

## THE ERROL BUDDLE STORY (PART ONE)

by Eric Myers

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When I first came to Sydney from the country in 1962, the jazz scene was relatively dormant, compared to the lively activity we have today in the art form. The El Rocco, in Kings Cross, was in full swing. But other than that rather gloomy cellar, where you were served coffee, sandwiches, but no alcohol, there were only one or two other places where you could hear live progressive jazz.

The three most prominent names in jazz at that time were, I suppose, Don Burrows, Errol Buddle and John Sangster. All played modern jazz regularly at the El Rocco in various groups, as leaders themselves, and as sidemen. They also were highly visible as studio musicians in the various television orchestras, which tended to reinforce their status — the top jazz players had a mortgage on the most lucrative studio work.

I am not necessarily saying that these three men were the best players in Australian jazz. They may or may not have been. But certainly they were central figures, and there was a delightful symmetry about them: Burrows was from Sydney, Sangster from Melbourne, and Buddle from Adelaide. It seemed to me in accord with an Australian egalitarian spirit that our three major State capitals all had at least one great musician in the top echelon of Australian jazz. Of course, Buddle and Sangster ended up in Sydney, where there was a wide range of employment opportunities in music from the early 1950s, but it should not be forgotten that each man was the product of a virile jazz sub-culture in his home city.



*Errol Buddle: the 'boss tenor' in Australian jazz, according to John Sangster... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR*

These three men also had something else in common — their careers stretched back to the 1940s, covering most of the significant years of the growth of jazz in this country. If a writer wanted to do a biography of a leading Australian jazz musician and, at the same time, take a good look at the history of Australian jazz from the mid-1940s, Burrows, Sangster or Buddle would all be excellent subjects. They have been around for most of it.

In 1982 all three men are pretty much at their peak. Don Burrows has become probably the most popular and widely-known jazz musician this country has seen and, as Chairman of the Jazz Studies Department at the NSW Conservatorium of Music, he is passing on his knowledge to younger generations of jazz musicians. John Sangster has, of course, blossomed profoundly as a composer and when he departs the scene, he will have left a massive body of original works on record.

In this piece we take a look at the third member of the triumvirate, Errol Buddle. He was born in Adelaide in 1928, and shares his birthday, April 29, with none other than Duke Ellington. His long career can be divided into six distinct eras:

- \*his beginnings in jazz in Adelaide from 1945;
- \*his period as an up-and-coming saxophonist in Melbourne and Sydney;
- \*his experience in the United States circa 1952-58, and the enormous success of the Australian Jazz Quintet in American jazz;
- \*his career in Sydney throughout the 1960s;
- \*his re-emergence in jazz during the 1970s; and
- \*the present era, in which he is one of our busiest musicians, playing at his peak.



*The Errol Buddle Quartet, touring South-East Asia in September and October, 1982. From left, Phil Scorgie, Buddle, Mark Isaacs, Len Barnard... PHOTO CREDIT FRANK LINDNER*

To take the last era first, Errol Buddle remains one of our most in-demand session musicians. He plays with Geoff Harvey's band on the Mike Walsh daytime television show, with Mike Perjanik's orchestra on the Parkinson show, and with Tommy Tycho's orchestra. He works extensively for Ken Laing's Media Music Co-ordination, which provided musicians for the *You're A Star* television show, and backing for overseas artists such as Sammy Davis. He is an essential member of John Sangster's 'family' of jazz musicians, and appears on most of Sangster's monumental records throughout the last decade. Sangster describes Buddle as the 'boss tenor' in Australian jazz.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays he can be heard with his quartet at Sydney's Soup Plus restaurant. His six-piece group, the Errol Buddle Band, works regularly at the Basement and other venues, and has done many concerts in and around Sydney, and as far afield as Gladstone, Queensland. This larger group is sometimes augmented by the singers Doug Williams or Keren Minshull.

On September 25, 1982, the Errol Buddle Quartet, including Mark Isaacs (piano and synthesiser), Phil Scorgie (bass guitar) and Len Barnard (drums) leaves for a concert tour through South-East Asia, taking in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Burma. This tour is part of the Department of Foreign Affairs' Cultural Relations Program, and will be administered by Musica Viva.

