

# AJAZZ

The Magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum

## Nickin' Off

Nick Polites Jazzmen  
1971

The Melbourne  
New Orleans Jazz Band  
1960



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## What Our Readers Say Page 3

**Remembering the Life of Nick Polites** Page 4  
By Con Pagonis

**Nick Polites Interview** Page 6  
By John Kennedy

**Lucy Brown and Friends** Page 8  
By Ralph Powell

**Matrix: A Magazine for Jazz Record Collectors** Page 10  
By Ken Simpson-Bull

***fidelis usque ad mortem*** Page 12  
By Tim Davis

**Reviews** Page 14  
By Eric Myers

**The Bands Within the Bands** Page 17  
By Bill Brown

**Bygone Days** Page 18  
By Ralph Powell

**Reminiscing** Page 20  
**Using Safari to Search the database**

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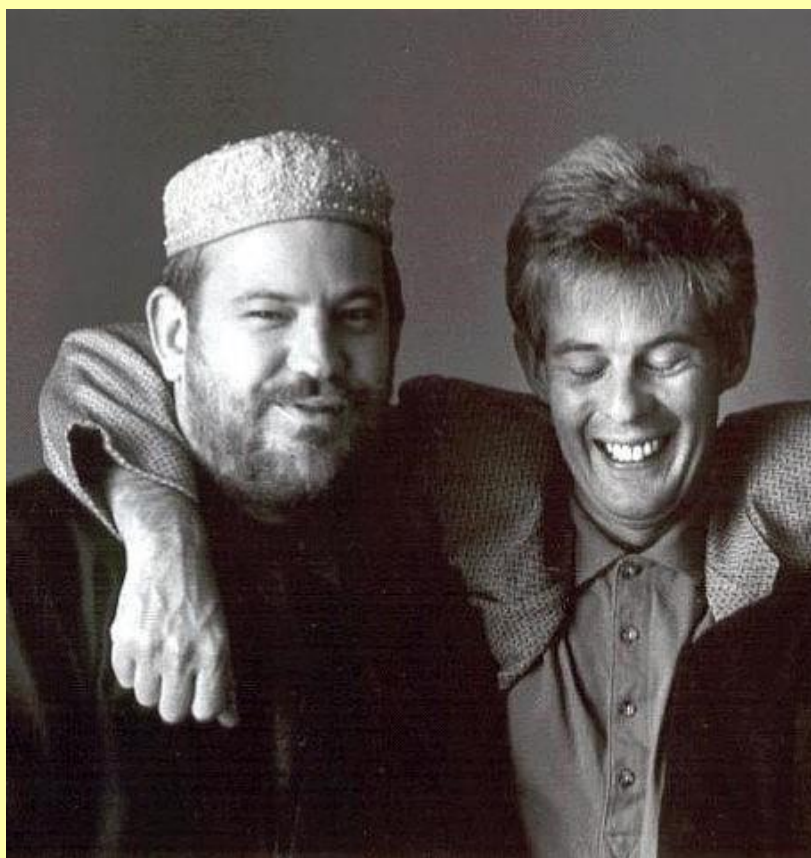
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## Paul Grabowsky AO

We are delighted that renowned Australian Musician, Paul Grabowsky AO, has accepted our invitation to become an Australian Jazz Museum Jazz Ambassador. Paul, seen here with the late Allan Browne OAM, agreed to be the public face of the AJM for our media marketing campaign.

"Jazz is where you have a group, a spirit and you're trying to make music together and bounce off each other"

Allan Browne OAM

The Australian Jazz Museum acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, water and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



## What Our Readers Say



Wow, this magazine is awesome! Thanks so much. The pages of Irene and the Ladies Dance Bands is fantastic ... I will read the whole magazine!

... **Jeff Cox**

Thank you so much – the mag is brilliant. I also loved the Members' Compilation 2021. Keep up the great work.

... **Ken Sumsion**

Just wanted to acknowledge the first class job the magazine folk do. ... my impression is that the publication's going from strength to strength with each succeeding issue. Bravo!

... **Jack Beamish**

The latest AJazz magazine has just arrived. A fine and interesting issue. A credit to the new editor and his team.

... **Bill Haesler**

Enjoyed seeing not only my article, but perusing the entire publication. Especially loved the sheet music illustrations about the epidemic. Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to write the article.

... **David McCain**

Congratulations on another outstanding publication ... is the AJazz available as hard copies or is that now a thing of the past?

... **Peter Haby**

Thank you for sending the magazine. I love it!

... **Clarita Liepolt**



## Do you have a story to tell?

We are always seeking contributions to AJazz

The following criteria are recommended:

- Articles can be created as "Word" documents and sent as an email attachment to [rpowell@ajm.org.au](mailto:rpowell@ajm.org.au)
- Alternatively items can be sent just as an email to [rpowell@ajm.org.au](mailto:rpowell@ajm.org.au) or posted on a USB stick, or on a CD to:

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- Photos are best sent as JPEG files with captions clearly identifying the subject.
- We have the right to edit in order to reduce item length, correct grammar and spelling errors, or remove offensive material.
- Only major changes to submitted articles require an author's approval.
- Submitted articles will be returned to sender only if requested.
- We are not obliged to publish.
- Preferred font is Arial 9

Contribution deadlines are six weeks prior to publication unless otherwise agreed.

Mid March for May AJazz

Mid June for August AJazz

Mid September for November AJazz

Mid December for February AJazz



Vale

**Ian Magee Orr**

"The Bug"

Trumpeter and Teacher

5 Dec 1939 – 9 Jan 2022

A life of music, Jazz and education

# Remembering the life of Nick Polites

2 July 1927 – 14 January 2022



Photo: George Krupinski

A tireless man, and a creative soul, Nick was voted Australia's best jazz clarinet player by fellow musicians and delegates.

**N**ick Polites OAM passed away on 14 January 2022; he was 94 years old. Nick was a much-loved iconic Melbourne jazzman, an early, influential and respected advocate for migrant services, a successful businessman and a life-long student of economics and social issues.

The child of Greek migrants, Nick was born in Melbourne in 1927. His father – Theodore Polites – was from Lefkas, a small Greek island near Ithaca in the Adriatic Sea. He and his brother John, both still teenagers, initially travelled down the east coast of Africa to South Africa in 1898. There they came into contact with Australian soldiers fighting in the Boer War. They convinced the two brothers to continue on to Australia where they arrived in the early 1900s.

Nick's mother, Philia Tsarouchas, was a refugee from Alatsata, a provincial town near Smyrna (modern-day Izmir) in what is now Turkey. Like so many people of Greek heritage living in Asia Minor, in 1914, with the imminent explosion of World War I, her family was forced to leave Alatsata. At the end of the war, in 1919, they returned to their hometown, but with Turkey being poised to take over the entire region, they were again forced to leave in 1922 with only two weeks' notice, and the family fled to mainland Greece. From there she travelled with other relatives arriving in Melbourne in 1923.

Nick's parents met and married in Melbourne in 1924; relatively late (particularly for those times) for both of them – Philia being in her late twenties, and Theodore in his early forties. They had four children – Helen in 1925, Peter in 1926, Nick in 1927, and Maria in 1929. The family initially lived in St Kilda and then Elwood.

Nick went to Elwood Primary School and then Melbourne High School. At primary school he won an academic prize which was subsequently withdrawn after a complaint from another parent on the grounds that his father was not naturalised, despite the fact that Nick was Australian-born.

This injustice became a great motivator in Nick's academic life thereafter. He went on to be dux of his school and captain of the school football team. However, outside of school Greeks were not allowed to play in Australian football and cricket teams, so Nick and other Greek friends went on to establish their own football team which they called "The Olympic".

In 1945 Nick got called-up for military service. On the same day the postman delivered two letters, one from the Australian Government to say he had to report for military duty and one from Melbourne University to say that, as one

like "West End Blues" for the first time was an epiphany which set the young Nick out on his life's journey in the jazz world.

