

AN AUSTRALIAN SOUND: JAZZ IN MELBOURNE AND ADELAIDE 1941-51

by Bruce Clunies-Ross*

*[This essay appeared in the book *Australian Popular Culture (1979)* edited by Peter Spearitt & David Walker.]*

During the 1940s a distinct strain of jazz developed in Australia which was not simply attributable to the individual style of particular musicians or the sound of certain bands, but to the combination of these things with certain conventions of performance and composition into a genuinely expressive regional idiom. It was not the beginning of an interest in jazz in Australia. That goes back at least as far as 1924, only a year after the famous recordings of the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band and before the electrical recordings of masters like Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong, when Percy Grainger added to his already well-founded reputation for eccentricity by commenting favourably upon the music during his lecture-recital tour of the country.**



Percy Grainger: in 1924 he commented favourably upon Australian jazz music during his lecture-recital tour of the country...

**In 1979 when this article appeared, Bruce Clunies-Ross was teaching English literature at the University of Copenhagen. He was then working on the life, times and music of Percy Grainger.*

***John Bird, *Percy Grainger* (London, 1976), p. 187. See also Grainger, 'My Musical Discoveries', *Brisbane Sun*, 20/9/26.*

Between then and the beginning of the Second World War a few pioneer enthusiasts started collecting jazz records and the first serious attempts were made to understand and play jazz by musicians who formed themselves into bands like Frank Coughlan's in Melbourne. But it was in the decade between 1941, when the nucleus of the Graeme Bell band performed at the controversial Contemporary Arts Society exhibition in Melbourne*, and 1951 when Dave Dallwitz, with his Southern Jazz Group, cut 45 original Australian tunes for the ABC in Adelaide, that the process of assimilation occurred which produced a characteristic Australian style.

The flowering of jazz in Australia coincided with the so-called revival of traditional jazz and was implicated in it. However, it did not happen as a result of that phenomenon but rather played an important part in its diffusion. Not all the musicians who began to take an interest in jazz during the 1940s formed their styles upon the conventions of traditional jazz. In Adelaide, at that time, musicians like Bryce Rohde, Errol Buddle and Jack Brokensha, who a decade later, in the United States, formed the nucleus of the Australian Jazz Quartet, were evolving a progressive or modernist style; others, mainly associated with traditional jazz, like Lew Fisher, Keith Hounslow, Mal Wilkinson and Roger Hudson were interested in the music of the 'progressivists', and Hounslow, in particular, was to develop in that direction with increasing power and originality.



Keith Hounslow: he in particular was to develop in the progressive or modernist styles with increasing power and originality... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

**See Ian Turner, 'My Long March', Overland, 59 (1974) pp. 23–40, for date. Max Harris, 'Lunching at Smacka's Place', The Angry Eye (Sydney 1973), pp. 13–15, mentions the event but not the date.*

But it was traditional jazz, as it had been played in New Orleans and Chicago and preserved on a number of classic studio recordings of the 1920s, which became the basis for the characteristic Australian style. This was determined partly by the point to which jazz had evolved when it was taken up in Australia, and by the way in which it was acquired.

At the source, in the United States, by the end of the 1930s, many of the improvising musicians of the earlier decade or so had been absorbed into big swing bands, which had developed a style so heavily dependent upon arrangements that it constricted improvisation, the characteristic expressive mode of jazz. The big white bands in particular, led by Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller and the Dorsey brothers, had captured a huge popular audience which through radio and electrical recordings had spread around the world. Jazz, which had evolved in the black communities of the southern and south-western United States where it served definite cultural functions expressive of the black American's historical and social position, seemed to have been superseded, debased and commercialised first by the popular hot and sweet music of the 20s, and then by swing. It was this situation which led to the revival of what enthusiasts at the time, and some of the musicians involved, regarded as the authentic mode of jazz.



The big white bands in particular, led by musicians such as the Dorsey brothers (above, Tommy on left, Jimmy to the right), had captured a huge popular audience which through radio and electrical recordings had spread around the world...

But the evolution of swing in the 30s was not quite as simple as this argument suggested. Some of the big bands, notably those made up of black musicians led by Count Basie and Duke Ellington, were producing creative music which called upon the improvising talents of their members and opened other possibilities for the special powers of jazz musicians. Moreover, most of the big bands, both white and black, had as offshoots small groups which played improvised music, though it often sounded different to ears conditioned to listen for the style of collective improvisation which prevailed in the twenties. It was from this, and in particular, from the Kansas City style of the Basie band, that another response to the constraints

of swing music evolved. This was bop which was the major innovation in the central tradition of jazz during the decade when the revivalist mode was flourishing in Australia and other parts of the world. There were thus two responses to the dilemma in which jazz found itself at the end of the thirties; a conservative, or reactionary, one which attempted a revival of the music which existed before swing precipitated its degeneration, and a progressive one which attempted to restore the essential improvisatory expressiveness to jazz while retraining its capacity for formal development.



