

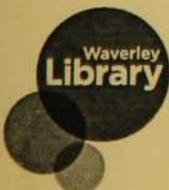
DOUBLY GIFTED

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2011

*“Buddy Bolden and me
- the true story”*



ILLUSTRATION VERDON MORCOM



*Daniel Hardie
The Nineteenth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
Delivered 17 September 2011
Waverley Library*



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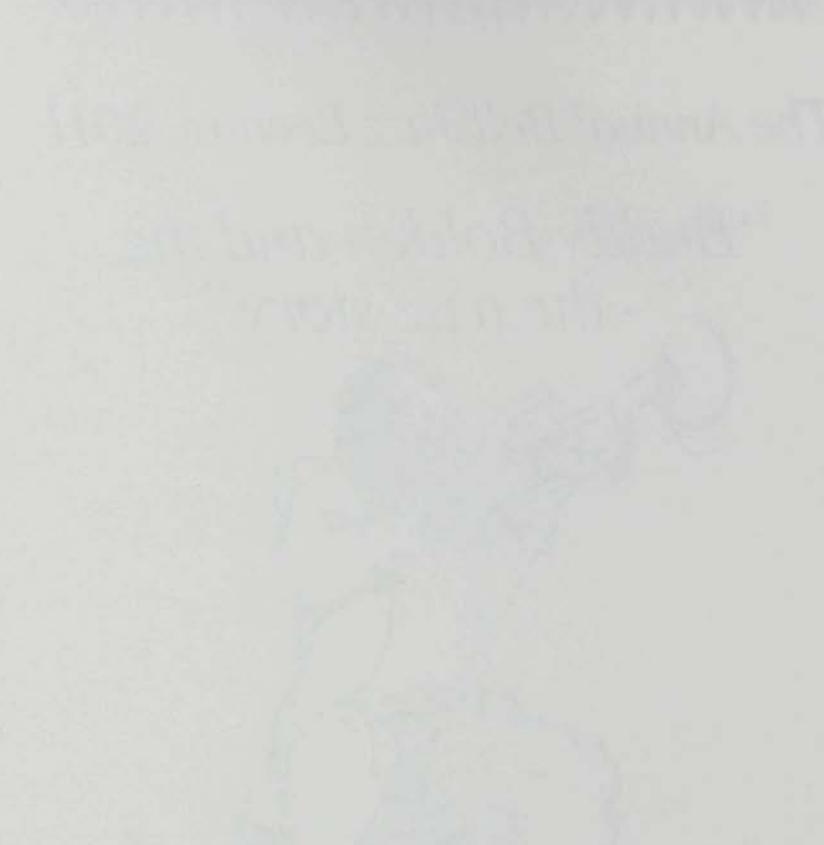


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ISBN 978-0-9757142-8-7

Published & printed by Waverley Library
32-48 Denison Street, Bondi Junction 2022

Telephone: (02) 9386 7777
Fax: (02) 9386 7700

Introduction

This year Doubly Gifted presents the 19th in the annual series of Bell Jazz Lectures. The Bell Lecture was initiated by the late Harry Stein to honour the contribution to Australian and the world's jazz by our best loved and most appreciated jazzman, Graeme Bell, who this month celebrates his 97th birthday.

Once again thanks are due to Waverley Library and to the Friends of Waverley Library, without whose support the Committee would not be able to present yet another prominent member of Australia's jazz community, to bring us yet another individual viewpoint on jazz.

Our lecturer for 2011 is Daniel Hardie, who has been closely involved in the Sydney jazz scene for many years and whose interest in the origins and development of jazz is explored and demonstrated in his several books and journal articles. His lecture deals in some depth with this theme and is based mostly around his research on the Buddy Bolden era.

This provides a most fascinating story and a correction to many of our understandings of the birth of jazz as a musical genre.

Ron Lander
Doubly Gifted Committee



Daniel Hardie

Daniel Hardie was born in 1930 in Manly NSW. He started playing cornet in a boy's brass band at age 8, later played flute, then drum and bugle at High School, and after graduating in History and Psychology at Sydney University, played clarinet in the Paramount Jazz Band - the house band at the Sydney Jazz Club of which he was a founder member. He has a fascination for old boats and jazz recordings.

Since retiring from the Australian Civil Service he has devoted himself to historical research and painting. He is a member of the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Society of Australian Genealogists and a former member of the Australian Psychological Society. During the 1990's he was a member of the Board of Directors of the Sydney Maritime Museum.

