

# DOUBLY GIFTED

*The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2003*

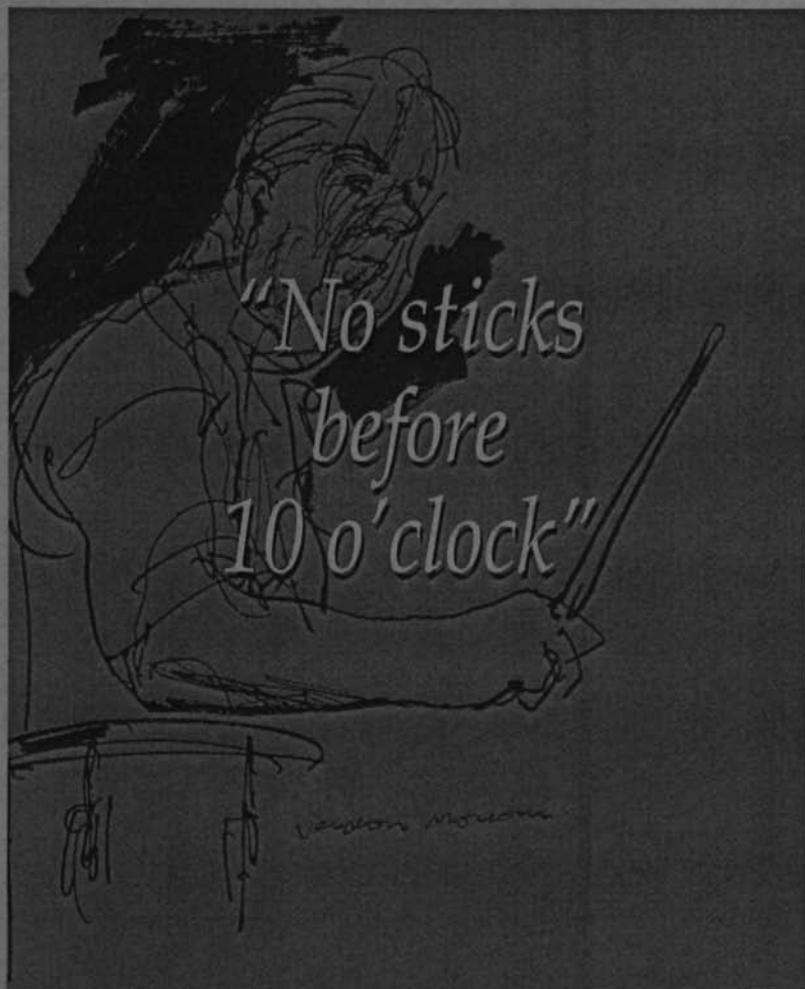


ILLUSTRATION VERDON MORCOM

*Len Barnard*



Introduction

This year, 2003, marks the Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2003, with a special guest, Len Barnard, and a special theme, "No sticks before 10 o'clock".