Errol Buddle is, therefore, as busy as ever in terms of work. But there is another aspect to his present career. In musical terms, this is certainly a new era for him. He is a recent convert to the sort of jazz that incorporates rock music. Call it what you like — it has been described a 'jazz/rock', 'funk', 'fusion', or 'crossover' — but this is the music which Errol Buddle is now excited about, and which he sees as an important new direction in jazz:

Jazz has, of course, been strongly influenced by rock music for about 30 years. Like many other musicians, Errol resisted it for some time. About a year ago, however, he bought some new, advanced-technology hi-fi equipment. In a record-buying spree, restricting himself to records no more than 12 months old, in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of what is happening in music today, he bought a large cross-section of recent recordings. He found that, to his ears, the LPs offering the most interesting music were in the 'fusion' idiom, particularly Grover Washington's LP *Winelight*. Others who interested him were musicians such as Tom Scott and groups like Spyro Gyra.

He found that the sound on these LPs was excellent, and also was attracted to the rhythms and melodic lines used in this music. He now feels that so-called 'rock' music has evolved to the point where serious musicians can utilise it in a jazz context, and finds it a more than adequate vehicle for improvisation.

So, some months ago he formed a six-piece band which could play music in this idiom, and recruited some of the younger, more brilliant musicians playing in Sydney: Mark Isaacs (keyboards), Dean Kerr (guitar), Phil Scorgie (bass guitar), Sunil De Silva (percussion), and Rodney Ford (drums).

"The thing I like about jazz/rock is that it is melodic and rhythmically exciting," says Errol. "There are so many rhythms you can use — South American feels, for instance. Then again, there are the percussion instruments, which I find very colourful. It adds to the music, I think. The bass lines are much more involved than they used to be. I find this tremendously

interesting. There is virtually no limit to the number of patterns that can be used in the rhythm section, rather than just the straight four in the bar.”

Errol resists the argument that the music “is not jazz”. He points out that, even when he was a teenager, he heard the argument often that bebop was not jazz. At various times he has heard it said that Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton, and even Charlie Parker did not play jazz. Jazz has always been in the process of change, and when the changes come into the music, there are always people who feel it is not the real thing.



*Stan Getz: when Buddle first heard him he thought Getz was effeminate...PHOTO COURTESY BIOGRAPHY.COM*

“I was like that myself when I first heard Stan Getz on record around 1950. I preferred people like Ben Webster, that more robust school of tenor playing, and when I first heard Getz I thought he was effeminate — that ‘cool’ sort of playing. I suppose it took me a good year to get to like him, and after that I thought he was the greatest.

“The new stuff is definitely jazz — there’s no doubt about it. I don’t really like the term ‘jazz/rock’. To tell you the truth, I didn’t care for rock for many years. I don’t really like jazz being connected with rock. Rock music turns me off anyway. What we play is a cross between ‘motown’ and South American rhythms. ‘Funk’ is what they call it now. To me, it’s a very musical and tasteful type of music.”

Errol Buddle sees a parallel between the funk jazz of today and the music of the pre-bop swing era. In the great days of Basie and Ellington, jazz was popular, melodic and exciting; people danced to it, and there was sometimes a singer as an additional feature to the instrumental music. With the incorporation of funk styles, Errol feels that jazz is recapturing some of its lost verities.

We now take a detailed look at the earlier Errol Buddle story. In particular we will examine his years in the United States between 1952 and 1958. This episode in Buddle’s career has been touched upon in Andrew Bisset’s book *Black Roots White Flowers*. We believe the story should be told in full. It is, in fact, one of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of Australian jazz.

Buddle arrived in Windsor, Canada, as a young man of 24. Within a short time, he had moved over the United States border to Detroit and was playing six nights a week at Klein's, a local jazz club in the black district, leading a band which included Tommy Flanagan (piano), Frank Gant (drums), Milt Jackson's brother Alvin (bass) and Frank DiVita (trumpet). After three months, the manager of the club brought in four new musicians to



*Klein's, 1953. Buddle (centre) on tenor sax. To the left is Pepper Adams (baritone sax), to the right Barry Harris (piano). Obscured behind Buddle is Elvin Jones (drums). To the left (outside the picture) was Major Holley (bass).*

serve under Buddle's leadership for another three months — Elvin Jones (drums), Barry Harris (piano), Major Holley (bass) and Pepper Adams (baritone saxophone). All were brilliant young Detroiters who were to become major figures in American jazz. On Saturday nights Billy Mitchell (tenor saxophone) was booked for a regular battle of the saxophones with Buddle and Adams.

Meanwhile the Australians Jack Brokensha (vibes and drums) and Bryce Rohde (piano) had arrived in the United States, and the Australian Jazz Quartet was formed in late 1954 with the American Dick Healey (alto, flute and bass). They worked at Detroit's leading jazz club the Rouge Lounge, which was managed by a man called Ed Sarkesian, who became the AJQ's personal manager. Through Sarkesian they were signed up to the biggest jazz agency in the world, Associated Booking Corporation, run by Louis Armstrong's manager Joe Glaser.

