



VJAZZ 33  
FEBRUARY 2007



### *From the General Manager*

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Gretel James

On behalf of the dedicated team of volunteers at the Archive, I extend a very happy and prosperous New Year to everyone – as we look forward to another busy and productive year in 2007.

We were able to put all our 'traveling exhibition' display panels on show at the Eltham Jazz & Blues Festival on the Saturday of the Australia Day weekend in January. They were viewed with great interest and have proved so successful we plan to produce several additional panels over the coming years – when circumstances and funding permit.

Work has started on producing a couple of new VJAZZ CDs (anticipated to be released in May 2007) and these will add to our 'Rare Collectible Jazz From The Archive'.

As most of you will know, the VJA has been an accredited Museum through Museums Australia (Victoria) for almost 4 years. The re-accreditation process has commenced. A lot of preparation for this exercise has already been done by a number of our team whose dedication I am most grateful for. Hopefully, in the May newsletter I will be able to report a favorable result.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, there is mention of our great foray into a 2-week display and exhibition at the Forest Hill Chase shopping centre, and our next major exhibition in the R.D. Marginson library at the Archive – the latter to be called 'The Making of an Archive – 10 Years of the VJA'. Some of our representatives will be in attendance at Forest Hill Chase and we would love to meet and greet as many of you as possible during this or both of these events – so please put them in your diary.

In addition to the above, other major Goals and Objectives for 2007 include:

- ◆ Continue the Archive's Mission & Vision of 'Saving Our Jazz Past for the Future' in accordance with its Charter.
- ◆ Negotiate the Archive's building lease renewal with Parks Victoria.
- ◆ Mount 2 Exhibitions in the R.D. Marginson Library at the Archive.
- ◆ Install a compactus unit in Vault No. 2 to provide more storage space for the print material collection.
- ◆ Continue spreading the word of "jazz" and the work of the Archive by attending local and regional jazz festivals such as The Briars at Mornington, Coolart at Somers, Eltham Jazz & Blues, Kyneton, Stawell, Wilsons Park at Berwick. Use these opportunities to show VJA's new Travelling Exhibition display panels, and hand out accompanying brochures.
- ◆ Increase sales of CDs sold through the Archive Shop by active marketing.
- ◆ Install a new computer onto the Archive's network, and replace 3 existing computer monitors (one of which has just 'given up the ghost') with LCD screens for increased productivity - particularly database entry of details of donated material.

*Ray Sutton*

Congratulations to Dr Anthony James Gould (Tony) for being awarded an AM in the 2007 New Year's Honours List, 'for service to the arts as a music educator, particularly through the Victorian College of the Arts, for the promotion of jazz and improvised music, and as a pianist and composer.'

GET WELL WISHES: Three of our regular volunteers, Reg Jennings, David Ward and Frank Webster have all seen too much of hospitals lately—we wish each of them all the very best for a speedy recovery.

***Guided Tours every Tuesday and Friday 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. — other times by ap-***

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE VICTORIAN JAZZ ARCHIVE INC. PATRON: WILLIAM H. MILLER M.A., B.C.L. (Oxon.)

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**STOP PRESS – ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS – MESSAGE FROM ALAN CLARK**

**FOREST HILL CHASE SHOPPING CENTRE (Me1 62 C2)  
IS HOSTING**

**THE VICTORIAN JAZZ ARCHIVE  
PROMOTION AND EXHIBITION OF AUSTRALIAN JAZZ HISTORY**

**COMMENCING MONDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MARCH AND CONTINUING  
UNTIL SUNDAY 1st APRIL  
“YOU’RE INVITED”**

We will present our **wonderful traveling exhibition panels** along with photographic and showcase displays, including instruments used by famous Australian jazz musicians. You will also view interesting overseas acquisitions such as the framed handkerchief used by Louis Armstrong in the movie “High Society”.

Each day around 12 noon we will be entertained with live piano jazz recitals featuring some pretty well -known names including **John Adams, Maurie Fabrikant, Kim Harris & Neville Turner**, (Forest Hill Chase has kindly donated the use of a grand piano for the entire 14 days of the exhibition). If you come along in the evenings of the Thursdays and Fridays and during the afternoons of the Saturdays and Sundays you will hear and enjoy a variety of bands including trios and quartets.