## The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2003

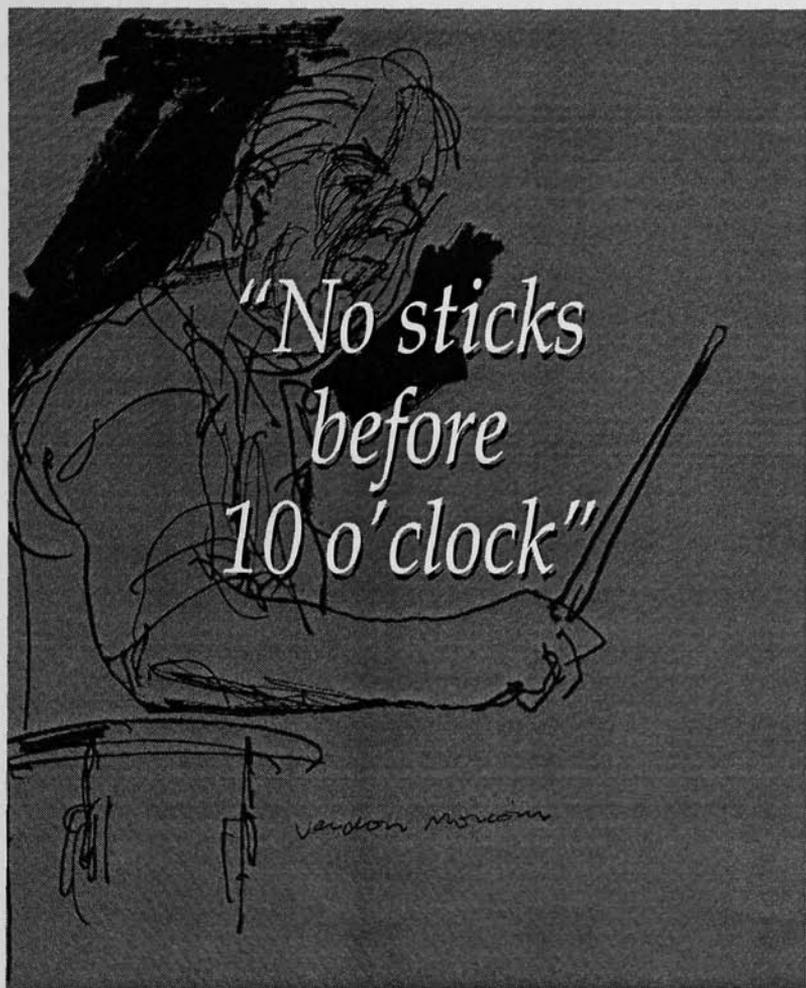


ILLUSTRATION VERDON MORCOM

*Len Barnard*

*The Eleventh Annual Bell Jazz Lecture*

*Delivered 20th September, 2003*

*Waverley Library*

© Len Barnard

ISBN 0-9585157-8-6

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

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

## Introduction

This year, 2003, finds the Annual Bell Lecture in Jazz reaching its eleventh year, with continuing interest and success.

Once again, the Doubly Gifted Committee wishes to thank the staff of Waverley Library, the Friends of Waverley Library and Waverley Council for its continued support and for making it possible to hold both these events, the Doubly Gifted Exhibition and the Bell Lecture in Jazz.

Both Exhibition and Lecture were concepts initiated by the late Harry Stein, and we continue to present them as a tribute to his memory and as a tribute to the great Australian jazz musician, Graham Bell.

Our Lecturer this year is jazz drummer, Len Barnard. Len is also known affectionately in the Australian jazz scene as "Sluggsie". He is one of the most popular jazz drummers, not only for his proficiency as a percussionist, but for his great sense of fun and ever present good humour.

His knowledge of jazz is outstanding, of both local and international jazz. He has been consistently recorded for the best part of fifty years and has worked with most major bands and most major musicians in Australia.

We look forward to Len's lecture which we feel sure will be both instructive and entertaining.

He will be introduced by the 2002 Lecturer, Bill Haesler.

Kate Dunbar  
Co-Convenor  
Doubly Gifted Committee



## Len Barnard

Leonard Arthur Barnard was born on 23 April 1929. He started his own band in 1948 and has performed, variously and amongst others, with Judy Bailey, Ray Price, Bob Barnard's Jazz Band and Galapagos Duck.

Under his own name, he has recorded extensively, with seven albums appearing under the Swaggie label. In New York, Len recorded with Ralph Sutton and Milt Hinton. He played drums on all of the Lord of the Rings series with John Sangster.

His ability and achievements have been rewarded by his being awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Musicians Union and included in the Roll of Honor at Montsalvat in 1990. In 1991, he won the Australian Critics Award at the Gold Coast Festival. The Len Barnard Story was serialised in Jazz magazine, 1981-2.

Len has said that his recreations include all forms of music except heavy metal and pop. He enjoys reading and is 'still trying to keep looking at things until they make sense'.



## 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.

## 'No sticks before 10 o'clock.' Len Barnard

Thank you Bill, and thank you all for turning out to this annual event. This will, perforce, be an extremely random collection of memories and opinions. I don't expect everyone to agree with me on all my observations, although I have the usual wistful hopes. First, a quote from Bing Crosby near the end of his life: *I think popular music in this country is one of the few things in the twentieth century that have made giant strides in reverse.*

I'll try and enlarge on that as we go along, but firstly some boyhood memories.

I arrived when halfpennies were still viable. Coleslaw and 'health food' were totally unknown and all the shops were a bit musty by present standards. One could buy a 'ha'porth of specks' from a fruiterer - quite a large bag of apples, pears and bananas that were approaching over-maturity.

Cheese was cut with wire, butter with butter-pats and weighed on brass scales. Bags of 'broken' biscuits from the grocer for a penny. Were people so fastidious in those depression days that they shunned speckled fruit and damaged biscuits?