Since 2004 he has been Convenor and Historical Director of the Buddy Bolden Revival Orchestra dedicated to performance of music of the Elemental Jazz era (1897/1907) with authentic instrumentation and performance practices.

He is the author of

- The Loudest Trumpet: Buddy Bolden and the Early History of Jazz - 2000.
- Exploring Early Jazz: The Origins and Evolution of the New Orleans Style - 2002.
- The Ancestry of Jazz: A Musical Family History - 2004.
- The Birth of Jazz: Reviving the Music of the Bolden Era - 2007.

Daniel Hardie has also published a number of works and journal articles in the field of Maritime History. He is a maritime painter and has exhibited paintings of heritage maritime subjects in Sydney and other major Australian cities.



Graeme Bell

The Doubly Gifted Committee and Waverley Library have named this lecture series on jazz, the Bell Jazz Lectures, in honour of Graeme Bell's outstanding contribution to jazz in Australia and abroad over the last fifty years. He is an outstanding pianist, excellent band leader and composer of note. Graeme is also a talented artist who has exhibited in the Doubly Gifted exhibitions of visual art works by jazz musicians, as well as contributing to other exhibitions.

Buddy Bolden and me - the true story

I wonder how many of you can remember your first encounter with jazz music.

When I was still at high school I began building radios - starting with the inevitable crystal set and moving on to build one and two valve receivers. Before long I had a radio I could listen to, using a pair of earphones purchased at an Army Disposal Store. On occasions I listened to US Army short wave radio stations broadcasting popular music for their troops stationed around the world. I recall hearing Frank Sinatra singing with a band on station KWID San Francisco.

But the experience I remember most was when I was listening one night to the ABC. It was a program that included what was called a Battle of the Bands and it was promoted as a duel between old and new forms of jazz. I had heard the word jazz and thought it had something to do with popular music, but here they were talking about Dixieland and Bebop. Then I heard a recording by the Graeme Bell Band for the first time. This was a revelation. I have no idea which band was representing the more modern style but the music played by the Bells spoke to me. This was a sound quite different from the popular music around at the time.

I began looking around for recordings of jazz and I found that there were many re-pressings of 1920's jazz performances becoming available and even some made more recently by Humphrey Lyttelton's English band. I soon discovered Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong. Before long I had decided I wanted to play that sort of music and began learning the clarinet. I had never heard of Buddy Bolden.

Around the same time I discovered there were a number of books that, though they were hard to find, recounted the history of jazz. I recently discovered a paper by my friend Bill Haesler in which he summarized the experience. Here's what he wrote: "When the jazz revival reached Australia in the mid-1940s, we younger enthusiasts embraced it wholeheartedly and absorbed its then 25-year old history. But there were too few jazz history books then, and not all were comprehensive. We absorbed works by Hughes Panassie, Robert Goffin and the still definitive 1939 *Jazzmen* by Frederic Ramsey and Charles Edward Smith. For some of us, Rudi Blesh's 1946 book *Shining Trumpets* became a bible."

Bill then said that he later became critical of parts of *Shining Trumpets*, but went on: "However, it opened our young minds to the musical streams which influenced jazz and which, in turn, spawned Dixieland and the swing music of the 1930s" ¹

It was in the pages of these books I first read about Buddy Bolden, but I have to admit I was left with a very hazy impression of a somewhat mythical figure, who played rough and loud music before going mad and being committed to an asylum. It seemed that very little was really known of him or his music.

Around this time I met Harry Harman who had decided to form a band and he invited me to join his Paramount Jazz Band. We went on to form the Sydney Jazz Club in 1953. In 1956 I stopped performing with the band and went off to other fields including a stint working in Melbourne. I did not stop listening to jazz music however, and my teen age children knew about Jelly Roll Morton and Bix Beiderbecke in the seventies – "Dad's strange obsession."

It was not until 1990 after I had been retired for a few years that I encountered the Buddy Bolden story again. On the shelves of Abbey's Bookshop I found a paperback entitled "*In Search Of Buddy Bolden - First Man of Jazz*" by Donald M. Marquis. On the cover there was a photo of Bolden's Band (I had seen that before) and a portrait of the man himself. One of the first things that Marquis did was to dispose of many fallacies that had crept into the jazz history books over the years.