All shoppers and visitors attending the exhibition will be able to enter to **win a fantastic trip to the Noosa Jazz Festival** with air fares and accommodation included. They will stay at the stylish “Bella Casa” contemporary apartments in the heart of Noosa for 10 days.

**THIS SENSATIONAL BONUS HAS BEEN SPONSORED WITH THE GENEROSITY OF THE FOREST HILL CHASE MANAGEMENT, AND WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION.**

Michael Hill Jewellers have also generously donated a ladies wrist watch with a retail value of \$250. They have also agreed to clean your jewellery free of charge. And I’m not allowed to mention the generous discount you’ll probably receive if you’re in the market for something special.

**THIS EXHIBITION HAS INVOLVED LOTS OF ACTIVITY AND ORGANISATION FROM YOUR HARDWORKING TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS. THE RESPONSE FOR ASSISTANCE FROM OUR MUSICIAN ASSOCIATES HAS BEEN OVERWHELMING.**

All we need is for you to come to Forest Hill Chase Shopping Centre – chat with the volunteers - listen to some great music - check out the latest CD’s in our expanding inventory and encourage your family and friends to tell the retailers that you are there because of your association with the Victorian Jazz Archive. And don’t forget to remind Barry or Neil that you are entitled to a 10% discount if you spot a CD or two you’d like to add to your collection.

**IF YOU HAVEN’T GUESSED IT ALREADY - WE’D LOVE TO SEE YOU.  
YOU WILL BE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED WHEN YOU SEE WHAT  
THE VICTORIAN JAZZ ARCHIVE IS ACHIEVING FOR  
THE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ COMMUNITY.**

## THE WES BROWN STORY

For some reason or other, when I was about five years of age, I started banging on a 4-gallon kerosene tin with a couple of meat skewers my mother obtained from the local butcher.

I finally looped some string around the handle and marched around the back yard of my folks' home in Brighton. (*I always loved marching and covered many a mile on the bitumen and bush tracks during my five years' army service in the 1939-45 war.*)

However, when I was 10 my folks moved to Carnegie where the local State School had a brass band. "This will be great" I thought, as I might be able to get my hands on a drum. "No son, you will play the cornet," said Dad who played in the Port Melbourne and Caulfield Brass Bands. And son didn't argue with Dad in those days.

So as the years progressed I moved on to the Caulfield Band, having served time with Brighton, North Melbourne and Dandenong Bands.

At the age of 15 I had saved enough money from my morning paper round to buy a second-hand Ludwig Drum Kit. I did my first ever gig on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1938 for a dance in the Yarraville Army Drill Hall, and received 15 shillings for my efforts.

Living quite close to the local Methodist Church, I was lucky to meet up with the church organist – William Landale McIntyre, who also played some terrific boogie and Fats Waller type piano. He even played a very much disguised version of St Louis Blues one night when they took up the collection.

As a result of our meeting, and with a member of the school band who had taken up clarinet and saxophone, we formed a group we felt sure would challenge the Benny Goodman Trio at any time. In August 1941 I had my first real taste of jazz when I did a gig at Manresa Hall in Glenferrie with the great Graeme Bell Band clarinettist, "Pixie" Don Roberts.

I was over the moon, when one day, my real estate agent boss called me in and said, – 'there's a guy named "Buck" Rogers who wants you on the phone.' Buck Rogers, the film star, turned out to be the great Roger Bell.

So that was my first real connection with the world of "Jazz". From that time on, I did gigs around Melbourne and suburbs with many top line musicians such as Geoff Kitchen, Harry Baker, George Tack and Tony Newstead.

One night while playing with the Roger Bell/John Tucker group at the 14' Yacht Club in St Kilda, I was approached by three new young lads, who asked me if I would like to join their band. This was mid-1946 and I was just settling into civilian life after war service. The lads in question were none other than Frank Johnson, Geoff Kitchen and Geoff Bland. The group was augmented and many jobs came our way – Melbourne Town Hall, St Kilda Town Hall, and finally the offer of a permanent Saturday night at the Collingwood Town Hall.