At first, Nick's parents resisted his pleas to purchase him a musical instrument; they were concerned music would be a distraction from his schooling. Eventually, after four years, they relented, and in 1942 Nick got his start on a second-hand alto saxophone. Barely able to play, Nick was performing with amateur bands at church dances almost immediately. He puts down his early pre-proficient opportunities to the scarcity of older more accomplished musicians who would have been in military service during WWII. Nick was a natural with a good ear; he learnt fast.

Even before acquiring an instrument he had memorised many of the tunes that would become his initial repertoire. By 16, in 1943, Nick had earned enough from these fledgling performances to buy his first clarinet; and he never looked back.

Like many of the early African-American jazzmen, Nick was unschooled in music. He was entirely self-taught and played by ear; not relying on written music at all (he described himself as a "slow reader" of sheet music). Through his adult life Nick carried a vast repertoire of tunes in his head.

Nick had his jazz heroes, such as New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis, but did not model his playing style on any one of them in particular, he developed his own jazz voice informed by the classic Creole-style of clarinet playing. As a reviewer once proclaimed, he is "the real deal". Louisiana Creoles were the descendants of mixed French and African American heritage. Nick told me that with his Mediterranean complexion as a young

## "Armstrong's Hot Five"

of a handful of the university's top students, his military service was deferred. At the age of 20, Nick graduated from the University of Melbourne with a degree in Commerce. He then went on to do a second degree in Arts, majoring in history and philosophy.

Nick's first conscious exposure to music occurred at age 11 in 1938. A childhood friend – Denis Athenis – loaned him Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings. Hearing what were then only ten-year-old recordings



man he passed for a Creole when performing in New Orleans. This was a great convenience for Nick as mixed-race bands were frowned upon by public officials.

Parental concerns about his academic future were unfounded; Nick went on to graduate from the University of Melbourne. He also quickly moved on to clarinet as his preferred jazz instrument.

At university, Nick performed with amateur campus-based and other semi-professional jazz bands; among them the Varsity Vipers and then the Doc Willis and Alan Bradley bands. His big break came in 1951 when he joined Melbourne's leading professional jazz band – Frank Johnson's Fabulous Dixielanders. In Australia this band was rated second only to Graeme Bell's Sydney-based band. The Dixielanders were Melbourne's pre-eminent jazz band of that time.

In 1954 Louis Armstrong and his band visited Australia for the first time and the Frank Johnson Band played to greet them as they disembarked from their Ansett flight on the tarmac of Melbourne's Essendon airport. The entourage were invited back to Nick's parents' place for a welcome party. That evening Armstrong invited Nick to play with his world famous All Stars band in the Polites' family home!

Nick played and recorded with The Dixielanders until late 1956. In September 1955 the band had a terrible car accident returning to Melbourne from a country gig. Band-member "Wocka" Dyer was killed and Nick was laid up in hospital for two months recovering from a broken neck. The spark went out of the band after that episode.

A staunch jazz traditionalist, Nick

## **“a staunch Traditionalist”**

moved on when the band started performing more commercially-oriented material.

After leaving the Dixielanders, Nick teamed-up with Llew Hird, and later with English folk-blues vocalist Peter Shiells, and still later with German migrant Mookie Herman on double bass. Their appearance at the 1957 Australian Jazz Convention was a fillip to their popularity on the jazz scene. With Llew Hird's departure in March 1958 leadership fell to Nick. They were renamed the Melbourne New Orleans Jazz Band. From September 1961 the band toured extensively in the UK, Ireland, and Germany until disbanding in London in April 1963.

Then, after a first visit to Greece, Nick embarked on his first of many pilgrimages to the birth-place of jazz – New Orleans. On arrival in the Crescent City, Nick made his way to Preservation Hall in the French Quarter and bumped into one of his jazz heroes – George

Lewis – standing in the courtyard of this now iconic venue. They had previously met in London and George said to Nick, "I'm playing tonight, come along and join in". Thus Nick became a regular at Preservation Hall for three months and then continued with additional regular performances there on subsequent visits.

During this time Nick even filled-in for George Lewis in his regular band when George had overseas performance commitments; and when George was in town, he and Nick played clarinet duets.

As mentioned earlier, Nick's "Mediterranean appearance" meant he was presumed by many locals to be of Creole descent; which aided in side-stepping the local segregationist public policy at that time.

Nick must have felt he was in jazz heaven! He was playing with his idols: George Lewis, Kid Howard, Jim Robinson, George Guesnon, "Slow Drag" Pavageau, Cie Frazier, and Dolly Adams on piano. In subsequent years Nick got to perform with the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Art Blakey and he befriended iconic performers like Mahalia Jackson.

Nick returned to Melbourne just in time for the 1963 jazz convention at the Kew Civic Centre. Early in 1964, he joined the popular Yarra Yarra Jazz Band as their leader for a couple of years; and he rejoined them after a spell. He moved on to team up with Sydney jazzman Geoff Bull for a European tour and his second visit to New Orleans where he was establishing his reputation with African American players and audiences who continued to presume he was a local Creole.

On returning to Melbourne in late 1966 Nick formed his own New Orleans Stompers which played for another five years. He continued with various bands through to the formation of the Louisiana Shakers in 1994. Nick was a fixture around the Melbourne jazz scene and toured extensively around the UK and Europe nine times. Nick performed his last gig with The Shakers on Christmas Eve 2018.

Nick felt particularly indebted to the late Ashley Keating who led The Shakers and organised their overseas tours around the UK and Europe. The Shakers have been recognised as one of the true "keepers of the flame" of the authentic ethnic New Orleans jazz style.

At four successive Australian Jazz Conventions from 1957 to 1960, Nick was voted Australia's best jazz clarinet player by fellow musicians and delegates. This discontinued practice was followed with a final convention concert by those voted the cream of all the players.

Nick has written and recorded several jazz compositions: "Green Gate Serenade", "Nickin' Off" and "Helpin' Hand Rag". A couple of these were winning tunes at the regular Australian Jazz Convention competition for new

compositions. He was also a leader and administrator for Australian jazz. He was president of the 1960 Australian Jazz Convention and several subsequently; and a convention trustee for several decades. He was a founding member of the Victorian Jazz Club and on its management committee for many years.

On graduating from university in the late 1940s Nick had taken up the CEO position with his family's confectionery manufacturing business through to its

## **“Bachelor of Social Work”**

sale in 1971. Fortunately his brother-in-law was able to step in to manage the business when Nick was on tour overseas.

After the sale of the family business, Nick moved into the migrant services sector, initially as a volunteer and then as inaugural director of the Australian Greek Welfare Society (now known as 'Pronia'). A condition of government funding at the time was that AGWS must employ a qualified Greek-speaking social worker. Problem was that there wasn't such a person in Victoria at that time. So Nick just went back to University and undertook a Bachelor of Social Work! Fortunately with his previous academic qualifications he was able to complete this degree within two years.

Nick was a member of the 1978 Galbally Committee whose seminal migrant services review and recommendations laid the foundations for the Australian Government's multicultural public policy to this day.

In 1981 he was awarded an OAM recognising his significant contributions in this field of his endeavours.

Nick never really retired. He continued performing as a founding

## **“a great legacy”**

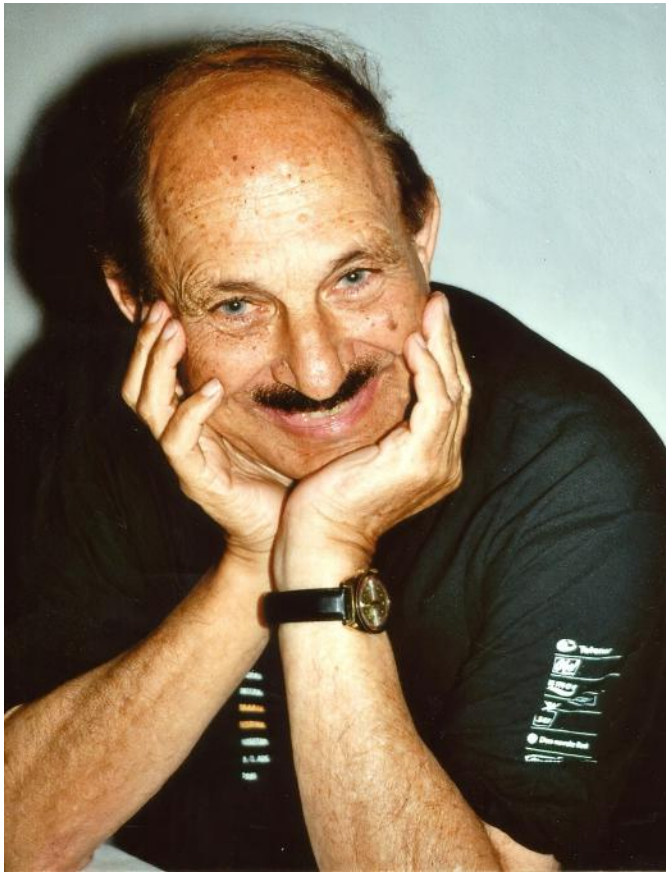
member of the Louisiana Shakers until after he'd turned 90. Fans could regularly see him perform at The Clyde Hotel in Carlton on a Sunday afternoon right through to the end of 2018. After that he would still make impromptu performances from time-to-time, to the delight of his friends and fans.

