

THE LEN BARNARD STORY

by Len Barnard

[This story was serialised in the first seven editions of the Australian Jazz Magazine, 1981-82.]

Part 1: Jazz Magazine, January/February, 1981

In a recent conversation with Don Burrows, we both decided that the thirties in Australia were great years in which to grow up. I don't expect everyone to enjoy reading reminiscences — but I have the usual wistful hopes. I arrived as the farthing was going out as viable currency, but half pennies were still reasonably capable. Coleslaw was totally unknown, and all the shops were a bit musty by present standards. Perhaps because there was no processed food.



L-R, Don Burrows, Bob Barnard, Len Barnard, Kenny Powell: the thirties in Australia were great years in which to grow up...PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

One could buy a “ha’porth of specks” from a fruiterer — quite a large bag of apples, pears and bananas that were approaching over maturity. Cheese was cut with wire, butter with butter-pats and weighed on brass scales. Bags of broken biscuits from the grocer for a penny. Were people so fastidious in those days that they shunned speckled fruit and shattered biscuits?

My small, pimply friends and I would sit by a canal on Point Nepean Road, eating our 'specks' and identifying the traffic. Hupmobiles, Capitol Chevies, Amilcars, Fiats, Studebakers, Hudson Terraplanes, Plymouths, Pontiacs and the odd Stutz Bearcat.

At home we had radio (wireless) and records. Ray Noble and Al Bowlly — *Sweet Virginia, By The Fireside, Time On My Hands*. The indispensable piano pieces of the day were *Nola, Polly, Kitten On The Keys* (by de Pussy, as The Champ would say), and Frankie Carle was just emerging as a rival to Charlie Kunz.



English bandleader, composer, arranger, radio comedian, and actor Ray Noble...

My Dad (The Champ) and Mum were musicians and the going rate for an evening gig was 7/6 to 10/-. They would get a pound or 25/- for a ball till 2 am, and often got home at daybreak. There was plenty of wassail in the musical world then as now. We had lots of musical evenings at home, and a neighbour would come and play our



Al Bowlly: on the wireless...

piano in the Shefte style. He was Rupert Brophy, a delicate man with a nervous dog. He featured flared trousers and side-burns — not quite an anachronism then, but he'd have been perfectly in style four years ago.

The Champ would drink almost anything, but one evening I recall Rupert offering him an orange gin. He (The Champ) said it was — “an outrageous prettifying of honest booze”. Another neighbour was a Mr Gurney who suffered from an ‘ulster in the stomach’ according to Mrs. Gurney. He always had the smell of raisins about him, but in retrospect, I think rum. He wore his Anzac medals daily all year round. The Champ liked Duke Ellington — “a really hot band, and you should hear that Sonny Greer on drums, and *Wa-de-Da* by Cab Calloway is the hottest record you'll hear in 100 years”. I hadn't quite reached the age where I went through life looking at things until they made sense. To me then, jazz music was racy, exciting, and as natural as food, nourishing my first cerebral needs, as was the day in 5th Grade when teacher Henry Virtue utterly floored me by using the word “lackadaisical”. When I joined the family band in the latter thirties, we played *That's a' Plenty*, *Deep Hollow*, *Casa Loma Stomp*, *Sweetheart Of Sigma Chi*, *China Boy*, and *Hot Lips*.

Other bands about Melbourne were Digger Tilney's Town Toppers, Al Davis and his Rhythm Aces, Jay Whidden's Orchestra at the Palais de Danse, St Kilda. Joe Watson's Band or Ray Tellier's Band alternated on Sunday afternoons at Wattle Path, a large Devonshire Tea pavilion on the Yarra bank, which became the Green Mill and later, the Trocadero. I got to play in two other bands apart from the family group — Fred Holland's Orchestra, and Harry McWhinney's Myola Melody Makers. Fred taught me a lot about chord progressions. He was a devotee of Corio Whisky, and would keep me back, after many a night with his — “now-just-listen-to-this” routine. A random thought is that I didn't hear much “bad language” in those days. It seems



You should hear that Sonny Greer on drums, said The Champ...

that the whispered obscenities and heresies of one generation have become the candid commonplaces of another.

In those depression years, musicians could always scrape a few bob playing somewhere. Dancing was the rage — kerosene, sawdust and shaved (or pared)

candles made the floor easier for the lovers of “sprautz” — pivots, reverse pivots and quarter-turns. The usual advertisements were:—

50-50 Dance Tonight

Fast Floor, Monte Carlo, Spot Dance

Good Coffee, Lively MC

The Mulvoguees were a large Irish family from Mentone — six brothers, all cricketers and hefty drinkers. Bernie Mulvogue was the liveliest MC and he “called” the Alberts Quadrilles with stentorian bellows. Whenever the crowd did the wrong steps or reversed on each other like nervous cattle, he would stop the whole thing — roar — “a bloody atrocious exhibition” — turn to the band and say — “wouldn’t it?” and start all over again.

In 1939, the family band began a regular job, thrice weekly, at the Wattle Palais, Frankston. This was promoted by Johnny Riordan, a pig-farmer-drummer (he fed his pigs with enormous vats of scraps from the Mess at Flinders Naval Base). The Champ was on tenor sax and the bandstand was a raised dais near the ceiling. Admission was 4/-. There were always dense crowds — and often a crash from the Gents area, or the sound of window gratings being pulled out, whereupon Johnny would hand the sticks to The Champ — “Quick, Jim, take over the drums. They’re breakin’ in down the shit’ouse ...”



L-R, Eric Toohey (trumpet), Len’s father The Champ (tenor sax), Howard Plummer (clarinet), with the Kath Barnard Band at Mentone City Hall... PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

On those nights at the Wattle, and sometimes at Mount, Martha House, the pay was 30/-. The whole band would be driven down by The Champ in his old Capitol Chev tourer. He was a great believer in pieces of twisted wire as a fix-it-all, and the old

Chev had yards of the stuff — keeping the mechanical windscreen wipers together, the roof on, and the choke adjusted. One night, they took a long, thin drummer named George Craig, a professional footrunner who trained on egg-flips. George's bass drum (a 28" monster that Paul Whiteman would have coveted) was tied to the roof of the old Capitol. On the way home, they ran into a monumental thunderstorm plus speedy gale, and the drum blew off and proceeded down Oliver's Hill at quite a clip. George kept saying "Jeez, it's cold" from the depths of the cosy back seat (I remember that smell of oil, canvas and leather) while The Champ, in his stiff-shirted dinner suit, pursued the runaway drum, then carried it all the way up the hill.

