

IF THOSE WALLS COULD ONLY SPEAK

by Harry Stein*

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If those walls at 104 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne, where Australia's first Jazz Convention was held in 1946, could only speak! What would they say? It would have to be a mixture of vaudeville tunes, revival hymns, socialist politics and hot jazz licks.

The hall was built as a vaudeville theatre in 1874 but before the turn of the century became the home of the first Pentecostal Assembly of Australia. Every weekday and Sunday there were prayer meetings, while on Thursdays they held a "tarrying



The Eureka Hall, photographed in October, 1985: its official name was the Betty Sutherland Memorial Hall...

**In 1986 the late Harry Stein was a Sydney journalist. In the 1940s, he was the President of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society, under whose auspices the first Australian Jazz Convention was held in 1946. He was also President of the Convention. He was the initiator of the Graeme Bell Band's first trip to Europe in 1947 and managed the band until the end of the first World Youth Festival in Prague.*

meeting” to allow the congregation to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What else could they name it but the Good News Hall! A press article of the day delightfully described their gatherings as “Holy Rolling at the Good News Hall”.

When the British socialist Tom Mann arrived in Australia in 1902, he was banned from speaking in every public hall. The solution: collections at free speech meetings which his socialist supporters put towards buying the Good News Hall. They renamed it The People’s Hall.

In the 1940s, the People’s Hall was leased to the Eureka Youth League (EYL) who renamed it the Betty Sutherland Memorial Hall, after a League executive member killed in an accident. It was Betty’s sister Pat Little, later Miller, who at a time of scarce resources during the war discovered the hall, arranged the lease and supervised its restoration.

In 1945 it became the home of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society and in 1946 the venue of Australia’s first Jazz Convention, now the oldest jazz convention in the world. It’s also the place where Graeme Bell ran a Saturday night jazz cabaret as the Uptown Club.



The Southern Jazz Group, performing at the first Australian Jazz Convention in 1946. L-R, Dave Dallwitz (trombone), Bill Munro (trumpet), Bruce Gray (clarinet)...PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

In 1947 it became the centre of the campaign to raise money to send the Bell Band to the first World Youth Festival for Peace and Friendship in Prague to represent the Eureka Youth League.

During these years the hall* became an important, mainly traditional, jazz centre that gave many aspiring jazz musicians and jazz activities a home. What went on in that hall would soon echo around Australia and in fact many other parts of the world.

The gestation period for the birth of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society started in 1944 at an army camp in Cowra. I was a footslogger and in came Ken Brentnall, a great trumpet player; he worked with Nancy Stuart, until her death recently. At 60, Ken is first cab off the rank to play with the Glenn Miller Band when it visits Australia.

Another arrival was David Ackerman, an outstanding sax and clarinet player, who came to Australia in 1939 with the Americanadians. There was also Doc Doyle, a first class versatile sax, clarinet, fiddle and trumpet player. We had two drummers, myself and Joe Compara. We jammed and played for concerts, and the group illustrated the talks I gave on the social background of jazz. They went on to join army entertainment units. I went to an engineering unit and ended up in hospital for a major operation.



In came Ken Brentnall, a great trumpet player... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

**Everyone referred to it as the Eureka Hall, although its official name was the Betty Sutherland Memorial Hall.*

After recovery, and out of the army, I joined the staff of the Eureka Youth League, determined to carry on what had begun in Cowra. That led to the formation of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society. The aims set out in the application form were:

To encourage the appreciation and playing of hot jazz. To study its true history and destroy its myths. To publish material to help these aims.

A strong influence on my attitude to jazz was the writing of Ian Lang, who, in *The Background of the Blues*, wrote:

*There is more than one kind of jazz and the kind I am concerned with is not the article of commerce, pumped out on the airwaves at all times of the day and night in America and Europe. Mass production jazz is big business, a complicated vested interest on which depend the fortunes or livelihoods of music publishers, song manufacturers, etc. The other jazz is music of the people, not quite the same as popular music and money making, while sometimes incidental to, is never the sole purpose of its production.**

There were Sunday afternoon jam sessions and monthly jazz recitals on a Sunday night. *Music Maker*, September 1946, reviewed a Sunday September 1st recital. The program included Joe Washington (Spanish guitar), Graeme Bell, Vivian Roberts (blues singer), Dave Price presenting records of Art Hodes, and George Tack on recordings of Ade Monsborough. "For a small fee, a member is entitled to a free jazz recital per month (supper included). Viv Roberts and Harry Stein are respective Secretary and President."

Some of the leading League members and suburban EYL branches also showed interest in jazz. Audrey Blake, the EYL Secretary, had, and still has at the age of 69, a



EYL Secretary Audrey Blake...PHOTO COURTESY SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

*From *Tempo*, April 1944.

keen interest in jazz. Rifka Brilliant, when she first became interested in jazz during her Melbourne University days, organised the EYL Peppercorn Tree Club in Elsternwick, which had jazz as one of its main recreational activities.

The Prahran Branch for some months ran a weekly modern dance with the Bell Band, and branches in Brunswick and Caulfield had record sessions and jazz concerts.

In Sydney, from 1946 to 1952, Doc Doyle arranged jazz groups for a Sunday night EYL jazz dance and jam session in its Market Street club rooms. Doc played six nights a week at the Carl Thomas Night Club, but Sundays were reserved for the EYL. Some of the musicians were Sid Edelman (reeds), Bob Dyer (tenor), Jack Craber (bass), Don Heapy (sax), and later Mick Fowler (drums) and the Fowl House Five. Doc says they finished up with so many musicians that they split the group in half and started another night with the Bondi Junction branch of the League.



Drummer Mick Fowler pictured in 1960: he and his group the Fowl House Five were amongst so many musicians that they split the group in half and started another night with the Bondi Junction branch of the League... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

The FYL Hot Jazz Society attracted large audiences. Today, you find traditional jazz club members well on in years, but most of our members were young workers, students, musicians, artists and writers. Among musicians associated with the society were Graeme Bell, Ade Monsborough, Tony Newstead, Frank Johnson, Doc Willis, Geoff Kitchen, George Tack and lots more.