As I was doing shift work as a bus driver at the time, I was unable to do the audition for Bill Freeman of the Freeman's Dance Circuit. My replacement was Alan Markby, cousin of the late Barry Markby. I had taught him sufficiently to enable him to do a very satisfactory job and the engagement was ours. In other words, the great Frank Johnson's *Fabulous Dixielanders* was born and the first of our long tenancy at the Collingwood Town Hall Supper Room commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1947.

Engagements kept pouring in and promoters from all around Melbourne kept booking the band at Town Halls, R.S.L. Clubs, Palais Royal, picture theatres and radio stations.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1948, Freeman's Dances booked the band for Friday night at the Masonic Hall in the City. This concluded sometime in 1951, but during 1950, the band moved into the Maison de Luxe in Elwood for a Sunday afternoon gig which lasted until the mid 1950s.

This was packed out week after week and many well known jazz musicians were invited for a guest spot with the band. On one occasion a sit-in drummer bashed and abused my drum kit to such an extent when I returned to the band stand, I found a great hole in my snare. This guy, who shall remain nameless, just walked off and left without so much as a 'sorry mate'. I was always very reserved at allowing "sit-ins" after that.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1953 saw us head off to Sale for the Annual Police Club Ball. On this occasion we went in Smacka Fitzgibbon's Packard as he was doing the job in place of Bill Tope.

On arriving at the hall we found the whole stage taken up with large music stands and seating for a 12 piece dance band. The place for us – *the high profile Jazz Band from Melbourne* – was the allocation of a six foot square space off to the side of the stage. Not exactly a good start.

The gig got underway under the direction of a cocky little M.C. in a trim suit, bow tie, a moustache *a la Clark Gable*, and slicked-back hair. The Big Band played on and on, while we sat back waiting for our big moment.

Imagine our surprise when the said M.C. walked up to Johnno, and said "You're on next; play a Mazurka!" Looks of disbelief from all of us – never heard of a Mazurka before, let alone played one. At that stage, Wocka Dyer took over, turned to us all and said "Tiger Rag fellas." With that he led off with a rip-roaring glissando, quick four beats of his foot, and away we went at a very quick tempo. With that the M.C. went into an absolute frenzy in front of the band, waving his arms and yelling at us to stop immediately. Wocka continued to razz him with longer and louder glissandos until the end of the tune. With threats from the M.C. that we would never get a job in the town again, we packed up and vacated the premises rapidly.

Many more engagements continued to roll in with trips to Deniliquin, Tatura, Shepparton, Nagambie and Ballarat.

The Melbourne Zoo, river boat trips, jazz concerts and the like, kept us busy until that fateful night returning from a ball at Nagambie, when Warwick "Wocka" Dyer passed away as a result of injuries received when the car containing five members of the *Fabulous Dixielanders* crashed off the road and turned over several times in a roadside culvert – the date, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1955.

Approximately two months after that tragedy, members of the band lost interest without the enthusiasm and driving force of that wonderful trombone player "Wocka" Dyer. And the *Fabulous Dixielanders* were no more. A very sad ending to an incredible period in my life.

Since that time I have been involved with Nick Polites, the Melbourne Jazz Club bands, Smacka Fitzgibbon's restaurants at both Kew and North Melbourne, Black Beach Jazz Band and finally a wonderful seven years with Kim Rushworth and the Maple Leaf Band. (cont'd page 4)

(cont'd from page 3)

I retired in 2004 from all professional work but currently at the age of 84, enjoy relaxing jazz with Keith Hamilton's Okeh Jazz Band and Victorian Jazz Workshop groups.

One of the many highlights of my musical career was a seven-week overseas tour with Herb Jennings' Golden City Jazz Band in 1995. France, England, Sweden and Norway playing jazz almost every day, was truly a wonderful experience.

*Wes Brown*

22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2006

## CHILD'S PLAY

In recent times in the Sound Room at the Jazz Archive we have been engaged in transferring the contents of various cassettes to the hard drive and hence to the preservation Compact Discs. This comprised sundry musical offerings of Australian bands operating at an engagement, festival, pub, whatever, with varying degrees of background clatter. Usually the music rose above this distraction and worthwhile sounds were recorded for posterity or that group of Martians who land in Koomba Park sometime in the misty future.

