



VJAZZ 43  
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# VJAZZ

*“Saving and Preserving our Australian Jazz for the Future”*

## THE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ CONVENTION EXHIBITION

**T**he Australian Jazz Convention Archive will hold a pictorial and memorabilia Exhibition commencing with an official opening on September 27 at the Victorian Jazz Archive building in Wantirna. The exhibition will be open to members and the general public from Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

The Australian Jazz Convention (AJC) commenced in Melbourne in 1946 and ran for four days. It comprised jam sessions of musicians from different states and bands. There were also record recitals, discussions, lectures on recording sessions and the early music leading into jazz and a riverboat trip. The public concert at the end of the four days featuring 10 bands was a financial success with 200 or more people packed into the hall and some being turned away.

The idea of a convention of jazz musicians in a similar format to the above was first put down in writing by Ade Monsborough in a letter to C. Ian Turner of Melbourne from Sydney where Ade was stationed whilst in the Air Force. The letter was written and post-marked 10<sup>th</sup> October 1944. It is not clear whether a second Convention was envisaged, but after the success and the euphoria of the first, the impetus thus gained ensured a second attempt at least.

The Convention, now approaching number 64, is to be held at LaTrobe University in Bundoora north of Melbourne from December 26 to 31 inclusive this year.

After almost six and a half decades its history looms large and is still growing, which means the AJC Archives are still expanding.

Thanks to the foresight of the original

mas and conclude some time in 2010. The exhibits will cover the period from the 1940s through to the present.

Displays will feature photos past and present, limited only by wall space available. Also on display will be AJC badges from their beginning up to the last Convention at Lismore 2008. Programs of all Conventions since 1946, posters, backdrops, banners, AJC polo and T-shirts, caps and the now indispensable convention bag, and assorted ephemera will be at the Exhibition. As each Convention year has its own committee and unique logo, the variation and wealth of artistic talent on display will be well worth seeing.

The Exhibition encompasses the breadth of Australian Jazz culture which is unique, evolving and continuing the idea of musicians getting together to play with those from other parts of Australia for the experience and possibly the joy of it without commercial restraints.

As Ade Monsborough (whose nickname in the 1940s was “the father”) said in an interview:

***“Yes Australian jazz is different: some say you can smell the gum leaves.”***



John Cummins leads the parade at the 50th AJC in Melbourne

Leaving on that note, do make the effort to see the Australian Jazz Convention Exhibition; you will not be disappointed.

**DON ANDERSON DAM**

**For the AUSTRALIAN JAZZ CONVENTION ARCHIVES**

For more information regarding the 64th AJC see inside of address label of this publication.

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## CELEBRATING SAM— Sam Meerkin 1943–2009

***“You’re driving me crazy” was played often in my early years by my parents so I was disappointed that Sam thought it appropriate to our life together! That title occurred frequently in our word play!***

Sam loved jazz from an early age; at Melbourne University he joined the Rhythm Club, he attended jazz venues of the time e.g. Keyboard, Club 431 and Powerhouse, where he served as doorman; a perfect cover for a shy youth. He became involved with the annual Australian Jazz Convention and served on the 1963 Committee and later ones. He worked to help establish the Victorian Jazz Club over 40 years ago where he was yet again, doorman. He left Australia to teach in Canada in 1969 for 4 years. On his return he continued his lifelong involvement with jazz.

Sam had early microsurgery for a severed index finger which prevented him taking up reed instruments despite Kenn Jones’ offer to teach him free if he practiced for two hours a day. He nevertheless took up the penny whistle which he mastered – his syncopation, sense of timing and sheer enjoyment of it made him expert. He could play any tune although Des Camm only ever asked him to play “Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas”. Sam really enjoyed being asked to play his B flat whistle for a number or two during a band performance at a festival or at a function. There was always **thunderous** applause at the end! He had perfect pitch and could also whistle in a way which fooled us as his lips never moved.

Sam and I enjoyed jazz locally, at festivals around Australia; he assisted as stage manager at Montsalvat, Marvellous Melbourne J F, at the VJC etc. He presented a very successful radio program for 9 years on 96.5, Inner FM and is still missed by many of his followers. He worked at 95.7 Golden Days Radio, more recently, declining a regular program so our travel plans would not interrupt the sequence. He supported the Victorian Jazz Archive as a life-member, as a benefactor and as a volunteer. He also worked hard for the VJC – as Vice President, programmer, membership officer and setting up the sound equipment

regularly. He was a meticulous worker who always did his utmost to promote trad jazz without reward, other than the joy of spreading it to others.

In recent years we discovered jazz cruises and have been all over the world following top American jazz bands, meeting top recording artists and inspired jazz lovers. We attended jazz festivals in some fabulous locations such as Clearwater Beach, Florida; Sun Valley, Idaho; San Diego, California and others which ensured that we travelled all over the USA and Canada. We had plans to continue our jazz cruises and festivals, until Sam’s cancer put an end to it.

I have only covered Sam’s jazz and travel interests so far; he was also involved in Freemasonry, being a highly

hoarder, not just jazz memorabilia, but of just about everything!

Sam was a loner, maybe even a misogynist, until I came along 24 years ago. He was shy and retiring despite his bluster. He had integrity and strong values. Sam was extremely gratified by the number of people who showed they cared about him during his illness. The huge crowd which attended his funeral was testament to the esteem in which he was held. He would have really enjoyed the recent jazz function held for our friends; he was proud of our jazz musicians and loved hearing them play.

