

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
2013

'Doubly Gifted – What is it all about?'



Detail from a painting of Graeme Bell by Bob Baird

Bob Baird

The Twenty-first Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
Delivered 28 September 2013
Waverley Library



INTRODUCTION

For the Twenty-first Bell Jazz Lecture, in the year 2013, the Committee once again thanks Waverley Library for its continued support, without which the presentation would not be possible.

The Bell Lecture was initiated by the late Harry Stein, to honour the contribution to Australian and the world's jazz by some of our most prominent musicians and, especially, by the late Graeme Bell.

The Committee is delighted to have as this year's lecturer, artist and musician, Bob Baird. Bob has been a member of the Doubly Gifted Organizing Committee for many years and has continued on its surviving subsidiary, in the organization of this annual lecture series.

Bob Baird is a recognized figure in the worlds of, not only jazz, but of visual art and education. His lecture, interspersed with visual illustration and commentary, relating to his theme, examines the background to that ability of crossover within and between the arts, possessed by many artists, which defines the term 'doubly gifted'.



**Bob Baird, F.R.A.S., A.W.I., P.S.A. N.Y.,
P.A.A.**

Bob Baird is a Sydney artist and jazz musician. He is, besides, an educator in fine art, having lectured and taught over many years at both T.A.F.E. and the Julian Ashton Art School.

Bob's own art work has been included in a wide number of exhibitions and is represented in public, corporate and private collections, not only in Australia, but in many countries overseas. He has been a finalist in such major art awards as The Archibald Portrait Prize, The Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, and The Shirley Hanan Portrait Award.

In the field of jazz, Bob has entertained audiences in Australia for some fifty years and he has toured extensively, 2001-2006, to jazz festivals in England, Scotland, France, Italy, Holland, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Austria and the U.S.A. He has backed many prominent entertainers and worked with many of Australia's jazz icons. He was band manager and played drums for five years with the Errol Buddle Quartet/Quintet. He plays in the Mike Hallam Hot 6, the Jack Wiard Ensembles and his own groups, *A Brush with Jazz* and *Jazz in Full Swing*.



Graeme Bell

This lecture series on jazz was inaugurated in 1993, in association with the second of the Doubly Gifted Exhibition of art works by Australian jazz musicians. It has been presented on annual basis since then.

The purpose has been, and continues to be, to honour Graeme Bell's outstanding contribution to jazz in Australia over a lifetime, which sadly came to an end on 14th July, 2012.

Graeme was an outstanding pianist, excellent band leader, composer of note and an ambassador for Australian jazz overseas. He will always be missed, but we hope to perpetuate his memory through the Bell Jazz Lecture series.

Doubly Gifted – What is it all about?

Good afternoon.

I would first like to say thank you to the Bell Jazz Lecture Committee for giving me the opportunity to present this 21st Bell Jazz Lecture.

As a preamble to the lecture, I wish to remind some of you here today and those who may not be aware, of the origin of the title given to the art exhibition and jazz concert - *Doubly Gifted*. The name *Doubly Gifted* is in itself a creative bit of wording. This became the title, given by Harry Stein, for the exhibition back in the early nineties, when the first *Doubly Gifted* art happening took place that is in 1992. Harry Stein (1919-1994) was a journalist and jazz aficionado. Harry and Graeme Bell were two of the founders of the first Australian Jazz Convention, in Melbourne in 1946. Harry passed away in 1994, approximately two years after presentation of the first *Doubly Gifted Exhibition*, not knowing it would run for 20 years. *The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture* commenced 1 year later. With my lecture today I would like to honour Harry Stein, the founder of the *Doubly Gifted* art happening.

We also celebrate today the 21st anniversary of that *Annual Bell Jazz Lecture*, which honours the legendary Graeme Bell. With this particular lecture today I have no doubt Graeme would have related very much to its contents. With his great talent as an artist and musician he was definitely doubly gifted.

Many people say, "I know what gifted is, but I can't really put it into words". Remember this phrase for later in this lecture, it will become very obvious why they can't sometimes put it into words)

The attempts to define 'gifted' refer in one way or another to so-called "in born" attributes, which also could be termed as natural creative skill.

Music, visual art, acting and writing all have similar concepts. For example, during the period when I commenced painting a series of portraits - *The Australian Jazz Icon Suite* - in 1993, the first portrait I did in the series was of John Sangster (Sango) and when I asked him "how do you start the process of writing a

melody or a theme and turning it into an arrangement for an orchestra or smaller group of jazz musicians.? Do you start writing the theme for vibes or piano - how do you go about it?" his immediate answer was "I like to hear the whole arrangement (melody/theme) in my head many times before I start writing. Then once I have heard it many times and I have a fairly good idea of what I want and what it will sound like, I get my pen and manuscript paper and start.

This is the very same approach used by many other arrangers, such as Judy Bailey, George Golla, and Julian Lee. Also the same approach applies to many poets and writers like Les Murray who said "I like to hear all the words in my head - this could be for some time and when I am ready, I then start to write."

