

Kathryn Wells review of:

Phil Sandford, *The Lion Roars: The Musical Life of Willie 'The Lion' McIntyre*

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Sandford's musical biography of jazz pianist and blues singer Willie McIntyre offers a glimpse into the jazz music and music-making of a group of mostly young men in Melbourne around and after World War II. Rather than personal nostalgia,¹ the musical biography specifically portrays the collective, as well as the individual, creation of music.² It gives a sense of the discoveries of new sounds as well as documenting the development of jazz styles amongst the musicians. Sandford provides an insight into jazz practice and specific musical lives that differed from the norm, rendering an understanding of how people experienced and contributed to changes of style in postwar Australia.

In 1939 jazz dancing was considered by some to be immoral and jazz lyrics were considered risqué: about smoking pot, sex, racism, drinking, dancing, blues, poverty, masculinity and feminism. In response to the introduction of the first ABC Radio Jazz Program, Harold Davies, professor of music at the University of Adelaide, declared that jazz was barbaric and a sign of a decadent civilisation.³ Yet, what we observe through Sandford's biography is a group of well-educated young men from the south-east of Melbourne, accountants like McIntyre and his fellow band members, scientists like electrical engineer Tony Newstead and George Tack, who studied agricultural science and worked for the CSIRO, immersing themselves in a world of new ideas and new sounds. Along with the various Palais bands' members from the industrial northern suburbs who became modern jazz players,⁴ the jazz musicians saw themselves not as barbaric but as 'men with enquiring minds' living

1 See jazz reminiscences published in the last two decades, including Harry Stein's autobiography, *A Glance Over an Old Left Shoulder* (Sydney, NSW: Hale & Iremonger, 1994), centring around his position as president of the Eureka Hot Jazz Society; following Dick Hughes, *Daddy's Practising Again* (Richmond, Vic.: Martin Books an imprint of Hutchinson of Australia, 1977); the contrasting Sydney-based scene the focus of John Clare/Gail Brennan, *Bodgie Dada and the Cult of Cool* (Kensington, NSW: UNSW Press, 1995); as well as the Annual Bell Jazz Lecture Series delivered at Waverley Library, Sydney, 1993–2014.

2 David Gramit, 'Unremarkable Musical Lives: Autobiographical Narratives, Music and the Shaping of Self', in *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms*, ed. Jolanta T. Pekacz (New York: Routledge, 2016), 159–78.

3 See Clement Semmler, 'Whither Jazz?', Fifth Bell Jazz Lecture, Waverley Library, 20 September 1997.

4 For example, Bruce Clarke and others came from Brunswick and Billy Hyde from Moonee Ponds. Andrew Bisset, *Black Roots White Flowers: A History of Jazz in Australia*, revised (Sydney, NSW: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1987), 129. Bisset also documents the links with Australians hearing American jazz bands at the Hammersmith Palais in London, then returning to creating Palais bands for the Wentworth Café in Sydney, 1920, followed by the Palais de Danse, St Kilda, 1923 (p. 14).

in a conservative milieu (p. 15).⁵ The various jazz sounds created by them were energetic and exciting, and their enjoyment, and those of audiences, might be said to give way to hedonistic abandonment.

Sandford suggests these diverse trad jazz players made a subtle but important, and 'staggering' contribution to Australian culture, witnessed by their ever-expanding audiences adopting a more worldly view about music, dancing, racism and entertainment that went beyond mild to roaring approval. Sandford presents Willie McIntyre as a contrast between the conservative norm of the 1940s and 1950s and the radicalism of jazz: from a suit-wearing mild-mannered accountant by day to a rollicking jazz pianist and blues singer by night. McIntyre gave himself the moniker 'The Lion' after the African American Willie 'The Lion' Smith (1897–1973), an immaculately dressed jazz man, a master and composer of Harlem stride piano,⁶ who was much admired by McIntyre. Sandford's approach to understanding McIntyre's musicality is to explore the lineage of his inspiration, learning and playing.

McIntyre is relatively unknown historically.⁷ However, the risk of trivialising his personal history is addressed by Sandford as he shows how McIntyre and his fellow musicians negotiated their musical experiences in the emerging postwar world. The inspiration for the author to undertake the research and tell this story was when 10-year-old Sandford heard McIntyre play in the early 1950s, an event that inspired Sandford to take up jazz piano. His purpose of documenting the role of Willie McIntyre as a jazz pianist and singer in the postwar jazz scene in Melbourne and Adelaide is an ambitious task. There is a lack of traditional sources: there are neither diaries, letters nor taped interviews with the subject, although a few dozen recordings survive. Sandford's 26 interviews conducted in 2015 expand on five interviews by Andrew Bisset in the 1970s (held at the National Library) and six by Tom Wanless and Bruce Chalk in the mid-1990s (held at the Australian Jazz Museum), as well as the John Whiteoak interviews, to convey not only the feeling of the swing sessions at various venues but also the network that created the Melbourne jazz scene. Sandford's methodology and purpose in this musical biography, based on extensive interviews about the aural experience, reflects the jazz writer Bruce

5 Roger Bell in Nigel Buesst, *Jazz Offcuts* (North Carlton, Vic.: Sunrise Picture Company, 1983), DVD.

6 Willie 'The Lion' Smith, named The Lion after his valour in World War I, was known to have influenced Duke Ellington who described him as 'a keyboard gladiator' and wrote 'Portrait of The Lion' for him. See Ian Carr, Digby Fairweather, Brian Priestley and Charles Alexander, *The Rough Guide to Jazz*, 3rd ed. (New York; London: Rough Guides, Penguin Books, 2004), 746.

