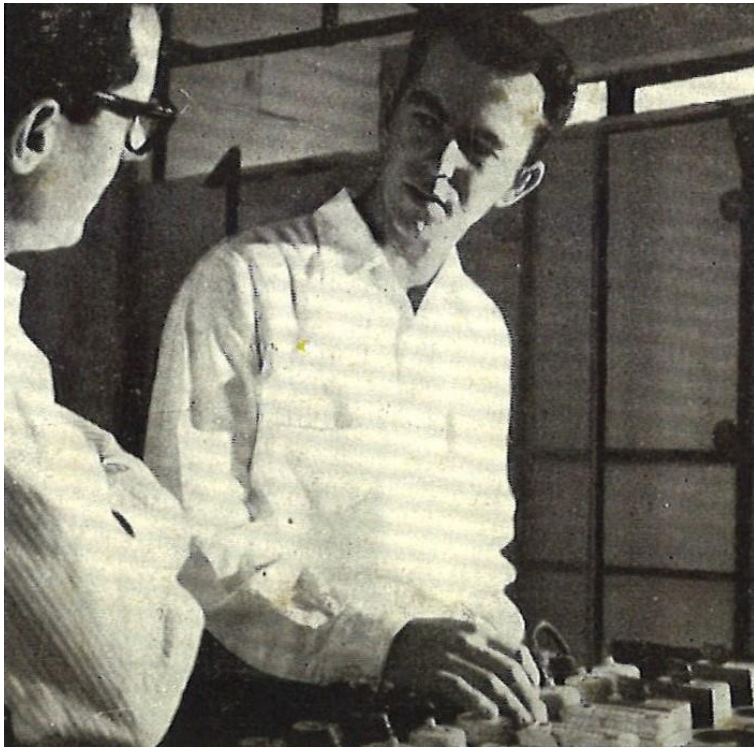


PAT CAPLICE: MODERN JAZZ PIONEER

by Eric Myers

While there is no individual entry for the vibraharpist/drummer Pat Caplice in Bruce Johnson's *Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz* there are three references to him in the book: in 1957 he was amongst several jazz artists who released recordings, including Clare Bail, Roger and Graeme Bell, Graeme Coyle, Ade Monsborough, Les Welch, the Australian Jazz Quintet, and the Cootamundra Jazz Band (pp 57-58). "The market for this music was essentially of the stay-at-home variety," writes Johnson, "and Pat Caplice, whose records of this period attracted such favourable comment, had to disband his trio for lack of work".



Pat Caplice (right) with recording engineer Brian Areagi, pictured on the back of the LP "Pat Caplice and his Associates". The musicians on this album, other than Caplice (vibes) were Jan Gold (guitar), Cliff Barnett (bass) and Mal Cunningham (flute)... PHOTO COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA

Caplice gets another mention in the *Oxford Companion* in relation to Sydney's nightclub scene which picked up during the 1950s and, according to Johnson "became in many respects, an extended workshop for professional musicians with progressive jazz interests (p 265)". Caplice is bracketed with musicians such as Frank

Marcy, Bob Gibson Lee Gallagher, Keith Silver and Joe Singer who were active in concert situations along with vocalists such as Georgina De Leon and Edwin Duff.

While Caplice, on the face of it, could be regarded as a minor figure in Australian jazz history, worthy of only a footnote, there is some accumulating evidence that, in fact, amongst the handful of jazz musicians who pursued careers in the music in the 1950s, he was a genuine pioneer and therefore more important than we might at first suppose.

I first became aware in earnest of Pat Caplice, when I contacted the vocalist/trombonist Dan Barnett in relation to the eulogy he'd delivered at the funeral of his father, the legendary double bassist Cliff Barnett, who died on July 5, 2006, aged 76. I've always felt that a eulogy delivered at a funeral by a relative of the deceased is an appropriate substitution for a formal obituary written by an outsider, and this proved to be the case with Dan's eulogy. It ranged extensively over Cliff's life and career, providing much interesting information of a personal nature which may not have been available to an obituary writer.