My knowledge of jazz is thanks to Sam; he infused me with the passion he felt for the music. It is a legacy I will carry on with enjoyment. However, it will never feel the same without him prodding me to say the name of a tune after the first notes or whistling in my ear as we listened to jazz somewhere. He loved to call jazz “foot tapping music” as opposed to the “head banging” type of noise. From now on, whenever I hear songs like “Gee baby, ain’t I good to you” or “After you’ve gone”, I will feel my personal sense of loss but will know that whatever Sam did to promote jazz was to benefit us all.



*Sam at Hall’s Gap February 2008*

respected and knowledgeable person who adhered to its principles. Sam was a potter and woodworker who completed the interior of his holiday house which had been built to lock-up stage. He created wall murals with mosaic tiles – one is in the TRANZAC Club in Toronto. Sam was a natural teacher; jokes kept the students working and many of his students developed careers in arts and crafts due to his teaching. He loved Collingwood Football Club and was one-eyed! He played in junior teams with the Club but suffered too much knee trouble to continue. He was a collector and

### *Evelyne Perks*

**I**t was with a considerable amount of sadness that we learned of Life Member Sam’s passing earlier this year. As Evelyne, his partner for 24 years, says, he was well known “around the traps”, whether playing his tin whistle, working with sound desks, announcing, or in fact as a general factotum. He put in his fair share at the Archive as a tour guide and was well liked by his many friends both in Australia and overseas. He is greatly missed and our deepest sympathy goes out to Evelyne and his mother.

We are grateful to Evelyne for passing on to the Archive a very large collection of CDs, records, tapes and books, which was part of Sam’s bequest to us.

### *Gretel James—Secretary*

**Please note the current VJA exhibition “The New Melbourne Jazz Band” has been extended until the end of August**

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The Victorian Jazz Archive acknowledges the support of the following organisations: The State of Victoria through the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Arts Victoria, Parks Victoria, The Ian Potter Foundation, The Myer Foundation, The Pratt Foundation, The Trust Company of Australia, The Helen McPherson Smith Trust, Diana Allen of Jazz Australia, The Estates of the late Don Boardman, Ron Halstead and David Ward and Ward McKenzie Pty Ltd. The Archive gratefully acknowledges the financial support given to the VJA Capital Fund by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, A.C., D.B.E.

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where jazz sessions were held. The place was called La Pion Lounge and one of the groups that played there was led by Jim Loughnan, clarinet/soprano sax man of the local scene. The rest of the group was Paul Martin on clarinet, Ross Collins on piano, Keith Cox on bass and Wes Brown on drums. One of Jim's heroes was Bechet, thus the two reed line-up followed the King jazz format. In recent years some of this blast from the past came out on a VJAZZ CD from the Victorian Jazz Archive. Despite a few sound lapses the music comes across the years and conveys the excitement the guys projected on those far -off nights. **On the disc [which I rate as one of the best the Archive has put out] they do two numbers - 'Really The Blues' and 'Speaking My Mind' - that are from The Bechet/Mezz repertoire.** On two tracks 'Wabash Blues' and 'None Of My Jelly Roll' an unknown banjo player is present. After that he wafts off into the Canterbury night. A wandering minstrel indeed. Jim has no recollection of who this fellow was. Jim often visits the Archive and although he doesn't play nowadays loves talking of the Melbourne scene from those times.

As a longtime Canterbury resident [since 1974] I was intrigued about this jazz happening in our rather staid neighbourhood. What became of our answer to The Onyx Club, or Mahogany Hall? I consulted a publication called 'Visions Of A Village' Canterbury Shops And Shopping 1880s - 1990s. This has drawings and lists of shops on Canterbury Road, Maling Road etc. It also lists a sequence of what businesses were there in that time frame. I reckon that La Pion bit the dust when a row of shops was demolished in 1969 for the building of the railway overpass. The site was occupied from 1894 by a range of users including a painter, a fruiterer, a joiner, a costume maker and a dyer [wot-no candlestick maker?] It became a sweet shop in the 1920s and was described as a CAFÉ from the 1950s. So I guess that was it.

Really the Blues indeed. I wonder if the phantom banjo player still hovers around looking for a gig? Some mornings when I'm having a coffee in Maling Road I imagine I hear him strumming through the hum of traffic and the insistent ringing of the mobile phones. A fertile imagination? Perhaps. Maybe I just need my medication increased.

I would like to mention that I gleaned a few snippets of information about Mezz Mezzrow from a book called Jazz Writings by the late Philip Larkin the English critic, poet and librarian.

*Bill Brown—Sound Room*

**Thank you Bill Armstrong: The Victorian Jazz Archive thanks Bill Armstrong for his generous donation on the occasion of his 80th birthday. He requested that in lieu of giving him a birthday present, those wishing to give him a gift should donate to the Archive. As a result of this we have so far received \$3,515 which we will be using to improve our sound room.**



**BILL ARMSTRONG'S  
80TH BIRTHDAY PARTY  
(Errol Flynn's 100th Birthday -  
any connection?)  
By Eric J Brown with help from  
Geoff Orr**

I was honoured to be one of approximately 250 invited guests at Bill's party, held at Port Melbourne Town Hall on Sunday June 21, 2009.