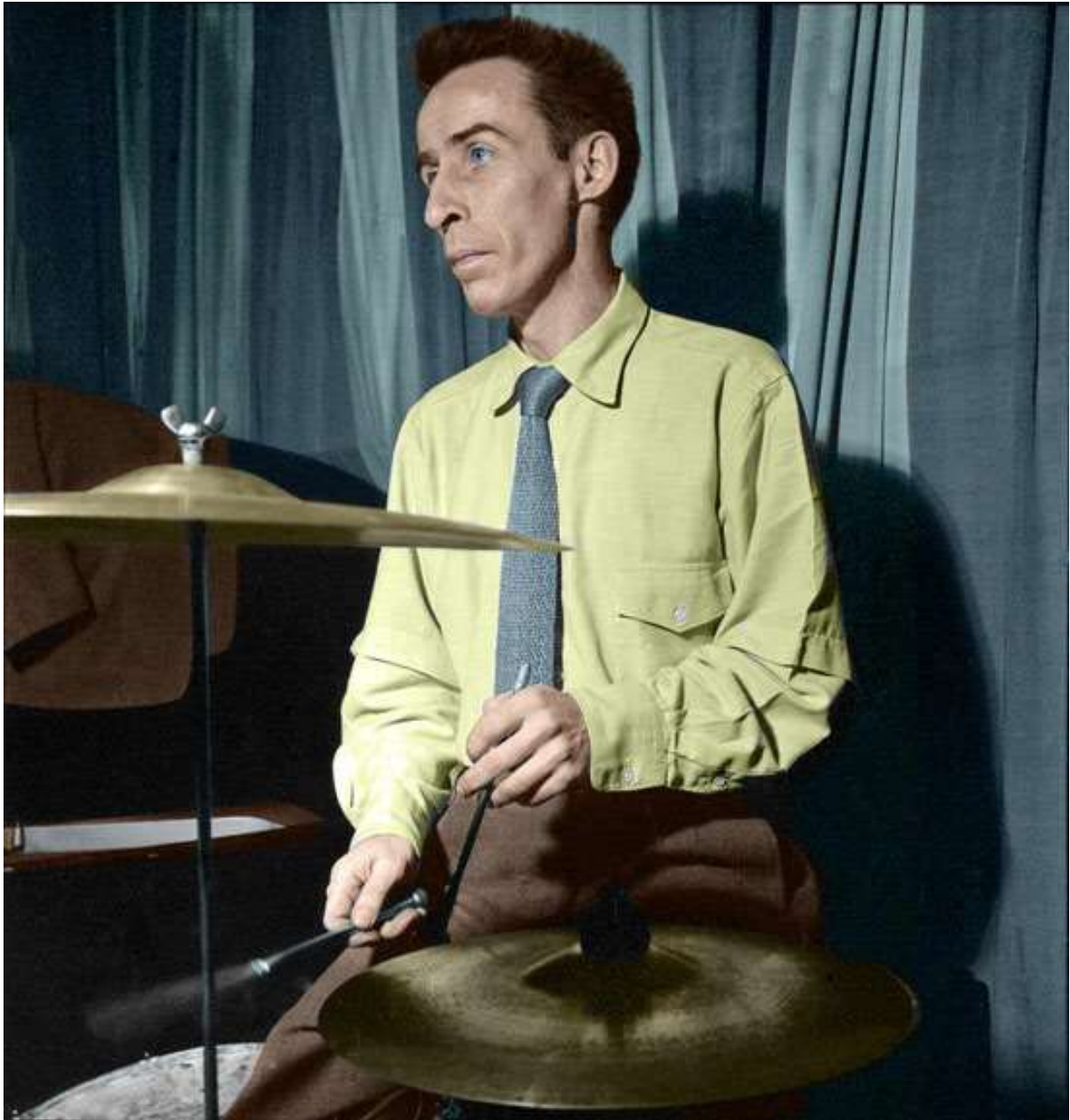
He secured the drum to the roof, his face lashed by hailstones, and Mum remembers him saying quietly to himself, "What a wicked night. Oh! It's a wicked night". Then the car wouldn't start! The Champ was in the rain again, his head in the engine, tinkering and rattling things to no avail, It was then that he said, darkly, "God damn it, bugger it!".

Beer was 1/- a bottle, and at the end of each week The Champ and my two uncles would pool their resources: "I've got two bob — I've got four — I've got two — Right let's go and get on with it..." Hitler had made all the newspapers, and I made it to High School in February, 1940, sharing with the other kids the certain knowledge that the war would be over in a couple of months. But the thirties were great years, even allowing for the depression; at least there was energy and optimism and big soups, stews and steak and onions.

Part 2: Jazz Magazine, March/April, 1981

"the three best sounds were cornet, clarinet and trombone..."

During the war there were shortages of petrol, beer, clothing, butter and sugar. Most commodities were rationed, and cars were laden down with charcoal burners for fuel. The Champ discovered that a strong cleaning fluid called Ee mixed with kerosene got us about. Melbourne was full of American soldiers and Marines — yes, I was bludging Camel cigarettes at an early age. Artie Shaw's Navy Band came to town with Rocky Cullucio on piano — exquisite chord changes, and Dave Tough on drums. I loved Dave's beautiful footwork and the way he shifted the tension and colour behind each soloist. He always had a sort of male nurse with him to keep him off the gin. At this time, I had *The Sheik* by the Benny Goodman Sextet BRC (Before Ride Cymbals). Nick Fatool on drums opened up my world with his insistent half-closed hi-hat rhythm which generated a hurtling excitement. Brother Bob and I spent hours listening, and absorbing the heady stuff.



The American drummer Dave Tough: Len loved the way he shifted the tension and colour behind each soloist...PHOTO CREDIT MIKE CREASY

Occasionally The Champ would stick his head round the door and shout, “No use listening to Benny Goodman and all those fellas. You’ll never be any good unless you practise. You’ll be a pair of billy-goats...”

At age 13, Bob was in the local brass band under Charlie Smith, a champion cornettist who used to bite on several corks to keep his loose dentures in place while he played. My aunts used to cry when they saw Bob marching with the band and tooting *Tiberius* or *Semper Fidelis* in his little blue uniform and cap. Records were all 78 rpm, and we devoured everything. My favourites were *All Too Soon* by Duke Ellington, featuring Ben Webster, a performance of grave, cat-like charm, and *Ring Dem Bells* by Lionel Hampton, which would still be in my “desert-island-ten”.



L-R, Len's mother Kath on piano, Howard Plummer, The Champ on drums (using Len's bass drum)... PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

The earth revolved merrily with four nights a week playing gigs through schooldays, football, cricket, and swimming. Mum's band — Kath Barnard's Orchestra — played stock arrangements mainly by Skip Martin, Spud Murphy and Johnny Warrington. I longed for some killer-diller charts by Jimmy Mundy, who wrote steamers for Lunceford and Goodman, but they were unobtainable.

I played with Fred Holland's Band on Saturday nights and he had some "atmospheric" charts by Raymond Scott, *Twilight in Turkey*, *The Toy Trumpet*, etc. In that band was Jack Butler, a clarinettist who had hollow cheeks, deeply sunken eyes, a hypnotic stare, and a high-pitched barking voice. He had very bad teeth, and when he spoke, he always held his hand in front of his mouth, coughing slightly, like a ham actor playing a diplomat. He wore red socks with his tuxedo, and always wowed the crowd with "slap-tongue" clarinet solos.

All my equipment in those days was inferior. Good sticks and brushes were scarce and Zildjian cymbals just weren't about — I had a bastardized ill-matched kit and drawing sounds from it required the utmost ingenuity. Good basic experience.

The Champ played a Buescher tenor sax, and often had a handkerchief stuffed in the bell, blowing cigarette smoke through the neckpiece and intoning mournfully, "Look, bloody thing's leakin' all over the place..." But we managed somehow, The Champ shaving his own reeds out of perspex. A friend who worked in an aircraft factory would bring him offcuts from fighter-plane cabins. The war ended in a burst of cheering, as all wars do, and in 1948, Bob and I switched allegiance from swing to "classic jazz". It was *Doctor Jazz* by Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers that did it.