The jazz community, colleagues, and admirers in the multicultural affairs sector, are indebted to the great legacy he leaves behind.

Nick Polites' many friends, musical collaborators and fans in the jazz community, and colleagues and admirers in the multicultural affairs sector, are indebted to the great legacy he leaves behind. ■

By Con Pagonis





# A life of Jazz

**On May 20th 1994 John Kennedy interviewed Nick Polites about his Jazz experiences. Here are Nick's responses to some of the questions which outline some of his jazz initiation and influences.**

## **How did you first become interested in jazz, Nick?**

Well, my father was manager of a live theatre first called the Playhouse, later the Garrick. It's near where the National Museum is now. Some of the people acting in plays left some [gramophone] records there and didn't claim them. As a result, we had these records at home. They were all marching-band ones: John Philip Sousa marches. I used to play these things on our wind-up gramophone [and] I found I liked music.

So then a friend of mine introduced me to a record: Louis Armstrong's "West End Blues", and I thought: now, this is great! So I saved up to buy my own record.

I went into Brash's when I had the money and I said, "I want a record", and the girl said, "Yes, which one?" I was only 11 and I'd been saving up for weeks. I think it was four and sixpence for the cheaper-priced Regal Zonophones, in those days all 78s of course. It's extraordinary I hadn't even thought about which one I wanted. She gave me a popular record of the time, and I very soon saw it didn't compare in any way with the jazz one. I got sick of playing that, whereas the jazz one I could play it even after I knew every note on it. There was something extra there. That's how I got onto jazz.

## **What was your first contact with jazz musicians?**

Well, it must have been Pixie Roberts – in an extraordinary sort of way. My parents used to take us four children to a Greek dance at the Greek Orpheus Club. There were not that many Greek people in Melbourne at the time, so they used to have these dances to get together. The band that used to play on quite a few occasions was some Chinese young ladies who were very strictly a dance band. There was another band which was a bit hotter than that, although still just playing dance music – just a four-piece. In it was Pixie Roberts on tenor sax. Little was I to know that later we would become friends in the jazz field. But he would be about the first I heard, and I think he was playing with Don Harper at the time.

One of the earliest live jazz bands I heard was a little concert done by Roger Bell and his band somewhere in the city. Graeme was away in the Armed Forces, I think. It had a

distinct effect on me to see local, ordinary human flesh-and-blood who could play such good music. It was great to sit down and hear this jazz because most of my jazz listening was to records, and it was from records I got my first influences.

There's no doubt about the greater impact of seeing ordinary human beings – not great gods – who could [really] play music. There was a feeling: gosh, if he can do it, surely I can. The standard of Johnny Dodds who first inspired me seemed something quite unattainable.

Later I discovered George Lewis and was very impressed. Later, I was actually able to meet him in New Orleans. In fact, I met him in London first, and even played with him. Another highlight was actually playing duets with George Lewis in Preservation Hall.

## **Which bands have you been associated with?**

The very first band I played with was run by a fellow called Russ Marshall. He rang me one day and said, "Look, you don't know me, but I've heard from school friends of yours you've just acquired a saxophone. I want you to play next Saturday at a dance". I said, "But I can't play it, I've only just got the thing". He said "Look, I can't get musicians. We've been playing as a trio. We've got to have a front-line man". I said, "But I *cannot* play it". He said, "It doesn't matter, just look as though you're playing. We've got to have someone there". And I was foolish enough to say yes.

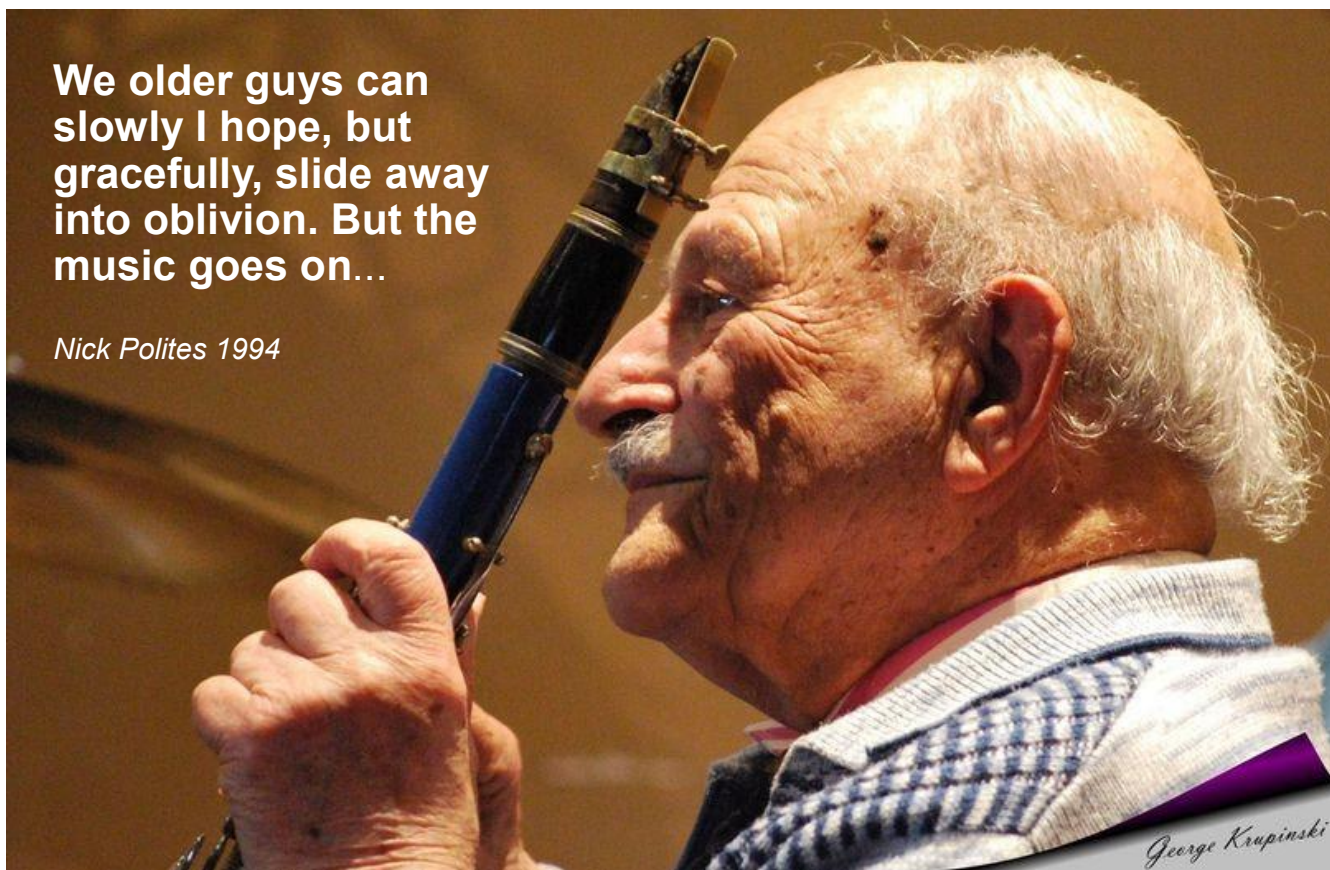
As I was on my way there I thought to myself: how loudly do you play? What's it like playing on a stage? All I knew was where to put my fingers to play the song "Sugar" simply because I had a record of it. When I first got the saxophone I worked out how to get that melody out. I couldn't stop playing it the first few days, and that was the only one I knew.

