

DOUBLY GIFTED

The Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, 2006

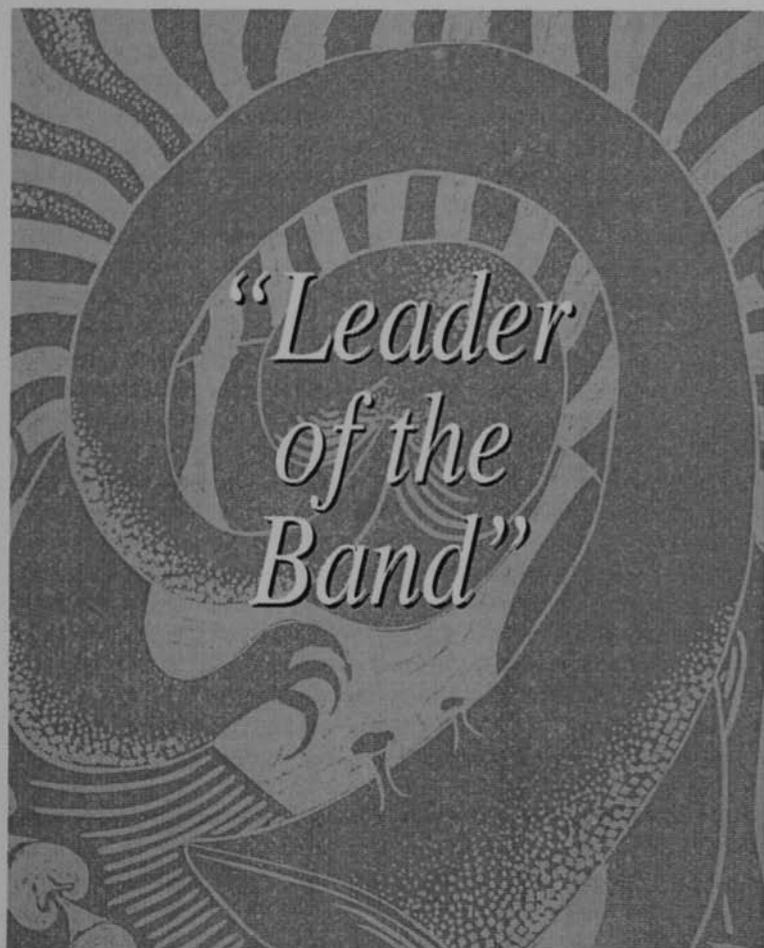


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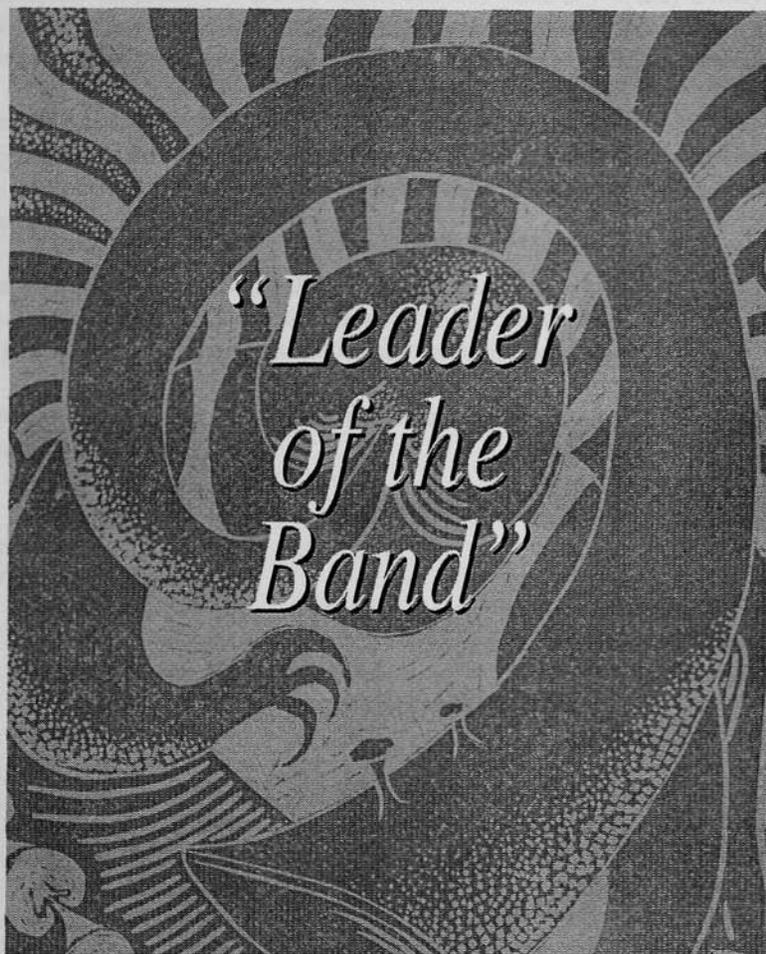