LeRoi Jones, who changed his name to Amiri Baraka in 1965 when Malcolm X was assassinated...

LeRoi Jones, in *Blues People**, pointed out that the response known as the revival was never a real option for black American music. Nor was it, in any sense, a revival. It was rather the diffusion among white middle-class people of a style of jazz practised two decades before.** In fact, the spread of this music went even further than LeRoi Jones acknowledged. The so-called revival of traditional jazz was really nothing more than its acceptance on an international scale by people for whom it necessarily served a different cultural function from that of its creators and their audience in the early decades of this century. It was the first stage in the internationalisation of jazz as an art, which entailed the diffusion of a set of conventions and principles for the performance of improvised music but not, of course, the matrix of sub-cultural needs and attitudes which brought them into existence, and to which they gave expression. In white, western, culture, jazz assumed a place as music, beside other forms of music whereas LeRoi Jones pointed out, in black American culture it was, and remains, something both more than that and different from it.

*(New York, 1963) pp. 202–4.

***Ibid.* pp. 202–4.

The obverse of LeRoi Jones's argument is that just as a reversion to the classic style of the 1920s was no option for the central tradition of black American music around 1939 or 1940, so was it the only possible option for international jazz in the 1940s. Bop evolved partly as a way of re-capturing jazz for the sub-culture to which it belonged functionally, and far from making it accessible, was a way of keeping it inaccessible from all but the urban black culture in which it was developing. To the international enthusiasts who discovered it in the late thirties and early forties, jazz was something opposed to swing. From their perspective there seemed to be a clear opposition between these two modes of music, and in choosing jazz, they inevitably arrived at a static conception of the music, since they were opting for a mode whose great achievements were already past by the time they discovered it.

From LeRoi Jones's perspective, the revival of traditional jazz was a 'hobbyist' phenomenon, a designation which brings out his sense of the difference between the function of jazz for black Americans and for the international enthusiasts who adopted it. Yet while this is true, the extent to which it was *merely* a hobby depended upon how and when it was taken up in another cultural setting. In the late thirties and early war years, Australia was still remote from the sources of jazz. It was taken up by people who had only the broadest sense of its cultural functions for whites or blacks in the United States, but who were involved in radical politics and modernism in the arts in their own culture. Jazz in Australia was initially associated with these things and developed, an appropriately expressive idiom of its own, though it bore only a formal relation to its sources and was to be swamped eventually by the preservationist trend and international scale of the so-called revival which, paradoxically, it had helped to bring about.



In 1944, the veteran New Orleans trumpeter Bunk Johnson (pictured above) was rediscovered and recorded... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

The revivalist movement had a musical, and what might be termed a 'spectatorial', phase. In the United States, the musical phase was ushered in by the first recordings of Lu Watters' Yerba Buena Jazz Band in 1941. About the same period, Eddie Condon organised his jam sessions and concerts in New York, and then, in 1944, the veteran New Orleans trumpeter Bunk Johnson was rediscovered and recorded. For a variety of reasons, of which the vagaries of communications under wartime conditions was an important one, these events did not have an international impact until sometime later. But in any case the first stage in the evolution of the Australian jazz idiom had begun before any of them. In 1941 the Bell brothers and Ade Monsborough were already performing in the context in which jazz was to develop in Melbourne* and by 1947, when Lu Watters made the second set of recordings which became a major stimulus for the international spread of traditional jazz, the Graeme Bell band was already touring Europe and recording in Prague and thus making its own important contribution to the diffusion of interest in this kind of jazz.**



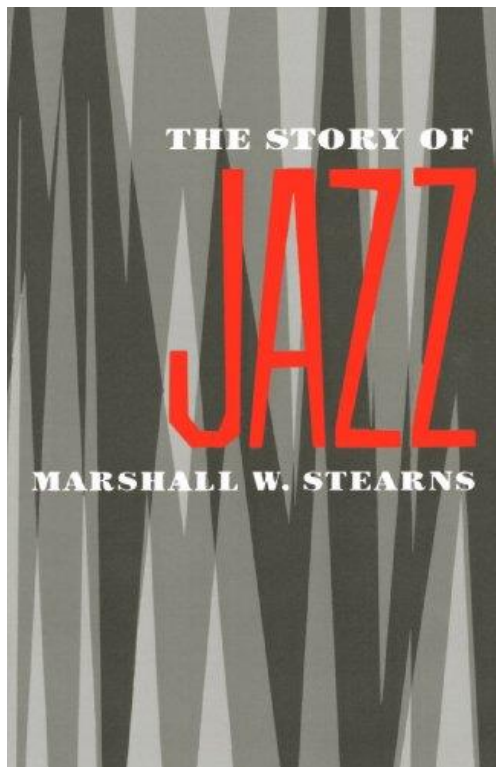
The Bell band probably taken in 1948 in the UK, back row L-R, Ade Monsborough, Roger Bell, Pixie Roberts, Lou Silbereisen, front row L-R, Jack Varney, Russ Murphy, Graeme Bell... PHOTO COURTESY JIM GODBOLT THE WORLD OF JAZZ

