



VJAZZ 56  
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# VJAZZ

Proactively Collecting, Archiving and Disseminating Australian Jazz



*Graeme Bell*  
*Russ Murphy & X Watts*  
*Roger Bell*  
*Baker*  
GRAEME BELL'S DIXIELAND BAND 1945

GRAEME BELL DIXIELAND BAND 1945

Graeme Bell-Roger Bell-Pixie Roberts-Russ Murphy-Bud Baker  
Cyril Watts



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**Front Cover Image**  
Graeme Bell Scrapbooks—  
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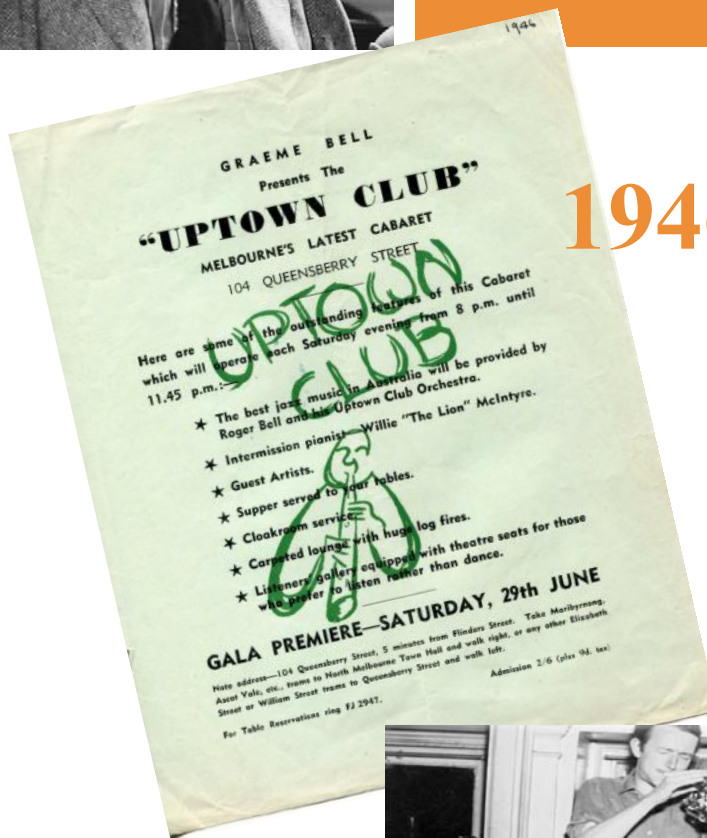
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15 Mountain Hwy.  
Wantirna  
Mel Ref 63 C8  
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**We dedicate this issue to  
Graeme Bell AO MBE.**  
7<sup>th</sup> September 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012

We have endeavoured to put together  
information and experiences from a  
number of different sources to honour the  
life and work of Graeme Bell. Thank you  
to all those who contributed.



1946



Graeme Bell (p) Humphrey Lyttelton (t)

1947 – 48

**We are happy to announce that the Victorian Jazz Archive has  
been granted Reaccreditation as a Museum up until 2017.  
Extended details will follow in our next issue.**

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## Recollections of my father—Graeme Bell

By Christina Bell

IT'S really hard to know where to start in speaking about Dad. Others more qualified than I have spoken of him as a musician. The story of his life and career have been told many times so I will simply share some personal reflections.

I didn't see all that much of Dad when I was growing up – he was away a lot and then moved to Sydney when I was 7 years old. We got to know each other more when I was in my late teens and I started making regular trips to Sydney and we found we had much in common—a similar sense of humour, a love of plants and gardening, a love of live theatre and ballet and of course music.

Whereas I think I tended to be quite shy as a person especially when I was young, Dad was a real extrovert. He was simply the most charismatic person I have ever met. He touched so many lives through his music and his vibrant personality. As many know from personal experience, he saw life in vivid Technicolor. Shades of grey were not his thing. My family and I know we are quoting the Master of Enthusiasm when we describe something as **"ABSOLUTELY MARVELOUS!"** Of course things could also be forcefully described as **"RUBBISH!"** or **"ABSOLUTELY BLOODY DREADFUL!"** And of course there was that large hearty laugh! When Dad and Roger, the brother he loved so dearly, were together and both laughing, the walls shook!

We've captured on film a family function around the time of Dad's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday when I spoke about his enquiring mind and keen interest in the world around him. It is well known that during band tours other bleary eyed musicians would sleep on after late nights but Dad would be up early and keen to go sight seeing. Here is a quote from his autobiography: *I have probably seen more of Australia than ninety-nine per cent of Australians and I love my homeland. But I have always felt a citizen of the world.* The amazing thing is his interest in the world around him had not diminished as he journeyed through his 97<sup>th</sup> year. Whilst health problems sometimes got him down, the company of his friends and family would quickly "buck him up" and he would happily talk about what was going on in the world. When Fiona, my daughter, and I visited Sydney for Dad's 97<sup>th</sup> birthday last year we took him to one of his favourite places - the Angel Place City Recital Hall - for a concert of baroque music. On the way, the taxi driver found out how old he was



Christina Bell, Graeme Bell and Fiona Bell

and asked him the secret of staying young – *Always be interested in the world around you* Dad replied without skipping a beat.

Unlike many others of his vintage, Dad did not live in the past even though he remembered it well – in fact his memory was phenomenal. He told me earlier this year how much he enjoyed the company of young people—how they energized him. He absolutely charmed all of the mostly young staff at Edina Hostel and they told me they missed him after he died. Many young musicians have benefited from the interest Dad showed in them and I'm sure that Fiona and Imogen, his other granddaughter, can attest to the fact that he was a very "with it" grandfather. Ever willing to engage in a changing world, in the week before he died Dad told me how much he loved the television program "Coast" and commented on how aerial photography had revolutionized documentary film making.

Another thing many will have noticed I am sure, is that in a country where let's say it's not really the norm (or perhaps that is changing now?) for men, Dad was always a snappy dresser – never afraid to wear bright colours or advise others to wear them. In fact as a painter he had a very good eye for colours and clothes and in his last years his yellow lemon scarf became a real motif. I remember when he came to Melbourne when I was young he would buy clothes in a little shop in what was the Southern

Cross Hotel. I treasured a black and white party dress he sent me for my eighth birthday and thought how special it was to be wearing something quite different from your typical little girl's party dress.

Dad was truly a renaissance man – interested in art, music, literature, politics, the environment, the performing arts and sport. All these interests stimulated his active intelligent mind.

Like many successful people in the public eye, Dad had a healthy ego but with his sense of humour he saw the funny side even of this aspect of himself. In the week before he died Fiona and I visited him in his Edina Hostel in Sydney where he showed us the books the local library had delivered for him – **"Rubbish"** he proclaimed. And then he pointed to one of them – a book on Australian legends and added with a twinkle in his eye – **and I'm not even in that one!** For much of my life I've had people say to me, *"Oh! You're Graeme Bell's daughter,"* and I haven't minded a bit. However, years ago I was a member of a university council here in Victoria, and a senior university official was in Sydney, met Dad and apparently said, *"Oh! You're Christina Bell's father!"* I think Dad was a bit put out by this reversal!

That week in June Fiona and I had spent some wonderful quality time with Dad. Even though he was troubled by the breathlessness which led to his hospital admission on June 9<sup>th</sup>, he was up till then in fine form—enjoying lunch

at the Czech restaurant which reminded him of his first trip to Europe, and on the Friday going with Fiona and me to have lunch at La Perouse where we discussed the joys of travel and reminisced about the beach walks he used to have with his beloved dog Tangles. Fiona and I are so pleased we made that trip to Sydney.

I would like to thank the many loyal followers of and supporters of Dad's wonderful music.

Although he is physically no longer with us his legacy is enormous – his wonderful music lives on through his recordings, as do our memories of a magnificent, larger than life human being.



