

JazzChord, Jul/Aug 1996

In an article by Leon Gettler entitled "Into The Music" on **the Sedergreens** (Bob and sons Mal and Steve), published in *The Age* in Melbourne on June 29, 1996, it's alleged that Mal and Steve actually came to blows after an incident at a gig in Adelaide last year. "Things got ugly up on the stand when pianist Steve cut off his younger brother Mal's saxophone solo," writes Leon. "Words were exchanged but to no avail so they stepped outside and slugged it out instead. Then they returned for the second set." Mal said: "I'm not going to cop that whether he is Steve Sedergreen or Herbie Hancock." There is some hard-hitting opinion in this article. Bob



Brothers Steve Sedergreen (left) at the piano with Mal Sedergreen (alto saxophone): they actually came to blows after an incident at a gig in Adelaide last year... PHOTO CREDIT LAKI SIDERIS

Sedergreen stresses that he's fundamentally a "street player": "My playing has never shown a lot of sophistication," he's quoted as saying. "When I heard a person like Bill Evans or Miles Davis, the esoteric, and that sort of thing, it turned me right off. Chuck Berry and Little Richard are my idols." Steve and Bob agree that the jazz scene in Melbourne is "alarmingly unadventurous", with unoriginal musicians copying earlier styles. "The thing that I can't stand is when we walk into a jazz club and there is no intensity. It's dull, flat, it's mediocre," says Bob. "There are a lot of players out there who are so reserved that they never let go. They are so composed, they are so calm, they are in such control, they are never going to put a note out of place. It's like your mother dusting the house... A lot of people sit there, sterile, and the band sits there, sterile, drinking water. You've got to have people swaying and moving in the aisles. This idea of this cafe jazz is a European concept. The new image, the trendy politically correct inspiration, is that the black American inspiration is not really relevant anymore... If a kid came along in Melbourne playing like Thelonious Monk, dressed wrongly, married to Nellie, and not hanging out with all the college kids, with really bad fingers, bad technique and playing a whole lot of gibberish like that, he would probably be laughed at."



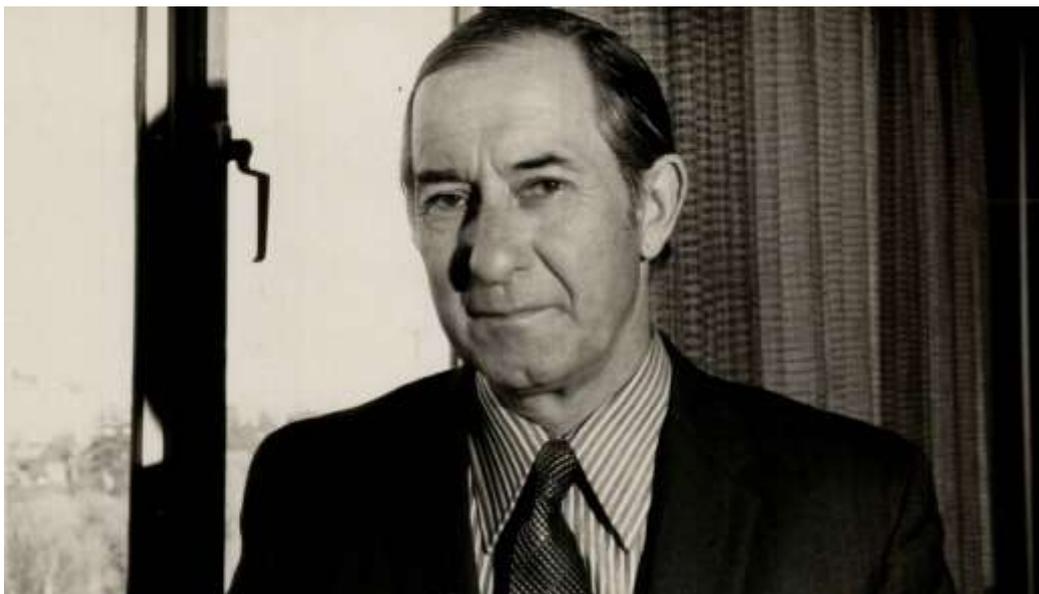
Bob Sedergreen: his idols were not Bill Evans or Miles Davis, but rather Chuck Berry and Little Richard...