*Turner, *op. cit.*; Harris, *op. cit.*

**John S. Wilson, *Jazz: The Transition Years, 1940-1960* (New York, 1966) p.

The 'spectatorial' phase had begun earlier, in Europe, with the first serious collectors of jazz records, the books on jazz by the Belgian Roger Goffin and Frenchman Hugues Panassie and the first jazz discography, also compiled in France by Charles Delaunay. By the late thirties and early forties, alongside the musical revival, there was an enormous spread of writing about jazz, exemplified by books like *Jazzmen* (1939) by Frederic Ramsey Jnr and Charles Edward Smith, *The Real Jazz* (1942) by Hugues Panassie, *Shining Trumpets* (1946) by Rudi Blesh and *Really the Blues* (1946) by Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe.*

Most of these attempted to explain and define jazz by asserting the authenticity of the small group improvised mode against the swing and commercial styles of music in the thirties, and sometimes, rather uncomprehendingly, against the innovative improvised music which was evolving in New York in the forties. As LeRoi Jones put it, they wrote 'about jazz as if they were trying to discredit Picasso by reconstructing the Pyramids', and inevitably, they arrived at a static definition of the art. It could hardly have been otherwise. In order that jazz could be detached from its roots and communicated across cultural boundaries it was necessary to fix the style. Many of these writers argued that jazz was not susceptible to development and their books often concluded with a pessimistic, even bitter, chapter on the future of jazz, which maintained that its greatest glories were behind it and that no-one was left to carry on the authentic tradition except a few Louisiana veterans like Bunk Johnson and the international enthusiasts who had just discovered it.



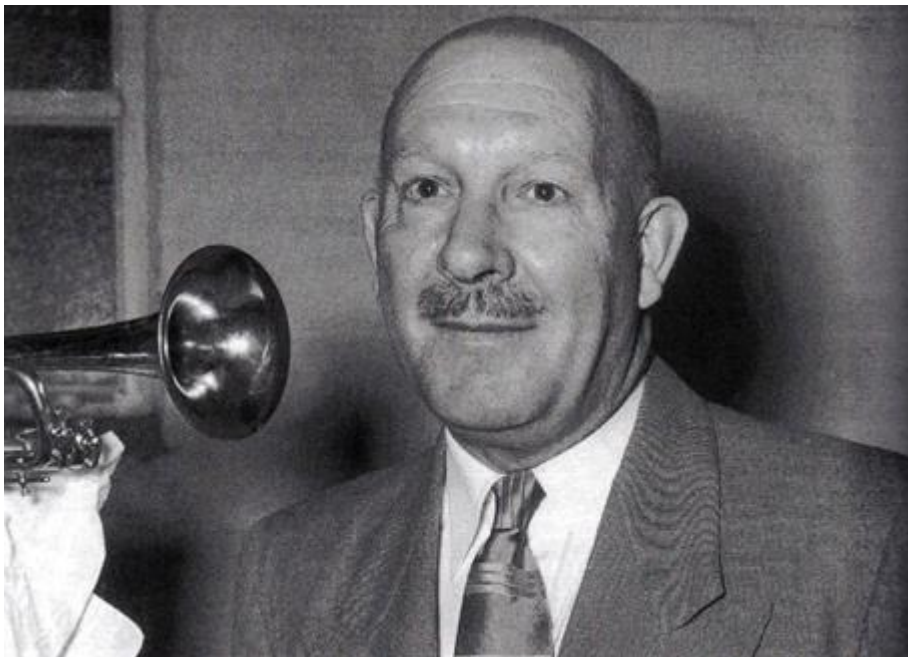
**All published New York. Copies were not generally available in Australia until the late forties. For an indication of the extensive literature on jazz in this decade see the bibliography of Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York, 1970), expanded edition.*

Because musicians in Australia began playing jazz before the spread of this static conception, they developed a freer style and adopted a creative rather than a preservative approach to the music. Thus it acquired a characteristic accent of its own, as compared to the international style of traditional jazz which was to flourish later.

Jazz Awareness

The formation of this distinct local strain was aided by the remoteness of Australia from the sources of jazz. At the time the Australian style was beginning to take shape, musicians and enthusiasts here were isolated in a way difficult to imagine now. They had very little idea of current activity in the United States, and the records and books available gave them an impression so selective as to be misleading. Yet it was precisely this situation which fostered the growth of a regional style and determined the course it took.