Original Band, last reunion, 50th AJC 1994  
J. Varney (bj) R. Murphy (d) R. Bell (t) A. Monsborough (sax)  
G. Bell (p) L. Silbereisen (sb)

## In Addition

By Jack Mitchell

**I** EXPECT that Graeme's career and accomplishments will have been dealt with by others, so I would like to add a bit on Graeme himself. Years ago he told me that he knew many musicians who were dead-boring to talk with as they could only speak about music. Because of this, Graeme said, he took a determined effort to develop an interest in many other matters besides music. In this he certainly succeeded, although I doubt he had to try very hard—I believe those interests would have arisen without conscious effort. It's well known of his (and Roger's) efforts in building a mud brick house, as well as his interest in art, politics (Australian and international) and literature. He also immersed himself in Japanese and Chinese matters, and people in general.

He was also very helpful to other musicians, particularly young ones. I've heard several stories of his sending sheet music and arrangements to artists with whom he'd had a brief acquaintance. I have personal experience of one example of his kindness. In 1964 I was involved with the Lithgow branch of the Miss Australia Quest, which raised money for the Spastic Centre. I know we're not supposed to use that word, but this was half a century back. Anyway we booked Graeme and the All Stars to play a concert at our Theatre Royal to raise funds. A week or so before the concert a young local musician, Alan Oloman, rang me. His band, called the **Black Diamonds** was becoming popular locally and he asked could his group perform, free of charge, in the theatre before the concert, as people were tak-

ing their seats.

I thought, "Come on. Who wants a rock'n'roll band playing at a jazz concert" but being diplomatic, I told him that I couldn't make that decision, but I would ask Graeme. I rang Graeme who said, "Of course. What a good idea. I love it". So the Black Diamonds played, although I didn't really hear them, being occupied with front-of-house matters, like counting the take. The All Stars were, of course, a great hit. Next morning Alan rang me to thank me for organising his gig (I accepted his thanks graciously) and he said, "Isn't Mr. Bell a nice man? At interval he spoke with us, congratulated us on our music and offered advice on presentation and matters such as providing more vocals".

A few months later Alan took his band, now called TYME-PIECE (if I remember correctly), that had a successful couple of years on the Sydney pub circuit, recorded a couple of singles for Festival that were well received (even by Glenn A. Baker) but finally decided against that life and returned to

Lithgow. I've often wondered whether they would have had even that short time in Sydney if it hadn't been for Graeme's encouragement.

One other thing I'd like to mention. In his autobiography Graeme mentioned a letter that Rex Stewart wrote to Bud Baker whilst they were in England during the second tour (p.134). Graeme quoted Rex's remark that, "I sure miss you fellows still. It's funny but I did not miss Ellington as long". Graeme did not quote a further sentence where Rex wrote: "Tell you what, why don't you guys play Canada and we will all make the home trip and do a season, then I'll come back home, how's that sound". It sounded like a pretty good compliment to me, and I'm sorry it didn't happen.



Rex Stewart, G Bell, J. Branston, B. Baker, R. Bell, A. Monsborough, J. Rich, K. Hounslow, P. Roberts.

# Remembering Graeme Bell

By Eric Brown

**R**ECENTLY Graeme Bell died. He had reached 97, but would have liked to have made it a century. This was probably due to his great love of cricket where, at one time, he became a qualified cricket umpire. By coincidence his mother, Elva Rogers, who sang with Madam Melba, reached about the same age. His brother, trumpet player Roger, took after his father John who was a comedian and lived to ninety. Graeme, Roger and Ade Monks were mainly responsible for the great interest in Jazz in Melbourne in the 1940s.

I knew of the Bells when I was a student at Caulfield Technical College. Bill Armstrong, also a student, would run Jazz Record Recitals at lunch time and I became hooked on the music. I planned to hear the

Ampersand label AMP1.

It was the Eureka Youth league which arranged for the Bells to go to The World Youth Festival in Czechoslo-

suggested I purchase a Southern Jazz Group Record instead. This I did which started me collecting S.J.G. records which is another story.



May Day float promo for the World Youth Festival in Prague 1947

Before leaving on their first overseas tour, the Bells had purchased some land in Eltham and started to build mud brick houses with the help of people like Gordon Ford. Gordon was a noted landscape gardener and lived in one of these with his wife Gwen until recently. It was in this house Graeme celebrated his birthday with many jazz friends including Dick Hughes and

Frank Johnson. Surprise guests were Terukazu and Yukuko Arita who had specially flown down from Tokyo for the occasion. The Aritas and the **Dixie Jive** had become good friends when Graeme recorded with the band in Tokyo.

After arriving in Prague for the World Youth Festival the band recorded for Supraphon and toured Czechoslovakia. Next stop was Paris on the way to London. Here they recorded for French Pacific and went to hear the **Claude Luter Band**. In London they set up the Leicester Square Jazz Club doing three nights a week. In 1970 I went to see it with the original number-one ticket holder, Charlie Crump. It was still there and empty, and on asking the caretaker if he would let us in for a photograph he would not and commented, "It was Soho we wanted"! If the Bells went off on a tour they got the newly formed **Humphrey Lyttelton Band** to deputise for them. This was the beginning of a long-lasting



Graeme Bell band in transit late 1948

Bells at the Uptown Club in North Melbourne, but my parents would not let me go as they did not like the idea of me going to a club run by the Eureka Youth League. What a pity as I missed out on some great jazz.

In those early years Graeme and Roger were inspired by the multi-instrumentalist Benny Featherstone who played at the Fawcner Park Kiosk on Sundays.

Another exciting happening was the arrival in Melbourne of the Artie Shaw band which had Max Kaminsky in the trumpet section. Roger and Pixie Roberts got to know Max who recorded with them and was issued on Bill Miller's

vakia. However, before they left on 3rd June 1947, the band went up to Sydney to do a recording session for Regal Zonophone. These featured Geoff Kitchen instead of their regular clarinet player Pixie Roberts who had been injured in a motor-cycle accident. These proved extremely popular, particularly "Smokey Mokes". When I went to buy them at Bob Clemens' shop in Flinders Lane he had sold out and



Graeme Bell meets the then Princess Elizabeth July 1951

friendship.

On returning to Melbourne they did many broadcasts and concerts plus touring

with Duke Ellington's trumpeter Rex Stewart. One concert I attended in Melbourne's Exhibition Building was packed to the rafters. The supporting band on this occasion was Tony Newstead's South Side Gang. In 1951 the Bells did a second tour of Europe with Deryck Bentley of Adelaide on trombone and John Sangster on drums. There they joined up with blues singer Big Bill Broonzy where an illegal recording was

including the very popular Paramount Recordings for Bill Armstrong as Frisco Joe and with Smacka Fitzgibbon. Skiffle became the craze in 1957 so Graeme formed a group using Vic Sabrino on vocals and John Sangster playing washboard.

During the 1960s Graeme formed an all star band eventually enticing Bob Barnard up from Melbourne to play trumpet with Ken Herron



Australian Outback Tour John Sangster, Graeme Bell, Roger Bell, Pixie Roberts, Ade Monsborough.



Bell Band and friends in Prague, 1947

made at a concert in Dusseldorf on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1951. This featured some of the best Bell Band recordings and has only been released recently on a double CD. Other recordings were made featuring members of the Humphrey Lyttelton band. At the newly completed Royal Festival Hall together with other band leaders, Graeme was presented to princess Elizabeth at a National Federation of Jazz Organization Concert on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1951. Both of these tours are covered by a thesis written by Lauren Van der Werff saxophonist with Michael Mc Quaide's band and a copy is in the Victorian Jazz Archive.

On returning to Melbourne the band broke up with Deryck Bentley and Bud Baker, who had had enough of touring, returning to their homes. Following this the band did a disastrous tour of NSW, using Jim Sutherland as driver and roadie. At a luncheon with Graeme and Dorothy at "Young and Jackson's" years later he revealed he did not have a driving licence during that tour!!

During 1953 and 1954 Graeme's band, together with Ceylonese vocalist Yolanda Wolf, did an extended tour of Korea and Japan for the combined Services Entertainment Concert Parties. Following this, Graeme did various gigs

on trombone and Johnny Mc Carthy on clarinet. The **All Stars** featured various personnel from time to time with John Costello replacing Ken Herron. This was basically the band he used until Bob Henderson replaced Bob Barnard in 1979.