My parents were part-time musicians and I would often be taken to my great-aunts when they had a travelling job.

My great-aunts were Effie, a widow, and Dolly, a spinster. I remember their house was dark and everything smelled of hot iron, dead flowers and pepper. Always had frankfurts to eat. Auntie Dolly liked to dress up, and when she did, she looked like a dozen cannonballs in a chiffon bag. A strange memory, but at home we had many family gatherings. My mother was a real party animal. My other aunts (Mum's sisters) were Myra Jean and Muriel Constance - good old-fashioned names. Jean was a dry, laconic character, and once said that Bing Crosby 'is a sonk - he has sonky eyes'. Good old-fashioned word. At parties, she would sing *I'm Lovin' Sam*, *That Sheik From Alabam* accompanied by The Champ (my father) on his Windsor model banjo. Then he would sing *It's Melon Time In Dixieland* with lyrics like 'Oh, Mother's got a new gingham gown, all the folks arriving from town . . .' It seems my brother and I never had a chance, wouldn't you say?

I finally got to High School, and in retrospect all the teachers were excellent.

A Miss Lola Duggan was music or singing teacher - no big band arrangements then - we didn't even have a concertina. Miss Duggan would play and we would sing *Pond Lilies*, *Nymphs and Shepherds*, *Road To The Isles* - all jolly British stuff!

And, of course, puberty. Where are you now Peggy Astridge, Phoebe Orchard, Ingrid Heuch and Flossie Renshaw? I would take a small drum kit on the train to school and play *Drummer Boy* with piano accompaniment. My friend Fred Whitworth would join in on a snare drum.

Fred later became drummer in my first band as I was playing piano at the time. Then from the age of 13, apart from playing with my mother's band (Kath Barnard's Orchestra), I played with Fred Holland's Band. I would go to Fred's house and he taught me chords and harmonic progressions - rhythmic vamping, etc. on tunes like *Deep Hollow*, *Toy Trumpet* and *Twilight In Turkey*. We played stuff mainly by British arrangers like Stan Bowsher, Jimmy Lally and Skip Martin. I longed for some killer-diller charts by Jimmy Mundy. The Champ was a good taste maker. He would say, 'Listen to Duke Ellington's Band with Sonny Greer on drums and *Warde-Da* by Cab Calloway is the hottest record you'll ever hear.'

He also admired attack and intonation in saxophone sections, particularly on Artie Shaw's recording of *Vilia*. All this was during the war. We couldn't get good sticks or brushes or cymbals. I also played with Harry McWhinney's Myola Melody Makers. They wore white tuxedos, and the alto player was Frank Coyle, father of Graham Coyle, the wonderful pianist in my later band.

There were lots of characters about them. There was Farmer Grey who hopped on stage and conducted the band with a beatific expression, quite drunk. And 'Kinky' Cairns, a small desiccated man with powerful neck muscles would scat with the utmost vigour on things like *Dinah* and *Nobody's Sweetheart*. 'Leaky' Pierce would take the stage with a lot of eccentric warblings all highly rhythmic. I thought these guys were great, but everyone would yell, 'Get 'em off.'

I can still smell the shaved candles or kerosene and sawdust to make the floor fast for dancing.

Heard the early Graeme Bell Band about 1946, I think, and loved the music.

Things were moving along just after the war. I got a band together in 1948 with Doc Willis' 'Tich Bray', brother Bob (who was about 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> then and starting to play very hot cornet), Fred Whitworth and Smacka Fitzgibbon on banjo and vocals.

We made our first recording for Jazzart which was Bob Clemens' label. Bob was 16 then.

This little story is a bit out of context here but it has some relevance. Doc Willis left the band and was replaced by Frank Traynor, then Smacka organised some smart uniforms for us. Smacka was always a dandy and loved good haberdashery. We had shot-blue jackets, grey trousers and polka dot hand-tied bow ties.

Many years later, Bob and Frank were at the undertakers before Smacka's funeral, which was being organised by Smacka's sister Maggie, the actress. Smacka was laid out in a dinner-suit with his banjo and Frank looked down and said, 'Look, he's wearing a clip-on tie!'

Smacka taught us all how to tie a proper bow in those far-off days.

So Bob dashed out and got a real bow-tie, then they tied it round Smacka's neck. Quite unconsciously, Frank said, 'That's better. Smacka wouldn't be seen dead in a clip-on tie!'