Glaser also managed the groups led by such luminaries as Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Chico Hamilton and George Shearing. The AJQ, now a quintet, found themselves amongst the top half-a-dozen groups in American jazz and, for four heady years, worked non-stop in virtually every major jazz club in the US, made seven bestselling LPs, played at Carnegie Hall and other major concert halls, backed singers like Billie Holiday and Carmen MacRae, and enjoyed life at the top.

During this incredible period, Errol Buddle became the first musician in jazz to use the bassoon extensively, and is so credited in Leonard Feather's *Encyclopedia of Jazz*. An interesting footnote is that the American bassist Ed Gaston joined the AJQ in June 1957, and came to Australia when the group toured this country in 1958 for the ABC. Gaston met an Australian girl two days after he arrived, married her – the well-known personality in the Sydney jazz community, Di Gaston - and remained here till his death.

It is a measure of the extraordinary devaluation of jazz in our culture that Buddle's achievements in the United States, plus those of the other Australians in the Australian Jazz Quintet, are hardly known to the Australian public. Similarly who, outside of a few jazz buffs, are aware of the exploits of Graeme Bell and his Australian Jazz Band, who took Europe and England by storm in the late 1940s?

In this country we make a huge fuss when our classical musicians become prominent overseas. Who has not heard of Roger Woodward and Dame Joan Sutherland? Yet, when our jazz musicians reach the top in England or the United States, the news hardly filters through to the public consciousness.

As a child Errol Buddle began in music as a banjo/mandolin player. He was among several young banjo players having lessons at the Adelaide College of Music in the mid-1930s. John Ellerton Becker, who ran the College, was an audacious entrepreneur. In 1936 he imported a number of saxophones from the United States and, despite the fact that these were Depression years, convinced the parents of several banjo students that their children should take up the saxophone. Errol was one of them, getting his soprano saxophone at the age of eight.



*A young Errol Buddle aged eight, holding his soprano saxophone...*

In this remarkably casual way, careers in music were set in motion. Other than Buddle, Syd Beckwith and Bill McKinnon — prominent Adelaide saxophonists in later years — also got their first instruments in the batch imported by Becker. Becker was an extraordinary man. He became a pioneer researcher into sheep and cattle farming, and soil improvement, and was later knighted for services to the pastoral industry. Now a millionaire, he lives on the island of Bermuda.

Three months after the arrival of the saxophones, Becker arranged for the eleven young recipients to perform for three weeks at the Prince Edward Theatre in Sydney, playing the popular music of the day. In this inauspicious way, Errol Buddle began a life in music. Throughout his childhood, Buddle was not over-keen on music. He took lessons and played in various bands, mostly because of pressure from his parents. His father was a car dealer in Adelaide, who later went into vintage cars and spare parts. During high school, Errol even gave up music for a time, to concentrate on school work.

It was during his high school years however, that some friends of the Buddle family, knowing that the young Errol played the saxophone, invited him to join their trio which played every Saturday night at a country dance — piano, saxophone and banjo/mandolin. Errol took the job at 15 shillings a night. He enjoyed it so much though, he would have done it for nothing. At this stage, he played only written melodies, and was totally unaware of jazz.

He was still 16 years old in 1944 when he answered a newspaper advertisement for a saxophonist at the King's Ballroom, Adelaide, and got the job. Shortly after, he saw that a jazz concert was being held at the Astoria Ballroom, starring two musicians he was well aware of: Syd Beckwith (alto sax and clarinet) and Bobby Limb (tenor saxophone) — then a leading Adelaide professional musician and later to become one of Australia's top television stars. "I just went along out of curiosity," says Buddle now. "They started to play and I was just mesmerised by the music. It was the first time I had actually really heard some live jazz. The person who impressed me more than any of them was Bobby Limb on tenor sax. His solos were so well-constructed."



*Bobby Limb on the cover of TV Week, holding his tenor saxophone: Buddle says Limb was one of the better tenor sax players in Australia ...Buddle stepped into his shoes when Limb left Adelaide for Melbourne...*

“Even today, Bobby Limb is still one of the better tenor sax players in Australia, I would say. I did a recording with him only a few years ago which he played tenor on — one of his own records — and he played it very well. Good tone, good execution, good style — it knocked me out.”

Buddle left the concert dazed. “I went home that night on the bus, I remember, and the first thing I did was turn the radio on, and try and find some jazz. I was absolutely wrapped. Then, of course, came looking for records. I used to go to record shops at 9 o’clock in the morning as soon as they opened, to try and get records. In those days records were still a little bit scarce after the war. If you missed out, you had to wait until the next month to get the next issue.”