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The Fourteenth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture

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Introduction

In 1991, Harry Stein suggested to the Doubly Gifted Committee that there should be an annual lecture dealing with aspects of our local jazz, and that it should be called "The Bell Jazz Lecture", in honour of our most famous Australian jazzman, Graeme Bell.

Fifteen years on, thanks to Waverley Library and the Friends of Waverley Library, we have been privileged to present thirteen of these Lectures given by men and women connected in various ways to Australian jazz – and all of excellent quality and interest.

However, Ron Lander pointed out to the Committee that our most renowned and venerable jazzman had never been invited to present the Lecture himself. This oversight has now been rapidly remedied and so we are honoured and delighted this year to present Graeme Bell.

What does one say about Graeme Bell? It is almost a case of what hasn't Graeme Bell been able to achieve. He is an artist, composer, pianist, bandleader, known throughout the world, respected by all jazz musicians and a generous hearted friend to many.

What a great pleasure for the Doubly Gifted Committee to present the 2006 Lecturer ... Graeme Bell.

Kate Dunbar
Doubly Gifted Committee



Graeme Bell

Graeme Bell began performing in the world of jazz during the late 1930s and, by 1940, was leading a jazz quartet, The Portsea Four. Four years later he formed his Dixieland Jazz Band, with which he toured Europe in 1947-8 and again in 1950-52. Subsequently he organised and led groups and played widely in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Korea and Japan. For a brief few years Graeme played commercially, until his return to jazz in 1962 with the Graeme Bell All Stars, playing and recording for some thirty-five years, in many venues at home and overseas, both with the group and as a frequent guest artist. After ten years of semi-retirement (during which he made the odd, though frequent, guest appearance), Graeme was instrumental in the revival of the All Stars to play at the Bowral Festival. This was in 2003 and other concerts have since followed. In 2004, in celebration of Graeme's 90th Birthday, a recording was made and published in CD format – Graeme Bell's Reunion Band Plays Australian Compositions. In 1978 Graeme was awarded an MBE and in 1990 was given the Order of Australia. He has now been further honoured by inclusion in the list of winners of the annual Helpmann Awards.

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 over the last fifty years. He is an outstanding pianist, excellent bandleader 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 art displays elsewhere.

Leader of the Band. Graeme Bell

A bandleader can be loved, hated or anything in between. But the greatest reward he can possibly hope for is respect. A diplomatic and democratic approach will, in most cases, earn this respect, and he can then, in such an environment, set about creating the sort of music he is after.

This is not to say that the autocratic dictator doesn't get results. To wit, the likes of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Buddy Rich, to name just three. But I think that easy-going democratic, lead-by-example musicians, such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Eddie Condon, Wynton Marsalis et al, finish up with a more artistic and spontaneous product.

It has been suggested by your committee representative, Ron Lander, that I include aspects and anecdotes from my own career as a background for the life of a bandleader.

In the late 30's, after cruising around in the pool of jazz discovery, our first band of any note was named "Graeme Bell's Dixieland Jazz Band". During the first overseas tour in 1947-8, we de-registered this title to get rid of the word 'dixieland', which we hated. The new name we decided upon was "Graeme Bell and His Australian Jazz Band", thus anchoring us to our geographical origins, of which we were almost obsessively proud. How an Australian band can call itself "The Basin Street Strutters", "The Chicago Stompers", "The New Orleans Newcomers" or such like, was completely beyond our comprehension. It also naturally followed that, where possible, the inclusion of original compositions in every program was a prerequisite. Thus emerged the likes of "Riverina Dreams", "Jumbuk Jamboree", "The Wombat", "Goanna March", "Big Walkabout", "Eurora" etc. The list goes on.

But I was only the nominal leader. It was a co-operative band and we held regular meetings. I had turned full-time professional in 1943 when, because of a lumbar back condition and therefore unfit for military service, I became a musician in an army entertainment unit in North Queensland. Having previously worked as an office clerk, I had acquired certain organisational skills, and what was more important, had more time to run the band. The others were either studying or working day jobs. The actual musical leaders were without a doubt, my brother Roger and Adrian Monsborough. In fact, it was those two who corrupted me, a classically trained pianist, into the tricks of that musical idiom known as jazz. Fronting a band was no great trouble because of the influence handed down by our parents who were in the world of theatre and music.

Of course, the hard yakka for a bandleader takes place off the stage. Getting the work, negotiating terms and conditions over the phone or in writing, arranging publicity, talking to the bosses, discussing staging with caretakers and soundmen,

doing press, radio and television interviews, banking the money and making out cheques for band members, buying a band bus and complete sound system, and probably the most difficult job – working out the program. This to my mind, is one of the more exacting tasks of the bandleader and only a lot of experience can equip him with the insight to read an audience. The locality and venue have some bearing on programming, but this is only the start. You must be prepared to alter your program immediately after assessing the audience, and make a decision in order to accommodate that particular situation. You can usually read an audience in the first half hour and you must have the courage to jettison some of your stuff and replace it with something more appropriate.

In spite of his best intentions, a bandleader is never out of danger of ‘sideman mentality’. The average sideman has not the faintest idea of the diverse roles of the bandleader and is therefore insanely jealous of any extra money “The Boss” is getting. The various chores I have mentioned are only a few of the responsibilities of a bandleader, and for him to receive four times the amount of the sideman would be getting closer to the mark.

When we were in London in 1947-48, after four and a half months in Czechoslovakia, we appointed our friend, ex navy lieutenant Mel Langdon, our manager. He and I and my then wife, Elizabeth and our little daughter Christina, were staying with singer Beryl Bryden at Maida Vale. Each morning Mel and I would don our best attire and do the rounds of the theatrical agents while the rest of the band were sleeping off the aftermath of the previous night’s gig. We also frequented the pubs in the West End where performers and musicians congregated for lunch. It was here that we met Tommy Trinder, who got the band into the famous Hammersmith Palais. We were the first jazz band to play there since the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919.

We believed that if you’ve got a product to sell – and music is a product – then you must present it. Our first uniform consisted of white wind-cheaters and brown corduroy trousers. We used to run on stage and start playing immediately – the wind instruments having previously tuned up. There’s nothing worse than seeing musicians shuffling around on stage, setting up and mumbling about what they are going to play. A bandleader must see that his band plays good music but also entertains. My mother was a contralto in Melba’s touring concert party and my father was an actor with a flair for comedy. Brother Roger inherited this gift and I could relate many hilarious scenarios, but will select just a few. During my piano solo of “Black and White Rag”, Roger and Ade would enter from the wings and quietly set up a card table and two chairs. With serious intent, they would start playing a game. At the appropriate moment, they would gently rise, pack up, and leave the stage before I had finished the final section. It was hard to keep a straight face.

During Lou Silbereisen’s bass feature of “Jersey Lighting” they would start up-stage with a quiet trumpet and trombone riff, while Lou belted out his solo. As the number progressed they would, by shuffling their feet in unison, move

forward until they reached the footlights with a crescendo at the climax of the piece. Justly deserved applause for Lou's solo immediately followed.

Our finale with the old band was – you've guessed it – "The Saints". During the interminable final ensemble choruses, the front line would march around the stage, going back of the rhythm section and finishing up front in their normal positions. This provided a bit of movement and visual change for the audience. Also, by marching away from the microphones, it gave a realistic auditory sense of a 'march past'. There's nothing worse than sitting through a show where the feet of the frontline appear to be glued to the floor by chewing gum. In one theatre in Europe, we rifled through the prop room backstage and donned all sorts of military jackets and caps for this final roundup. The following night we found this wardrobe room securely locked. When I formed the All Stars after moving to Sydney, a similar format was employed where the front-line would march through the audience and back up on stage whilst playing "The Saints" for the final encore. Even the slightest physical contact with an audience will always draw a warm response.