Also as well as musical offerings there are some interviews on the cassettes. These are either with musicians or other luminaries involved in the Australian jazz scene over the years. They are very beneficial as a lot of the worthies involved have left us. Also we have a number of cassettes of material taken from radio programs, mainly from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. For instance the advent of the ABC's fiftieth birthday heralded a nostalgic overview of the jazz presented on that network over that period. The names of Alan Saunders, Ellis Blain, Kym Bonython cropped up and of course the doyen of the airwaves (for me at least) Eric Child.

On my arrival in Australia I was elated to find that such illuminaries as Bonython and Child were presiding over erudite discourses of our favourite music. The UK scene which I had left had, in the mid sixties, quite a few jazz programs on the BBC presided over by knowledgeable folk. This was on the BBC of course as at that time there were no commercial radio stations as such, apart from pirate stations situated on hulks offshore (they had the good taste not to introduce the commercial horror until after I'd decamped for the Wide Brown Land).

I recall Eric's program was 'Discourse On Jazz' while Kym ran the 'Tempo Of The Times' or some such name. When Kym fell through the floor (did he jump or was pushed?) Eric got expanded time and his Friday night program ran from 7.15 p.m. until 10.00 p.m. Eric's fine speaking voice, urbane and cultured without the BBC braying quality and his wide knowledge of jazz in all its forms, offered an unbeatable combination for success. His Friday program consisted of three quarters of an hour of music of Australian content in which all facets of the local scene were on view from the New Orleans aspect of Geoff Bull up to the more modern output of Brian Brown or Galapagos Duck. The middle hour might be a focus on a particular musician — someone from the Golden Age like Henry 'Red' Allen or Edmund Hall on one hand or someone from the fifties, American West Coast scene like saxophonists Art Pepper or Gerry Mulligan. Eric was equipped to do justice to all of those jazzmen. I recall the last hour would be given over to new releases. So anything that was current would be played irrespective of its style in the jazz spectrum.

His 'World Of Jazz' show on Saturday morning also varied its content. I think it lasted for about thirty five minutes. His delivery was a lesson to anybody attempting this feat. He

made the most of the time and managed to squeeze a lot of music into his allotted time, giving the relevant details and passing comment without any extraneous waffle. There was something for everyone; each week had a theme. For instance the first week was for what he called 'The Older Sounds', the second week dealt with 'Mainstream' music, the third the 'Big Bands' (anything from McKinney's Cottonpickers' up to The Stan Kenton Orchestra), the fourth week would be more 'modern' sounds. If there was a fifth week in the month then who knows? It could be a bit of anything — a show on Fats Waller, Eddie Condon, Duke Ellington — Eric had his favourites or a program on Jazz In Europe between the wars.

So the listeners could pick and choose — listen to which week featured their taste in music. Happily Eric has his niche in the Archive and with the various cassettes that exist we can still hear that voice intoning 'Good Morning' and we can settle back for the great music to flow over us.

*Bill Brown*

## NEW MEMBERS

Since the last newsletter we welcome the following new members:

Colin Blyth, Robert & Aileen Brunning (F), Ian & Robyn Burgher (F), Evan Charlton, Ziggy de Gozdawa, Norm Ellis, David Golsworthy, Rob Huther, Bruce Lawn, Shaun Leane, Peter & Lorraine Lester (F), Bruce Miller, Malcolm Mitchell, Peter & Clara Oakley (F), Conrad O'Donohue, Mary Oxenford, Lyn Yeoman, and Alan Richards and Professor and Mrs Evan Walker took out Life Memberships. We thank you all.

## CASH DONATIONS

Anonymous, Bill Brown, Liz Currie, Victorian Jazz Club.

## INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION

The international collection of jazz records has increased steadily over the years to a point where the steel shelving was beginning to collapse under the strain. A quick calculation showed that there were now 1.5 tonnes of records in store, and remedial action was required—and quickly!

The purchase and installation of six metres of 'compactus' movable storage was arranged by Mel Blachford and funded from the current Ward Mackenzie donation. The new set-up is very professional and has more than doubled the capacity of the previous set-up.

The collection is currently being lodged numerically on the data base.

These two factors will make the collection more accessible, and bring it into line with standard Archive practice.

The improvement to the management of the collection is so marked that similar storage for the print collection will be installed in Vault no. 2.

Because of the nature of the print collection, the capacity for storage will increase at least three-fold.