Photographs of Cliff Barnett were rare, but Dan was able to provide photographs of his father as a member of the Pat Caplice Trio, along with Pat, and an unidentified guitarist. Subsequently I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Pat Caplice was still alive and living in Chatswood. Courtesy of Dan I contacted him, and he was kind enough to loan me his memorabilia, including photographs, newspaper clippings, reviews and other helpful information. As I write this, (in October, 2022) Pat is aged 95 and, as he was born on April 4, 1927, will turn 96 in 2023.



Cliff Barnett (left) and Pat Caplice (centre) with unidentified guitarist on the right, who joined the trio for a series of school performances, as Pat's normal guitarist was unavailable. Pat was unable to recall this guitarist's name, but said he and his wife referred to him as "the teenybopper"... PHOTO COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA

Caplice as a nightclub musician

In a list of career highlights (undated) which he provided to John Sharpe (author of two important books of interviews with jazz musicians, *Don't Worry Baby, They'll swing their arses off*, and *I Wanted to be a jazz musician*), Caplice says he played drums and vibes at Romano's under the leadership of Gaby Rodgers and Bela Kanite, as well as under his own leadership; at Prince's under the leadership of Doh Brunel and Percy Winick; and Chequers under the leadership of Reg Lewis and Wally Norman. There's no indication of how long these gigs lasted, but Caplice describes them as "permanent weekly work".

In fact, although work for him as a vibraharpist was lean, Caplice says he supported himself throughout a lucrative musical career primarily as a drummer. Although he was not a drum virtuoso – he says he could not even play a so-called "paradiddle" – other musicians enjoyed his playing because of his excellent time-feel, and he provided sensitive accompaniment without getting in the way of what other musicians were playing.



This is a shot of Pat Caplice on drums at Spellson's restaurant... PHOTO COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA

In addition he lists "sessions" in Macquarie lunchtime radio shows (the Bob Dyer Show and Jack Davey Show) with Billy Antman's quartet. Other radio work included a radio show on 2UW with Tommy Tycho, weekly ABC radio jazz programs with Bela Kanitz, and a series of ABC radio Sunday evening programs with the Clive Amadio Quintet. The latter were classical music programs, rather than jazz, which went out live but interestingly Caplice did not play live. He would come into the studio on a Sunday morning and pre-record what was required for the live broadcast.



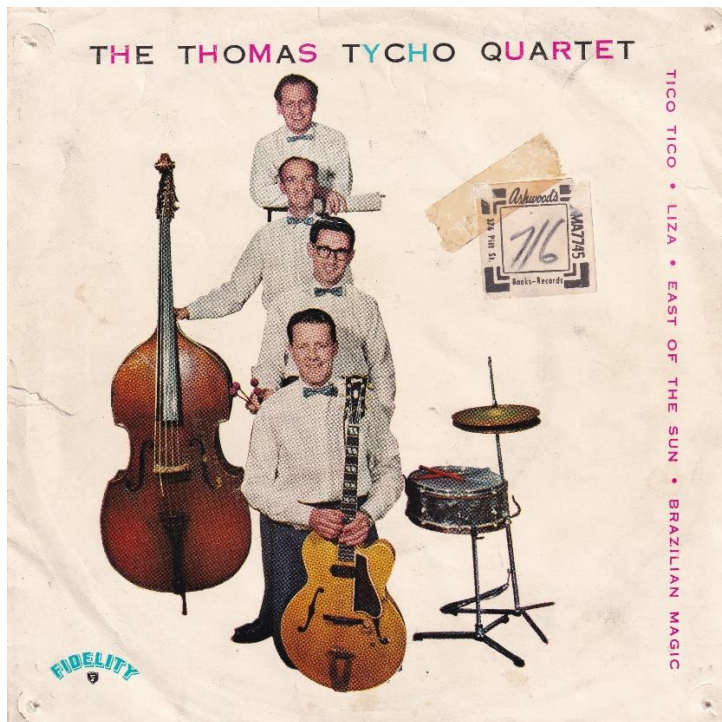
L-R, Radio stars Bob Dyer and Jack Davey: Caplice did sessions for both shows hosted by these radio stars...