I recall a celebrated English historian introducing Bolden in a work published in the 1960's: "We see him first, surrounded by legendary mist, as Buddy Bolden, the demon barber of Franklin St., the blackest of black men, as the tale goes, 'a pure Negro' (for blackness means low status even among negroes) who found his cornet on the street." ²

Marquis' work exposed this kind of thing for the rubbish it was. None of it was true. Then there was the crude implied comparison with the murderous Sweeney Todd 'the Demon barber of Fleet Street'. Bolden was never a barber (Marquis discovered he was a plasterer.) He did not live in Franklin St. He was light skinned – the family was classified as Mulatto in the census – and Johnny St Cyr later described him as light skinned like a

Maori. A glance at the photograph of the Bolden Band would have revealed his light colouration. There is no evidence that he found his cornet in the street.

Marquis published his work in 1978. It was a complete biography of Bolden dealing with his family history, early musical influences, where he played, his personality, his colleagues, how he played and the story of the breakdown in his health. Charles Joseph Bolden later known as Buddy or Kid Bolden was a real person. Born in New Orleans in 1877, he never married, but had two de facto wives, and two children. His musical career extended from around 1894 to 1907 when he was committed to an asylum diagnosed with Dementia Praecox – Early Onset Schizophrenia in to-day's terminology. He died in the asylum in 1931.

This book differed from most jazz histories in the thoroughness of Marquis' research, using not only oral history but historical documents and official reports. He also spoke with surviving relatives, neighbours, members of the Bolden Orchestra, audience members and musical competitors. What caught my particular attention was the chapter on what and how Bolden played. It was obvious from what I read that there might be more information available than had previously been collected about the beginnings of jazz and its musical ancestry. Most jazz history books concentrated on the recorded works of the 1920's and later. I felt impelled to see what I could find out about the beginnings of music itself.

In 1993 my wife and I visited The William Ransome Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University in New Orleans. I also contacted Mr. Marquis who was kind enough to have lunch with us. I told him of my intention to write something about the music of Bolden's time and he made some valuable suggestions about sources of information in contemporary New Orleans newspapers. The research that began then was to lead to my book *The Loudest Trumpet: Buddy Bolden and the Early History of Jazz* published in 2000. That was just a beginning; because it quickly became clear that there was much more information potentially available about New Orleans Jazz before 1917. This data was scattered in many publications and it had never been brought together to tell a connected chronological story of Early Jazz from 1907 to 1917. It also became apparent that it was necessary to understand in some detail the musical environment of New Orleans and its antecedents.

The search for that information was to lead to two more books: *Exploring Early Jazz: The Origins and Evolution of the New Orleans Style* published in 2002 that told the story of Bolden's career and the bands that followed him and *The Ancestry of Jazz: a Musical Family History* published in 2004 that described the many threads of American musical history leading up to the Bolden revolution.

Since then I have been looking more closely into facts surrounding the birth of jazz itself. Did jazz suddenly appear, in 1894 at the Globe Hall in downtown New Orleans when Buddy Bolden stood up and played the first blues for dancing? ³ What did it sound like? What is the truth about its immediate origins. I have been helped in this research by work carried out since the 1990's by other historians that has revealed much about the music of the time, at the beginning of what has been called the ragtime era. In fact we are now able to understand a lot about the actual performers of the time and some of the influences that surrounded Bolden in the last ten years of the 19th Century.

Some strange things were written about the birth of jazz. In *Shining Trumpets* Rudi Blesh proposed that in the 1870's the black brass bands of New Orleans adapted African rhythms heard during slave dancing in New Orleans Congo Square creating the first jazz. He stated that Bolden had converted that antique form into a Classic Jazz style that lasted through the 1920's. There was absolutely no evidence to support this. Later research showed that the brass bands did not play in a jazzy manner until after 1908 - after hearing the music of the Bolden band. Blesh described Bolden's band as the greatest of the bands of the 1890's. "Bolden" he wrote was "born shortly after the Civil War" ... "a barber with his own shop"..."editor and publisher of a scandal sheet the *Cricket*"..."⁴ In fact Bolden was born in 1877 - 22 years after the end of the Civil war and he was never a barber nor the editor of a scandal sheet.

Another writer, Robert Goffin, wrote: "Slowly but surely the music of the Congo Square evolved ... By 1880 jazz was in gestation... it is no longer simple percussion...we are in the presence of an organized body of music." He proposed that this slave music, adapted by the composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk provided the missing link between the tom-toms of Africa and the music of Buddy Bolden. "Not until the birth of jazz,"

he wrote, "was this rich poetical vein tapped and then by a New Orleans composer who studied in Paris, Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Between 1890 and 1905 Gottschalk devoted his time to recapturing the moods of the plaintive and fervent Creole Music."

This sounds plausible, but it's nonsense. Gottschalk did indeed publish such music - but he died in 1869. His compositions certainly influenced early American music, but any link with the birth of jazz is tenuous.

About Buddy Bolden the same author wrote: "According to the most recent information which I have been able to gather, Buddy Bolden who first attached himself to the harmonica, began to play with Bennie Peyton's orchestra about 1900. Two years later, or so, he had his own orchestra which he modified in 1903..."⁵ There is some evidence that Bolden may have had lessons on the accordion, not the harmonica, and he probably played from time to time in Henry Peyton's accordion led band. However Bennie Peyton's band was active in Europe in the 1920's and 30's. Bennie was born in 1890 and would have been 4 or 5 years old when Bolden started his career.

The authors of the respected book *Jazzmen* wrote that: "Bolden was already in his teens before the Congo Square dances were discontinued"⁶ - but the slave dances had been discontinued long before Bolden was born.

Having re-read a number of these early jazz histories I wondered whether, when the authors did not know the facts, they just made something up. More kindly a later author wrote of the authors of *Jazzmen*: "...they did not understand the history of music, the environment in which it existed, or the principles on which it was based."⁷ What then is the truth about the beginnings of jazz and what part was played by Buddy Bolden?

Unfortunately most early accounts of the beginnings of jazz did not take any account of situation in which Bolden found himself and we need to understand something of popular music in 19th century New Orleans if we are to appreciate Bolden's contribution. We need also to place his orchestra, his repertoire and performance practices in the context of the commercial popular music of his day and the history of Afro-American music after Emancipation at the end of the Civil War.

Fortunately since the 1990's considerable research has been done into the development of black popular music in the 1890's. New Orleans was a dancing city from its beginnings under French rule in the 18th Century. It's tradition of dance music began very early and by the 1890's it was firmly established. It was a tradition based on European musical practices, with strong French pedagogical influences that lasted through long years of Spanish rule from 1763 to 1803 and survived the American purchase of Louisiana in 1803 and the Civil War of the 1860's. While there was a limited audience for classical music and opera there was a strong market for dance music. This dance music market derived to a considerable extent from the many Friendly Societies established by Afro-American citizens, white workers and some immigrant groups that built neighbourhood halls. Societies like the (Creole) Francs Amis, the Portuguese Benevolent Society and the Friends Of Hope. These halls served as meeting places in which their members might seek entertainment including dances, balls and picnics.

In the early 1800's the historical record shows that these entertainments were catered for by music provided by what were referred to as 'bands of music'. Just what was there instrumental composition is not really known, but it is usually assumed these early bands were small string bands. There was also a strong brass band movement playing all kinds of music, especially at Mardi Gras. On average the New Orleans brass bands had 12 members playing saxhorns of various sizes, trombones and cornets.

By the 1870's the story becomes clearer and we can often find the actual names and compositions of both band and musicians, like *The Big Four String Band* of 1879 'comprising Messrs Barnett, Porter, Duplessis and Martinez.' With changes in personnel this band eventually became known as *Professors A.L.Tio and C. Doublet's Big Four String Band* comprising two violins, viola and string bass. This interesting group later became known as the *Tio-Doublet Orchestra* and, as we shall see, it seems to have been a significant contributor to developments in the 1890's.

Commonly smaller bands included a trio lead by a violinist accompanied by Spanish guitar and bass violin. Sometimes the lead was played by a mandolin. Some string bands like the *Excelsior String Band* of 1881 were composed of musicians from brass bands who also doubled on stringed

instruments, in this case they were members of the contemporary *Excelsior Brass Band*. String bands played at conventional balls and dances but some played less formal music on the street corners.

Researchers have noted a trend beginning in the 1880's to introduce wind instruments into the string bands. The string trio was reinforced with the louder clarinet, cornet or trombone. This evolution led to a new name – *The Tin Band*.

