JAZZ DIASPORA: Music and Globalisation *by Bruce Johnson. Published by Routledge New York & London, 2020. ISBN 978-1-138-57755-8 (pbk).*

Reviewed by Ted Nettelbeck*

Professor Bruce Johnson is arguably Australia's foremost scholar of Australian jazz history. Throughout his long career as an academic, jazz trumpeter and jazz advocate he has produced an extensive list of publications, including *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz* (1987), the first and most impressive encyclopaedic account of the Australian jazz scene from its beginnings around 1917 up to the time of publication. His latest book, *Jazz Diaspora: Music and Globalisation* (2020), forms part of a publishing venture by British-based Routledge named *Transnational Studies in Jazz*.

Professor Bruce Johnson on trumpet… PHOTO CREDIT PETER COSGROVE

**Ted Nettelbeck is a professional jazz pianist and academic. He retired as paid staff recently at the University of Adelaide, where he is now Emeritus Professor in Psychology, and relocated to Melbourne.*

The book extends his previous challenges (Johnson, 2002, in press) to the predominant US-centric account of jazz history (denoted throughout as the "canonical model"). This model commonly "quarantines [jazz] music from broader fields of enquiry" (p 165), presenting jazz as a high art form, developed principally by African American musicians initially, but then exported world-wide (the "diaspora" in the book's title). Johnson considers this version restrictive, overly simplistic and therefore misleading. Instead, he proposes an alternative perspective that attributes important jazz developments to practices drawn from diverse regions widely located throughout the world and outside of the US.

An essential background to an understanding of the main issues underpinning what Johnson advances as a "counter-narrative" is provided by a lengthy Introduction, which *inter alia*, includes an excellent summary guide to the jazz diaspora; -- and, tangentially, a lively but brief account of Australian bandleader Frank Coughlan's (1904-1979) career.

Australian bandleader Frank Coughlan: a lively but brief account of his career (1904-1979) is included... PHOTO CREDIT MIKE SUTCLIFFE & OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

Seven chapters are arranged within four parts, the headings for which derive from an in-joke (first eight-second eight-bridge-last eight), describing the ubiquitous 32-bar structure (AABA) that emerged from Tin Pan Alley and has underpinned so many American songbook standards. The opening chapter, by far the longest and almost half of the total length (62 pages, all of Part 1), provides an historical chronological account of the global jazz diaspora. This account acknowledges, with some reservations, the canonical version that jazz emerged from New Orleans in the early 20th century and quickly spread "up the river" to Chicago and then to New York as

local musicians took advantage of favourable economic opportunities. However, Johnson's first point of departure from the canonical model is located back in these early times; he points out that an international "diaspora" of American performers aligned with the new music fashions was under way from close to the earliest emergence of jazz from New Orleans. Certainly, from 1917, the year when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band introduced jazz for dancing to New Yorkers and while World War I was still being waged in Europe, jazz quickly made its way to Europe. Johnson makes the point that some of the music that claimed jazz links – and was accepted as such -- would today be regarded as novelty noises within a vaudevillian tradition. Nonetheless, jazz was, by 1920, firmly established in France, Spain, Germany, Italy, the UK and Finland, despite opposition from the Catholic Church in some quarters – and the long-term ingrained prejudices of some from within the domain of Classical music.

1917 an important year, when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (above) introduced jazz for dancing to New Yorkers… *PHOTO COURTESY FRANK BRIGGS COLLECTION*

This rapid uptake of the newest form of popular dance music then spread during the decade that followed, to include several countries in South and Central America, to several regions within the USSR bloc, to some regions of Africa, to China, Japan and South East Asia, to India, the Philippines and to Australasia. The advent of the Great Depression near the end of the 20s actually served to speed this process, presumably because dancing to jazz and the emerging big swing bands provided relatively inexpensive entertainment, as did the popularity of the swing bands deployed to entertain American troops overseas after the US entered World War II and during the post-war period. Sundry technological developments during this time – cinema, radio, sheet music, recordings and the invention of the phonograph, the amplification of sound – assisted the spread of the music; and by the commencement of the Cold War era around 1946-47 jazz had become integral to US-Western Bloc

policy in confrontation with the Soviet Union-Eastern Bloc. This was not the beginning of the implication of jazz in political change; that had begun more than a decade earlier with the emergence of the Nazi and Communist States, which had tried, not always successfully, to oppose jazz activities within their areas of influence.