*Young students of radical tendencies were seldom found in the drawing classes of the National Gallery School where Wheeler and McInnes held sway, or in the expensive day classes of the George Bell School. One was more likely to find them in the life classes of the Victorian Artists Society, among the shelves of Gino Nibbi's Leonardo Bookshop, Ristie's coffee shop, and the incipient jazz clubs, on the fringes of the Eureka Youth League and, especially, deep in the bowels of the Public Library.**

The EYL also ran its own art classes at Queensberry Street; many of these young art students were also in the Eureka Hot Jazz Society. The hall was ideal for the Society and the Convention. It could seat 300, had a gallery, high class amplification and recording equipment, and a cafe and catering facilities.

The EYL played an important part in backing up the first Australian Jazz Convention as it was under the auspices of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society. The EYL also provided all of its facilities and a place for the Convention Committee to hold its meetings. The members were made up of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society, the Jazz Appreciation Society, the Geelong Jazz Lovers Society and a moving feast of individuals including Graeme Bell, and Doc Willis.

Graeme Bell and I kept things moving between meeting. I was President of the Convention. The Convention put jazz on the pages of the daily press:

*About 60 people gathered at a dinner in North Melbourne last night to mark the opening of the Convention. As Harry Stein of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society, sponsors of the Convention, said, "This makes jazz history."****

Then this strange report:

*Under auspices of the EYL Hot Jazz Society delegates and bands equipped with what are presumably musical instruments have assembled in Melbourne for the nation's first Jazz Convention.****

The organising of the first Australian Jazz Convention was a most important milestone in the development of jazz in Australia. It gave jazz musicians and devotees a focal point for their continuing involvement in jazz, no matter what changes there were in music fashions. There were better days to come, for at Christmas the Jazz Convention would be on again.

**Rebels and Precursors*, Richard Haese, 1981, p 16.

***Melbourne Herald*, 27/12/46.

****Melbourne Sun*, 27/12/46.

**AUSTRALIA'S
FIRST JAZZ CONVENTION
27th-30th December, 1946
EUREKA HALL, 104 QUEENSBERRY ST., NTH. MELB.**



Featuring

- * SOUTHERN JAZZ GROUP, S.A.
- * BARRELHOUSE FOUR, TAS.
- * PORT JACKSON JAZZ BAND, N.S.W.
- * GEELONG JAZZ GROUP, VIC.

Melbourne

- * GRAEME BELL
- * TONY NEWSTEAD
- * DOC. WILLIS
- * ADE MONSBROUGH
- * FRANKIE JOHNSON
- * RON WEBBER

FOUR DAYS OF HOT JAZZ

Friday, 27th Dec.—10.30 a.m.-10.30 p.m.: Talks, Recitals, Jam Sessions
 Saturday, 28th Dec.—2 p.m.: Riverboat Trip; 8 p.m.: Visit to Uptown Club
 Sunday, 29th Dec.—2 p.m.-10.30 p.m.: Talks, Recitals, Jam Sessions
 Monday, 30th Dec.—10.30 a.m.: Exclusive Records by W. H. Miller.
 7.30 p.m.: Public Concert featuring all bands

Registration Fee for Four Days, 2/-. Official "Angry Penguins" Souvenir Programme obtainable from booksellers and at Eureka Hall. Price 1/-.

NEW ORLEANS RIVERBOAT TRIP

All Aboard M.V. MISSISSIPPI 2 p.m., SAT, 28th DEC.

Featuring Graeme Bell's Dixieland Band and Interstate Groups

Tickets obtainable from R. CLEMENS Music House, 31 Little Collins St. Melbourne

PUBLIC JAZZ CONCERT

7.30 p.m., MONDAY, 30th DECEMBER

* 10 Interstate and Local Bands

Admission, 3/3 (inc. tax), payable at door.

Under auspices Eureka Hot Jazz Society. Telephone: FJ2947

Poster for the first Australian Jazz Convention, 1946...

It became not only the oldest jazz convention in the world, but its significance was that it was entirely non-commercial and organised in a most democratic way by revolving voluntary committees.

Sometime after the Convention, I rang Graeme to ask if he was interested in taking the band to the world's first Youth Festival in Prague, representing the EYL. When he picked himself off the floor, he said he would take the band anywhere. It was a shock because a traditional jazz group had never left Australia before. In Melbourne a committee representing the EYL, the Bell Band, the Eureka Hot Jazz Society and jazz enthusiasts was formed to raise money.

Artists gave over 60 paintings and sketches which were auctioned off at the Victorian Artists Society. Here also prominent writers including Vance Palmer autographed

their works which together with cherished books donated by others were auctioned on another night. There was also a record auction and jazz concerts, dances and a battle of jazz during a river trip. There were collections at factory gate meetings and donations from trade unions and the All-Slav Congress. A thousand people came to a combined meeting-concert at the Princess Theatre.

The Committee appealed for support on the basis that it was better for youth to meet in concert halls and on sporting fields than on the battlefields . . . it is a sentiment that is still as valid forty years later.

Concerts and jazz cabaret as well as jazz cruises were also held in Sydney. The band made two trips for these events. While most of the Sydney program was arranged by the EYL, the concert at the Assembly Hall was arranged by Ron Wills, Mel Langdon, Eric Dunn and Dick McLaren. One concert was organised by the Women's Auxiliary of the Ironworkers' Union.



The Graeme Bell band in 1947...PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

I went ahead of the band to Sydney and my first job was to fix a time with Ron Wills at EMI for the famous Bell Band Regal Zonophone recording date that I had the pleasure of listening to as it was recorded. We had to choose a day and time which fitted in with the band's itinerary.