In 1975 Graeme received a research grant, and on the advice of Roger Beilby and myself went to Canada and USA

where he recorded with Toronto's **Climax Jazz Band** FESTL-35927 and visited New York. There he went to the Condon Club and also renewed his friendship with Max Kaminsky at Jimmy Ryans. Following this he attended The Newport Jazz Festival where he heard the famous trumpeter Jabbo Smith. On our advice he went to St Louis for its ragtime festival on the Golden Rod Show Boat anchored in the Mississippi River. Here the **Salty Dogs** of Chicago with vocalist Carol Leigh plus **The New Black Eagle Band** from Boston were on the program. Graeme was surprised to find many knew his recordings. One of these included his friend Wayne Jones drummer with the **Salty Dogs** who has a huge record collection.

Next stop was New Orleans where Geoff Bull and Max Collie were in town and showed him around. He heard **The Papa French Band** in Heritage Hall and **Sweet Emma's Band** in Preservation Hall. Graeme took the St Charles Avenue street car out to meet up with Dick Allen at Tulane Jazz Archives. Here he listened to reel-to-reel tapes of interviews that Dick and Bill Russell had done with many of the old time musicians, some now long gone.



Louis Armstrong talking with Graeme Bell, Mascot VIP Lounge, Sydney 1963

Next was a visit to the Joplin Ragtime Festival in Sedalia Missouri featuring many well known rag-

time pianists and bands. Following this was the World Championship of Jazz in Indianapolis put on by Max Collie and featuring many top American bands, but won by Max's band!

After a holiday, Graeme caught up with Turk Murphy at Earthquake Mc Goons in San Francisco and played intermission piano contrary to the rules in his visa. Another highlight was a meeting with Lu Watters now retired and living in a cabin 120 kms out of town.

Back in Australia he went down to Melbourne to do a Scott Joplin Ragtime Concert at the Robert Blackwood Hall where its superb acoustics allowed the band to play without amplification.

After I returned from New Orleans in 1969 where I spent a lot of time in the Tulane Jazz Archive, I was contacted by Graeme who asked me if I would put together his scrapbooks. At first I was not going to as he was in Sydney and I was in Melbourne. Geoff Holden talked me into it and then the flood of items began. This has continued until recently and has resulted in about ten ...books. Graeme has put several of them in the Mitchell Library in Sydney as there was no jazz archive around at that time. Hopefully the remaining ones will go there too, but will be scanned for lodging in the Victorian Jazz Archive.

After several TV appearances the band did the first of three tours of PNG and New Zealand. During this time the **All Stars** played at Sydney's Chevron Hotel for two years complete with "Crazy Floor Show". Here they had Bob Van Oven of the **Dutch Swing College** on bass.

In 1972 Graeme took part in a salute to Louis Armstrong concert tour. This featured several of his English friends Alex Welsh, Roy Williams, Humphrey Lyttelton and Bruce Turner.

He was a guest of Channel Seven's "This is your Life" in 1978, and in 1980 he performed at the Breda Jazz Festival in Holland and again in 1981 when Franz Jackson and Doc Cheatham were also guests.

Graeme issued recordings of Breda on his Seahorse label SHL004.

For Graeme and Dorothy's silver wedding anniversary in 1986 they did a short trip to China, something repeated in 1990, but this time with his band and vocalist Little Pattie.

Apart from his AO and his MBE Graeme has had many tributes, anniversaries, honours and farewell concerts which is only appropriate for somebody who has done so much for Australian jazz.

I enjoyed most the return to the Uptown Club Concert and the tribute to him for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Bentleigh Club, Melbourne. Here the surprise guest was Johnny Malpas, banjo player with **Ade-laide's Southern Jazz Group**, which was a contemporary of the Bell band. This indicates just how much Graeme was held in regard by his fellow musicians.

My thoughts are with Dorothy, Jason, Imogene, Christina, Bill, Fiona and the Bell Family at this time.

#### References:

Graeme Bell's Autobiography

Graeme Bell's Scrapbooks

My poor memory



Bell Band Sydney Harbour. Ken Herron (tb), Bob Barnard (t), Graeme Bell (p), Laurie Gooding (cl), Alan Geddes (bj), Harry Harman (sb).



Port Moresby 1963. Harry Harmon, Ken Herron, Alan Geddes, Bob Barnard, John Mc Carthy, Graeme Bell, Candy Devine.

# GRAEME BELL - A PERSONAL RAMBLING MEMOIR

By Ray Marginson

THERE have been many places where the history of the Bell Band is fully set down and its effect on Australian jazz evaluated. I felt I should prepare some notes on Graeme's personal role and, in particular, how I saw him from the first time when Ray Bradley and I heard him, with Pixie Roberts, playing at one of those innumerable coffee shops that abounded in the early forties. It was the start of an obsession with improvised jazz and a revelation.

In the feckless, irresponsible, live for the moment existence, typical of the life of a jazz musician in the 1940s Graeme stood out. Not that he played no part in the iconoclastic scene they all inhabited, but that he was the one who realised, very early, that someone had to take responsibility. Someone had to assume the role of a band leader, with all the 'burdens' such a decision brings; and he took it on. This was one of the reasons why the Bell Band survived, grew, and developed. Graeme's combination of musical talent of a high order with an almost instinctive grasp of management essentials inevitably brings comparison with those who created the major name big bands of the 30s and 40s; Benny Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw and Bunny Berigan. The greatest of all these is perhaps the composer/pianist Duke Ellington who held the core of his band together from the twenties to his death. This is not a far-fetched comparison but Graeme would probably mutter to himself in embarrassment over such a statement. However, I feel it is essentially true and this is born out by his second creation after the demise of the original band, his All Stars. He knew what to do and how to manage disparate personalities. He was, of course, greatly aided by the spirit of those in the bands who were themselves conscious of their pioneering role and, particularly in the early days, were on a very exciting wave as the dancing public embraced the jazz revival.

Early his musical role in the nascent Bell Band was providing, with the close-knit rhythm section, (essentially Russ Murphy, Norm Baker and Lou Silbereisen as well as, from time to time, Jack Varney, Lyn Challen, Laurie (Ghost) Howells, Charlie Blott, Bill Lobb and Jim Buchan), a strong fundamental chordal base for Roger, Pixie Roberts and Ade Monsborough. It enabled the front line, led by the driving but lyrical

cornet of his younger brother, to produce something very new and Australian in the dance halls of 1940s Melbourne.

I have quoted elsewhere (in the Archive booklet for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday) a very significant statement about how he saw the music they created. He *"never claimed exclusive rights to the playing of jazz music in Melbourne"*... *"What we were about was entirely different in that we were after a collective sound, collective improvisation in the classic jazz mould. Solo playing constituted a small and unimportant role compared to our ensemble playing. There was no ego-tripping. You would be lucky to get sixteen bars of solo interspersed with ensembles and then the whole tune would be taken out with anything up to six full band choruses. To my knowledge, nobody had done this previously."*

"Graeme Bell: Australian Jazzman" 1988. p42

And further at p.51 on the Heidelberg Town Hall six piece:

*"What a dream. None of us had, as yet, been able to fulfil our ideal of a regular three-man front line. This is what it was all about. The sort of jazz we were after could best be expressed by three wind instruments in counterpoint. We were searching for a completely different sound ... unerring solid beat ... an uncomplicated springboard for the frontline ... to create musical tension, at times nudging the borders of discord only to back off in time to complement one another in harmony."*

Later, his talent encompassed original composition and the recording of many works played by his own band and a legion of improvising jazz groups that followed in their wake.

It is fortunate that his band-leader role gave him sufficient forbearance to yield to my persistent request in 1945 that we try and set down all the detail he could recall of the acetate recordings of the band from 1938 forward to 1947 (the date of the first commercial Regal Zonophone recordings). It was this list, together with the archives of Jack Mitchell, Bill Haesler and Bill Miller that enabled John Kennedy and me to put together the double CD, VJAZZ 007/008, that preserved the surviving Bell recordings from 1939 to 1947.

The other early trailblazing work of the Graeme Bell original group, including the 6 sides from the 1947 Sydney session, can be heard on the digitally remastered 2009 CD produced by the doyen of Australian recording figures Bill Armstrong.