Pat Caplice's interaction with Tommy Tycho

Tommy Tycho, one of Australia's most eminent musical directors, was born in Budapest, Hungary where he studied piano, harmony, composition and conducting. In order to pursue a musical career, he left Hungary as a young man early in 1947 to join a Hungarian orchestra in Tehran, the capital of Iran. After three years there, during which time he was pianist to the Shah, Tycho moved on with the orchestra to Baghdad for a year, before migrating to Australia in the early 50s, arriving circa 1951. For two years he worked in a Sydney department store, before breaking into the music industry and finding work as a musician, first with the ABC. In 1956 he joined ATN Channel 7 as pianist in the *Sydney Tonight* orchestra. In 1957 he formed a quartet for the Radio 2UW programme, *Laugh Till You Cry*, which included Pat Caplice on drums.



The Tommy Tycho Quartet, which provided music for the Radio 2UW programme, "Laugh Till You Cry". L-R, Tycho (piano), Johnny Weine (guitar), Reg Robinson (bass) and Pat Caplice (drums)... PHOTO COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA



The Thomas Tycho Quartet recorded this EP in 1957, with the same personnel: From the top downwards, Tycho (piano), Reg Robinson (bass), Pat Caplice (drums), and Johnny Weine (guitar).

In a document in his memorabilia, Caplice has written “Highlights of my musical career: My first love has always been arranging and recording techniques for the recording of small groups.” He lists four albums, as follows:

***Art Ray Quintet, by the Pat Caplice Quintet, for Diaphon**

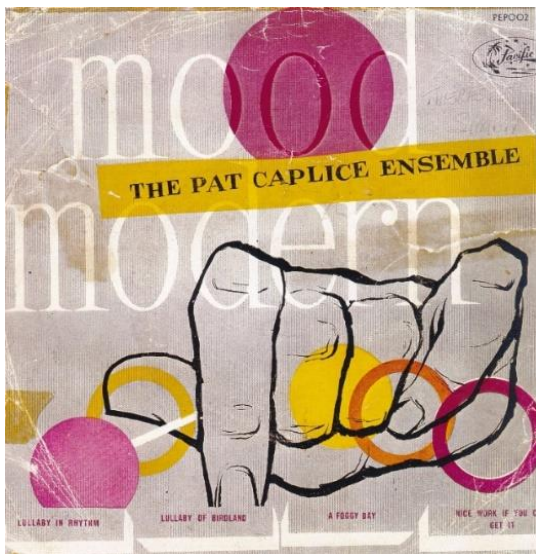
The Art Ray Quintet was not a jazz group. It was a name made-up in order to give the album a title. Amongst the newspaper clippings in Pat’s memorabilia, a writer in *The New Australasian Post*, (undated) writes about the album, assuming that the Art Ray Quintet exists. He refers to a conversation with a taxi driver called Joe about long-playing microgroove records coming onto the market. “Don’t suppose they’ll be much good though. Local music doesn’t seem to go over like the stuff from overseas”, says Joe. The anonymous writer disagrees: “In this case you’re wrong, Joe. They’re made in Australia, with Australian artists, and they are good.”

The writer explains that new LPs are being issued by a company called Diaphon:

Their latest is the best – an experiment to see whether modern music, played by Australians, and packaged on 10-inch microgrooves, will sell. The Art Ray Quintet is featured on both sides playing eight numbers in a slick, modern style. This group has appeared at several Sydney night clubs and comprises piano accordion, vibraphones (sic), guitar, bass and drums.

The standard of the recordings, both technically and musically, is high. The quintet's style is based on modern ideas, played by most successful overseas small combos. The Art Ray Quintet are better here than many recent recordings I've heard of much-publicised American groups." He then lists eight tracks: In a Little Spanish Town, All the Things You Are, Blue Moon, The Lady's in Love with You, Dream a Little Dream, The Stars Fell on Alabama, The Song is Ended, and What Is This Thing Called Love. Ideal selection for the next party and for dinner music, in fact any time you feel like quiet, pleasurable listening.

***Mood Modern, by the Pat Caplice Ensemble, for Pacific**



The album *Mood Modern* features a sextet with the following personnel: Pat Caplice (vibes, leader and arranger). Jan Gold, John Morrow (bass), Ken Hardy (bass clarinet), Peter Richardson (flute), and Don Osborne (drums).

***Fascinating Rhythm, by the Pat Caplice Quartet, for Columbia**



This EP was apparently a precursor to the LP *Caprice*. It appears to have been recorded in 1957 as Pat is referred to as an “MM poll-winner”, the year the magazine *Music Maker* conducted its readers’ poll which led to the famous 10-inch LP on the Parlophone label called *Jazz In Australia*, comprising four tracks recorded by the poll winners in late 1957.

Information on the *Fascinating Rhythm* EP is as follows, written by a writer whose initials are GH, (who could well be George Hart, then editor of *Music Maker* magazine). The four tracks are as follows:

**Fascinating Rhythm*, featuring Pat Caplice (vibes & marimba), Ken Hardy (bass clarinet), Jan Gold (guitar), John Morrow (bass), Cyril Bevan (drums);

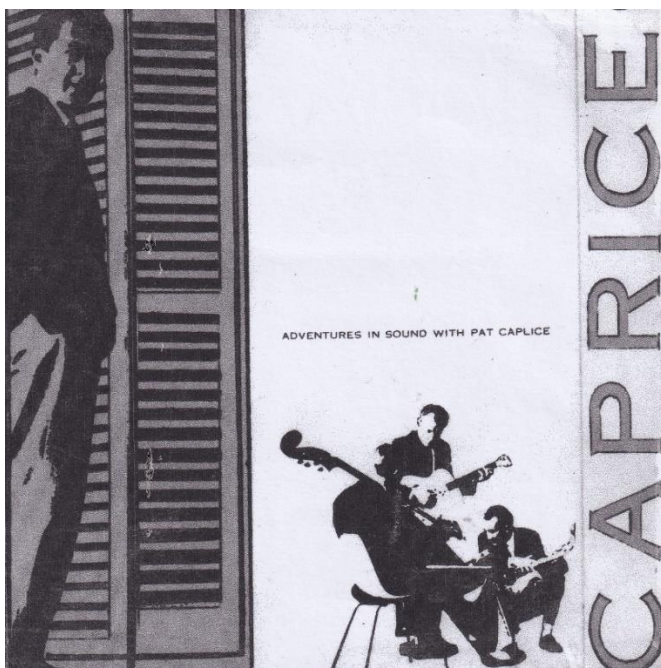
**I Can’t Believe That You’re in Love with Me*, featuring Caplice (vibes), Dave Titana (guitar), John Morrow (bass).

**Dearly Beloved*, featuring Pat Caplice (vibes), Peter Richardson (flute), Hardy (bass clarinet), Gold (guitar), John Morrow (bass).

**Why Can’t We Be Friends*, featuring Pat Caplice (vibes), Stan Fry (French horn), Jan Gold (guitar), John Morrow (bass).