Make a date to visit your Archive in the near future to see these and other improvements which are continually taking place.

*Jeff Blades*

## VJA Collections Manager's report January 2007

Our mission statement reads "Preserving our jazz past for the future". The wisdom of our founders ten years ago in creating a home for jazz enthusiasts to deposit their precious music collections has been justified. Recently we have received donations from collectors who are afraid their relatives will send their jazz records to the tip upon their death. Others have discussed making a bequest to the VJA to be added to their wills. Our collection of Australian jazz items, records, CDs, photos, books, posters, instruments and ephemera has now grown to 10,000 items and increases weekly.

### Overseas collection continues to grow.

The 6-metre compactus recently installed in the Ron Halstead room has doubled the storage capacity for our overseas collection. The collection now has over 4000 LP's and a similar number of 78rpm discs. We have started the long task of cataloguing all the titles and artists. Eventually we hope to add these to our website to be available for research. Currently 2200 LPs with over 22,000 tunes have been completed on an excel spread sheet. Similar progress is proceeding with the 78s.

### The digital world takes over

All of us are affected by the digital revolution in our daily lives. The Archive is embracing the new technologies in a variety of ways.

- The Sound Room is busy recording rare interviews with musicians from cassette onto MP3 files (read ipod). This enables us to safely preserve for the future the valuable history of jazz in Australia as told by those taking part. The recent death of several well-known jazz musicians including Ade Monsborough, Len Barnard, Chris Taperell, Barry Buckley and Gary Costello remind us how important and urgent this task is.
- The poster collection is gradually being recorded using digital photography. A CD holds up to 100 small posters which can be accessed for printing and displays.
- All our photos and negatives are being scanned onto computer and CDs. Our biggest challenge is to identify the musicians on many of the prints. Memories fade and people die. The Archive gives priority to identified photos. A word of advice. Write on the back of each photo with a soft 4B pencil if you wish to donate any to the archive – never use pens or press too hard.
- The Sound Room has new software and computer to convert our VHS collection of jazz videos to DVD. In the future we hope to be able to put small clips of music onto our website. There are lots of issues to overcome first; copyright, time and money.

One of our recent donations came from Russ Murphy who was the drummer with the Graeme Bell band on their overseas tour. The 78rpm Supraphon recording of the band was made in Czechoslovakia. Russ had to return earlier to Australia and was given a farewell record with the brown cover signed by all the members of the band. It is a valuable record of these early pioneers who took jazz to war ravaged Europe after World War 2. Russ signs himself in a letter to me as "a Stone Age drummer". On

the phone from Queensland where he lives in retirement he sounds far from 'Stone Age'.

The list of donations recently received is too long to publish. An important development is to see several CD producers including Newmarket records, Nif Nuf records and Swaggie making available two copies of their new releases to the Archive. We encourage younger musicians to lodge a copy of their recordings with us. They represent the future and it is important we store their early work.

So much to do, so little time, jazz rolls along.

*Mel Blackford* Jan 2007



The following is a copy of an article from a Noosa magazine of 1993, which is amongst our treasures at the Archive.

### FRANK JOHNSON

*The man behind the Noosa Jazz Party is a living legend of Australian music — Profile by Phil Jarratt.*

The stooped figure of a man in, shall we say advanced middle age, appears from the early morning shadows, momentarily unsettling the young family making their way from their holiday apartment to the beach. He is a crumpled, almost bedraggled figure, and he carries his cleaner's bucket and mop like a ball and chain.

But there is something about this fellow—a mischievous twinkle, a knowing toss of the head—that says there is more here than meets the eye.

The man is Frank Johnson, and almost 50 years ago—before Elvis and Johnny O'Keefe, and long before Diesel or Harry Connick Jr., he had the world, and a trumpet, at his fingertips. In Melbourne they queued around the block to see Frank and his band; his songs went to the top of the hit parade and a Saturday night dance without Frank was like a beer without a head.

Frank Johnson, 66 last May and a long-time Noosa resident, likes to blow his own trumpet only in the literal sense. It takes a few hours and more than a few beers to get him to relive the glory days—a magical period just after the war when rations were beginning to be lifted and the big Australian cities were awash with new music, new ideas and a new liberalism. A post-war baby boomer who always believed that the symbiotic relationship between music and sex dated from Elvis Sun recordings, I am fascinated by the licentiousness of the period.