However, the later policies of the US State Department were highly successful in bringing jazz music to a very wide range of regions outside of the US by way of Willis Conover's daily *Voice of America* radio broadcasts into some 80 countries and by sponsoring tours by major jazz artists, like Gillespie, Armstrong, Brubeck, Goodman, Herman, Terry, among others. These activities then laid the foundations for two trends that have encouraged the expansion of local jazz scenes outside of the US. First, increasingly large numbers of skilled US-born jazz artists have left the US for substantial periods of time, settling and maintaining their careers outside of the US. And, second, was the development of what was to become a vast number of jazz festivals outside the US, a network which exists to this day and which supports not just the careers of US jazz musicians but also the careers of very substantial numbers of musicians based elsewhere.

American broadcaster Willis Conover (left) here pictured with Louis Armstrong: Conover's daily Voice of America radio broadcasts went into some 80 countries…
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKOWN

The main point that Johnson draws from this history is that, although it must obviously be the case that US-trained jazz musicians have served as models for local jazz musicians in these different regions, from the outset it was also the case that jazz practices in those regions drew too on local music traditions, resulting in somewhat unique regional differences.

Chapter 2 opens Part 2, providing a short account of how much of jazz discourse, criticism and infrastructure came to be developed outside of the US. In fact, writing

about jazz as a form of music deserving of serious consideration actually originated in Europe during the 1920s – principally in France, Belgium and the UK - well before a jazz literature had begun to appear within the US. As a consequence of this, many jazz infrastructures, like specialist magazines, collectors' clubs, annual jazz festivals and jazz education programs, were established within regions of the diaspora *prior* to their emergence in the US. As part of this account, Johnson makes passing reference to the Australian Jazz Convention, first organised in 1946 and run continuously for 74 years, making it the world's longest running jazz festival. And, although jazz education at secondary and tertiary levels is now widespread, principally following the models of the highly successful programs established in the US during the 1950s and 60s, Johnson points out that formal jazz education was already available in Finland around 1926 and that a conservatory-based program was established in Germany in 1928. And, as a consequence, many jazz musicians who developed their skills under local circumstances outside the US, came to establish significant careers in jazz.

This shot was taken in 1946, the year the Australian Jazz Convention began, and has been running continuously for 74 years, making it the world's longest running jazz festival. On the mudguard is Geoff Kitchen (clarinet), bonnet Frank Johnson (trumpet), standing Warwick 'Wocka' Dyer, behind are Ken Evans (cornet) and Bill Tope (banjo)... PHOTO COURTESY BILL BOLDISTON

Chapter 3 provides a more in-depth consideration of how local music forms have impacted broader jazz practices world-wide. Johnson initially emphasises the extent to which, until about the early 1960s, the principal focus of jazz musicians outside of the US was to model the examples of US jazz performance, particularly the language of bop, thereby establishing internationally recognised standard practices that tended to define jazz as a distinctive style of music, different from all other forms. Beyond this time, however, the past 50-60 years has witnessed the assimilation of specific local practices outside of the US, sometimes driven by conscious and determined rejection of US models but sometimes the consequence of distinctive regional styles, which have drawn on local folk and concert materials and on local instrumental traditions. Here, but expanded further in chapter 4, Johnson makes the point that there have been clear instances of localised jazz practices (Django Reinhardt provides an obvious example but Johnson identifies several others) that have proved influential internationally, without drawing to a significant extent on the US-based model. Chapter 4 also includes several challenges to the canonical assertion that jazz is a music form distinctive from all others with its “authenticity” established by its black African roots.

Guitarist Django Reinhardt provides a clear instance of localised jazz practices but Johnson identifies several others… PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

As part of this account, Johnson has provided thoughtful analyses of putatively distinctive diasporic styles, like “Manouche”, a term used initially to capture the music of Django Reinhardt and the Hot Club of France, British “Acid Jazz”, the “Nordic Sound”, “Afrobeat” and “Australian jazz”, as well as of the integration of

Brazilian and Cuban influences into US-based jazz forms. Importantly, he emphasises that the storyline of such developments is more complex than these terms may imply. Thus, such developments were frequently more the consequence of highly localised, and even highly individualised, circumstances, rather than broad national or metropolitan movements. In this regard, I found his ideas about a distinctive "Australian" jazz style particularly interesting. He appears to lend credence to the opinions of those English journalists reviewing the work of the Bell band, including Ade Monsbourgh, during the Bells' visits to Europe and the UK during the late 1940s-early 1950s, that their jazz had a distinctively Australian flavour. Nonetheless, he is sceptical about whether this tradition can be held to be manifest beyond the particular circumstances that applied at that time, particularly in Melbourne (where the Bells were then based), where a post-war modernist art movement rejected earlier conservatism while embracing revivalist jazz. This is not to deny the originality displayed by some later outstanding Australian musicians, like Frank Smith, Brian Brown, John Sangster or Bernie McGann; but I took Johnson's point to be that such instances do not necessarily translate into a national trend.