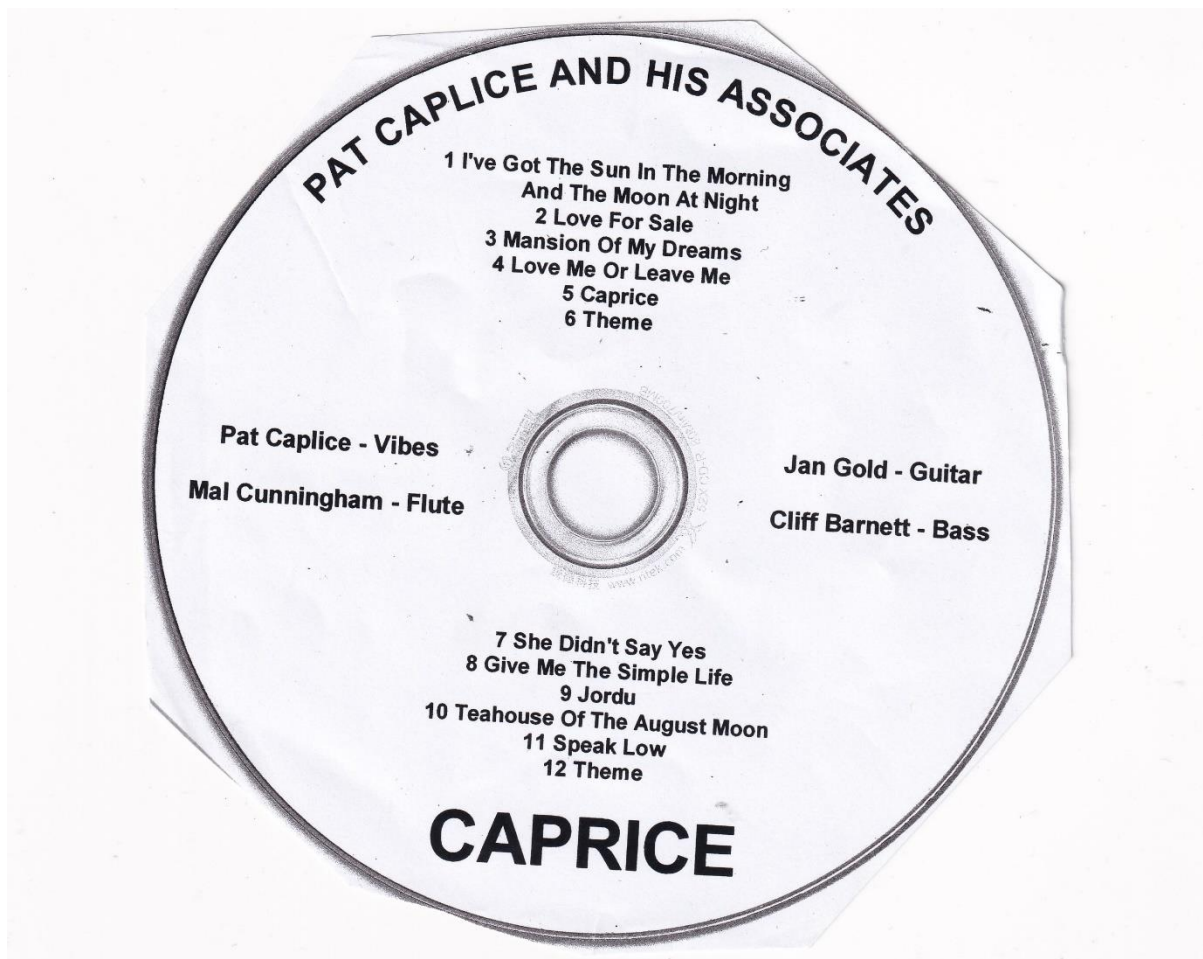
GH writes that this 45 EP was recorded in Caplice’s own studio, and that “he has combined his knowledge of recording techniques with some pleasing experiments in tone-colours... Pat’s vibes playing is stylish and imaginative, and his teaming with Jan Gold’s polished guitar is most effective. Tasteful, melodic, nicely pulsating, this is chamber jazz that never shouts, and is never too ‘far out’ for the average listener. It should whet the appetite for Pat’s 12 inch LP due out soon.”

The “Caprice” LP



There's an article by Jerome Davis in *Record Guide*, Volume 7, No 10, April, 1958, on page 13, with the heading "Outstanding work from local jazz group headed by Pat Caplice". This album is described as "the first time that an Australian group has had an LP record to themselves", pointing out that the Australian Jazz Quartet, which had previously recorded, "is only partially Australian."

According to the Eric Dunn review, the tracks are *I've Got The Sun in the Morning*; *Love For Sale*; *Mansion of my Dreams*; *Love Me or Leave Me*; *Caprice*; *She Didn't Say Yes*; *Give Me the Simple Life*; *Jordu*; *Teahouse of the August Moon*; *Speak Low*; *Silver Slippers*.



The personnel on "Caprice", L-R, Cliff Barnett, Mal Cunningham, Pat Caplice, Jan Gold... COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA

In Pat Caplice's memorabilia, it is noted that the LP was "subsequently reviewed favourably by Downbeat in the USA". Unfortunately, Pat says, this review has been lost. Possibly he loaned it to someone, and it was not returned.