So I went to this dance, it was a church hall in Brighton, and played. They started off playing "Sugar" and I played it correctly. I was a complete illiterate but I just played it right. I got a resounding applause. I was so surprised. They'd been waiting to have a saxophone to play in the band and they'd been getting on with just piano, guitar and drums, so the people there were very happy. Then we had to play another song.



**We older guys can slowly I hope, but gracefully, slide away into oblivion. But the music goes on...**

*Nick Polites 1994*



[So] I just pretended and played softly. The others kept it going.

The last tune before supper we played "Sugar" again. Then the first tune after supper was "Sugar" and the last tune of the night was "Sugar". In those days you always had to play "God save the King" at the end of the performance. I just went behind the curtain and hid because, if I had tried to just busk it and not play it correctly, the servicemen on leave in the audience would not have put up with that.

I got paid and I was asked to come again the following Saturday. After a few months I'd learnt [some more tunes] and I slowly picked up a repertoire. That was the beginning of my life in music with this Russ Marshall band, and I played with them for some years.

Then I started playing at St Silas Hall with Manny Papas, Doc Willis and Alan Knight and, soon after that, [with] Allan Bradley's Rhythm Kings.

#### **After you joined John Sangster's jazz band in 1950, tell us about that?**

John Sangster was a very bright young fellow. He was living at Alan Watson's just down the road from my place in Rockley Road, South Yarra. I can distinctly remember playing at a big concert at the Exhibition Building with John Sangster.

The Allan Bradley band had Ken Ingram in it, and I thought he was the personality in the band. He used to drive it along. Winger Nelson was on banjo. He's dead now. That's about all I remember about those bands.

[Then] John Tucker rang to ask me if I could play with the Frank Johnson band for one night at Collingwood Town Hall. Geoff Kitchen had left the band and Johnson had got John McCarthy from New South Wales. After a little while McCarthy went back. John has told me just recently that in fact, it wasn't exactly his sort of music.

So I went to Collingwood Town Hall. I knew Johnson only vaguely, but not too many of the others. I just sat down and played and I realised, here's a band in which every member knows exactly what he should be doing, and does it well. I thought to myself at the time, oh, that makes it easy for me,

doesn't it? I had been blaming myself about a lot of things in my playing but, a lot of things I was blaming myself for were just as much due to the fact that the [other] fellows were not always spot on. These boys had all those things going, and I think Geoff Kitchen deserves a lot of credit for that because he was a pretty hard taskmaster.

I found it easy and I enjoyed it. So they asked me to play again the following Saturday and I said okay. And then Johnson asked me if I would join the band permanently. Yes! For me, that was a big step forward because it was in the Johnson band that I did my real apprenticeship. They knew what they were doing and it made me get down and learn all my chords.

#### **Were you ever a full-time musician?**

It didn't support full-time unless you wanted to live very cheaply. Some have done it but I had no choice. I was in business and I can remember finishing a job and then rushing around to the factory to switch off the heater or something. While I was overseas with the Melbourne New Orleans Band, which was for a couple of years, I was full-time. It's good being full-time because that's all you work on. But in Australia it was impossible in the earlier days, and I've never wanted to be just a musician, anyway. I've always worried about the fact that if you were fully dependent on it, you might [have] to change your music to get a bigger market or something like that, and I didn't want that to happen.

#### **What are your views on the future of jazz in Australia?**

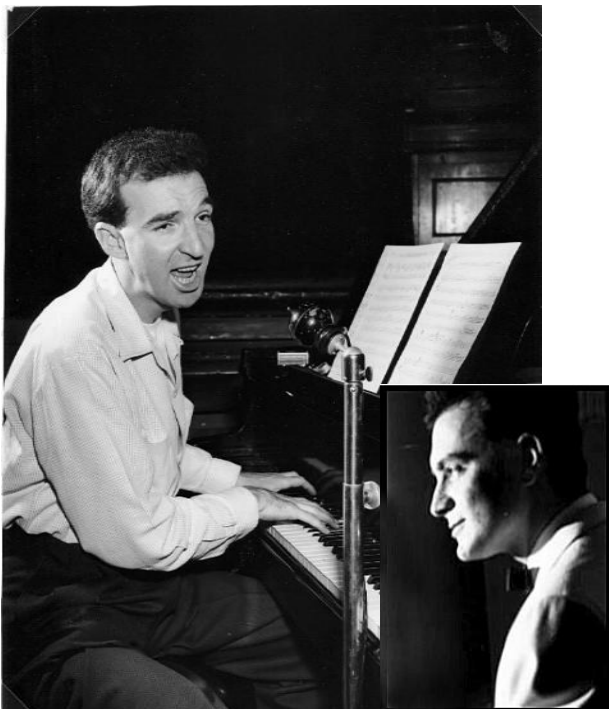
Well, I've always had the view that in every generation of young up-and-coming people you'll find a percentage who like music and, among them, a smaller, but nevertheless viable percentage who will hear a bit of jazz music, like it, and want to play it. There mightn't be a lot of them, but they will always be there. I lived through a couple of generations where very few such people came through. Rock'n'Roll conquered them. It didn't look too good at one stage but recently it's all come alright. ■



Georgina de León aka Lucy Brown

In the 1980s and the '90s Lucy Brown and Friends were regulars around the jazz venues of Sydney.

Thirty years prior Lucy was an aspiring “jump” performer called Georgina de León. Described as “a swinging singer with a “cool” style” by the ABC Weekly, she started singing with pianist Les Welch and drummer Larry Stellar. She also joined forces with Edwin Duff and, in December 1952, was chosen by Les Welch to sing “St. Louis Blues” on his **Tempos De Barrelhouse** recording, one of the very first 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm microgroove records by an Australian artist.



Les Welch

Larry Stellar

## Lucy Brown and Friends

By Ralph Powell



Georgina sang on Les Welch’s **Tempos De Barrelhouse**

Georgina also sang with Jack Sinclair’s Steely City Seven, with the Reg Lewis Instrumental Quintet on Candlelight Cabaret and was a regular with the Port Jackson Band. Graeme Bell had invited her to sing “Airway Boogie” at a Sydney concert but her contract with the Manhattan label at the time prevented this.

Born in 1926, to a Filipino father and a mother of Mauritian descent, she had no formal musical training beyond singing in her school choir, attempting to master piano and successfully learning to read music.

Having started her singing career with Les Welch, she also worked with Ralph Mallen, Billy Weston, Don Burrows, Terry Wilkins, Keith Silver, Alan Nash and John Edgecombe, the John Angel Trio, Ken Morrow and Alan Pring’s Orchestra.

Georgina trained as a stenographer when she left school, working as a shorthand-writer and typist for the Accounts Section of the Technical Education Branch of NSW from the age of 16. She was based at East Sydney Technical School. In July 1950, with her friend Audrey Gurd, Georgina travelled to London where the girls were hoping to break into the thriving music scene of the time. Although unsuccessful in their singing ambitions, they did meet some notable performers in London.

They talked to Nat “King” Cole and Nellie Lutcher, met Ray Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, and saw Danny Kaye, Red Skelton, Tyrone Power and Montgomery Clift.

After a year in London they left for the United States where they spent several months before Georgina returned to Australia. Audrey remained in North America, eventually marrying a Canadian.





Georgina de León was often joined by Edwin Duff

For several years Georgina was not active in the music scene as she was employed by Selangor Pewter and did not perform at all. That changed when Bettye "Bottles" Holloway invited her to set up a jazz group at the Dry Dock in Balmain. The Lucy Brown Quartet with Pete McMurray, Tony Buckley, Ken Morrow and Frank Murray was born.

Patrons refused to believe her name was Georgina de León so she jokingly suggested Lucy Brown based on a nickname given her by someone at the Corinthian Room several years previously.

