DON BURROWS: THE GENTLE COMMUNICATOR

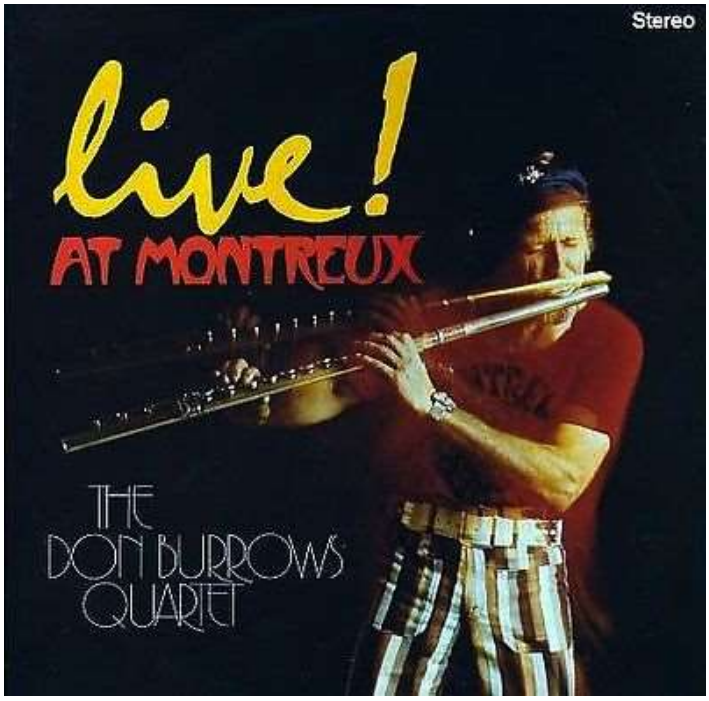
by Eric Myers & Adrienne Lamb

[This article appeared in the August, 1978, edition of Encore Magazine.]

To write the history of Don Burrows would be virtually to write the history of Australian jazz over the last 30 years. He has been such a dominant influence during that time, that few seriously question his right to be regarded as Australia's premier jazzman. Just as the number one big band always belonged to Duke Ellington in the States, Burrows' pre-eminence in Australian jazz has rarely been questioned.

It is not our purpose to merely list Don Burrows' achievements, which are legion. This would require a series of articles, so full has his career been.

A judicious selection of some of his firsts may show the extent to which he has dominated Australian jazz: the first Australian jazz musician to be invited to take his group to the prestigious jazz festivals of Montreux and Newport (1972); the first jazz musician to be awarded the MBE for services to music and the community (1972); the first Australian jazz musician to sell a gold record, with the LP *Just The Beginning* (1973) — (in 1974, his LP *DBQ At The Opera House* also went gold); the first jazz musician to be offered a creative arts fellowship in the Australian National University in Canberra (1977); the first jazz musician to be artist-in-residence at Sturt College of Advanced Education, Adelaide (1978). . . The list goes on.



In this story, we want to look behind the achievements, and throw some light on his roots and philosophy. There is little doubt that Don Burrows stands for many things which are worthwhile. He appears to be a man of considerable humanity, a communicator with a deep concern for his society, and the role that music can play in

the community. Thus his newfound role as an educator, and his strong and thoughtful opinions on Australia today.

Don Burrows, pictured in 1978, aged 50…

For an appreciation of Don Burrows, it is important to remember the world in which he grew up. When you see him playing concerts and gigs, appearing in the media, and moving around the schools and the universities, taking jazz to the people, it is hard to believe that this extraordinary man is 50 years old.

He looks very much like an artist and thinker: deeply tanned, a few wrinkles, dark greying hair atop a high forehead. His is not the face of an old man; with his attractive, warm smile, there is not much hint of aging. Yet, you have to realise that Don Burrows grew up during the thirties, in a world very different to the Australia which later generations know, and he broke into music during the disjointed time of the Second World War.

What were the fundamental experiences which drew the young Don Burrows into music? In his early development, he emphasises the proximity of live music in Sydney, and its availability for a young music lover. One such influence was that of the musicians who played on Bondi Beach each weekend — guitar, harmonica, side-drum with brushes, maybe saxophone and clarinet — surrounded by a crowd of music-lovers, 13 or 14 deep on the sand. It was a joyous experience for the young Burrows, at that time about 8 or 9 years old, and he describes it as “my first encounter, visually, with jazz… I didn’t know there was a name called ‘jazz’ for it. I just liked the feel and sound of it…”

A relatively young Burrows with his baritone sax: he broke into music during the disjointed time of the Second World War… PHOTO © RON FALSON ARCHIVE

Don remembers the live broadcasts of music on Sunday mornings over 2KY from Suttons Music Store, and the 2GB shows which featured live music and big bands: "All the stations had bands," says Don. "All the shows would have invited audiences so, just for the sake of writing for the ticket, I could come in and watch a show being recorded, or played live. I would always sit near the band…"