Australia too had its pioneering collectors, of whom the two most important were William V Holyoak in Adelaide and William Miller in Melbourne. Both had a lasting effect upon the way in which an awareness of jazz developed in the two cities where the Australian style flourished. Holyoak's collection of jazz books and periodicals, now in the State Library of South Australia, indicates a sustained interest in the subject from an early date, contemporary with that of the famous European collectors. By the 1940s he had one of the most extensive collections in the country, largely made up of rare copies of imported records. His sympathies leaned towards traditional jazz, but this collection reflected a genuine curiosity about all forms of the music. He acquired the early recordings of bebop and progressive jazz and made them available, with the rest of his collection, through his Tuesday night radio programmes over 5AD.



Pioneering collectors such as William V Holyoak (above) in Adelaide had a lasting effect upon the way in which an awareness of jazz developed... PHOTO COURTESY DON HOPGOOD



Another pioneering collector Melbourne's William H Miller... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

The few big collectors imported their own records, but the majority of people interested in jazz in Australia had to rely upon the thin selection of English and Australian pressings which filtered through to the music shops. Although record collecting was never widespread in the days of 78s an indication that music dealers considered the market for jazz records particularly unprofitable is the fact that they were always in short supply. So little was available that ordinary collectors probably bought everything they could find. This had certain effects upon the developing jazz culture. Individual collectors often had very different collections, because they had been acquired in different places at different times, and an appreciation of a particular band or musician might be based upon one or two three-minute sides. Informal meetings and then local jazz societies where enthusiasts could listen to each other's records and discuss them came into existence, and these fostered listening habits different from those which prevail in an age of muzak. Instead of the extended impression which is obtainable from long playing records, the situation conduced to a sharply focused and detailed sense of a given musician's style, based upon an intensely concentrated hearing of one or two sides. This was indispensable to those who aspired to play jazz themselves and substituted for the informal apprenticeship which was available, though with great difficulty, to potential young jazzmen in the United States. An aspiring jazz musician generally knew every audible note and chord on the important sides in his collection, and could tell instantly if a new or imitative performance deviated even slightly from the original.

The scarcity of records, and especially the rarity of re-issues of older performances, meant that radio played a major role in spreading an appreciation of jazz in Australia. It was the best way of keeping up-to-date with developments abroad and even with interstate activities because it was through the relatively informal programming in the forties and fifties that collectors like Bill Holyoak and Kym Bonython were able to introduce recent acquisitions to other jazz lovers. The best sense an Australian could get of developments in the United States in the years just after the War was through Holyoak's *Swing's the Thing* programme in Adelaide on Tuesday nights, when he could hear music as diverse as white traditional jazz and black bebop, together with the classic recordings from earlier periods of jazz. Some of the important radio programmes at this time were, like Holyoak's, regional. In Melbourne, Roger Bell's broadcasts on 3UZ concentrated on traditional jazz and fostered the taste for this kind of music there.



Roger Bell: his broadcasts on 3UZ concentrated on traditional jazz and fostered the taste for this kind of music there... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Nevertheless, ABC national radio programmes, especially the one conducted by Eric Child on Saturday mornings, were equally important in focusing the common interests of jazz lovers across the country, and Child's had the further distinction that it was organised like a good music programme. Every week it presented a balanced selection of masterpieces, so that over the years it served the function of educating listeners in the central repertoire of jazz. The time allotted by radio to jazz was strictly limited, and the programming often at odd hours, yet these programmes had



ABC national radio programmes, especially the one conducted by Eric Child (pictured above) on Saturday mornings, were important in focusing the common interests of jazz lovers across the country... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

a faithful audience and an incalculable influence in cultivating a taste for certain kinds of jazz in Australia. At the critical period, in the years just after the War, the well-known broadcasters all had an open-minded bias towards traditional jazz, even though Holyoak let his listeners hear other kinds of music, and Bonython was already showing signs of progressivism.

After 1946, jazz also spread through the annual [Australian Jazz] Conventions, the first of their kind in the world.* These had an ambivalent effect on the evolution of the distinctly Australian strain of traditional jazz. At first they fostered it by bringing musicians together and enabling them to make experiments like Dave Dallwitz's seminal recording of *Passion Rag* in which he used an enlarged group, including musicians from Melbourne and Hobart. In particular, they were the origin of the fruitful collaboration between Dallwitz and Ade Monsborough, which brought the Australian style into being. However, from the early fifties, as jazz continued to spread in Australia, but came increasingly under the influence of the international traditional style, this began to predominate at conventions, and the local strain was diluted, and all but disappeared, until it had its own revival in the 1970s.