And—the name stuck. ■



Georgina fronting the Port Jackson Band



# matrix

## A Magazine for Jazz Record Collectors

By Ken Simpson-Bull

THE recent sad news of John Kennedy's passing got me thinking about one area of his jazz interests in which he was passionate – discography. By definition, discography is the study of musical recordings and the compilation of descriptive relevant information, and John did something significant about it: he created a monthly "jazz record research magazine" which he called *Matrix* and made himself editor. In an interview with this writer however, John claimed that the original idea came from Bill Haesler.

His partner-in-crime, the same Bill Haesler, was designated Assistant Editor. They went under the formal names of Martin John Kennedy and William J. Haesler respectively. Along the way there was a lot of help from many well-known personalities from among the local jazz-record-collecting fraternity including Jack Mitchell whose later monumental discography *Australian Jazz on Record* owes much to *Matrix*. Additional help came from some important overseas collectors who

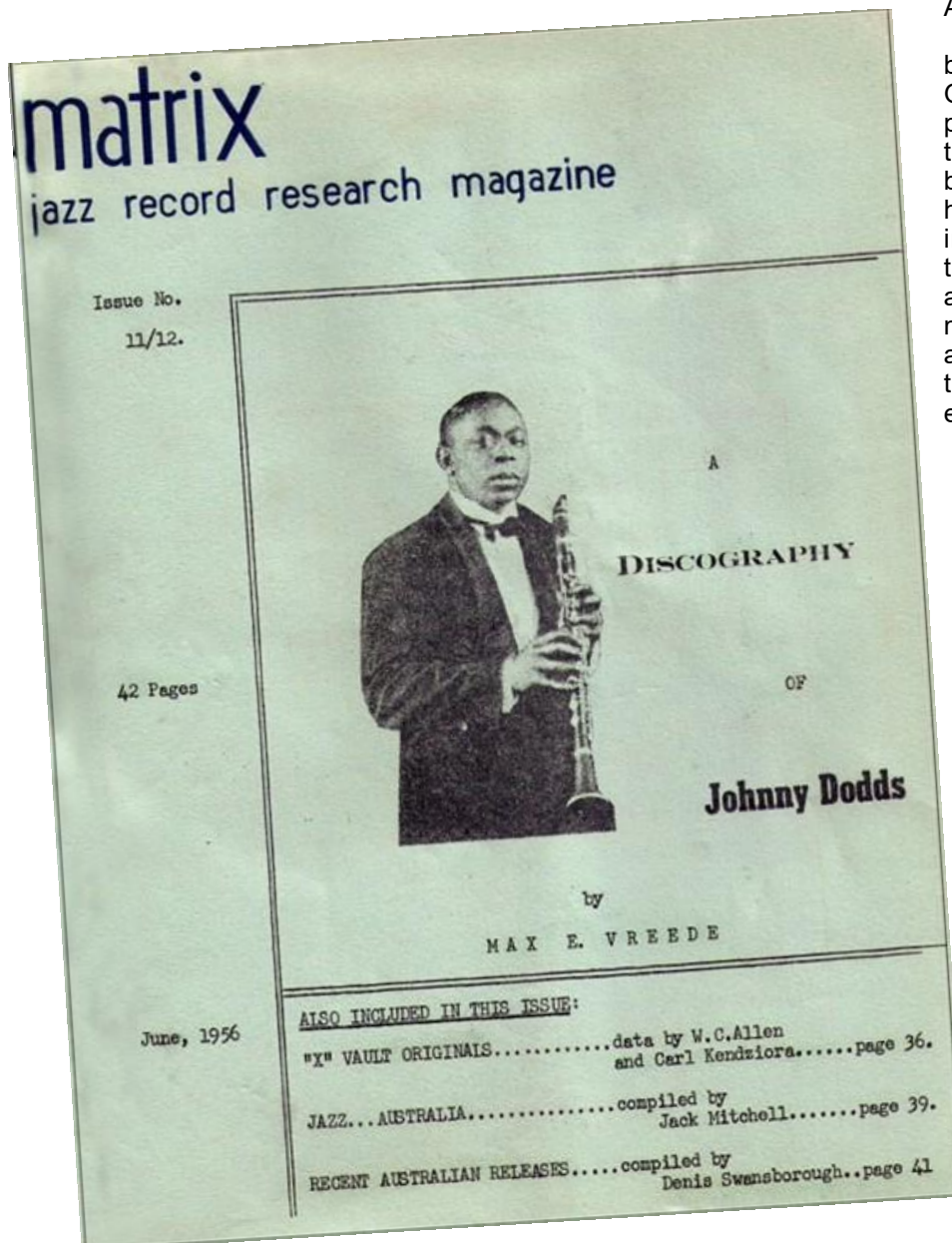


On 78s there was very little room on the label to display all of the information that record collectors wanted even if the manufacturer desired to supply it. Note the identifying matrix number between the runout grooves.

were consulted, in particular the American Dan Mahony.

The word matrix should first be explained to the uninitiated. Gramophone records were produced by a moulding process, the first item in the process being the original recording having been effectively engraved in wax. This engraving was thus the source of all future moulding and therefore became the matrix. To identify the recording and thus every copy made from this original, a number was engraved in the wax just beyond or between the run-out grooves. This was known as the matrix number.

When John inaugurated *Matrix* Magazine in July 1954, most of the many thousands of treasured jazz records in the hands of collectors were 78s – LP microgrooves having only recently been introduced. On a 78, the label is the only place where the identity of the record could be placed. (With 78s, the existing practice was that they were not issued with related sleeves on which additional information might be printed as was the case with LPs.) There is not much room on the label, so all that could generally be fitted-in was the name of the band, the vocalist (whose name was quite often merely identified as "with vocal refrain"), the name of the tune, the composer's name, and the catalogue number.





Jazz collectors desperately wanted more information which the manufacturers seemed reluctant to provide, such as the names of the members of the band and the instruments they played, the identity of vocalists, the date (and place) of the recording, and other relevant information. The take-number was occasionally also important because often several recordings of the one tune were made in order to obtain a satisfactory result. This number was also usually engraved into the wax typically (but not always) in the form of -1 or -2, etc. Sometimes alternate takes, which might sound quite different to another, were issued in different countries. All of this information was often difficult to acquire. Contributors to *Matrix* effectively had to be investigative detectives.

*Matrix* magazine was printed by the then-common Roneo wax-stencil process on quarto-size

## MATRIX

paper. The first issue had 20 pages as did most subsequent copies on average. This first issue featured a fairly comprehensive discography of Lu Watters' Yerba Buena Jazz Band. There was also a descriptive article by Bill Haesler on King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band based on recent discoveries made in the USA, another article by Bill called "In the Wax" about Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dodds, King Oliver and others, and a revue of currently available jazz magazines. There was "special space set aside" devoted to Australian Jazz which included recording dates and details of recently released or forthcoming local recordings.

In issue No 2 John wrote that he was happy with the response to the first issue and said that the future was assured. There was a full discography of Graeme Bell covering 12 pages plus a listing of Bill Miller's XX label. These veiled Ampersand records were of American performers whose names were disguised because of possible copyright infringements. Pseudo-

SUBSCRIPTION RATES			
Australia:-	1 year	6 issues (post free)	for 10/- (Aust.)
	3 years	18 issues (post free)	for 26/- (Aust.)

nyms on the record labels included The Black Beach Pirates, Gorgeous Weed and Stinking Socks, The Up and Down Prestidigitators, Carrots Kale and his Beat Roots, and other similar humorous appellations.

## Jazzart

Issue No 3 boasted better quality stencilling and improved layout. This issue also contained a listing of the complete Jazzart catalogue gleaned by Bill Haesler from Bob Clemens (originator of the label) and from the AWA recording logs. This information finally found its way into Jack Mitchell's *Australian Jazz on Record* which was used as the reference source when the Victorian Jazz Archive issued "The Complete Jazzart Collection" on six CDs in 2011. It was interesting to read that several Jazzart catalogue numbers were issued to recordings that were never released including three by the Dutch Swing College Band recorded in London.

## discography

Further issues continued with the discographic listings of various, mainly American, jazz groups. There were discussions on various performances, and contributions from readers correcting, or adding to, various articles. Much debate was held over who played what instrument on a particular record – sometimes the official ledger was found to be wrong.

Over the years, while Brian Rust's two-volume *Jazz Records 1897-1942* was considered the bible of discography, *Matrix* continually revealed previously unknown and new information on the subject. Because of the

higgledy-piggledy nature of some of the discographic entries, an occasional alphabetical index of back-issue entries was published to enable the grouping of relevant bands or performers. All of this work, done without the convenience of a word processor, must have been a mammoth time-consuming task on a humble typewriter.

Not content with the amount of time that John must have been putting into *Matrix*, he also, for a period, took on the task as assistant editor for *Australian Jazz Quarterly* (along with Bill Haesler as editor) after Bill Miller had decided to relinquish his own role as creator and editor of this popular magazine.

I noticed two marriages announced in the pages of *Matrix*: "On the 19th march [1955], Assistant Editor Haesler will be married ..." and "Congratulations to Jack Mitchell who got himself married on February 9th [1957]", however neither event appeared to have lessened the prolific level of contribution these two now-married men continued to provide.

The magazine forged along successfully for a number of years, but by March 1958 John Kennedy had bailed out due to family health issues and other important commitments. However, Bill Haesler soldiered on, and from the U.K. George Hulme (who later moved to Canada), who had been a contributor since the beginning, assisted for a while.

But eventually the magazine closed down locally, and its future intended contents were incorporated into the English *Discophile* magazine (which had been running since its own inauguration in 1948). *Discophile* renamed itself *Matrix* in January 1959 (was it a tribute to Australia's *Matrix*?). It was by then being produced by Bernard Holland and Gary Charsley in Stoke-on-Trent, UK. ■



# *fidelis usque ad mortem*

## The Muddy River Jazz Band

aka Ad Mortem Rhythm Kings

By Tim Davis

**T**he Muddy River Jazz Band, formerly known as the “Ad Mortem Rhythm Kings”, was formed in 1944 by a group of classmates at Ivanhoe Grammar School.

The original members were Richard “Dick” Dooley (trumpet), Vincent “Wal” Davis (clarinet and saxophone), Geoffrey “Herb” Davey (banjo) and Geoffrey’s brother Neil on wash-board. On leaving school, Wal Davis spent a brief time at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT) where he met Bruce “Spruck” Thomson and John “Doc” Davies (piano) who joined the band in 1948.

Bruce Thomson began playing by tapping on an old suitcase but it wasn’t long before he purchased a drum kit that stayed with the band for over 60 years. The band’s original name was an inside joke, derived from the school’s Latin motto, “Fidelis Usque Ad Mortem” meaning “Faithful even unto death”.

The band’s name translates as “To Death Rhythm Kings”!

The band organised its first “major” gig at Mount Martha House in 1948 where they played as the house band for free board over Christmas and New Year, an arrangement that was repeated in 1949. With a similar arrangement they played at the Continental Hotel in Sorrento in 1950, the Portsea Hotel in 1951 and at the Cumberland Lorne in 1952.

Through the camaraderie of the band and sense of fun and inclusiveness typical of trad jazz, they collected a variety of musicians along the way.

It was at Mount Martha house they were approached by a trombone player, Peter MacNeil, who asked if he could play with the band. He was enthusiastically received and continued to play with them for many decades. Alex McKenzie, an old school friend of Wal Davis, was encouraged to join the band when Wal Davis purchased him a sousaphone. Another member in the early days was Bob Ferguson who played banjo. Being from a musical family, all of whom played an instrument, he also played trumpet. He became a preacher-man and went to New Zealand but returned many years later to play banjo with the band at the 50th Australian Jazz Convention.

In 1949, through personal contacts, the band managed a brief recording session at Sutton’s Music in Elizabeth Street where they made several “direct-to-disc” recordings on 78 rpm discs, although the sound quality was not very good.



Mount Martha House, January 1948

John (Doc) Davies p, Vincent “Wal” Davis cl, sax, Geoffrey “Herb” Davey bj, Richard “Dick” Dooley t, Neil Davey wb, Peter MacNeil tb





Portsea Pier, January 1951

**Dick Dooley, Bob Ferguson, Herb Davey, Alex McKenzie, Wal Davis**

saxophone, Herb Davey on piano and Spruck Thomson on drums.

For the next ten years they played on a regular basis, often in the region of Wonga Park and Warrandyte for events at local schools, scout groups and parties, developing a large following in the area.

From time to time other musicians would join in, such as Jim Mills on banjo and Peter MacNeil on trombone whenever he could travel from the country to Melbourne. Gilbert "Gib" Hewison had a stint on drums much later, known to the band through his wife Fay Hewison who was a good friend of Wal Davis' wife Sylvia. It was Fay (originally Myfanwy Davies), the daughter of a prominent local artist, who painted the band's drum.

From 1975, the band continued playing at a reduced pace, including a stint at the 50th Australian Jazz Convention.

The band fell into a hiatus from 1953 for about 20 years due to members travelling abroad, getting married and having children, but reformed again in 1975 adopting the name "The Muddy River Jazz Band" in reference to the Yarra River that

flowed through Heidelberg and Ivanhoe where most of the band members lived.

During this period, the core of the band was Dick Dooley on trumpet, Wal Davis on clarinet and

It was with great sadness that it all finally came to an end around 2012 when old age caught up with them, such as arthritis preventing Wal Davis from playing. He was in his early 80s at the time. ■



A band "Practice" 1995

**Bruce "Spruck" Thomson d, Geoffrey "Herb" Davey p, Vincent "Wal" Davis rds, Dick Dooley t**



# Eric Myers' Album Reviews

**JAMES RYAN  
LIVE IN MUMBAI**

Label: Rippa  
Recordings

**Steve Hunter elsb,  
Ken Edie d. Scott  
Tinkler t, James  
Ryan s**

PHOTO CREDIT  
SEEMA SANGHI



THIS album, featuring four virtuosic Australian jazz musicians, was recorded in Mumbai, India, in 2009, but released on Rippa Recordings only in July, 2020. An outstanding album, full of inspired playing, it should be better known. It resulted from an invitation extended to Australian saxophonist James Ryan to bring a group to India, on the Bay of Bengal in eastern India, for the fourth edition of the Chennai Jazz Festival. This festival took place over three days, with a mix of workshops, interactive sessions and performances.

The tour was organised by Seema Sanghi, a jazz enthusiast and apparently a friend of the Ryan family. She secured the invitation from the festival and applied to the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) for financial support to underwrite the tour. Ryan had little to do with this process, as Sanghi handled DFAT, and the tour was administered by Music Viva Australia.

This unique quartet which, other than Ryan on tenor saxophone, included Scott Tinkler (trumpet), Steve Hunter (electric bass), and Ken Edie (drums), performed three times only: once for the JazzGroove Association in Sydney before they left Australia; once in Chennai, where they also did a workshop; and once at the Blue Frog club in Mumbai. The final performance was recorded and now appears on this CD. *James Ryan Live in Mumbai* therefore documents a quartet that never performed again, as its members were living in different states of

Australia. Courtesy of COVID, Ryan had time to prepare the album for release in 2020.

In recruiting the three musicians to join him on this short tour, Ryan chose well. This high-energy quartet is a reminder of Mark Simmonds Freeboppers, the group which recorded the two-CD album *Fire*, and won an ARIA for best jazz album in 1995. To suggest such a comparison isn't outrageous, since the instrumentation – trumpet, tenor saxophone, bass and drums – is duplicated. Moreover, Tinkler himself played on the *Fire* album; Ryan's intensity on tenor is not unlike that of Simmonds (although Ryan says he never heard much of Simmonds' playing); and Hunter had two stints with the Freeboppers, once in the late 80s and again in the mid-90s, for about a year in each case.

The album consists of five very hip compositions, three from Ryan, and two from Hunter. Ryan lays down the gauntlet from the outset with an exciting soliloquy which morphs into Coltrane-like high squeals and low foghorn sounds. He is joined by Tinkler for some judicious collective improvisation two out, before Edie and Hunter join in, with a R & B-like time-feel and Ryan's tune "Hey Which Way" is played. It features a characteristically biting theme, played loosely but basically in unison.