English journalists identified a distinctively Australian flavour in the music of the Graeme Bell band. Above is Ade Monsbourgh on valve trombone with the Bell band at the Leicester Square Jazz Club in London, 1948... PHOTO COURTESY GRAEME BELL & JAZZ MAGAZINE

Titled "Problematics", chapter 5 expands on doubts foreshadowed in chapter 2 about the adequacy of the canonical description of the diaspora to account for contradictions and inconsistencies applying to four important underpinnings to the canonical narrative: the role of sound recordings; the significance of national borders or geographical locations; the origins of jazz; and gender roles. The common theme

running through Johnson's considerations of these matters is that influential canonical histories have grossly oversimplified the actual complexities in these domains. Thus, in short, recordings have not necessarily supported common assumptions about how jazz musicians played on gigs; a historical description that assumes the relevance of certain national and geographical boundaries to style, like the emphasis traditionally given African traditions over European-American traditions, fails to provide a reliable account of local developments; and the consequence of the commonly held conviction, that "jazz has remained…an overwhelmingly male domain" (p 139) to neglect female contributions to jazz in most canonical accounts. In all such instances, Johnson avoids any dogmatic insistence that these perspectives are entirely wrong; instead, he points to a great many examples that illustrate that the actual story line is a great deal more complex – and much more interesting – that the canonical account has maintained.

Reviewer Ted Nettelbeck at the electric piano: he took the main message to be that , when attempting to improve understanding of what jazz is, and how it differs from other forms of music, jazz scholars should continue to seek to develop and apply alternative jazz-specific research methods to the currently mainstream canonical approach… PHOTO COURTESY MELBOURNE JAZZ CO-OPERATIVE

The final section comprises chapters 6 and 7. The former is perhaps the chapter intended to be most relevant to the field of New Jazz Studies, for which the book has been written. Johnson begins by emphasising that his argument is not that the canonical model should be abandoned. Rather, he insists that it is a narrative that should serve as "an essential reference point against which to construct a repertoire of alternative discourses" (p 156). This chapter posed the biggest challenge for me because, without the benefit of any formal advanced philosophical training, I was not

confident that I had thoroughly understood what Johnson sought to convey. However, I took the main message to be that, when attempting to improve understanding of what jazz is, and how it differs from other forms of music, jazz scholars should continue to seek to develop and apply alternative jazz-specific research methods to the currently mainstream canonical approach, which has been founded on the Western European art music paradigm and is therefore not necessarily the most appropriate means to progress knowledge and understanding.

Keith Jarrett's gyrations, his ecstatic shouts and groans: such behaviours have commonly been regarded as irrelevant – or distracting. Johnson allows the possibility that such activities could be essentials within the creative processes, particularly within an improvisational music like jazz, which in earlier forms was universally linked to dance...

The concluding chapter includes several suggestions for possible new research directions for jazz scholarship, generated by "extended mind theory", essentially the idea that engaging in music involves much more than "listening" as conventionally understood. Instead, Johnson proposes that both "mind" senses and "body" sensations interact together and with circumstances in the sonic environment, in complex ways that influence music generation and interpretation. This expansion to how one thinks about "cognition" does permit very diverse ways by which musical knowledge and understanding could be acquired within, for example, different cultures. It also provides a theoretical framework for exploration of the role of kinaesthetic feedback (foot tapping, finger clicking, facial expression, posture, gesture) in music making and appreciation.

Author Bruce Johnson: although Jazz Diaspora is doubtless intended primarily for an academic audience, the writing is generally accessible to a lay readership…

Such behaviours have commonly been regarded as irrelevant – or distracting (I'm thinking here of Keith Jarrett's gyrations, his ecstatic shouts and groans). Instead, Johnson allows the possibility that such activities could be essentials within the creative processes, particularly within an improvisational music like jazz, which in earlier forms was universally linked to dance. Johnson holds that there appears to be correlation between diasporic distance and the extent of engagement in overt physical behaviours while playing. At the very least this observation serves to underline the potential relevance of the diasporas; they have played a much more important role in jazz narrative than has been afforded by the canonical model. As

someone actively involved for a very long time in playing this wonderful music, I was immediately struck by the potential relevance of Johnson's ideas for improving understanding of extended cognition.

