

DOUBLY GIFTED

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 1994

*Jazz Possibilities
&
Realised Denied*

Gail Brennan

INTRODUCTION

The Second Annual Bell Jazz Lecture given by Gail Brennan was opened by the Hon. Peter Carr, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts at Waverley Library on Thursday, 8th October 1994. It continues to examine aspects of jazz in our culture from its original areas.

Jazz Possibilities & Realised & Denied

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The Second Annual Bell Jazz Lecture

Delivered 8th October, 1994

Waverley Library, NSW

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Annual Bell Jazz Lecture given by Gail Brennan and opened by the Hon. Peter Collins, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts, at Waverley Library on Saturday, 8th October 1994, continues to examine aspects of jazz in our culture from new and original areas.

After completing his biography, "A Glance Over An Old Left Shoulder", Harry Stein died. Harry was the ideas man behind the Bell Jazz Lecture and its main motivator. Although he left us with a solid basis of ideas on which to build, his cheerful personality and persuasive abilities are going to be missed.

The Doubly Gifted Committee hopes that the Annual Bell Jazz Lecture will continue as a memorial to his inventiveness.

This Second Annual Bell Jazz Lecture is being given by Gail Brennan who is known by jazz enthusiasts for his critical articles in local newspapers and his jazz writings. His wide range of jazz knowledge has earned him respect among his many readers and editors and he brings to the subject a broad and impartial attitude.

Kate Dunbar
Co-Convenor
Doubly Gifted Committee



Gail Brennan

Gail Brennan has written jazz criticism for the Sydney Morning Herald over the past seven years. He also writes a column of "automatic writing" called Ad Lib, for "On The Street" magazine, has written for most major Australian publications - including "The Bulletin", "The National Times", "Nation Review", "The Independent" and "The Age" - sometimes as a music critic and sometimes as a general feature writer. He has been an editor of "Music Maker", music editor of "Hi Fi And Music" and arts editor of "Sydney City Monthly", has written for "Town" and "Stand" magazines in London, and has had work published in Poetry Australia and New Poetry. He was a member of the improvisation group Free Kata. Gail Brennan wrote the narration and conducted most of the interviewing for "Beyond El Rocco", a film directed by Kevin Lucas which received an award at the recent Festival of Music Films in Poland. Currently he is writing a book, "Bodgie Dada: Australian Jazz Subcultures", which will be published in October next year by NSW University Press.



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.

I welcome the Honourable Member, the Minister, the distinguished patron, Mr Graeme Bell, members of the hallowed Sydney Jazz Club and everyone who has been kind or curious enough to come and hear my views. It is a great honour to be asked to deliver the second Bell lecture, particularly with Graeme Bell and his wife Dorothy in attendance. Nevertheless, I think everyone here will understand my wish to dedicate this lecture to the memory of Harry Stein...

Was there a time when we were not looking back on some other time - some Golden Age - of which the present is a pale reflection? It seems that many cultures have a dreamtime, a golden age, a time when things existed in their purest essence, when legends were made, when the gods walked the earth. Many individuals have such a time in their lives. That time is their childhood or their youth, or childhood through to middle age - depending on how old they are. The golden age could have been five years ago, or even last year. It is a time on which the creative memory has begun its operations. It can seem more real than the present, and yet some cultures use the golden age or the dreamtime to enrich the present. Everything that happens to us, everything we do, resonates with the ancient time. Everything is simultaneously real and mythological.

It is my contention, though, that a negative application of the idea of a golden age, from within jazz culture and from without, has inhibited and stunted many of the musical and social possibilities presented by the tradition of jazz - to such a degree that I can only wonder how jazz, on a creative level, has been able to limp along at all, let alone deliver us the treasures of the current golden age.

In the first Bell lecture, Dr Bruce Johnson showed how jazz had kept a kind of folkloric process of performance and composition alive (and in accepting this idea, let us remember that folk music is not necessarily static) - a process in which performance and composition overlapped and were sometimes the same thing. A process in which every player contributed to the composition.

