

DOUBLY GIFTED

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2005

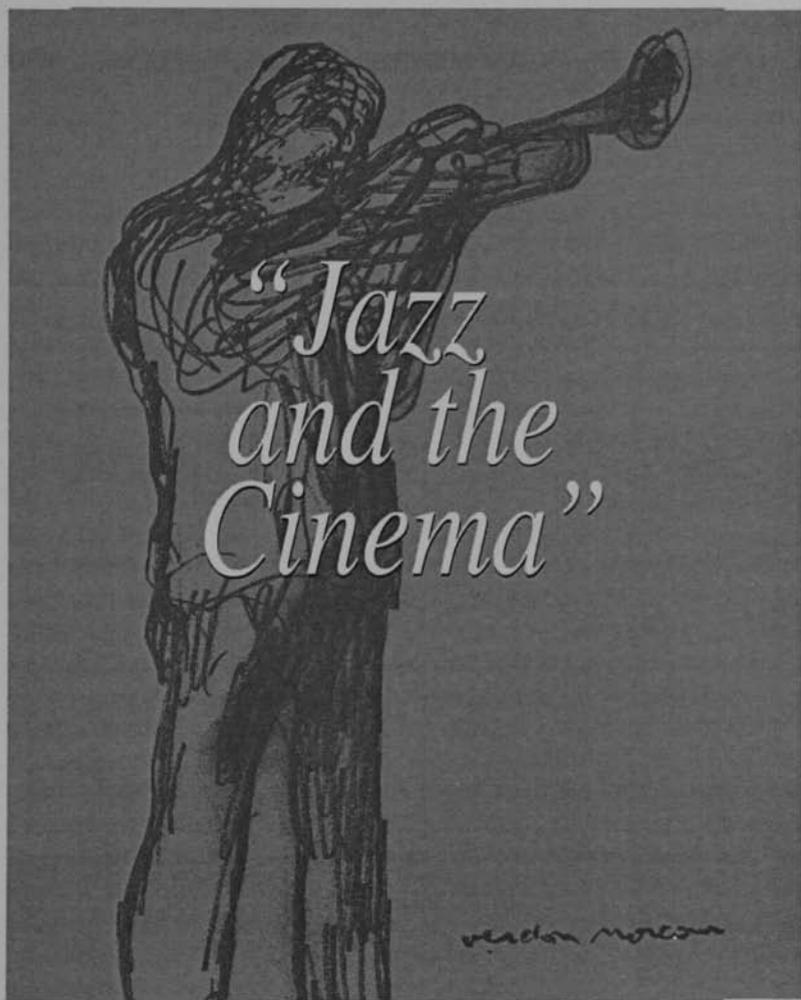


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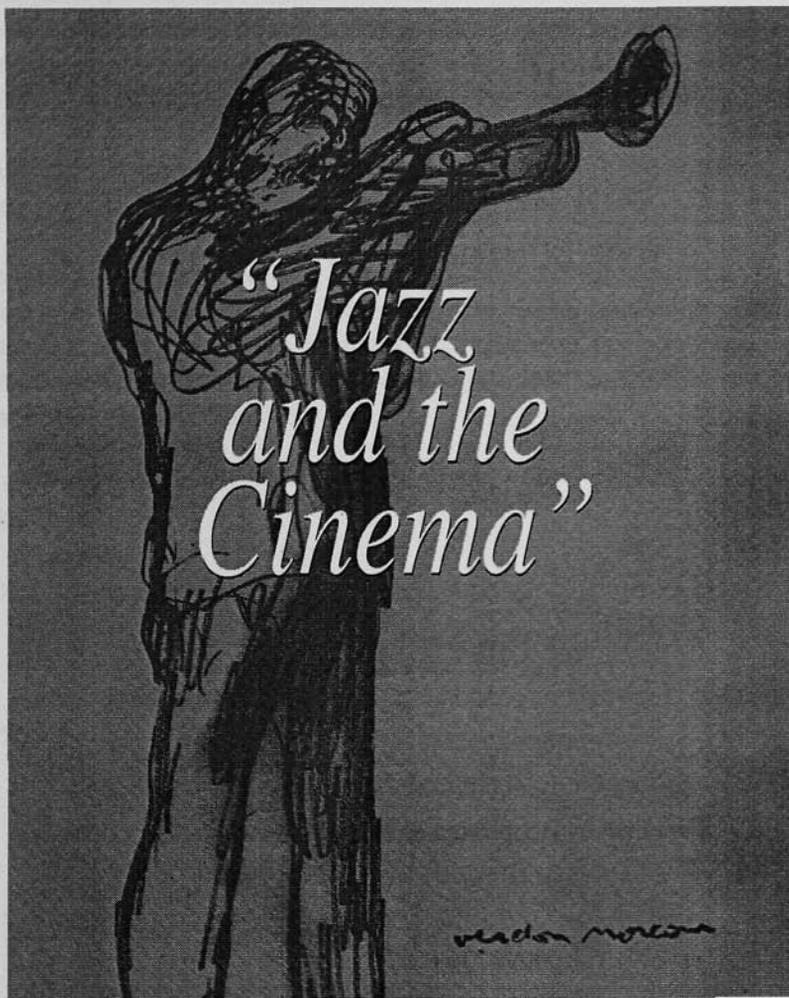


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Jim McLeod

*The Thirteenth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
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Waverley Library

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Introduction

This year, 2005, thanks to Waverley Library, Friends of Waverley Library and Waverley Council, we are able to present our 13th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture. The organising Committee extends sincere thanks to the staff and others for their help and support.

The initiator of both the Exhibition and the Bell Jazz Lecture, the late Harry Stein, would be well pleased with every Lecture given, and once again we are fortunate to have a prominent jazz personality as Lecturer, the widely known and popular broadcaster, Jim McLeod, whose wealth of knowledge and experience are legendary.

Although Jim now spends much of his time in Italy and no longer broadcasts for the ABC, he continues to present jazz segments in Australia, through Ovation TV.

In previous years it has been the custom for the Lecturer to be introduced by the preceding year's Lecturer. However, due to an interstate workload, John Morrison is unable to attend. It is most appropriate, then, that Jim should be introduced by an equally long-standing broadcaster, writer and performer of jazz, Joya Jenson. We thank her for agreeing to undertake this task.

Kate Dunbar
Co-Convenor
Doubly Gifted Committee



Jim McLeod

As a national voice of jazz in Australia, Jim McLeod is the best known broadcaster of, and writer on, jazz in the country. His radio programs have featured Australian and International artists in performance, and in interviews with such notables as Keith Jarrett, Artie Shaw, Wynton Marsalis, McCoy Tyner and many others. Since the 1970's Jim has been attending and reporting, for radio and magazines, from jazz festivals in the USA and Europe. Jim McLeod's Jazztrack was presented on ABC Classic FM over many years and has provided a brilliant archive of Australian jazz, and excellently recorded material for hundreds of CD releases - to the benefit of the artists involved and to the general cause of jazz promotion. In 1994, ABC published a book of interviews, "Jim McLeod's Jazztrack". Jim was recognised in 2000 by the Australian government and the British royalty with an OAM "...for services to jazz through the media." He now presents Jazz On Ovation, an Australian cable/satellite TV service and writes, on a freelance basis, for magazines and websites.



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.

Jazz and the Cinema. Jim McLeod

Welcome to all and congratulations to the committee on the continuing annual Doubly Gifted Exhibition and this Bell Jazz Lecture, dedicated as it is to the distinguished man who is a considerable talent and inspiration in music and in visual arts. As well as enjoying his music and personality for so many years, I have a painting by Graeme Bell hanging in my living room in Collingwood which was borrowed recently for the exhibition at the Victorian Jazz Archive. I would like to thank the committee for asking me to present this 2005 Bell Lecture, and Joya Jenson for the introduction.

I suppose you might think that the most obvious subject for me to choose would be broadcasting – radio and television, since I spent 48 years at the ABC, the larger part of that time broadcasting jazz programs. And nowadays I present jazz segments on cable/satellite TV station Ovation. However, in his 1997 Bell lecture Dr Clement Semmler talked quite a bit about broadcasting, and well he might, because without Clem Semmler very little jazz would have been seen or heard on the ABC, ever. And we might be missing him more and more, the way it is all going at the national broadcaster. So, instead of talking about broadcasting again, I have chosen to talk on a subject of interest to me, and, I hope, to you – and not far removed from the media. Jazz and the Cinema. By cinema I am really referring to Hollywood and the fact that the two parallel arts are both early 20th Century American inventions and, so, almost inevitably intertwined in thought if not in fact. We know that great cinema has come from Europe – and often with links to jazz – and we could make a case that Europeans treat jazz and cinema with greater respect. But our culture has been more influenced by American culture – and it still is and will continue to be – especially our cinema, since our so called Free Trade Agreement with the USA. I happen to think that there is more interesting and more adventurous jazz in Europe as well. However with those thoughts to ponder, I will mostly stick with USA movies and jazz because that is what has been the main scene for all these years.

There's a delightful irony in the fact that the movie which ushered in the 'talkies' – movies with sound – was "The Jazz Singer" in 1927, which featured not a jazz singer, but the popular entertainer of the day, Al Jolson. He did work in 'black face' which I suppose for Hollywood made enough of a connection with jazz. Just to make the point clear, I think we all know that "The Jazz Singer" wasn't the first attempt at sound movies, and indeed "The Jazz Singer" was, I think, only 25% "talkie"; but the commercial success set the path for the future. The first all talking feature length film, also from Warner Brothers, was a gangster film, "Lights of New York" in 1928.

Hollywood has never let fact get in the way of a good idea, and the connection with jazz was a useful one for the film studios, a quick connecting link in the minds of the general public. Too bad that there were so many differing ideas of just what jazz was; or what it meant to different people. Even after movies with sound, actual jazz music was rarely heard – the music of opera, symphony and palm court orchestras being the favoured sounds. To make the point I would like to refer you to the 1934 movie, “Murder at the Vanities” in which the entire Duke Ellington Orchestra, dressed in 18th Century wigs and clothes, is machine-gunned down by a shocked classic conductor who couldn’t bear the pain of hearing them ‘swing’ Liszt’s 2nd Hungarian Rhapsody.

Long before 1927, and “The Jazz Singer”, Hollywood had tied together these two art forms of the 20th Century, film and jazz, as a commercial proposition. We had movies with titles like “The Jazz Monkey” and “Jazz Jailbirds” in 1919; “Jazz Bandits” and “The Girl with a Jazzed Heart” in 1920 – and, even “Children of Jazz” in 1923. You might like to speculate on what “A Jazzed Honeymoon” might have dealt with, but there was such a title in 1923. What these had to do with the music we love is something to wonder about, because they didn’t have sound for a start! But, these early films carried stories which suggested the supposed racy, reckless pleasure-bent life of jazz in the stereotypes so loved by Hollywood, but they also reflected the public perception of the Jazz Age abandon that was the reason for “jazz” in the title.

Let us look at some movies that did deal with the music. Soon after the impact of “The Jazz Singer”, the first commercial movie with sound, there were two notable films by Dudley Murphy that we should mention - in 1930, Murphy made serious and important links between jazz performers and movies. “St Louis Blues” starred blues singer Bessie Smith in her only filmed performance, so it was significant for this alone. The Queen of the Blues, Bessie Smith, appeared for 17 minutes playing a good woman who has to suffer her no-good man taking her money and leaving her for another woman. Based on the ideas of the famous song, the composer, W C Handy, also got to collaborate on the screenplay. The all black cast came from Harlem nightclubs, and stride pianist James P. Johnson played the leader of the band which was made up largely of members of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra.

Dudley Murphy’s second film was based on Duke Ellington’s composition, “Black & Tan Fantasy”. The film was named “Black & Tan” and featured The Duke Ellington Orchestra with a chorus line from the Cotton Club where the Duke so often played since his band first went there in 1927. The story concerned Ellington playing a talented jazz musician who is down on his luck. He meets a dancer, played by Fredi Washington, with a health problem and tries to help her. Also in the film were the Five Hot Shots, a top tap dance act. Because of the historical significance, sections of these two Dudley Murphy films are often used in compilations and video documentaries.

“The King of Jazz” was also made in 1930, to prolong the ridiculous title given to the star of the film, Paul Whiteman. The Rhythm Boys – Bing Crosby, Harry Barris and Al Rinker – appeared in a number of extravagant features, but the lulu of all was a grand finale intended to represent the creation of jazz, “The Melting Pot of Jazz”, in that whole spectacle there were no black faces – Afro-Americans to be seen at the creation of jazz, Hollywood style! While today we may regret the segregation in these early movies, it was the fact and otherwise we may not have had the chance to see these wonderful performers in those days or all these years later. Although many of the roles were stereotypical, they did bring these performers before a wider audience. They also provided employment for them – and in later years often immortalized the artists – as we still watch them and love them today.

Another crafty Hollywood technique in dealing with a mass market involved the scheduling of movies - often complete scenes were purposely shot as a segment which could be edited out for more sensitive areas in the South of USA, without changing, in any way, the sense of the film screenplay. Hollywood was exploiting the artists in a sense, but, as I say, there were benefits for the artists – and for us today.

The idea, from the earliest days of Hollywood, of linking jazz to life in the USA continued – usually connecting jazz to the seedy side of life and crime, but jazz was also used to rally the citizens – for instance, in wartime studios, actors and musicians supported the war effort. Movies boosted the image of an America clean and free, and appealed to one’s honour and duty to one’s country. While you might be risking your life to save democracy, life back home was still fun and dancing – to the greatest bands of the day. Some of the images come to mind:-

The Andrew Sisters and “Don’t Sit Under The Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me” from “Private Buckaroo” in 1942 – there might not have been too much jazz in that but, more in a jazz vein, it also had the Harry James Band.

“Ship Ahoy”, in 1942, had the Tommy Dorsey Band and stars such as Red Skelton and Eleanor Powell in a silly story featuring a leggy dancer on a cruise ship who is asked to transport a mine to Puerto Rico, unbeknown to her she is dealing with spies!.

The classic “Stage Door Canteen”, also in 1942, had both the Benny Goodman Band with Peggy Lee AND the Count Basie band with Ethel Walters! Plus an acting cast including Katherine Hepburn and Gypsy Rose Lee. The flimsy storyline has a young serviceman on a pass in New York City wandering into the canteen where some of the greatest names in music and theatre appear.

Two series of jazz based films should be noted, too. “The Big Broadcast” – the first one in 1932 – which capitalized on the popularity of artists such as the Mills Brothers and The Boswell Sisters, and Cab Calloway performing “Minnie The Moocher”; later in the “Big Broadcast” series, Benny Goodman’s Orchestra and Ray Noble’s Orchestra. These came from the Paramount studios.

Meanwhile Republic Pictures, in the 1930s and 1940s, began a series called "Hit Parade" with Duke Ellington's Orchestra, Ivie Anderson, Rex Stewart, Count Basie Orchestra and Woody Herman's First Herd.

A favourite title and film, just for the names who played in it, was "Reveille for Beverly" in 1943. Ann Miller was a disc jockey (they are not usually so attractive) who plays recordings of jazz instead of classics on her radio spot. The film showed quite a few jazz classics – Basie's "One O'Clock Jump", Bob Crosby's "Big Noise from Winnetka", Betty Roche with Ellington for "Take the "A" Train", Ella Mae Morse sang "Cow Cow Boogie" with Freddie Slack's Orchestra, and Frank Sinatra sang "Night and Day". What a show!

In 1947, "New Orleans" cast Billie Holiday as a maid to an opera singer, played by Dorothy Patrick, who persuades her maid to take her on a visit to a Storyville club. There she sees her own opera coach digging Louis Armstrong! The film had some top jazz as well as Armstrong, music from Mutt Carey, Zutty Singleton, Barney Bigard, Budd Scott, Lucky Thompson, Meade "Lux" Lewis, Red Callender, Woody Herman and Billie Holiday. The happy ending comes with the opera singer performing "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?" in a recital in New York City.

Apart from these obvious music features, dramatically, jazz music and musicians, in the movie-makers' minds, remained linked to crime and misfortune. I suppose there was some justification for this connection in that the speakeasies of Prohibition, run by ganglands most ruthless characters, did have entertainment from jazz bands, leaving a lasting perception from earlier times.

In fact one screenplay, in 1955, was concerned with that connection. In "Pete Kelly's Blues", actor/director Jack Webb plays an ex-soldier and trumpet player whose band finally gets a gig in Kansas City, but after the gangsters move in, and the band's drummer is shot, Kelly is battling with a gangster mob and being forced to employ the alcoholic girlfriend of the mobster as band singer - played wonderfully by Peggy Lee. A fine cast of jazz musicians was featured, including Ella Fitzgerald whose performance of "Hard Hearted Hanna, the vamp of Savannah" stays in my memory forever. The film gave us the opportunity to see and hear Matty Matlock and George Van Eps, and the sound of Dick Cathcart ghosting the trumpet part for Jack Webb, and Eddie Miller ghosting the saxophone for Lee Marvin. I must say, the image of Lee Marvin playing saxophone is a baffling one, really.

A few other well known films with what we might call 'jazz stories' come to mind:-

"Young Man with a Horn" starred Kirk Douglas as a young trumpet player, Rick Martin, who has a gift for music but a weakness for booze – the movie based on a book of the same title and a role based on the life of Bix Beiderbecke

who was, we all know, a brilliant trumpet player who died in his thirties, ruined by alcohol. In the movie though he is rescued by Doris Day – who else? Hoagy Carmichael also had a part in “Young Man with a Horn” as Willie ‘Smoke’ Willoughby.

I would like to mention, at this point, a fine biography film, “Bix the Legend” made by Italian director, Pupi Avanti, in 1990 with music from Bob Wilber who has made himself quite expert at this vintage material. While I’m mentioning Bob Wilber, he also did the music with many fresh transcriptions for Francis Ford Coppola’s “The Cotton Club” in 1984, a film which had good reviews.

“The Man with the Golden Arm”, in 1955, presented the story of a professional card dealer and a jazz drummer, who is ruined by drug addiction. Frank Sinatra was excellent in the lead role, and Elmer Bernstein’s jazz based score, with arrangements by Shelley Manne and Shorty Rogers was great.

We have had recently what I thought was an excellent film with a jazz connection, the Academy Award winning “Ray” – the story of Ray Charles brilliantly played by Jamie Foxx. It was, I think, a faithful attempt to tell the Ray Charles story.

Probably the finest film based on jazz themes was “Round Midnight”. It was actually based on the story of pianist Bud Powell, but, in the film, tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon, proved to be a superb actor, even adlibbing the screenplay frequently, and being nominated for an Academy Award. “Round Midnight” was a particular treat for jazz audiences because it showed many brilliant jazz greats. Herbie Hancock composed and arranged the score and also appeared as the band leader with Wayne Shorter, John McLaughlin, Pierre Michelot, Billy Higgins, and, especially, Dexter Gordon.

But often when Hollywood attempted a biography of a jazz musician, somehow the truth got sidetracked rather than sound-tracked. We will all have our own favourite jazz bio films from Hollywood.

The Benny Goodman Story was probably one of the better ones – not historically correct but close, and with some memorable music – re-creations of Benny’s most famous recordings and appearances from Kid Ory, Buck Clayton, Teddy Wilson, Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa and Harry James. Goodman must have been jumping up and down when they refused to let him play himself, but Steve Allen did a pretty good job, and even looked a bit like Goodman.

Hollywood made rather a mess of the so-called biography of Billie Holiday, “The Lady Sings the Blues”. It was conceived as a vehicle for Diana Ross and her career, rather than a tribute to Billie Holiday. We heard lesser versions of “Lover Man”, “God Bless the Child” and “Strange Fruit”. Carmen McRae told me she walked out of the film in disgust. But then we also should remember that the book, “The Lady Sings the Blues” by Billie Holiday, as a biography, I believe was not too accurate either.

“The Gene Krupa Story” in 1959, (it was called “Drum Crazy” in UK release) starred Sal Mineo as Krupa, and while it might have pulled at the heart-strings, Hollywood style, in some scenes – especially Gene as a potential priest, in Hollywood terms it wasn’t too bad. As someone said of Wagner, “He’s not as bad as he sounds”

As I mentioned earlier, in early Hollywood, soundtracks usually resembled the orchestral scores of symphonic works and opera, or the palm court orchestra – the more romantic era of movies produced lush orchestral scores. Jazz came more and more to the soundtrack after World War 2, through its association with the drama of everyday life and crime, in the minds of producers and directors – an association that went back to the earliest days of cinema. Jazz became more connected with loneliness, violence and conflict, common post war themes. Now it was to be the actual music rather than associated ideas with jazz and jazz based scores adding drama to the story.

Marlon Brando was the star of a number of films which boasted fine jazz based scores. “A Streetcar Named Desire” in 1951, from the play by Tennessee Williams, was set in the French Quarter of New Orleans during the restless years following World War 2. It had music by that superb screen composer, Alex North, and definitely jazz- influenced music. The music for Brando’s role as an ex-prize-fighter, now longshoreman struggling with corrupt union bosses, “On the Waterfront” had an excellent score written by Leonard Bernstein, the American genius of all music who frequently championed jazz. Marlon Brando’s classic “The Wild One” about a gang of 40 motorcyclists, The Black Rebels, was made also in 1954 and had a jazz based score by Leith Stevens. In 1955, Elmer Bernstein wrote for the film I previously mentioned, “The Man with the Golden Arm”.

A number of jazz musicians were writing for Hollywood in the 1950s and ‘60s. Benny Carter who had a very long career as a band leader in America and Europe left the jazz scene to compose for film and TV. Among his successful scores are the films “A Man Called Adam” and “Stormy Weather” and the TV show, “M Squad”. In “A Man Called Adam” Louis Armstrong appeared and Nat Adderley ghosted the trumpet playing for Sammy Davis Jnr. “Stormy Weather” had an all black cast, but what a cast with Fats Waller, Cab Calloway, Ada Brown, and Katherine Dunham’s Dancers, the remarkable dance company which I saw, in person, at the Sydney Jazz Club at the Ironworkers Club in Sydney in the early 1950s where they had come to unwind after their Tivoli show. I was in my mid-teens and learning about jazz with school mates on Saturday nights.

Duke Ellington’s music was a striking dramatic lift for “The Anatomy of a Murder and won the Grammy Award in 1959 for Best Soundtrack Album and Best Background Score for Motion Picture or TV. The story concerned a murder, but the arrested man claimed in his defence of a ‘crime passionel as his wife had been raped by a bar tender. James Stewart played the small town lawyer responsible for defending this difficult case.

The beautiful stylised music of John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet were vital to "Odds against Tomorrow" also in 1959, and screen play which involved planning a bank robbery but also highlighted racial tensions.

Hollywood created classics like "I Want to Live" in an Oscar winning performance from Susan Hayward and with an outstanding score by Johnny Mandel, to dramatise the story of Barbara Graham a criminal involved in vice and drugs who is executed in San Quentin. I have strong memories of Gerry Mulligan, Bud Shank, Frank Rosolino and other top jazzmen on that score. Gerry Mulligan, married at one time to movie star, Judy Holliday – and later, Sandy Dennis – had quite a number of film appearances to his credit. "The Subterraneans" was a travesty of Hollywood attempting to cash in on Jack Kerouac but the music was tremendous from Gerry Mulligan, Art Pepper, Art Farmer, Andre Previn and Carmen McRae!!

In 1977, Martin Scorsese made a film called "New York, New York" set at the end of World War 2 and starring Robert De Niro as Jimmy, a selfish and smooth-talking musician who frequently played the tenor saxophone, but we really heard the sound of Georgie Auld on the soundtrack. Robert De Niro and his co-star, Lisa Minelli won Best Actor and Actress in a Musical/Comedy Awards at the Golden Globe Awards. The song, now very popular won Best Original Song. Georgie Auld should have got something, don't you think?

Perhaps the most amazing use of jazz was for the film in 1957 when French director Louis Malle persuaded Miles Davis to do the music for "Ascenseur pour l'échafaud". Miles would watch the action, and then his group would improvise to the action on film. True improvisation.

Jazz also was the "cool" sound of the "hip" generation. Henry Mancini became a musical celebrity after his most distinctive scores using big band sounds and the cool jazz of West Coast America for Television's greatest private detective "Peter Gunn" in 1958 – this was also the first time in the big time for director Blake Edwards who went on to become one of Hollywood's top directors. He also married Julie Andrews, which has nothing to do with our subject of Jazz and the Cinema. The action of "Peter Gunn" was centred around a jazz club, "Mothers" where we were thrilled frequently to see great jazz players – thrilled no matter that they were in short scenes. Later these same music ideas gave the "Pink Panther" films a special feel. Peter Gunn also gave the cue to many other crime busting private eyes – "Richard Diamond, Private Detective" music by Pete Rugolo; "Johnny Staccato" music by Elmer Bernstein and "Mr Lucky" again music by Henry Mancini.

There were also, you may remember, any number of TV talk shows which had jazz musicians providing the music, and sometimes involved in the discussions. The Steve Allen show had great bands with the likes of Herb Ellis, and Allen

himself was a fine pianist. That tradition continued with Branford Marsalis providing music for The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. Doc Severinson with Johnny Carson; and, in Australia, Paul Grabowsky was the music director for Steve Vizzard's TV show out of Melbourne.

My own personal favourites of jazz on TV were from a program called The Robert Herridge Theatre. In 1957 in a praiseworthy attempt to represent the jazz scene they presented "The Sound of Jazz". The whole casual feel of the show added to the joy of seeing Count Basie & His Orchestra, Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk, Rex Stewart, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Jimmy Rushing and many others. Then, in 1959, Herridge presented the Miles Davis Quintet with John Coltrane, THE band of the time, and three pieces of Miles Davis with the Gil Evans Orchestra. I have never before or since been so glued to a TV screen. Herridge also produced "Jazz from Studio 61" with the Ahmad Jamal Trio and a group led by Ben Webster. How I wish we could have more of these simply produced productions today.

At the same time movies were developing a love for jazz and more documentary style movies were a delight for those of us living in places like Australia where we rarely saw the jazz great perform. "Jazz on a Summer's Day" is one of my favourite films for that reason. It was filmed at the famous Newport Jazz Festival in 1958 by the celebrated photographer, Bert Stern, and his only motion picture. The opening scene shows Bob Brookmeyer and Jimmy Giuffre in action. In what have become regarded jazz classics we also see Anita O'Day in that incredible sun hat; Thelonious Monk, George Shearing, Gerry Mulligan, Mahalia Jackson, Louis Armstrong, and a scene that seems to be special to almost everyone who sees it, where drummer Chico Hamilton maintains a rhythmic pattern playing mallets.

In 1957, Ed Murrow, of television reportage fame, made a film which was really a direct tribute to Louis Armstrong, "Satchmo the Great", which was shot as they followed the All Stars - Louis Armstrong, Trummy Young, Edmond Hall, Billy Kyle, Arvell Shaw, Jack Lesberg, Barrett Deems and Velma Middleton - on a tour of Europe and Africa. We meet W C Handy, who is then 80 years old, blind, listening to a performance of his "St Louis Blues" featuring the Armstrong All Stars with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein. The only ordinary section of the film is the interview by Ed Murrow asking the most banal questions of Louis Armstrong.

"Mingus", a 1968 film about the brilliant jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus took a very candid look at this controversial figure. We see him being evicted from his apartment in New York, and invaluable scenes which show Mingus composing at the piano, reciting poetry, and telling his version of life the way he saw it; and Mingus had quite a different view of most things.

We had better include a mention of “Jazz, a film by Ken Burns” a documentary made in the 1990s for television. It is an attempt to document the history of jazz, and, I guess does a reasonable job for people who don’t know too much about the subject. It makes a useful introduction to the subject but leaves out a number of important musicians,. So it was a huge disappointment to jazz people and created an enormous file of emails on one website. It comes in various versions, too. We saw the briefer series on ABC TV.

In more recent years the most successful documentary of a jazz musician was “Straight No Chaser”, a movie directed by Charlotte Zwerin, produced by Charlotte Zwerin and Bruce Rinker and made from hours of material shot by Christian Blackwood. Clint Eastwood was the Executive Producer, by the way. As you know, the film is a tribute to Thelonious Sphere Monk, the colourful type of eccentric that camera’s love. He had a habit of dancing, in the street, or on the stage when the spirit moved him. In this marvellous film we see him at a huge European railway station, dancing about. We see him and his musicians in performance, travelling, rehearsing. Trombonist Eddie Bert told me that when he was in the Thelonious Monk Big Band they rehearsed once at Monk’s house but he rarely sat at the piano. He danced about which was his way of making sure that the music kept swinging.