Despite all of these herculean efforts, only enough money was raised for one-way tickets for the band and my return passage, all our expenses in the UK and Paris, train fares to Prague, Festival fees and accommodation during the Festival. Graeme recently reminded me that at a later stage in the campaign, Ade Monsborough had invited Jack Varney to join the band on the trip, which would only be possible if he paid his own way. The band members obviously also had to raise additional money for their personal needs as they knew they would be away for some time.

The fares were 75 pounds each. Contrast this with the charge of one and eleven pence to get into “The Story of Jazz Concert” to raise money for the trip. On the program for the above concert were the Bell Band, New Orleans Trio and Tony Newstead’s Band. There was also the problem that it was not long after the end of the war and civilian passages to Europe were even harder to get than the proverbial rich man getting into heaven. After frantic efforts, I was able to tee up passages on a converted troopship, the S.S. Asturias. This meant accepting hammocks to sleep in, queueing for meals and washing our own dishes. Well, we were young, the risks were taken and the rest is history!

I purchased the tickets using money raised by the Fund. Fifteen of us, including Graeme’s then wife, Elizabeth, left Australia, the rest coming from a League group helping to build a youth railway in Yugoslavia and Australian students from Oxford and Cambridge. We turned difficulties into opportunities on the Asturias and elected sub-committees for sports, entertainments and discussions. Concerts, balls and even banquets with printed menus were arranged ex-officio. We provided a library, a mending service and even had a souvenir printed with a colour print of the Asturias. First Class was dead, but Steerage jumped every night.



The Graeme Bell band recording in Prague, 1947... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

The band made an enormous impact at the Festival. Their recordings like *Walking Wenceslas Square* and *Czechoslovak Journey* could be heard in the streets of Prague over the extensive loudspeaker system. They recorded 14 sides for Supraphon which were broadcast over the radio. As well as managing the band up to the end of the Festival, I was leader of the 43-strong Australian delegation.

I had hoped to be able to arrange tours of the band to other countries after the Festival; that was not on, but it was not from want of trying. The band, through a jazz connection, arranged a recording session and four and a half months’ engagements

throughout Czechoslovakia. Mel Langdon, having left the Navy, travelled with our group at his own expense, and took over as manager of the band after the Festival. As we all know, he did a first class job for the band in Europe and when they returned home. In fact, we left him behind in London to tee up post-Czechoslovakian engagements. He came on to the Festival at a later stage.



Mel Langdon, here pictured in 1960, took over as manager of the Bell band after the 1947 Festival... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

At a recent Sydney Jazz Club picnic, I was asked to pick a raffle winner. When it was announced that I had been the initiator for the Bell Band's first trip to Europe, someone shouted out, "But you only provided one-way tickets." My reply was, "But look what it led to! Sure, the band had both hard and wonderful times, but look at the way they helped to revive traditional jazz in the UK, the recording dates, the many tours!"

It was their international reputation that led to the ABC offering them a contract and to the band becoming a household name in Australia. Graeme Bell says that the two things that made his band were the Regal Zonophone recordings and their first European tour. They also helped to develop a greater interest in jazz in the Eastern European countries through the young people who heard them at the Festival.

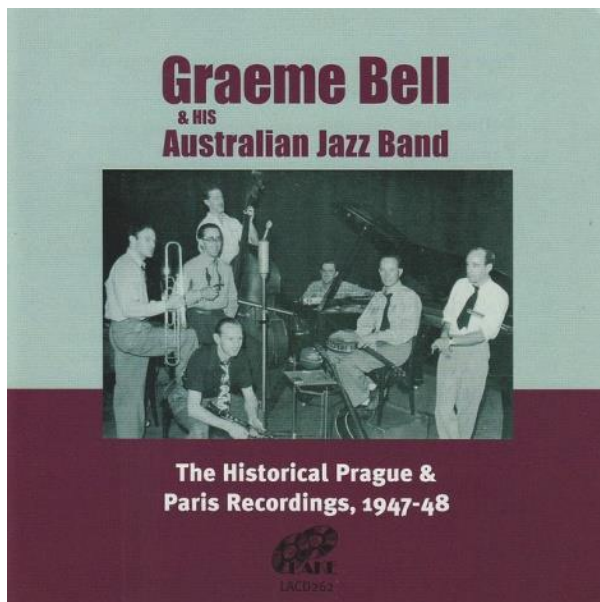


The Graeme Bell composition Smoky Mokes on Regal Zonophone...

Josef Skvorecky, a Czech writer and musician, now living in Toronto, Canada, wrote in his book, *Brass Saxophone*:

After the war ended, we heard the Graeme Bell Band perform at a Youth Festival in Prague. Soon there was a proliferation of Louisiana sounding names like “Czechoslovakian Washboard Beaters”, “Prague City Stompers”, “Memphis Dixie” and dozens of others.

One of my last jobs for the band was to tee up a concert date with Django Reinhardt at the Hot Club of France in Paris. There he was, with a glass of wine, a French cigarette and minus a few fingers. To my surprise, it was a real club not just a record label.



Album cover for the Bell band’s Prague & Paris recordings 1947-48...

A year later, when the band came back to Australia, the Cold War was well under way. They had to choose between a non-commercial tour with the EYL who had sent them to the Festival, or a blossoming professional career.

In a long ABC *Broadband* program in October, 1980 Graeme Bell explained that because of those who had contributed money and helped them go overseas, the decision to break was an agonising one, but they really had no option but to follow their careers. He was grilled by the ABC about their political connections as any link with the EYL would have meant no ABC contract.

The EYL also did not take into account the impact of the Cold War and the fact that, apart from Graeme, all the members of the band were apolitical. In preparing this article, I showed Audrey Blake what I intended to write about the break between the EYL and the band. Her comment was: "Looking back, I was wrong to take such a hard stand on Graeme Bell and his band as I did. In the light of the Cold War their decision was understandable and we should have understood and accepted it."

It was by no means the end of the involvement of the EYL and the Left in jazz, and my friendship with Graeme went on. The interest shown in jazz by the EYL and many leading young Communist Party members alarmed some conservative forces in the party who were all at sea about jazz.