So, Errol Buddle became hooked on jazz. He bought anything and everything if it was jazz — Artie Shaw’s Gramercy Five, Ellington, whatever. “If a record had a tenor solo on it, even eight bars, I’d buy it,” says Errol. He was then still playing only the alto saxophone. “Up to that time I was so wrapped in tenor, all the solos I did, I used to do in the bottom register of the alto, because it had a slightly deeper sound.” In 1946 this dilemma was rectified. Errol came to Sydney for a short holiday and bought his first tenor.

At that time Bobby Limb was Adelaide’s most prominent saxophonist. In 1946 he left to join Bob Gibson’s big band in Melbourne, then the leading orchestra in the country. Errol Buddle was good enough to step into Limb’s shoes. This included three radio shows and a number of dance band gigs. At the age of 18, Buddle had broken into the top echelon of Adelaide music. Not only was he a budding jazz player; he had also developed enough to handle the best studio work — a capability that would stand him in good stead throughout the rest of his career.

In post-war Adelaide, there was a small, thriving jazz scene. There was a Jazz Lovers’ Society meeting one Sunday every month at the King’s Ballroom. The President was Bill Holyoake, one of the first important record collectors in Australian jazz and a pioneer broadcaster. One of the members was Kym Bonython, who occasionally played the drums. Jack Brokensha had been discharged from the Air Force and was playing regularly in Adelaide; the saxophonist Clare Bail was on the scene.

Every Sunday night there was a jam session, which went on until 3 am, at the Air Force Association. The President of the Association was Ron Wallace, who was also a jazz drummer and allowed jazz musicians to use the Air Force ballroom.

Still, to provincial Adelaide, Melbourne represented the big time, and most young Adelaide musicians kept one eye on the opportunities there. Not long after Bobby Limb left Adelaide, John Foster (bass), Jack Brokensha (drums and vibes) and Ron Lucas (piano) were offered a job playing seven nights a week at the Plaza Coffee Lounge in St Kilda. They were a show band plus a comedian and a girl vocalist, but they also played some jazz.

At Easter 1947 they sent Errol Buddle a telegram and asked him to come to Melbourne and join the group. He came over, but it was not an auspicious debut for the young Adelaide saxophonist. He was fired after only two weeks, when the manager, on a whim, decided to cut costs. Still, in the casual spirit of those lighthearted days, he was reinstated a week later when the other members of the group talked the manager around. Subsequently, Buddle was

to become a great attraction through his tune *Buddle's Bebop Boogie*, a rousing 12-bar blues which featured a number of key changes.

For Buddle, seven nights a week at the Plaza was a dues-paying job. Originally called the Rockettes, the group stayed there for a year. Meanwhile Ron Loughhead replaced Lucas on piano. The Adelaide musicians established themselves quickly, and moved on to other jobs, such as the Galleon, a coffee lounge not far from the Plaza, and later to the Stork Club, owned by Sammy Lee.



*The Stork Club, Melbourne, May 29, 1948. From left: Ron Loughhead (pno), John Foster (bs), Craig Crawford (tenor), Jack Brokensha (drs), Ken Brentnall (trt), Errol Buddle (tenor)... PHOTO CREDIT JOHN M DUNCAN*



*The drummer Stewie Speer: Buddle remembers many jam sessions at his place after work, after 12 midnight... PHOTO COURTESY LUCAS PRODUKTIONS*

Errol Buddle counters the view that modern jazz in Melbourne really started with the opening of Horst Liepolt's Jazz Centre 44 in 1955 — where a new generation of young musicians emerged, particularly Brian Brown, Stewart Speer, Keith Hounslow, David Martin and Barry Buckley — all youngsters who reacted against the 'cool' jazz of the 50s, and were highly influenced by black American hard-bop.

"It was going as early as 1947", says Errol. "Stewie [Speer] was playing then, but not professionally. I can remember many jam sessions at Stewie's place. Everyone was very keen; we were working seven nights a week, yet we'd still go to jam sessions after work, after 12 midnight."

In 1947 Buddle worked in various groups with Don Banks, then primarily a jazz pianist, but an important figure who was to become one of Australia's most distinguished composers. Banks was head of the Composition Department at the NSW Conservatorium of Music when he died in 1981.

"Don was one of the first to play bebop in this country. He was a very studious chap, a very serious musician, a very good pianist and writer. After that, he went to England and wrote a lot of film music, and got into classical music. He had a good bebop style on piano, a bit like Al Haig."