Conventions, along with local societies and the little magazines which began to appear quite early in Australia,** also encouraged the acquisition and diffusion of the sub-cultural traits associated with jazzmen and their fans. Some of these derived

*Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

**Copies of *Jazz Notes* edited John Rippin, back to 1940 are held in the collection of the musician Roger Hudson, Melbourne.

from America through books like *Really the Blues* and Hoagy Carmichael's memoir *The Stardust Road* (1946) but by the time these books became available in Australia, its jazz culture had already begun to develop traits of its own. Limited recognition, the enforced confinement of musicians to an amateur status and the public image of jazz as degenerate helped to shape the attitudes which jazz precipitated in its followers. Musicians and enthusiasts developed a sense of group solidarity against a hostile or indifferent world, which expressed itself in esoteric language and behaviour that sometimes amounted to a kind of public clowning. Jazzmen were inclined to play up to the role expected of them but in doing so adopted an attitude of mockery to elements in society which they identified as repressive* and sometimes referred to them collectively as 'suburbia'. Long before the word 'Alf' became current, jazzmen were using the word 'Ralph' to identify the conformist whose life-style denied spontaneity, and they evolved a behavioural equivalent of jazz in order to shock him. In jazz argot, this was 'to put on an act', which involved spontaneously exploiting a situation by unpredictable actions and verbal wit which left the victims in mute confusion.



**Ivor Francis, reviewing the first performance of the Ern Malley Suite in the South Australian Art Gallery, recalled the 1940s as 'the most culturally intolerant era in Australia's history' and cited several instances to prove it. Undated cutting from the Adelaide Advertiser, (?) mid-November, 1974; the suite was premiered on November 14 that year. For earlier instances of specific hostility to jazz, see David Walker, Dream and Disillusion (Canberra, 1976), pp. 138, 149 & 151. I am indebted to D. Walker for drawing my attention to other adverse comments on jazz which appeared in The Triad Bulletin and Stead's Review between 1925 and 1930.*

People who 'put on acts' were called 'characters' and their acts were like Dada happenings whose effect was gained by the sheer incomprehensibility of the performance to all except a privileged few. Notable characters in the early days of Australian jazz were the Melbourne clarinetist George Tack, and the Adelaide drummer, Bryan Kelly, who possessed amazingly quick reflexes and a genius for mis-cueing situations. Like the ever-changing, distinctive, argot of jazz, with its vogue words which often developed such an extensive range of function and reference that their meaning dissipated until they seemed to be repeated simply for their ritual value, the function of 'characters' and their 'acts' was esoteric.



Melbourne's George Tack: a notable character in the early days of Australian jazz...
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Max Harris was probably not far from the truth when he related the evolution and continuance of this inward-turned jazz culture in Australia to the tradition of mateship, for jazz offers an experience which is essentially mutual to performers and fans who are 'digging' the music. Moreover, the milieu in which jazz evolved in Australia was notably masculine. There were exceptional cases of women participating (just as there are in the United States) but musicians and enthusiasts were predominately men. Women were present at concerts and jam sessions mainly as supportive appendages, though some, like Joan Dallwitz, were totally sympathetic. In general, however, the peculiar quality of this male world is implicit in titles like Ade Monsborough's *Don't Tell the Boys You Saw Me* and Dave Dallwitz's

Unreasonable Woman Blues. The jazz sub-culture tended to type women as threats who might draw its members into a more settled, conformist kind of existence.



Max Harris (foreground) in the Heide kitchen in 1945 with, L-R, Sidney Nolan, Sunday Reed, John Reed and John Sinclair... PHOTO COURTESY STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA



Dave Dallwitz, 1948: one of his compositions was called Unreasonable Woman Blues... COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN

An Australian Sound

The Australian strain of jazz evolved in this social and cultural context, chiefly in Melbourne and Adelaide. The basis for it was the traditional collectively improvised music of New Orleans, which Australians knew mainly from studio recordings made in Chicago in the twenties, though during the War they were to have some contact with American musicians through the visit to Australia of Artie Shaw's Navy Band, which included the white Chicago trumpeter, Max Kaminsky. Later, the great black trumpeter, Rex Stewart was to tour Australia during his international wanderings

between 1947 and 1951 and exercise a formative influence on Australia's most brilliantly original jazz instrumentalist, Keith Hounslow.



