged 24 went to Canada and settled in Windsor, across the US border from Detroit. Soon he was playing bassoon with the Windsor Symphony Orchestra.

In 1953 Buddle came to prominence in Detroit. After sitting in at Klein's, a jazz club where a group including pianist Tommy Flanagan was led by saxophonist Yusef Lateef, the manager George Klein asked Buddle to take over the group. It became the Errol Buddle Quintet.

Later Klein brought in four musicians to work under Buddle's leadership: Elvin Jones (drums), Barry Harris (piano), Major Holley (bass) and Pepper Adams (baritone sax), all young Detroiters who later became great names in American jazz.



The famous shot taken at Klein's, Detroit, in 1953. Buddle (centre) is on tenor. To the left is Pepper Adams (baritone), to the right Barry Harris (piano). Obscured behind Buddle is Elvin Jones (drums). To the left (outside the picture) was Major Holley (bass).

Meanwhile, Buddle had encouraged two Adelaide friends to come over, drummer/vibraphonist Jack Brokensha and pianist Bryce Rohde. They arrived in Windsor in March 1953.

In 1954 Ed Sarkesian, who owned one of Detroit's leading clubs, asked Buddle to provide a band to back the singer Chris Connor. Buddle included Rohde and Brokensha plus American bassist Dick Healey, who also doubled on flute and alto sax. The Australian Jazz Quartet (AJQ) was born.

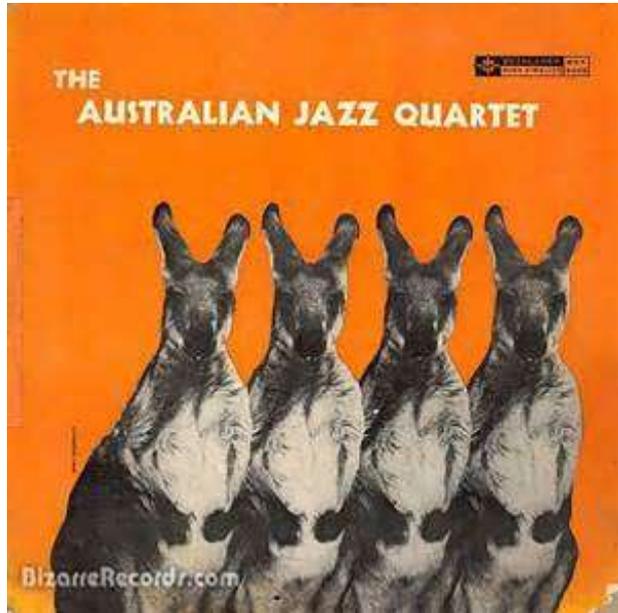


The original Australian Jazz Quartet: Bryce Rohde (at the piano) then, clockwise, Errol Buddle, Dick Healey, Jack Brokensha...

Healey mostly played bass but when he played his horns, Brokensha moved onto vibes, giving the AJQ its distinctive sound of two woodwinds, piano and vibes.

Sarkesian recommended the AJQ to Associated Booking Corporation, run by Louis Armstrong's manager Joe Glaser. Glaser also handled Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Miles Davis, Stan Getz, and George Shearing.

The Australians found themselves at the top in American jazz. For four years, they worked non-stop around the US, made seven bestselling LPs, played at Carnegie Hall in New York several times, and backed singers like Billie Holiday and Carmen McRae.



One of the AJQ's seven bestselling LPs...

During this period, Buddle became the first musician in jazz to use the bassoon extensively, and is so credited in Leonard Feather's *Encyclopedia of Jazz*.

After a year, Jack Lander, an Australian bassist living in Toronto, joined and the AJQ became the Australian Jazz Quintet. By 1958, its members were homesick. Buddle had met and married an American woman Olive Ann (Ollie), and their first son Lee had arrived.

Back home in October 1958 the AJQ, regarded as "the first jazz combination formed by Australians to achieve success in the United States" did an extensive concert tour for the ABC. Modern jazz venues were then virtually non-existent in Sydney, except for El Rocco and the Sky Lounge. For many years Buddle played little jazz, and primarily worked as a studio musician.

Subsequently there were various milestones for Buddle, as jazz increased in popularity. The Nolan-Buddle Quartet had a long residency at The Rocks Push. Buddle toured Russia in 1975 with the Daly-Wilson Big Band, and in 1976 recorded a jazz version of *The Theme from Picnic At Hanging Rock*, which became a commercial hit. John Sangster, who regarded Buddle as "the boss tenor in Australian jazz", featured him on many of his albums.

In 1977 Buddle released *Buddles Doubles*, on which he played soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxes, flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet and percussion. The tunes on the LP were arranged for various combinations of reed instruments, but all the section work was achieved through Buddle's brilliant overdubbing.



On Buddles Doubles, Buddle played soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxes, flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet and percussion... PHOTO COURTESY MUSICA VIVA

Buddle continued playing well into his 80s. For his last 15 years, with increasingly limited mobility, he lived in state housing accommodation in The Rocks, then Potts Point on the ninth floor with views of the city, Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. Afraid of going into a nursing home, he loved his apartment, and died there peacefully.

Buddle had three children with his wife Ollie, before they divorced in the mid-1970s. He is survived by two sons Lee and Perry, both of whom live in Western Australia. A third son Jay died at 21. Buddle is also survived by his partner jazz pianist Maree Steinway, and three grandchildren, Lee's children Xanthe, Lexi and Felix.