*Don Banks (left) pictured here with Don Burrows: he was one of the first to play bebop in this country, Buddle says. "He had a good bebop style on piano, a bit like Al Haig."*

"There was a good jazz scene in Melbourne in 1947 — Bobby Limb on tenor sax, Splinter Reeves on tenor, alto players like Eddie Oxley, very young at the time; trumpet players like Freddie Thomas; drummers like Charlie Blott; guitar players . . . Bruce Clarke was just starting at that time."

Meanwhile, at the Plaza, the singer Edwin Duff had joined the group, now under the name Jack Brokensha Quartet. They became so well-known that in 1948 they were booked to appear at the Sydney Town Hall for two concerts. They were successful in Sydney but due to poor promotion their tour of New South Wales country centres — such as Dubbo, Bathurst and Orange — was a flop. Duff knocked everyone out with his Sinatra-style sophistication and the bop-inspired unison lines he executed with Buddle.



*The singer Edwin Duff: he joined the Jack Brokensha Quartet at the Plaza in Melbourne. He knocked everyone out with his Sinatra-style sophistication and the bop-inspired unison lines he executed with Buddle ... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM*

Following the group's return to Melbourne, Jack Brokensha had a nervous breakdown in January 1949, and was paralysed down one side of his body. There was no satisfactory explanation for this affliction, but it appears to have had something to do with after-effects of the war. He went back to the Repatriation Hospital in Adelaide. Buddle stayed on in Melbourne for a while, but became homesick, and returned to Adelaide too.

Andrew Bisset, in his book *Black Roots White Flowers*, states that on this trip back to Adelaide, Errol Buddle took up the bassoon for the first time. Buddle says this is incorrect; at this stage he had still not touched the bassoon.

In mid-1949, following Brokensha's recovery, the quartet was re-formed in Sydney with Brokensha, Buddle, Loughhead and a new bassist John Mowson. They landed a job at Gold's Nightclub in the AWA Building in York Street (now the Shalimar Restaurant) and became probably the most popular small jazz group in Sydney.

The American trumpeter Rex Stewart, during his five-months tour of Australia in the second half of 1949, recorded with the Jack Brokensha Quartet in Sydney. "This was the first time that a big jazz name came to Sydney," Errol remembers. "We did some recordings with him at the AWA studio, and something happened to the master. It was destroyed or damaged, and never released. Special arrangements were done by Ron Loughhead. I remember we had strings and French horns; for those days it was quite advanced.

“I was very impressed with Rex Stewart. It was quite an education listening to his style. I had never heard any American player in person, and he had a different approach to his instrument than I’d ever heard before. Of the Australian players, I think the closest to that real authentic jazz style was Ken Brentnall in those days. Ken was quite an amazing jazz trumpeter — and still is. He was one of the first to play bebop in this country.”



*The US trumpeter Rex Stewart, pictured here during his 1949 tour with the Melbourne trumpeter Roger Bell... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM*

After six months in Sydney the quartet went back to the Galleon in Melbourne in December 1949. Homesick again, Errol Buddle decided to leave the group and be home in Adelaide for Christmas. He was replaced by Ken Brentnall. Buddle found the Adelaide scene lively; there was plenty of work in the ballrooms, studios and concert venues. But he was soon itching to get back with Brokensha. By mid-1950 Brokensha was working in Sydney, and Buddle came over, expecting to join his friends again.

This time, however, he was out of luck. When he reached Sydney the group had disbanded and Brokensha had moved to Brisbane. “I was stuck in Sydney, no job, no nothing,” he says. Not for long. Soon he was playing tenor with Billy Weston’s band at the Gaiety Ballroom. Then, in late 1950, Australia’s best-known bandleader Bob Gibson returned from England and formed, for the first time, a big band in Sydney, to do various dance jobs and radio programs. Buddle was one of the first to be invited to join.

“By this time I was wrapped in tenor”, says Buddle. “Lucky Thompson really knocked me out — he still does. . . Don Byas . . . About 1951, I heard my first record of Stan Getz. At first I didn’t like his style at all. It was a complete change to what I’d been used to. I preferred the hot players like Coleman Hawkins, those robust players. At that time I was into the tenor players playing with Dizzy Gillespie. To me, Getz sounded effeminate. It wasn’t until later that I started to like him. In fact, when I eventually went to the States, Getz became my favourite tenor player.” Buddle was developing a liking for the sort of playing that was later to be dubbed ‘West Coast’ or ‘cool jazz’ by the critics.

Meanwhile, there was another change coming on. By late 1951, Buddle was working every night at Chequers’ nightclub in Sydney from 6 pm to 1 am, and recording during the day. He was becoming sick of the professional musician’s nightlife. Also the woodwind player Jock

McKenna had introduced Buddle to Stravinsky's works, particularly *Rite Of Spring*, and *The Firebird Suite*.