He led the original band on its trailblazing first overseas visit to Prague, Paris, Berlin and London in 1947. He spoke often of the sombre and abysmal experience of food-starved London in the bitter winter of the post-war years, endured with his then wife, Liz and their newly-born daughter Christina; all this offset to some extent by the enthusiasm and wild receptions at the many concerts up and down the U.K. and in Paris and Berlin.

In the Archive I have deposited a very sad letter to me that illustrates just how difficult the whole process of getting to Europe actually was for them all. In 1947 Betty and I were only recently married, accommodation was virtually unobtainable and we had the great good fortune to take over Graeme and Roger's room at 1 Hawksburn Avenue, South Yarra. The letter reflects the dire financial straits they were in, even lacking fundamental things like warm clothing for the European winter. They were all disappointed with the lack of support from the Melbourne jazz community. Despite their great popularity no effort was made at fundraising, except in Sydney. The letter seeks from us some trifling sums as advance rental for equipment left behind in their room. It was a sobering



Graeme and Margo Bell, 1942

moment for us, even then, and encapsulates a time in the immediate post-war period now completely forgotten. Things were tough; as has been said, the past is another country.

Women have been very central in Graeme's life. There were many of great importance. From his mother Elva Rogers, who early nurtured his musical talent. She had been a contralto recitalist and was in Melba's travelling company. Then his first wife, the elegant Margo Byass, now Mrs Winch, but known to the band (and the hangers-on) as "Sox". His second wife, the poet Elizabeth Galloway Watson, later honoured in the Order of Australia for her work for Buddhism in Australia, and the mother of his daughter Christina he named "Tinka", with whom he has been very close. At his death he was married to Dorothy, the mother of his son Jason. It was Dorothy's indomitable strength that rescued him from a dark period of his life in Brisbane and led the way to new flowering in Sydney. Here he led a different type of band, his "All Stars", that initially included many names now famous internationally such as the trumpeter Bob Barnard and his superb drummer, brother Len.



**Graeme and Elizabeth**

Full credit must also be given to another enormously important person in his musical life, the phenomenal jazz entrepreneur Diana Allen. As his Melbourne agent and his friend she has consistently supported and enlarged the impact of his work over a long period. In recent years despite his age he has produced many performances both live and on CDs, among these has been the 2 CD set recording 47 of his own compositions (Newmarket) and the 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration CD (B & W Music) by the Graeme Bell Reunion Band.

He never lost his affection for Melbourne, the venue for his art training under Max Meldrum, the centre of his musical development and the place he called home. It was here that his life-long friendships were formed; for instance with fellow Meldrumite Peter Glass, with whom he, Roger and landscape architect Gordon Ford shared several hilltop acres in Eltham. His transition to Sydney, when he left Brisbane, was inevitable. It was the best place to establish a group like the All Stars, performing in major hotels and whenever possible playing mainstream jazz. It was Paul Keating who said, "If you don't live in Sydney you are just camping out". Not all of us would agree but the remark contains a truth so far as the All Stars were concerned. It is doubtful if they would have survived in Melbourne. The type of venues needed were just not there.

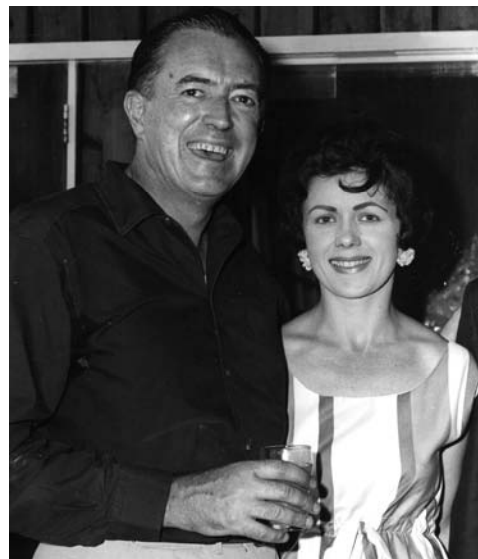
It is now almost seventy years since Ray Bradley, John Campton and I stood around the Heidelberg Town Hall bandstand to hear the six piece group led by Graeme; an engagement that Ade Monsborough summed up by saying, "The Heidelberg days were the most exciting I can remember and we played as well as any time barring perhaps Prague".

I count it a unique privilege to have been there, and grateful that, on VJAZZ 007, in the recording "Chicago", the Archive has preserved something of that sound we heard at Heidelberg in 1943. Recovered from a cassette presumably taken from a worn acetate of unknown origin, held in the National Film and Sound Archive, in my view it is as close as we will ever get now to hearing the six piece, belting it out, chorus after chorus, and loving what they were doing.

Finally, I am also personally grateful for the part Graeme played, with Roger, in adding considerably to my literary and cultural education. They and their friends like Bill Miller, today our Patron, were brilliant conversationalists, quick witted, humorous and talk was always illuminated by a depth of reading in areas often new to me. It was my alternative university.

In Graeme we have lost an Australian icon, a significant figure in Australian music but above all, a warm friend.

We shall continue to miss him for a long while.



**Graeme and Dorothy Bell**



**Graeme and Christina**



**Graeme, Fiona and Christina, Monsalvat 1990**



**Graeme Bell and Diana Allen 1999**

## Remembering Graeme Bell Clayton RSL August 29<sup>th</sup>.

A mutual spirit of cooperation was very evident when committee members of the Victorian Jazz Club and the Victorian Jazz Archive met together at VJA headquarters, Koomba Park Wantirna, to arrange an event to suitably commemorate the fabulous contribution that Graeme Bell made to Australian jazz, and indeed overseas jazz, during his lifetime. Representing the VJC were President Keith Nash, Vice President Doreen Hughan and Secretary Margaret Hendrie. The VJA were represented by President Terry Norman, General Manager Ray Sutton and Collections Manager Mel Blachford.



**President of the VJA Terry Norman shaking hands with the President of the VJC Keith Nash.**



**Fiona Bell & Christina Bell**



**Diana Allen**



**Dr Ray Marginson AM**



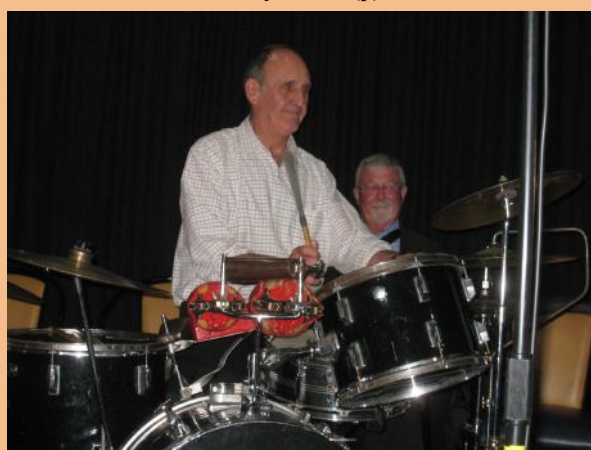
**Graham Coyle (p) Chris Ludowyk (sb)**



**Tony Gould (p)**



**John Adams (p) Chris Ludowyk (sb)**



**Ian Smith (d)**



“Remembering Graeme Bell” was an excellent get-together of almost 300 attendees held at the Clayton RSL to hear key note speakers Christina Bell, Dr Ray Marginson AM, and Diana Allen; and invited pianists Graham Coyle, Tony Gould and John Adams. Ian Smith (d) and Chris Ludowyk (sb) provided rhythm support to the pianists. Film and video clips from the VJA and other sources were shown on a big screen throughout the mid-day, early-afternoon event.

**Images courtesy of The Victorian Jazz Club.**



## Remembering Graeme Bell AO MBE

### By Diana Allen

**M**Y FIRST recollection of Graeme was when I was eleven years old and my mother pointed him out to me on a City-bound tram from our home in Kew. I had no idea who he was, as I knew nothing about jazz, nor did my mother, but the fact that she pointed him out to me made me realize there was something very special about this man. I still recall how good looking he was as he sat in the outer part of the tram smoking. He must have been about 35 at the time but he was already a household name and his picture had obviously appeared in the paper often enough for my mother to have recognized him.

