

BLACK ROOTS WHITE FLOWERS: A History Of Jazz in Australia, by Andrew Bisset. Published in 1979 by Golden Press Pty Ltd. ISBN 0 85558 680 X, 190 pp.

Reviewed by Ian Neil*

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L-R, Director of the Australian Music Centre James Murdoch, author Andrew Bisset & jazz musician Don Burrows at the launch of "Black Roots White Flowers"...
PHOTO CREDIT WALTER GLOVER ENCORE MAGAZINE

Here is the final paragraph of this informative and valuable book:

Jazz in Australia is here to stay. Its popularity may wax and wane but it will always have a hard core of adherents. Developments in music in the USA will continue to be its major influence, but more and more Australian musicians are thinking and composing for themselves (and finding a public who will let them do so) which gives Australian jazz a certain independent momentum of its own. This momentum can be traced, growing in strength, from the early vaudeville days, through big bands, to the present. Australia probably has as many jazz musicians per head of population as any other country, but their interests are not enslaved to current fashions overseas. Traditional jazz is proportionately stronger in Australia than in America, and has,

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in turn, influenced the traditional jazz of other countries. Modern and traditional Australian jazzmen are being recognised for their artistry at home and abroad. They have made the music their own, infusing it with a distinctive flavour best described as Australian.

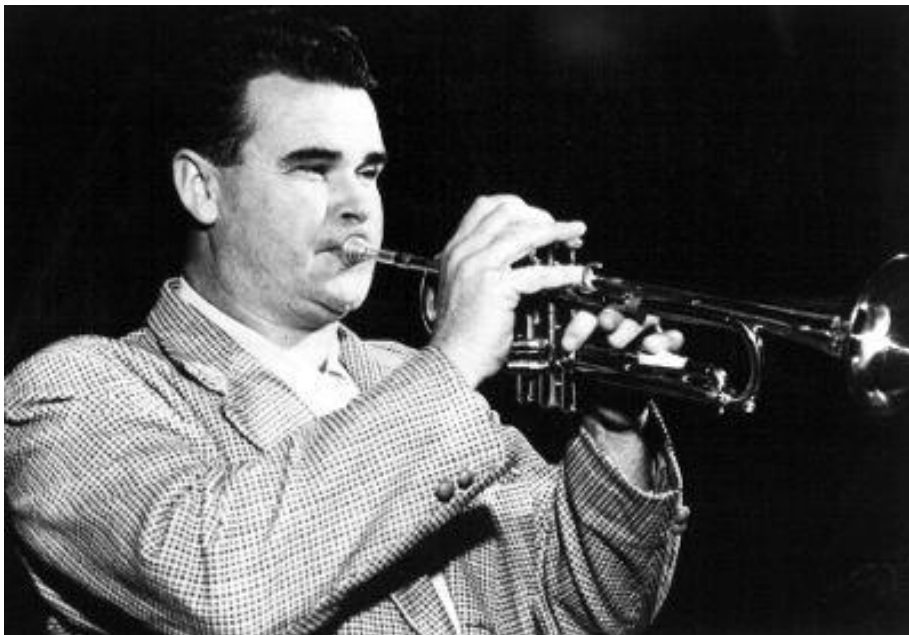
The past, present and future of jazz in Australia so succinctly proclaimed.

Indeed the conciseness of Andrew Bisset's book (182 pages – many illustrated) is reason for my only disappointment with it. Disappointment not with the writer's clear and matter-of-fact style, nor with the lucidity with which he documented the arrival, development, progress, maturation and national approbation of this stimulating form of musical expression. I am disappointed that the writer did not write more expansively about many of the players and personalities whose contributions he records; that he dealt so summarily with Melbourne's Storyville Club, and that he did not even mention the several Jazz Action Societies... entrepreneurial, educational and promotional organisations of great importance. The Storyville Club, which recently celebrated its 11th anniversary, has an impressive record of achievement deserving more than the nine lines accorded it. Its annual Jazz Party – now four years old – is a sociomusical event of real significance, certainly worthy of documentation in such a book as this.

The pleasures of *Black Roots White Flowers* are as various as they are numerous. The book is very attractively bound and presented, the paper of excellent quality, the type bold.

For anyone seriously interested in jazz the relationship becomes more meaningful and rewarding as the fan and the idiom becomes more intimately acquainted. At its best such a relationship commits the fan to a mature, consuming interest in this wonderful music and the remarkable musicians (past and present) who make it.

Andrew Bisset's book exists to satisfy the Australian jazz fan's devouring interest.



American trumpeter Lu Watters: we learn that his father was an Australian...

For being, as I have said, such a concise book it is very informative. I was surprised to learn that Lu Watters' father was an Australian; that Sir Lawrence Wackett, the distinguished aviator and onetime head of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, played the banjo in a band with Captain A H Cobby, the famous air ace, on drums when they were fellow officers in the Australian Flying Corps.

And I was surprised and delighted by the picture of Buddy Rich, aged six, at the Tivoli in 1925. With his parents he toured the Australian vaudeville circuit for 18 months.



Buddy Rich, aged six: with his parents he toured the Australian vaudeville circuit for 18 months...

It is especially gratifying that the noteworthy work of the late Raymond Hanson at the Sydney Conservatorium, long before there was a department of Jazz Studies there, is highlighted. It is good too that so much has been revealed of the work and influence of the greatly talented Frank Smith, also deceased, the first jazzman to benefit from Hanson's invaluable teaching.

In a foreword to the book Don Burrows says, "I am glad somebody has finally produced such a book as this. I think it is important." It is important. I too am glad - and grateful to Andrew Bisset.



Ian Neil: grateful to Andrew Bisset... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR