Popular Music and Australian Culture

Popular Music and Australian Culture:

Across the Grain

By

Bruce Johnson

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PREFACE

The provenance of this collection exemplifies John Lennon's adage that life is what happens while you're making other plans. Originally commissioned by Professor Richard Nile of Curtin University, under the auspices of the Australian Public Intellectual (API) network, the publication date was scheduled for around 2004. I want to express my great appreciation to the API network, both for that particular invitation and for its commitment to its larger objective of fostering the intellectual life of Australia through its imaginative range of initiatives. Various circumstances intervened after the MS was submitted, some beyond my control or even knowledge, but including my own relocation to Finland in 2005 for some years. This all led to the lapse of the original arrangements. It was only some years after my return to Australia that I was reminded of the project and, to my delight, Cambridge Scholars Publishing took it up again. My thanks to them.

My brief from API was Australian culture and, in most cases, this was straightforward. The essays in Part One are specifically anchored in Australia's responses to the twentieth century, with primary focus on music. As I read them, however, it seemed to me that there was a hidden dynamic at work which needed to be made explicit. It is to do with methodology – or, to put it another way, they all 'have attitude'. If it is stretching things to call it an Australian attitude, then at least I can say that I think it is an attitude I have because I am an Australian. Frankly, one way or another, all of these were written out of a sense of some dissatisfaction with then-dominant intellectual discourse.

My first direct experience of the sense of an intellectual 'centre', to which I had been at an uncomfortable angle, was the period I spent on my doctoral research in London, from late-1969 to the end of 1971. I made many friends, but in one way or another I was made to understand that conviviality was tacitly conditional upon my behaving like an Australian. This involved manifesting certain characteristics which, while apparently endearing, lacked the same kind of intellectual gravitas to which the locals were entitled. There was no malice in this, just the expectation that I would behave like a postcard. People felt more comfortable with me if I drank beer and asked where the dunnie was than if I engaged in discussion about metaphysics. I think that this experience is one that many Australians would recognize.

There are several responses. At one end of the spectrum, exaggerate the stereotype; at the other, try to assume the complexion of 'the centre', changing your accent and deportment literally and metaphorically. Both of these seemed to generate an imposture that denied the particular history that made us. If we bring the latter persona back home to Australia, it produces an alienating disdain for our own place. In 1972, when I began my own career as a university lecturer, that disdain for where we started, that embarrassment about encountering ourselves, seemed still to be a very powerful force in academic life.

At that time, it was reflected in biases towards a canon defined by Englishness and an ossified notion of 'literariness'. I embrace English literature, for it has enriched my life and understanding beyond measure, but I felt prickly when this bias required me to be apologetic for certain kinds of Australian cultural reality. The orthodox interests of sectors of 'The Humanities' came to seem strategically distanced from Australian humanity. There were also certain assumptions about intellectual life and its relations of power that were not open to question; after all, they provided the foundations of academic authority. These silences became very interesting to me because, rather than being trivial, they seemed to me to hold significant answers to the question of why we were the way we were. It was the trivialisation and marginalisation of certain realities of consciousness and experience that made them interesting. What we hide is so often more revealing than what we display. What's in the dust in the cracks and behind the cupboards? This interest is manifested in the kinds of subject that I am attracted to as a researcher: writing of matters that were largely disdained by literary studies, yet which satisfied some significant social appetite; music that was largely ignored by musicology, yet clearly important to great numbers of people. 'Corniness', for example, became fascinating.

The kind of curiosity these puzzles generated also informs the methodologies that seem to underpin the way I think about research and knowledge. Academic life is conventionally the life of the mind. Yet, once we decide to conduct cultural studies, we must confront the fact that all of us live in the body. The highest knowledge is thought of as the province of reason, yet reason is frequently absent from our cultural negotiations. The academic mind could solemnly declare the meaning and value of various artifacts or texts, yet people went on using them in blissful and unpunished indifference to this intellectual legislation.

The line of thinking beginning to unfold for me was: don't just study that which is academically authorised - indeed, don't study solely *in a way* that was academically authorised, since it was that which seemed to cast shadows as often as light. If, as researchers and teachers, we were

seeking to engage with our cultural life in a way that enriched experience, then something was missing; not only in what kinds of practices and processes we were addressing, but also in the way we were doing so. Indeed, it seemed that as soon as some hitherto trivialised phenomenon was legitimised by the usual kinds of academic scrutiny, it was frozen and isolated in the spotlight: 'You will be visible only on my terms'. To know was to take control.

I began to find myself drawn to different areas and forms of enquiry, particularly auditory cultures and modalities, and ethnography. I found energy in areas of study still off-centre. Rather like those shadowed informants in T.V. documentaries on various unauthorised practices ('It all started when I realized I liked wearing rubber-suits lined with jam'), it was only in the late twentieth century that I discovered I was apparently something which was coming to be called a cultural phenomenologist. The articles in Part Two give glimpses of the logic of that particular path. The point is that, while those essays are not always explicitly on specifically Australian subjects, I think they say something about an approach to cultural studies that grows out of my being Australian.

It is not distinctive (in the sense of unique) *to* Australia. I feel a similar off-centred curiosity in Finland and to an extent in other Nordic countries, and I think there's a study in that. It is, however, distinct *from* attitudes that seem to dominate as we move closer to the traditional and hegemonic academic centres. If we want to conduct 'Australian Studies', then, by including those essays I am trying to make the point that the field is not confined to what we study; it also involves the exploration of how and why we study. Even if Australia is not explicitly present in these essays, they are all informed by my experience of Australian music and culture as an observer-participant in a specific time and place.