Some years later .... a friend of my parents lent us a stack of 78s to play on our new radiogram and amongst them was a recording of *Czechoslovak Journey* played by the *Graeme Bell Band*. I will never forget to this day the impact that recording had on me as I played it over and over, and in retrospect I realize that this was the beginning of my addiction to jazz. This tune was also somehow exotic in a Slavic sense but I found out years later that Graeme had run it up in his Bourke Street studio in *preparation* for the band's trip to Prague! He had somehow managed to capture a European flavor with this tune and it has remained a favourite of mine in spite of the fact that it is seldom played.

How could I possibly have known in those days that, many years later, I would become Graeme Bell's Melbourne representative. My mother also would have found it hard to believe in 1950 when she pointed Graeme out to me on that tram, what lay ahead for her daughter with this extraordinary man.

My first association with Graeme however began in 1988. I had recently moved to Melbourne from the Western District of Victoria where I'd been presenting jazz for ten years and where I had lived for 25. Graeme's autobiography had just been published and I had read it and been intrigued by the amazing narrative of his life in music. I rang him in Sydney and told him how much I'd enjoyed his book and asked him if he'd like me to launch it in Melbourne; the rest as they say is history!

We had the launch at Rialto Receptions in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda which was a huge venue and we filled it. Graeme's three wives all attended, a clue to the sort of man he was, as he always remained on good terms with his ex wives! People came out of the woodwork for this historic occasion and this remained

the case for the rest of his life.

He sold a lot of books that day, all autographed with his beautiful, distinctive and famous signature, and Graeme and I were up and running.

He of course played piano in the band that we put together for this occasion which consisted of Fred Parkes, Bill Howard, Ian Smith, Leon Heale and John Scurry. The event was a huge success and the first of many that followed over the next 25 years. Graeme invited me to become his Melbourne representative soon after the book launch, and from then on always referred to me as his *own impresario*, which I went along with of course!

Our next venture was the *Golden Jubilee Celebration* of his original band. I will never know how I managed to persuade the new owners of The Uptown Club in Queensberry Street, North Melbourne, Graeme's original jazz club and HQ of the Eureka Youth League in the 1940s, to let me *borrow* their hall for the Bell Band's Golden Jubilee. What an ask! The hall had been beautifully restored by the early 1990s and was, and still is, the HQ of *The Legion of Mary*! Over several cups of tea I somehow persuaded the priests and nuns in attendance, and who to my surprise all knew who Graeme Bell was, to allow me to recreate his first jazz club for one night for this important occasion. I left the proposal with them that day, in trepidation, and eventually received a letter to say that they had agreed to go along with the idea, as they could see it was an historic event. Graeme and I were over-

whelmed by their generosity and kindness. They said they would clear the hall of any vestige of Roman Catholicism and I assured them that the hall would be respected and returned in the same condition in which it was handed over to us, which it was.

I hired a small team of 'party planners' and at great expense they went about their research and preparation to recreate the Uptown Club as close to the way it was in the 1940s when the Bell Band reigned supreme and where the first Australian Jazz Convention had taken place in 1946.

'Prickly Pear' the party planners, recreated from photos, Clem Meadmore's wall-hangings around the hall, and the music-stands that Graeme had originally created with his drawings of reed players, for the stage. Slides of photographs of the band in their hey-day were projected onto a large screen above the stage all night and a huge Clem Meadmore look-a-like wall hanging hung as a backdrop on stage. The hall looked incredible and was filled with round tables seating ten, and the balcony was used for a fabulous exhibition that Ray Marginson put together of the original Bell Band. The party planners had even painted a runner of piano keys up the steps of the hall's entrance for Graeme and the band and later everyone to use rather than a red carpet. The whole effect was sensational and the night was a triumph!

All the original band were on stage that night except their drummer Russ Murphy who was ill at home in Queensland.



The Bell Band's Golden Jubilee, The Uptown Club 1993  
Steve Waddell (tb) Roger Bell (t) Neville Stribling (cl) Ade Monsborough (sax)  
Graeme Bell (p)

Ian Smith replaced Russ and in addition to Graeme & Roger Bell, Ade Monsebourg, Jack Varney and Lou Silbereisen, we added Steve Waddell on trombone and Neville Stribling on saxes, to support them.

We had interesting speeches dispersed with music throughout the evening, including a speech from the man behind the first European tour of the Bell Band, founding member of the Eureka Youth League, Harry Stein. He came down from Sydney and I remember him saying that he would have walked on broken glass to be there.

Speaking of glass, Peter Glass gave one of the best speeches of the night. Peter was a painter at Eltham all his life and had built mud brick houses with Graeme and Roger in the early days and had attended art classes with Graeme at the National Gallery in Melbourne in the 40s and 50s. He was also Humphrey Lyttelton's best man! It is very sad to think that so many people who took part in that great reunion are now gone, but I'm so pleased I was able to get them all there for that one last fling together, that they all enjoyed so much.

We had far too many people in the hall on the night, and many were turned away. The whole event was fortunately filmed by Steve Bowman and I still have DVDs of the event which are wondrous now to view. Everyone present will remember that night forever in spite of a few unavoidable sound difficulties with the music.

Many further big events with Graeme followed, including his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday at Mietta's [when a contingent of Japanese jazz musicians surprised him by arriving unexpectedly from Japan], and his 90<sup>th</sup> at the Assembly Hall in Collins Street which ran over two concerts and was attended by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch amongst other dignitaries.

Another fabulous tribute concert to Graeme was the one that Brian Kelly and I arranged at Dallas Brooks Hall when for the first half of the program we had the **Creole Bells** playing early material of the Bell Band and after interval the Bob Barnard **Allstars** with Ian Pearce on piano played Graeme's later material. Graeme sat on stage in a beautiful leather chair donated for the night by Moran Furniture and talked about his musical life, using a remote to illustrate it in pictures on a huge screen. This included the interview that he did with Louis Armstrong at the Sydney airport in the '50s. The bands played appropriate pieces to illustrate his narrative and once again Dallas Brooks Hall was packed. I received many phone calls, emails and letters afterwards from

all sorts of people that were present congratulating us on such a memorable evening. One was from the late Campbell McComas who said he couldn't remember a night's entertainment he'd enjoyed more! Coming from him that was an enormous compliment to Graeme, and all of us. But it was really about Graeme and his innate sense of communicating with an audience.

Graeme's Farewell Concert in the Ian Roach Hall at his old school Scotch College, was also a sellout. He chose Mi-



Graeme Bell's Ragtime Four. Tony Orr (bj), Diana Allen, Neville Stribling (cl), Graeme Bell (p), Joe McConnechy (sb).

chael McQuaid's wonderful **Red Hot Rhythmakers** for this great occasion, a band of which he was enamored! He played piano in the band, told wonderful anecdotes about his colourful life and had the audience in the palm of his hand to the very end.

Everything that Graeme and I worked on together over twenty-five years worked, and I learnt a lot from him in the process. He was a born marketer and would do anything to help promote these events. He was appreciative, helpful, always co-operative and a pleasure to work alongside.

He was unique in so very many ways.

He always showed appreciation to his audiences for their attendance and they loved him for it ..... as long as they didn't keep wanting him to play all his old tunes over and over, he definitely didn't appreciate that! All his life he had moved forward and

never remained bogged down in the past like a lot of his fans did.

Graeme's and my 'last hurrah' together was the launch of the double CD of 45 of his own incredible compositions in 2008. This had begun as a small project of *his*. He told me he was going to put all his own compositions onto a recording and make 100 copies to give to friends to mark the end of his career. I explained that very *many* hundreds of his fans would want a copy of this recording and he should have it produced commercially. He reluctantly agreed to this, knowing it would mean a lot of work and he was weary and too old for any more big projects. It did turn out to be a huge project but he got a lot of help from many friends and musicians, particularly Bill Haesler, and he eventually declared it to be the best recording he had ever released and I totally agreed with him. The music on these two recordings is indicative of Graeme's great talent as a composer and the enormous diversity of his compositions. It became the biggest selling album of the year for Newmarket Music and it bears

testimony to his prodigious output in so many areas of his life. His book of notes that comes with the recording is superbly produced also.

He will of course always remain the man who put Australian jazz on the map and one of the greatest jazz band leaders in history. Graeme's last project turned out to be an appropriate swansong for him and one that enabled him to finally and gracefully bow out.