At first these mixed wind and string bands sounded thin ("tinny") to New Orleans audiences used to the fuller tone of a twelve-piece brass band, hence the name Tin Band. Nevertheless they soon began calling themselves orchestras. By the late 1890's there were a number of well known bands of this type operating in the city including the Silver Leaf Orchestra and the larger John Robichaux Orchestra. A well-known example was Frank and Mc Curdy's Peerless Orchestra that began adding wind instruments, including a piccolo, after before 1900. As the Peerless Orchestra it performed conventional dance music throughout the early 20th century. By 1910 it had seven players – violin, guitar, string bass, cornet, slide trombone, clarinet, and trap drums. The *Trio-Doublet Orchestra* too started introducing wind instruments with cornet, valve trombone, clarinet and later trap drums.

The composition of these early conventional tin bands varied, but usually a string trio was the foundation of the band and the leader was the violinist.

New Orleans dance patrons expected the latest in dance music. Research published in the 1990's looked at the typical schedule of dances. Here's what Professor Gushee wrote: A typical, if rather grand, sequence of dances is that from the program of the Pickwick Club's ball, February 25, 1889: ouverture, waltz, polka mazurka, lancers, waltz, polka, schottische, varieties (a kind of Quadrille), and so on for thirty dances, concluding with, predictably "*Home Sweet Home*". This is not that different from the Installation and Hop given at Turner's Hall on December 8, 1894, by the Ramblers Club, which offered grand march, waltz, polka, mazurka, varieties, waltz, polka, schottische, lancers, and so forth."⁸

Around 1891 a new dance - the Two-step originally danced to a six- eight march tempo began to be popular throughout the country. Sousa's *Washington Post March* was a favourite of the two-stepping couples.

Some early jazz historians wrote as if New Orleans culture was not connected to that of the rest of the United States. This was far from the truth. The developments in instrumentation and dance fashions I have mentioned were largely in step with those in the country at large. The industrialization and commercialization of popular culture and popular music that was occurring in the 1890's was to see the establishment of national theatre chains and vaudeville circuits. Dissemination of popular music was increasingly dominated by the professional song writing and publishing industry through published scores and stock arrangements.

In the 1890's the commercial stage and the music publishing industry also experienced the entry of considerable numbers of Afro-American performers and composers, a phenomenon that had been gathering strength since the end of the Civil War. In the 1870's the *Fisk Jubilee Singers* introduced a saleable form of black spiritual music that spread and had them performing as far afield as England, Germany, Melbourne and even Tamworth in New South Wales.

Another famous performer was singer Sisieretta Jones known as The Black Pattie, so called because her voice was believed to rival that of the famous opera star Adelina Patti, who led a troupe of black vaudeville performers on the national stage in the early 1890's.

Black performers also began to perform in Minstrel shows and by 1896 the music publishing business experienced a phenomenon known as Coon shouting. This had begun some time earlier but beginning in 1896 with the most scandalous of Coon Songs Ernest Hogan's *All Coons Look Alike to Me* the craze took off. Despite content that was degrading to their race, black performers began singing Coon songs on the Vaudeville stage and black composers vied to produce them. In addition throughout the 1890's black vaudeville performers like McAdoo's Minstrels danced the cakewalk on stages all over the nation.

In 1896 a man called Ben Harney claimed to have introduced the first ragtime songs to the stage. These dates are very important to our understanding of the events leading to the beginning of jazz. Three years before Scott Joplin published his first piano ragtime composition, the tunesmiths of the nation were publishing ragtime coon songs and cakewalks in the form of stock arrangements for small orchestras like the Tin Bands of New Orleans. These compositions commonly included snappy syncopated rhythms that were unusual in earlier dance music.

At that time the established dance bands in New Orleans, like the *Tio-Doublet Orchestra* and the contemporary *Cousto-Desdunes Orchestra* experienced a demand for this new syncopated music. The cornetist Manuel Perez who later became involved in the jazz revolution said that: "...after 1895, even though they usually played polkas and schottisches, they [i.e., Tio and Doublet] let themselves be tempted by the infatuation of the audiences and went along with the new music. They constituted the link . . . between popular music and ragtime." Perez said that the amateur string bands on the streets also took up this rhythmic revolution.⁹

This was the time when Buddy Bolden was just learning the cornet from his mother's boy friend Manuel Hall. Around this time there were a number of other bands like the guitarist *Charlie Galloway's Band*, *Bou Bou Augustat's band* and *Henry Peyton's Band* - all experimenting with the latest musical trends. Galloway introduced a new musical stream of Street Songs. Peyton's band swung the quadrilles and Augustat introduced an improvised performance style. Bolden grew up as a performer hearing these bands and joined Galloway's band. Before long he was organizing his own orchestra.