On arrival I was greeted by Bill, a friend for just on 60 years and a great influence on my life. Why was I invited? Bill and I were fellow engineering students at Caulfield Tech in the 1940s where he put on jazz record sessions at lunch time. It was the first time I had heard "real jazz", leading me and fellow student Bill Bunnett to attend the 4th AJC held in the Prahran Town Hall in 1949. There I watched as Bill recorded the whole convention on his wire recorder using only three microphones. These and other recordings were transferred to acetate discs using his home made cutting machine. At the time he was recording bands at his home, at 100 Darling Road, East Malvern, and in local halls, mainly jazz bands who just wanted to hear themselves — there were no cassette recorders in those days. He was doing so many of these sessions that he gave up his academic career for one in the recording and sound industry, and what a career it has been!

Now to the celebrations. On entering the hall I noted many photographs along the wall featuring many people in Bill's life. These were repeated on TV screens either side of the stage. Along the other was a display by the Victorian Jazz Archive featuring their activities. At the back of the hall was the food and drink area which was well patronized dispensing pies, sausage rolls, pizzas, beer and wine.

On arrival some people were videoed giving their thoughts on Bill. These were shown later on the TV screens as was Barry Humphries' message from Los Angeles per Dame Edna Everage. (cont'd p7)

## **KING JAZZ COMES TO CANTERBURY**

The King Record Company was an organisation that put out some jazz recordings in the post World War Two period, 1945 and 1947 to be exact. They featured the flamboyant New Orleans clarinet/soprano sax man Sidney Bechet and Milton Mezzrow known as 'Mezz'. This latter gent was one of the Jazz characters.

***"A white Chicagoan of Russian-Jewish background he became obsessed by not only the music, but the way of life of the negro populace. He lived for a time in Harlem, took an Afro-American wife and whilst in jail for peddling marihuana led the coloured prison orchestra."***

Spectacular as his activities might appear he was a fairly ordinary clarinet player. However he appeared on a few recording sessions in the thirties often with Bechet and the trumpeter Tommy Ladnier including some arranged by visiting French critic Hugues Panassie.

Thus in the late forties he teamed up again with Bechet in quintet/septet format 'King' sessions. The two work well together and the tunes, mainly themes based on the blues, roll along nicely. In the sixties Storyville, a Danish label, issued those sets on, I think, five long-play records [I have three of them]. So far so good. What has this to do with a leafy green suburb in Melbourne town?

In the sixties apparently there was a café in Canterbury Road near Rochester Road

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## **Beginnings:** **a Memoir of The Yarra Yarra Jazz** **Band by Lee Treanor**

The insistent beat carried us down the bluestone steps. The three of us had trooped through the cold Sunday night from where the bus had dropped us to a gravel car park behind the t-trees along the cliff. The sound—the clear, direct trumpet, the strangely split notes of the clarinet, the trombone growling beneath and the delicate piano filigree—lifted our anticipation and carried us through the open door. A gaggle of duffel-coated girls our own age and older, grinding out their ciggies on the way down, pushed in behind us. The three of us – Ian Orr, Kevin Goodey and I – acted ‘cool’ as we leant against the wall, totally absorbed. We were all fifteen, sixteen, lived within an easy walk of each other and played in a local teenagers’ dance band together. Ian, though, had an older sister, Jess, married to Bill Haesler, and Bill was our passport to jazz.

Actually it was clear, even then, that Ian had the jazz bug bad, and that ain’t good. I’d devoured all of my father’s 78s – Muggsy, Benny, Billie, the Count, the Duke—and had bought a few of my own 10 years earlier and Wes Brown had been a regular visitor: one of my Dad’s best friends. Kevin, I believe, was a total neophyte. To him, and to me too, that night was the first opportunity to feast on a live band: The Bob Barnard Jazz Band.

During the next couple of years we were privileged to be invited to sit in with the band, usually one or two at a time for two or three tunes. This was no doubt due to the camaraderie between Bill Haesler and the band, but it spoke volumes to me of the generosity of those musicians. To be able to sit there, with Graham Coyle’s occasional guidance on chords and Don Bentley’s good-natured chiding if I dropped the beat, and to enter into the dynamics of a band of that stature was pure gold.

Other sit-in musicians gave me a wider experience too: Derek Phillips and Barry Markby spring readily to mind. However Bob, Ian and the others all had a similar straightforward lead which was easy to follow but which left me completely unprepared when Frank Turville – recently returned from England and of whom I had no experience – joined me for a sit-in. I was totally flummoxed, just couldn’t follow his seemingly amorphous lead. I left the stage at the end of the bracket feeling sooo embarrassed. A couple of months later, though, and most of the line up of the Melbourne New Orleans Jazz Band played a bracket. **I was hooked and wanted more.**

By this time we were seventeen, eight-

een, and had expanded to four with the inclusion of Eddie Robbins, who also lived within an easy walk of our homes. Not only was Eddie a naturally fluent clarinet player, he had a car: a Chevrolet coupe which seated three in the front and had room for two more in the open ‘Dickie’ seat. No more bus trips and there was even room for his girlfriend, Pat. Along the way we had all joined in a loose gathering on Saturdays in the Pier Hotel in Frankston. The group included Brian Carter and his wife, Mary, on tuba and piano, and another fine young clarinetist, Peter Lewis.