While all of these essays represent prior public presentations, not all of them have been in academic journals; some were conference papers and one was an online publication. To that extent, much of this material is available in this form for the first time. In addition, there is material which has not been presented in any form outside of, for example, seminars, and this is incorporated here as expansions of various articles. Where I have made revisions, they have not been to hide the evidence of misdeeds. The general arguments remain as they were originally (likewise, the dates of the reference material), but there are minor changes. Some of the material here is actually a conflation of several shorter fragments that were broken down to fit the constraints of the original forum, and now put back together as originally conceived, with the joints soldered and sanded. In a few cases I have added a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph that foregrounds the

Australian connection. Other revisions have either been minor stylistic clarifications, or, particularly in the case of 'Home, Sweet Home revisited: Gallipoli to Gundagai', a more extended documentation of the argument.

Many of these essays began life as rather speculative work-in-progress conferences or other professional presentations, and I would like to record my thanks to all those colleagues who allowed me to workshop ideas in that way, and who provided a steadying hand. Many of those presentations went on to become refereed articles, with all the chastening that is required to achieve that form. Others, however, remain speculative broad-brush sketches that signify the early stages of a hypothesis trying to become a thesis. In some ways, these are therefore the most vulnerable to critical scrutiny, but I still think they are useful as opening up lines of thought. They provide their own form of provocation, and I have on several memorable occasions had my intellectual life more creatively transformed by hearing a conference paper than is often the case with the follow-up print research.

The prefatory notes to each essay give the specific relevant acknowledgement, but I also wish to acknowledge (with thanks) all those collegial organizations that provided various forms of support - including time, space, and funding - which enabled me to produce this work over the last decade. Most notably: my own Faculty of Arts and School of English at the University of New South Wales, and Fellowships and fellowship at the Department of Folk Tradition, University of Tampere; the Department of Cultural History, University of Turku; the Department of Cultural Research, University of Joensuu (all in Finland); the University of Aarhus (Denmark); the Institute of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool (England), the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow (Scotland). I want to add a personal acknowledgement of friend and colleague at the University of Technology Sydney, Liz Giuffre, who over many years has been of invaluable assistance in researching, preparing and formatting my work, including in this instance.

I said that I have not modified the argumentative thrust of these essays. If I did so, it would be because of primary research I have conducted since I originally wrote them, but also because of the published research of others. There seems to have been a shift in Australian studies over the last two decades. Some of this is exemplified in my prefatory notes to each essay. More generally, the work of Richard Nile and colleagues in developing the API network was both a manifestation and driver of this change. Most of the research represented in this volume is on Australian music. Since I wrote the earliest piece here, scholarship in that area has been both quantitatively and qualitatively transformed in ways that gratifyingly

compromise some of the generalisations I have made in these essays about the state of such studies. The community expanding under the aegis of the Australia/New Zealand chapter of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) is one example; likewise, the work of Philip Hayward and his colleagues in setting up the Centre for Contemporary Music Studies at Macquarie University, and in establishing the journal *Perfect Beat: The Asia-Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture*, currently co-edited by Shelley Brunt and Oli Wilson. Perhaps the single publication that proclaimed the shift most comprehensively is the *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia,* edited by John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell for Currency House/Press (2003). This monumental achievement to my mind marks a decisive change in the academic climate that, at various times, I have lamented in past publications. I am grateful for my association with the individuals and the organisations I have named and the community of scholars which they represent, and honoured to count them as friends.

Bruce Johnson
Universities of Technology Sydney, Turku Finland and Glasgow Scotland
2022

Part 1 - Australian Cultural Histories: Case Studies and Overviews

The case studies were not written as a group, nor in the order presented here. However, arranged chronologically by their subjects, they provide snapshots of instructive moments in the history of twentieth century Australian popular music, and its dialogue with the larger culture. The subject of each represents a major genre in that history.

The first performance by an Australian jazz band under that name was in mid-1918. Jazz was, arguably, the first new popular music of the twentieth century, not only in terms of form but by virtue of its mediations and social coding. Rock'n'roll, arriving here in the mid-1950s, was the musical proclamation of the arrival of youth culture and the baby boomers as a socially significant demographic, as well as being the most radical challenge to jazz-based practices up to that time. The Beatles' Australian tour of 1964 signalled, among other things, the local corporate stage management of rock/pop. The Hanson/Pantsdown episode on the eve of the twenty-first century dramatised a number of unforeseen ramifications of music digitisation technology; it came to act as an instrument of political power and individual and collective identity formation.

Accounts of these are followed by two wider-ranging overviews of aspects of Australian cultural history, part of my attempt to make sense of why our responses to the conditions of modernity seem so distinctive, as the outcome of our particular history. As such, they are more speculative sketches which try to assimilate existing accounts, rather than original and detailed case studies.

Part 2 - Writing with Attitude: Issues in Cultural History

In terms of explicit coverage, these essays bear uneven traces of the 'matter of Australia'. Yet, as discussed in the Preface, they grow out of an attitude which I believe evolved from being Australian, and which I think has decisively affected my research. The section includes the least 'academic' of all the essays in this volume; they are the most vulnerably speculative. The studies in Part One, while conforming to traditional scholarly criteria sufficiently to be carried in academically refereed journals, are nonetheless driven by the same kind of curiosity that the essays in this section document. These are presented in the order they were written, because they are a record and explanation of the evolution of those interests. They grow out of an attitude to research which is most succinctly summarised in some simple (and many would say simple-minded) questions: What do people do? How do people feel? What do people mean? Why do we want to know? Those questions have led me down a number of crisscrossing paths of enquiry exemplified by these four essays: what I have heard called 'cultural phenomenology', the politics of research, ethnography and acoustic ecology.