All of the Melbourne jazz musicians used to fraternise a lot and formed life-long friendships. In early 1952, we made the very first Australian recording in microgroove 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> rpm with Bill Armstrong using a Pyrox wire recorder. Ross Fusedale was our manager at this time and sent a copy to Ron Wills at EMI, and the magic words came back - 'I think a session at EMI is indicated.'

Well, we thought we were made - on Parlophone, a major label - the world at our feet - today Homebush - tomorrow THE WORLD. We were very young. And the Bell Band and Johnson Band had been there first. Anyway, we mingled as I before stated. If only we had had cassette players in motor cars then. Often, we would drive 20 miles to play 16 bars of a new 78 rpm record to fellow jazzmen. It was a thrill waiting for the new releases on 78s in those days.

We had a regular Sunday night at Mentone Life Saving Club. It was packed each time, and the band really fired. On rainy nights, people would come in with muddy shoes, and what with the vigorous dancing and the body heat, the mud became red dust which permeated the whole room. Nobody seemed to care.

Several funny things happened, but this is a very curious vignette.

Frank Johnson's Dixielanders were to play at Stawell Football Club's Annual Ball. It was a scratch band - Smacka Fitzgibbon, Frank Traynor and myself from my band. Geoff Kitchen, Frank Johnson and Jack Connelly. Frank's father, who at that time was a leading light in the Communist Party (and Frank was always a bit pink!) had borrowed a friend's car to drive Smacks, Frank Traynor, Geoff Kitchen and myself to Stawell, leaving GPO Spencer Street at 5pm. Meanwhile, Frank Johnson and Jack Connelly had taken the train with the drums and tuba in the luggage van. It was a monumental balls-up, as we waited for Geoff Kitchen until after 6pm, then decided to make a run for it without him.

He had been waiting at Flinders Street Station. Jumping ahead, can you read the dialogue - 'But you said . . .'; 'But I thought . . .'; 'I distinctly remember you saying, etc.' Anyway, it was a very long drive and we were late. We got to the hall to see 900 people dancing to Jack Connelly myopically peering at a chord book and pumping stodgy rhythm while Johnno was teetering on the edge of the stage playing boozed trumpet.

Then, to ironic cheers, we took to the stage to find that the drums and tuba had gone on through to Adelaide. We borrowed a tuba, bass drum and snare drum from the local brass band. I had to play with a terrible drum propped on a chair. Smacka did a few vocals but we were not convincing. This was vineyard country, and there were crates of champagne and sparkling burgundy backstage, and we dulled our private pains with lots of it.

We took a break and a young beat band came on and played Pee Wee Hunt's *12th Street Rag* which was a hit at the time. They brought the house down. Then we copped the taunts - 'We don't need smart-arse bands from Melbourne, our boys are better.'

So the dreadful night ended, and we ran the gauntlet of angry locals shouting, 'You'll never come back to Stawell again, Johnson.'

When we got to our hotel, we found it was owned by the Football Club President and he had locked us out.

We spent the night in the car and somebody had had the presence of mind to grab a crate of champagne which didn't need chilling as it was very cold.

When we drove off at about 5.30am, suddenly the car was full of blue smoke and knocking noises. Con-rod through the sump! Nothing like the deep silence of the bush, the frost, the occasional magpie carolling (to us it sounded like chortling!).

Frank Traynor and I were employed at the Commonwealth Bank and had to get to work. Eventually, we were picked up by a Dutchman, an ex-Grand Prix driver in the then new front wheel drive Citroen. He drove extremely fast and deposited us at the bank at 8.55am. We were in the gents, changing out of our tuxedos into suits - getting hard looks from the Honest Johns who also worked there. The drums and tuba got back four days later!

Touring in Australia was pretty tough early on. When we toured in the fifties, there were no motels, only largish decrepit country hotels with sagging beds, cardboard wardrobes and bathrooms - one to a floor. Awkward!

Then later in the sixties and seventies, there were motels and better road-houses for snacks, etc. But the signs of decay in the business were becoming visible gradually and the pop music was a huge enmeshing ocean of marketed crap. Nowadays, it would be tough to make any sort of profit on tour. Cost of petrol and accommodation would be prohibitive. Too much video, CDs, muzak - all of a miserable standard. Pirating of recordings and copyrights with an even chance of never being found out. The music that we play is only popular in a few nostalgic pockets. The paradox is that whenever some young people hear mainstream jazz played really well with spirit and fire, they become superficially interested, but the peer pressure (the nineties buzzwords!) always wins out.