PAT CAPLICE
"CAPRICE"
Columbia 12in. 330SX 7588. 52/6.
I've Got the Sun in the Morning; Love For Sale; Mansion of My Dreams; Love Me Or Leave Me; Caprice; She Didn't Say Yes; Give Me the Simple Life; Jordu; Teahouse of the August Moon; Speak Low; Silver Slippers.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that a local group has a twelve-inch LP to itself, and it is heartening to realise that the standard of the music they present not only justifies the space allotted to them but merits comparison with the very best overseas recordings. The basic line-up that occupies the first five tracks consists of Pat Caplice on vibes, guitarist Jan Gold and Cliff Barnett on bass—while flautist Mal Cunningham is added on the remainder. Even with the limited forces he employs, the thoughtful and inventive arrangements by Caplice avoid the monotony that so often afflicts similar combinations, and the interest is sustained throughout. It is the remarkable understanding between the musicians, undoubtedly helped by the charts, that constitutes the major interest of the set, as it is seldom that anyone gets the opportunity to indulge in any extended solo improvisation but rather concentrate on interplay between the various instruments. This makes for an intelligent and valid approach to jazz of a mature standard such as one has not yet come to expect from local combinations, and reflects the greatest credit on all concerned. Both Caplice and Gold emerge as artists of outstanding merit and young Mal Cunningham is of almost equal stature—while Cliff Barnett's bass work is a model of unobtrusive strength. In fact, the only criticism that can be levelled against the disc is the use of that overly cute phrase that closes each side, as it smacks too much of the tags so beloved of certain Dixieland bands.

PACKAGING: A striking and original cover design is matched by the brief but adequate notes that, however, do not identify the drummer on "Give Me the Simple Life"—though it pretty obviously is Caplice himself.

A review of "Caprice" by Eric Dunn which appeared in the same edition of Record Guide, April, 1958...

Jerome Davis points out that the Caplice group had previously issued two 45 EP discs, *Mood Modern* on the Pacific label, and *Fascinating Rhythm* on Columbia. He also refers to the fact that Professor Raymond Hanson of the NSW Conservatorium of Music had written a special work for the group to record. Pat cannot recall the name of the composition, but says that it was a difficult work and, as there was not enough rehearsal time for the musicians to master it, they chose not to record it.

Another review of *Caprice* dated April '58 appears in Pat's memorabilia, written once again by GH (possibly George Hart, editor of *Music Maker*). He praises the album

highly: “Overseas, a group like Pat’s would be working full-time in TV, radio, nightclubs and so on. It would rank with some of the most famous and highly paid modern jazz groups. But in Sydney, Pat and his associates work separately, and only get together for rehearsals and occasional public appearances (which invariably create a near riot). Let’s hope the situation will be altered by this LP which should convince promoters and entrepreneurs that the Caplice unit is something to rave about.”

“Here is modern small group jazz intelligently arranged and sensitively interpreted with tasteful use of modern recording techniques. Planned and recorded in Caplice’s own studio, and subsequently processed and released by EMI, the disc is a milestone in Australian made jazz.”



This shot of Caplice was used to illustrate the review by GH, who called “Caprice” “a milestone in Australian made jazz”...

This *Caprice* LP was also issued as a 45 RPM EP (Extended Play) record on EMI, also released in 1958. It has four tracks already recorded on the LP: *Love For Sale* and *Love Me or Leave Me* on side one; and *Give Me the Simple Life* and *Jordu* on side two.

The liner notes, almost certainly written by the above-mentioned Jerome Davis, congratulate Caplice on “his choice of musicians and instruments. And the blending of these ingredients in each of his arrangements which do more than anything to give the group its original sound. Pat’s concern for this aspect is illustrated by his sensitive chording in each number although at the same time he offers no slight voice when the vibraphone is heard as solo instrument.”

The Music Maker 1957 All Stars

A nationwide popularity poll conducted by *Music Maker* magazine early in 1957 resulted in a 10-inch LP on the Parlophone label called *Jazz In Australia*, featuring the winners from 200 musician candidates. In a report in the *Telegraph*, (presumably the *Daily Telegraph*), in November, 1957, *Music Maker* editor George Hart stressed the planning that had gone into the repertoire performed by the All Stars.

Four numbers were recorded: *George of Harts* (written and arranged by Dave Owens); *Short Message* (written/arranged by Don Burrows); *Ockeration* (written/arranged by Johnny Bamford) and the Duke Jordan jazz standard *Jordu* (arranged by Pat Caplice). The anonymous writer of this piece says his personal preference of the four pieces is *Jordu*, which he describes as “deft and stylish.”