The fascination of a young music enthusiast was also encouraged by the live music which, in those days, was provided in the big movie houses, like the Prince Edward, the State, the Regent, the St James: "I would crack my neck to come and see the movies in town, because not only would I see the movie, but the big attraction for me was to see a live band playing. These weren't jazz orchestras, but they were backing acts. I was fascinated by the big drummers catching the tricks, all the shiny saxophones…"

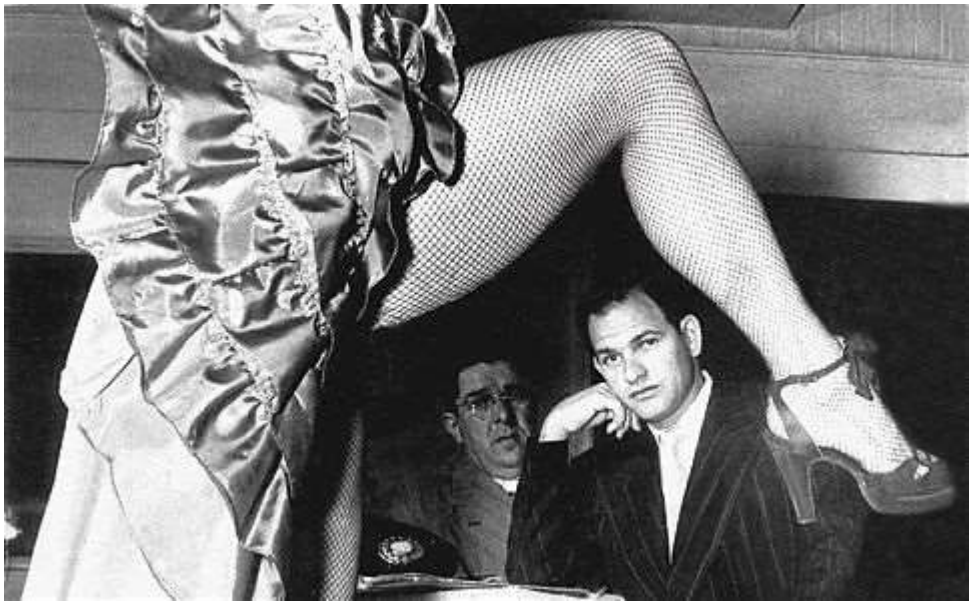
Still at school, Don found himself in the school band at Bondi Beach and, with other gifted children, was selected to play in the big rehearsal band under Vic McMahon, which played Saturday mornings at Palings Concert Hall. An added bonus was that, downstairs in the shop proper, many musicians would come in and jam, some of whom Don had seen on Bondi Beach. He speaks with affection and nostalgia of those days: "This is a facet of music stores which has gone, which is very sad, but in those days, Friday nights and Saturday mornings were jam session nights. Musicians could come in and take a guitar out of the showcase, a trumpet or something, and they'd jam, and it was good for business. People knew this and would come along, listen to

music being played and see the instruments they were interested in buying being played on. So, it had a lot going for it."

The upshot of this was that the concept of live music, and playing music for the sheer joy of it, became dominant ideas in Don Burrows' consciousness: "I grew up hearing it on the radio, seeing it with my own eyes and hearing it with my own ears right from the beginning when my interest was first germinated. This was an enormous kick-off for anybody."

It is possible to see a genuine connection between these experiences and the themes which now are Don Burrows' main concerns: his desire to bring live music and the jazz consciousness to the wider society, particularly to children in the schools, his great admiration for the ways in which the Brazilians incorporate music into their experience, his regret that Australian musicians do not get the best out of themselves, his sadness that the music industry, in the past, did not support Australian talent.

As a young teenager during the Second World War, Burrows began playing gigs. "It came to the inevitable," says Don, "something had to give and I'm afraid school lost. I just didn't finish school". It is ironic to consider that the musician in this country who has contributed much to the teaching of jazz, did not complete school, and actually celebrated his 15th birthday playing at Sammy Lee's Roosevelt Club in Kings Cross.



The famous shot of Abe Saffron, co-owner with Sammy Lee of The Roosevelt Club in Kings Cross, where Don Burrows, while playing there, celebrated his 15th birthday…

Don made his first appearance on record in 1945, working for George Trevare on Regal Xonophone. The group recorded all Australian compositions on three 78s (and these rare sides are now extremely valuable collector's items).

One of the most admirable things about Burrows is his concern that children should be more open to the arts — not only jazz music, but any art or live performance which

might awaken and inspire them. “One of the best things that can happen to a child is to be confronted with a real live performer, whether a player, an actor, a singer, a sculptor, whatever. . . but somebody who does the real thing. It’s an inspirational thing.”