The late Paul Mortier, a cultural spokesman, called a meeting of young Communist Party (CP) members in New South Wales during the 1950s to point out the "decadence" of jazz. This was followed by Audrey Blake writing an article in the *Communist Review* that agreed with Mortier. She also said to me recently: "Sometimes reading articles of mine from the thirties and forties I have to wince, but only the one on jazz written after Paul's lecture to the young cadres makes me feel really bad!"



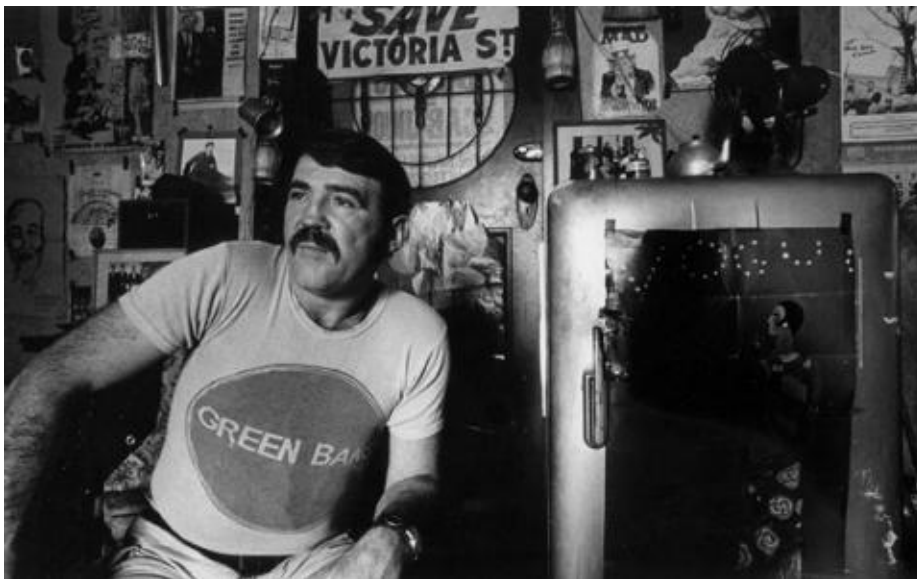
Cultural spokesman Paul Mortier: an arch-conservative as far as jazz was concerned...

Here was Paul Mortier, a revolutionary in his politics, but an arch-conservative as far as jazz was concerned, and finding himself in the same stream as the then ultra-conservative Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, J S McDonald, who wrote:

*Decadence in Art was the product of a generation revelling in jazz and jitterbugging.**

The Conservatives tried to impose their dogmatic approach to jazz on us, but they failed as our involvement kept rolling on.

In 1950, the National Committee of the EYL shifted to Sydney and Sunday nights at the EYL Hall in Market Street were happy jazz occasions. Mick Fowler was prominent on these nights. Don Heapy, the League Secretary, also sat in on sax.



Mick Fowler, in 1973... PHOTO COURTESY GREEN LEFT.ORG

Later, the EYL would send Mick Fowler and the Southern Cross Jazz Band to the World Youth Festival in Moscow. This would mean that the EYL would have been the only organisation in Australia ever to have sent a traditional jazz group, let alone two, to Europe.

Mick is now playing his drums in a higher region. Mick was a Communist and a member of the EYL and the Seamen's Union. In Victoria Street, Potts Point, there is a plaque celebrating Mick's fight to save Victoria Street from commercial development. He was the last person evicted by the developers.

In 1951 I began to edit a new weekly youth paper called *Challenge*. Its purpose was to help to organise an Australian Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship in 1952. It carried a lot of jazz material, including an interview with Duke Ellington by Chuck Fine, our Canadian correspondent.

* *Present Day Art*, 1940, J S McDonald.

One of the events of the carnival was a jazz concert at the Bankstown Theatre. The line-up included the Riverside Jazz Band, the Horrie Dargie Quintet and Bob Gibson's Band. *Challenge* would later engage the Harbourside Jazz Group for its own Carnival night.

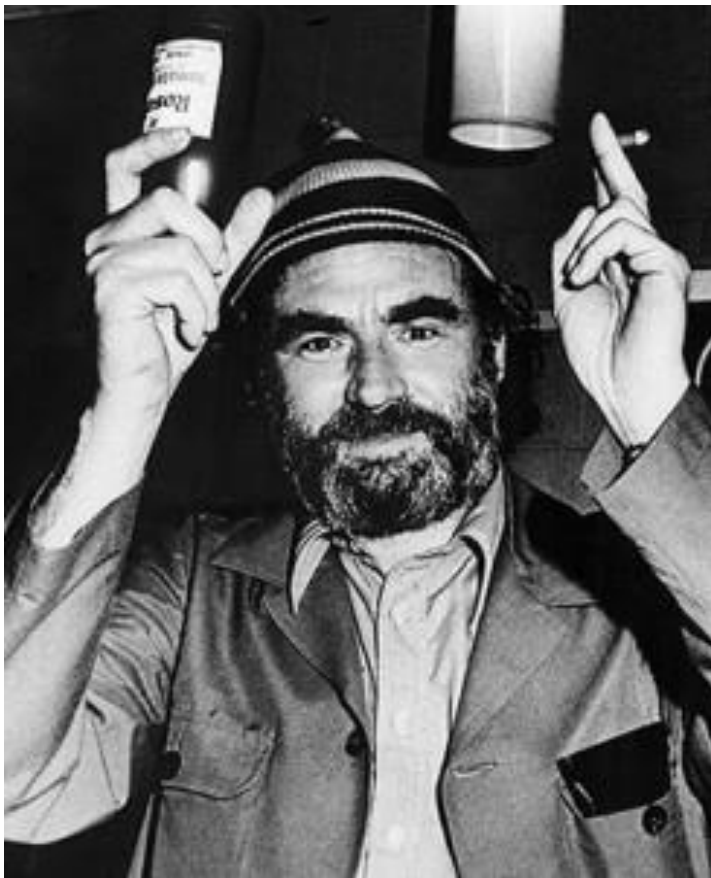


A later shot of the Horrie Dargie Quintet on GTV9 in 1959... PHOTO COURTESY ENCORE MAGAZINE