The most we can hope for is some efficient business-minded jazz-loving entrepreneurs to organise the odd festival (see John Buchanan and John Trudinger). Then the most we can hope for is about \$400 for 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 3 days on call with various groups that make up a festival - say, three times a year.

The other paradox is that the crowds (mostly oldies) come out of the woodwork to attend these junkets, but seldom, if ever, support the same bands at their normal workaday venues, if any.

Anyway, I'm a bit ahead of myself here.

In March 1955, we decided to go on tour in Australia and then overseas. We had £1,500 and could have sailed for Europe, but had to do the Oz thing first. In retrospect, it was like Napoleon and Hitler taking on Russia. Of course, my band then was the result of honest work that had required ingenuity, patience, self-control, alertness, physical strength, a knowledge of craft, an inner empathy with

other improvisers, dexterity when called upon, humour, black despair, modest income, and above all, a desire to do the best possible job under existing circumstances.

Having unloaded that lot, it was a dream that became a nightmare.

In 1955, we encountered some quantities of bad luck. Each town we visited was recovering from drought, flood or lack of funds, and in one instance (Warracknabeal), the local fire brigade slapped a boycott on us. We were scheduled the night before the Fire Brigade Ball. They ripped down our posters, pressured the shopkeepers to get advertisements removed from windows and the local paper rapped the Council for hiring the hall to us. Each of us were living on 10/- a day after two months.

Then the truck had to be prepared in Hamilton (Victoria). The parts flown down from Melbourne didn't fit. We got more parts by road from Ballarat.

Tich Bray, our clarinettist, had to stay with the truck while we went on. We had booked the tour ahead and had to keep faith. Then Tich drove all night through heavy rain, picked us up at Barham and drove on to Berrigan. We were bogged twice on that trip - the roads were terrible.

We made Berrigan dead on 8.30pm, wet and muddy, stumbled into the hall and started playing. Ninety people turned up, and we required 250 to break even.

So we headed for Sydney for a few weeks on the Paradance circuit and a radio series for the ABC produced by Will Pryor and compered by John West. Ross 'Kingswood Country' Higgins, and Bonnee Montgomery were featured vocalists on these shows, which made us solvent for a time, even though Bob and I were sharing one Sargent's pie for 'luncheon' each day.

Conferences. Off to Brisbane. Win there or give it up. Big concert at Brisbane Stadium made £150 profit but we were £800 in debt. So my battered old gang met at a hotel, and in minutes we'd killed Australia's first musical cooperative. The band broke up. Some of us were visibly moved. It was an extraordinary string of misfortunes that flattened our brave enterprise.

After my band's disastrous tour in 1955 (we looked so smart in navy suits with pearl buttons), I stayed in Brisbane for another year, playing at Storyville and the Celebrity Club. My old Melbourne friend John Sangster was working with Graeme Bell in Brisbane and we renewed our old friendship. More about John later.

Anyway, I got the blues and went back to Melbourne. I was working with a quartet led by Al Redding at the Flamingo in St Kilda. One night, Bruce Kennett came in and told me he was taking a new big band into the Palais de Danse and wanted me on drums. This was THE plum job in Melbourne - excellent musicians and good conditions. So I said, 'Yes.' I didn't let on that I was a poor reader, because I wanted that job.

The policy at the Palais was that while the ball-goers were dining, the orchestra would play selections from shows like *South Pacific*, *The King and I*

and *Kismet*. On my first night, a chart of bits from *Scheherazade*. Well, I stumbled along, hitting gongs and tom-toms in all the wrong places and getting hard looks from the brass section.

Then came the dance music and I was much better but still managed to make a shipwreck of a few endings.

Anyway, the second night was substantially the same program and halfway through, Bruce Kennett sidled over, and with a smile of Christian charity said, 'You can't read for nuts, but you've got a bloody good memory.'

I learned to read in a helluva hurry and outlasted three band-leaders, the others being George Miller and Tom Davidson. Tom was a strict martinet, and put a stop to one of our good visual gags where during a Gipsy Tap (old time dance), I would bounce a stick off a large tympani and as it sailed aloft Les Patching, the pianist would catch it, pass it round his back and throw it back to me. All this in perfect time with the music.

It was a very funny band, always much hilarity in the band room and often afterwards in the car park with frost-bitten hands and lots of beer.