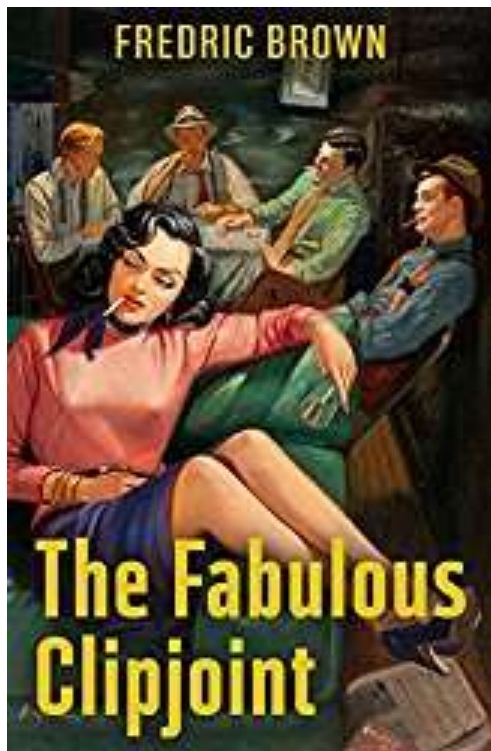
Jelly Roll Morton: it was Doctor Jazz by his Red Hot Peppers that did it...

Here was the true essence, the unalloyed “hotness” for which we had subconsciously craved for years. So a band had to be formed to spread this wonderful message, and with crusading zeal and perhaps absurd pretension, we plunged into the maelstrom.



The Len Barnard Famous Jazz Band, 1949. L-R, Len (piano) Bill Fredrickson (bass), Smacka Fitzgibbon (banjo) Tich Bray (clarinet), Bob Barnard (cornet or trumpet), Fred Whitworth (drums), Doc Willis (trombone)...PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

The two main bands in the revival were Graeme Bell and Frank Johnson, but I wanted a hot New Orleans style band with a different approach to the idiom than had — to my knowledge — hitherto been attempted in Australia. Our early efforts were full of piss and vinegar and not much artistry, but the band always stomped. I was on piano when Smacka Fitzgibbon joined, and Bob was blowing with great fervour. The influence was Armstrong's Hot Five, and we secured our own half-hour radio show on 3KZ every Friday at 7 pm, compered by Philip Gibbs. Frank Traynor came in on trombone, I switched to drums, and Tich Bray played clarinet. Smacka did the vocals. When the band finally jelled it was all crimson, magenta, and vermilion, or so it seemed at the time.



*The cover of Fredric Brown's book *The Fabulous Clipjoint*...*

We made our first record for Jazzart in 1949, *Ory's Creole Trombone and Clarinet Marmalade* for Bob Clemen's Jazzart label. It didn't set the jazz world on fire then and it certainly won't now. Bob was causing lots of comment at the age of 17 and the band was becoming popular. We were reading the novels of [the American science fiction and mystery writer] Fredric Brown — *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, *We All Killed Grandma* and *Here Comes A Candle*, which were peopled by off-beat characters with names like Yehudi Smith. I always thought that the three best smells in the world were new-mown grass, fresh tar, and vanilla beans.

But, at the start of the 50s, the three best sounds were cornet, clarinet and trombone playing collective polyphony. I don't think we ever got over those first kicks, and we entered the new decade ready to conquer the world.

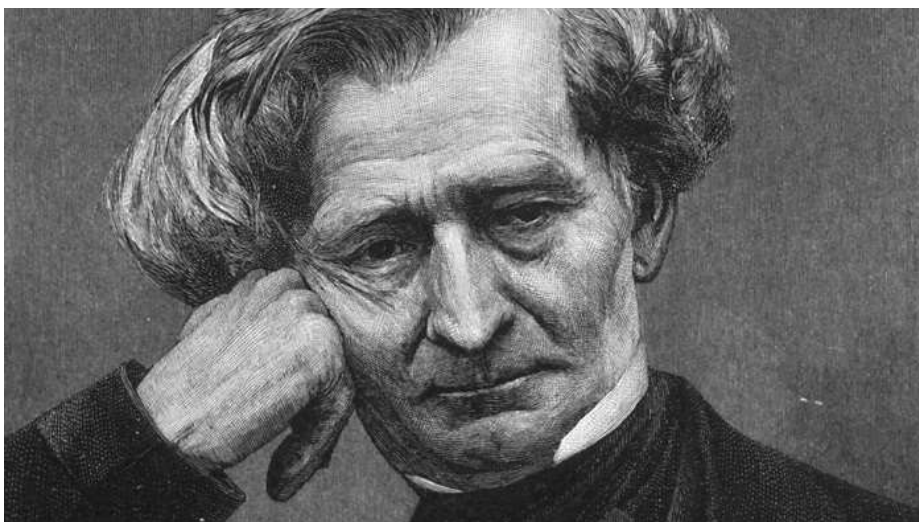
We were very young.



The front line of Len Barnard's Famous Jazz Band in 1950: L-R, Frank Traynor, Bob Barnard, Tich Bray... PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

Part 3: Jazz Magazine, May/June, 1981

"How difficult, indeed impossible, it is to prevent the little cymbals in B flat and F from dragging when the players are a long way from the conductor. I had stupidly left them backstage, next to the drums, and despite everything, they were often as much as a bar behind. Since then, I have been careful to place them right beside me, and the difficulty has vanished..."



Memoirs of Hector Berlioz (1854)

And so into the Fifties. In 1951 my band recorded the first Australian long-play album, a 10" for Jazzart. They called it "Microgroove" then. Whisky was not inconspicuous, but it turned out pretty well. We engaged Ross Fusedale as band manager. He played alto and was nicknamed "Stomp". Anyway Stomp wrote to Ron Wills of EMI in Sydney, enclosing the Jazzart record. It was jubilation day when a letter came back, ending with, "I think a session for Parlophone is indicated." To be asked to record for a major label... our futures were assured... we would be famous. Ah! Youth.

Then we had Union trouble as they forbade us to go to Sydney for recording on Melbourne Cup Day 1952, as we had a concert in Melbourne under their patronage on the same night. We got to Sydney on Cup Eve (three hours in a Douglas Skymaster), and played a concert at Mosman. Next day at 9 am to Homebush, where we cut eight sides, had a few hilarious tankards with Sydney friends, and back to Melbourne for the Union concert in the Town Hall.

So we made it, but I was on the carpet before the Board, and severely reprimanded. I didn't tell them we'd paid our own fares!

"the band, although rough at times, has drive, energy, and relaxation..."



Roger Bell: holding a large beer and chortling, "Ja get rubbished, boy?"...PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

I came out of that meeting to see Roger Bell holding a large beer and chortling, "Ja get rubbished, boy?" Subsequently the Jazzart album was released in Britain on Esquire (20-016), called *Jazz Down Under*, and my spies told me that a few of the Parlophones showed up on Swedish HMV Pelican books later published *Recorded Jazz – A Critical Guide* by Rex Harris and Brian Rust in which they said, "the band, although rough at times, has drive, energy, and relaxation."

During this time, we were working around Melbourne and playing many Downbeat concerts for Bob Clemens. On one occasion, Bob was “doing” his National Service in the Artillery at Puckapunyal, and he was coming down the 70 miles to play the concert. We were on second, but no sign of Bob by 8.35 pm. So Geoff Brooke had to keep singing songs with the ABC orchestra, compere John Storr apologising and peering anxiously into the wings. Just as the ABC boys ran out of charts, John finally said “Pucka has been relieved.” It was mid-winter, and Bob had come down riding pillion on a motor-bike. He looked bronzed and fit, but his hands and mouth were frozen. Two of us got him into his band suit, while another poured vintage port through his chattering teeth. Frank Coughlan looked upon this tableau with some avuncular interest. Adversity brings out the best in jazz bands, and it was a great night after all.