"Hey Which Way" evolves characteristically. It doesn't conform to the conventional head-solos-head structure. Once Tinkler starts his solo, a typical display



of his stamina and technical virtuosity, there is the feeling that anything is possible, reminiscent perhaps of the way in which Miles Davis constructed his music in live performance in the later stages of his career. The rhythm section's time-feel is generally broken up or ambiguous, and soon Hunter and Edie drop out to give Tinkler space to express himself unaccompanied. Hunter then plays a short solo, bringing the temperature down, before the head of the tune re-enters, leading into another fierce Ryan solo before the head is played again.

When musicians vary the head-solos-head convention, I often wonder how the music is put together. Who takes the decisions that are necessary? I have already drawn attention to the playing of the rhythm section. Hunter and Edie adopt a number of approaches throughout the album. They might provide an ambiguous time-feel which disguises the pulse; perhaps turbulence or mayhem when necessary; perhaps an underlying groove in swing-feel or eight-feel. Occasionally one of them drops out, or indeed both Hunter and Edie can drop out entirely, to give the front-line players space to take the spotlight. In these ways the music is afforded variety, and is prevented from sounding repetitive.

The unpredictable ways in which these compositions evolve speak to the "sound of surprise" element in jazz but, at the same time, I feel they work well on the basis of a high degree of empathy between the musicians. The players make decisions on the fly, perhaps by osmosis, perhaps on the basis of shared ideas, which enable the elements in the music to fall into place. The musicians effortlessly move from section to section, seamlessly changing gears.



**Scott Tinkler: a strident example of unaccompanied technical virtuosity in live performance...**

This album highlights the role of individual virtuosity in jazz. All four musicians are capable of brilliant one-out instrumental soliloquies, unaccompanied for several minutes, and this is perhaps the main reason why the audience in the Blue Frog club was obviously mesmerised. Sometimes it is not obvious how the other musicians decide to re-enter the fray, to provide accompaniment and support for the soloist. But the direction of the music is unerring.



**James Ryan: his intensity on tenor is not unlike that of the late Mark Simmonds**

I have heard very few jazz albums which provide a more exciting trumpet/saxophone combination than Ryan and Tinkler together. They are both strong examples of unaccompanied technical virtuosity in live performance. On this extraordinary album one can feel the power in their playing.

In his review of Tinkler's now legendary 2007 solo album *Backwards*, the writer John Clare was justified in describing his "astonishment at [Tinkler's] resources of imagination and technique ... His unique open tone ... is released with shattering power in blazes of staccato speed; in massive blasts and long shining notes that weave and sustain melodic shapes."

Any jazz musician capable of playing like this in live performance can bring the house down. This largely explains the universal adoration which trumpeters coming after Tinkler have shown for his capacities. Outside of his *Backwards* album, *James Ryan Live in Mumbai* surely provides one of the best recorded examples of Tinkler's unique ability. Putting him together with Ryan, possibly the most exciting tenorist in Australian jazz since Mark Simmonds, was serendipitous and inspired. ■



*Eric Myers has been listening to jazz for 60 years, and writing on it for 40 years. He was the inaugural jazz critic for the Sydney Morning Herald 1980-1982, then jazz critic with The Australian newspaper, 1983-1988. He was publisher & editor of the Australian Jazz Magazine 1981-1986, and a government-funded Jazz Co-ordinator from 1983-2002. He returned to writing on jazz for The Australian in 2015.*



## Album Revue

**TIM STEVENS** (solo piano)

Label: Independent

For some reason, I've always been drawn to the music of Tim Stevens. His distinctive appeal as a jazz pianist dates from his emergence in the 90s with the Browne Haywood Stevens Trio, with drummer Allan Browne and bassist Nick Haywood. Their two albums *King, Dude & Dunce* (1995) and *Sudden in a Shaft of Sunlight* (1998) impressed many people, including the artistic director of Italy's prestigious Umbria Jazz festival, Carlo Pagnotta, an influential figure in international jazz. While in Australia in 2000, Pagnotta heard the two BHS trio albums in my car as I drove him around Sydney from place to place over several days. Later he heard the trio live at Wangaratta, and invited Stevens to bring the group to the next Umbria Jazz, to take place in Perugia, Italy, in July, 2001.

Pagnotta, with a long history of assisting emerging jazz artists who took his fancy, offered to pass on the two BHS albums to his close friends, Bruce Lundvall at Blue Note, and Tommy LiPuma at Universal. To cut a long story short, Stevens performed at Umbria Jazz in 2001, but not with Melbourne's Browne and Haywood. Instead, he took with him two Sydney musicians, bassist Mark Lau and drummer Simon Barker, playing music unlike that of the BHS trio.

As a result, the connection with Pagnotta went no further, for reasons which have never been clear, although I have my theories. Stevens certainly had the talent to make an impression internationally, as many other Australian jazz musicians have done subsequently, but this golden opportunity for him to be in the vanguard of what became a movement in later years went awry in Perugia. Perhaps a future biographer will throw light on this puzzling episode in Stevens' early career.

Post-Umbria, and for that matter post-BHS, Stevens has produced much music over the last 20 years, most of which I haven't heard. Three of his albums have come my way, however, and I reviewed them in the Australian: *I'll Tell You Later in December: Christmas Music and Improvisation for Solo Piano* (2017); *With Whom You Can Be Who You Are* (2018) for jazz trio and string trio; and *There'll Be Some Changes Played* (2021) from his piano trio.

I've just re-read those reviews, and they are glowing; I'm happy to stick by them. Admittedly, they were based on a small sample of Stevens' considerable output, but they were enough to indicate that his music still has great appeal, at least to my ears.

*The Beauty of the Way and the Goodness of the Wayfarers* is Stevens' seventh solo piano album. Of course I have only limited knowledge of his artistic development over two decades. From the 80s and well into the noughties, reviewers such as I were often assisted by articles and interviews appearing in several publications which would throw light on the *oeuvre* of an artist like Stevens, and give us signposts to look out for. However, such pieces on jazz musicians have virtually disappeared from the quality media, which are now full of relentless articles on rock and pop musicians, reflecting the fashionable view that it is in those commercial genres where the

art music of today is primarily found. If this is a querulous, over-long introduction to a review of Stevens' latest album, it is true that I was thinking of offering the editor of AJAZZ a one-sentence review, which might have gone something like this: "Listening to *The Beauty of the Way and the Goodness of the Wayfarers* has given me a great deal of pleasure." End of story.

In an ideal world, this might have been possible. However, I have a page to fill. Listening to this album one is struck by the intelligence in the music. This is not surprising, as Stevens, now aged 50, is a very intelligent man, obvious from his website [timstevens.com.au](http://timstevens.com.au) which reveals him as an exceedingly perceptive analyst of music, movies, himself, whatever. There Stevens has apparently poured out his thoughts over many years. I've now subscribed to his newsletter, and will return to read more carefully what he's written on a host of subjects. It's interesting that he rejects the influence on his pianism of Americans such as Keith Jarrett and Bill Evans; rather he stresses the debts he owes to Australian musicians such as Tony Gould and Paul Grabowsky. Moreover, has there ever been an Australian jazz musician who's articulated more baldly the angst in trying to market original music to an unresponsive public?

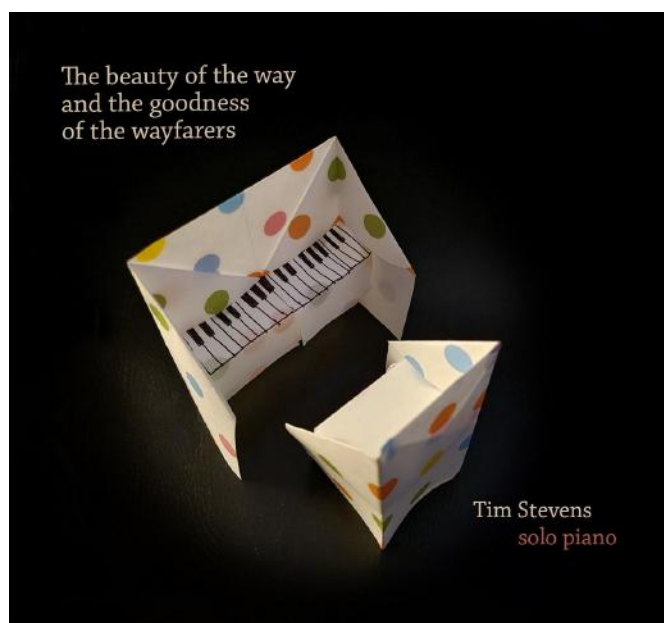
On this album notice the prolific unfurling of musical ideas. Here is a musician bursting with creativity, a reminder that during 2016, he observed a New Year's resolution to write an original composition every day during that Leap year – an exercise in self-flagellation perhaps, but which he achieved. "It is the only time in my life I have kept a new year's resolution," he writes, "and I have the 366 tunes spiral bound in twelve books, one per month."