* Following a conversation with the great pianist **Bryce Rohde**, when he was visiting Sydney, Bryce sent me an article from the newspaper *The Armidale Express*, dated March 1, 1961, and entitled "Council Cautious About Letting Jazz Pianist Use Grand Piano". The Bryce Rohde Quartet was to play a concert at the Armidale Town Hall as part of the University Orientation Week, but a request for the group to use



Bryce Rohde at the piano. Bassist Bruce Cale is in the background, with unidentified drummer... PHOTO CREDIT FRANK BURKE

the grand piano - then worth 3,000 pounds - was refused by the Mayor Ald P G Love and the Town Clerk Mr R A Browne. The organisers wrote to the Council asking them to reconsider. When asked why permission had been refused, one of the alderman who supported the decision responded: 'It is a jazz band.' When another alderman, who supported reconsideration, pointed out that the group was composed of highly reputable musicians, who had given concerts in many other venues where the grand piano had been available for their use, the Town Clerk said: "There are jazz groups



The situation was resolved when a call was put through to Clem Semmler (pictured above) at the ABC in Sydney...PHOTO COURTESY PETER SEMMLER

and jazz groups. We would have to set ourselves up as arbiters of jazz groups to decide which one could be allowed to use the grand piano.” Apparently the condition had been laid down shortly after the instrument was purchased that the Mayor and the Town Clerk “had to be satisfied with the standards of the user, either from their own knowledge or from the recommendation of some person who knew the user. In this instance there was the matter of precedence, and the absence of an A Mus A qualification.” According to Bryce the situation was resolved when a call was put through to Clem Semmler at the ABC in Sydney - it was really the ABC’s piano. “Within minutes lo and behold the B R Quartet had the okay to use the ‘concert’ grand piano!” writes Bryce. “But what wonderful drama for a few hours.”

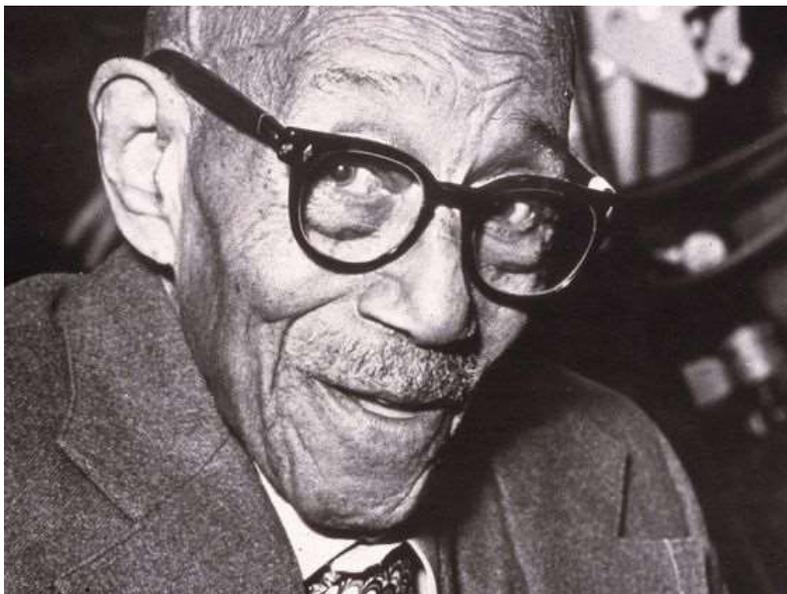
* In an article in *The Australian* on July 13, 1996 Kevin Jones wrote on the considerable overseas success of the Sydney trumpeter/cornetist **Bob Barnard**. Consistent with the way that *The Australian* usually trivialises jazz, the article had the corny heading “Cool Bob blows hot in overseas climate”. But I was relieved that Jones did not repeat his familiar swipe at the Australia Council: that it won’t fund Bob Barnard to tour overseas. This is a myth that a number of people have in the past been rather dishonestly pushing, without checking the facts. And it’s completely unfair to the Australia Council. The facts are as follows. About 10-15 years ago, Bob was receiving substantial support from the Council. My records show that he