Buddle was attracted to the sound of a particular instrument used by Stravinsky in these works. At first he didn't know what the instrument was; eventually he discovered it was the bassoon. At this stage, having had enough of night clubs, he decided to take up the bassoon and hopefully get into a symphony orchestra. He began studying at the Sydney Conservatorium with Wally Black, principal bassoon with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Soon he was playing the instrument with the student orchestra. "I very quickly adapted to the bassoon," says Errol. "At first I thought I'd never be able to play it, because the fingering is quite different. I gradually got used to it."



*The multi-instrumentalist Buddle, pictured here with his array of instruments, became the first musician in jazz to use the bassoon extensively, according to Leonard Feather's Encyclopedia of Jazz. The bassoon is on the far left...*

Fired with the idea of becoming a symphony player, Buddle returned to Adelaide where he could live with his parents and study music seriously. Once back in his home town, he studied bassoon at the Adelaide Conservatorium with Jock Goode, principal bassoon with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, and began building up his record collection with the works of Beethoven, Tchaikowsky and Stravinsky.

Still, it appeared that once again the quiet life in Adelaide was not going to retain Buddle for long. A friend, the New Zealand drummer Don Varella, had gone to Canada and had been writing enticing letters, highlighting the amount of live jazz that was frequently available on that side of the globe. Buddle was particularly impressed by a letter which Varella had written the day after he heard the Duke Ellington orchestra with Louis Bellson on drums and Paul Gonsalves on tenor. "Soon I got the bug," says Errol, "and began thinking about going to Canada".

Buddle says that the reference in Andrew Bisset's book to the "round of farewell appearances" (page 103) is misleading. These farewell appearances did take place in April 1951, but they were to do with the plan of Errol Buddle and Jack Brokensha to go to England. "But we never went," says Buddle. Subsequently, the two men did not decide to go overseas together (as Bisset claims) nor did they go together. More than a year after the "farewell appearances" — on August 1, 1952, not April, as stated by Bisset — Buddle, aged 24 years, left as an immigrant for Canada, without Brokensha.

Andrew Bisset also states that Buddle was voted Musician of the Year by the magazine *Music Maker* before he left for overseas. This also is incorrect. Buddle's election as Musician of the Year, in *Music Maker's* All-Star Australian Modern Musicians' Poll of 1952, was announced in the magazine's edition dated October 1952. It was many months before Buddle was to know that he had won the coveted award.

Errol Buddle arrived in Canada on August 3, 1952. Immediately he and Don Varella launched into a three-weeks trip through the West Coast of the United States, to experience an orgy of jazz. At the Blackhawk in San Francisco they heard the Earl Bostic band, a rhythm-and-blues group which included a then unknown saxophonist by the name of John Coltrane.



*John Coltrane: an unknown saxophonist playing with the Earl Bostic band at the Blackhawk in San Francisco in 1952... Buddle was more impressed with Bostic...*

Buddle was more impressed with Bostic on alto than with Coltrane on tenor. The following night they heard the Dave Brubeck Quartet, with Paul Desmond on alto saxophone. In the next few days they heard the Ray Anthony big band, the Cal Tjader group and others, before going on to Los Angeles where they heard the Les Brown band with Dave Pell on tenor.

"I was very tenor-minded", says Errol, "it was nothing but tenor I used to listen for. One of the things that struck me right away was the different quality of sound the Americans were getting out of their instruments. Everything sounded different to what I was used to in Australia. There was more finesse in their playing. Even the cymbals on the drums sounded more paper-like; it was a lighter sound than in Australia, where the cymbals sounded heavier. Virtually they were going for the whole concept which, even to this day, is pretty much the same. It's almost a more legitimate approach to the instruments there. But of course there are a lot of players here who are getting that sound now.

“Sax players were using closer facings on their mouth pieces than we were using, which gave them a more legitimate sound. That’s what classical musicians use. The opening of the tip of the mouthpiece is smaller. I noticed it straight away with the Les Brown band. It had a different sound, a different tone to what the bands in Australia had. I guess it’s just better musicianship. I found right away that the Americans definitely played quieter than we did. That’s also pretty much true today.”

“Also the American players had more finesse on their instruments and better intonation. It was just a more academic approach to playing. They seemed to stress certain things more than we did. They were very meticulous players in tone production and intonation. Their instrument set-ups were more geared to playing in tune, than to playing loud. It’s a different concept of playing.”