PART 1 –

AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL HISTORIES: CASE STUDIES AND OVERVIEWS

CHAPTER 1

NATURALISING THE EXOTIC: THE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ CONVENTION[1]

The essay reflects a longstanding interest in the history of the relationship between jazz and radicalism in Australia. My thanks to the late Audrey Blake, who over many years patiently continued to provide assistance in my investigations of this field. In many ways, my continuing interest is also a tribute to Audrey and her late husband Jack, both examples of a durable intellectual curiosity and commitment to social justice, sustained with inspirational determination, open-mindedness and magnanimity. The essay was originally published under this title in *Jazz Planet* (ed. E. Taylor Atkins, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2003, pp 151-168.) It is reprinted here by permission of the University Press of Mississippi (website: www.upress.state.ms.us). Since its original publication, and since the publication of Starr's study of jazz in the USSR (1980), there have appeared a number of studies in that field, including Johnson 2017 and most recently Reimann 2022 and Havas 2022, which would nuance my comments on jazz in the Soviet Bloc.

Because of the number and variety of sources I have gathered the citations as endnotes rather than footnotes, with a bibliography.

§§§

In 1941, a jazz band performed for the opening of the Contemporary Art Society's annual exhibition in Melbourne. In 1947, an Australian jazz band embarked on a visit to Prague for the International Youth Festival, and went on to tour around Europe and the United Kingdom for a year. Three sectors of interest converge in these events: the jazz community, the wider radical arts community, and the political left; I have discussed them elsewhere.[2] Here, I wish to study an event which they bracket, and to tease out some threads which may make intelligible the weave of a significant moment in Australia's larger cultural history.

In December 1946, the first of what has become an annual jazz festival, the Australian Jazz Convention (AJC), was held in Melbourne. This

is, in many ways, a unique event both in Australia and internationally, bringing together musicians from most regions of Australia who are committed to (what has since become identified as) the traditional style. It is important to emphasise that, in the historical context of this discussion, references to 'jazz' are references to what is now more specifically described in such terms as 'traditional', 'revivalist' or, more problematically, 'dixieland' jazz. When its proponents referred disdainfully to 'pseudo' or inauthentic jazz forms in 1946, they were not, as a rule, referring to what later became known as 'modern jazz' such as bop, hard bop or 'cool' West Coast. These had not yet established themselves in the local discourse. As the primary sources cited below suggest, 'true jazz' was invoked most frequently in contradistinction to commercial swing.

The musicians at the first AJC performed *gratis* primarily for each other's benefit, and were mostly amateurs in every sense excepting their musical proficiency in their chosen style. The AJC has been held every year since, with the same basic format. Apart from continuous informal jam sessions, anyone may ensure programmed performance time simply by registering as a musician. Attendance figures have risen to include increasing numbers of the non-playing public, and the number of musicians has also increased to as many as 520 (in 1998), incorporating amateurs and full professionals. Since the late 1980s, attendance figures stabilised at around 1,000 to 1,200 for capital cities, and 800 to 1,000 when held in country towns. In 1995, at the fiftieth AJC, the total attendance of playing and non-playing registered delegates, and the public, was between 4,500 and 5,000.[3]

The Australian jazz movement has been internationally influential far beyond what the size, location and history of the country would at first lead anyone to expect. A major international jazz reference work describes it as arguably producing 'the most stimulating music outside America'.[4] There are currently [2004] around one hundred annual music festivals devoted (in whole or in part) to jazz. The AJC was not the first jazz festival in Australia, with the once-off 'Jazz Week' at Sydney's Globe Theatre in 1919 presenting film, performance and dance (Johnson, op. cit., p. 61).[5] While those responsible for maintaining the non-commercial character of the AJC avoid the word 'festival', in the generic sense the 1946 AJC was the world's first annual jazz festival.

Its beginnings have become tangled in anecdote. There had been informal discussions for a couple of years prior to the earliest reference in print, which appears to have been in the journal *Jazz Notes* 65, June 1946, page 3 (hereafter *JN*). Editor C. Ian Turner suggested an Australian Jazz Convention in Melbourne, with a view to establishing a national affiliation

which, in turn, could become part of an 'International Jazz Foundation'.[6] In *JN* 69, December 1946, page 3, the new editor John Rippin announced the forthcoming Jazz Convention to be held in Melbourne from the 26th to the 30th of December.

Harry Stein, referred to as President of the AJC, welcomed the delegates at the opening dinner to a programme of performances including on a riverboat excursion on Melbourne's River Yarra, and a concluding public concert (see fig 1). Discussion groups were held, covering topics such as the social background of jazz, forming record collections, and organising jazz events and clubs. There were also record sessions, and the results of said sessions were aired by Sydney-based ABC broadcaster Ellis Blain (*JN* 70, January 1947, p. 22). The event was reported by both mainstream press (*Melbourne Herald*, *Sun*, and *Women's Weekly*)[7] and professional music press, including the Sydney journal *Syncopation* vol 1, no 2.[8] The most comprehensive account was provided by Dave Dallwitz in *JN* 70, January 1947, pages 12 to 16. The general public was served primarily by the riverboat excursion and the final concert held in the main venue, the Eureka Hall in North Melbourne, which accommodated 300, and had a gallery, recording equipment and catering facilities.[9] There were two riverboats 'bulging with jazz lovers, mostly in pairs and mostly young, but with a fair sprinkling of middle age (and children)', and for the final concert the hall was 'crowded out' (Dallwitz op. cit., pp. 14-16).