"You just want to hear the dirty bits," Frank Johnson declares.

"No, I want to hear all of it."

"Well, you'd better get me a cold beer, then. And keep them coming."

Frank Johnson was born in Kew in 1927, the son of an Irish/Scot radical who would go on to become one of the leading lights of the Communist Party of Australia. Frank was apprenticed to a photo-engraver after completing school and, since the printing industry was protected, he saw out the war years in the plate room. (cont'd page 6)

Neither of his parents played instruments, but Frank had seen movies like *The Glenn Miller Story*, and had a mad idea that he'd like to join a dance band. He wanted to learn the trombone, but on the day in 1944 that he took his pocket money along to the instrument hire shop, only a cornet was available. "Like the trumpet, the cornet is an absolute swine of an instrument," Frank recalls, "But they had one so I took it."

Shortly after the war a friend took him along to the Palais Royale in Fitzroy to hear Graeme Bell's traditional jazz band. Frank was hooked from the moment he heard the freewheeling music, and he and clarinet player Geoff Kitchen put together a scratch band and began to play church hall dances and the like in suburban Melbourne. He recalls: "We were regarded as complete amateurs by the established dance bands, of course, but we persisted and improved quite quickly. We had to play dance music too, barn dances and foxtrots and so on, but most of it was jazz, and I think we put our own Australian stamp on it."

At the end of 1945 Frank was approached by a dance promoter to put together a band to play a room in Collingwood. He put together a seven-piece band which was to become the biggest thing in Australian jazz for the next decade. Frank Johnson's Dixielanders seemed to be an appropriate name, but Frank and the lads, who were nothing if not cheeky, liked the rarely-heard and quite over-the-top adjective "fabulous". Frank Johnson's Fabulous Dixielanders were born and by the time of the first Australian Jazz Convention in 1946—an historic event which Frank helped organise—they were one of Australia's leading jazz bands. In Melbourne they competed for gigs with the Graeme Bell band and Tony Newstead's Uptown Band, but the Johnson band's party approach and Frank's matinee idol image soon made them the crowd favourites.

Throughout that first flush of fame, the Dixielanders mainly consisted of Frank Johnson (trumpet and vocals), Geoff Kitchen (clarinet), Geoff Bland (piano), Warwick Dyer (trombone and vocals), Bill Tope (banjo and guitar), Jack Connelly (bass) and Wes Brown (drums). Frank soon found that his job as bandleader was a full-time one and gave up photo-engraving, but the others kept their day jobs—Bill Tope was company secretary at Myer, Warwick Dyer a clerk of the court—which meant that Frank had to have a full complement of stand-in players at the ready. Some of these, like clarinet player Nick Polites, went on to become permanent members of the band. Others, like Smacka Fitzgibbon, went on to carve their own niche in jazz history.

Says Frank: "It was a good living. Melbourne was very much a Thursday to Sunday town, but with a Sunday afternoon gig, you'd be playing a minimum of five gigs over that period, with private parties and balls and things on the Tuesdays and Wednesdays. We were bloody flat out most of the time, and it was pretty lucrative. If the guys were getting five quid each I'd be getting seven, so I did all right. I became very well known around Melbourne. I couldn't go anywhere without people jumping all over me. It wasn't exactly adulation, but I had no difficulties making contact with members of the opposite sex, if you know what I mean."

The band was given its own radio show, the 3UZ Jazz Club Of The Air. The Dixielanders would play live once a month and the rest of the time Frank would play requests. From about 1949 he was able to slip in his own recordings into the program. Melbourne solicitor Bill Miller started Australia's first specialist jazz label and called it Ampersand. The Dixielanders were among the first bands to record, with enough success to attract the interest of Bob Clemens' Jazzart label. From there they went to Wilco, and finally the breakthrough into mainstream recording came when Parlophone invited them to record.

Frank recalls: "It wasn't quite like recording sessions today. They had a studio at Homebush in Sydney's west, so we went up there by car and played a few gigs to help with the expenses. On the day of the recording we went out to Homebush in the morning, did our sound checks and got everything ready, then knocked off for lunch and a few beers. Then in the afternoon we'd just go in and play two cuts of each track then back to the pub. They'd select the one they liked best."