We also organised a *Challenge* “history of jazz” evening at the Seamen’s Club. It was compered by Sid Miller with a program of rare records, eg blues, spirituals, worksongs and jazz of the day. When a reader complained that there were too many articles on jazz which “is used by the Americans as a drug on the minds of the people”, I published the letter and a long reply from Ernie Honeyman, who wrote that “jazz music is the gift of the common people of America, product of their hands and minds, poignant comment on the condition of their lives”. At 71, Ernie, who has a superb record collection, is still a keen follower of jazz. If I was ever asked to name a list of favourite books, *Black Roots*, *White Flowers* by Andrew Bisset would be near the top. I have only one bone to pick with him. When Andrew Bisset looked for the reason for the involvement of the EYL with jazz it had to be entirely ideological. He wrote:

The Eureka Youth League, which began in 1941, was a left-wing society with Communist affiliations which took up jazz as a cause of the proletariat. They thought jazz was the negroes' protest at the conditions of life and felt it could be related to Australian working class traditions.

I have set out to show in this article quite clearly that in the left-wing movement of the time there were those who liked jazz and promoted it, and those who thought it was decadent. One of the most prominent supporters for jazz was the late historian, Professor Ian Turner. There certainly was no agreed set-pack left-wing ideological position about jazz, and I have never heard anybody talk about jazz as a cause of the proletariat.



The late historian Professor Ian Turner: one of the most prominent supporters for jazz... PHOTO COURTESY MONASH UNIVERSITY

I was also very interested in the social significance of jazz and gave illustrated talks on the subject while in the Army, at the first Australian Jazz Convention, and over the ABC swing session hosted by Ellis Blain.

Looking back at my notes, now 40 years old, I said: “Although jazz is not many years old, its roots go back to the American people’s music of many years ago. Jazz first became recognisable in and around New Orleans at the end of the 19th Century. Jazz developed from plantation songs, early vaudeville tunes, New Orleans dance tunes, spirituals, blues, work songs and march tunes of the Spanish-American and Civil Wars.



The ABC's Ellis Blain...

“The ‘blues’ arose in the post-Civil War period. None were written down until the end of the 19th Century.

“The Negro is no longer a slave, nor is he entirely free. He works in the mills and sings work songs like *Good Bye Bag, I Know You’re Gone* as he empties the rice bags. He works on the railroad and, as he helps raise the rails, joins in a chorus of *Lift ‘em Up Joe*. He carts coal around New Orleans singing *The Coal Cart Blues*. He fights against discrimination with Jim Crow Blues:

This here town’s a Jim Crow town. Gonna pack my things and get out of this town.

“He travels north and lives in areas the whites have deserted — naturally he had to pay double rent:

Landlord called for 40 dollars — ain’t got a cent — got the rent house blues.

“He lives in tenements that when they catch fire the brigade takes its time in arriving: *If your house catches on fire ‘n’ there ain’t no water roun’*. *Throw your trunks out the window and let the shack burn down.*

“Paul Whiteman once wrote:

Jazz is the spirit of a new country. It catches the underlying motif of a continent and period, moulding it into a form which expresses the fundamental emotion of the people, the place and time so authentically that it is immediately recognisable.

“It is the last part of the statement which is important, for what is recognisable in jazz is essentially American; the blues arises from the Negro spirituals, the unity of African rhythms and the Negroid interpretation of Christianity. New Orleans jazz was influenced by the march and the way the common people joined in to develop a new way of playing music. The Chicago hard jazz, harsh and jagged, was a reflection of Chicago itself.

“New York, the commercial centre of America, set an orchestral style for jazz. Tin Pan Alley was in New York and put commercial jazz on the map, not only in America but the whole world.”



Paul Whiteman (above) once wrote “Jazz is the spirit of a new country. It catches the underlying motif of a continent and period...” PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

I would have been a significant influence on the Left in the early period for the promotion of jazz. My interest in jazz goes back to 1934 from listening to records. By 1935, I was taking drum lessons from the legendary Benny Featherstone. Seeing and hearing him playing drums was my first personal jazz explosion. He followed his extraordinary drumming by playing hot solos on most of the other instruments in the band. This was with Art Chapman’s New Embassy Jazz Band.



Art Chapman's New Embassy Jazz Band, pictured in 1934: Harry was taking drum lessons from the legendary Benny Featherstone... PHOTO COURTESY NIGEL BUESST COLLECTION

The second explosion was hearing Cy Watts on piano and Haydn Britten on sax at a Workers' Sports Federation Dance at Port Melbourne in 1936. They were playing the sort of jazz I had only heard on records. From then on we were a group, until I went overseas in late 1937. We played every Sunday at a Young Communist League dance at the Druids Hall in Carlton as well as other gigs. We joined up again when I returned to Melbourne in 1939.