The core of the Convention consisted of musicians and committed jazz enthusiasts, estimated at one hundred, with a 1:1 ration of musicians to non-playing delegates (Haesler interview, 18/2/02). The musicians were ecstatic; 'Seventh heaven. Marvellous', recalled Tasmanian reed player Tom Pickering nearly forty years later (Pickering interview, 16/5/84, 19).[10] In 1989, Graeme Bell still remembered it as 'one of the most exciting times of my life ... we were walking on air' (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89). There are four strands in the responses to that event; the first of which being that, beyond the heat of the moment, the AJC inspired further activity. Clarinettist Bruce Gray (with Adelaide's Southern Jazz Group, or SJG) spoke of 'many sleepless nights after that', as it increased commitment and practice activity. He commented further: 'as soon as we got back, I can remember Dave [Dallwitz - the leader] saying that we must do so and so ... for the next convention' (Gray interview, 27/1/82, pp. 16-17). This was a community who had come to know the music as something produced by Americans of mythic status; for the most part, it was mediated, non-corporeally, by sound recordings.[11] The AJC confirmed and conferred agency on those present, moving them further away from the role of consumer and towards the role of producer. Young Melbourne clarinettist

Nick Polites experienced a further reorientation away from his Greek background, with the 'watershed' understanding that seeing so many other 'ordinary people' actually playing the music confirmed that 'it can be done' (Polites interview, 28/12/88). Frank Johnson had experienced the same sense of empowerment, of 'revelation', when he first heard live jazz - the Bell band - played by 'ordinary people' earlier in the year (Frank Johnson interview, 28/12/88).

The other three strands are woven around the idea of community. The AJC disclosed a national jazz community, a significant matter in a country whose few major centres are separated by thousands of kilometres, and when contact between them was mainly by road, rail, or post. In his 'Introduction: Jazz in Australia' in the souvenir programme for the Convention, Graeme Bell began:

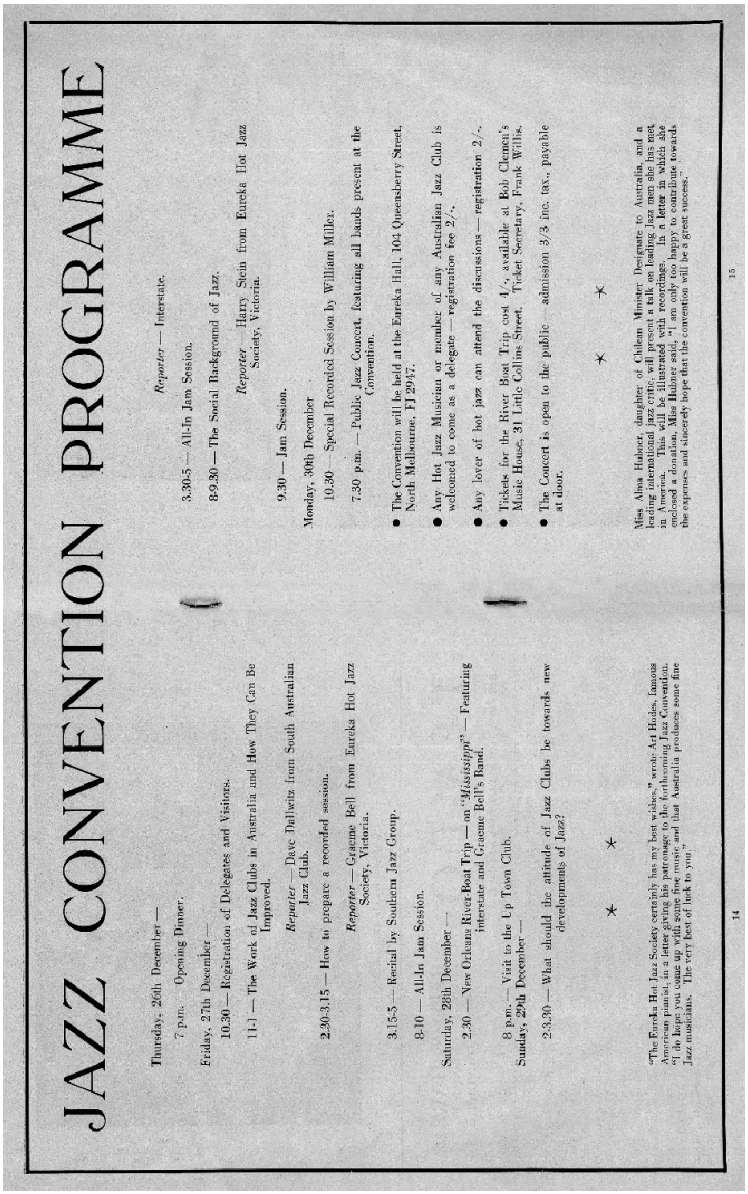
> Six years ago, there was but a handful of musicians in Melbourne to play jazz. The pseudo variety of rhythm section supporting soloists had, of course, been operating outside this small circle. When I use the word 'jazz' I am not referring to this latter type, but to the collectively improvised music in the negro idiom which is the only music which should be and usually is today referred to as "jazz." It was not long before this music started to spread, until today that handful of musicians sincerely endeavouring to play jazz has grown to an extraordinarily large number considering our small population.[12]

Dallwitz expressed the belief that the AJC would increase national jazz solidarity (Dallwitz, op. cit., p 14), and later spoke of his realisation 'that we had kindred spirits' (Dallwitz interview, 25/1/82, p 13).[13] Bruce Gray recalled it as 'indescribable' when he and his Adelaide colleagues, most of whom 'hadn't really been further than the front gate', met 'all these guys, all playing jazz. It really was fantastic' (Gray interview 27/1/82, p 16). Tasmanian musician Ian Pearce spoke of his 'excitement that these things had happened quite separately from our activity on a distant island - that they were of a similar mind. ... It's spontaneous - spontaneous combustion as far as I can tell. Just happening. A mystery'. (Pearce interview, 28/12/88). Even for Melbourne musicians, 'to see all these other guys playing was a revelation' (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89); it 'opened our eyes', according to Bell's reed player Don 'Pixie' Roberts (Roberts interview, 28/12/88). Regional differences also emerged. SJG brass bass player Bob Wright found different chord sequences from those evolved in Adelaide (Wright interview, 24/1/82, p 11), while for Melbourne musicians, it was the first time they had heard the rhythmic pulse of the SJG, off-beat banjo against on-beat tuba, and the washboard 'knitting it all together'. The

distinctive sound of the SJG 'created a storm' (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89).