Clovelly Surf Club, Sydney, 1949, front-line players L-R, Rex Stewart (cornet), John McCarthy (clarinet), Ron Falson (trumpet), Keith Hounslow (trumpet), Johnny Edgecombe (guitar)... PHOTO © RON FALSON ARCHIVE

The Australian musicians who began playing traditional jazz around the beginning of the War adopted it not as a style, to be preserved, but as a musical language to be exploited for expressive purposes, while respecting the limiting conventions of the style.* This is most immediately apparent from the large number of original tunes composed by the Bell brothers and Ade Monsbrough in Melbourne, and by Dave Dallwitz, for his Southern Jazz Group, in Adelaide. The approach of the Bell group was the more conservative. Some of their early originals were closely modelled on the style of the classic recordings of the twenties, but granting these limitations, they were genuine compositions, and not mere 'blows' over the familiar chords. Roger Bell produced a number of pieces of this type and demonstrated that, like King Oliver, he could invent a tune, as opposed to an improvised solo, within the conventions of the twelve-bar blues or sixteen-bar stomp charts. *Tessa's Blues, Alma Street Requiem*

**I consider that the aims of a band such as this are three-fold to entertain, to perpetuate the "trad jazz" style and to develop this style. The latter is a delicate process because it must not be at the expense of the style itself. Dallwitz, Sleeve-notes to his Jazznote record, JNLP-008/S, 1973.*

and *The Lizard* are three of numerous such originals which became part of the repertoire of the Bell band in its earliest phase. This set one of the basic precedents for Australian jazz, and the title of the tunes suggests a recognition that the conventions of New Orleans jazz could be adapted to frame musical expressions of Australian experience. Roger Bell further pioneered the expressive use of the medium with polythematic tunes like *Woodburn Strut* and *Old Man's Beard* which exemplify an exploratory approach to the forms of traditional jazz. *Old Man's Beard*, for example, has a very elaborate structure which is a far cry from the string of improvised variations for solo and ensemble on a single theme which is the stock-in-trade of most amateur traditional jazz. Its four themes are made up of units of varying length which are divided and combined in various ways to exhibit different aspects of the style, like some of the work of Jelly Roll Morton, but the tunes are nothing like Morton's. Nor is the overall effect of the piece. Morton's influence has been completely assimilated and made to serve a different musical sensibility. Roger Bell's tunes have a broad, strong quality, with a direct musical logic, which is easy to associate with his improvised playing.



Uptown Club, North Melbourne in 1947, L-R, George Tack, Lindsay Motherwell, Roger Bell, Graeme Bell: Roger Bell's tunes have a broad, strong quality, with a direct musical logic... PHOTO COURTESY GEORGE TACK OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

Jazz based on polythematic structures had not been developed extensively after the work of Morton in the 1920s, but it was rediscovered by Australian musicians, and became one of the main distinctions of the local idiom. Ade Monsbourgh and Dave Dallwitz, the musicians who brought the style to its highest point, used it in most of their work. It is, of course, characteristic of ragtime, a form which they were to naturalise a quarter of a century before its fashionable revival.

The music of Ade Monsbourgh illustrates several ways in which traditional jazz was developed, rather than preserved, in Australia. As the gifted multi-instrumentalist who gave the Bell band and, in some of its studio recordings, the Southern Jazz Group, great flexibility of sound and voicing, he evolved, on clarinet, trumpet, valve



Ade Monsborough: his emergence as a saxophone player in the late forties is in itself evidence of a creative attitude to traditional jazz... PHOTO CREDIT BRENDON KELSON NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

trombone, and then the saxophones, a very free style of improvisation, unconstrained by traditional models. This encouraged among Australian musicians the cultivation of personal, original, idioms, exemplified not only by Monsborough's understated playing, which is appropriately Australian, but also by the distinctive styles of Keith Hounslow, Kelly Smith, Rex Green and Lew Fisher, among others. Ade Monsborough's emergence as a saxophone player in the late forties is in itself evidence of a creative attitude to traditional jazz, for at that time the instrument was deplored as inauthentic by revivalists who subscribed to the static idea of jazz. He was probably the first musician to develop the instrument as a front-line voice in this phase of the music's evolution, and his tearing saxophone sound became a major element in the Australian mode. His playing aroused great interest in Europe and in Australia almost all saxophonists in traditional jazz show the inescapable influence of his style. Without his example it would be difficult to realise the possibilities for the instrument in the traditional idiom.

A typical example of Monsborough's instrumental style can be heard on the 1972 recording of his own tune, *Clever Feller**, which illustrates another of his extensive contributions to the Australian idiom in jazz: the creation of a kind of lazy, pared-down ragtime. This relatively strict and complex form, which had been used by Morton, and was, along with the blues, one of the main roots of jazz, acquired a distinctly Australian flavour through the work of Monsborough and Dave Dallwitz. The sympathetic collaboration between these two musicians produced some of the major achievements in Australian jazz.



Dave Dallwitz: the sympathetic collaboration between him and Ade Monsborough produced some of the major achievements in Australian jazz...

PHOTO COURTESY JOHN DALLWITZ OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ

Monsborough participated in the recording which marked the emergence of Dallwitz's characteristic style: *Passion Rag*, recorded for Jazzart around 1948. Two things are notable about this record: the use of an extended band, with its writing for reeds in harmony and the daring combination of ragtime with impressionistic effects derived from other sources altogether. These have continued as the characteristic trademarks of Dallwitz's music to the present day. While Monsborough developed a relaxed, economical, ragtime Dallwitz, more directly in the tradition of Morton, explored the potential of the form to build tension, with rhythmic and melodic elaboration.