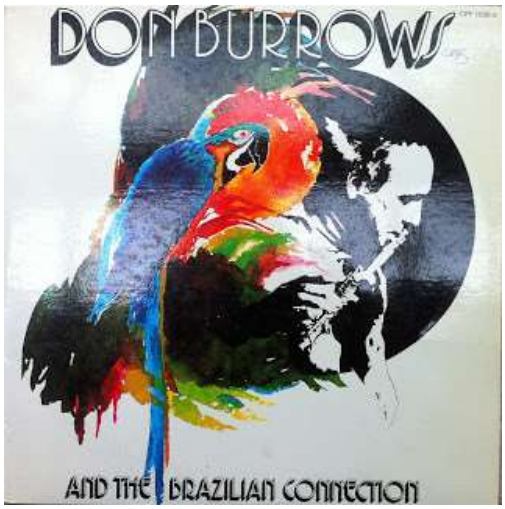
He believes that something happens to Australian children during the growing-up process, especially in the big cities. In the more isolated areas of Australia, children are more community-minded, and therefore retain their curiosity and spontaneity, but generally Australian children are turned off to music. “Here, we seem to do something to the mental processes of the kids. Around the 12, 13, 14 age group they seem to become musical wallflowers . . . There’s something in our community and in our attitudes where their thinking is tampered with as far as giving of themselves is concerned, being naturally musical. It’s very hard to get a group of Australians to sing. Have you ever tried?”

It is Don Burrows’ empathy with children which is a dominant force in his personality. It obviously gives him a charge, and allows him to get much joy out of teaching: “I think, if there’s one thing I’ll claim, only one, it’s that I get on great with kids… I love kids and I love working with them, and it’s the only time I really feel at home and sort of vaguely confident. Any other time I’m very unsure of myself, always have been as a player, but with kids I feel at home, really relaxed and right, which should tell me something… I should only work in that area — I think I do that area better than anything I do.”

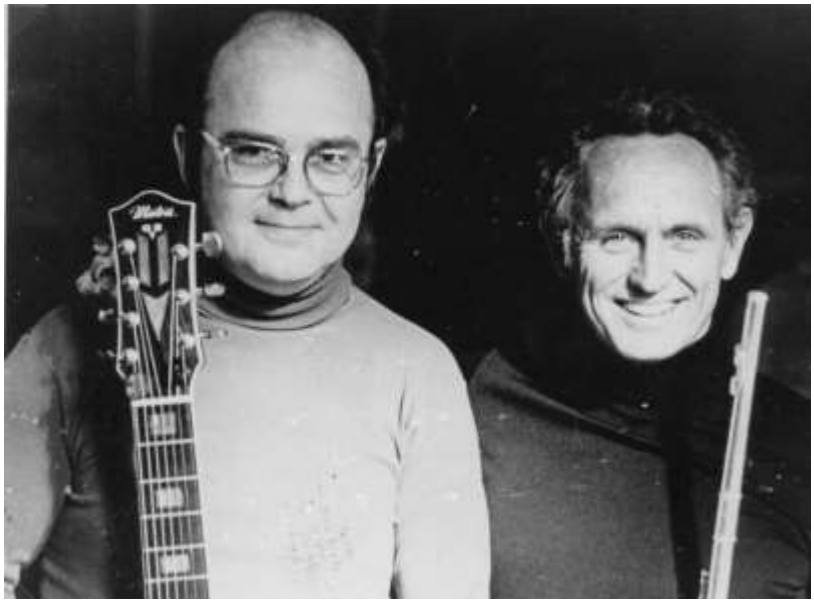
Burrows, pictured in 2010 with Pittwater High student Lachie Hamilton: with kids Burrows feels at home, really relaxed and right… PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK

Australia has never had a strong ethnic music, with the exception of Aboriginal music, which is now beginning to assert itself. The fact that most Australian music has in the past been derivative has been a source of some regret to Don Burrows. The relative paucity of musical inspiration in this country has made his recent experiences with Brazilian music and musicians overwhelming.

“I admire a people who have such a musical heritage and can display such spontaneous love and respect for it unashamedly. They’re very lucky people.”



Don has naturally been influenced by American jazz, but he feels an empathy with Brazilian music which is special: “There’s just something else that I felt in being swept up by this music of Brazil, that touched me even deeper. This might indicate that jazz doesn’t run as deeply inside me as a total music as, say, this other sort of music, and its syncopations.” Shortly, he and guitarist George Golla will be returning to Brazil to film a documentary on the life and music of the people in that country.



Guitarist George Golla (left) with Burrows: the duo will be returning to Brazil to film a documentary on the life and music of the people… *PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ MUSEUM*