The AJC also gave momentum to an internationalism that went beyond the USA as the only significant site of jazz consciousness. The Programme itself reflects this. The co-editor, Roskolenko, was a US serviceman posted in Australia. The cover announced articles by 'Critics from Three Countries': British writer Charles Fox, US writer Frederick Ramsay, as well as Hobart reed player Tom Pickering. There was an appreciation of Duke Ellington by Inez Cavana[u]gh.[14] There was a message of congratulations from (Russian born) US pianist Art Hodes, and one from Alma Hubner, daughter of the Chilean Minister Designate to Australia, who had earlier contributed to *JN* an article on the jazz movement in Chile.[15] The cover photograph of Roger Bell with African-American corporal 'Morris Goode (Harlem, N.Y.)' reinforces the sense of international jazz fraternalism as, wearing each other's hats, they apparently engage in a trumpet 'dialogue' (see fig 2).[16] The first AJC also inaugurated an unbroken tradition which 'gave musicians and devotees a focal point for their continuing involvement in jazz' (Stein, op cit., p 87), and thus it became a major public workshop for, what has become internationally recognised as, an 'Australian jazz style'.[17]

Fig. 1 – Programme for the First Australian Jazz Convention, published in *Angry Penguins Broadsheet* #10, December 1946. From the author's collection.



JAZZ CONVENTION PROGRAMME

Thursday, 26th December —

7 p.m. — Opening Dinner.

Friday, 27th December —

10.30 — Registration of Delegates and Visitors.

11-1 — **The Work of Jazz Clubs in Australia and How They Can Be Improved.**

Reporter — Dave Dallwitz from South Australian Jazz Club.

2.30-3.15 — **How to prepare a recorded session.**

Reporter — Graeme Bell from Eureka Hot Jazz Society, Victoria.

3.15-5 — Recital by Southern Jazz Group.

8-10 — All-In Jam Session.

Saturday, 28th December —

2.30 — New Orleans River Boat Trip — on "*Mississippi*" — Featuring Interstate and Graeme Bell's Band.

8 p.m. — Visit to the Up Town Club.

Sunday, 29th December —

2-3.30 — **What should the attitude of Jazz Clubs be towards new developments of Jazz?**

* * *

"The Eureka Hot Jazz Society certainly has my best wishes," wrote Art Hodes, famous American pianist, in a letter giving his patronage to the forthcoming Jazz Convention. "I do hope you come up with some fine music and that Australia produces some fine Jazz musicians. The very best of luck to you."

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Reporter — Interstate.

3.30-5 — All-In Jam Session.

8-9.30 — **The Social Background of Jazz.**

Reporter — Harry Stein from Eureka Hot Jazz Society, Victoria.

9.30 — Jam Session.

Monday, 30th December

10.30 — Special Recorded Session by William Miller.

7.30 p.m. — Public Jazz Concert, featuring all bands present at the Convention.

- The Convention will be held at the Eureka Hall, 104 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne, FJ 2947.
- Any Hot Jazz Musician or member of any Australian Jazz Club is welcomed to come as a delegate — registration fee 2/-.
- Any lover of hot jazz can attend the discussions — registration 2/-.
- Tickets for the River Boat Trip cost 4/-, available at Bob Clement's Music House, 31 Little Collins Street. Ticket Secretary, Frank Wills.
- The Concert is open to the public — admission 3/3 inc. tax., payable at door.

* * *

Miss Alma Hubert, daughter of Chilean Minister Designate to Australia and a leading international jazz critic, will present a talk on leading Jazz men she has met in America. This will be illustrated with recordings. In a letter in which she enclosed a donation, Miss Hubert said, "I am only too happy to contribute towards the expenses and sincerely hope that the convention will be a great success."

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Fig 2- Maurice Goode and Roger Bell, on the cover of *Angry Penguins Broadsheet* #10, December 1946, advertising the First Australian Jazz Convention. From the author's collection

Present throughout the AJC were also the organisers. Although there is frequent reference to a 'committee', it was 'very loose' (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89). Dallwitz listed Harry Stein, Graeme Bell, Ade Monsbourgh, John James 'and the rest of the Melbourne Committee' (Dallwitz, op. cit., p 12).[18] At the AJC forty-two years later, however, Roger Bell recalled that the committee was 'spearheaded' by his brother with some input from Stein (Roger Bell interview, 22/12/88), while Graeme remembered a more even balance (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89). Trumpeter Frank Johnson's impression was that the committee was made up of members of the Eureka Youth League (EYL): himself, reed player Geoff Kitchen, Stein, Rivka Brilliant, Joe James, and some involvement from Audrey Blake (Frank Johnson interview, 28/12/88), though there is evidence that he may well be confusing this with the second AJC. Stein and Blake were senior officials in the EYL, and would later become National President and National Secretary respectively. Stein's own recollection was that the EYL's most important involvement was logistical: the venue, the catering, cleaning, recording (Stein interview, 15/2/89).