Somewhere about this time I heard of the Blue Heaven coffee lounge in St. Kilda. I went once or twice, on my own, to listen to the Melbourne New Orleans Jazz Band: I wanted more. By then I had found the occasional LP by Barber and Colyer and I still recall the excitement when, at Clements Music Store, I found my first 78 of George Lewis. I couldn’t wait to whip it around to Eddie Robbins’ house; we both agreed **‘That’s the sound, the true sound, that’s where we want to go.’** Looking back now, I wonder at the ignorance of the young. Ten years before this, the Graeme Bell Jazz Band was making a more-than-reasonable interpretation of ‘the sound’, but, of course, we’d never heard them. Where did they get it from? Was it just intuitive? They certainly wouldn’t have had access to recorded sources - Heavens, we hardly had any - but the infectious drive and the ensemble playing they display on their own records is strongly in the New Orleans idiom.

Sunday nights rolled around seemingly every week and, during the year I turned nineteen I was thrilled to have the entire Melbourne New Orleans Jazz Band turn up for a blow at the Mentone Lifesaving Club. At the end of one number a chap, just a couple of years younger, came up to me and smiled. I can’t remember precisely, but the conversation would’ve gone something like: ‘Great music isn’t it?’ I nodded. ‘I’m Maurice Garbutt,’ he continued, ‘and I’m thinking of forming a band.’ ‘In that style?’ I asked. He nodded. ‘Count me in,’ I said. He gave me another smile – the same gentle, almost shy smile he gave me just this week from his hospital bed - and the deal was done. We sealed it when I asked, ‘Do you need a clarinet player?’ and Eddie Robbins was member number three of the still uncompleted and unnamed band. Some time later, with the inclusion of Don Hall, Les Fithall and Bob Brown, and during a rain-filled lull in a job that entailed playing down Swanston St. we thought we’d better give the band a name. We knew it couldn’t be anything with Mississippi or Delta, but something with a river seemed to be de rigueur, but Yarra didn’t sound too flash. **So I sug-**

**gested, ‘How about Yarra Yarra?’ and thus it was.**

In the whole of the next year we had no jobs: it was probably just as well. Then a few that led to us playing at a church dance, ‘Dante’s Inferno’ – all the dances had names then; if you didn’t know where it was, Man, you just weren’t cool. That led to an approach by John Wratten, a Queen’s Scout from Moorabbin. He was looking to start a dance, alternating jazz & rock. **At his urging and against strong antagonism from some in the band, but with the nod from Maurice, I went to the home of a girl John knew, Judy Jacques. In the course of an afternoon, we went through the basic keys, chords and words of half-a-dozen tunes, enough for the first night. Among these was the old gospel ‘Down by the Riverside’. She looked good, she sounded even better and the small crowd there loved her. Thus the Yarra Yarra New Orleans Jazz Band was complete and Judy’s persona as a gospel singer was forged.**

The times favoured us. Everywhere, it seemed, the crowd wanted local, young talent. Folk was in: think Judy Durham and the Seekers riding the wave of Pete Seeger, the Kingston Trio and many others. Judy Durham was singing with Frank Traynor, too, so the cross over was there. There was gospel on the radio sometimes: Mahalia Jackson got an airing, even on the commercial stations. It seemed almost overnight and we had jobs all over. One that kicked us along was an Australia Day evening concert at Frankston. We were only one of four or five bands, but as we were playing our last number, a major fight broke out. The MC rushed on and told us to ‘keep playing, keep playing.’ Of course, we did. The crowd took it we were the star turn; Judy sang her heart out on a couple of rousing good-ol’ hand-clappin’ gospels, the band played as if possessed & Lo!, our name was all over Melbourne.

Shortly, we were playing at Jazz Centre 44 and then came ‘Gasworks’, at Kew Civic Centre, where we played to crowds of up to 1500. By then we were playing four and five nights a week, rehearsing on one and I had two nights’ night school. And I was married. Up until I left, in 1963, the band had had only one personnel change: Denis Ball replaced Eddie Robbins, who had gone to the UK. All but one of the bands I have played with since have been in the New Orleans style. Maurice Garbutt, of course, is acknowledged as a stalwart of the style and has led the Yarra Yarra’s now for fifty years; our hearts go out to him in his present predicament. Of the others band members, Don Hall and Bob Brown have died; Les Fithall and Denis Ball are respected and regu-

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lar participants in gigs and at the Victorian Jazz Club; Judy Jacques has mastered several genres of singing and has taught at the VCA.

Along the way, John Wratten, who became a successful promoter, was unfortunately killed on Calder Raceway; John Wratten's younger sister became my girlfriend, and has been my wife these past forty-seven years. Ian Orr has made jazz music his life; Kevin Goodey forged a successful career in finance, in Sydney, has played reeds on many visits overseas, has made CDs and regular appearances at festivals. When I first met the Wratten family, John and Beverly's younger brother, Barry, was desperate to escape from the piano accordion to which he was unhappily tethered. I was instrumental in persuading his mother to let him learn clarinet. He flourished at this; at times I was able to lend a hand to his first band which included, among others, Chris Deutcher & Charles Paine. Barry has spent most of his life devoted to New Orleans Jazz and has developed his style from one heavily influenced by George Lewis to one he can rightly call his own.

As for me, for the past five years I have acted as Treasurer of the Victorian Jazz Archive and hoping to find a band in need of a banjo player. A band that plays 'the true sound', of course.

*Lee Treanor— Musician & Treasurer*  
June 2009

### The Money or the Jazz

The 2009 Stonnington Jazz Festival was again a great success, with increased audiences and a bill featuring all Australian artists.