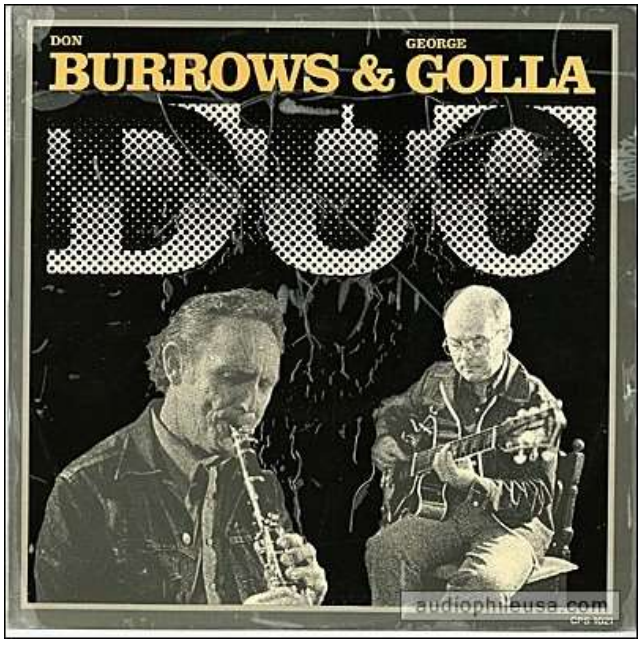
A clue to Don Burrows’ musical philosophy can perhaps be gleaned by his attitude to some of the jazz performances which he has heard in the United States: “Indeed, many of the performances I’ve heard there in more recent times were downright angry and downright frightening and that’s an element I personally don’t care for in

music. . . I think I'm basically too gentle inside to cop anything too angry and I don't like hearing people use music to vent their anger. . . but it's their right."

When you hear Don Burrows playing the flute, alto sax and clarinet as he did with George Golla in the recent Winter Series of Jazz at the Paris Theatre, Sydney, you can't deny the impressiveness of his playing: the technical mastery of his chosen instruments, the beauty and musicality of his improvisations, the fact that he swings and gets the music burning. It is apparent that, allied to his natural ability, he has put much work into his instruments. He has set an example, and been the envy of other players.

Still, he is concerned that Australian musicians (himself included) have not put the work into their instruments which musicians do in other countries. "One of the factors that's deprived us of higher achievements is that basically, we are downright lazy. We don't put anything like the amount of work in on our instruments that our counterparts in other countries do. We really have a 'sunshine syndrome' here . . . Broadly speaking, as a people, we don't apply ourselves diligently enough, almost to any damn thing that we do as an Australian people, in my opinion, and music is no exception."

He is quick, however, to point out that things have not been easy for creative people in Australia, in the past. And he should know. When you look at the recognition which Don Burrows enjoys now — regarded as an artist, a teacher, and a celebrity, with the right to go overseas as a representative of Australian culture, as he did recently with George Golla to Europe and the Middle East (sponsored by the Dept of Foreign Affairs and Musica Viva) — it is easy to forget the past.



Don Burrows albums are made regularly, and sell well... But this is a latterday development...

Only in the late 60's and the early 70's did the realisation come over Australians that there were things in this country which merited our pride and care. The beginnings

of an Australian identity — particularly in films and television — also meant an increasing interest in Australian music, including jazz, and Don Burrows' recognition as an artist has come late in the career of a man who has been carrying the torch for Australian jazz as long as we can remember.

These days, Don Burrows albums are made regularly, and sell well. He has two gold records to his credit already. But this is a latterday development. What about the early days, in the fifties and early sixties? Did the record companies encourage him to record? "God, no", says Don, "they were really stifling. The big record companies have a great deal to answer for, for the way they behaved in the past. I'm not talking about now—it's starting to happen — but, it's been quite disgraceful, the neglect of those in a position to record talent... I can think of oodles of talented people in this country who never struck a note on a record, which is quite disgraceful."

The American vibes player Red Norvo: Burrows was told that if the company wanted a Red Norvo record, they would send to the parent company in the US for a master...

Don tells a story about the American vibraphonist Red Norvo, who came to this country for concert appearances, and was staying and rehearsing at Don's place. Naturally Don played with his group, and Norvo suggested that they make an album together while he was in town. Don put the idea to a record company, but the idea was rejected. Don was told that if the company wanted a Red Norvo record, they would send to the parent company in the US for a master!

"It was disgraceful, quite pathetic," says Don, "and not only that. When I think what some of the big music stores here have taken out of the music industry... Very few have put anything back into the industry, to promote the art form that's made money for them."

One of the things which comes across when you talk to Don Burrows is that he is a man who knows himself, who is relatively sure of his values, while at the same time he is obviously open to new influences. But he frankly admits that he is not in tune with everything that is happening in today's music. "I get very bored with those

pieces which go on and on, on one scale. I think you've got to be enormously interesting and inventive to hold anyone's interest for 30 minutes on one scale."

Also, he regrets the fact that many musicians strive for a sound which is regarded as the 'in sound', rather than finding their own sound: "I don't enjoy that tendency for sameness, even in sound, when suddenly it's considered 'hip' to sound a certain way on the tenor saxophone. So, everybody sounds exactly that way, instead of sounding like themselves."

Burrows has an affinity for the compositions of Michael Bartolomei (Bart) pictured here on the piano… PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Don's dislike for one-scale raves perhaps explains his affinity for the compositions of a young Australian composer, Michael Bart — tunes which are lyrical, in varied time feels, and which feature beautiful changes. At the Paris, Don Burrows and George Golla played three such tunes, *Brown Shoes Blues*, *Colours*, and *Other Times, Other Places*. Michael Bart was a student of Don's at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and it is worth a mention that the presence of the Jazz Studies courses at that institution was the result of Don Burrows' activities and persuasion on behalf of jazz.