Bob Barnard: there is a myth that the Australia Council won’t fund him to tour overseas...

received \$4,000 to tour Yugoslavia in 1979-80; the JAS of Tasmania received \$2,000 in 1981-82 to bring Bob down to perform; Bob received \$1,000 to go to the USA in 1982; and \$15,000 in 1984 to tour Europe. Since then, I believe that Bob has not made an application to the Australia Council for funds; so, one can’t blame the Australia Council for not funding applications that it doesn’t receive. Be this as it may, Bob Barnard now has an application before the Australia Council, which went in on May 15, 1996. I assisted him with the application, which asks for funds to assist a proposed European tour. It will be interesting to see if it is funded. If not, what reasons could the Australia Council advance for not being able to fund such an application? I don’t see any reason why such a brilliant and accomplished musician

such as Bob Barnard should be ineligible for Government funds, simply because he's active in so-called "traditional jazz" (which is usually not considered "innovative" enough to be funded by the Australia Council). Doesn't the Australian Opera, which presents a traditional art form to the public, get considerable assistance from Government funding authorities? Moreover, the Australia Council states that one of its "central objectives" is "the pursuit and promotion of artistic excellence" (1996 Grants Handbook, page 2). "Excellence" is extremely difficult to define objectively; but, is there a trumpeter of greater "excellence" in Australian jazz than Bob Barnard?



Ragtime pianist and popular songwriter Eubie Blake: included in a series of stamps featuring ten distinguished jazz musicians, part of the Legends of American Music Series...PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

*I imagine that only vigilant readers of *JazzChord* will remember that I was following up an initiative of Bruce Viles, owner of The Basement in Sydney, regarding the issue of **a series of stamps featuring Australian jazz musicians**. The latest I've heard, from the Philatelic Group, Australia Post, is that the issue programmes for 1996, 1997 and 1998 are fully committed. But Australian jazz is on the list of possible stamp subjects for 1999 and 2000. One of the interesting facts I discovered, in following this up, is that those whose heads are featured on stamps have to be dead; apparently no live person (other than the Queen) is featured. Meanwhile the US Post Office has issued a series of stamps featuring ten distinguished jazz musicians, as part of the Legends of American Music Series. I've seen some of them, and they're very handsome. But there is some controversy about them, according to Mark Tucker, writing in the *ISAM Newsletter*, Vol XXV, No 2, Spring 1996. (Thanks to Anthea Parker, reference librarian at the Australian Music Centre, for alerting me to this matter.) All of the musicians on the stamps are men; why not at least one woman?, says Tucker. And some people are asking why Eubie Blake - more a ragtime pianist, and popular songwriter than a great jazz musician - is included, alongside jazz giants such as Mingus, Monk and Coltrane. But the more substantial complaint is that, in the fine print in the left-hand margin of each stamp, all of the musicians are identified as composers first - as in Louis Armstrong, "Jazz composer & trumpeter", and Coleman Hawkins, "Jazz composer & saxophonist".



Louis Armstrong (above) described as “jazz composer & trumpeter”, and Coleman Hawkins(below) described as “jazz composer & saxophonist”...



Armstrong and Hawkins were brilliant instrumentalists and improvisers, rather than composers. Mark Tucker asks: “Was someone at the Post Office suggesting that these musicians belonged on stamps because they were serious creators, America’s version of Europe’s Great Composers? Duke Ellington had something to say on this subject long ago: “To attempt to elevate the status of the jazz musician by forcing the level of his best work into comparisons with classical music is to deny him his rightful share of originality.’ Recognising jazz is a good thing” - Mark Tucker concludes - “Understanding it would be even better.”