I left in 1961 just as I got my band together to record the *Naked Dance* album. The band was on and we had an excellent sound engineer - Russell Thompson. It turned out well and still stands up after 40-odd years.

Then, I did nearly eight years in the Mayfield Room at Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne. That's where the title of this lot comes in, 'No sticks before 10 o'clock', so that during that period I became a fairly proficient brush player.

From the mid sixties to the mid seventies, there was much recording - several albums for Swaggie under my name, two albums with Roger Bell's Pagan Pipers, and about five with Dave Dallwitz's original compositions.

Studio time was expensive and, on my records at any rate, we did the whole album in three hours - warts and all. We were paid \$26 a man and I got another \$10 for writing the sleeve notes. Then when I got to Sydney, I joined Ray Price Quintet with young Tom Baker who was 22, Graham Spedding, Pat Qua and myself. Black skivvies, black trousers was the dress, as it was for the original Tom Baker Band a year later.

Ray was paying \$310 a week, which was good money then, but we were doing three shows a day - a primary school in the morning, drive to another town and a high school in the afternoon, then a cabaret at night - lots of pulling down and setting up. We played everything from Bennie Moten's *Thick Lip Stomp* to rock things like *Greasy Papa*, and then later raves like *Tequila*. I'd had enough after seven months. One album remains from then.

Tom Baker was interested only in hot jazz, and happily I planted the seed for Tom's San Francisco Band by introducing him to Lu Watters. Thus, I was a founding member of that band, which caused such a sensation at the Balmain Convention.

Which reminds me . . . I was also a founding member of Jazz Action Society, an idea of the late Mike Williams, along with Judy Bailey, Billy Weston, Col Nolan and John Pochee. We used to run a Jazzmobile on Saturday mornings at strategic points in the city and suburbs. It was a flat-tray truck and Geoff Bull's Band did a few, and several other pick-up bands.

I still have a copy of the minutes of a meeting in which one of the items was 'hire of truck - \$8'.

The Mayor of Sydney, Nick Shehadie, played clarinet on a Jazzmobile and that was good for publicity.

And during that period, I did some travelling with the Dick Emery Show (Dick was quite a good guitarist) and Kamahl (we used to call it 'music to change kaftans by'). These tours were with the remarkable Kenny Powell on piano (he can literally play anything!).

You gain experience by a sort of osmosis over the years. Then one day you are at a studio confronted by banks of strings and brass, and it is then you know you are in the REAL world. Don't screw up! You must have experience and some background, and this is a handicap for most young people coming into the music business today. They don't know how to play for dances or shows. They have had the benefit of three or four years tuition and can play the hell out of their instruments but don't really understand how to do a gig properly. More on this later.

Then I joined Yamaha as keyboard manager in 1970, and studied electronic organ in Japan for a month or two. Sorry, this is becoming a parade of gigs which I didn't want, but during a four-year period, I didn't play drums at all until old friend John Sangster asked me to play on the *Hobbit Suite* album in Sydney. This was a pretty frantic period of my life and I was away from home a great deal. Eventually the wheel came off my marriage.

Brother Bob had been in Sydney for about 12 years and kept at me to come up. So in 1974 I arrived in Sydney. Things started happening rapidly. I went straight into Judy Bailey's trio and the Col Nolan/Errol Buddle Quartet. Brother Bob's band at the old Stage Door and lots of recording, mostly with John Sangster, my old friend who died of an excess of living. He lived by the dictum of Sir Thomas Beecham, who said, 'Everyone should try everything at least once. With the possible exception of incest and folk-dancing.'

None of John's large recorded output came from grants. He made his own money and devoted it to his own music. And knowing the vicissitudes of this life, if he wanted certain players from interstate, he provided first-class airfares - letting them 'get it easy' for a change.

His *bête noir* was *Lord of the Rings*, a vast epic in three large volumes which was so evocative to him that he wondered why nobody had actually done anything with it. 'Where is the opera, the ballet, the film, the descriptive music?' His lively imagination brought a largish group to the old EMI Studios over a period (some 28 years ago) to record four double albums.

It was a wonderful time, and some of the pieces are perfectly constructed gems. Often, for effects, we would strike gongs and chimes firmly (at strategic points) and gradually lower them into large buckets of water. This produced a mournful sound in pieces like *Goldberry* (Volume 2). It was demanding work, as often the number of bars was quite odd - like 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> instead of 8 or 17 instead of 16.