Frank Coughlan: he looked upon this tableau with some avuncular interest...

Bob had left camp AWOL and it cost him 8 pounds in a taxi to get back to Pucka. The concert paid 5 pounds.

Then after a classic series of disagreements, Frank Traynor and Greg Clarke left the band the day before Cup Eve of 1953, and we were due in Sydney for another Parlophone session the next day. Ade Monsborough, Graham Coyle, and Ron “Zeke” Williamson were literally pitchforked into the band and onto a plane. We played a Cup Eve concert at Sydney’s Assembly Hall — best acoustics in the world! Then Stomp was agitated, as Ron Wills had insisted on titles for the session — we had none — with the threat that, if these were not forthcoming, they may cancel the whole junket.



Ade Monsborough: literally pitchforked into the band and onto a plane... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

To his eternal credit as an advocate, Stomp, though visibly ageing overnight, saved the day with wild promises of “great original tunes.”

Excuse the digression, but in retrospect, and on original tunes in general, the good ones can be likened to a good play, in that a witty comedy must have bottom as well as wit. That is to say it must be capable of holding an audience if the wit were removed. It’s the old architectural trick; you must ornament your construction, and not seek to make your construction out of ornaments.

Anyway, we came up with a tatterdemalion collection of titles like *Homebush Stampede*, *Come In Spinner* and *Got The Shakes*; all based on various jazz forms cyclic, rags, and “shouts.” When the records came out (still on 78 rpm), many of the fans opined darkly that we had forsaken the “true” jazz for a hybrid form — that we were becoming showmen ; mountebanks, charlatans, not to mention bounders, cads, and rotters. We won most of them over eventually.



Trombonist Frank “Doc” Willis: he joined the band for the 1954 Great Australian Tour... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Then in late 1954, Stomp started preparing the Great Australian Tour to raise money for an overseas trip. Ade didn't want to travel, so we had a trombone again, one Frank "Doc" Willis. We hired Robin McCulloch as advance man, and invested in a battered Pontiac to carry him ten days ahead of the band arranging halls, advertising, and accommodation. Every few days he would phone Stomp to tell us where to go. We followed on in Bob's Oldsmobile, and all the gear in a Reo truck with garish tarpaulin announcing "Pre-Embarkation Tour." Our uniforms were dark blue suits with pearl buttons, blue suede shoes, and black string ties as affected by Mississippi gamblers. I had a kit of Trixon drums and a 24" Zildjian ride cymbal. It was the first year of Moomba, and we played a farewell concert in the Treasury Gardens to about 8,000 people. Hopes were high in March 1955, and we had great success in Gippsland.

Ron Williamson, ("Zeke") had left his job in a rope factory to become a pro bass player, with the warning (always borne out) - "I always get pissed on Friday afternoons" — Zeke would stroll about country towns, and in Warragul, he came to me one morning and said, "Ya know, this'd be a great town to settle down in. There's a beautiful rope factory down by the railway..."

More about this disastrous tour later, and my subsequent appearances in Vaudeville, but that's another story.

Part 4: Jazz Magazine, July/August, 1981

One day in March 1955, The Champ was laughing about Eddie Condon's book in which a Chicago gangster said, "I like jazz. It's got guts, and it don't make you slobber". Then The Champ said seriously "You fellas are taking on a huge gamble with this tour y' know".



Eddie Condon: The Champ was laughing about his book...

Of course, my band then was the result of honest work that had required ingenuity, patience, self-control, alertness, physical strength, a knowledge of craft, an inner empathy with other improvisers, dexterity when called upon, humour, black despair, modest income, and above all, a desire to do the best possible job under the existing circumstances. Having unloaded that lot, here is a chronicle of a dream that became a nightmare.

In 1955 we encountered some quantities of bad luck. Each town we visited was recovering from either drought, flood or lack of funds, and in one instance (Warracknabeal), the local fire brigade slapped a boycott on us. We were scheduled for the night before the fire brigade ball. They ripped down the band's posters, brought pressure to bear on shopkeepers to get advertisements removed from windows, and even the local newspaper rapped the council for hiring the hall to us.

Each of us were living on ten shillings a day after a month or so. Then the truck had to be repaired in Hamilton (Vic). The parts flown down from Melbourne wouldn't fit. We got more parts by road from Ballarat. Tich Bray, our clarinetist, had to stay with the truck while we went on. We had booked the tour ahead and had to keep faith. Then Tich drove all night through heavy rain, picked us up at Barham, and drove on to Berrigan. We were bogged twice on that trip. The DMR then, was not like it is now. We made Berrigan dead on 8.30, wet and muddy, stumbled into the Hall and started playing. 90 people turned up and we required 250 at each show, to break even.



Tich Bray (left) pictured here in 1955 with another great clarinetist Johnny McCarthy... PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

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

The Sydney musicians were helpful, but it is a strange quirk of humanity that people will fete you and buy you drinks, but should you ask for a sandwich, the friendship is strained. We held a conference — “Off to Brisbane, win there, or give it up —“

Tich and I went in the truck. Tich Bray is a smallish, compact man of great strength and forthright opinions. In fact, Tich called a spade a shovel. We were going through flood-devastated Maitland when the clutch housing cracked on the Reo. Tich was standing there telling God all about it, when a drawling country voice said — “G’day, I’m Herbie. Havin’ a bitta trouble?” Tich, of the legendary short fuse that suffered fools ungladly shouted, “Course I’m havin’ bloody trouble, you bloody Yarra. I wouldn’t be bloody standin’ here if I could drive the bastard, would I?”

As placid as a pumpkin, the unruffled Herbie said, “Let’s ‘ave a look at ‘er”. In ten minutes, he had the clutch housing off, and the truck propped on a red-gum stump. “I’ll ‘ave this back 8 am termorrer. Welded. Cost you a tenner”. The perfect bush mechanic. Herbie’s talk was sprinkled with laconic asides such as “Look at that sheila will yuh. She’s got a face like a bum with eyebrows”.

The big concert at Brisbane Stadium made us 150 pounds profit, but we were 800 pounds in debt. So my battered old gang met in a hotel, and in minutes we’d killed Australia’s first musical cooperative. The band broke up. Some of us were visibly moved. Stomp, our manager, was not to blame. It was more a case of bad collective decisions, and an extraordinary string of misfortunes that flattened our brave enterprises.



The Australian comedian George Wallace: he offered Len a short season as a solo act at the Theatre Royal...

So, Tich and I stayed in Brisbane working for Skippy Humphries at Storyville. Then I was offered a short season as a solo act at the Theatre Royal by George Wallace. With George on those shows were Eddie Edwards, Stevie Doo, Alwyn Leckie, Max Blake, and a delicious bunch of chorines. Jack Iverson was on trumpet in the pit-band led by Clyde Collins. My drums were on a black velvet dais behind the curtain, and I would come on in a white sharkskin suit, mouthing rib-shaking quips like “Evening, folks. Well look here, I have a pair of drumsticks, and I know exactly what to do with them, because so many people have told me!”