Probably the most outrageous piece of business was when, with my teeth out, a large hat bashed over my head and a huge overcoat draped over my body, I arose from a hastily-flung open trap-door, playing – or pretending to play – a small-sized violin while the rest of the band, doubling up with suppressed laughter, tried to continue playing. During somebody's solo I would quietly slip off stage and Jack Varney, our guitarist / banjoist, would replace me on piano. Hardly anybody would notice this. The pianist is the least object of scrutiny. He is the most invisible. An audience's focus is always on the wind instruments. Mel, our manager, would be waiting for me in the wings with a clean handkerchief to accommodate my false teeth. We'd both then nip down underneath the stage. A chair or stool for me would be placed under the trapdoor, which Mel would push open at the appropriate moment. I'd then pop up, visible from the waist only, and execute my crazy act. My exit would be as brisk as my bewildering entrance and, with all trappings discarded and uniform intact, I would go back on stage and quickly slide onto the piano stool and the piece the band was playing would progress to its conclusion. What the audiences thought of all this we never knew. But one could be certain that they were completely dumbfounded and possibly wondered if all Australians behaved this way. It was early post-war Europe. The theatres were geared for drama and opera, hence the tempting availability of a centre-stage trapdoor. We young rascals grabbed every opportunity to utilise the facilities on hand, but without, I must say, compromising the quality of the music expected of us.

I applied the same emphasis on entertainment content when, having moved to Sydney in 1957 to take up a hotel residency which comprised mostly commercial music and very little jazz, I was offered a dream job in the early 60's. This was a two-year contract to play jazz at the then-existing Chevron Hotel at Potts Point in the glittering Kings Cross district. We played seven performances per week,

consisting of six four-hour night sessions and a three-hour Saturday matinee. In addition to the dance music, we were required to accompany a guest artist and also present our own comedy floorshow. The guest artists, who were booked by an agent on a weekly basis, had their own specially arranged music, so every member of the band had to be a sight-reader. For our own comedy routine, trombonist Ken Herron was the natural comedian this time. It is not within the scope of this talk to go into great details other than to mention that these band floorshows, which took many hours of arranging and rehearsal, lasted four weeks each and included themes such as: Roaring Twenties, Black and White Minstrel, Hill-Billy, Circus and chaotic Slapstick. For the latter, I arranged the "Poet and Peasant" overture integrated with smoke bombs, car horns and the usual knock-about repertoire reminiscent of silent movies. For this we all wore a full set of 'tails' and bouffant wigs.

So what's the relevance of all this to the work of a bandleader? To entertain the audience at the same time as supplying quality music – yes. That's just what I've been trying to convey, but there is another dimension and a very important one – to keep the musicians keen and interested. Of course we must remember that times were vastly different in those days half a century ago. You worked every day in a resident job just the same as an accountant, a carpenter, a doctor or a shop assistant etc. Therefore boredom was just around the corner. So a bandleader had to counter this by adding ancillary interest to the job. There were many methods one could use to achieve this. No matter how large your repertoire, you are bound to play some of the more popular tunes over and over again. Say one of these repetitive war-horses is in the key of Eb. So what I did one night, as we were about to play it for the umpteenth time, I shouted to Bob Barnard, "Let's do it in F", and proceeded to count it in. Immediately an electrifying and fresh excitement emerged from what had become a dreary and stale old piece of musical boredom. A bandleader relies on the quick reflexes of a good sideman, and, as a leader of the frontline, nobody was quicker on the uptake than the great Bob Barnard, and I've had some very close runners-up since!

It is tempting, of course, to throw overboard tunes that the band is utterly sick of, but the customers, after all, are the ones paying the money. So the above example is just one of the ways of reaching a compromise. In the old days, Roger and Ade were well-known jazz tragics, and would want to change the items on a program at the drop of a hat. This was much to the discomfort of our German comper during our 35 concert tour of West Germany in 1952. Our tune-list, which he held in his hand, became a mess of crossings-out and additions, which drove him mad. Understandably, I guess, because he was an actor who'd been used to the constancy of the same script each night he went on stage.

The music game abounds with stories. And I know you are expecting me to relate as many as we have time for. We have talked about general stage appearance. The leader must see that shoes are polished and clothes neatly pressed etc. Mel, the first band's manager, used to keep a comb and brush in the wings and all instruments had to look their best. Ade Monsbourgh prided himself in the

fact that his instrument case was never opened except on the job. One night when he opened it, a rotten, half-eaten apple was found wedged in the bell of his alto sax.

I have done many tours for the ABC Concert Department. Once, when coming down in the lift of our hotel in Townsville to make my way to an afternoon rehearsal and sound check, a gentleman, the only other occupant, said to me "Are you here for a business convention?" I said "No, I'm on tour for the ABC with the Graeme Bell All Stars". He replied, "Geez, he's been going for a long time". Yes, you may well laugh – and that was 30 or 40 years ago!

During the early sixties, Ray Price's band and my All Stars had regular gigs on different days at the Macquarie Hotel, Woolloomooloo. I remember that one of our shifts was on a Saturday afternoon, after which, with less than half an hour to spare, we'd have to make a mad dash up George Street to the Ironworkers Hall to play the night session for the Sydney Jazz Club. I was hurrying out the hotel door when a bloke confronted me. "I've been a fan of yours for years and love your music. Would you be good enough to let me have your autograph?" Complying with his wish, I smiled and thanked him for his words and handed the book back. As I turned to hurry up the hill, he called back "Gee, thanks Mr Price".

Apart from getting work, another job of a bandleader is to be constantly replenishing the repertoire. A repertoire designed to satisfy both audience and musicians. Sometimes it is a case of 50/50. Fifty percent to propel the musical creativity of the band and the other fifty percent to feed the commercial greed of the employer and, above all, to strike a balance that will satisfy the paying customers. A leader must be musically trained in order to be capable of writing arrangements, where necessary, for new material and backgrounds for singers etc. For all this, although he may not have the skills to actually play the other instruments, he must, nevertheless understand their capabilities such as, keys, range etc., and be able to write out the parts in manuscript form. Also a minimum of conducting methods is necessary for colla voce passages and rubato endings when a downbeat signals a final chord and a cut-off signals its instant demise. We toured Papua New Guinea several times and on the invitation of Tom Shacklady, the conductor of the police band, attended an open-air gig one day. He got Speddo (Graham Spedding) and Bob Barnard to sit-in and here they were, sitting behind their respective music stands wearing the police berets, and I was ushered, or politely pushed, to the conductor's podium. All was going reasonably well until a breeze blew up and the pages of the conductor's score started to blow backwards, with the result that I was still conducting after the band had finished! The high-pitched laughter of the indigenous musicians was enough to send waves of happiness throughout the whole of Port Moresby.

We toured the main townships of Papua New-Guinea several times. The concerts were organised by the Red Cross and the audiences consisted of ex-pat Aussies and their working associates. At our instigation, a concert was arranged

in a local hall in Port Moresby for the indigenous population. These were peaceful and friendly days before the emergence of the so-called 'rascals'. Knowing that our music would be strange to their ears, we decided to call on our plentiful supply of comedy. They absolutely loved it and laughed their heads off. One of Ken Herron's best pieces of business was to walk off stage blazing away into the wings and to disappear, still playing, from some back door and out of the building. With eyes narrowed, we'd peer about with a "where the hell's he gone" look and the audience would be craning their necks in every direction. All of a sudden Ken's macho trombone sound would be heard coming from the back of the hall after he'd entered the front door. He'd then march down the centre aisle blasting away and rejoin the band, accompanied by wide-eyed excitement and applause. On one occasion, he managed to get up into the dress circle, or mezzanine and the first notes of his re-emergence would be heard as he leaned over the balcony with ear-splitting trombone slides.

The Sydney Club audiences loved it when I announced that Ken, in addition to being a great instrumentalist, had a most appealing tenor voice. To my piano accompaniment he would sing "By Killarney's Lakes and Fells". Speddo, with painted moustache and slickly-groomed hair, would enter in white smock as a barber. Tying a bib around Ken's neck, he would lather up his face whilst the song continued. When Ken reached the full-throated final note, the brush would be jammed into his wide-opened mouth. A mad, angry chase through the crowd followed, causing mayhem. When petite singer Lesley Lambert was with us, she'd come on with Speddo, dressed in mini-skirt, dainty apron and bonnet. She held the tray of shaving gear whilst Speddo went to work.

Trombonist and vocalist Ken Herron was capable of playing other instruments, and if an urgent call to business cropped up and I had to leave the bandstand, he would take over the piano. The situation in the Oasis Room at the Chevron Hotel was very intimate, and the level of the stage was only a couple of hand breadths above the tiny dance area. One night when Ken was on piano, a customer leaned over and asked him for a request. Ken said "Well, you'd better wait until Graeme comes back". Unaware of all this when, after some management discussion I returned to the stage and was back playing with the band, a man came up and touching me on the shoulder said "is he back yet?"