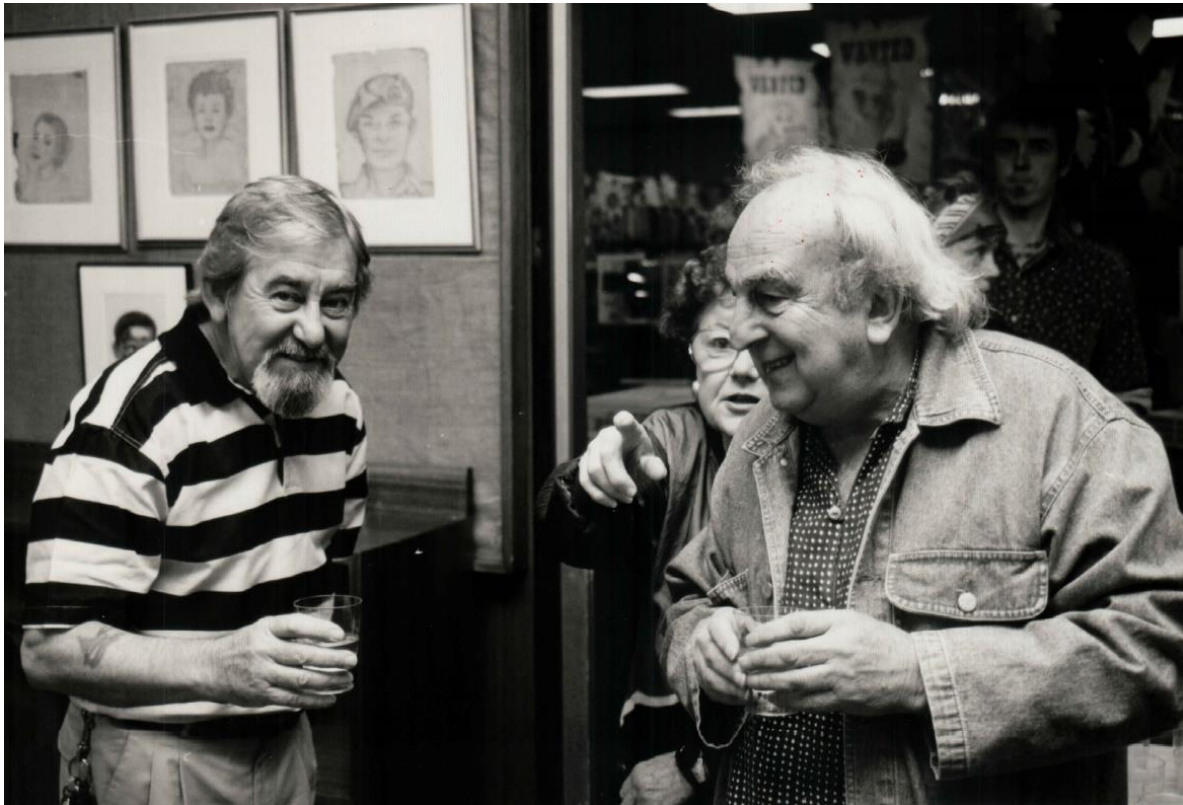
When I asked Graeme Bell for his estimation of Cy and Haydn, he said that Cy was the pianist that he most looked up to in Melbourne, with Haydn a very underrated jazz musician. Cy, who was a self-taught pianist, took up trombone when he was in the RAAF. He played piano with Roger Bell's Band at Saturday night engagements at the Heidelberg Town Hall. Cy played trombone with Graeme at the Uptown Club and at the first Jazz Convention.



Graeme Bell in 1948: the pianist he most looked up to in Melbourne was Cy Watts...

He recorded on the Jazzart Label as Cy Watts and His Jazzmen in 1950, 1951 and 1952. *Jazz Notes*, May 1944, wrote: “Haydn Britten can be heard playing some good alto in Jim Buchan’s Sextette at the Coconut Grove every Sunday afternoon.”

My old mate Doc Willis, speaks about jazz as a people’s music that came from the lower end of the scale and that is a definition I like.



Harry Stein (right), pictured with his old friend the trombonist Doc Willis, who spoke of jazz as a people’s music that came from the lower end of the scale... PHOTO COURTESY HARRY STEIN

At a later stage, in the USA, Max Roach helped to write and record *Freedom Now Suite* featuring Abbey Lincoln and Coleman Hawkins. This was at a time when the black man’s struggle for freedom was at a high pitch. This is akin to Aboriginal rock groups like Us Mob and No Fixed Address who today link their struggles with the music they compose and play.

Duke Ellington also wrote *King Fit the Battle of Alabam* as one of the songs he composed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the emancipation proclamation. I remember seeing and hearing the Negro singer Nina Mae McKinney at the Melbourne Tivoli in 1937, when she stood on a drum and sang, “What did I do to be so black and blue, my only sin is my skin.”



Album cover of Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite, featuring Abbey Lincoln and Coleman Hawkins...

We certainly knew of the major role of the American Negroes in the development of jazz and how it related to their lives and problems, and we sympathised with their struggles but never mechanically related it to Australian conditions. That's a myth. In Australia, jazz has been radical in the sense of musicians going against the commercial stream to play it and in the new way they saw the musical language. Even when the work available was only in dance bands, musicians in Melbourne who liked jazz would get along to Fawkner Park Kiosk on a Sunday to hear Bob Tough on sax and Benny Featherstone on trumpet and then sit in. I was a regular visitor, as were the Bells and Ade Monsborough.



Benny Featherstone (above) and Frank Coughlan (below) according to Harry, without a shadow of doubt, were the Fathers of Jazz in Australia...



Frank Coughlan... PHOTO COURTESY BILL HAESLER

I also heard many times the other legendary jazzman, Frank Coughlan, playing trombone or leading the band in Melbourne or at Sydney's Trocadero. Bisset got it right. Benny Featherstone and Frank Coughlan, without a shadow of doubt, were the Fathers of Jazz in Australia.