At the free youth jazz workshop conducted by Don Burrows, Allan Browne, Mal Sedergreen and Nick Haywood, over 200 students were treated to an exciting insight into the experiences and advice of these jazz masters and some of the students joined in the open jam session. Peter Redden, the Arts, Culture and Events Coordinator, City of Stonnington was amused but not surprised when he overheard a student telling a fellow student, "these jazz players love to play around the charts rather than straight from them". "Yeah" replied the other student, "but the problem with a Jazz muso is he plays for the love of it – I'm going to be a rock n roll star cause I love the money".

*Les Newman*  
*Media & Public Relations Officer*

### Letters to the editor:

Further to Jack Mitchell's letter published in the last Newsletter wherein he refers to Ern Pettifer, herewith is a photo of Ern which appeared on the cover of a 1937 Musicmaker magazine, and thanks to the expertise of my good friend Frank Leonard, the photo is better than the original. Although Ern Pettifer was well before my time so to speak, there is no question that he was the outstanding clarinetist of his era, whereas my musical career didn't commence until about 1950.

Later on, the clarinetists I most admired were Ken Weate, Larry Keane, Neville Maddison, Eugene Danilov, not to mention the Sydneysiders Don Burrows and Keith Silver. Ken Weate was Helen Reddy's first husband and the brother of Bruce, a fine accordion player with whom I worked on countless occasions.

Incidentally, in the last newsletter Bryan Clothier said that he thought I had taught Gavan Gow, but the honour in fact goes to Alec Doherty who, now in his early eighties, is still going strong.

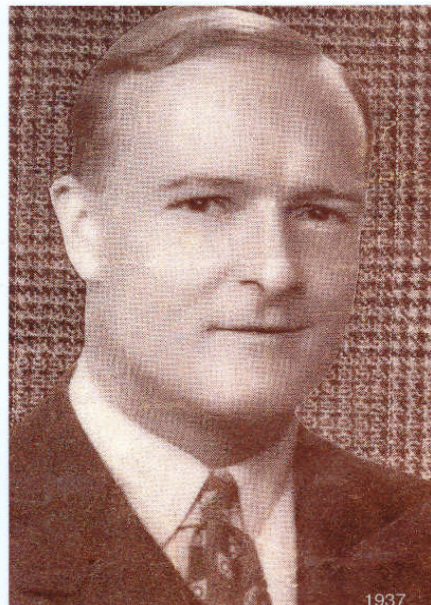
On the other hand, I can vividly recall Gavan coming along to check me out on a Friday night at the Cambridge Club, situated in the church hall at the corner of Punt and Toorak Roads, South Yarra, circa 1960. Interestingly enough, the band was led by Gavan's brother Frank with a virtual all-star line-up of Bob Barnard or Des Edwards, trumpet, Harry Price, trombone, Alan Lee, rhythm guitar, Tony Johnson, drums and the late Ron "Zeke" Williamson playing bass and tuba.

#### Afterthought:

When referring to the clarinetists I most admired early in my career, I inadvertently omitted Geoff Kitchen who was pivotal to the success of Frank Johnson's Fabulous Dixielanders. This was because of his improvising skills which welded Frank's trumpet and Warwick Dyer's trombone together to create the exciting ensembles that the Johnson band was renowned for.

On the other hand, although "Johno" never claimed to be a great trumpet player, his forte was always to play a strong melodic lead. Moreover, he was the best front man alongside whom I have ever worked.

*Alex Hutchinson—Musician*



Ern Pettifer

### RESULTS OF MONTSALVAT 1988 COMPETITION

**Congratulations to Graeme Bell with correctly naming 29 of the 37 musicians pictured. Tom Wanliss came second with 27 and Sandy Leaman came third with 23.**

Here are the correct names to the best of our knowledge.

1. Pixie Roberts
2. John Sangster
3. Frank Johnson
4. George Tack
5. Paul Furniss
6. Robin McCulloch
7. Margret Roadknight
8. Judy Bailey
9. Penny Eames
10. Neville Stribling
11. Bob Wright
12. Brett Iggulden
13. John Malpas
14. No one can identify him
15. David Eggleton
16. Warwick Alder
17. Frank Gow
18. Bob Barnard
19. Graeme Bell
20. Tony Newstead
21. Ron "Zeke" Williamson
22. Keith Hounslow
24. Ian Pearce
25. Joe McConechy
26. Tom Pickering
27. Ken Evans
28. Bill Tope
29. Doug Rawson
30. Bob Whetstone
31. Bob Davidson
32. Ian Smith
33. Herb Jennings
34. Ed Gaston
35. David Addis
36. Allan Browne
37. David Rankin

Thank you to those who entered—we would have been pleased to see more.

### BUSHFIRE BENEFIT FOR FERTREE GULLY CFA

Thanks to all concerned for helping to raise in excess of \$10,000 on 14th June. Particular thanks go to Ross Anderson, leader of the New Melbourne Jazz Band for organising the event, the management of the Whitehorse Club for providing the venue free of charge and to all musicians who donated their services.

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## Artie Shaw's Australian Concert Tour – 1943

By Graeme Pender

In this article I will attempt to determine the degree of impact Artie Shaw's Australian concert tour of 1943 had on Australian musicians. The first hint of Artie Shaw coming to Australia was briefly mentioned in the January edition of *Music Maker* (1943). After arriving in Australia in September 1943 following the completion of duty in the South-West Pacific area for nearly ten months, Shaw engaged in a series of concerts in Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, catering primarily for U.S. service personnel. Although various reviews of Shaw's tour published in *Music Maker* (1943) describe the musicality of his band as "colossal," "indescribable" and "momentous," it is unfortunate that audiences were restricted in most cases to U.S. service personnel only. Considering that many of Shaw's personnel were suffering from the effects of food poisoning, dysentery and dengue fever brought on by their tour of the South Pacific, it is a wonder they were able to produce music of such a high standard.