The artist, Rod Milgate - painter, actor, playwright and musician - approaches his many creative talents the same way.

I was given the same answer one day by the great Australian landscape painter, Lloyd Rees, who said to me "I like to see the whole picture, its lights, darks and its overall atmosphere in my mind's eye before I start to paint.

To quote the famous French Impressionist, painter Claude Monet, is an artist unless he carries his picture in his head before painting it and is sure of his method and composition."

I have used this approach myself for many years, not knowing that it was exactly the same starting point for all the other art forms. Therefore, the starting point for the gifted person with a combination of music/art, poetry/music, writing/music, singing/art, is that they all visualize these concepts the very same way, before starting their creation.

Now let's look at some of the terminology relating to both visual-art and music.

(n.b. from this point on Bob Baird presented visual illustration, with commentary, relating to his theme).

ART - COMPOSITION

Creating an original design firstly in the mind's eye and then adjusting the image by a series of small studies on paper

MUSIC - COMPOSITION

The bringing together of a series of notes and chords, to create preconceived emotional sounds.

ART-ACCENT

An emphasis laid on part of an artistic design or composition in colour or tone.

MUSIC –ACCENT

To lay stress, or emphasis on any given musical tone, or chord.

ART - BALANCE

Where the elements in a work of art are arranged to create feeling of stability - symmetrical, asymmetrical or informal.

MUSIC - BALANCE

Balance in music is the level or quality between sections.

Adjusting the volume of the bass section to equal or "balance" the volume of the strings.

ART- COLOUR

Colour refers to hue: the actual colour- red, yellow, and blue.

Intensity: strength of colour- dull red or bright red. Value:

describes the lightness or darkness of a colour produced by light or various wavelengths striking an object and reflecting back to the eyes.

MUSIC - COLOUR

Colour or timbre (pronounced tam-ber) - refers to the unique sound of each orchestral instrument. If an oboe and flute each play the same exact pitch, they produce unique sound, due to the difference in tone colour.

ART- LINE

A continuous mark made on a surface by a moving point.

MUSIC- LINE

Lines in music may go up or down or create patterns of movement.

As we have seen, the term ‘creative person’, doesn't just refer to musicians. It is also found in many other aspects of the Arts – e.g. writers, singers, actors. Some well-known doubly gifted singers/artists are Paul McCartney, Tony Bennett, John Lennon, and Frank Sinatra. Actors such as Tony Curtis, Henry Fonda, Anthony Hopkins, Red Skelton, Dennis Hopper, Anthony Quinn, Barry Humphreys, and Max Cullen to name just a few that we know of. In fact, most of these singers/actors hold regular solo exhibitions and their works are considered by the critics as being of a very high standard.

From my personal discussion with poets, composers, writers, musicians, actors and singers, I find that they all tend to approach their creative talent in the very same way. It begins in the mind's eye and is conceived as sound, or as a visual concept.

During many of my demonstrations to students and art groups, with a detailed description of what I am doing, I suddenly stop speaking and go into a place of which I have no control. After a couple of seconds, I apologize and tell them of the ‘switching off’ over which we don't have complete control. This is the creative process enjoying itself and what it is meant to do - taking on its creative role, where dialogue is not needed and tends to get in the road of creativity.

Now, with reference to what we said at the opening – “I know what gifted is but can't put it into words” - The creative act in itself can only be seen or heard, as in painting, music, poetry, writing and acting. There are really no words to define the creative gifted person, hence to explain this gift in words is always going to be difficult, mainly because the creative act is too complex to describe verbally.

The musician/artist or any of the other combinations I have talked about, all tend to develop from an already creative mind. a mind that already has a strong creative urge. This means it is not surprising that we have creative people crossing over into other art mediums because they are based on emotion.

The musician and the painter tend to have a much greater eye to hand motor skills. This is a natural skill for the creative person which is enhanced and perfected to a high degree by practice. This high degree of motor action (eye to hand) is found in musicians when playing jazz or classical music. The same skill applies to the artist when painting and especially when drawing from life. They also have a much higher developed awareness of negative space in nature. I found the closest comparison for students to understand this terminology (eye to hand), when I was teaching, especially drawing, was by associating motor skills to signing your name, without hesitation (as a spontaneous act without stopping).

The creative mind tends to be unique and highly skilled due to the genetic wiring and the environment that they grow up in as a child. Being exposed regularly, in that environment, to music, painting, writing, acting - any of the arts - this is the optimum world that tends to cultivate his, or her already creative urge. How many times have you heard a musician say that their love of music comes from old 78s being played, by their parents when growing up? A creative skill is not always handed down from parents to their children - his or her creative talent could be handed on genetically from a relative somewhere in the family gene pool.

So what is Doubly Gifted - what is it all about?

It is all about some human minds being blessed with a stronger than normal creative ability, to be able to cross over, without effort, into many other creative mediums. These creative gifts can't really be taught they can only be improved on, by study, and practice - a natural talent and skill that is so complex it goes beyond any description.

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