For a man whose achievements in Australian jazz have been spectacular, there is a disarming modesty about Don Burrows. He describes his partnership with guitarist George Golla with some humility: "We don't blaze any trails musically… We just play, and thoroughly enjoy playing, and I think if there's a factor that is a cause for any acceptance by people in the audience, it's possibly that we really love what we're doing."

Right on. But future generations of Australian jazz fans will look kindly on the man who put so much back into music, without receiving the recognition he deserved until relatively late in his career. "I think it behoves anybody involved in any

endeavour to put something back into it", he says. Don Burrows has done it in the past, is doing it now, and his enthusiasm for future projects and activities is undimmed. In 1978 he is a man in his prime, a musician at his peak.

Don Burrows has been a highly successful studio musician throughout his career: "I seem to be able to string notes together in a way that seems to effectively get across to Australian audiences, which is very fortunate for me. It's given me a very comfortable career, but I would never kid myself that I'm a creative musician… I'm not an innovator at all… I haven't got that spark. I hear all those things in others. I would like to be in that league as a creator and an innovator, but you've either got it or you haven't and I never have had it. I think what I have is an ability to communicate. I'm a communicator. I can think instantly of players in this country who could blow me off the floor in one concert, but they're not communicators and this is sad. It upsets me to see these really fine creative people not getting through and it worries me… I wish there was something to be done for them — I've felt this way all my life."

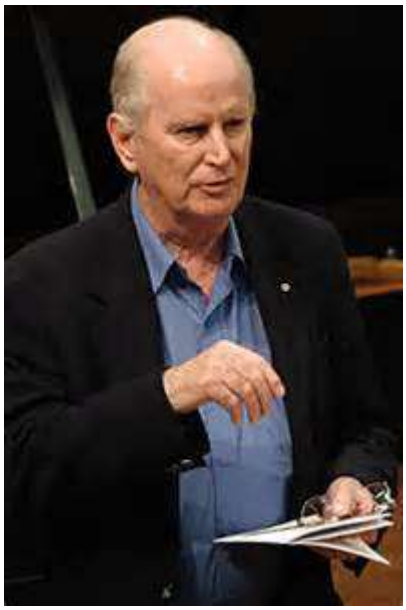
DON BURROWS: PROFESSOR OF JAZZ

by Eric Myers

[This article appeared in the March/April, 1981 edition of Jazz Magazine.]

Don Burrows took up his appointment as the first full-time Chairman of the Jazz Studies Department at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music in 1980. Twelve months on, Burrows may have taken up his appointment in 1980, but his involvement in the cause of jazz education goes back much further. It was in the early 1970s that he read the text of an address by the then new Director of the

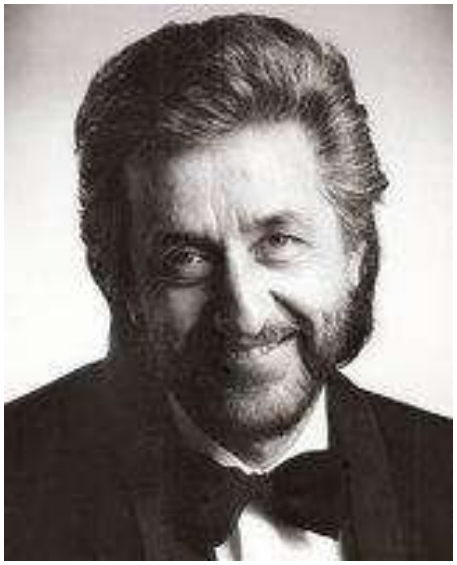
Conservatorium of Music Rex Hobcroft, in which Hobcroft expressed the view that a true Conservatorium should be a place where many musical forms, other than just classical music, might be studied.



Rex Hobcroft: he believed that a true Conservatorium should be a place where many musical forms, other than just classical music, might be studied…

Burrows subsequently wrote to Rex Hobcroft, suggesting the establishment of a jazz studies program. This came about in 1973, when a course commenced, headed by the American saxophonist Howie Smith. Smith had the position for three years, after which it was taken over by another American Bill Motzing, the trombonist, composer and arranger (and former sound mixer for the group Blood Sweat and Tears) who had been living in Australia for some years.

The American Howie Smith headed the jazz studies program for three years from 1973…



Bill Motzing, another American, succeeded Howie Smith…

In 1978 his place was taken by the first Australian to head the course, the pianist and saxophonist Roger Frampton. Two years later in 1980 the position was made full-time, and offered to Don Burrows.

In 1978 Roger Frampton became head of the course, before the position was made full-time in 1980, and offered to Don Burrows… PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Burrows was originally prompted to take up the cause of jazz education because, as he saw it in the early 1970s, there were limited opportunities for young, jazz-oriented musicians to hear and play music. “All through the 30s, 40s and 50s there had been plenty of big bands around”, said Burrows, “even if they were commercially involved

in, say, radio and TV shows, or even backing jingles. There was a whole era of involvement for jazz-type musicians."