There are three communities of interest which, by any account, converged in the establishment of the AJC. The Souvenir Programme was a special issue of the *Angry Penguins Broadsheet*, edited by Max Harris and Harry Roskolenko (see fig 2). AJC patron Art Hodes congratulated the Eureka Hot Jazz Society, often spoken of as the hosts or sponsors of the Convention. There was also of course, the broader jazz community. The interwoven interests of these three groups have been recalled in passing from a broader perspective on Australian history by other writers, including academic and member of the Communist Part of Australia (CPA) Ian Turner, who moved in the space shared by artistic and political radicalism and the jazz community in Melbourne during the 1940s.[19] It is this triangle of interests that frames the inauguration of the world's oldest annual jazz festival.

Of the three, the Angry Penguins group, with the radical arts community of which they were largely the centre, has attracted the most scholarly attention. *Angry Penguins* itself was established in 1940 by *enfant terrible* of Australian letters, Max Harris, and financed by lawyer John Reed. Reed was the country's leading patron of Australian modernism, and his small farm on the outskirts of Melbourne, 'Heide', was a bohemian centre which hosted writers, jazz musicians (in particular, the Bell coterie), and leaders of the coming generation of modernist painters (most notably Sidney Nolan, who designed the journal). This group overlapped with other sectors of Australian radicalism, including the Contemporary Art Society, established by modernist painters in Melbourne in 1938 to contest the

conservative major arts institutions.[20] At the centre of pivotal debates in the history of Australian modernism, *Angry Penguins* was probably the most significant journal of modernist experimentation in the arts in Australia during its lifetime, 1940-1946.[21]

Its political orientation was left-wing; Harris himself was, for a period, a member of the CPA.[22] The fourth issue of *AP* carried a piece by Jack Blake, Secretary of the Victorian State Committee of the CPA, and husband of Audrey Blake of the EYL. His essay was an edited version of his speech opening the Anti-Fascist Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society.[23] The connection was also personal; shortly after Jack Blake's death Audrey Blake recounted to me (Blake interview, 11/9/01) that when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis during the war, John Reed had contributed substantially to the costs of the treatment.

AP and its network also had strong connections with the jazz community well before the first AJC. *AP* carried items on jazz, and, in the 1945 issue, announced the inauguration of three regular sections, Music, Film and Jazz. The first refers clearly to 'art music' ('yet to find its proper level in the literature of this community'), and of the latter two it wrote:

> ... each are [sic] of major importance in modern society, both culturally and socially - they are the new art forms of the 20th century, each with infinite potentialities, each surrounded by barriers of commercialism which not only hamper the artists in these mediums but make it almost impossible for the public at large to appreciate their work. (p 3)

Dallwitz's account of meeting the Bell band places Max Harris at the point of contact, as someone who knew the emerging jazz scene very well. That connection was forged through the Contemporary Art Society, of which Dallwitz was also the founding chairman of the Adelaide branch. The Harris 'set' followed Dallwitz's band, the SJG, in Adelaide, and Harris himself was present at their first recording session. Parties at Dallwitz's house were attended by both SJG members and radical artists, and Harris would sit on the piano and improvise scurrilous blues lyrics about those present (Dallwitz interview, 26/12/88). The Melbourne *AP* and modernist painters also overlapped, both socially and creatively, with the jazz scene. Apart from activities at Heide and with the CAS documented elsewhere, Roger Bell recalled jam sessions at Sidney Nolan's studio in Russell Street (Roger Bell interview, 28/12/88).[24]

The political left also had a connection with the jazz scene, most conspicuously through the EYL, which in 1945 created the Eureka Hot Jazz Society (EHJS). The Bell band in particular enjoyed a high-profile association with the League and the EHJS until 1948. In 1941, they presented a 'History

of Jazz' concert, co-produced by Harry Stein of the EYL.[25] By 1944, the band was 'playing for many Eureka Youth League dances, and riverboat trips' (ibid., p 54). In June 1946, they rented the EYL premises for their own regular Saturday night cabarets under the name The Uptown Club, though this was entirely run by musicians, spouses and friends (ibid., p 56). In the 1947 May Day March through Melbourne, the EYL contingent, led by the Bell band, won the first prize.[26] These are not exactly covert associations. The most significant synergy was the Bell band's visit to Prague in 1947, leading to the European tour which has been chronicled and analysed at length elsewhere (Bell, op. cit., pp 63-118; Stein 1994, op. cit., pp 87-98; Johnson 2000/2021, op. cit., 147-157).

Harry Stein was pivotal in this connection. He had begun playing drums in dance bands in the 1930s, in particular for dances run by the Young Communist League, (of which he was a member). In England, from 1937 to 1939, he had attended discussions in the communist community on the social significance of music and its relation to Marxism, 'topics I never heard discussed in Australia' (Stein 1994, op. cit., p 44). He had begun presenting talks on the social background of jazz while posted in rural Cowra, New South Wales during the war, and the foundation of the EHJS was to partly reactivate this project - that is, it was educative as well as recreational. Its aims were 1. 'To encourage the appreciation and playing of hot jazz'; 2.'To study its true history and destroy its myths'; and 3. 'To publish material to help these aims' (Stein 1994, op. cit., p 85). Stein's name is as tightly woven into accounts of the first AJC as is that of Graeme Bell.