Then six leggy girls came on, each holding a saucepan upside down. I played on these (the saucepans) with much vacuous posturing and rolling of wrists to the tune, *I Know That You Know* with stop-time breaks. Sort of a loud-shoe dance. Then the curtain rolled up and, sans girls, I played the finale on drums, usually the ubiquitous *Caravan* or *Golden Wedding*. They were very funny days.



John Sangster on drums: Graeme Bell, working the Celebrity Club in Brisbane, sent for him... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

Graeme Bell was working the Celebrity Club in Brisbane, and had sent for John Sangster. I met John from the train, and we talked all night. He had a beautiful 18” ride cymbal, and a brisk pair of hi-hat cymbals. He and Graeme were the entire band at this small club, and myself and other musicians would call in and jam until daybreak on odd occasions.

“you can’t read for nuts, but you’ve got a bloody good memory”

But this was 1956, and Melbourne was calling again. I had the blues, and went back. I was working with Al “Chan” Redding at the Flamingo in St Kilda during the Olympic

Games, and one night Bruce Kennett dropped in. He was taking a new big band into the Palais de Danse, and wanted me on drums. This was the plum job in Melbourne, but after all those years of jazz, my reading of drum music was poor. But I took the job. The first night at the Palais, Bruce looked rueful and crestfallen as I was not reading well. The next night was substantially the same programme. At the end, Bruce sidled over, and, with a smile of Christian charity, said, "You can't read for nuts, but you've got a bloody good memory". I learned to read very fast.

These next few years were so full of incident and anecdote that they must take up a longer chapter, about Stewie Speer, Brian Brown, Horst Liepolt, and the continuing confessions of a second-line Thespian.

Part 5: Jazz Magazine, September/October, 1981

"To put paint on one's face, learn another man's words, simulate another man's passions, and go on the stage to court the applause of an ignorant rabble must always be a despicable business, unless the actor knows and holds himself to be in touch with beauty..."



Jean Yonnel (Comedie Francais 1946)

At the old Palais De Danse we wore pale blue jackets and black bow ties. The regular personnel was Les Robertson, Bruce Gardiner (trumpets), John Hawker, Col Williams (trombones), Eugene Danilov, Jack Romeril, Brian Brown, Len "Yossel" Josephs (saxes), Les Adams (guitar), Alf Gardiner (bass), Les Patching (piano), LB (drums).

I had a routine with Les Patching, where I bounced a stick high in the air from the head of a tympani, and Les would catch it with his right hand, flick it round his back to his left, and throw it back to me. It was a good sight gag, and always cracked the

patrons up, until Tommy Davidson took over the band. He was somewhat of a martinet and told us he didn't want any "horseplay-on-the-stand" but, for all that, it was a happy orchestra. The late "Yossel", of the wonderfully dry asides like — "I think we'd better play a Canadian Three-Step in case there are any three-legged Canadians in the house" and Jack Romeril's "I've been in the doghouse so many times, I'm gettin' my divorce put through the RSPCA". It was a hard-drinking band, and more often than not, we would still be in the car park at 4 am, the air strict with frost, clutching freezing bottles and laughing about nothing in particular. As Jelly Roll would have said — "everything was in the line of hilarity".

Most of the arrangements were still published in England, and my two drum features were *Viva Verell*, and *Delaney's Delight*. At this time, Horst Liepolt had started jazz Centre 44 at the Katharina Restaurant in St Kilda every Sunday. Two bands alternated and they were Brian Brown's Quintet with Keith Hounslow on trumpet, Dave Martin on piano, Barry Buckley on bass, dear old Stewie Speer on drums, and the other was Allan Lee's Quartet with Frank May on drums, John Allen (bass), and LB on piano. Brownie's group was pure hard-bop inspired by Horace Silver and Miles Davis, Keith and Brownie being floated by the excellence of the rhythm section, and playing good, strong booting phrases, admirably comped by Dave's gnarled and craggy piano work.



Dear old Stewie Speer on drums... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM

There was a good spirit in the jazz fraternity at the time, as we all had so much to talk about, think about, and to play. It was nothing to travel 20 miles on an impulse to play 16 bars of a new record to a friend who would get a kick from it.

Then Ray Bolwell got the job as record producer at Telefil studios, and asked me to get a band together for an album. I got Brother Bob, Mal Wilkinson (trom), Fred

Parkes (clt), Graham Coyle (piano), Peter Cleaver (guitar and bjo), and Joe McConechy (bass) and we recorded an album called *The Naked Dance* in October 1961. Russ Thompson was the engineer who gave us a first class recording sound, and I had taken infinite pains to choose unhackneyed and well constructed tunes, arrange them very simply, then just let the band swing. Which it did.



I was concerned about security, in that a musician's life is very much like a wandering minstrel's life with few prospects of financial independence for the future. I resigned from the Palais and took a job selling Life Assurance for Legal and General. This lasted for one year. Frustrating. Hopeless. No killer instinct. No sales talent. Pains in the gut at night. Then I walked into Les Patching one day in Collins Street, and he said — "just the man I'm looking for. I'm taking a trio into The Cockpit

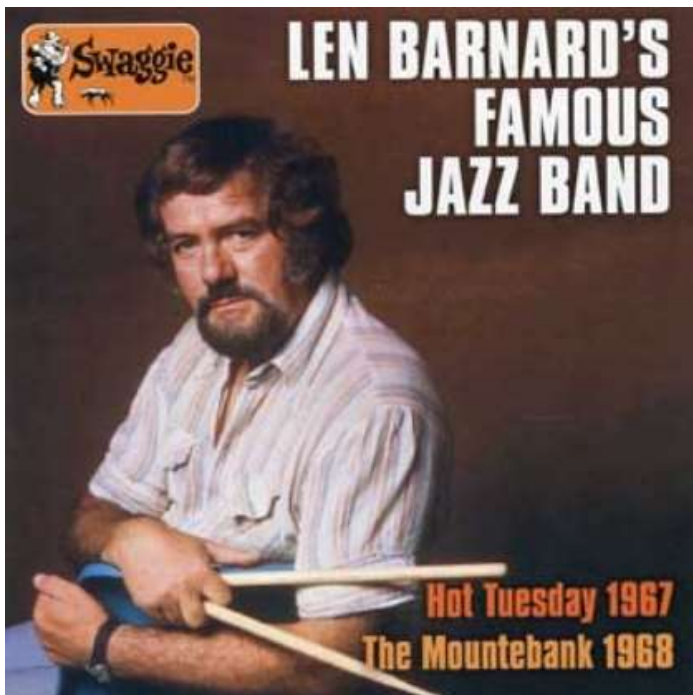


Cover of album released by the Les Patching Trio...

at Essendon airport. It's under Federal law, people can drink until midnight, and the money's good". The only real security comes from within, so I accepted, little knowing that I was to be in that trio for the next nine years, one at the Cockpit and eight at the plush Southern Cross Hotel. Ivan Videky was on bass, a gentle soul of Hungarian persuasion. He used to mangle the language beautifully with such observations as — "Ya betta get your 'flu shots. I think there's gonna be an epileptic..."

So it was basically dining room music, apart from recording *The Wombat* album with Roger Bell's Pagan Pipers, and a Frank Johnson album for Astor records.