Roger Dean has said that for a good part of the twentieth century, jazz kept improvisation alive in Western music. Whenever this interactive form of music-making has enjoyed some popularity it has given people a glimpse into its workings - a glimpse into a world full of people. That may seem a strange thing to say, but much popular music before the advent of rock, and much classical music to this day, has presented not the interaction of people, but a star in front of anonymous accompanists. When Benny Goodman became popular, however, so did Harry James, Gene Krupa, Lionel Hampton and so on. Sometimes it seemed that Benny Goodman was not all that happy about their popularity, but the nature of the music was such that its fans were moved to wonder who were these other people collaborating in the composition of the music - because parts of the composition were clearly being created in real time, there and then, on the spot - whichever you prefer. In other words, improvised. Similarly, Count Basie's popularity made Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Herschell Evans, Jo Jones and Harry Edison popular. Nobody ever thinks of Dave Brubeck in isolation. They think immediately of Paul Desmond and Joe Morello. Think of Miles Davis, and you begin thinking of a host of other people - from John Coltrane to Dave Holland.

Since The Beatles, this has been true of rock and pop groups, but it was not always so. When I was a teenager I won bets with my rock and roller friends over how certain instrumental riffs on hit records went. I was surprised to find that they didn't listen to the whole thing the way a jazz listener does. A synthetic world was projected over the airwaves, in which only the star was real. Jazz, on the other hand, has developed a following of people who are interested to know who made each sound on a particular record; who are interested to know something of the musical theory and techniques involved, and more importantly, the process of interaction that creates a jazz composition. Jazz, whether we all

realise it or not, put us in touch with ancient methods of music-making at a time when music was seen as a “product” whose manufacture was mechanical and anonymous - with a glamorous star out front selling it.

This began to change with rock and roll, and of course it had changed completely by the late 1960s. Rock and its audience began to have a jazz-like relationship and, coincidentally or not, a good deal of jazz argot was also adopted: “dig”, “groove”, “man”, “chops”, “feel”, “far out”, “funky”, “gas” and so on. The interaction between Jimi Hendrix and Mitch Mitchell was as crucial as that between John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. Fans knew who the drummer was, and the bass player and the lead guitar. Real people were making music again. As in jazz, those people were also mythologised, but despite this, there was an appreciation that music was made by people interacting. So, in a sense, this jazz possibility has been realised. It has gone into the mainstream, where it is, however, constantly in danger of being buried.

But there are other other possibilities in the jazz tradition, and some of them have been very imperfectly realised or have been kept a secret or have been completely buried by the weight of real and imagined golden ages. Before we look at them, let us go back to a golden age that some of us here can remember, and see how it was received at the time.

When I began listening to jazz, in the 1950s, there were all these fresh sounds - some floating and transparent, some heavy and thrusting, some screaming, some swinging lightly with vibraphones and brushes, some rampaging, some ethereal, some down home and funky - and all these wonderful new and old musicians. There was no doubt that there was a contemporary jazz, a jazz of the time, whether you liked it or not, and if you were young enough to know that you were living in a golden age, it seemed to perfectly express the time. Clifford Brown, Lee Konitz, Gerry

Mulligan, Stan Getz, Art Pepper, Paul Desmond, Art Blakey, Sonny Rollins, Jackie McLean, Thad Jones, Ernie Henry, Hank Mobley, Sonny Clark, Wilbur Ware, Paul Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, Kenny Dorham, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Warne Marsh, Lennie Tristano, Miles Davis, Wynton Kelly - I could spout these fabled names for some time, and there are many people here who would know every one, and who would say, "Yea, verily, that was a golden age!"