7 Bisset's *Black Roots White Flowers* mentions McIntyre twice in the context of the Melbourne jazz scene of the 1940s and 1950s, and Bruce Johnson, *Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz*, mentions him five times but mostly in lists and some photograph captions. Even Lorraine Barnard, the *Australian Jazz* reviewer of this book, notes her unfamiliarity with McIntyre.

Johnson's argument that hearing jazz music, a genre that exists primarily in a unique moment of performance, has helped shaped modern consciousness and allowed us recreate our sense of identity through collective improvisation.⁸

In documenting McIntyre's early jazz days, Sandford shows the development of modern improvised jazz in the late 1930s, mostly swing music. This follows Whiteoak's research that revealed 300 to 400 dancers turning up on Sunday afternoons at the Fawcner Park Kiosk in St Kilda. Instead of hearing the jazz dance music of earlier years, audiences, including fellow musicians, now heard highly improvised music, both collectively and solo.⁹ Several future members of the Tony Newstead Band went to the sessions, including trumpeter Newstead, drummer Don Reid and clarinettist George Tack, who along with McIntyre formed a quartet with an unknown bass player in 1941. We see McIntyre establish himself on the jazz scene by 1942.

Sandford's revelations about style arise from his exploration of how McIntyre and his fellow jazz musicians were inspired and learnt their jazz. Like jazz itself, born out of New Orleans African rhythms, slave-hollers, Creole melodies and European instrumentation with collective improvisation; developed as African American blues and then 'jazzed up' by getting it moving;¹⁰ McIntyre explored the blues, then New Orleans rag-style piano. In particular, he listened to the New Orleans polyphony of the pianists and vocalists Jelly Roll Morton and, especially, Fats Waller, as well as the boogie and blues pianist Jimmy Yancey. McIntyre absorbed their strong rhythmic style of playing piano and singing, and, like Fats Waller who grew up with spirituals, hymns and field hollers, McIntyre's vocal style included shouting the blues. He was regarded within the jazz scene by his contemporaries as playing a unique combination of stride, boogie woogie and blues as part of a Chicago-style free jazz band.

Sandford shows how World War II had a profound impact on the development of Australian jazz. During McIntyre's war service in Papua, based at the Seventeen Mile clinic outside of Port Moresby, a Red Cross hut not far away at the Seven Mile doubled as a jazz club every Sunday afternoon. Serendipitously, old playing mates gathered: Tony Newstead, Sid Bromley and Don Reid as well as McIntyre—who was recalled as doing more playing with the American bands than Newstead (p. 43). This was an unusual experience for Australian jazz musicians in the context

8 Bruce Johnson, 'Jazz and Society. Sound, Art, Music—Living', Inaugural Bell Jazz Lecture, Waverley Library, 9 October 1993, see lecture index at ericmyersjazz.com/index-bell-lectures.

9 See John Whiteoak, *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia 1836–1970* (Sydney, NSW: Currency Press, 1999), 238–41, and while McIntyre is not featured in Whiteoak's classic account of St Kilda's Fawcner Park bands and players, there are detailed interviews and accounts of the Frank Coughlan Band, Bob Tough and Benny Featherstone as well as Don Reid, who later played in a band with McIntyre.

10 Geoff Bull, 'Jazz: What's In A Name?', Sixth Annual Bell Jazz Lecture, Waverley Library, 19 September 1998, see lecture index at ericmyersjazz.com/index-bell-lectures.

of the union ban on African American bands visiting Australia from 1928 until 1954.¹¹ More unusual was when McIntyre managed during a visit to Brisbane in 1944 to gain entrance into the Dr (George Washington) Carver Club, which had been formed as a segregated club in 1943 for and by Negro servicemen with the Red Cross Jazz Unit.¹² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists, poets, musicians and singers, as well as many women, attended dance nights held on a converted ice-skating rink. McIntyre's first postwar recording was his composition the 'Carver Club Special'. The importance of subtle levels of influence and an understanding of these historical episodes is illuminated through the biography where we learn that 'swing-jump' jazz trumpeter Morris Goode, whose previous tour was with the American Teddy Hill Big Band featuring trumpeters Roy Eldridge and Frankie Newton, made his debut at the Carver Club where he played with McIntyre (p. 49). However, Goode's historical impact has previously been secured by an image of him playing with fellow trumpeter Roger Bell on the cover of the program of the first Australian Jazz Convention in 1946, after he had formed a quartet with the Bells. Sandford's work shows other strands to the jazz web.