As early as the 1960s Burrows could see that studio work was on the decline, while dance halls and night-clubs, which employed big bands, were fast disappearing, and therefore the opportunities for young musicians were shrinking.

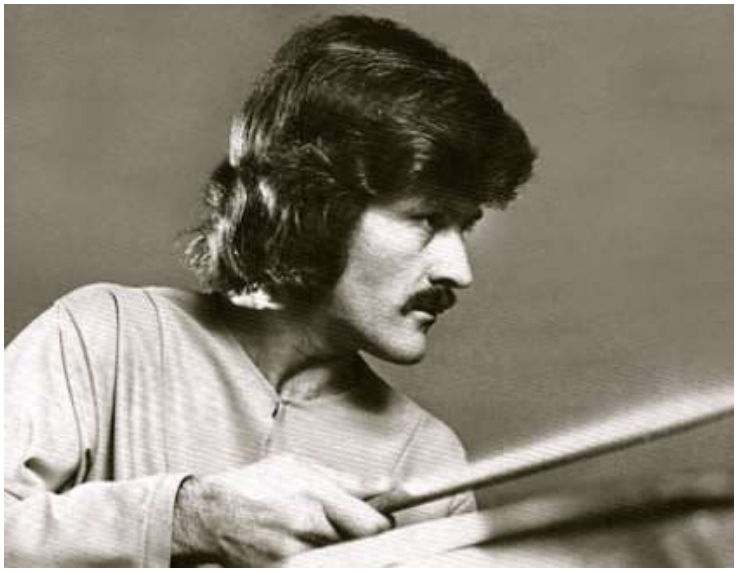
Burrows: he could see that studio work was on the decline, while dance halls and night-clubs, which employed big bands, were fast disappearing…PHOTO CREDIT EDMOND THOMMEN

"I had grown up through an era in which, even if you went to the movies in town, you saw a big band performing. If you went to the 2GB Macquarie Theatre or the 2UW Radio Theatre to watch a show being put together, it always had a big band.

"So, there were many opportunities for a child with eyes and ears for music to, free of charge, see and hear big bands performing, and musicians doing their thing. Today these opportunities have disappeared. Under-age kids today can't get access to licensed premises, to the RSL clubs, the Leagues clubs. When I grew up, I could see and hear music everywhere".

Burrows believes that the great value of the Conservatorium jazz course is that it provides a structured opportunity for jazz enthusiasts to meet, play and study. “The Con is a place where, on a regular basis all year, jazz-minded young musicians, or older musicians, it doesn’t matter, can meet, can play together, can write, can listen, can discuss, can read about jazz, with the advantage of being around professional people who have spent their lives in and around jazz music and jazz musicians.”

Burrows feels that the commitment of a Monday through Friday situation is what the present era needs. In past years, there were many rehearsal bands, such as Billy Weston’s famous one, where there was a sense of belonging to something, and real dedication to the learning, exploring and discovering involved in the art of jazz.



Burrows points out that the Daly-Wilson Big Band, co-led by drummer Warren Daly (above) and trombonist Ed Wilson (below) provided a context in which players could develop their abilities…

By the early 1970s, however, most of those bands had disappeared, although Don points to the excellent work done by Warren Daly and Ed Wilson from 1969 to create opportunities and provide a context, in the Daly-Wilson Big Band, in which players could develop their abilities.

Burrows sees the Conservatorium course now as providing a nexus situation in Sydney jazz, and the fact that it is part of a permanent educational institution means that funding is available to provide jazz tuition for many young people who would otherwise not be able to afford it.

"Sure, there are class-room situations, and now there are Diplomas, but these are only means to an end," he says. "l get a bit annoyed when I hear people criticise it and say 'who needs a piece of paper to say you can swing?' But they've missed the point. To make this an ongoing, permanent thing, jazz tuition is in safer hands as part of the education system, than left to a single individual or a single entity. I just feel that this will be forever, if we do it properly — there'll always be an opportunity for jazz-type young people to learn the history of jazz, if nothing else".

Most of today's working jazz groups are small, tight combos, says Burrows. The Conservatorium provides opportunities to experiment with other colours and unusual instrumentation — string sections, bassoons, oboes, alto and bass flutes and so on. "All these other textures are laying there waiting to be found, and maybe have something done with them", says Burrows. "The Con can provide that sort of chance, and I'm working hard all the time towards more unification and more interaction between the Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, the Conservatorium string groups, the choirs, and the Jazz Department, so we can get together and use each other's expertise and facilities, to broaden all our horizons."