In the early days in Melbourne with the 'old band', we often played balls in the St Kilda Town Hall. The bandstand was curiously placed in the centre of the ballroom. Dinner suits and fashionable female gowns were de rigueur. Pulling her low-cut gown off one shoulder, a good-looking 'bird' approached the bandstand one night asking me to autograph her now completely exposed breast. Without hesitation, I complied. One week later we were back for another ball at the same venue, and here's this same girl fronting up again. She proudly displayed my signature situated above her nipple. "I've avoided having a shower since you graced my body with your signature" she said. I was never able to remember what we played in the following dance bracket.

Touring with the All Stars for the various State Arts Councils was always a joy. We did every State plus the Northern Territory. The pay was top of the range and conditions were excellent. Single motel accommodation was provided, as this was the only piece of privacy in which one could indulge during the long days of travelling in the band bus and performing on stage. Then there were the after-the-show receptions. These were the little thank-you and getting-to-know-you supper and drinks affairs which were held at the home of one of the Committee's members. The lady president would make a speech to which the bandleader had to respond. As a rule, these little rituals were very relaxed and jokes and laughter would take place in a friendly environment. But there were a few times when a rather stiff and so-called upper-class approach brought forth the inevitable reaction from the typical jazz musician's healthy larrikinism. Once again it was the bandleader's job to calm the waters. Except on those occasions where he himself was the main offender, after being provoked by some haughty or patronising attitude.

Probably the most boring activity of a bandleader is doing interviews, photo shoots, signing documents and autographs, and doing the sums. Although patrons seek the autographs of all band members, the one who is most sought after is the bandleader because his name appears to represent the band in question. I remember once, after a big concert in the Birmingham Town Hall, being seated behind a table in the foyer signing my name for hundreds of patrons who had been placed in an enormous queue.

After leaving Melbourne, I had spent a disastrous year in Brisbane, which incidentally, coincided with Len Barnard's dissolution of a disastrous tour. My first permanent gig when I moved down to Sydney in 1957 was at the Bennelong Hotel in Beverley Hills. The line-up was a trio, with Johnny Sangster on drums and a singing bass player by the name of Tom Monk. We played six nights per week and Saturday afternoons for two years. On Friday and Saturday nights, the attendance in the lounge hit the thousand mark. The waiters, holding trays containing full jugs of beer over their shoulders, took up their positions and waited for the doors to be flung open. There was no breathalyser in those days. In would rush the patrons to the strains of the only jazz tune we would play all night. The remainder of our three hours would be taken up by tunes from the hit parade plus the accompaniment of the different guest artists per night. Tuesday evenings and Saturday afternoons were given over to those dreadful talent quests. Mounting the stage, a contestant would hand you a beer mat with some writing on the back. "Here's a list of my songs". "And what key would you like this one in?" Striking a chord on his guitar he'd say "This one." "And what tempo would you like?" "Just watch my foot". Any intro other than the last four bars of what they were about to sing was a complete disaster. The professional guest artists were a different matter, and covered the entire spectrum of the showbiz scene. There were jugglers, acrobats, magicians, dancers, fire-eaters, trick cyclists, multi-instrumentalists, mouth-organ and gum-leaf players and singers of every genre: pop, folk, country and western, lounge and the odd opera singer. These guest artists whose appearances were all booked by an agency had their

own written arrangements. Like all the musicians on the circuit, we all had to be sight-readers. It was a bonus for me when the word got out that I could do arrangements. So with all these artists going through each week, I got quite a bit of extra paying work in this direction.

This venue became so successful, that when I told the boss that John Sangster was able to play vibraphone but couldn't afford to buy a set, he kindly paid for one and deducted a small weekly sum from John's wages. Do pub owners do those sorts of things now? I don't think so. Not only that, this boss used to pay for the singles of all the hit tunes as they came out so that I could transcribe them to music for us to play. But the best of all was when I asked him if we could increase the trio to a five piece jazz ensemble for Friday and Saturday nights. The answer, believe it or not, was yes! So Sangster went onto trumpet. Johnny McCarthy came in on reeds and Alan Geddes took over the drum kit. Where are those pub bosses now? This job in Sydney started me off as a real bandleader. I was now my own man and not dependent on the musical policies of the old band in Melbourne. I was learning to handle the whole baggage of what a bandleader must carry. For a Melbourne musician, the career of a professional musician in Sydney was, particularly in those days, poles apart.