The late Frank Smith, one of Australia's great musicians, was using Ivan and myself as the "house" rhythm section on countless TV jingles and commercials, like "Join The Jigglers" etc. One of Frank's favourite gags was "Why has an elephant got four feet?" — "Because he'd look bloody silly with six inches". As you can see, vulgarity sometimes cuts ice that refinement scrapes at vainly. In 1967, Nevill Sherburn of Swaggie Records, asked me to get an album ready. It was six years since I'd recorded under my own name and it was exciting to be in the old harness again. I got Brother Bob from Sydney and he came on blowing stronger than ever when we recorded *I Hope Gabriel Likes My Music*, *Euphonic Sounds*, and others. The album was titled *Hot Tuesday*, and was immediately followed by *The Mountebank*.



I managed to get Beverley Hay out of obscurity for these sessions, as I thought (and still do) that she was one of the best vocalists anywhere, used Ade Monsborough, Neville Stribling and Fred Parkes on reeds, and they all made bright and brawny sounds. Of course there were lots of commercial recordings with Les Patching and many others, and in fact, on last count, I found that I have been on 61 albums so far, which is all very nice, but there is still no pecuniary ease.

But all things change, and one day Tony Gould rang me, suggesting that I go to Rose Music, as there was a position open for Director of Yamaha Music Foundation, an educational set-up of great prestige. I had the interviews, was barrelled through an “intelligence” test with W D Scott & Co (Managerial Consultants), and got the job.

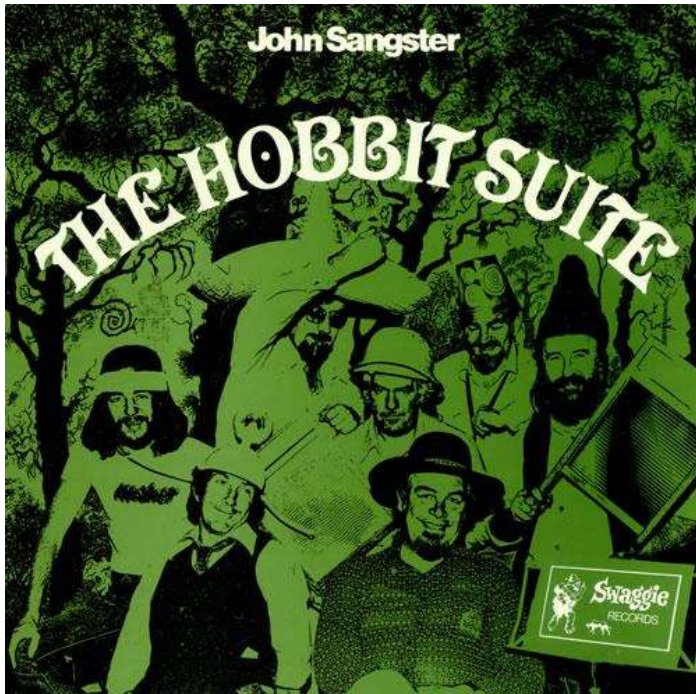
Thus I had to learn electronic organ quickly, including of course, the pedals, a quite different technique than the pumping of a hi-hat. A sort of puzzled proficiency came just in time for me to be sent to Japan to study the Yamaha methods of education in mixed classes. On my first night in Tokyo, I was feeling, believe it or not, dis-oriented, until I heard a girl vocalist (Japanese) in the dining room singing “Ruv me or reave me, or ret me be ronery” and *Days of Wine and Loses* and my mouthful of tempura went in several directions. I studied organ intensively with Koichi Oki, a small, whisky-loving man. He had no English and I had no Japanese, but we communicated pretty well, when he showed me his progressions of alternating 9ths and 13ths which he called “running fourths”, and his own peculiar slapping of the left hand on the lower manual. I had to write a tune as a test, and came up with *Tiggle*, which he liked, and which I subsequently recorded with my band on an album called *The Trouper* along with John Sangster and Jack Lesberg.



The bassist Jack Lesberg: he and John Sangster played on the album The Trouper...

So, back in Australia, it was difficult to get enrolments for the course, and I even collaborated with Rosalind McMillan in the writing of a new course more suitable to Australian students. Then Alan Rose, the head man, decided I should be Keyboard Manager, and I was in the commercial scheme of things again. Touring all over Australia, lecturing and giving “teach-ins” for Yamaha dealers. This had an eroding effect on my marriage, and in 1974, the wheel came off that marriage. I decided to resign from Yamaha, and go and chance my arm in Sydney. Bob had been urging me

to do this for years. I had hardly tapped a drum in five years, except to record the *Hobbit Suite* with John Sangster, but there was another Moomba concert in the Myer Music Bowl, a farewell exactly 19 years later than the send-off on the disastrous tour. Sangster was there, and we swung pretty well that night; all night, in fact, and there was a 10 am call for a Dave Dallwitz session — *Midnight Crawl* — aptly enough.



Len had hardly tapped a drum in five years, except to record the Hobbit Suite with John Sangster...

Bob and John McCarthy were on that one, and Greg Gibson wandered into the studio with his clarinet, and upon being asked if he would play, he said — “I haven’t got an appointment”, and sat ruefully to one side.

Sydney is a wonderful city, the best in the world. I walked straight into a job with Judy Bailey’s Trio at Belrose, stayed with Darkie McCarthy until I got set, then moved to Darlinghurst and the Col Nolan Quartet for a time. It was a good feeling, as a goodly portion of my life in Melbourne had been based on compromises, but eventually the naked realities get the upper hand, and I deplored my sort of shabby-minded timidity in not breaking away sooner.

Ray Price, whom I hadn’t seen since 1962 when we recorded the All-Stars series for Pix, was forming a Quintet for touring, and asked me along. It was a crazy seven months, for Ray with all his irascibility, has a superb sense of humour: “We have Pat Qua on piano, and on paydays, it’s a case of quid pro Qua”, and “Len Barnard was with Ashton’s Circus, but was trodden on by an elephant, and for years afterwards suffered from pachydermatitis”. Graham Spedding and Tom Baker were the front-line, and we had a few peppy arrangements, especially of *The Chant* and *Thick Lip Stomp*, the old Bennie Moten tune. We did three shows a day, comprising two school

concerts, at different schools, and an evening cabaret — endless setting up and pulling down of equipment — drummer’s nemesis.



*Graham Spedding...he and Tom Baker were the front line in the Ray Price Quintet...
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM*

Got the blues and resigned yet again, then went on tour with Kamahl. The money was good and the company was fast, in short, or to cut a long starry shirt, it was Kenny Powell, Neddie Sutherland, and “Strop” Thompson. There were some uproarious nights on those tours which I’ll try and describe at some later sitting. Later I worked with Kenny Powell again on the Dick Emery Show. It was Saturday night at the Hordern Pavilion, but during afternoon rehearsal, Kenny had to fire the trumpet player because he couldn’t “cut” the charts, so frantic ‘phone calls were made, and luckily, Ron Falson was secured at the very last moment. Ron came on (very clear-eyed for a Saturday), and cut the show perfectly at sight. They are the situations that require strength and ability.

The Golden Empress was a new nightclub in Goulburn Street and I backed some great shows there including Ricky May, Talya Ferro, Brenda Kristen and Joe Martin, but then Keith Cook asked me to go into Jools Restaurant in Crown Street, and fortunately I went, as the Empress folded about a month later. At Jools, it was a theatre restaurant revue called “Clap”, written by John McKellar, starring Ronny Frazer, Noel Ferrier, Judy Morris, Megan Williams, and Rod Dunbar. We played on

stage, and my job was to punctuate (or catch) movements of the artists, which worked pretty well for almost a year. Then one night, I looked up at the balcony to see Tom Hare and Chris Qua having a quiet libation at the bar. When I joined them later, Tom said, “How’d you like to join Galapagos Duck?” I said I’d be diluted.