Back in Canada, Buddle settled in the provincial town of Windsor. He chose this town because it was just across the US border from Detroit. Soon he was playing bassoon with the Windsor Symphony Orchestra and the Canadian Ford Motor Company Concert Band. It was a stroke of good fortune that Buddle decided on Windsor. In this city there was a shortage of professional musicians, and it was possible for him to join the union. Don Burrows, who had spent several months in Canada before Buddle arrived, had been unable to join the union in Toronto, because of strict resident requirements, and therefore found it virtually impossible to play. Even sitting in was difficult for non-members. Burrows earned his living selling encyclopaedias and packing shoes in a department store. Buddle, on the other hand, was able to earn a living in Windsor as a musician.

Soon, Buddle and Varella were frequent visitors to the clubs in Detroit, where there was one of the most vibrant jazz scenes in the United States. They were itching to form a group and get into the act. Buddle went to see a booking agent, who suggested that he and Varella get some Australians together and form a group; he promised them some work, if they were able to form an Australian group.

Buddle then wrote to the pianist Terry Wilkinson (who failed to reply) and to Jack Brokensha. Eventually, in late 1952, Brokensha decided to come. Without consulting Buddle he asked the Adelaide pianist Bryce Rohde to come too. They came by ship, by way of London, and arrived in Halifax in early 1953. Buddle got a call from Brokensha and Rohde, who were in jail in Halifax with no funds and no means of support. He and Varella sent money, and the two South Australians arrived in Windsor in March 1953.



*The pianist Bryce Rohde: Jack Brokensha, without consulting Buddle, asked Rohde to come to Canada too... PHOTO CREDIT TREVOR DALLEN*

Following this intrepid journey, rewards were not imminent for the hopeful Australian musicians. Little work came in, and often they barely survived. “One night for dinner I remember we had between the four of us, enough money for three apples and a half a loaf of bread,” says Errol. “I think one of us worked that particular night and got some money.”

By late 1953, Buddle was playing enough in Windsor to make a name for himself. Through a local DJ who admired his playing, Phil McKellar, he landed an audition with the Woody Herman big band. McKellar knew Herman well, and recommended Buddle. Herman, who was looking for a new tenor saxophonist sent Buddle a ticket to fly to New York, so that he could audition with the band, then playing at the club Basin Street.

One of the saxophonists in the section was a young Jerry Coker, later to become Associate Professor of Music at the University of Tennessee, and author of many books on jazz, including the excellent *Listening To Jazz*. Buddle had his own mouthpiece, and borrowed Coker’s tenor when he sat in with the band.

Woody Herman was auditioning a number of tenor players, and the chair eventually went to Jack Montrose, who had the added qualification of being an excellent arranger, which appealed to Herman. Nevertheless it was an invaluable experience for the young Errol Buddle, who was still to make his mark in American jazz.

During 1953, Buddle and Varella had begun to frequent a jazz club called Klein’s, which was on 12th Street in the heart of Detroit’s black district. It was the leading jazz club in the city employing local musicians. One night the two men were in the audience to hear a group led



*The Detroit saxophonist Yusef Lateef: Buddle wasn’t sure if he was fired, or whether his contract was up...*

by Yusef Lateef, which included Frank DiVita (trt), Tommy Flanagan (pno), Milt Jackson's brother Alvin Jackson (bs) and Frank Gant (drs).

Varella urged Buddle, who as usual had his own mouthpiece with him, to sit in with the group. The two men spoke with Lateef, who had a brand-new Selmer tenor. Lateef agreed to allow Buddle to sit in, imploring him to be careful with the new instrument. Buddle then blew a 40-minute set of bebop standards with the quintet.

"It was just beautiful playing with those guys," Errol recalls. "The rhythm section really jelled. It was really happening. When you play with guys like that, a funny thing happens — your playing improves straight away. I sat down after the set feeling quite elated."

The manager of the club, George Klein, immediately came over and asked Buddle whether he would like to work in the club. Flabbergasted, the Australian replied that naturally he would. Klein then said he would like Buddle to take over the existing group. "I just about fell through the floor," says Errol. "His words were actually 'I want you to keep these guys in line'. I wasn't sure if Yusef Lateef was fired, or whether his contract was up."



