Although my interest in jazz had begun some years earlier, it was not until the 18th Australian Jazz Convention in 1963 that I was first introduced to recorded Australian jazz, the specialist labels and jazz discography. Nevill Sherburn of Swaggie Records had a stand in the foyer during the Convention and from him I purchased a 7" 33-1/3 rpm record of Frank Johnson and His Fabulous Dixielanders.

*Nevill Sherburn of Swaggie Records: he had a stand in the foyer during the 1963 Convention... PHOTO COURTESY ROGER BEILBY*
Next day I met Bill Haesler, a name I had come across the previous evening while reading the Johnson cover notes on my train trip home. I asked Bill where I could hear and learn more Australian jazz. I was told there was very little reading matter although Jack Mitchell had published a discography of Australian jazz in 1960, and Bill would bring me in a copy the next day. Indeed he did, and a whole new world opened to me.

I poured over this discography for weeks and finally, armed with a list of records I had decided I wanted, I attacked the local record shop in my old home town of Geelong. How disillusioned I was; this was a specialist’s art. The girl had never even heard of the bands let alone have any of their records. I continued my search and eventually became the proud owner of the Bell Regal Zonophones, the Parlophones and a few records from the Ampersand Jazz Art and Memphis labels. I was also able to keep abreast with new releases from frequent trips to stores like [Bob] Clemens* and Thomas’ in Melbourne, constantly referring to and quoting from Mitchell’s discography.

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*Editor’s note: Bill Haesler advises that Bob Clemens not only owned the jazz record shop, but also the Jazzart record label.
In 1968, a friend showed me a copy of *Matrix*, an English jazz collectors’ magazine and in it was a column “Jazz Australia” by Jack Mitchell in which Jack listed new Australian releases and corrections to his discography. I obtained photocopies of all his columns and set to work comparing my records with Jack's listing. I found a track with a vocal on that was not listed, a name was spelt incorrectly, and I even had a record he had not listed. After building up courage, I put pen to paper and wrote to Jack pointing out these mistakes. Soon we were corresponding regularly and eventually exchanging records, tapes, etc.

Soon after I was appointed administrator of the Australian Jazz Archives, by the Australian Jazz Convention Movement in Hobart in 1971. I suggested to Jack that one of the first projects that I would like to undertake was to print an updated version of his Jazz Discography. Printing has just commenced and with the book's publishing date drawing closer (probably October or November), I decided it was time to collate all the information gathered about Jack over the years.

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*Editor’s note: Bill Haesler advises that the Matrix Jazz Record Research Magazine was initially published in Australia and edited by Martin John Kennedy with himself (William J Haesler) as assistant editor, in July 1954. It ran successfully up to issue Number 16 (May 1957), when ownership was transferred to discographer George W G Hulme who edited and published it in England from issue Number 17 (April 1958) up until Number 106/107 (December 1975). Jack Mitchell's “Jazz...Australia” column commenced with issue Number 1 and continued until Number 22 (March 1959).
Jack’s interest in jazz began in 1944 while at Randwick School* where his friends introduced him to the hot records of Muggsy Spanier, Bob Crosby and similar on local labels. During that year he attended a meeting of the Sydney Swing Music Club at the Blue Tea Rooms in Rowe Street, Sydney, where he first met Eric Dunn, Ron Wills and Ross Fusedale (all well-known Sydney record collectors. The first two are still involved with production, etc of records and Ross known for his time spent managing the Barnard band and his production of Zenith Records. Ron Wills organised Wilco issues in Australia.)

* In March 2019, Jack Mitchell drew attention to an error here. He writes: “I was not at school in 1944 - I left at the end of 1941 (now called year nine) with the Intermediate Certificate. After that my doings are of little relevance to my jazz activities, but I worked as a cinema projectionist for six years, which gave me the opportunity to get to record stores as they opened at 9 am - new records were limited in numbers and quickly sold out.”

Roger Beilby (right) broadcasting on 3CR with John Smyth in the late 70s: Beilby was appointed administrator of the Australian Jazz Archives in 1971...