I miss him, the one and only Graeme Bell; we will never see the likes of him again.



Graeme Bell and Diana Allen Sydney 2004

## A JAZZER OF NOTE By Bill Brown



**T**HAT title would certainly apply to Graeme Emerson Bell who died in recent times. An icon of Australian Jazz History dating back to the forties, his exploits in furthering hot jazz music world wide is well documented in Australia and overseas.

Other people who knew him personally will write of his activities better than I can; however, I will attempt to chronicle my observations from the wings so to speak, as a collector/enthusiast.

I was introduced to the 'Good Noise' of jazz in Scotland in the early fifties just after the Bell Band's second European tour, so I missed out on hearing them at that time.

However, I recall hearing a BBC radio program in 1958 which was celebrating the then tenth year of the Humphrey Lyttelton Band. Various records that Humph had made during that decade were played including at least one of the combined Graeme Bell/Lyttelton tracks recorded in London in 1951. It was mentioned that those sessions were deemed to be a bit 'modern' for the purists, although really they sounded similar to the sound put out by the legendary Luis Russell Band of the twenties.

Fast forward to 1966. That year I arrived in Melbourne and amongst my early jazz purchases at Thomas' record shop was a seven inch Swaggie LP of the Bell/Lyttelton sides. For good measure I also purchased an LP which had Graeme's London recordings from 1951 plus Ade Monsborough with Humph's band.

In the years to follow I acquainted myself with the Australian jazz scene

and soaked up its history.

I didn't see Graeme's band until 1972 when they held one of their periodic reunions at La Brochette Restaurant in Kew. It was the 'old' band more or less. Graeme, brother Roger, Ade, Pixie Roberts (Clt,Ten,Sax), Bud Baker (Gtr, Bj), Lou Silbereisen (Bs, Tuba). Charlie Blott was on drums. He had appeared with the early band on occasions but hadn't been on the two European tours.

The band led off with a number minus the piano then Roger made an announcement about 'The band's piano player' and Graeme appeared from the rear of the restaurant to a fanfare from the musicians and appreciative applause from the audience. It was a great evening. All the band's old favourites were trotted out and as in the past the band was broken down into the smaller groups, Late Hour Boys, or Pixie's Trio and of course Roger's vocals were also in evidence.

In later years I saw Graeme a few times when he visited Melbourne. I recall a concert at Dallas Brooks Hall in 1999. Then of course there was the tour in 2004 when he celebrated his ninetieth birthday. He visited our jazz archive and opened the special exhibition we had put on to coincide with his milestone.

Last time I saw him play was at Scotch College when he was part of Michael McQuaid's big band. They did quite a few of Graeme's compositions and he was clearly impressed by their prowess and Michael's arranging skills. In an article I wrote for the Archive Newsletter in 2004 I fell back on cricket parlance to say that as he'd notched up ninety we hoped he'd go for the hundred. Graeme certainly gave it a good shot as they say.

I hope if there is an afterlife that the band holds some more reunions; starting off with 'Georgia Camp Meeting', 'South' and of course 'Smokey Mokes'.



## Graeme Bell and the start of World War 2

**O**N the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1939, my sister celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Our father arranged a party at a popular venue "The Gables", Finch St. Malvern. We heard the famous speech of Robert Menzies – declaring we were at war with Germany. Despite this momentous news, it was a wonderful evening, mainly because of the music of no other than Graeme and Roger Bell, with a young, fresh faced group who supplied the most fantastic music. My brother who was in the Militia Reserve was called up to guard the Barracks in St. Kilda Road. We were thrilled when he turned up later in the evening in his hired dinner suit.

What a great career they had.

*Jean Kelaher.*

In a conversation with Jean, who is in her ninetieth year, she said she couldn't remember the other members of the band, and was unsure whether Graeme was the piano player. *John Thrum*

## Graeme Bell Tribute

**A**S a youth arriving in Melbourne in 1946 from Gippsland, where I had fumbled my way through what passed for "jazz" sheet music, I went to Graeme for lessons on what jazz was really about.

As a very patient teacher, he first taught me the basics of jazz for piano and then led me carefully along the path of improvisation. In turn, this led me to the Melbourne jazz scene, where I enjoyed many happy and often uproarious gigs at a time when many of us were first cutting our jazz teeth. At some of these, there was often disappointment that they were expecting Graeme Bell and all they got was Graeme Bull – it wasn't a typo!

Due to business and family commitments and a move to Sydney in 1968, I became a fringe dweller of the jazz world but each time I was able to venture forth, what Graeme taught me has always stood me in good stead.

I was fortunate to be able to meet up with him in recent years when his body was failing but his mind was still as sharp as it was in 1946. We would joke that, at 84, I was probably his oldest living pupil.

*Graeme Bull*

## Ring dem Bells

By Dick Hughes

**P**ARDON the cliché, but Graeme Bell put Australia on the world map of jazz. He did that with his first overseas trip in 1947/48. He wasn't our greatest jazz musician and he wasn't the father of jazz which, I'm told to my anger (and would have been to Graeme's embarrassment), I was quoted as having said in *The Australian* online on June 16th, three days after Graeme's death.

Years before Graeme were Benny Featherstone (whom I never heard) and Frank Coughlan (whom I heard several times, and with whom I once recorded).

Which reminds me that *Tempo* magazine asked Graeme early in 1949 what he thought of the 1948 all-star Australian jazz band, the members of which were voted for by critics chosen by *Jazz Notes*, the magazine that our patron, Bill Miller, founded in January 1941 – Bill Miller, who first recorded Graeme Bell for his Ampersand label in 1944. Graeme told *Tempo's* Melbourne representative (Michael Cannon, possibly): "I think Geoff Bland on piano and Frank Coughlan on trombone." The critics, who included such as John Rippin, Norm Linehan and Lionel Davies, had voted for Graeme on piano and Ian Pearce on trombone.

It was surprising how many of the same critics voted for Frank Coughlan in the 1949 poll.

Graeme Bell first entered my life in the December 1945 issue of *Jazz Notes*, in which he and his band had taken out an advertisement wishing readers (I guess that, at 13, I was the youngest) the best for Christmas and 1946. I had heard a Roger Bell broadcast on the ABC from a Melbourne Town Hall dance in mid 1944, but did not consciously hear the Graeme Bell band until I heard the Ampersand.

Bell-Monsborough Jazzmen of *Georgia Camp Meeting* that was Graeme's theme for his outstanding Radio 3UZ 10.30pm Wednesday program, *Come In On The Beat*. This program introduced us to classic Jelly Roll Morton **Red Hot Peppers** records, to the best of Billie Holiday (two consecutive sessions as I recall), to the **Condon Commodores**, to **The Art Hodes Blues Notes**, and, one biting-cold night in July (talk about Yarra River shiver!), the Bechet-Ladnier **New Orleans Footwarmers**. And I shall never forget the *Knee Drops*, with the

Ade Monsborough/Rex Green trumpet/piano duet, that Graeme played after the first Australian Jazz Convention, or the **Armstrong Hot Five** program in Mid January 1947 that he dedicated to Roger, who was recovering in hospital from an appendicitis operation, whereby hangs a thread of a tale about Alma Hubner (Chilean Consul's daughter), which I refrain from telling.

“Mick Mulligan's had a heart attack”, and Graeme said, “I saw him rehearsing for one when I was last here.”

I had missed Graeme Bell on the one day my strict and jazz-hating grandparents had “let me out” to go to the first convention, and didn't catch up with him until a Yarra riverboat trip in February 1947, when Roger was still out of action.

It was on a late December 1948 riverboat trip (an event of the third convention) that somebody gently and jocosely chided Graeme (who, like every musician, had played for nothing at the convention) for having “gone commercial”. Whereupon Graeme sat down at the piano and played *So Different Blues* by Dink Johnson, the New Orleans old-timer, brother-in-law of Jelly Roll Morton whose records he had introduced to listeners of *Come In On The Beat* in December 1946.