And of course, masters of earlier eras were in their prime. Louis Armstrong was playing magnificently. Duke Ellington had one of his greatest bands and was writing glorious new music. Count Basie's band was hot. Dizzy Gillespie was at a peak, and his big bands were a delirium of joy, whether they were playing bop at the speed of light or Afro Cuban music. You had the opportunity to hear Pee Wee Russell with Thelonious Monk, and the meeting of Thelonious Monk with Coleman Hawkins, whose playing in the 1950s was a miracle of maturity, like a forest giant.

Truly, a golden age, and yet, when I first began reading jazz criticism, I thought that there was something wrong with my ears. This modern stuff was a load of bitter and discordant rubbish, according to the Messers Stanley Dance, a particularly cranky father and son team (or was it one man writing in the Royal plural?) In fact, jazz in the 1950s showed that modernism didn't have to be bleak and harsh - just modern and fresh - but the Dances did not hear it that way. I was told to read someone called Whitmont Blatherer, who was highly esteemed for using fancy terms like "the chalimeau register" and quasi Zenisms like "The Sound Of A Tongueless Dog Barking At The Moon At Mid Day". Have I got that right? Perhaps not. He showed some understanding of Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman, but by and large he found it hard to mention modern musicians without invoking their "elders and betters". I still have an extraordinary review of a Max

Roach record in which he does not mention any of the other players (they include Booker Little and George Coleman) but attempts, most strenuously, to show that Max Roach's drumming imparted no rhythm.

I still have the record under review - it's called Deeds Not Words - and Max is steaming. I can think of only one explanation for Mr Bleriot's extraordinary misconceptions, and it has some relevance here. When many Europeans first heard African drumming they did not perceive any rhythm at all, but experienced it as a wall of noise. These days I sometimes hear quite complex traditional rhythms being played in coffee shops, and young people move to it easily. Clearly, we are hearing rhythm differently now. What many jazz critics completely ignore is the fact that, in our ever-changing society, each era has its own aesthetic and its own rhythms. Have any of you old buffs out there actually listened to the layered textures and cross rhythms of the Beastie Boys? We will return to this.

Now, not only were the modernists a bunch of musical criminals, but Ellington's band was a pale shadow of the great band of 1940. Basie's was a "mere rhythm machine", and yet, paradoxically, it didn't swing like the band of the late 1930s. I listened to all the old records, and I was deeply puzzled. I couldn't find anything that swung more than Basie In London, although I could find things that swung differently. In some cases the contemporary performances seemed larger and more vivid - partly because recorded sound had vastly improved, partly because those contemporary performances were for contemporary ears. The mystery was solved when I found a book of essays on Duke Ellington. Lo and behold, there was a quote from a critic in 1940 who said that Ellington's band was a pale shadow of previous manifestations. Ellington, he complained, had forsaken jazz and jumped on the swing bandwagon. But - wait a minute - this was the band that the 1950s critics were holding up as the paragon of

virtue. Aha! In the words of the old Ellington song, I was beginning to see the light!

Another thing the critics and old buffs were down on was rock and roll. I came to jazz through rock and roll, so I balked a bit when I heard them complaining about the puerile lyrics of rock. Now, let's take a song that has been associated with jazz and look at its lyrics in isolation: "No girl made has got a shade on sweet Georgia Brown/It's been said she knocks them dead when she's back in town" Hmm. Now a rock and roll song: "New Jersey turnpike in the wee wee hours/ I been cruisin' slowly 'cause of drizzlin' showers/Up come old flat top, he come movin' with me/Then I'm wavin' goodbye in a little ol' souped up jitney." Infinitely superior. If we want jazz to continue as a music of some relevance, we'd better drop these ignorant expressions of superiority or we'll just be laughed out of court. I know some jazz snobs who are quite happy to get up on a stage and sing "Back in Nagasaki where the fellas chew tobaccy and the girls all wicky wacky woo." God knows why they sing this. I think they've forgotten themselves. Now, that's not fair. It's part of a larrikin tradition, and it really meant something when society was more stuffed-shirt and po-faced. But if we imagine that there's something superior about this curious form of expression, we'll be mocked or ignored.