That there was such overlap in the public sphere is beyond dispute. What is often bitterly debated is the overlap of socio-political agenda. Let us begin with one incontrovertible observation: the convergences signified that jazz was a significant musical preference for individuals who also occupied positions of influence in radical arts and politics. Harry Stein's preference for jazz was a musical one. Frank Johnson remained vigorously socialist all his life, and was eager to play up the left's organisational connection with the jazz movement in the 1940s. Nonetheless, although he did see an affinity between jazz and radicalism in the other arts, he declared unequivocally that, for him, playing jazz was apolitical. He played it because he liked it (Frank Johnson interview, 28/12/88). Graeme Bell was socialist in sympathies, a member of the EYL, and fully aware of Stein's politics. The only reason he took the gigs, however, was because they were opportunities to play the music he liked (Graeme Bell interview, 16/2/89). Audrey Blake was zealously committed to the CPA through the period under examination, yet she has always been equally clear that her attachment

to jazz was visceral before it was ideological. Growing up as a working-class girl during the 1930s,

> ...jazz was just the music I liked. [...] the pop music of the day didn't satisfy me. I just thought that jazz and blues were [*pause*] just wonderful, that's all. And it wasn't anything to do a with sort of theoretical working out of anything, because for one thing I didn't have any theory at that time. (Blake interview, 14/8/89)

She went on to emphasise that the then-current understanding of jazz as a non-commercial expression of an oppressed minority enhanced its appeal, but was not the basis of it. These accounts are typical. Blake's final observation resonates with Stein's surprise at what he heard in the UK, both of which give momentum to the next stage of the discussion. The enthusiasm for jazz was primarily musical - in fact, it survived all personal and ideological vicissitudes in the relationships between the three communities I have identified, which were to come later.[27] For the EYL in particular, jazz was not a doctrinaire instrument of party policy - nor was the EYL in the period under discussion.

The perennial question has been to do with what the logistical connections signified regarding ideological overlap.[28] Interpretations range from the assertion that the connection is entirely apolitical to the claim that the jazz community was highly politicised. At the former end of the spectrum, jazz musicians declare that they didn't know or care what the EYL represented (Roberts interview 28/12/88; Roger Bell interview, 28/12/88; Dallwitz interview, 28/12/88); the EYL members just happened to like jazz. At the other extreme is the claim that there was a party-political agenda linking jazz, the EYL and, explicitly or implicitly, the CPA.[29] Somewhere between these two poles were jazz musicians like Nick Polites and Frank Johnson, who were left-leaning and understood the basic agenda of EYL, but nonetheless consciously resisted joining the CPA on grounds of its perceived doctrinaire rigidity (Polites interview 28/12/88; Johnson interview 28/12/88). Central to the debate is the question of what the EYL represented politically in the 1940s.[30] If we examine the history of the EYL more closely, we break out of this narrow debate about party affiliations and lay the foundations for a hypothesis more broadly relevant to Australia's cultural history and the role of jazz in that narrative. Three aspects of the organisation are central to this re-assessment.

First, the League was ambivalent about its relationship with the CPA. Throughout the life of EYL, there was internal pressure to declare itself a 'Marxist or Marxist-Leninist group - in other words, a dedicated revolutionary youth group'.[31] In the period under discussion, the pressure

was unsuccessful - but the EYL 'constantly had problems of deciding what in fact it actually was, a broadly based and non-aligned body, or broadly based but somehow aligned, or some other position up to an open preference for the Communist Party' (ibid.). This ambiguity left open the question regarding CPA alignment which has pervaded discussions of the alliance between the League and the jazz community. This has made it easier for various witnesses to spontaneously (re)construct that identity in whatever way suits them. The ambiguity of the League's position also tends to confirm, however, that the brief of the League went beyond a doctrinal party line, seeking to tap into, and respond progressively to, the industrial, recreational, and cultural needs of young Australians. Although it 'received the benefit, or otherwise, of the CPA's advice and membership support' (ibid.), its activities reflected dynamics in the Australian social consciousness rather than implementing detailed Comintern directives: 'the League ... had plenty of latitude on developing its own programme and actions' (ibid., p 4).

The recruitment of jazz bands by the EYL was, as Stein and Blake have indicated, primarily a manifestation of their own enthusiasms. Other writers in the communist movement such as Paul Mortier condemned the music, along with modernist art, as decadent.[32] On at least one (undated) occasion, the subject of one of the debates which were part of EYL youth programmes was that jazz was a decadent music (Stein *con*, Mortier *pro*) (Blears, op. cit., p 90). Given suggestions that EYL was an inflexible instrument of Moscow via the CPA, it is important to recall that, in the USSR, such a public debate would probably have been impossible. Policy on jazz changed with international politics - during the second front, it was acceptable; after 1946 it 'came to a halt'.[33] In Stalinist Russia, cultural policies might come and go, but they did not allow for public debate at any moment. Likewise, the League's alliance with modernist *literati* and painters is in sharp conflict with the 'socialist realist' Moscow line enunciated by Andrei Zhdanov to the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers.[34] A rigidly Moscow-oriented Communist organisation could not have lined up with such interests in the period we are discussing, nor with the jazz community during much of the time that EYL was publicly sponsoring its activities. This once again reminds us of the sparseness of 'theoretical direction' from either Moscow or the CPA, and the flexibility exercised by EYL in adapting youth programmes to the local cultural landscape, in concert with the musical tastes of the local leadership.

A League Leaders study course of about 1943, which Blears attributes to Audrey Blake, asserted:

> Most of our members do not belong to or support any party. Whilst being non-party, we regard ourselves as part of the labour movement, which is not just the Labor Party but is made up of all the organisations of the working people, Labor Party, Communist Party, Trade Unions, Trade Union Youth Organisations, and the Eureka Youth League.[35]

He quotes from the same source that, at the first national conference of the EYL in 1943, states that changes to the constitution 'are evidence of the fact that the League had developed into an anti-fascist organisation rather than a socialist organisation' (ibid., p. 49).