Graeme Bell was the great “introducer”. One of his greatest introductions was that of dancing to the world of English jazz. Neil Macbeth, one of Australia's best drummers (“Macbeth, Macbeth! A drum doth come!”) interviewed me for the Archive some time in the 1990s. I told him that my earliest mentors had been Will McIntyre, Bill Miller and George Tack. I neglected to mention that my great patrons had been Graeme Bell and Kym Bonython.

When I left Melbourne in May 1952, within a month of the **Graeme Bell Australian Jazz Band's** concert after its return from its second overseas tour, he gave me a letter of introduction to Humphrey Lyttelton that paved the way for many sit-ins with Humph's band.

Another band I jammed with was that of Mick Mulligan, whose pianist was Ian Pearce. At the Perugia Jazz Festival of July 1987, I met for the first time since my last night in London in mid November 1954, the clarinetist Ian Christie, who said, “Mick Mulligan's had a heart attack”, and Graeme said, “I saw him rehearsing for one when I was last here.”

Graeme introduced me to his fiancée, Dorothy Gough, at the Musician's Club in Sydney in February 1957. As a result of that introduction, I had the honour of being best man at their wedding on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1962.

Pardon another cliché, but Graeme Bell's death on 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 marked the end of an era. Clichés usually have at least one virtue, in that they express the truth. But on reflection, I see I have that wrong. Graeme Bell outlived the era. We may hear no more the tintinnabulation of the Bells. Their tongues may be stilled, but still ring on. They toll for you; they toll for me. Ring dem Bells!

Pray permit me a postscript. When Nevill Sherburn released on Swaggie Graeme's solo with rhythm section of *Top Of The Town*, I said of it in my review in the Daily Mirror that, for me, it was magically redolent of the Melbourne Jazz world of 1948-1950. Listening to it, I saw – and still see – in my mind's eye the faces of so many, such as Willie McIntyre, Ade, Lou and Pixie, George and Lorna Tack, Tony and Pauline Newstead, Don and Vale Reid, Greg Gibson, Ken Ingram, Bill Miller and Norma Johnson, and two whose mere names were redolent of that time – Smacka and Wocka.



A copy of the advertisement taken out in *Jazz Notes* in 1945.

**PLEASE NOTE: Regular items have been deferred to following editions.**

## Meeting the Bell Brothers

By Betty Burstin

**F**IRST came in contact with the Bell family shortly after I met my husband in the early years of the war (WW 2). Actually the first family member we met was their mother who had been a singer (contralto, I think) and I am sure that was where the boys started to become interested in music. As well, I fancy that their father was into music and entertainment.

The person who introduced us to the Bells was George Tack, a much loved and respected Jazz man who, together with John Burstin, had been responsible for starting the Melbourne University Rhythm Club.

This club was partially instrumental in stimulating public interest (in Australia) in jazz as the expression of unfettered playing by the musicians rather than the careful structured performances of the big bands. The Bells used to play this — new to most Australian listeners — exciting and spontaneous music to increasingly enthusiastic audiences on Saturday nights at Heidelberg Town Hall during most of the war years.



1944  
Morris Goode (t) playing with Roger Bell (t)

We got to know the brothers quite well, visiting them occasionally on their Eltham property where they were engaged in making mud bricks for their future mud brick house. Everybody had a lot of fun 'helping out'. One met with some very interesting people at the Bells' 'country retreat', later including Peter Glass and his French wife, who were gourmet cooks, as well as the first builder of an Eltham Mud Brick House, whose testiness, when the ignorant questioned his 'building methods' was legendary. There was the young Gordon Ford who became a very successful landscape designer and promoter of an Australian

garden with plants to fit in with the Australian landscape and many others with new and sometimes unsettling ideas, but always interesting. And always of course, there were the Bell boys enlivening the discussion with their banter; Roger with his sardonic wit and Graeme's less biting but decidedly apropos replies.

A classic example of Roger's spontaneous and sometimes outré sense of humour was at our wedding reception. Some unfortunate seating arrangement had placed the Bells at the same table with some more straitlaced types, who were taken aback when Roger started to pat vigorously, the plates of jelly on the table, at the same time singing with much gusto his song of the moment; 'I wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate' — she shakes just like jelly on a plate. Even though their table was a fair distance from the wedding table, Roger's voice could be heard clearly and the faces of some of the senior relatives registered astonishment, bordering on disapproval.

After the war the Bells and their band—Pixie Roberts on clarinet, Ade Monsborough on trombone, Lou Silbereisen on double bass, Jack Varney on banjo, Russ Murphy on drums, Graeme playing piano and Roger on trumpet, did a lot of overseas travelling. Graeme moved permanently to Sydney so we gradually lost touch, although we were always interested in hearing them play whenever they were in Melbourne.

The last time I saw Graeme and had some time with him was many years ago



Rehearsal, Prague 1947. Russ Murphy (d), Ade Monsborough (tb), Lou Silbereisen (sb), Graeme Bell (p), Jack Varney (gtr).

when I visited him in his house by the sea (sorry can't remember the suburb). I'd arrived in time for a big but informal gathering of well known musos, all primed to have a non-stop jam session.

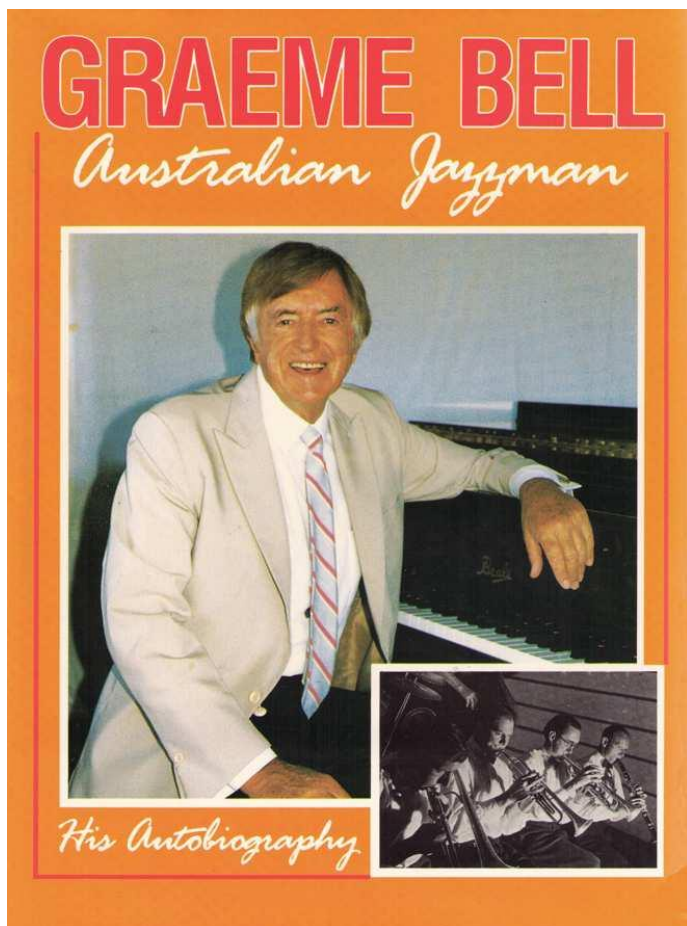
The finale of the night was a group swim in the ocean. Despite some entreaties to join some of them skinny dipping, I swam with my bathers firmly attached to my person.

Remembering the years since I first met with the brothers I would say the madcap spirit and joie de vivre so indicative of their personalities and enjoyment of life was still alive until the end of their conscious lives. What can seem ultimately to be lost through the ravages of sickness or old age does not wipe out all the positivity and happiness they brought to others when they were 'in their own skin'.



Original Bell Band, Montsalvat, 1988. Graeme Bell (p), Russ Murphy (d), Pixie Roberts (cl), Ade Monsborough (sax).

## Review



### GRAEME BELL

#### Australian Jazzman

#### His Autobiography

Reviewed by  
Ken Simpson-Bull

IN 1988 Graeme Bell published his autobiography. It covered the years from before he was born in East Melbourne on the 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1914 until his return from his first trip to China in 1986. At that time Graeme wrote, "I have not retired, but have scaled down my performances, thus giving myself some time for painting ..." Some scale-down! For the next 20 years Graeme continued to perform and entertain to the delight of thousands of Australian and overseas jazz enthusiasts.