Bolden's Orchestra was a considerable popular success, beginning around 1897 and he became known as King Bolden. Witnesses said he was the first man to play the blues for dancing. The word jazz was not used to describe the music of his time but later when the word was in popular usage witnesses said he was the leader of the first jazz orchestra.

What was his contribution to the beginnings of jazz? To answer this question we need to look for information about his orchestra, and musicians - what instruments did they play? How did they play? What music did they perform?

Bolden's Orchestra in the late 1890's was a **Tin Band** and its composition was much the same as many contemporary dance bands. As was usual, there was a violinist leader, one member of a string trio that also had a Spanish guitar and bass violin played with the bow. This was supplemented by a cornet, clarinet and valve-trombone. After 1895 these bands could employ a trap drummer who had a big rope-braced marching type bass drum fitted with a rudimentary foot pedal, one snare drum and one cymbal mounted on the base drum – this meant one man could play the three percussion instruments. Recent evidence suggests that most of his regular players were capable musicians who could read music and that a selection of arrangements was kept by clarinet player Frank Lewis but they invariably played without written music.

The usual arrangement in these bands was that the violinist was leader in a musical sense. Often another member acted as manager looking after the business side of things. It appears Bolden was business manager to begin with, but at some point Frank Lewis and then the valve-trombonist Frank Duson took over the role.

The Bolden Orchestra played both uptown and downtown and even went on excursions to neighbouring cities. It was expected to play the kind of dance music popular at the time. Although it did sometimes perform at street parades this was a minor role. Witnesses suggested the Bolden Orchestra performed a mixture of conventional dances like the quadrille, mazurka, the polka and the waltz but added march two-steps and eventually the slow drag. This seems to have been a common pattern after 1897. The compositions performed appear to have varied from venue to venue. At rougher places the slow drag danced to a very slow blues was played late in the evening.

Thanks to some excellent work by a Swedish researcher,¹⁰ we have access to a list of compositions contemporary witnesses said were performed by the Bolden orchestra. The repertoire was a mixture of contemporary popular songs, including love songs, like *Ida Sweet as Apple Cider*, coon songs, like *Under the Bamboo Tree* and traditional dances (waltzes, mazurkas and quadrilles). In addition there was a new element drawn from Afro-American vernacular sources known as ditties like *My Bucket's Got a Hole In it* and *Funky Butt*. These dance songs, also called jump ups were

performed in out of town juke houses frequented by black dancers and on the streets. One researcher suggested that these were introduced to dance music by Charlie Galloway who had been a street performer in his youth, and also by Bolden.¹¹ Towards the end of the century piano ragtime became a national obsession and the New Orleans bands including Bolden's group played adaptations of *Maple Leaf Rag* and some other popular rags.

Bolden is credited with being the first to introduce the blues to the dance evening and his repertoire included a number of blues that have since become standards like *Careless Love* and *Make Me a Pallet on the Floor*. Bolden was a church going Baptist and he adapted a number of spirituals and jubilees popular in his holy-roller congregation, the best known of which was *Go Down Moses*.

Some writers have argued that it is impossible to know about the sound of early jazz because no recordings exist before 1917, but in 1989 Kathy Ogren¹² suggested that a performance history of early jazz could be reconstructed based on musicological studies and analysis of the changing experience of performers. She pointed out that a recreation of the times, venues, media and patronage of such performances was critical to such reconstruction. More recently David Sager¹³ has proposed that much can be learned from contemporary cylinder recordings of the Bolden era. Donald Marquis established that the Bolden group did indeed make a recording on wax cylinder but it has apparently not survived.¹⁴ Fortunately descriptions of early jazz of the Bolden era have survived a number of them from musicians who lived during his career.

In summary, this evidence shows an improvising group performing in the New Orleans tradition. The melody was the responsibility of the violinist who carried it throughout the performance. The other players supported the melody with harmonies, countermelodies or variations on the theme. As one member of Bolden's orchestra¹⁵ said: "the violin played melody and Buddy ragged the melody – he would take a note and put two or three to it." This syncopated ragging was improvised quite unlike the regular syncopations written into the melodies of ragtime songs and piano rags. It was a new element in dance music.