Also valuable, but a little too long, was the film about Charlie Parker, “Bird”. The technical feats of actor playing original music by such a superb jazz giant are impressive and the story as dramatic as it is moving. Charlie McPherson played the saxophone, Lennie Niehaus did the score. Perhaps the techniques were greater than the film. But the director, Clint Eastwood, is a dedicated jazz fan and has given jazz a considerable amount of support. He was Chairman of the Monterey Jazz Festival at one time.

Of course, a number of important jazz films have been made away from Hollywood including “Momma Don’t Allow” made by Tony Richardson and showing Chris Barber’s band in an English jazz club; “Tailgate Man From New Orleans” referring to Kid Ory; “Django Reinhardt” on the life of the great guitarist, narrated by Yves Montand; Ben Webster was the subject of “Big Ben” from Holland. A number of European composers wrote jazz scores – John Dankworth and Claude Bolling being outstanding. “Alfie” made in UK in 1966 had a greater impact due to the soundtrack from Sonny Rollins, Ronnie Scott and Stan Tracey. In 1956, Sidney Bechet had a starring role in a French film “Ah! Quelle Equipe”.

Woody Allen makes much use of jazz music in his films – he plays pretty rough clarinet himself as you may have heard on his recording with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. A few notable films of Woody Allen’s where jazz features include “Sweet and Lowdown” (2000) a biography of the legendary swing guitarist Emmet Ray. “September” (1987) the soundtrack of which came from Ben

Webster and Art Tatum recordings; and “Anything Else” in 2003 whence we hear the music of Billie Holiday, Lester Young and Teddy Wilson, and actually see and hear Diana Krall.

Special mention must be made of a film called “The Gig”, a 1985 film about the jazz life by Frank D. Gilroy. Everyone who has seen the movie rates it very highly. There’s a wonderful twist to the film which has an Australian connection. A terrific American jazz trumpeter, Warren Vache, has an acting role in the film in which he does very well playing a trumpet player named Gil Macrae. However when it became time to record the soundtrack Vache was ill. Guess who is the great jazz trumpeter you actually hear – and see Warren Vache miming to – our own Bob Barnard!!

There is an American website which provides a lot of detail about films which have jazz featured. It is www.jazzonfilm.com

Though I did choose to talk about Hollywood, I do think that it is a pity that there is little to say anyway about jazz and cinema in Australia because the motion picture industry still struggles in this country. I know that some fine composing for film has been written over the years by our jazz composers – for instance John Sangster, Don Burrows, Paul Grabowsky in recent years, but there’s precious little to find. “Beyond El Rocco” was an amazing film, with a sort of storyline to suggest the famous Sydney jazz club where many great nights of jazz were heard in the 1950s and 1960s. The Bryce Rohde Quartet, John Sangster, Judy Bailey, Errol Buddle, and many more were featured there. The movie, “Beyond El Rocco”, showed some of these musicians and many other contemporaries, mostly from Melbourne and Sydney.

The 1992 release, “Dingo” was just as amazing. Miles Davis did actually come to outback West Australia to film part of this his only acting role in a film. The story concerns a young Australian, John Anderson, who becomes obsessed with playing the trumpet. The sight of Miles in this outback town with a population of 70 must have been quite an experience for all, including the remarkable Miles Davis. The movie didn’t do that well, but it isn’t that bad, really.

Jazz has had a profound effect on us; otherwise we probably would not be here at this lecture. What impact has Hollywood had on our lives? From the movies we have learnt more about jazz than we might otherwise have done. I remember a colleague at the ABC a few years ago saying that Hollywood had ruined his life because he thought everyday life was going to be like that. Perhaps that is a problem of digesting so much of another culture.

There is much more to this subject of Jazz and Cinema, but this afternoon has been a great deal of fun for me to think about, research, and to present to you for this 2005 Bell Lecture. I thank the committee again for asking me and everyone here for their attention.

I will end with a perceptive quote about jazz, from the movie "The Gig", which every jazz musician will understand: "It's not a religiondevotion is not enough".

Don't forget.....

The 14th Annual Bell Jazz Lecture
will be presented by
George Washingmachine
Jazz violinist
September 2006

General enquiries or further information
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