

**BOB BARNARD, GRAEME BELL, BILL HAESLER AND JOHN SANGSTER
ON THE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ CONVENTION** edited by Norman Linehan.
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Reviewed by Eric Myers*

This review appeared in the March/April, 1982 edition of Jazz Magazine.

This small, 20-page booklet consists of paraphrased interviews of the above-mentioned four men, conducted by Norm Linehan between March and September 1979. All were encouraged to give their thoughts on, and experiences regarding, various Australian Jazz Conventions, so it is an invaluable source document for anyone concerned with this unique event which has been running annually since 1946.



*Norman Linehan... PHOTO CREDIT JANE
MARCH*

**When this was written in 1982, Eric Myers was the jazz critic with the Sydney Morning Herald, and editor of Jazz Magazine.*

As an outsider who is too young to be aware of past Convention controversies, I was struck by references to those jazz conservatives and purists who were, at one time or another, opposed to any form of modern or progressive jazz. At the 1958 Convention John Sangster, Jim Somerville and Bob Cruickshanks played *It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing* (composed, incidentally, by Duke Ellington in 1932). They were informed (politely) that they weren't entirely welcome - their music was too modern.



The Port Jackson Jazz Band in 1945, including Bob Cruickshanks on the far left. Others L-R, are Ken Flannery (trumpet), standing Lynn Healey (drums), Keith Silver (banjo), Jack Parkes (leader, trombone), Kevin Ryder (piano)... PHOTO COURTESY BILL BOLDISTON'S SYDNEY'S JAZZ



John Sangster: "I got banned... I was barred. Up till then I thought I was a traddie, just a jazz musician"... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

"I got banned," says a bewildered Sangster. "I was barred. Up till then I thought I was a traddie, just a jazz musician." Similarly, at the 1952 Convention, Graeme Bell remembers that the big band he assembled caused some ill-feeling, even though the arrangements were no more revolutionary than those of the early Ellington and Luis Russell bands. Charlie Blott, Splinter Reeves and Stan Walker were even more audacious - they presented some out-and-out bop music. They "were greatly reviled by the mouldie fyggies." Bob Barnard also remembers this as the occasion when "the boppers got in."



Bob Barnard (cornet), pictured here in early 1952 with Frank Traynor (left, trombone) and Tich Bray (right, clarinet): Bob remembers the 1952 Convention as the occasion when "the boppers got in"... PHOTO COURTESY NIGEL BUESST COLLECTION

The bitterness generated by this incident is also reflected in the Bill Haesler interview. "Bill said he and the Committee were quite disgusted at what the bop group did, not only by the music itself but because that band had agreed to do something in the Eddie Condon mould and had broken their promise, which as well brought down on the Committee the wrath of the traditionalists."

How archaic this dispute now seems in 1982 when bebop (or bop, as it became known) is just as much a historical style as traditional jazz! Amongst a great deal of esoteric talk about the Conventions, there are many delightful quotations. Consider Bob Barnard's reaction to the playing of the American trumpeter Rex Stewart at the 1949 Convention: "Here's me, looking at this real black man playing the trumpet. Terrific!"



Bill Haesler (left) said he and the Committee were quite disgusted at what the bop group did... PHOTO COURTESY BILL HAESLER



Rex Stewart (front) with the Graeme Bell band in 1949, L-R, Johnny Rich, Roger Bell, Ade Monsborough, Pixie Roberts: Bob Barnard said, "Here's me, looking at this real black man playing the trumpet. Terrific!"

This booklet goes into a number of issues that will be of interest mainly to Convention insiders. Should some local musicians or bands be paid? How important is the Original Tunes Competition? Where should the Convention be held? What can the Committee do to ensure that the Convention survives in the future? Those who are interested in questions like these will find Norm Linehan's booklet essential reading.

The booklet, however, has wider relevance. The Australian Jazz Convention is an extremely significant cultural event in this country. Needless to say, it is entirely unrecognised outside a small circle of two or three thousand jazz fans. One has to agree wholeheartedly with John Sangster: "There is nothing like it anywhere in the world."