Chris Qua (left) and Tom Hare: how’d you like to join Galapagos Duck?

So, it was back into the jazz once more, and more about it next time.

Part 6: Jazz Magazine, December, 1981

“I sat in the orchestra, between the kettle-drums and the side drum. You can’t be too close to an orchestra. The sound is quite different, more voluptuous, more significant, when you are in the middle of it. Everything takes on a new aspect. The orchestra becomes a set of individuals, delicately inter-related, instead of one huge machine...”



Arnold Bennett (Journals 1899)

Those of you who follow these rantings are, I fondly hope, aware that they are not a carefully selected parade of detail, but just very random reminiscences. With Galapagos Duck, we had Roger Frampton on piano, filling in until Ray Alldridge was free of touring commitments.



One version of Galapagos Duck, L-R, Len Barnard, Greg Foster, Chris Qua, Tom Hare, Col Nolan...

There was always a great atmosphere at The Basement, and the band was firing.

I have a comical recollection of the washboard duets perpetrated by Tom Hare and myself. We would start off flailing away with great bravura, eventually swapping “fours” on the laundry type rhythms. It was then that Tom’s wide, bright, Vaudevillian smile would crumble into grimaces of pain as the metal thimbles chewed into his cuticles.

We recorded the album *Magnum*, then toured Asia for the Department Of Foreign Affairs, which was negotiated through Musica Viva and Peter Brendlé. Firstly to Jakarta, its frantic traffic, and the wonder of the Balinese gamelan bands. The plangent sound of the percussion instruments and the charmingly unexpected crescendos and pauses captivated us completely.

It was near election time and the military boys were doing plenty of strutting.

Two of our concerts at universities were cancelled because of “student unrest,” so we were able to get together with a large gamelan band, where I had a lovely time,

sweating the while, trading eye-brow-raising passages with these cheerful men. Jack Lesmana was very hospitable, and we had a few informal sessions with Indonesian All-Stars, in which Jack was the fine guitarist, and Benny Mustafa the excellent



The fine Indonesian guitarist Jack Lesmana: he was very hospitable...

drummer. Thence to Bombay and the first Jazz Yatra Festival (Yatra is the Indian word for pilgrimage). The airport was chaotic, and they mislaid one of our trunks of instruments, later found on the tarmac at 3 am with the “This Side Up” arrows pointing downwards. Bombay is enchanting, exasperating, reeking of history and other things, charismatic, teeming with tricky humanity, mysterious to the newcomer, cricket loving, religious, enigmatic, and Indian.

But then, all my life I’ve been handicapped as a debater or controversialist or condemner by finding myself to too large a degree ranged also on the other side.

One word about Galapagos Duck at that particular time. A good band can always rise to the occasion, but a really good band can pick the occasions that are worth rising to.



At Rhang Bavan in India the members of The Duck were introduced by Voice of America broadcaster Willis Conover (pictured here)...

This one was at Rhang Bavan on Thursday night, February 16th, 1978 to an audience of 2,000, who had been bludgeoned by a seemingly interminable barrage of electronic “free-form” from Zbigniew Namyslowski (Poland) and the Volker Kriegel Quintet (West Germany).

Willis Conover announced us, and we came on rhythmically, blowing straight and clean, and cracked the place up. We were still on stage at 1 am and nobody had left. It was a riot. Now, don't get me wrong, dear listener, I don't for one moment suggest that our music was any better than that preceding us. It's just that a lot of guys misunderstand the cerebral acceptance of an audience, and won't come to grips with the fact that people en masse want to be entertained and not educated.



The pianist Roger Frampton: we played the concert with him transposing everything down a key...PHOTO CREDIT JOE GLAYSHER

Then we took a train to Poona (Last Outpost Of The British Raj), 100 miles north of Bombay. We were driving to the Nehru Memorial Hall in a minibus, and saw a superannuated grand piano being trundled along a dusty road on a cart propelled by six Indian labourers. There was only one piano available and that was it. When the Indians arrived at the hall with it, there ensued an hour of gesticulating d'amour as they got it on stage. Then, Roger Frampton found it was a whole tone flat. The promoter assured us that it would be tuned, and when we came back later, he said — “Ah! Tuner has just left. Piano okay now.” But piano was the same as before, and we discovered that there was no piano-tuner in the town, and only one in the whole of Bombay. Thanks to Roger's musicianship, we played the concert with him transposing everything down a key, and myself on a borrowed boy's drum kit from the Don Bosco Home.

This prompted a good song title *There Ain't No Tuner In Poona, And There's Only One In Bombay*. It has yet to be written. Then we did three concerts in Colombo where we met a strangely assorted bunch of local musicians, one of which was a bass-player called Lucky, who was permanently stoned, and who kept a flask of warm arrack on his hip. We stayed at the Galle Face Hotel, which is pure Somerset Maugham, ocean, palms, noiseless gliding waiters, smell of spices; all the overtones of a gracious bygone era.

Thence to Hong Kong for one concert. John Gunn, of the Australian Embassy in Peking had heard of our tour, and arranged to get us there. The train from Honkers to Kwangchow (Canton) was curiously elegant with white lace antimacassars on each seat. This was the border of Red China, and it was a tiresome time as the guards searched all our equipment. We were cracking gags to them about concealed explosions and contraband — always a mistake — utterly humourless. Maybe the reason for the term — “inscrutable Orientals” is that there is really nothing to “scrute”.

Then on a plane full of Chinese soldiers to Peking, where I was billeted with Peter and Wendy Phillips in the Foreign Compound. We did two concerts at the Embassy in the Great Hall Of The Australian People. Not one Chinaman was present. The audiences were Embassy staff from Norway, Britain, Africa, America, Australia, all starved for live music, so Roger helped make it live by hopping about the stage (from piano to soprano) like a small, slim, prehistoric bird. Peter Phillips speaks fluent Mandarin, and he arranged for us to visit The Great Wall, a real experience, and the Ming Tombs, an unreal experience.



The Galapagos Duck banner on the Great Wall... PHOTO COURTESY PETER BRENDLÉ

Then to Manila, which is full of raging hysteroids, and Singapore, where my favourite cowbells were stolen from backstage. During all this time, the band was developing a subtle change in style, with looser arrangements, and more individual blowing space.