This takes us to the second and third aspects of the League's history which are relevant to this enquiry. Any attempt to investigate the character of the EYL must also ask: 'where, and when?' The largest branches, New South Wales and Victoria, were more independent of Party interference than those in other regions (Blears, op. cit., p 8). Even more critical, however, is the period in question. Audrey Blake (op. cit.) and Blears (op. cit.) disclose a broad trajectory in the history of the EYL and its antecedents, the Young Communist League (YCL) and the League of Young Democrats (LYD), in which independence from the CPA was at its apogee from the formation of the EYL to around 1948. Audrey Blake had been a member of all of these, and was the founding President of the Victorian branch of the LYD, which was established in 1939 specifically to give effect to a more broadly based youth agenda with diminished Party alignment. In the wake of the banning of the CPA in June 1940 by the Menzies government, the LYD was declared an illegal organisation and its premises and the homes of its leaders were raided by the police. With the opening of Hitler's second front, of course the USSR suddenly became a valued ally against fascism. This, coupled with the advent of the Curtin Labor government, provided an opportune moment to form a new socialist-oriented youth organisation. Thus, the EYL, formed in December 1941, grew out of a wide-ranging youth movement that had emerged in the late 1930s, committed to the problem of youth unemployment and the rise of fascism. Indeed, with the easing of centralised ideological controls marked by the formation of the LYD, it appears that these two issues of international relevance were, at the time, more to the foreground than any Moscow-centred communist agenda.

The EYL thus begins to look more like the manifestation of a broader sea-change in social consciousness than of a rigid party machine. Its first conference produced a seven-point programme (Audrey Blake op. cit., p 44-5) that could hardly be said to be reeking of communist ideology. Apart from the call for the lifting of the ban on the LYD, they might have come from any labour or even church group concerned about working

conditions, costs of living, and the need to mobilise in the war against fascism. Although it supported the candidature of Jack Blake as an Independent Communist (the Party was still illegal) in a by-election, the EYL was allied more generally with youth organisations, including the National Fitness Council and the National Youth Association (of which Audrey Blake was, for a time, a member of the Victorian executive (ibid. pp 54-5)). Indeed, it received a letter of congratulations from Prime Minister Curtin for its effort on behalf of war production and the military (ibid., p 52). The week-to-week activities of the EYL by late 1944 are illustrated by the programmes available to the eighty-two members of the Pacific Youth Club, the Fitzroy branch of the EYL. It rented its own club rooms, had classes in swimming and dancing, a gymnasium, a concert party, and discussion group. Saturday was open club night, with its library open, as well as table tennis, chess, draughts, dancing, and a social being held on Sunday night. It had representatives on the Auxiliary of the Heidelberg Hospital, the Opportunity Club Committee and the War Loans Committee (ibid., p 68).

In the period immediately following the war, the EYL still carried much of this agenda, which was primarily anti-fascist and pro-workers' rights, with the emphasis on its youth constituency. At its third National Congress in 1945, the EYL committed itself to a post-war New Deal for Youth campaign, directed at the improvement of working conditions and educational and recreational opportunities for youth, with no policies that would not be shared by any organisation committed to the interests of young people. Many of its proposals were implemented by the new Labor government (ibid., p 70-71).

How, then, did the EYL come to attract the designation of 'a communist front' (eg, Frank Johnson interview, 28/12/88). There is, of course, the general problem of trying to retrieve the phenomenology of the past. It is important, for example, to remember something Audrey Blake has emphasised continually, which is reflected in the programme of activities exemplified above. Compared with today, there was almost unimaginably less mediated and pre-produced entertainment, less affluence, fewer educational opportunities, less sexually oriented and commodity-serviced recreation and, it seems, a social life more attuned to collective activity and the family. EYL filled a much larger gap in youthful educational and recreational opportunities than exists today - and did so at a time of much stronger local and international socialist consciousness.

There are special sensitivities associated with the history of communism in Australia, which have erected screens of various traumatic events between then and now. How people remember what it might have

signified to be associated with the EYL (say playing in its street parade or at its cabarets), can be completely transformed, one way or the other, by later Cold War hysteria and the Menzies government's intimidation of the left and the workers. The siege mentality in the EYL also produced a much closer alignment with the CPA, so that by 1952 it identified with the Party perspective (Blears, op. cit., p 54). For a rigid party member of a particular temperament, recollections of EYL membership in the early 1940s may well then take on a more heroically revolutionary complexion. On the other hand, for someone who went on to a career in the public service, looking back through the screen of the late 1940s, it is likely to be useful to remember it simply as a youth organisation with interests in workers' conditions.

The EYL in 1946 was not the same as the EYL in 1952; The EYL was different, Australia was different, and the nature of the triangular relationship between both of these and the jazz movement also underwent numerous permutations. Arguably, the EYL in 1946 resonated with the emerging progressive elements of Australian youth consciousness; by the 1950s, however, the resonance was not so close.

What is clear is that the links between jazz, radical arts, and politics during the 1940s were not hammered out in the forge of communist ideology and Comintern policy - in fact, they were as likely to be in conflict with them as not. Even the activities of the EYL itself at that time cannot be explained simply in terms of a CPA agenda. Individual tastes in music on the part of key EYL figures are important, but in themselves do not explain the growing jazz following among radicals as well as in the broader community. This alliance reflects the emergence of a larger discourse than that of the Party, or that of a minority group of writers and painters who were often unintelligible to the general public. If we examine the Australian jazz discourse of the time, I believe we can produce a much more ambitious hypothesis. The Australian jazz journals in the mid-1940s were the sites at which the meanings of the word 'jazz' were debated.[36] Certain attitudes emerge from these discussions, which correspond significantly with those which also pervade the EYL and the *AP* groups. Beneath differences of focus and surface differences of opinion, they share a number of very fundamental socio-cultural assumptions. We don't need theoretical constructs to discover this shared space, though a number of terms suggest themselves as points of departure for its definition: Lukacs' 'intellectual physiognomy', Williams' 'structure of feeling', Bourdieu's 'habitus', Fish's 'interpretive community'.

The first AJC was not simply a gathering of performers playing, and audiences listening to, an exotic music, like a gamelan concert in Sydney. They were coming into being as a community, and extending that