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Ross was responsible for Jack’s subscribing to Jazz Notes, edited by Bill Miller in Melbourne, from which he first read about Graeme Bell and other Australians playing in the Dixieland idiom. Very little music was heard locally although Jack recalls that Don Burrows, then at Bondi School, was somewhat of a local hero among other schoolchildren because of his musical ability. Don was playing with a group that included Ken Flannery, Wally Wickham and Don Andrews, playing in an Hawaiian style. The first live jazz Jack heard was from the Port Jackson Jazz Band who played regularly at Bob Young’s large house in Bondi where every weekend jam sessions were heard featuring most of Sydney’s hot musicians.

One of the most memorable sessions was in April, 1947, while the Bell Band, in Sydney recording for Regal Zonophone, ventured out to Bob Young’s and music unheard to that day in Sydney was played. Very early in his listening career Jack
constantly carried a notebook around. He purchased the first Ampersand record, the George Trevare records on Regal Zonophone, and other records as they came out. Notes were kept of them in his notebook and gradually Jack acquired details of other Australian recordings. He purchased back issues of *Tempo* and *Jazz Notes* and from these obtained information on earlier recordings by people like Jim Davidson and Frank Coughlan.

*Graeme Bell’s Australian Jazz Band, as it was in 1947 (here performing in Prague, Czechoslovakia), L-R, Lou Silbereisen (bass), Jack Varney (guitar), Graeme Bell (piano), Ade Monsbourgh (trombone), Roger Bell (trumpet), Pixie Roberts (clarinet): music unheard to that day in Sydney was played...*
Eventually, as more records were made, it assumed a reasonable proportion and Jack started to list these alphabetically. Originally only a hobby, Jack found he was constantly referring to it to answer fellow record collectors’ questions. Norm Linehan, a Sydney record collector, suggested to Jack that he knew someone at a publishing firm who would be interested in publishing Jack’s manuscript. This Jack mentioned to Bill Miller who replied if this deal fell through, he would be prepared to publish the book as one of his *Australian Jazz Quarterly Handbooks*.

*William H (Bill) Miller, seen here on washboard: he published a slim booklet (16 pages), *Australian Discography*, in September, 1950... PHOTO CREDIT NORM LINEHAN*

In September, 1950, a slim booklet (16 pages), *Australian Discography*, was published by Bill Miller, listing something less than 200 records. Jack’s interest in discography continued during the time he spent studying dentistry and after he settled in Lithgow during the fifties, he set about the organising of the second edition of his discography. Jack published this himself in 1960 with the assistance of a grant from the 13th Australian Jazz Convention. A much larger work, subject to minor revision in respect of New Zealand recordings and unissued records, it retained the then classical method of alphabetical presentation.

Jack, although very busy with a thriving dentistry practice and family of three, has found time to prepare a third edition of his discography. The format has been revised into strict chronological order. It is generally accepted by discographers that this
chronological listing is far superior to an alphabetical one. It means that future editions simply follow on from the last date instead of requiring a complete re-hash of the book, which eventually becomes impossible as witness the demise of the once definitive Delauney.

Norm Linehan: he can personally attest to the time and effort Jack Mitchell has put into ensuring that the facts as stated are correct... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH

Jack, when asked recently how he determined whether a record was worthy of inclusion in his Australian discography, said "I have attempted to include all records generally accepted as jazz or which I feel were regarded as jazz by the people who made them, or which had a bearing on the history of jazz in Australia". This third edition, it could be said, has been virtually ready for publication for some years and an abortive attempt was made at serial presentation in the Sydney-based magazine Music Maker, which failed when Music Maker was taken over by Sound Blast early in 1970, when only seven instalments had been published. Norm Linehan, in a foreword to the discography, sums up the whole work thus: "Perhaps the most important aspect of a work of reference such as this is its accuracy, and I can personally attest to the time and effort Jack has put into ensuring that the facts as stated are correct. Many hundreds of hours have been spent in correspondence with others, and in listening to records in order to identify personnel and verify recording dates."