By the end of the 1950s there was an unprecedented spread of jazz possibilities, suggested by Miles Davis, Jimmie Guiffre and Paul Bley, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, George Russell, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy and Booker Little, Bill Evans and others. There was the possibility of full-blown collective improvisation which did not necessarily replicate a 30 year old style. There was the possibility of a freer approach to improvisation, which, although it was unmistakably modern, had more in common with some earlier, eccentric and colouristic approaches than it did with the increasingly academic or

systematic approach of bop. There was the possibility of jazz creating a dialectic between Western experimentalism and non-Western forms. In fact it has always done that, but the possibility of dramatic new achievements in that area have been realised in part, and denied in the main. As we moved into the late 1960s, people like Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders and Miles Davis undertook the decompartmentalisation of black American music. We should remember here that some people, including Louis Armstrong, had seen rhythm and blues as the next jazz style after swing. In the early 1950s Louis had introduced Fats Domino as a new star of jazz, to the horror of some jazz buffs.

Many buffs saw rhythm and blues as some sin committed in the 1940s that had nothing to do with jazz, even though many musicians played in both idioms, and Ellington employed fantastic R&B shuffles in the 1950s. In fact, Ellington saw both bop and R&B as elements to be used - thumbing his nose once more at his sillier admirers. Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and others enormously expanded the textures and rhythms of jazz, blending Western and non Western elements effortlessly. We forget that jazz has always done this. They just took it further. Wynton Marsalis does it, even as he preaches exclusivity. At the same time the possibilities of multi-voiced writing were still being explored by Booker Little, Sun Ra, Andrew Hill, Gil Evans and others. Within all this was a movement toward what we now know as World Music. The Art Ensemble of Chicago were using the term World Music by the early 1970s. In the 1960s, Don Cherry had called it Organic Music. In 1967 our own Charles Munro had recorded a landmark in the idiom, the great Eastern Horizons.

For those who were young enough to know that they were living in a golden age, jazz was the nexus of unlimited musical exploration. It was the great intersection. Through it we came to Indian music, to black gospel music, to African music, to Stravinsky, Bartok and Webern. Hell, those of us who knew it was

a golden age listened to everything, including the Country and Western hour, on which some fabulous musicians appeared - but through all that, the jazz tradition was of central interest. Its intensity and flexibility were to be marvelled at. When Miles Davis said that he had the greatest rock band in the world, what he meant was that jazz musicians, if they applied themselves intelligently, had the imagination and musical resources to work a transformation of the materials at hand, to develop hitherto unseen potentials - as they had always done. Whether or not you agreed that it was the best rock band in the world depended on your criteria, but it is worth noting that when I play Jack Johnson or On The Corner to young people today, they are amazed that these were not recorded in the nineties. They were so far ahead of their time! For those who were young enough to know they were living in a golden age, jazz was inclusive rather than exclusive.

Now that the music industry has recognized the World Music endeavour, now that improvisation is accepted in contemporary classical music as a valid form of musical creation, you would think that jazz critics and buffs might be proudly proclaiming that jazz had a lot to do with this, and still does. You would think they might be demanding that the ABC devote some time to the vivid local contributions to international creativity- in contemporary jazz and improvised music generally - instead of taking away that section of Jim McLeod's programmes on which he played new releases and unusual adventures in jazz. You might think that jazz commentators would be listening keenly to new developments - not necessarily liking them; that's not the point, but studying them and thinking about the role of the jazz tradition in all of it, and advocating that tradition to all and sundry as an essential strand of 20th century culture. But most are not. Most are busily narrowing jazz down. "That's not real jazz," is their cry. "Miles Davis and I parted company when he went electric," wrote one pundit. Stop Press! Genius and hack part comany!