John would write his arrangements with a pencil on score paper often in hotels with rum or vodka constantly beside him in the midst of a noisy bar. Oddly enough, some of his most introspective and pretty pieces came from within this atmosphere. And at other times, lying serenely in a hammock by the water at Narrabeen, surrounded by reed warblers and pelicans, he would write highly bombastic and dramatic pieces. Hear *Orcs* on Volume 1!

When the arrangements were handed out in the studio there was never an alteration necessary. He heard the whole thing in his head as he wrote it down. Often at later sessions for Rain Forest Records there would be a bottle of Haig's Scotch between each two music stands. He'd say, 'I want everyone to relax.' BUT you always had to deliver your best efforts.

Once, at the Edinburgh Festival, I met Al Casey, guitarist for Fats Waller on those hundreds of recordings, and he told me that Fats was the same - wanted everyone to take a drink or two and loosen up. BUT you must cut the job - no excuses - keep it mellow.

Just this year in January, Tony Gould, Graeme Lyall, Allan Lee and I did a *Lord of the Rings* concert in Melbourne for the International Jazz Festival. Brother Bob was booked elsewhere, so we got Eugene Ball on trumpet from the *Hoodangers* (a band that plays a sort of traditional jazz in a very original manner), a 20-year-old trombonist Eric Budd and Nick Haywood on bass.

When John finished those recordings, he scrapped all the charts, saying, 'Well, that's that - the beast is slain.'

So we transcribed some of the pieces from *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, but the charts were extremely sketchy. It was so interesting to hear the way these young players interpreted the music in their own original way, yet preserving the inner ethos of the pieces.

Anyway, near the end of 1976, I was playing on stage in a revue called *Clap* in a theatre restaurant called Jools which is now the Hard Rock Cafe in Crown Street.

Ronnie Frazer, Noel Ferrier, Judy Morris and Michael Caton were all in a series of comic sketches based on topical subjects.

I looked up at the bar and saw Tom Hare and Chris Qua watching proceedings. They were re-vamping Galapagos Duck and wanted me on drums at the old Basement and on tour. It felt a bit strange as I was at least 20 years older than anyone else in the band. Those were funny days - the band rehearsed a lot, worked a lot and laughed a lot.

I had to draw on all my reserve energy and dexterity as some of the things were fairly complex. I resurrected my old washboard routine on a tune called *Basement Blues* played at frantic breakneck speed.

We toured extensively in Indonesia, India (Bombay and Poona) and Hong Kong, and were invited by the Australian Embassy in Peking to do a concert at the Down Under Club in the Foreign Compound. Train to Canton, then vigorous border checks of all our equipment.

This was 1978. There was no nightlife in Peking - just lots of soldiers and posters of Mao Tse-Tung. All the embassies were in one large compound of apartments, and to alleviate the boredom, people would have dinner parties every night, inviting embassy staff from other countries, each of whom returned the hospitality in a sort of Round Robin situation. Duty-free liquor was very cheap and frequent.

Our concert was a great success. There were no Chinese present except the embassy coach driver who looked rather bemused.

Later in Europe, we found that the Polygram Record Company were mystified by our material. It was very eclectic and drew from all the buckets of jazz and swing - a burst of Dixieland - then a tune by *Weather Report*, a Clarence Williams washboard piece and a Dizzy Gillespie bossa-nova. It seems that this doesn't succeed so well in Europe. They liked to know what they were getting - like the Rolling Stones - you get Rolling Stones all the way the same.

I've noticed that this sort of thing applies in America, and perhaps explains why most revival bands keep playing hackneyed old tunes. Maybe because the punters don't know what they like - they like what they know.

A few thoughts on the music . . . The audiences at classic jazz festivals are getting older, and there are literally no young people showing any interest. At least we are 'hanging in there' (another buzz phrase of the nineties), hopefully not to resort to silly gimmickry - the last resort of any art that has lost its capacity to make itself attractive to a paying public by more decorous means. Any art, in short, that begins to sense its own impending obsolescence. There are still pockets of good taste out there.

I have views on rock and pop, but please don't think my reactions are a 'sour grapes' philosophy because they are so popular. I try to look at everything as objectively as I can, even things I don't like. The whole rock thing is a sociological phenomenon. There is no doubt that it has swept the earth. It's not music, just a manifestation of our times, run by businessmen in New York and London. Its called marketing.

But there is a trend now where some of today's jazz players improvise for long periods on one chord or two chords, but I think that is a dead end. I feel that jazz can still be innovative within certain stylistic parameters. Actually, the more rules there are, the easier it is to do good work. That is why there are so many excellent sonnets and so much atrocious free verse.

Nowadays, some rock music has a sort of textural vitality, but rap music is mindless and unspeakable. Of the more avant garde groups, Clarion Fracture Zone and The Umbrellas play contemporary music that sometimes feels pretty good, but these are the types of bands that get Arts Council grants.

If you will forgive a short soap box departure, it seems to me like this: 'Modern' jazz should be called contemporary music - not jazz - for if it is jazz it seems to have lost its way in the labyrinth that has been created by the feverish search for INNOVATION. It has spawned compositions that twitch horribly and never swing - puerile bleatings and honks (that presumably pass for passionate self-expression) and a general air of sanctimonious righteousness, sans vivacity, sans humour, lacking total gesture.

Some of the offerings viewed and heard in a purely objective way can be hilarious, as if watching an eccentric play with actors who are mystified as to the actual plot, playing fragmentary tatters that don't point anywhere.

I'm sure that music was meant to charm and make you feel good, not an algebra of notes, somewhat like abstract art, a chartless quagmire. Having vomited that lot, I'm concerned about the future of mainstream jazz.

And, on the above, there are yuppies and others who won't say they don't like abstract music or art for fear of being considered 'unhip' or 'not with it' - the worst possible scenario in their lives.

There are those who disguise poverty of talent by dressing it up in new clothes or saying conversely that digging a ditch is a new form of architecture.

A few good things - touring America with my brother's band, recording in New York with Ralph Sutton and Milt Hinton in 1983, a session organised by local man Mark Hewitt, and in 1991 I won the Critics Award at the Gold Coast Festival and it was presented by Benny Carter. I told him I used to ride my bike home from school to play *Joe Turner Blues* and *Beale Street Blues* by his band many times over. And I got to play with him alongside Ed Caston. We lost Benny in July this year. A gentleman.

Looking around, I haven't got much time for religion - so much cruelty and hatred. Fairy stories for grown ups.

Summing up on that, I am unable to believe in the divinity of Christ, virgin birth, heaven, hell, the immortality of the soul, or the Bible. But I believe in a first cause and a source of order in the universe, and I think that the presence of conscience in man suggests some divine implantation.

On the subject of drums, most musicians say they don't know anything about them, only that the band can sound good or bad because of them. I feel that one must lean against the pulse and enhance it, or intensify it without any conscious DRUM efforts. If the time is on, it will always swing. Then you use your ears. Your drums are merely an extension of the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet. So, don't PLAY the drums, let the band play them for you.

But here is the curious anomaly: whilst not playing the drums instil energy into the surrounding equipment, like hissing to a recalcitrant child (suppressed rage!), 'Just wait until I get you home', so you strike the drums and cymbals in a drawing back attitude. It's like controlled anger played with exact fine time in each measure.

Pull away until your ears (remember them?) tell you that subtle changes are happening your musical surroundings. Sometimes you must go for the jugular vein but if you can't hear the piano and the bass: (i) they are not doing it property; or (ii) you are playing too loud.

If that all sounds a lot of malarkey, I will be happy to answer questions in more detail, as it's a fairly abstruse theory.

So, in case you are not yet convinced that I am quite mad, my favourite singers are Connie Boswell, Lee Wiley and Mildred Bailey.

My two favourite bands are the Modern Jazz Quartet (subtle, intense, lyrical and emotional) and Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers (really what it was all about - arranged by Morton and played with strutting confidence). Outstanding jazz music!

Favourite single record is *Ring Dem Bells* by Lionel Hampton's Band in 1938 - relentless punch and drive all the way.

I must mention something that Roger Bell (Graeme's brother) once said, 'Nowadays to be very young with no talent is an unbeatable combination.'

So thank you for this opportunity to get my thoughts across, and as I said at the beginning, it was extremely random and somewhat garbled. Now, as Moses once said, 'I must stop now or I shall be getting silly.'

That is why there are only ten commandments.

Don't forget.....

**The 12th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture  
will be presented by  
John Morrison  
*Musician, band leader etc.*  
September 2004**

General enquiries or further information  
may be obtained from:

The Secretary, Doubly Gifted Committee,  
Jeannie Mc Innes, 5 Lodge Avenue,  
Old Toongabbie, 2146  
Telephone: 9631 1183



**DOUBLY GIFTED**