Some questions which might be considered are: what was the impact of Shaw's band on Australian musicians and audiences? Did any of Shaw's personnel become involved musically with Australian musicians? What did Shaw think of the standard of musicianship in Australia? The last of these questions is probably the easiest to answer. **It was alleged in *Music Maker* (1943) that Shaw believed Australian musicians were "excellent" as individuals.** With regard to Australian ensembles, it was further claimed that Shaw felt Australian musicians were lacking in "precision of attack and, [what] was equally important, release" hinting at the importance of "listening" to others within the ensemble.

The question of whether members of Shaw's personnel became musically involved with Australian musicians relates to Max Kaminsky's (tpt) recording session with members of the Bell band. Ray Marginson, Ray Bradley, Splinter Reeves (reeds) and Charlie Blott (dms), coteries from the *Melbourne University Rhythm Club*, introduced themselves to Max Kaminsky (tpt) after Shaw's Melbourne concert. The following day, Roger Bell, Bill Miller, Ray Marginson and Ray Bradley had lunch with Kaminsky, convincing him to become involved in a recording session organized by Miller. Kaminsky recorded four tracks on Miller's Amper-sand label on 19 September 1943. Roger



(Artie Shaw)

Bell's Jazz Gang recorded the following three tunes: *At the Jazz Band Ball*, *Oh! That Sign* and *Royal Garden Blues*. *Ja Da* was recorded with Don Roberts' Wolf Gang.

Kaminsky was the only musician from Shaw's band who recorded whilst he was in Australia - most probably against naval regulations - which is why he asked for the recordings "to be kept a secret until after the war." Kaminsky's actual influence on musicians' during his brief stay in Australia was probably minimal due to his playing being the "least featured of the three take-off trumpets," being allowed only the occasional opportunity to solo in Shaw's band. Although Roger Bell felt that the recording session with Kaminsky "was a great moment in [the band's] development," clearly it was Kaminsky's earlier recordings with the Condon groups of the 1930s and early 1940s which helped to influence musicians such as Bell and his colleagues.

Dave Tough (dms) was another Shaw musician who recorded with the Condon groups, helping to influence the "righteous jazz" fraternity. His drumming style was reported in *Music Maker* (1943), emphasising his "solid rhythmical wire-brush work," "use of cymbals" and in particular, his bass drum foot technique. Although approached by Kaminsky and asked to record on the 19 September session, Tough was not interested. Again, any influence made by Tough at this time upon Australian musicians would probably only have occurred through his Condon group recordings of the 1930s and 1940s. Broadly speaking, many traditional Melbourne jazz drummers had been focusing on musicians such as Dave Tough, Zutty Singleton and Ray Bauduc, tending to disregard the more commercial and highly stylized drumming of Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich.

Some members of Shaw's 17 piece naval

band socialized to varying degrees with Australian civilians, including a private party organized during their stay in Sydney. *Music Maker* (1943) briefly discusses a jam session which occurred at this party naming only five of Shaw's musicians who appeared to participate in it: Sam Donohue (reeds), Mack Pierce (reeds), Max Kaminsky (tpt), Rocky Cullucio (p) and Dave Tough (dms). There is no mention of Shaw himself either attending this party or participating in the jam session. Likewise, there is no description of (1) what was played, (2) whether any recording took place or, (3) if any Australian musicians were involved in this session.

The question relating to the impact of Shaw's band on Australian musicians is a far more complicated one. Melbourne historian, John Whiteoak argues that the Shaw visit "marked the beginning of a slow polarisation of the more ardent lovers of collectively improvised jazz and those attracted to the model of relatively orthodox technical brilliance provided by Shaw's band." Whiteoak also identifies Melbourne musicians such as Don Banks (p), Charlie Blott (dms), Lyn Challen (sb) and Splinter Reeves (reeds) who had previously been identified with traditional jazz were now shifting their interest into some of the more progressive styles of jazz.

There can be no doubt that musicians and members of the public alike were excited at the thought of Artie Shaw playing in Australia. Because of the many restrictions and limitations imposed on local audiences, I wonder whether Shaw's Navy band made any immediate impact on Australian jazz musicians, albeit the limited number who heard him, even though Shaw believed "everyone, including civilian musicians, should profit musically" from hearing his music. In most local areas, official restrictions had been placed on Australian audiences, allowing only U.S. military personnel the right to attend Shaw's concerts. *Music Maker* (1943) cites Townsville and Brisbane as the only centres in Australia where it appeared Australian civilians and servicemen were able to patronize these performances. The Sydney and Melbourne concerts presented more of a difficulty for civilians and Australian service personnel. Even though there were the obvious restrictions in place, some musicians in Melbourne managed to sneak into Shaw's concert:

You can therefore imagine everyone's dismay when we found out that no Australian would be allowed into any of the concerts...One or two sneaked in illegally and others set up listening posts beneath high open windows and ventilators outside the various town halls where the band played.