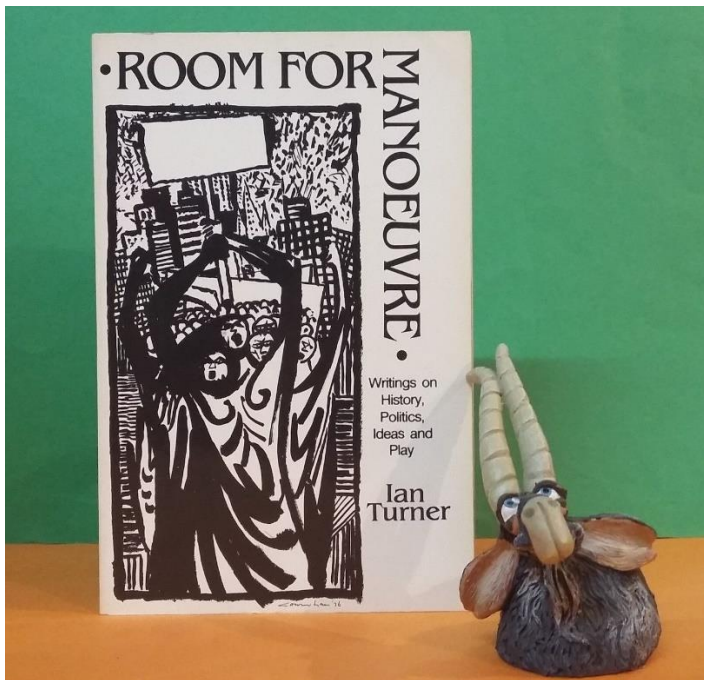
The best drummer I ever came across was Billy Hyde. He was influenced by Benny Featherstone, but he developed his technique a lot further. He played at many places with Bob Gibson and had an afternoon job at the coffee lounge under the Manchester Unity Building in Collins Street, Melbourne.

Then, of course, there was the tenor player, Bob Tough, and his brother Ernie on bass. They lived in the next street to me in Carlton.

I would add to the list Larry Keane, sax, and a great trumpet player, Freddy Thomas. Last, but not least, Bernice Lynch, a beautiful 18-year-old redhead who played guitar with Art Chapman's New Embassy Jazz Band. A bit older than 18 today, she still plays around the Sydney jazz pub scene.

It is also true that contemporary artists in battle against the old art establishment recognised a kindred spirit in jazz and helped it in many ways. They held their art exhibition at the Hotel Australia because the art establishment refused to give them space. Professor Ian Turner summed things up well when he wrote:

*Paintings by Tucker and Nolan and Bergner and Noel Counihan and John Perceval provided the backdrop for Graeme and Roger Bell and Ade Monsbourgh playing the first live jazz I ever heard at the Contemporary Art Society's Exhibition at the Hotel Australia in 1941. I felt then as I still believe that there is no barrier, indeed that there is a necessary communion, between what is innovatory and exciting in arts and in politics. Both offer new ways of seeing the world, new ways of living: the individualism and anarchism of radical art are needed to temper the collectivism and authoritarianism of radical politics.**



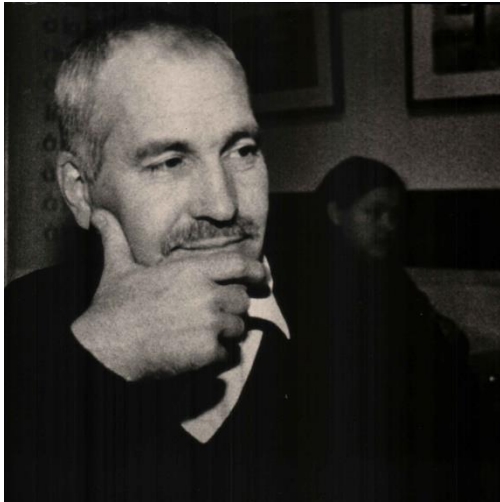
We also saw evidence of this relationship when the *Angry Penguins* literary magazine, closely identified with contemporary artists, published the official program for the first Jazz Convention. They also ran many articles on jazz in the magazine. This could also be seen in the help artists gave to assist in raising money for the Bell Band to go the Festival. Graeme Bell was also an artist and so was Dave Dallwitz who broke away from the art establishment and became the first President of the South Australian Contemporary Art Society.

The EYL was a vital socialist youth organisation, heavily involved in political and industrial activity. Jazz was only a part of its recreational program. The list also included sports, art classes, creative and folk dancing, Australian bush songs, camping and hiking.

Some of us on the Left liked jazz for itself; we also recognised its radical qualities, saw it as a people's music, wanted to see the development of an Australian type of jazz and wanted to encourage its fight for recognition. That battle is far from over. I became a jazz groupie when I was fourteen and now, at sixty-seven, am worse than ever, with an interest that covers the whole spectrum of jazz.

*From "My Long March", in *Room For Manoeuvre*, Ian Turner, 1982, p. 110.

A COMMENT by Bruce Johnson



Bruce Johnson: the traditional jazz movement in Australia from the '40s had an affinity with radical elements in our culture... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

The editor of *Jazz*, Eric Myers, has asked me to comment on the foregoing article. To place it in context: in an appreciation of Graeme Bell (*Jazz*, Winter/Spring 1984) I suggested that the traditional jazz movement in Australia from the '40s had an affinity with radical elements in our culture, expressing itself particularly in political and artistic alliances; I made it clear that most musicians were the pursued rather than the pursuers in this courtship, though this was not invariably so.

Jack Mitchell replied to this article in *Jazz*, Winter/Spring 1985, generally preferring not to believe these assertions. (He is, incidentally, to be thanked for correcting the captions to the photographs; as it happens, however, I did not compose them, and hadn't seen the photographs at all until they were published with the article).



Jack Mitchell: preferring not to believe Bruce Johnson's assertions...

Harry Stein's article in turn reinforces my original proposition. I don't believe that it is either necessary or constructive for me to dwell at length on the fundamental logic and the tone of Jack's article. I believe that Harry Stein's piece makes it even clearer that there is considerable substance to the claim that the spirit of the revivalist movement was hospitable to other anti-establishment impulses. Jack's observation that "jazz is its own reason for existence" contains an important truth, but one which has to recognise also that no cultural event occurs in a vacuum. There is extensive debate on the 'relative autonomy' of art from the social base and I would refer to the work of Stefan Morawski and Frederick Jameson for anyone wishing to be introduced to it.

There are one or two specific points which should be added for the sake of the record. First, the documentation of the relationship between jazz and radical perspectives is far from complete. Without even digging into my files, I would list the following as examples:

- John Howley (bs) performs in a band at an exhibition of his paintings at the Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, in 1957.
- Peter Upward's exhibition at Gallery A in 1958 presents a band which includes Keith Hounslow and Stewie Speer.