These were nine of the winners of the instrumental sections of the Music Maker 1957 Readers' Poll, pictured in EMI Studios. L-R, Freddy Logan (bass), Frank Smith (alto), Ron Webber (drums), Dave Owens (tenor) Johnny Bamford (trombone), Ken Brentnall (trumpet), Terry Wilkinson (piano), Don Burrows (clarinet, holding flute), Mal Cunningham (flute, holding baritone). Two poll winners were not present when this was taken: Pat Caplice (vibes) and Johnny Weine (guitar). This photo appeared on the cover of Music Maker, Vol 3, No 4, September, 1957... PHOTO COURTESY CATHI WILKINSON

In conversations I've had with Pat, he has stressed that when he began playing in the 1950s, he found that when musicians got together to jam, they would invariably limit their playing to endless choruses of the blues. Accordingly, he got into the habit of encouraging them to not only write their own compositions, but also to write their own arrangements, along the lines of music coming out of America, so that the music they presented to the public would be more interesting.

In a statement (undated) under the heading "Pat Caplice Jazz Notes", he writes that America led the way in creating instrumental groups which functioned without a piano. From the 1950s to the 1970s those musicians wanting to play more sophisticated jazz were "looking for new sounds in the industry rather than hearing constant improvising, even though the top instrumentalists of that time were great."

Caplice was an early pioneer in what he described as "this unique area" – that is to say the presentation of arrangements featuring attractive musical colours which enabled him to be chosen by record companies trying to widen the jazz audience (Diaphon, Columbia, EMI and Pacific).

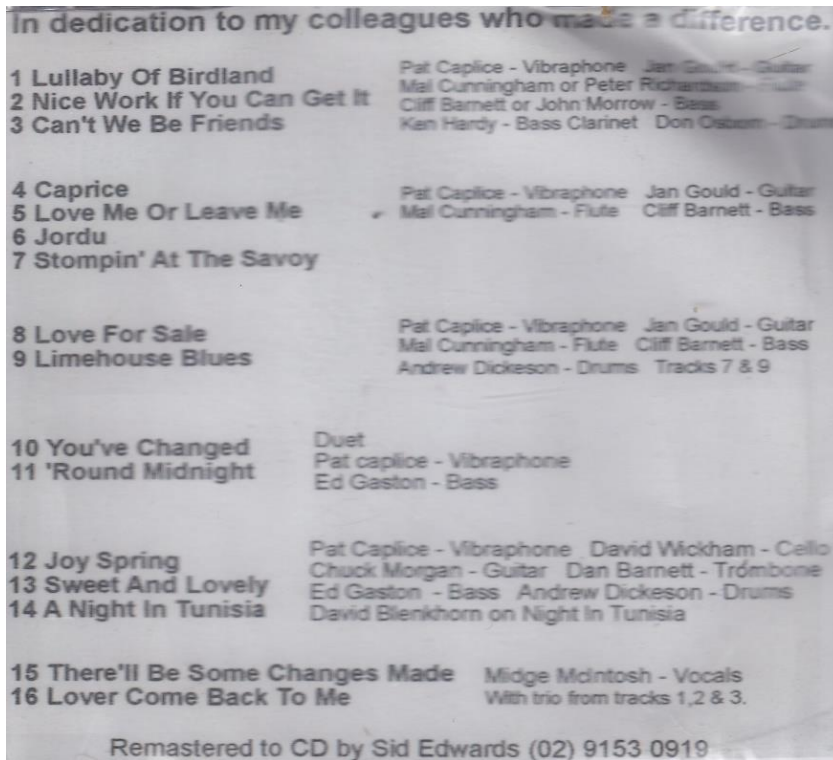
Caplice's musical philosophy is perhaps most clearly articulated on the back of the *Fascinating Rhythm* EP. He writes as follows:

The very crisp and real life alto sax of Ken Hardy in "I Can't Believe" and the plaintive French horn of Stan Fry giving a distant effect to "Why Can't We Be Friends," are some of the benefits reaped from the emphasis that has been placed on recording techniques in this album. The highly competitive field of progressive jazz calls for originality and with this in mind I have experimented with the bass clarinet, eventually combining the deep resonant talents of this instrument and the string bass, finding the perfect vehicle for their unison sound in "Dearly Beloved" where their background to the flute solo gives the rendition a musical lift. This album has been designed to stimulate interest by a variety of sounds and arrangements and in the initial offering of "Fascinating Rhythm" I have endeavoured to maintain this end with a further reshuffle of the combination to include a very real clarinet sound interspersed with vibes and the mellow offerings of the marimba. I hope to reach you with one of these arrangements.

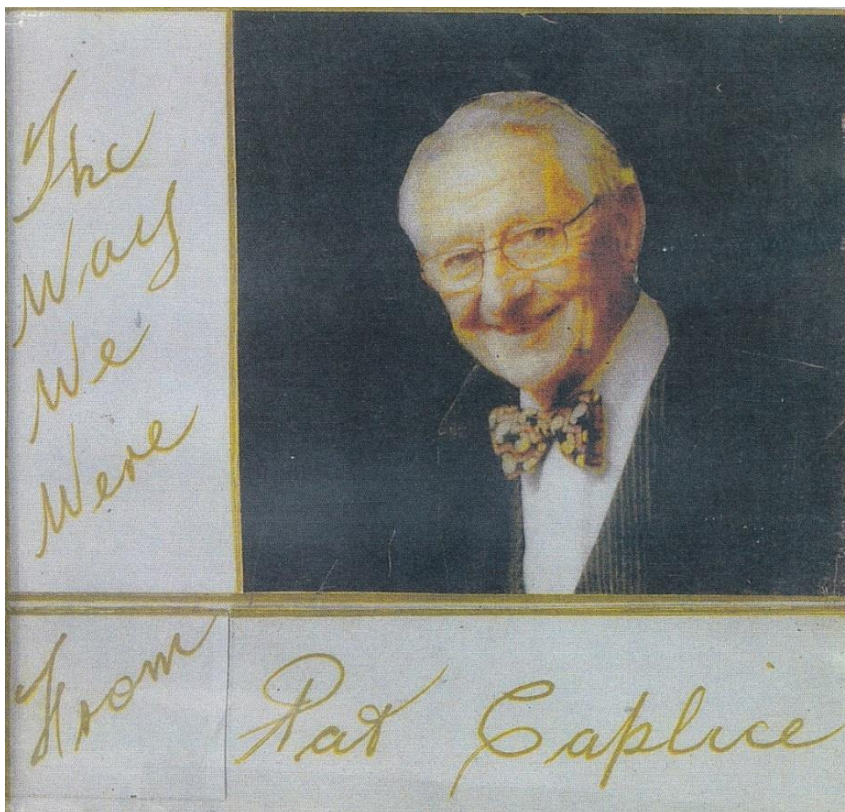
The album "Caprice Revisited 1957-2001", also known as "The Way We Were"

The late Ed Gaston who was in the habit of coming over to Caplice's apartment to jam, encouraged Caplice around the turn of the century to put together a "CD master" of the tracks that were most popular of his many recordings. Some tracks were laid down by what is described as "some current members of the fraternity", including Gaston (bass), Dave Blenkhorn (guitar) Andrew Dickeson (drums), and others (See full personnel on next page). Two tracks feature singer Midge McIntosh,

with *There'll Be Some Changes Made*, and *Lover Come Back To Me*. Five tracks were reproduced from the original LP. There were 16 tracks in all.



The 16 tracks issued on the CD "The Way We Were"... COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA



CD cover of "The Way We Were"... COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA



Recording “The Way We Were” in 2001, L-R, Andrew Dickeson (drums), Ed Gaston (double bass), David Blenkhorn (guitar) and Pat Caplice (vibes). Below is another shot of Pat taken at the same session... PHOTOS COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA





Perhaps Pat Caplice's favourite group throughout his career was the trio pictured above, L-R, Caplice (vibes), Jan Gold (guitar) and Cliff Barnett (double bass)...
PHOTO COURTESY PAT CAPLICE MEMORABILIA