**Dallwitz—Monsborough Jazzmen, Swaggie S 1303, 1972.*

However, many of his compositions draw upon Monsborough's austere melancholy voice, and his gift for bringing out the strong inner lines of the music. In fact, it is evident from Dallwitz's earliest recordings, cut for Bill Holyoak's label, Memphis, in 1947, that he was a composer who conceived his music in terms of overall sound; but as a jazz musician this meant that he thought not in terms of instrumental timbre, but of particular musicians' 'voices' and their improvising abilities. Thus he drew equally upon the example of Duke Ellington who by the twenties had developed the chief elements of his style. Gunther Schuller in *Early Jazz* observes that Morton and Ellington were the complementary jazz composers of the twenties and regrets that they ignored each other. In the music of Dallwitz we get an idea of how they might be combined. A splendid example is *Crocodile Creek* where the potential for rhythmic and melodic juxtaposition and contrast, characteristic of ragtime and other polythematic jazz pieces like *Old Man's Beard*, is joined with impressionistic orchestral effects to evoke a distinctly Australian mood. It does this so successfully that if we did not have the composer's assertion that it was deliberately written to rival Morton's *Jungle Blues** we would fail to notice the sources altogether.

Graeme Bell had explored traditional jazz idioms for impressionistic purposes in *Czechoslovak Journey*, recorded for Supraphon in Prague during the first tour of his band in 1947 and in *Chicken and Almonds*, which like Dallwitz's *Clarinet Sugar* and *Clarinet Spice*, from about the same time, created a controversy in Australian jazz circles in the late forties because they were rejected by purists as not authentic. However, the full development of this evocative style came with the 45 original tunes which Dallwitz with his second Southern Jazz Group cut for the ABC in Adelaide in 1951.



Graeme Bell at the piano: he explored traditional jazz idioms for impressionistic purposes in Czechoslovak Journey in 1947...

*Dallwitz, interview with author, Nov. 20, 1977.

These sessions formed the culmination of the Australian style and it is a great pity that the transcriptions were broadcast only once, in groups of three, on week-nights at ten minutes to six and then a few of them were issued on a commercial ten-inch long playing record. The remainder, unfortunately, are no longer in a condition to be re-issued. The tunes, by the Bell brothers, Ade Monsborough, Dave Dallwitz, Keith Hounslow, Doc Willis and others, exemplify the full range of Australian jazz, and in Keith Hounslow the band had the best lead trumpeter in the country. Because of his very individual genius as an improviser he stood a little apart from the development of regional Australian jazz, but through his association with Ellington's cornetist, Rex Stewart, he could produce a voice beautifully adapted to the sonorities Dallwitz was charting for these sessions. The stimulus of his presence can be heard in *Crocodile Creek*, which was first recorded on this occasion, and in other Dallwitz numbers, like *Mirage*. Hounslow himself contributed three fine atmospheric pieces to the repertoire—*Blues for Rex*, *Glad Song* and *That Imbo Thing*—which gain some of their qualities through Dallwitz's scoring.



Keith Hounslow, here on flugelhorn in 1982: because of his very individual genius as an improviser he stood a little apart from the development of regional Australian jazz... PHOTO CREDIT FIROZE MISTRY

Angry Penguins

Dallwitz's use of ragtime sometimes deliberately exploits its potential for naiveté, a region of musical sensibility he shares with Jelly Roll Morton. This gives some of his music a consciously primitive quality comparable in certain respects with the paintings produced around the same time by Sidney Nolan. In fact, the Australian style in jazz developed in Melbourne and Adelaide as part of that phase of cross-fertilisation in the arts and related fields which was associated with Angry Penguins, and it therefore captured the attention of some of the most actively creative people at

Angry Penguins

Editors: Max Harris—John Reed

1945



An *Angry Penguins*' graphic artist portrays the modern age.

the time. Jazz was a valid and appropriate medium for the expression of the blend of attributes which formed the distinctive cultural impulse of the movement. It combined the excitement of a modernist form with primitive spontaneity and the capacity, in the work of the Bells, Monsborough and Dallwitz, to evoke a genuinely Australian atmosphere.