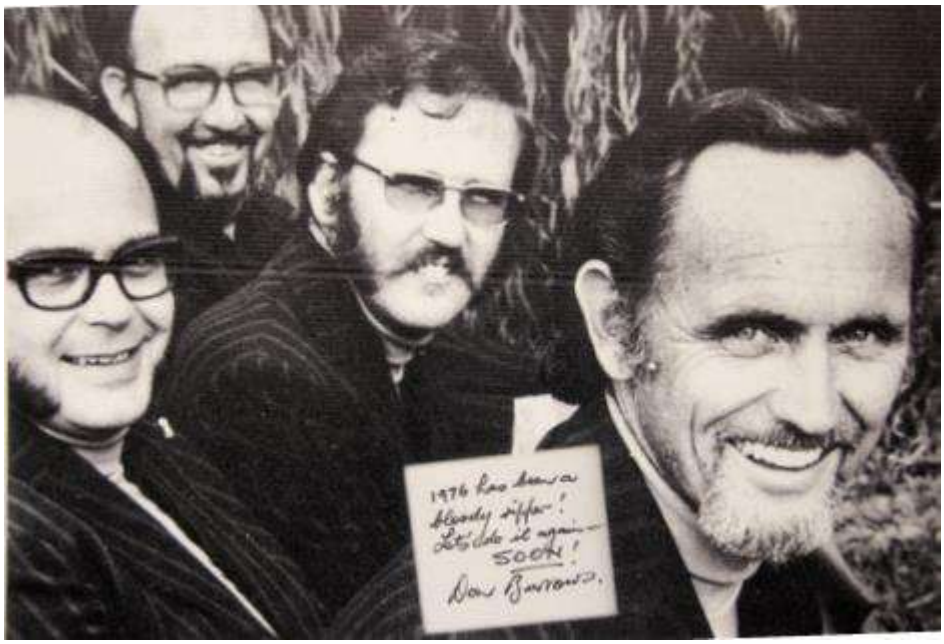
Burrows points out that the market-place cannot provide the facilities and opportunities for musicians to learn about these wider areas of music, yet frequently that same market-place demands that jazz musicians know about these things. The Australian film industry, for instance, is now booming, providing opportunities for talented young composers to create film scores. Yet this might require enough knowledge to write for a 50-piece orchestra, says Burrows, and courses at the Conservatorium, in the jazz and other departments, do provide this knowledge,

"There is a whole world of music, loosely entitled 'jazz', that includes film music and God knows what else, that is not the domain of the classical musician. It is the lot of the jazz-type musician. And it doesn't just mean standing up and playing *Opus de Funk* to be a jazz musician. Anyone who thinks that is kidding himself. You have to do a certain percentage of jobs that are soul-destroying; you can't always call the shots. But you have to be able to learn from those situations, which can make you more determined to find your own direction".

Don Burrows is, of course, one of the leading performers in Australian jazz and his involvement at the Conservatorium naturally means that he is playing less. This is one of the regrettable aspects of the job.

"All my musical life", he says, "has been pretty much a learn-on-the-job situation. Very few of the fellows of my generation have any formal training. We're guys who

have done an enormous amount of playing, and that's been our class-room. In other words, we are very much non-academics."



The Don Burrows Quartet in 1976, L-R, George Golla (guitar), Ed Gaston (bass), Alan Turnbull (drums), Burrows (saxophones, clarinet & flute): very few of Burrows' generation had any formal training…

The irony of now being in an academic situation and having to insist, in many instances, on an academic approach to jazz is not lost on Burrows. In fact, it produces a considerable conflict-situation for him, and has caused him to do a great deal of thinking about his own basic values.

"In truth, I do believe that jazz music and the discovery of it is not a class-room thing at all", he says. "It's a street music — the streets and the smokey joints are the true class-rooms of jazz, and I would hate to ever have anyone think that I thought differently. They'd be very wide of the mark".

"I wouldn't swap the joints I used to play in, and frequent, and listen and learn in, for any class-room. But times change; the needs of today's jazz musician are a lot different. It's moving into a more intellectual area. That's okay, but I don't think it should be at the expense of knowing the historical and the theoretical background of jazz. The Con can be a place of discovery, whether it's on headphones or in the library, or reading, or just being around guys of my generation".

I asked Don Burrows what particular values he would wish to impart to his students. What sort of fundamental things was he aiming to teach them?

"The first and foremost thing before any other consideration is 'swing' — or time, feel, pulse," he replied. "I don't think there can be any further discussion unless there is an agreement that the ingredients that cannot be done without are time, pulse, rhythm. They're first and foremost. Some of the music has become so intellectual,

with so much going on, that the guts of the matter has somehow been forgotten, and that disturbs me".

Burrows has found that many of his young students have to be reminded, almost daily, of these fundamental jazz values. With some students, there is an excessive preoccupation with such things as speed, technique, range, and so on, at the expense of feeling. "I don't want to be misunderstood here", says Burrows. "I would hate it to thought that I didn't like Art Tatum, because there's a guy, you could freely say, who had a terrific preoccupation with technique. But not at the expense of 'time', not at the expense of 'pulse'.

The pianist Art Tatum: a terrific preoccupation with technique, but not at the expense of 'time', not at the expense of 'pulse'...