It has been a pleasure to review this book. The approach is scholarly -- and I have as a result occasionally found myself reaching for a dictionary; the text is supported by an extensive Bibliography, Filmography and Discography and, although I had little cause to test it, the Index appears to be professionally well produced. But, although a book doubtless intended primarily for an academic audience, the writing is generally accessible to a lay readership. Apart from the main message, which I found novel (it had never previously occurred to me to challenge the canonical version of jazz's history) but also convincing (because of the extent to which argument has been backed by evidence), I also found considerable enjoyment in some of the secondary asides, like fascinating anecdotes involving earlier Australian jazz figures; and the way in which the jazz diaspora has secured the primacy of the saxophone and the now-ubiquitous, single-person trap drum kit within jazz practice. I recommend the book unreservedly to everyone interested in the history of how jazz music has evolved during its first 100 years; you will find much on which to reflect.

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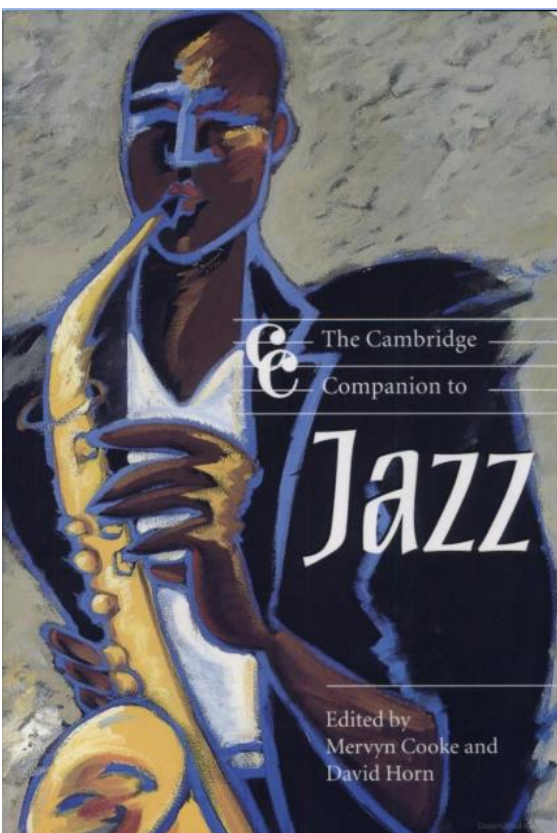

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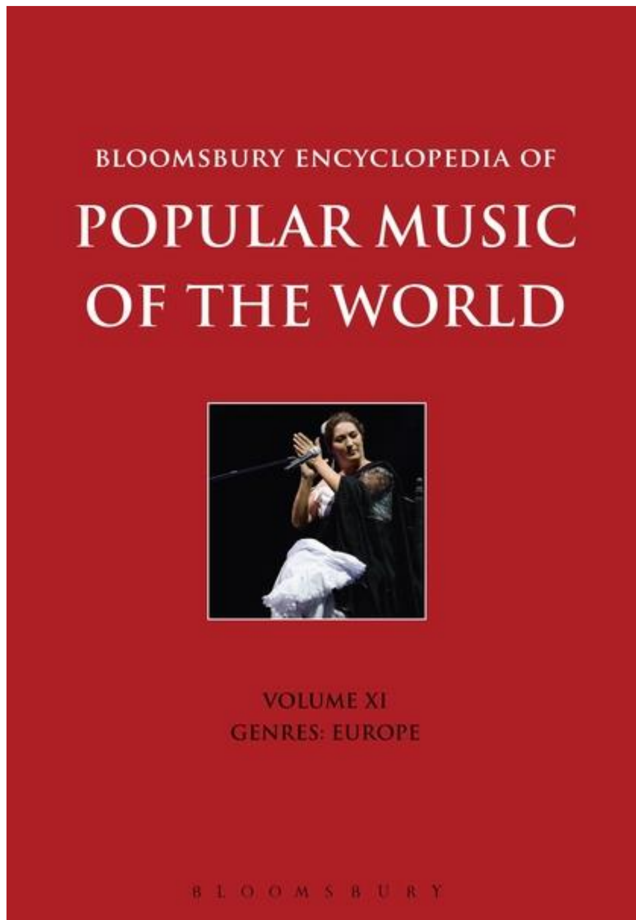

Editor's Note: *A short review of "Jazz Diaspora: Music and Globalisation", written by Eric Myers and published in "The Australian" on January 30, 2021, appears on this site at this link https://ericmyersjazz.com/theaustralian-2015-19*