One day at the Bennelong Hotel, I think it was one of the Saturday afternoon sessions and we'd just walked off stage for a break. I noticed some animated conversation at a table not far from the bandstand. The occupants were glancing our way and heads were either nodding or shaking in disagreement, when all of a sudden, one stocky little man approaches me and says "Are you Graeme Bell?" I said "Yes, that's right." With a defiant glare and chin stuck out, he replied "Pig's arse, he's in America". He strutted back to his table, leaving me completely bewildered. There was nothing I could say, so with a shrug of my shoulders, I just moved away thinking to myself "if he's in America, who the hell am I?"

Although autograph signing can be boring and tiring, it is part of the territory, and an effort to maintain a pleasant response to vacuous remarks is the best way to go. Fans will assert that you've played in such and such a place, and I've learned, eventually, that no matter how incorrect or bizarre the question is, the best way out is to agree. One woman swore she saw me in Warsaw. I've never been to Poland in my life. Quite often, others say "How was it in Russia?" Many often tell me, to this day, how much they loved my Port Jackson Jazz Band. One man told me his brother had played in my band. When I asked him what instrument he played, he replied "piano". Over a long period, musicians play in the same venues many times. The Melbourne Town Hall, in the old days, was no exception. A lady with an eager, smiling face and eyes lit up with anticipation of my shared enthusiasm, said to me "Remember the Melbourne Town Hall?" I am ashamed to say that I couldn't resist the reply, "Yes, it's on the corner of Swanston and Collins Streets". The most odd remark one gets is "You're one of my greatest fans". Commenting on this once, Patricia Thompson (aka Little Pattie) told me that she too was often on the receiving end of this most peculiar piece of 'reverse swing'.

I have never felt guilty about the fact that I have sometimes booked a musician for the band who was, shall we say, slightly technically inferior to another, because he had a better stage personality. Having a non-reader can also be a great handicap. I remember at one venue, many years ago, I had to replace a reed player with Paul Furniss, who was an excellent reader. The player in question, although a good natural musician, was not a reader, and therefore did not comply with the requirements of the job.

I have never subscribed to the theory of telling musicians how to play. There are many other ways of obtaining the sounds you require, and if you lead by example, it is uncanny how the intelligent sideman will cotton onto what you are after. Of course, mutual cooperation and trust is the name of the game. Many of the ideas for head-arrangements with the All Stars, for instance, came from the collective minds of two or more players and myself. Both Bob Barnard and Ken Herron contributed hugely to the first All Stars line-up, as did Paul Furniss and Bob Henderson to the last group. Then you get the practical and inventive mind of a Graham Spedding. There was not a single idea or trick that we wanted in our floor shows that he couldn't manufacture and bring to life. They can all contribute, and a bandleader should let it be known that he welcomes ideas from every one of the musicians.

In Australia, one encounters the same feeling of mateship in bands as one does in sporting teams. In England, however, the leader is the 'Guv'nor'. He is the boss and I think the situation in the U.S. is much the same.

I talked a minute ago about 'head-arrangements'. For the uninitiated, this is the arrangement of musical figures and harmonies not written down. Rather, they are worked out and memorised by the musicians in their heads. These musical ideas which serve as a nice framework for the improvisational sections of a piece, are usually devised at a rehearsal. But they can also be the result of cliff-edge spontaneity actually on the job, thus contributing greatly to the excitement generated by working without a safety net.

Although a career as a bandleader can afford one tremendous creative outlets and generate great satisfaction, nothing can compare with the easy relaxation of being a sideman. All the bandleader's responsibilities are cast aside. You are told what to play, when to play it, the starting time, the finishing time, and then you can go home. At the end of each week, you are presented with a pay packet. I experienced all of this in 1968 when, for about three months, I became part of Terry Lightfoot's band. My family and I were holidaying in Europe and he contacted me to ask if I could prolong my stay to join his band. I was picked up and delivered back each night to Victoria Station, from which I then caught my local train home to Bromley, Kent, where we were renting. The band bus, driven by Terry, transported us all over the U.K. Sometimes I wouldn't get home until three or four in the morning. Unlike it is in Australia, the provincial employers do not pay for accommodation, so you always without fail, return to London. Terry was the "Guv'nor" and controlled everything. When it was his birthday, he

shouted drinks all round until it was discovered that he had the incorrect day and he had to do it all again the following night. My feature solo (the pianist in a pommy band just gets one solo) was "Maple Leaf Rag". Scott Joplin always insisted that his ragtime compositions should not be played fast, and eventually had his publisher have these instructions printed on the music. He would have been horrified, because after the first night, Terry said "Not like that - I want you to thrash around". After that I had to play it at break-neck speed every night.