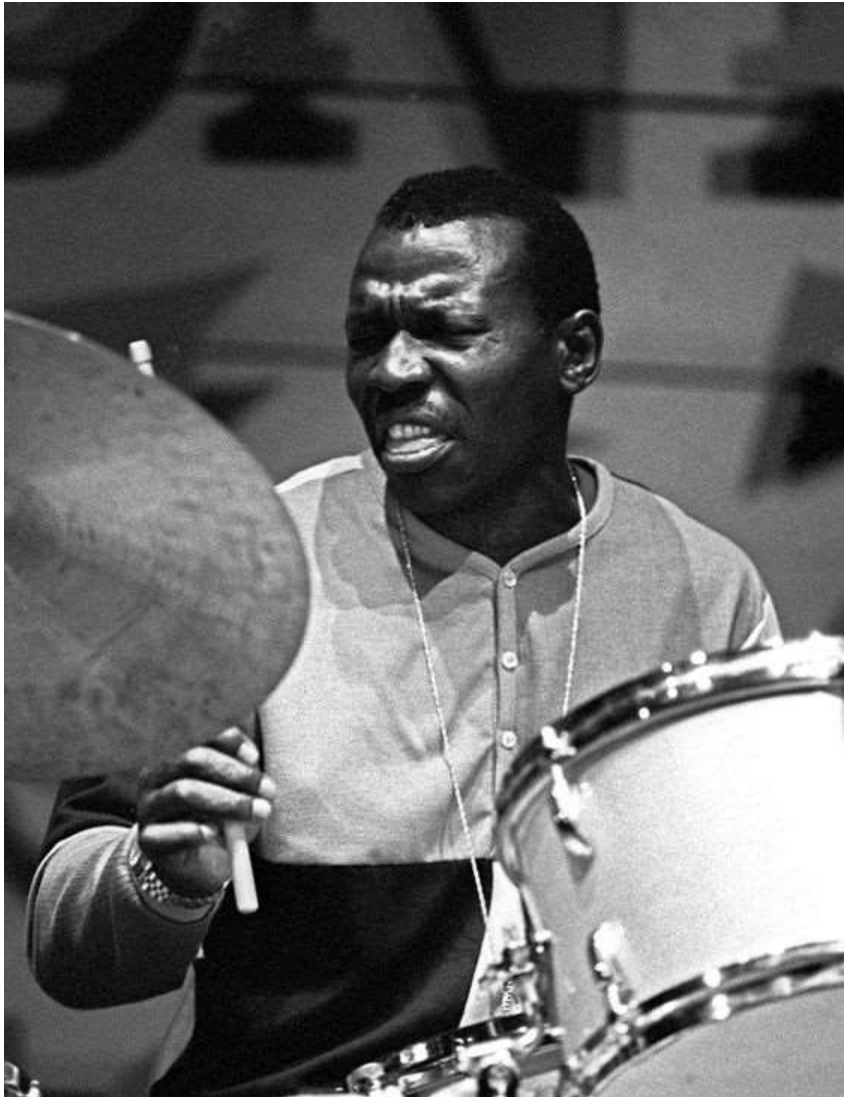
*A shot of Klein's jazz club, Detroit, probably in 1953. The sign on the right reads "Errol Buddle, Australia's Down Beat Winner"...*

Klein offered to smooth things over with the musicians' union, and within a short time, the Australian took over the group, which was billed as the Errol Buddle Quintet. They played six nights a week from 9 until 2 am. "After a few weeks with these guys, I started to get the hang of it. There was a different feel in the rhythm section — definitely different rhythmical concepts than we had in Australia. I started to play things I'd never played before. They were wonderful people to work with."

After three months Buddle's contract expired, but he was asked to stay on for another three months. This time, Klein wanted to bring in four new musicians: Elvin Jones (drums), Barry Harris (piano), Major Holley (bass) and Pepper Adams (baritone sax) - an extraordinary collection of young Detroiters, all of whom were to become great names in American jazz. On Saturday nights Billy Mitchell (tenor sax) was booked, for a three-way battle of the saxes.

"Billy Mitchell was a real extrovert", says Errol. "He later became deputy leader of the Dizzy Gillespie big band. I can remember him some nights taking long solos on the blues. At the beginning of each chorus he'd yell out, the top of his voice, the number of the chorus

numbers 1, 2 . . . and so on. One night he counted up to 100! He'd played 100 choruses of the blues without stopping!"



*Elvin Jones was very inspiring to play with... Buddle remembers Elvin coming in one night and saying 'guess what, my brother's got a job with Count Basie'... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

"Elvin Jones was very inspiring to play with. Just to hear him burning along behind you turned you on musically. At that stage, there was no abstract stuff — it was more swinging music — but in his later LPs with John Coltrane he sounded much the same to me. I could recognise his playing."

"Elvin's brothers Hank and Thad had already left for New York. I remember Elvin coming in one night and saying 'guess what, my brother's got a job with Count Basie'. Elvin was quite thrilled. Thad had really made it!"

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**TO BE CONTINUED in "The Errol Buddle Story, Part Two" at this link**  
**<https://www.ericmyersjazz.com/essays-8>**