And it's not just the critics. A year ago one of our most acclaimed mainstream musicians was asked on radio whether there

was anything new happening in Australian jazz. "No!" he snapped, and I use the verb advisedly. He could have been honest and said, "Yes, but I don't like it." Or even more honest: "Yes, but I haven't really bothered to listen to it very closely." Instead, he opted to lie outright. Why would he lie, and why did he sound so bitter, when he was doing very well for a jazz musician? Because to admit that anything had happened in the past thirty or forty years would be to somehow diminish his own youth, his own Golden Age? To admit that there were alternatives would be to destroy the closed shop mentality that is the bane of jazz. It is no coincidence that a close colleague of this musician is in the habit of ordering his drinks in rhyming slang and then refusing to translate for the hapless barman or barmaid. This thoroughly shitty attitude - this "you don't know and you'll never know" outlook, which some of his cronies actually applaud - is the downside of jazz buffery.

One critic told me that he had instructed his daughter to go and see Dewey Redman, in order to check out "the enemy." Now, Dewey Redman is a very sweet, inoffensive man. He is also a great creative musician who is very aware of the tradition. How could he conceivably be seen as anyone's enemy? This is the madness that is the downside of jazz buffery. Like most activities, jazz is dualistic. It stands for freedom on the one hand and bigotry on the other.

It is impossible of course to hear Clarion Fracture Zone, Wanderlust, The Catholics, The Necks, Mike Nock's band, Paul Grabowsky's projects, The Umbrellas, Australysis, Atmosphere, Musikki Oy, Mark Simmonds' Freeboppers, Artisans Workshop, Mara, Ten Part Invention, Tip and so on without concluding that, somewhere in all that activity, there is definitely something happening, and that it is different to anything that has ever happened in Australian jazz before, and indeed something that is fresh and distinctive on an international level.

Now, I don't hold up these examples of buffery purely out of spite, although I feel quite spiteful about the destructive and mean

attitude I have described. With such an attitude present within the jazz community, how can we expect jazz to be perceived in the community at large as anything other than a music of the past, a trip down memory lane, a museum piece? When Don Pullen appeared on Margaret Throsby's radio program, she told him straight, that, to her knowledge, all the jazz greats were back in the thirties, forties and fifties. She was talking to one of the important figures in post sixties jazz, but seemed unaware of the discourtesy. Jazz commentators have gone out of their way to create this peculiar view. Who can blame the host of a general interest program for picking it up?

I have nothing against a musician playing in an old style. Some of our most moving and creative musicians do. The fact is, however, that there are many young and not so young musicians who are moved to create a music that more obviously reflects our times, a music that is informed by the culture that surrounds it; and while ever that impulse is denied, whilever that music is buried, or villified under terms like "avant garde" or "cutting edge", jazz will be seen largely as a repertory music, heavy on Timeless Values but completely devoid of immediate contemporary relevance or the much-vaunted ability to surprise.

Today, jazz buffery has taken a very strange turn. Bop, this allegedly bitter, dark, discordant, inaccessible music (remember the Messers Dance), has become the model of academic correctness - to the point where I have begun to sympathise with those who always opposed it. When I view it as just another alternative, I love it. When it is presented as the only way to play, I begin to hate it.

Tony Gorman told me a story that should stand as a parable of the academically correct attitude. He once got a job playing on a

ship with a bunch of Americans straight out of music college. They played fiendishly well. Absolutely correct post bop. The other band on the ship came from Guinea as I recall. They'd been doing the job for years, and their families depended on the income. They played their own music beautifully, and people loved it, because it was happy and it was great to dance to. Of course their renditions of Glenn Miller were risible, but nobody cared. Nobody except these young winners! winners! winners! straight out of college. Back in port they presented their impressive diplomas to the company and declared that the Guineans should be sacked for laughable renderings of Glen Miller. And they were. Next trip, the young lions played their fiendishly proficient post bop in the ballroom, and on the second night nobody came.