The English bands work much harder than we do here, and there is a higher standard of professionalism. In a three-hour gig you get one break. In the second half we used to dwell on the drum feature of "Caravan". While Richie Bryant was toiling away on his drum kit, it gave us a chance to sneak to the toilet. There, with great relief, I'd line up at the urinal alongside the likes of Ian Hunter-Randall and Mickey Ashman. We'd look at one-another and say "Thank god for Caravan!"

Some people talk of the demise of traditional jazz, but this is only part of a general draught in all 'live' acoustic music. All forms of jazz have completely lost their grass-roots appeal. Classical music is also feeling the pressure and has had to counter this with a very aggressive and costly marketing formula in order to put bums on seats. Trad jazz is mostly confined to special events such as festivals, whereas contemporary jazz relies heavily on grants. Commercial radio completely ignores jazz, and let's be frank, the community jazz broadcasters reach an audience mostly comprising older sections of the public. Big swing bands and jazz courses in schools are to be highly commended, but mean little out of their scholastic environment. Where do the kids play when they leave school? Graduating in classical studies also opens up a frustrating future. Where are the once ubiquitous trios in restaurants and hotel lounges now?

Getting back to jazz, the big shopping centres used to be a regular outlet. But the writing was on the wall years ago. I remember my band playing in one of these well known and popular malls, and children walking past with their hands clasped over their ears. The music was too foreign for them. As the great Len Barnard used to say, "anywhere west of Central Station is a 'no-go' area for jazz."

So what's the answer? The public have to want the music. You can't foist a culture in the form of a musical idiom on them. I, personally, don't believe in a revival, but - 'live' music, both classical and jazz, can be preserved as a 'boutique' art music, and here's where the bandleader makes his contribution. He's got the product, but now he must sell it. Paul Dyer, harpsichordist and leader of Sydney's Brandenburg Orchestra, had colourfully-attired dancers striking statuesque poses to support a program of medieval music at a concert in the City Recital Hall which I recently attended. Richard Tognetti, leader and violinist of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, has all his musicians standing up and playing with bodily animation. Both leaders communicate verbally, where appropriate, with the audience. I once heard Simone Young, when conducting the S.S.O., put

her baton down and, facing the audience, commenced a little speech with the words, "I'm originally a Sydney girl" Just another example of how the stiff, conservative approach has had to give way to a more informal and intimate connection with the audience. It's hard to compete with electronically enhanced entertainment which relies on flashing lights, ear-splitting noise, sex and the smashing of stage props – all to support 'music' of very dubious quality. But we can only try by being more assertive and creative in our presentation of top quality music of all genres.

All forms of jazz have now been virtually outlawed by commercial radio, and to a lesser extent, by the print media. Its visibility with the general public is negligible. The smart, young, bald-headed suits and the shapely skirts who gather after work to chatter over their chardonnay and Hahn beer have never even heard of Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker, and a few streets away at the local club, the thick necks and blonde bimbos would never have even heard of Bob Barnard or Judy Bailey, let alone Ade Monsborough or Johnny Sangster.

A frightening thought emerged recently regarding the average age of the members of a jazz audience. Enthusiasms raged regarding the recent popularity of twenty-four year old Michael McQuaid's "Red Hot Rhythmakers" – all in their twenties. It was thought by many, that here was a band, at last, which would draw in the younger generations. Not so, however. Why? Because at their concerts, as in all jazz concerts, you will encounter a veritable sea of white-haired seniors, and the young people of today wouldn't be seen dead sitting amongst them. I have talked to Michael himself on this, and we both sadly agree on the accuracy of this assumption.

But let us not despair. The inner musical workings of jazz will never be understood by the masses any more than they understood Bach. And that was 300 years ago. At the height of jazz popularity it was the rhythm, the beat, the glamour and excitement which drew the people in. They would have understood no more about the musical intricacies of Louis Armstrong's "Potato Head Blues" than they would have about Bach's 48 preludes and fugues. And the same situation applies today. But this doesn't matter. They can just sit back and let the musical beauty and warmth of feeling waft over them and come out inspired and alive. What more satisfaction can the leader of the band have than that?

Don't forget.....

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