Stewie Speer (drums), performing with Keith Hounslow (trumpet) and Dave Tolley (bass), on the occasion of a Peter Upward exhibition in Melbourne in 1958... PHOTO COURTESY BODGIE DADA & THE CULT OF COOL

– The Contemporary Art Society hires bands led by Alan Lee, Mookie Herman, Paul Marks, for its exhibitions in November, 1960.

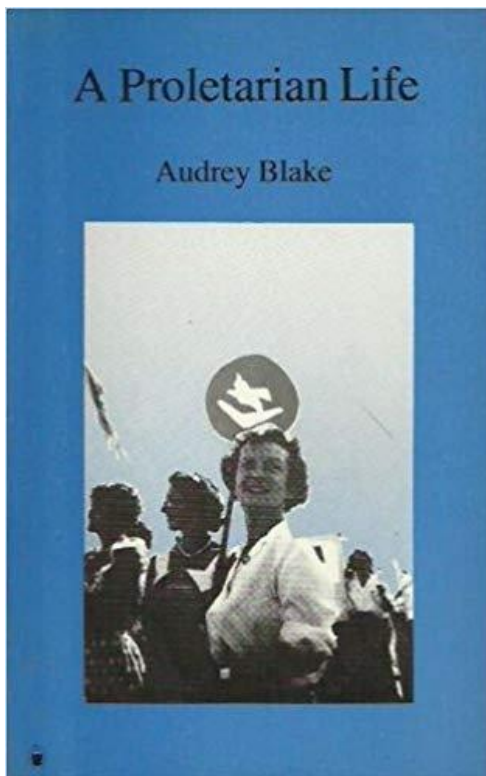
– Poetry and jazz sessions in various cities through the late '50s and '60s, with emphasis on 'beat' or otherwise experimental poets like Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti.

– Jazz venues which double as galleries where the work of young painters can be viewed and purchased.

– *Angry Penguins*, the most important Australian radical literary journal of its time, devotes a full issue to the program for the first Australian Jazz Convention.

– Some of the earliest jazz concerts in Melbourne were presented at the New Theatre, also known as the 'Left Theatre' because of the political interests managing it.

The Eureka Youth League's connection has not only been visible in Melbourne (at the Uptown Club), and Sydney (the Southern Cross Jazz Band), but also Brisbane, where the League provided support and premises for the Brisbane Swing Club (later Hot Jazz Society) from 1946. The fact that this caused career problems for a well-known Brisbane musician decades later should remind us also that silence on the matter by those involved is itself as likely as not to be eloquent.



A reading of Audrey Blake's *A Proletarian Life* will also provide a glimpse of the attraction which jazz held for young people of radical political persuasions since the '30s. Since writing the first article, the pamphlet which I mistakenly believed was called *Things I Hear* has come to light. Its title is *Did You Know This?* and I provide a copy for Jack's interest, since he has tried so hard to find it.

Did you know this?

No. 3.

JUNE, 1948

PURGE

The Comrades recently held a big Congress in Sydney. They called it a National Congress. Uncle Joe's direct reps were present and took charge. J. B. Miles was given a walk-out powder and Comrade Sharkey was hoisted to the saddle. Then they told the mugs how democratic it all was.

The Comrades deny all this—they would! They even deny that Uncle Joe is their Boss!

JAZZ

Some years ago the Comrades set up Graham Bell and his Dixieland Jazz Band, which is now entertaining the Comrades behind the iron curtain in Europe. Its successor is the PORT JACKSON JAZZ BAND.

Just what do the Comrades expect to do with this band—apart from bringing in the shekels? Is it part of their drive for "culture"?

RE-SHUFFLE

The Central Committee of the Party has been turning the heat on the Eureka Youth League. Young Eureka Comrades just back from Tito's "democracy" are setting the pace. Local publications are to be abolished and a new weekly youth paper is to appear. It will be as phony as its predecessors.

RUNAWAY

Comrade Rowe of the A.E.U. who recently established a sprinting record in Queensland has been going round telling people what a hero he was. The full blast of the Commo propaganda machine has been thrown into the task of repairing his tattered reputation. But all the blah in the world cannot alter the fact that Rowe ran out and left the strikers in the lurch.

GAS

The recent gas strike in Sydney was a Communist stunt, foisted on unwilling Unionists by the Red Czars in the Federal Council of the Union. Hundreds of thousands of Sydney people were without gas during one of the coldest week-ends during the year. Hospitals were in a desperate position. Four old people were later asphyxiated, when the gasless rings had not been turned off. But what's that to the Comrades?

Premier McGirr took a strong stand and the Comrades ran for their burrows.

DOCTORS

The Comrades are cashing in on the battle between the Government and the B.M.A. Comrade Healy of the Waterside Workers' Federation, unofficial Foreign Minister and Patron of our "Indonesian Comrades" came forward with the fatuous suggestion that the Doctors should be de-registered. A great pity for Healy and the Comrades that the B.M.A. isn't in Soviet Russia. Then the firing squads would be working overtime.

The aim is to embarrass the Government, antagonise the Doctors and boost Marx House.

BOGUS

Two very active Communist "Front" Organisations are flourishing in Sydney, namely the 'New Theatre League' and the 'Studio of Realist Art' (S.O.R.A.). These are being boosted by the Communist-dominated Actors' Equity. The aim is to place Art and Drama in the Marxist straight-jacket—all in the name of progress, of course.

You will hear from us again

Authorised by Eastern Suburbs Social & Discussion Groups.

The 1948 pamphlet 'Did You Know This?' which recently came to light. Note the comments under the heading 'JAZZ'.

I do not wish to suggest for a moment that Australian jazz musicians constitute an extended cell of communist or even left-wing sympathies, and was careful in my original article to stress the apoliticism of most musicians. Nonetheless, there is a significant thesis here, and neither jazz scholarship in particular nor Australian cultural studies in general will be well served by an a priori refusal to entertain its possibility.