However, this engaging and informative book *does* cover the period in which Graeme became a legend. His recognition as Australia's best known and most famous jazz musician probably came about around the time of his much publicised trip to Czechoslovakia in 1947 when he put Australia on the jazz map of the world. This trip, with his band consisting of Roger Bell, Pixie Roberts, Lou Silbereisen, Jack Varney, Ade Monseborough and Russ Murphy is so descriptively revealed in the book that you feel like you're living the journey.

Graeme actually didn't start learning piano until he was eleven years of age.

He studied under Jessie Stewart Young at the Albert Street Conservatorium along with his brother Roger, but Roger gave it up after two years. "Anything I know about piano playing I owe to Jessie Young", Graeme stated. "Not only that, but she ... guided me into

a strong appreciation of classical music which has continued to grow over the years."

So how did he get into jazz? "My brother got me into jazz", Graeme says, "There's no question about that. At that time [around 1933] ... as far as I was concerned, jazz players were splitting notes, slurring here and there, not even hitting notes cleanly. I later realised that they were ... creating a new and per-

“ My brother got me  
into jazz ”

sonal way of expressing their music."

Roger brought home several jazz recordings which eventually caused Graeme to "soften up". But when Graeme tried to play jazz on the piano Roger had to tell him to relax more. Eventually Graeme and Roger formed a jazz quartet at home with friends but they weren't yet ready for a public performance. It wasn't until 1935 that, with a few additional players, the group started to sound like jazz musicians and played at a few suburban dances.

The book takes us through those early years, gigs at the Nepean Hotel in Portsea, radio broadcasts, building with mud bricks at Eltham, the formation of his "Jazz Gang" in 1941, early recordings for Bill Miller — it's all there in

detail. There are also plenty of rare and nostalgic photographs.

Graeme relates not only his professional life, but his personal life as well, revealing many secrets that sometimes come as revelations. It's a fascinating read and is highly recommended to not only jazz lovers but to those with an interest in Australia's musical history. Jazz historian and discographer Jack Mitchell has added a comprehensive listing of Graeme's recordings from 1944 to 1983. Just *some* of the bands Graeme fronted include: *Graeme Bell's Dixieland Six*, *G.B.'s Dixieland Band*, *G.B. and his Dixieland Jazz Band*, *G.B.'s Original Four*, *G.B.'s Late Hour Boys*, *G.B. and his Australian Jazz Band*, *The Bell-Lyttelton Jazz Nine*, and *G.B. and his All Stars*.

The book is available for loan to Jazz Archive members or for study on the premises. Although now out-of-print, an internet search showed plenty of copies still available from suppliers for as low as \$17 second-hand. At the time of its publication, ABC Broadcaster Eric Child described the book as "The story of a colourful life ... effortlessly written ... a most reliable and valuable source of jazz history." Incidentally, the photo on the cover was taken by Graeme's wife Dorothy. In 2011 Graeme kindly gave permission to the Victorian Jazz Archive for its use on the cover of the Vjazz CD "Graeme Bell's All Stars – Robert Blackwood Hall Concert – 1978".

# Meet and Greet



**Graeme Bell and Johnny Ray, 1957**



**Graeme Bell and Phil Leggett at Leggett's Ballroom, Prahran**



**Don Burrows and Graeme Bell**



**Graeme Bell and the Dixie Jive**



**Kenny Ball and Graeme Bell**

## Graeme Bell: Secrets yet to be unlocked

### Bell Treasure Trove at VJA

By Mel Forbes

**T**HE VICTORIAN Jazz Archive is home to an enormous collection of Graeme Bell memorabilia, which has come from a variety of sources. Because of the size of the collection we are still in the process of assessing and cataloguing.

So far there are 1,176 Graeme Bell items that we already have catalogued, searchable through the ERL database. Given that the 18,000 items on our database cover many hundreds of jazz artists this gives some idea not only of the breadth of the VJA Bell collection, but of the importance of Graeme Bell in the jazz scene overall.

Of our 1,176 catalogued items, there are 223 ten-inch 78 RPM discs (including 20 test pressings, 64 acetates and one shellac); 14 twelve-inch 78RPM discs; 5 fourteen-inch acetates, 14 sixteen-inch acetates, and 64 vinyl LPs. And don't forget the over 100 cassette tapes, including 27 interviews of or by Graeme Bell. Other musical offerings include 68 DVDs and 64 videos. There are 11 books totally or partly devoted to Graeme Bell; about 90 photo collections and a further 90 individual photos; over 200 posters, and 2 scrapbooks.

Curios include Bell's old briefcase, a waistcoat worn during many musical gigs, and the candles from his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday cake. These are just the items we've already catalogued. There are an estimated thousand more in the process of being catalogued, including correspondence, material pertaining to the Bell Awards and Lectures, press clippings, awards and tributes, photos, concert programs, tickets and more scrapbooks. Even a Fantaes wrapper with a potted bio of the great man on it. The only thing that might be lacking is sufficient space to house it all!

## The Bell Awards

### By Albert Dadon

**E**ARLY 2003 I introduced an idea at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival board which I thought could make a difference in the way Australian Jazz musicians could think of themselves. When you bring an idea to a committee you don't know in which direction it could go, I've always been wary about the camel story – you know the camel designed by a committee.

As it turned out, it was one of those happy occasions with a committee, an idea and no camel story. John Haddad, a member of the Festival Board at the time, immediately suggested that Graeme Bell would make a wonderful Patron and Adrian Jackson was quickly on the phone to ask Graeme. Graeme responded in the tradition of great jazzmen: "where do you want me to sign?"... Ah! the sense of humor of the late Graeme Bell is legendary.

Graeme Bell didn't just lend his name to the organisation, he wholeheartedly supported its objectives as he understood the importance of recognizing the original talent from our own jazz culture.

Graeme, accompanied by Dorothy, had come to all events in person and co signed all winners certificates until 2011. Graeme even played the piano opening each ceremony until 2007... He decided he couldn't play anymore. A year later, however, he continued to honor us by his presence and share with us his words of wisdom and sense of humour, even though I knew how difficult the journey from Sydney was becoming for him and Dorothy... They would never miss the opportunity to be with us and mingle with the younger musicians. Graeme would never miss an opportunity to come

up on stage and communicate with the audience. His mind was sharp and it remained so until the end.

It was only in 2011, when he could no longer physically take a plane, that Graeme and Dorothy missed the first Award ceremony. I recall going to visit him in Sydney at his home with my camera and brought back a moving message to the Australian jazz community. This was presented in the 2011 Awards night ceremony.

This year I called Graeme at the end of April while he was in hospital and told him how sorry I was that he wasn't in a condition to be filmed ... He replied, in his usual manner, "Why not?!. So we presented the last message of Graeme Bell at the 2012 Award ceremony on the first Thursday of May, the Graeme Bell Jazz Awards official date. In that message you could tell that, indeed, Graeme Bell was still caring and thinking of others, contributing where he could, motivating other musicians as he always did, fulfilling his mission as our Patron.

Having been close to Graeme for the last 10 years of his life was a real privilege and, of course, you witness moments that turn an ordinary day into a day of life... One of these moments was when we inaugurated the Graeme Bell Award Sculpture at Monash University Clayton Campus, just across from the School of Music. When the sculpture was unveiled Graeme was disappointed. He said, "I don't look like this". He then looked at me and smiled. He was still not missing a beat.

I first met Graeme Bell at the announcement of the first short list of the Bell Awards in March 2003. It was at the

Grand Hyatt Hotel, in their bar when it used to be on the first floor. We had turned the bar into a jazz club and got 2 pianos in. I asked Paul Grabowsky to play a duet with Graeme and they both jammed. Mainstream TV channels captured the moment and transmitted this on the evening news that night.

It was one of two occasions where I was involved in organizing a jazz event that made the news... The second one was a few years later when the Premier of the time couldn't attend the launch of our Festival program, the then Opposition leader did – he jumped on the stage with Kate Ceberano and grabbed the mic and sang his heart out. It made the evening news.

The following year I invited the same Premier to attend the next program announcement, his response: "Ask the Opposition Leader". It wasn't a joke. Gosh I miss Graeme Bell.



**Graeme and Albert**

Image courtesy of  MONASH University



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