

MORE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ ON RECORD, by Jack Mitchell, National Film and Sound Archive: Canberra, 1998. ISBN 0 642 36511 3; iv + 345pp, indexes. RRP is about \$40.

Reviewed by Peter J F Newton*

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Jack Mitchell has for more than 40 years been one of Australia's leading jazz discographers. He has published many articles in popular magazines and in such important specialised journals as *Australian Jazz Quarterly*, *Jazz Notes*, *Matrix* and Sydney Jazz Club's *Quarterly Rag*. He has also been called on to provide accurate information for LP sleeve notes and for the detailed booklets that accompany some important CD reissues. In recent years he has produced a definitive book on the work of the legendary Port Jackson Jazz Band and an extensive discography for Graeme Bell's fine autobiography. With interests going across boundaries into other musical fields, Jack is also a leading light in the Australasian Sound Recordings Association and President of the Fellowship of Australian Discographers, for which he writes the irregular FAD Report. In short, he knows his stuff. So much so that he will be the guest speaker at the 1999 Graeme Bell Lecture (Waverley Public Library, Bondi Junction in September, 1999); I urge everyone to attend.**



The discographer Jack Mitchell: in short, he knows his stuff... PHOTO COURTESY JACK MITCHELL

* At time of writing in 1999 Peter Newton was best known in the jazz community as a jazz writer/editor, broadcaster and historian.

**Jack Mitchell's lecture is in the *BELL JAZZ LECTURES* folder on this website, and can be read at this link <https://www.ericmyersjazz.com/bell-lectures-3>.

The art of jazz discography is traceable to the separate pioneering works, circa 1936, of the French collector Charles Delaunay and the Englishman Hilton R Schleman. They set the pattern for these historical research tools which, with some variations in layout, scope and the use of abbreviations, has prevailed to this day.



The French discographer Charles Delaunay, pictured here with the American pianist/composer Thelonious Monk...

Jazz discographies have, in a sense, been the catalyst for discographical research in many other fields of music. I believe that the jazz format calls for very specific sets of information to warrant use of the term 'discography'. In my book, a listing is not a discography. Compiled from a variety of sources (including catalogues, recording company data, listening to the records themselves, reviews, personal contact and even oral history), the jazz discographer seeks to categorise and classify as accurately as possible the provenance, contents and range of labels on which particular recordings have been released. At the very least, the best discography will give details of place (concert hall, studio, broadcast) and recording dates, matrix and catalogue numbers (or their absence), label names (and country of origin), alternate takes, personnel and instrumentation, and individual tune titles. Some discographers go even further, identifying album titles, composers and lyricists, band and personnel pseudonyms, unissued sessions and so on. For the work to be of analytical value, omissions or uncertainties should be indicated but it is permissible, on the basis of aural evidence or interview, to suggest possible personnel and second guess session details.

In this present work (which we'll call MAJOR), Jack has produced a jazz discography in the classic sense, extending on or correcting the work of his earlier book, *Australian Jazz On Record 1925-1980* (AJOR, AGPS, Canberra, 1988). In the earlier

work, great attention was paid to the existing forms of presentation, from 78 to the vinyl microgroove. Less attention was paid to taped recordings owing to the difficulties in obtaining information, and the CD was then still in its infancy with only a modest jazz offering. In the ensuing years there has been an explosion (leading possibly to a chain reaction) in different types of recording media, often presenting us with new problems owing to poor source details, sometimes unreadable or inaccurate booklets (where illegible and grotesque graphic designs often obscure important facts about the music), and the great difficulty in getting producers of privately circulated CDs and cassettes to give out any information. These are the new challenges for our necessarily pedantic art.

Although MAJOR is an important addition to the slim corpus of good Australian discographies, it is not without its problems. I think that Jack has tried to get too much into this edition, given the extraordinary proliferation of CDs and the aforementioned cassettes over the past decade or so. His cut-off date was originally set at around 1996 (although some 1997 items are listed), a date that was, I believe, too ambitious.

1995 would have been more satisfying, possibly allowing more time for the correction of errors or the inclusion of late entries. Layout of the two books is essentially the same, although in MAJOR, Mitchell has varied the identification of label titles in a way that I find distracting. These should not be seen as derogatory remarks, for MAJOR's appearance is of great importance to the Australian jazz world just as our jazz scholars are embarking on a new voyage of discovery with the recent creation of formal jazz archives, both nationally and regionally. It is also a damn good buy! Overall, production is less elegant than that of AJOR but this is not surprising, given that despite technological advances that we apparently have to have ad nauseam, batch printing and publishing is still relatively expensive.

The art of the discographer depends on the generosity of many people who, often at their own expense, provide the data that are often grudgingly supplied by some record producers and band leaders; the importance of this aid is properly noted by the author. I understand that as his next task Jack intends to update and merge both books in CD-ROM format.

Editor's note: Jack Mitchell's book "Blistered Heels – Jazz And Hot Dance Music In Australia In The Twenties" is reviewed on this website at this link <https://www.ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews-2-2>. Also, his book "Back Together Again! The Story of the Port Jackson Jazz Band" is reviewed on this site at this link <https://www.ericmyersjazz.com/book-reviews-5>.