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(continued from page 6)

*Music Maker* (1943) describes a "well-known trumpet player" who approached the doorkeeper of the Melbourne Town Hall "with trumpet in hand" and gained entry to the concert by informing him that Shaw was "waiting for a trumpet player." Likewise in Sydney, "despite the organizers' assertion that no civilians would be admitted, many Sydney musicians were fortunate enough to gain admittance." Andrew Bisset describes Duke Farrell (bs/tba/cello/vcl) "hanging around until he met an American servicewoman who would take him in"; Wally Norman (tpt, tbn, ldr, arr) gaining admission to the Trocadero by "applying a pair of bolt cutters to the back door"; and Arthur Christian who dressed up in his Navy League uniform and "conned his way in."

Notwithstanding the fact that Shaw's personnel represented some of America's greatest jazz musicians, Shaw's style of music failed to influence the majority of 'righteous jazz' aficionados, because to them it represented the ultimate in commercialized swing music. There was no mention of Artie Shaw's Australian tour in *Jazz Notes* other than a brief disparaging reference in a five page article on Max Kaminsky by Bill Miller. Even though Shaw's extraordinary improvisational technique seemed to have "an unlimited fund of ideas and the music [poured] out in a never ending stream," the results of a 'Jazz Notes Poll' of 14 clarinet players, Shaw was voted the most unpopular jazz clarinet player with a score of only '1' point. Benny Goodman gained '6' points, whilst Johnny Dodds achieved a score of '36' points.

### *Graeme Pender—Musician & Tutor*

\* Ed's note—Footnotes could not be transferred into our system but are available .

### **Bill Armstrong's Birthday Party**

(cont'd from page 3)

I sat at a table near the front of the hall which had coasters featuring a number of Bill's record labels like Paramount and Fable etc. and was soon surrounded by Greg Young of Readings' Books and Records, composer George Dreyfus of Theme from Rush fame, Roger and Anne Beilby of Mainly Jazz and Geoff Orr, vocalist and recording engineer of Lyric records. This will give you some idea of the guests in attendance. I didn't make it to the Jazz Archive table!

The entertainment was provided by people who are household names in the entertainment, recording and jazz world. Before the main concert, pianists J Neville Turner and Graham Coyle played as people arrived and found tables to sit at. This was a bit difficult because many had not seen each other for years and just wanted to talk.

The concert began with vocalist Mike Brady singing a couple of numbers with TV pianist Peter Sullivan who accompanied most of the performers while Mike

Brady did most of the MC work. With Peter Sullivan was a group of musicians, including Andrew Swann on drums, who played a couple of instrumental numbers. To my mind Normie Rowe was the star performer. Backed by pianist Murray Robertson of the Thunderbirds, they were worth going miles to hear!

Following him was Marcie Jones of the Cookies who sang several songs including "I'm Not Bitter" which would delight any women's libber. Bruce Woodley of the Seekers and Dobe Newton of the Bushwackers combined to sing "I am Australian" inviting the audience to join in. Bobby Bright of Bobby and Laurie was next, followed by 85-year-old Ron Tudor of the Fable label speaking about his time with Bill at W & G and subsequently. Molly Meldrum, complete with his trademark hat, gave his thoughts on Bill as did most of the performers.

Bill's six children Mark, Mandy with son Brian aged 14 from USA, Fleur, Charlotte from London, Lucy and William and other grandchildren joined him on stage. After speeches honouring him, it was an opportunity for Bill to demonstrate his piano-playing ability. Together with Peter Sullivan he played "A Duet for Three Hands" using one finger to great effect and announcing the movements.

The birthday cake arrived and there was the usual cutting the cake and blowing out the candles, followed by Bill's speech. This ended the formal (?) part of the afternoon and it was left to the Synchronopators to finish the celebration with some great jazz with Wilbur Wilde sitting in on saxophone for a couple of tunes.

This was a fitting end to a wonderful afternoon's tribute to Bill Armstrong's enormous contribution to recording.

What was this contribution? Continuing on from his time recording on wire recorders and acetate discs he started producing various records on labels including "Paramount". The most popular of these were by Frisco Joe's Good Time Boys. These were recorded in the Darnum pub by Smacka Fitzgibbon and Graeme Bell.

There followed a period at the ABC and 3UZ where he worked with Graham Kennedy and "Nicky" Nicholls. He then moved to W & G where he met up with Ron Tudor who later produced many more extremely popular Smacka recordings released on Fable in 1970. These have been re-issued on CD by Bilarm Music in recent years. By 1961 Bill became manager of Telefil located in Acland Street, St Kilda where the 'Naked Dance' LP by Len Barnard's Jazz Band was recorded. This probably became one of the best Australian jazz recordings at the time and still is! After numerous reissues on LP it has been jointly put out by Bill and Nevill Sherburn of Swaggie Records on the Bill Armstrong Collection CD BAC21-2.

The first Armstrong recording studio opened in Dec 1965 in a house at 100

Albert Road, South Melbourne. This expanded to include four adjoining houses employing twenty people. Then the studios moved to the old Croft's Grocery warehouse at 180 Bank St and became one of the leading recording studios in the world. It featured Australia's first 16-track machine, recording just about all our top performers. It was sold in 1974 and became Armstrong Audio Visual A.A.V. Following this, Bill was mixed up with ethnic radio 3EA, moving on to being manager of 3EON-FM which was Australia's first commercial FM station.