Now we have outstandingly accomplished musicians coming out of our conservatoria all the time, but their attitudes often are completely different. Sure, they've been told by a well known drongo - Dickhead Macho, I believe they call him - that Miles Davis couldn't play the trumpet, and that women can't play the trumpet because "they have no balls", but they just laugh. Nobody who is deeply interested in music even thinks about whether Miles Davis could "play the trumpet", any more than they would waste their time wondering whether Hans Heysen might be a better painter, academically, than Van Gogh. Hans who? Dick who? They listen to all kinds of music with interest. They'd much rather hear good rock or Latin or African or Cuban music or reggae than boring jazz. And they see no reason why jazz shouldn't use some of these lovely rhythms. In fact, you would have to be extremely insensitive not to want to use them. It is a pleasure to talk with them, because they have a great curiosity about all kinds of music, and for this reason they are jazz's best ambassadors.

Of course the great fear is that, with such open- mindedness, jazz will disappear. Who knows? There have been a few jazz

musicians - and they include Miles Davis and Duke Ellington - who have declared that their music is not jazz, just music. They didn't want it to be called jazz anymore. This way, so they imagined, they would avoid being reviewed by jazz critics, with their suffocating sets of conditions. Every time they did something interesting, the critics said "that's not jazz", so they said, "suits me!". The irony is that the great public still hears it as jazz - just as they hear everything from Bach to Bartok and beyond as classical music. And the great public is right, in my opinion, the critics wrong. Eddie Condon once said, "I don't care what Stan Kenton plays, but I wish he wouldn't call it jazz." Mr Condon, of course, owned the name jazz, yet wrote a book called, "We Called It Music". He didn't call it jazz either! Stan Kenton didn't need to call it jazz. Most people sensed immediately that it belonged to the same tradition, the same chain of events, as Jelly Roll Morton, however different in tone and emphasis it had become. I don't think there's much chance of jazz disappearing. People seem to recognize it as jazz, in all its diverse forms. Of course jazz is just a word, and a silly one, and it doesn't matter in one sense whether it is used or not. I just happen to like it because it has moved from being a sexual reference to a wonderful sort of meaninglessness, like dada.

Academic correctness seeks to remove the dada element from jazz, without restoring the sex! I am in absolute agreement with Ade Monsborough that the roots of jazz should be taught - not just big bands and bebop. The complaint I most frequently hear from students is that, "all we get is white big bands." There are great white big bands, and if nothing else their technical excellence should be a part of any musical study, but jazz is also an art form that deals with the sonic equivalents of shape and colour. Anyone studying jazz should have Johnny Dodds, Don Cherry, Bill Harris, Johnny Hodges, Eric Dolphy and Pee Wee Russell brought to their attention.

Do you know that jazz has been associated with back to Africa movements, civil rights, communism? Yes, communism, right here in Australia! Abstract Expressionists and the modernists of Australian art have been drawn to it. Now, I am not a communist, nor a back to Africa man, but no study of jazz should ignore these things. Academic correctness seeks to divorce jazz from everything but the ideal of academically excellent playing. So jazz is simply about excellence. Excellent what? Oh, excellent excellence of course. What else do you need?

There are a number of musical systems in operation in the world. All are fascinating, and every aspiring musician should study at least one of them - but in the full knowledge that each one departs at some point from science and even rationality. This is obviously true of Western systems. Our keyboard-based music, our tempered scale, has less mathematical consistency than the scales used in some parts of Africa. My point here is that there is no absolutely correct system. Perhaps the only fixed reference in jazz has been the blues, and that breaks the rules of Western harmonic progression and uses notes that aren't actually on the acoustic keyboard. The message of the blues is also Stockhausen's message: that music is an open sky. I read recently of one musician complaining that our Western music was being polluted by world music influences. One of the first pollutants was jazz, which superimposed microtones or in-between notes, or blue notes on a system that hadn't had them for centuries, and introduced a weird blues tonality that went straight from the root to the fourth. Clearly, jazz was one of the first world musics, and this is part of what makes it so damned interesting.