"I often find, particularly when students come to playing ballads, they're afraid to leave space. I think those lovely silences are an utterly essential part of the structure of a solo, or even the shaping of a melody, and there's a tendency to fill every corner of every bar with intricate, scale-type notations which very quickly cease to bear any relevance to the intent of the tune. Even the title of a ballad might convey some intended mood or meaning, or sentiment, which is often buried".

Burrows therefore believes that 'understatement' or feeling for space, is an entirely worthwhile musical value to impart to young players.

Another value which Don Burrows is concerned to impart is, ironically, not a musical one: that of 'reliability'. "This might seem a sudden departure from musical considerations," he says, "but I have no time for blokes who turn up when they feel like it rather than when they're needed. They've got to have a total commitment and

an awareness of the other guy. I've had a lot of trouble in the last year getting that point across to this generation of players".

"You would be amazed at how many guys, for a 10 o'clock appointment, or class, turn up at 20 past 10, or don't show at all. That, to me, is out. That's really bugged me all year, it's really driven me up the wall".

It is the need to combat this lack of discipline in young players which has been the most worrying aspect of the job for Don Burrows. A sensitive man, he feels bad about having to be the one to pull young musicians into line; it takes a lot of energy out of him.

"For me, this is the worst part of the job", he says, "and I'm going to have to learn to handle it better for my own well-being, or I'll end up in an early grave. It does get to me".

"Of course, it's offset, in many ways, by the guys who don't abuse the privileges, and do have a great attitude, and can be relied upon to give their best at all times. Sure, they make up for the ones who cause me this anxiety."

Burrows is perplexed that these problems should be there at all, and describes many of the excuses offered by young people as "pathetic". A musician might say that he had to play the night before, as an excuse for being late. "It's part of being a musician", he says, "you've got to be able to cope with late nights and early starts. In my career, I've often had to play till 2 or 3 in the morning six nights a week, and be on a 9 o'clock call the next morning, year-in year-out. So, don't tell me your hard luck story, mate. I've been through it. That's part of being a musician, coping with those demands".

One of the newer projects that Don Burrows is working on concerns bringing in older jazz players to the Conservatorium so they can pass on the wealth of their experience. "I see the Con as a place where, with dignity and meaning," he says, "they can be looked up to and considered important, so they can impart what they've gathered to the next generation of players".

Burrows himself occupies, of course, the only permanent position in the Jazz Studies Department. All the other teachers are employed on a casual basis. He would like to see, ultimately, about ten full-time teachers, with the appropriate instrumentation to form a faculty band, which could do workshops and concerts, where talented youngsters might be invited to play alongside the older masters.

"All around Australia", he says, "there are highly respected and qualified jazz musicians who could be contributing, and this could be happening in every capital city."

Burrows points out that all the current talk about a jazz "boom" pre-supposes that jazz must have been in decline. In his view, jazz never went away; it was always strongly there. Otherwise, people like himself, John Sangster, the Barnards and others would not be where they are today, and they have all enjoyed good livings.

“But I think it’s fair to say that not one of us has been the total purist. And whether we’re talking about jazz music or fly-fishing, or anything else, total purists bore me to death. You’ve got to have wider ears. Deep down I’m a jazz musician — it was jazz that brought me into music. But, if I happen to draw comfort from other musical forms, whether it be a piece from Brazil, or a romantic, centuries-old melody from Spain, there’s nothing wrong with that. Any jazz musician has been touched by other forms. Charlie Parker himself drew enormous inspiration from ballet music, which is a long way from his bop thing”.

Charlie Parker: he drew enormous inspiration from ballet music…

Talking to Don Burrows, one derives from him a feeling of restless optimism, that having passed a major turning-point in his career, he is into a new and positive era. And, of course, his career has been a distinguished one, dotted with milestones: the first Australian jazz musician to take his group to the Newport and Montreux jazz festivals; the first Australian jazz musician to be awarded the MBE; the first Australian jazz musician to sell a gold record; the first jazz musician to be offered a creative fellowship at the Australian National University, Canberra; and now, the first to occupy the full-time position of Chairman of Jazz Studies at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music.

Unquestionably, his job provides a new and different challenge for a man who has been almost wholly a performer throughout his career in jazz: “With jazz education, there is still such an enormous amount that I’ve got to learn. I couldn’t tell you the number of times in the past year when I’ve actually said to the students ‘give me a go, because I’ve got more to learn than you guys have’. What I don’t know about administration would fill volumes. I’m not trained for it.

“Ideally, I would like to have it so I’m more a musician than a letter-writing, telephone-answering executive. That is not really me, and I don’t see, frankly, that I have a great deal to offer through those channels — there are people far more qualified and expert in handling that role.”

“So, it almost needs two people — a co-leadership thing there, including someone who is interested in the jazz idiom, understands the people who make it up, but is not such a performer — someone skilled in the running of day-to-day business. I’m not a business type, I’m a musician. I would hate to see myself end up ultimately forgetting how to put the clarinet together”.