On the sale of 3EON in 1986 he was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal for five years, but resigned in 1986 after only 15 months, considering it a "toothless tiger". After investing in various theatre productions Bill returned to producing recordings, including LPs on the Jazz and Jazz label. A number of these were either produced by the late Ron Halstead, or made from recordings he did while in the USA. Ron was the original VJA sound room engineer and many of these tapes are lodged at the Archive. There followed CDs under the "Bill Armstrong Collection" label which included Barry Humphries' favourites, Smacka, British Dance Bands, Bob and Len Barnard, Swaggies and re-issues of some of the J & J LPs. Together with Nevill Sherburn of Swaggie, Bill is working on future CDs at the moment and as the party invitation says "He is still organising".

Thanks Bill for your enormous contribution to recording and more particularly, Australian Jazz.

*Eric J Brown, Registrar, July 2009*

### **Letter to the editor:**

The letter by Bryan Clothier in the May VJAZZ Newsletter reminded me of Brian and Geoff Forrest as the Archive's first two volunteers who were not committee members.

We had started to move jazz material from out of our garages and under beds, to be sorted prior to going into our first shipping container, now known as Vault One. Brian and Geoff would work at a big table in the space where the computers are now. There was no ceiling or reverse air conditioning for heating and it was so cold you could not feel your toes let alone your fingers.

These wonderful gentlemen worked beyond the call of duty with good humour, whilst listening to jazz recordings, and I remember their input to the embryonic days of the Archive with much affection. When Geoff Forrest died from cancer, his family made his grandson Nicholas Blaich a Life Member of the Archive at the age of seven, as a tribute to his grandfather.

*John Kennedy*

### New Members

We welcome the following as new members:

James Anstey, John & Gail Arkins, Graham Barber, Amy Breed, Michael Brennan, M Cathcart & H Rayson, Suzannah Collins, Brian Coote, Frank Cox, L Dennehy, Rhys DeWilde, Noel Dollman, Norm Ellis, Goldy Evans, Diana Fowler, Barbara Garrett, Hobart Jazz Club, Daniel Hogg, Terry Johanson, Elizabeth Johnson, Marion Lustig, Nathan McCormick, Luke McGorlick, June McGraw, Maria & Hendrik Matser, Bethany Nette, Nathan Nette, Robert Ramos, Norm Reynolds, Barbara Richards, Barry Sanders, Carolyn Spurrier, Ray & Mavis Strong, Hilton Vermaas, Graham White, Rosemary Worssan and Kay Zhang.

### We are grateful for the following cash donations:

Bill Armstrong's Birthday Fund, Bill Armstrong, John Bentley, Bryan Clothier, Pauline Collins-Jennings, Hilary Dossier, Professor William Hare, Beverley Jennings, Frank Killeen, Ray Marginson, Ida Markby, John R May, Deslys Milliken, Malcolm Mitchell, Mrs Peggy Morris, Geoffrey Norris, Aydin Nurhan, Bob Sedergreen, John D. Thompson, Geoff Tobin, Frank van Straten, Ronald Wakeman, Cecil Warner and Tom Woods,

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### **The Best Jazz Dunny In Town "Do You Remember"**

When the aroma of barbecues on the lawn following an AGM would be overpowered by the pong of the septic system as it became overloaded?

Even after we connected to the sewer and installed a disabled toilet, our facilities were less than adequate and could have caused the Archive to be shut down over OH&S issues had someone laid a complaint against us.

As the first part of our five-part building program, the entire amenities building has been gutted and converted into a toilet block **at our expense** thanks to the cooperation of our co-tenant Darren Wallace of Operation Revegetation.

The conversion allowed us to treble the ladies' facilities and include a "powder room", double the men's and upgrade the disabled toilets, all to a very high standard. Improvements include floor tiling, wall tiling to a height of two metres throughout the building, with hot water, hand dryers, soap dispensers and wash basins where necessary.

The contract was awarded to the Dandenong company Elken Lane Pty. Ltd, whose site manager, Peter Mironov offered expert advice to overcome unseen problems as

they arose, to the satisfaction of all concerned. Speaking personally, I would not hesitate to recommend Elken Lane to any member seeking domestic or commercial construction. They were flexible in their approach, delivering the job on budget and on time.

In conclusion I would remind you this is the largest project undertaken at the Archive in its thirteen years of operation. It could not have been successfully achieved without much input from the following volunteers and members.

Frank (Tiger Rag) Webster, who kept the old "men's" running against all odds while producing the original sketch and measurements for the new loo which were accepted in principal by Parks Victoria, who incorporated them in our current lease.

This allowed Peter Barker, our draftsman/drummer to develop four or five options from Frank's sketch. I may have driven Peter crazy in the process but the end result was worth it.

Mel and Margaret Blachford chose the tiles, and through a family connection introduced us to Brian Benton of Benton Plumbtec. Brian provided all the china and hardware including delivery, exchange of

goods etc. at minimum cost to us along with heaps of advice to us amateurs. Boy—did I drive him crazy? Check out Brian's wonderful showroom in Warrigal Road, East Bentleigh for all your plumbing requirements.

Professional painter Barry, son of Terry and Faye Norman, donated all the paint and worked weekends and evenings to make the building useable before going away on holiday. The exterior will be completed when Barry returns.

Rod Clements took care of all the fiddly bits including locks, knobs and door handles while replacing some old fittings which looked out of place with the rest of the job.

On behalf of the Board of Management I offer a sincere THANK YOU to all the members involved in this project.

"Did I remember?" - you betcha, but don't take my word for it—come and see for yourself.

**Jeff Blades—Project Manager  
Flushed with success!**

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