Browsing in a book about rock, I came across the assertion that jazz had progressively tamed its folk sources. Rock of

course...well, rock could do no wrong. This ignores musicians like Pharoah Sanders, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, Mingus, Coltrane and others who have on occasion played music that is much wilder than the folk sources of jazz, but it certainly applies to today's academically correct beboppers and those who nag on sentimentiously about the fundamentals and the tradition. Believe me, these things will take care of themselves. Conservatoria are not going to throw them out. Young musicians will continue to study them, and - if there is any hope for jazz - to rebel against them. I remember a review of Miles At Filmore in which the reviewer said that Keith Jarrett's electric organ was so wrong it sounded like a racing car going the wrong way against a crowded field. This was meant to be perjorative. But in a way that he may or may not grasp, the reviewer recommended it to many younger listeners.

Many generations now have been brought up on fast motion film, which sends us hurtling through intersections against the terrific onset of mazes of rushing metal, through snarls of traffic that part instantly on our arrival. Film can give us the experience of hurtling on and on, through all obstacles, like an imperishable essence. To many of us the description is not necessarily perjorative at all. It excites our interest.

The critic forgets that at one time they likened jazz to barnyard animals and the din of factories - they said it was like unto beasts of the field, like unto birds of the air, and like unto creeping things!....and that's why we liked it: because it could incorporate so many extra-musical elements in a musical continuum; that it could gather unto itself so much of the real world of experience. One of Duke Ellington's trombonists was complimented on a solo, and he said, "Yeah, I got it that time. It sounded like my uncle falling down the stairs."

Personally, I hope that element never leaves jazz. But the marvelous thing about it is that the most programatic, colouristic,

free, rough and raucous jazz is still somehow connected to the most abstract, rarefied, systematic explorations. In fact one feeds the other, and often they overlap. In that way, jazz is like twentieth century visual arts, in which abstraction and depiction - sometimes of a vivid, surreal, bizarre nature - constantly feed each other. Jazz should actually be more like that. Modern art criticism embraces the primitive and the intellectual, minimalism and complexity. It pauses before dismissing a broken milk bottle on a bronze pedestal. Sometimes it pauses rather too long, in my humble opinion, but jazz criticism has surely gone much too far the other way. To reach its full potential, and to reach all the people it should reach on all the different levels on which it should be reaching them, jazz needs an intensely interested and creative commentary. Excellent excellence can be pretty damn sterile.

Now, there are economic reasons why all of jazz's possibilities have not been realised. Having three horns instead of two can make an enormous difference, both for written composition and collective improvisation. Vibraphones and marimbas and electric sounds can open up worlds of colour and rhythm. Time spent working together can also result in polyphonic movement and breadth of sound, in vivid colour and interesting textures, but time and extra players cost money. Most jazz musicians these days are professionals, and this has certain disadvantages. It is often difficult to commit oneself to the development of a band sound. This is why bands like Clarion Fracture Zone, The Catholics, Wanderlust, Ten Part Invention, Ted Coassin's big band, The Umbrellas and so on should be supported. The media, and most shamefully the ABC, have shown an extraordinary lack of interest in the unique surge of creativity in Australian jazz over the past six years or so. Forget the pejoratives "avant garde" and "cutting edge". This is simply music that is being created with the impulses of today, informed by the history of jazz. Equally

shameful is the complete lack of interest shown by all but a handful of jazz critics. Nothing has changed since the last golden age, except that today's critics don't even feel the need to offer reasons for rejecting the present.