Dallwitz was first associated with *Angry Penguins* when one of his paintings was the subject of a critical appreciation by Ivor Francis in an Adelaide issue of the magazine.* In an issue which seems to have been put together on both sides of VJ day in 1945 he appeared again as the author of an important article in the new jazz

**There were close ties between jazz and the visual arts in the 1940s. Besides Dallwitz, who continued to practise both arts, Clem Meadmore, the modernist sculptor, was involved in jazz as an occasional washboard player. Tom Pickering, the Tasmanian clarinetist, was also a painter and Kym Bonython, the first drummer in the Southern Jazz Group and impresario, is a leading collector and authority on modern Australian painting, as well as being a gallery director. This was also one of Graeme Bell's professions.*

section of the periodical, which aimed to treat jazz ‘as an integral part of contemporary culture’. The various contributions to this section are arranged to bring out a controversy between Dallwitz, whose article is largely a thorough analysis of a recent Ellington piece, *Bakiff*, actually composed by the band’s valve trombonist, Juan Tizol, which employs elaborate orchestral sonorities including the violin with ostinato figures such as Dallwitz was to use in his own way in pieces like *Crocodile Creek*, and Bill Miller, who rejects pieces like *Bakiff* as having no value at all and who presents a strong version of the revivalist case. Dallwitz’s article is entitled ‘He That Hath An Ear’ and it is clear from the distinctions and comparisons he draws that he conceives of jazz as a musical mode with expressive potential to be related to other forms of music, as opposed to Miller who insists upon its essential separateness. Inherent in the editorial organisation of the whole section, and explicit in the unacknowledged review of Cedric Pearce’s book *Trumpet in the Night*, is an understanding bias towards Dallwitz’s position and a recognition of its creative potential.



The Duke Ellington band’s valve trombonist, Juan Tizol: his piece Bakiff employs elaborate orchestral sonorities including the violin with ostinato figures such as Dallwitz was to use in his own way in pieces like Crocodile Creek... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

The next issue of *Angry Penguins* was the last, and the jazz section was a report from Inez Cavanagh on 'The American Jazz Scene: 1945'. She described the situation in terms which LeRoi Jones would have accepted 20 years later and which have become the received interpretation by most jazz historians. The traditionalists are put on the right of the current controversy, the progressivists on the left. She sides with the left, and argues that in their insistence on improvisation or nothing the traditionalists are often wrong because they do not always know what improvisation is. Among the new musicians active in New York she listed Dizzy Gillespie and pointed out that his influence was as strong as Armstrong's once had been. This was about as up-to-date as it was possible to be in 1946 and there is no other writing in Australia—and not much anywhere else in the world at that time—which pointed so accurately to the direction jazz was taking.



Dizzy Gillespie in 1948: his influence was as strong as Louis Armstrong's once had been... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

By the mid-forties, *Angry Penguins* not only had a grasp of the way the central tradition of jazz was developing, it had detected the trend towards an Australian sound which was to reach its full development in the music of Dave Dallwitz. In these years of intellectual ferment which characterised Melbourne during the War, the cultural policy makers of the Communist Party seem to have reached the same decision for they cultivated jazz as a genuinely popular music with an authentic national quality. The Eureka Youth League organised concerts with the Bell band in Melbourne and sponsored the first convention which was the occasion of a controversy between Harry Stein and Kym Bonython on the social function of jazz.



A controversy between Harry Stein (above) and Kym Bonython (below) on the social function of jazz...



The same organisation arranged the first overseas tour by the Bell band as part of the ceremonies associated with the rebuilding of Lidice. As Max Harris pointed out, this was Australia's first post-war cultural export, and it was the major stimulus to the revival of jazz in Europe*. Paradoxically, this was to lead to the obliteration of the distinct Australian style.

This had evolved as part of a larger phenomenon and, in the years after the War, traditional jazz bands began to flourish—as an informal and mainly amateur form of music making—all over the country, but particularly in Melbourne where, in the late forties and early fifties alongside the Bell-Monsborough group, there was the magnificent Frank Johnson band, and the Barnard brothers outfit. These gradually became part of the international jazz revival which the Bells had helped to foster and the increasing availability of records of bands in America, Britain, France and Holland led to the diffusion of an international style of traditional jazz.



One of the “Barnard outfits”, Len Barnard band circa 1952, Greg Clarke at the piano, then back row from left, Frank Traynor, Bob Barnard, Len Barnard, Tich Bray, Peter Cleaver... PHOTO COURTESY ROGER BEILBY

With the break-up of the second Southern Jazz Group in 1951 the Australian sound was to be heard only rarely, as in the recording made in 1954 for *Australian Jazz Quarterly* of Ade Monsborough with Len Barnard's band, until the extraordinary late flowering of Dallwitz's music in the 1970s through which he has finally won Australian and international recognition. He has revived some of the music of himself and Monsborough, composed half a dozen new suites for his own band and others, had his music recorded by American musicians like Earl Hines, Armand Hug and Bud Freeman and in his *Ern Malley Suite* (1974) evoked more vividly in music precisely the jazz culture which this article has attempted to delineate.

**Dallwitz, interview, information on sponsorship of jazz by Eureka Youth League and the activities of Bell band on getting jazz started in Europe. On the League, see also Turner, op. cit. and Harris, op. cit., p. 14.*