In recent years, as the release of albums has become a flood, Australian composer/musicians are now likely to articulate in their liner notes what has inspired the music. In Stevens' case it is primarily friendship. "This music is ... for Tabitha [Halley], whose company I have enjoyed for over 30 years", writes Stevens. "Tab and I met in the last years of high school. She is my closest friend in the world after my wife and our kids, and I thank God for her."

The album has 12 tracks, including nine Stevens' original compositions, and two free improvisations. One standard, the Gershwin tune "How Long Has This Been Going On?" completes the album. I found the two free pieces difficult to relate to, possibly owing to my own shortcomings as a listener; others may consider them supreme works of art. Otherwise, I enjoyed most the slower tunes, particularly the slowest tune on the album "The Vault", where the piece's minimalism enables the lyricism in Stevens' playing to shine through.

I found the Gershwin the most agreeable track on the album; the treatment of this great composition is utterly beautiful. It clearly illustrates what has been present in Tim Stevens' music, dating from the 90s: his precious gift for melodic beauty. ■

... Eric Myers







By  
Bill Brown

# The Bands

within

# The Bands

**T**his heading has a subtitle **SWINGTIME AGAIN** and comprises two LPs on the Coral label. I came upon it when I was raiding my shelves for another vinyl item.

As is often the case I found this instead. It took my attention as I had recently been playing some big-band swing tracks. There are a few of the Big Groups that employed smaller aggregations on occasion.

I will list the groups and tunes here – in alphabetical order:

## **The Bob Crosby Bobcats**

"Palesteena" (vocal by Nappy Lamare), "Slow Mood", "Loopin' the Loop", "Jazz Me Blues".

## **Tommy Dorsey Clambake Seven**

"The Dirty Dozens", "Mr Freddie Blues", "The Honey-dripper", "Trouble In Mind", "Heebie Jeebies", "The Blues Don't Waltz".

## **Lionel Hampton Quartet**

"Ridin' on the L & N", "Chord-A-Re-Bop", "Limehouse Blues".

## **Lionel Hampton and His Hamptonians**

"How High the Moon".

## **Woody Herman and his Woodchoppers**

"South", "Three Little Sisters".

## **Woody Herman and His Four Chips**

"Chips' Blues", "Elise".

## **Artie Shaw and his Gramercy Five**

"There Must Be Something Better Than Love", (vocal Mary Ann McCall), "Nothin' For Nothin'" (Mary Ann McCall), "Crumbum", "Shekomeko Shuffle", "My Kinda Love", (vocal June Hutton), "Dancing On the Ceiling", (June Hutton).

I reckon the set is quite enjoyable. The time-span of the recordings is interesting. Going from the late thirties to the early fifties. Really well past the Swing Era when the tumult of the Traditional/Revivalist movement of the other phenomenon, the Bebop/Cool School, were on the scene. I notice the absence of an Ellington influence.

Over the years a few of Duke's sidemen had made recordings with smaller groups, often with Duke on the piano stool. Johnny Hodges, Barney Bigard, Rex Stewart, and Cootie Williams spring to mind. However they are covered for posterity elsewhere. Right now I shall look for the LP I originally sought. Now what was it? A good question. ■

## Did You Know?



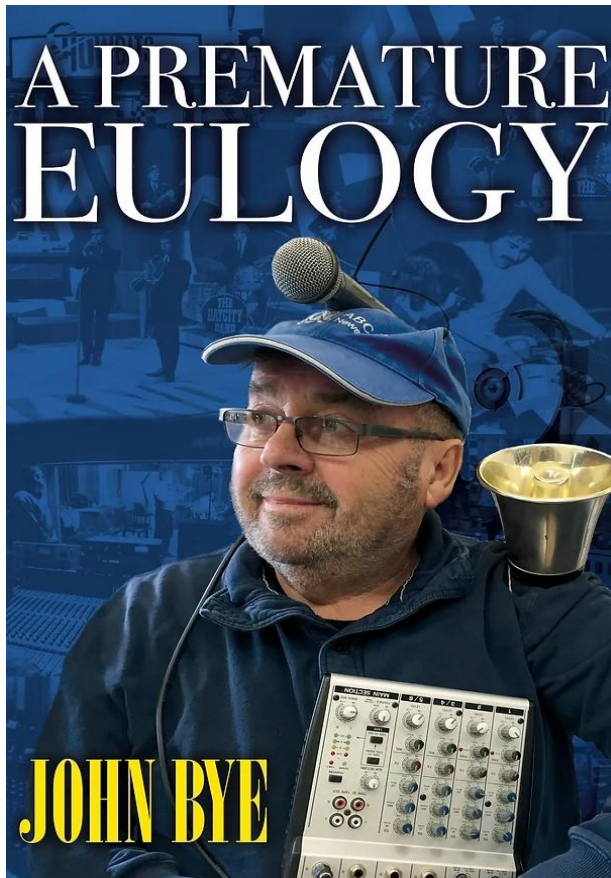
Not a jazz lover?

**J**erome Kern, although a prolific composer, did not leave us with a large number of jazz standards. The reason may be his attitude to jazz as expressed in this statement from 1924:

*None of my music reaches the public as I wrote it. It is so distorted by jazz orchestras as to be almost unrecognisable. A composer should be able to protect his score just as an author does his manuscripts. The public, through cabaret and radio broadcasting, is not getting genuine music, only a fraudulent imitation ... this debasement of all music by cabaret [read "jazz"] orchestras has grown by leaps and bounds.*

# Bygone Days

A Tale of John Bye and the Beale Street, Bay City and Ubangi Jazz Bands



**J**ohn Bye's autobiography, *A Premature Eulogy*, is a conversational and informative read, laying out an interesting and varied life of an Australian musician and entrepreneur.

In 1958 John started his first business aged ten. By 1963, at the age of fifteen, he had formed the **Beale Street Jazz Band** with local boys like Brian Cadd, some of whom went on to play with groups like Axiom, The Loved Ones and Frank Zappa.

Graham Kennedy helped John's **Bay City Jazz Band** secure a regular gig on "In Melbourne Tonight" and the 431 Jazz Club. The band appeared on Downbeat and, in 1966, renamed **The Bay City Band**, reached number 40 on the 3DB Top Forty with "Blue Day".

The **Ubangi Jazz Band** was his final jazz group.

After a variety of moves and occupations, he ended up at Newmarket Music producing several children's recordings and jazz albums with the likes of Richard Opat, Bob Sedergreen, George Washingmachine, Ian Date, John Scurry, Howard Cairns, Jo Stephenson, Eugene Ball, Steven Grant, Vince Jones and Allan Browne.

The book is a self-published, B&W illustrated, 160 page paperback. ■







Between 1964 and 1966 the Bay City Band performed several times on GTV 9's IMT



Russel Munger, Richard Opat, Len Watterson, John Bye, Peter Bennett, Mike Cousins

# Reminiscing



## Search tip for Apple users!



In the early 1950s Bill Miller's pirate label **Double Cross** produced reissues of US jazz material not readily available in Australia



## Using Safari to search the AJM database



Some Apple users have experienced difficulty accessing the AJM database when using Apple iPads, iPhones or Macs with the **Safari browser**.

This is resolved by changing settings to **allow pop-ups**.



An internet search lists the options for doing so on each of these platforms.

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