There were no dramatic high-flying solos of the type that became common in the 1920's, though the band introduced the idea of making breaks in the chorus of the tune. From time-to-time other members would take over the melody and improvise on it supported by the violin maintaining the melody. In general the valve trombone played a bass part reinforcing the rhythm section. The rhythm was two beat with emphasis on the first and third beats of each measure. John St Cyr described this saying: "...the bass hit 1 and 3 with little runs for two or three measures... the guitar hit straight 4 beats with little runs to break up the monotony...the bass drum played straight one and three beats." He said that drummers had their own individual jazzy styles on the snare drum.

Some witnesses compared individual styles of players with those of musicians who had performed on later recordings. One said that clarinetist Frank Lewis played clarinet like George Lewis, another that Bolden played like Fred Keppard. In the 1940s Bunk Johnson recorded a number of demonstrations of Bolden's style of playing and improvising that the musicologist Gunther Schuller considered were probably indicative of the early style.

This new style of performance spread rapidly in New Orleans, and a number of bands began to compete with Bolden. By 1910 some of them were making changes to the structure of the band and performance style. In 1917 one of these variants became known as jazz.

In the classical field musicologists have recreated the musical styles of the past from written records and musical texts. In 2004, with the help of Geoff Bull and Trevor Rippingale, I established the Buddy Bolden Revival Orchestra, to apply this approach to recreating the common style of the Bolden Era. Beginning with compositions from the Bolden repertoire, using original instrumentation and performance practices, we learned a lot about adapting scores from Bolden's time and balancing the musical forces of the Tin Band. Listening to contemporary recordings gave us information about tempi and performance styles. We also found that the original musical text had an influence on the sound of the improvised version. A listener who described the result called it a cross between nineteenth century parlour music and traditional jazz. The results

of this experiment were published in my latest book "*The Birth Of Jazz; Reviving the Music of the Bolden Era*" in 2007. Since then we have performed selections of the repertoire to concert audiences in NSW, Canberra and last year in Queensland.

What then was Buddy Bolden's contribution? He was the lynch pin in a change that began in the middle of the ragtime era starting before 1899, a change that was before long to see ragtime decline and be superseded by jazz as America's popular music not long after Bolden's career ended. He introduced ensemble improvisation and blues intonation into dance music. Most probably the two-beat syncopated rhythm that dominated jazz performance well into the 1920's derived from his attendance at the First St. Baptist Church. He introduced vernacular songs that had been relegated to street performance to the dance hall repertoire, some of which remain as jazz standards to the present day, combining them with the popular ragtime songs and dance tunes of the day. By pulling together all of these elements he created a foundation for the jazz of the twentieth century.

In the 1950's economic historian, Eric Hobsbawm, demonstrated the dependence of jazz musicians on the commercial popular dance market during the 1920's and the popularity of hybrid variants of the jazz style as dance music right through until the coming of bebop. However he failed to appreciate that jazz itself had begun as a hybrid form of the commercial popular music of the end of the 19th century.

Bolden and his players were working musicians playing commercial dance music to which they added the excitement generated by musical elements drawn from sacred and vernacular Afro-American music. This was the culmination of a long series of musical adaptations that had begun with Afro-American hymns and black-faced white minstrels featuring travesties of black culture that led to the ragtime era with the entrance of black performers to the commercial stage dancing cakewalks and shouting coon songs.

New Orleans performers performing this New Orleans style quickly spread out over the United States. Jelly Roll Morton went to California very early.

Before 1917 the Original Creole Orchestra a Tin band similar in composition to the Bolden Orchestra and comprised largely of members of the earlier Freddie Keppard's Olympia Orchestra performed with great success all over the country on the commercial vaudeville circuit, though like the earlier coon shouters, to get a hearing, they had to perform material that was demeaning to their race. One of the most skilful jazz bands of the early twentieth century had to perform a chicken act with a black faced comedian called Uncle Eph in order to have their music heard and play tunes like Old Black Joe surrounded by 'Old Plantation' scenery.

In 1917 one of the established recording companies recorded a white band that called itself a "jass band" and the new music now called 'jazz' spread out all over the world.

By then, Buddy Bolden had been ten years in a Louisiana mental hospital, in Jackson La. a shambling figure who occasionally played in the hospital band.

"You could tell he was better than the rest." said one of the hospital attendants. "He played over the rest and louder than most people."¹⁶

This is his story not mine.

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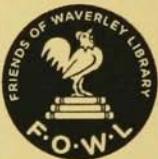
Notes:

Don't forget

The 20th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
will be presented in
September 2012

General enquiries or further information may be
obtained from
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