The Fabulous Dixielanders enjoyed considerable success as recording artists, with one song, *Sweet Patootie*, rising to the top of the charts despite (or perhaps because of) being banned by the ABC. Frank says: "Patootie was an Afro-American word for a woman's arse, but that's hardly a reason to ban the song, when you consider the fairly basic derivation of the word 'jazz' itself. As a great musician once said, it don't exactly mean goin' to Sunday school."

The Fabulous Dixielanders did not travel as often nor as widely as, say, the Bell band, mainly because Frank believed covering long distances by car was too tiring and too dangerous. Nevertheless, they did accept gigs in rural areas, particularly after the square dance revival in Melbourne in the mid-1950s drastically reduced the number of city engagements available. But Frank was never happy about the travel.

In September 1955 six of the Dixielanders crammed into Frank's Ford Customline with the drum kit in the boot and the rest of their instruments on their laps, and drove to Nambour to play at a ball. Returning in the early hours of the following morning, they were involved in an accident in which Wes Brown and Nick Polites suffered injuries and Warwick Dyer was killed. "Wocka" Dyer had been Frank's closest friend in the band and the fact that he had been at the wheel broke Frank's heart and the spirit of the band.

"There were already problems and tensions," Frank recalls, "But this really put a hole in the whole damn thing. Warwick and I were the band, and suddenly it was just me. I know what I want in a band and I'll do what I have to get it. Geoff Bland reckoned I was a c... so he left, and Geoff Kitchen wanted to get into arranging his own material, so he left and went to Sydney. Then it started to get a bit physical, and it was time to give it away."

Frank formed a quartet which developed a huge following during its residency at the 431 Club, but the glory days were over and one band would never again so dominate the Australian jazz scene. At the end of the 1950s (believed to be April '62 - see next issue, Ed.) he fled a failing marriage and joined a band playing for its passage on the Greek liner *Patris*. They played up a storm all the way to Athens, then split up. Frank travelled for a time in Europe, then joined the other members in London where they reformed and played the club circuit. Thus began a decade of intermittent travel and music, part of it spent in the divided city of Berlin.

When he returned to Melbourne at the end of the 1960s, Frank found that the jazz scene had changed beyond recognition. Not only had the Beatles-inspired rock boom taken over the music charts, but Dylan-inspired folkies had taken over the small venues.

Many of the old jazz players had joined rock bands (drummer Stewie Speer had become one of Max Merrit's *Meteors*) and those still playing seemed to be "pale imitations of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker".

In need of a buck, Frank went seriously into selling cars, a pursuit to which his sharp business brain was well suited. At Preston Motors he worked with Brian Coutts and Henry Lees, fellow members of the Torquay Surf Club who were soon to join the procession of surfers from that region moving to Noosa. "Why don't you come with us, Frank?" they urged. He couldn't think of a reason, and moved to Noosa for the first time in 1970. (cont'd page 7)

Frank returned to Melbourne in 1976, but by the early 80s he was back in Queensland, first living in Brisbane and more recently in Noosa.

Jazz remains at the core of his existence. For a time he played on the Kookaburra Queen cruises on the Brisbane River and as a 'walk-around' player at Dreamworld. If he doesn't have the fans queuing around the block these days, it is of no concern to Frank Johnson. The only thing that has ever mattered to him is the music. He says: "I have a fairly individual view of jazz. I see it as like classical music, which was the pop music of the 17th century. It took three centuries for it to become accepted and revered the way it is today, whereas it's taken jazz less than a century. Jazz isn't studied in the same way because you can't nail it down. It's too anarchistic, too democratic, and that's why I love it so much." The Noosa Jazz Party was Frank Johnson's idea and he and Richard Stevens are the committee of two who make the decisions. Frank believes that the Jazz Party will become one of the truly great jazz festivals, but it will not go the way of Monterey or Montreux. "They've gotten out of hand and that will never happen here. The musos come here for peanuts because it's fun, and the people love it because it's free. We've gone right back to the roots, back to the simple ideas that made the first Jazz Convention such a success all those years ago."

*Phil Jarratt*

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**FRANK JOHNSON 1993**

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*Barry Mitchell*  
**Merchandising Officer**

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