Now, I do not deny that the music which most often fulfills its own potential is that played by traditional bands, like The Port Jackson Jazz Band, The Red Onions, Tom Baker, The Yarra Yarra Jazz Band and so on. Similarly, the supposedly avant garde Art Ensemble Of Chicago, after all these years, has a patina and a deep well of collective experience which a new, young band is hard pressed to match. Nor have I any doubt that young musicians could learn a great deal from their attention to dynamics. Some young musicians play consistently too loud, too heedlessly of their fellows. That's youth. My ideal of jazz is still embodied in records like those of Louis Armstrong's Hot Seven, in which it seems to me that solo and collective improvisation, spontaneous and prefigured composition, are in marvellous balance. But not all jazz of that time is played at that level. Some of it is dreadful. And there have been many recorded sessions which achieve the same ends in later styles. I think of Charles Mingus, of the Dave Holland Quintet, of recent things done by Randy Weston, Oliver Lake, Geri Allen, Steve Coleman. These things, when they are reviewed at all, are approached as something terribly problematic. Difficult. The reviewer wonders if such modern stuff can be recommended without a strong warning: not for the fainthearted. My experience tells me that there are many young people for whom this music is direct and exciting. For them, earlier styles are more difficult of access. There is a barrier: that the earlier styles are clearly of another age. It is not so easy to grasp the motivation behind the old style. That we older writers can ignore this bespeaks an extraordinary arrogance. We can't keep on assuming that each generation will agree on the nature of the Eternal Verities.

In summary, I believe that jazz has the potential to lead the way in certain areas of modern music, that at its best it presents an egalitarian ethos that is not inconsistent with the pursuit of excellence, that it is and can be more effectively a major agent in world music, that it is and can be more effectively the site of a dialectic between European harmonic exploration and the rhythmic and textural orientation of non-Western music. There are economic reasons why some of these potentials are not fully realised. There is indifference where there should be vital interest. There is an unceasing campaign of jazz bashing from the many professional philistines of our media. But some of these constraints might be eased if there was a more engaged appreciation of jazz as an evolving rather than a finite form, within the jazz community itself.

Let's be realistic, you are not going to persuade young, modern-minded arts programmers that they should take much notice of jazz when you yourself believe it is a finite form that reached its full potential decades ago and that any further developments should be discouraged. With that attitude you shouldn't be surprised if they said, "Yeah, we might give it a run one day when we're doing a bit of a musical archeology piece. Is that what you had in mind? Funny hats? Vests? Bicycle clips round the sleeves?" No, no, you scream! That will alienate everyone. But what exactly do you have in mind?

Jazz will always mean a great deal to me. For its intrinsic value and because it led me to many other things, but I don't listen exclusively to jazz - nor does Graeme Bell - and I think anyone who does is a fathead, a bonehead and a complete turnip, and anyone who sets themselves up as a jazz critic without studying the spectrum of music, including rock and contemporary classical music, is irresponsible and an ass.

But I digress (it has been my life's ambition to actually say that in a speech: but I digress). Jazz record covers in the 1950s and 1960s were the first introduction to the magical world of 20th century visual arts for those of us who were not so well educated. Through jazz I learned that there was a rich black culture in America. White jazz made me keenly aware of California - that great centre of creativity and nuttiness. An awareness that gave an extra dimension to the place when it was hippy heaven in the minds of most. Through jazz I actually learned who was playing that crazy music in the animated cartoons. Through jazz I became interested in modern classical music and the music of Africa, India and the Middle East. Later I developed a taste for Japanese music and Chinese Opera. I have a strong feeling that I would not have developed these interests - at least not until very recently - if I had decided to stay with rock and roll back there in the 1950s.

Due in no small part to my background in jazz, every kind of music holds my attention, without necessarily pleasing me. People who are interested in jazz as an evolving form are often aware of a very wide spectrum of culture, including the culture of the very young. They are usually very funny. People who have attended rock industry awards assure me that a less attractive class of person dominates the proceedings - one who is more pretentious, self-conscious, obsessed with status, and not very funny at all. Glimpses on TV have tended to confirm this view. But there is another kind of jazz buff, whom I tend to avoid. Time stopped for him decades ago. Nothing I say will have any effect. As usual, you can only appeal to the swinging voter. Pun intended. My appeal is that you live in all time: the past, the present and the speculative future. That's the golden age, and we are in it.

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