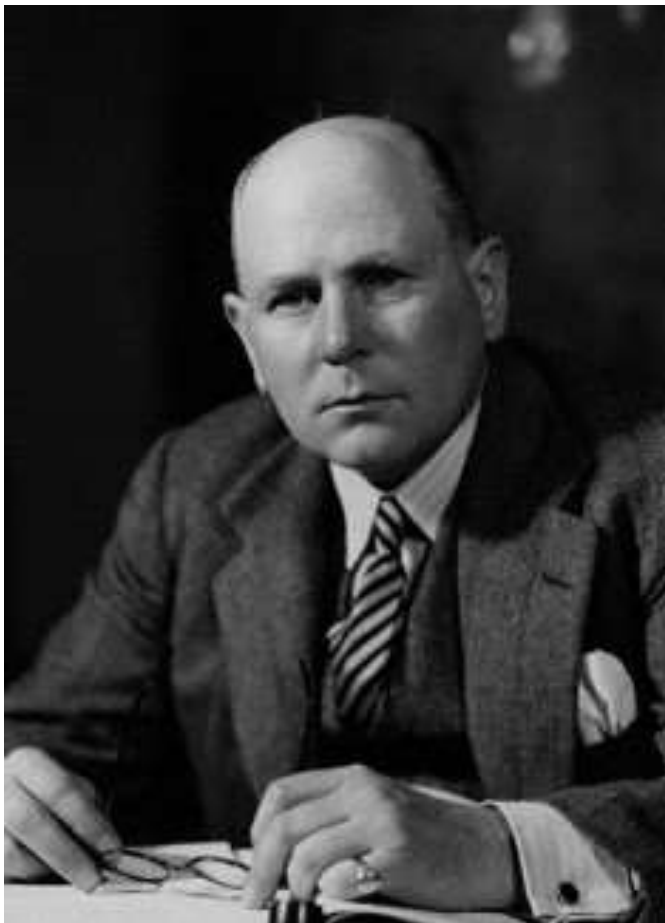
Back in Sydney, Peter Brendlé came in as permanent manager, and we recorded *Right On Cue* for Polygram. Peter negotiated a European tour and we left in mid-1979 for Frankfurt.

We drove to Kassel for our first concert and met several German jazz-lovers, jowls crimson with good cheer.

This was subsequently an eventful tour which must perforce await the next instalment.

Part 7: Jazz Magazine, January/February, 1982

— *“Beauty is the vision of the artist, and a man is a great composer of music not because he represents in sound what it feels like to be a locomotive, but because his mind is made of the stuff that would have made him a great musician before steam-engines were thought of.”*



James Agate (1928)

When Galapagos Duck arrived in Kassel, Germany, we were welcomed by Willi Borchner, a gentle German with a slow American drawl. He was an ex-prisoner of war, and had been employed by the Americans as an interpreter in European prison-camps. He loved jazz and was the curator of the Kassel Museum and Art Gallery, which was once the Kaiser's summer palace. It was grandeur unsurpassed, with heart-stopping views, soft drizzle in diffused sunshine, handsome gazebos in superbly landscaped gardens, and evoked the whole ethos of the graciousness of the 19th century in one afternoon.

Our concert was a sellout, and very successful, so we charged across Europe into Switzerland and to the beautiful village of Les Avants, where Peter Brendlé's sister, Ruth, was in charge of Joan Sutherland's house. Thanks to Ruth and Peter and their parents, the hospitality was first class.

We needed a band rehearsal, but everything "got out of hand," as usual, and the only rehearsing that happened, was Greg Foster's long walks in the alpine fields, as he listened to the cowbells which were attached to every piece of cattle. Les Avants overlooked the highly expensive city of Montreux, where we played an outdoor Saturday afternoon concert at the prestigious Festival. I feel that it has become an annual place-to-go-and-pose-with-latest-gear-and-sunglasses, and the jazz is not altogether paramount as it should be. A vast complaint, I grant you, but one must report the basic observations and resultant feelings.



The Duck, in a shot taken in the Swiss village of Les Avants, where Peter Brendlé's sister Ruth was in charge of Joan Sutherland's house. L-R, Brendlé, Len Barnard, Greg Foster, Dame Joan, Tom Hare, Chris Qua, Ray Alldridge... PHOTO COURTESY PETER BRENDLÉ

So it had all been idyllic so far, and we set off for Munich to a general dousing of spirits, due to a husband-wife feud between the proprietors of the Jazz Allotria Salon. The surname eludes me, but Herman the German and his Frau will suffice. The publicity for our appearance was poor, and we stayed 13 miles out of town at his motel, a ragtime establishment. Herman had the sallow complexion, thin wrists, and sharpish teeth of the habitual drunkard, and kept up a high pitched cackle which went (interminably), “Nothing can possibly go wrong. Hee, ho hee...”

Anyway, on the night, everything possible went wrong. Herman’s Frau wouldn’t let me use the tatterdemalion Trixon drum kit, nor would they provide a piano, the upshot being that we packed up (I can still see the brass instruments going into those coffin-like green metal trunks), and left, amid glowering remarks of “very bad” from the sipping customers. I’ve never been quite sure whether they meant, knowingly, the feud of the management, or that the Australian band was being precious and recalcitrant. We roared back to the motel, to the mortified concern of the staff — and of Herman, apparently, who was “unobtainable”. We decided to drive all night to Calais, thence to London.



Australian expatriate saxophonist Ray Warleigh supported The Duck at the 100 Club in London...

Bureaucratic balls-up at Dover about work permits was overcome eventually, then we met James Hunt, Cultural Attache at Australia House, who was a gentleman and helpful as well. We played the 100 Club in Oxford Street, supported by expatriate Australians Dave MacRae (piano), and Ray Warleigh (saxophones). Or saxophone and half-dozen of the other. It was a sellout again, and this prompted James Hunt to organise a special concert in the main hall at Australia House, in which one only

previous concert was performed by an obscure fiddle-player named Yehudi Menuhin. I think every Australian in London was there that night and you could “feel the warm”. Some of Tom’s relatives from Dagenham were there. Always loved that word, Dagenham; sounds like a nondescript breakfast dish. They were enchanted, of course.



Pianist Dave MacRae: he also supported The Duck at the 100 Club in London...

Thence to Brussels and a concert on the steps of the Opera House, but a flashback here to the comic opera entry into East Germany. We wanted to visit Bach’s house in Eisenach, about 25 miles over the border. The search, the spurious doubt about Ray Alldridge’s passport photograph, the posturing, the \$10 each road tax, the whole charade was very enlightening, and not one smidgeon edifying. Same bunkum occurred on the way back. Grin and bear it? Only once, thank you.

Anyway, after this tour, we came back and continued at the newly renovated Basement. Bruce Viles had got cracking while we were away, and it was great to see the transformation, much of it due to Tom’s work prior to the tour. Then came a job fit for the *Guinness Book of Records*. We flew from Sydney to Miami, Florida, via San Francisco (where Ray’s synthesiser was knocked off), and New Orleans (where we didn’t even smell the gumbo, but only the petrol as we refuelled), to represent Polygram Records at Musexpo. We played a 40 minute set at this vast function, and were on the plane at 7.30 am the next morning for Sydney. In Miami, I bought some swimming trunks so that I could dunk myself in the Gulf of Mexico, but they didn’t fit, and it rained anyway. I think.

Towards the end of 1980, Tom decided on a new policy for G. Duck, which involved two keyboard players, a more sophisticated lighting setup, and more electronic sounds. Some of us disagreed, and after the usual classic “throw down” in the office,

Chris Qua, Col Nolan, and myself resigned. No acid remains from this, as we are all close friends. As ever.



Len Barnard (left) with Bob Barnard, Gold Coast Jazz Awards, 1993: it was back to where Bob and I first started...PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD

It was just a question of policy, which seems to have paid off for the band in the long scheme of things. The wheels turned fast then. Tom rang Laurie Thompson, and offered him the gig on drums which he accepted. Laurie had been with Brother Bob's band for some time. At 9.30 am the next morning Bob rang me with – “What's going on?” I replied, “Well, I'm not working tonight, if you need a man on tubs.” So the old wheel turns again, and I'm back to where Bob and I first started, mainstreaming it up with the utmost vigour.