The postwar flourishing of the Melbourne jazz scene is often credited to Roger and Graeme Bell; this is confirmed by Sandford in his interviews with drummer Don Reid, although Reid notes how the Tony Newstead Band, of which he was a member, as well as other bands built up their own audiences, and styles, around the 1946 Convention. The dominant style of the Melbourne trad jazz scene was New Orleans, with the Bells and others reviving Dixieland postwar (p. 101).¹³ Sandford's research confirms that Andrew Bisset was right to correct Max Harris, writing in *The Australian* from 1972 to 1974, who portrayed Australian jazz as evolving from Graeme and Roger Bell's Dixieland jazz, followed by Don Burrows (and Bob Barnard)—despite jazz developing out of jazz dance bands across Australia in the 1920s and 1930s and the existence of both trad and modern styles. Sandford details how the freer Chicago style of jazz,¹⁴ favoured by Tony Newstead's 'South Side Gang' and characterised by piano introductions and a succession of solos, was unlike the two lengthy trumpet ensembles favoured by the Bells and Frank Johnson. The Newstead Band took it a step further using a double bass instead of a tuba, and guitar instead of banjo, creating a simple but effective modern jazz sound. Yet this apparent simplicity accommodated complex contrasts, from the melodic middle register trumpet sounds of Newstead through McIntyre's passionate blues with a focus on the 'blue note', adding a flattened note or lower pitch (as well as

11 Lee Gordon organised concerts with Artie Shaw and Ella Fitzgerald who arrived in July (although Fitzgerald arrives later as she was refused the first-class seats she bought), then Gene Krupa and Louis Armstrong's band arrived in August 1954, in Bisset, *Black Roots White Flowers*, 163.

12 This followed the formation of the segregated Booker T Washington Club in Surry Hills, Sydney, in July 1942 and the North American club in Townsville, October 1942. See Bisset, *Black Roots White Flowers*, 81–85.

13 Trumpet player Frank Turville commented that 'Melbourne was the New Orleans of the South' in Buesst, *Jazz Offcuts*.

14 Adopted from Chicago-born Bix Beiderbecke and his New York-based players.

giving it more grit), to make sure that every note counted. Contemporaries like Frank Johnson, who expressed admiration for the Chicago style, and Dick Hughes, who commented on earlier, vehement arguments about styles, suggested that the relevant existence of bop and cool (which the trad players refused to countenance), the virtues of hot jazz, big band sounds or small combos and swing (and dead swing), while hotly debated at the time, were a nonsense—as the key element was the enthusiasm for jazz, in which blues has remained an undercurrent.¹⁵ However, the emergence of different styles is in no doubt.

Sandford's interviews with half a dozen players during the period of the 1946 Convention take the reader to individual sessions of music where McIntyre played in town halls and clubs, on riverboats, at festivals; to the songs that were played and to the exhilarated feeling of those present. We are permitted to linger on the verandas of private bohemian jazz fans who hosted the musicians, smell the air, savour the drinks, hear the visiting female vocalists and appreciate the general mayhem. Keith Hounslow described the 24-hour jazz parties: 'we'd be down there night after night ironing ourselves out but having a hell of a good time' (p. 73). By 1949, the Tony Newstead Band with its Chicago-style jazz had a heavy playing schedule at concerts, clubs, ballrooms, theatres, private parties and parades that extended not just throughout Melbourne but to Adelaide. McIntyre's frequent trips to Adelaide to see wartime comrades resulted in annual jazz events hosted by the Walkerville Football Club and the North Adelaide Cricket Club, and saw some recordings in Adelaide. From this focus on McIntyre, we see how the friendships and camaraderie between players forged during the war influenced the playing and sound of many different trad jazz sessions outside the influence of the Bells' Dixieland sounds—whether Newstead's Chicago sound or Dave Dallwitz's composition 'Back of Bourke',¹⁶ all contributing to the emergence of an Australian jazz sound.¹⁷

While the immediate postwar jazz conventions were perhaps a beacon in a sea of postwar conservatism in Australia, the perceived association of Melbourne jazz with radical left-wing views was partly due to where the new Uptown Jazz Club (established in 1946) was situated—the Eureka Youth League Hall—above the Eureka Communist League. The league founded the Eureka Hot Jazz Society and funded the 1947–48 tour of the Melbourne trad jazz Graeme Bell Band to Eastern Europe. However, the radicalism of the Eureka societies supporting the experience of jazz due to its association with described Negro protest and expression about their life experiences did not necessarily extend to the Australian musicians, although they participated in supporting African American musicians. The first African American

15 See Dick Hughes, 'Jazz and the Press, Related Airs and Themes', Third Annual Bell Jazz Lecture delivered at Waverley Library, 23 September 1995, see lecture index at ericmyersjazz.com/index-bell-lectures.

16 Dallwitz's composition was later improvised around by Bob Barnard. See Bisset, *Black Roots White Flowers*, 137–38.

17 See also John Shand, *Jazz: The Australian Accent* (Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2006).

jazz musician to arrive as a soloist in Australia since the deportation of members of Sonny Clay's band in 1928, and the consequent union ban on African American musicians, was the trumpet and cornet player Rex Stewart in 1949. He arrived for the 4th Jazz Convention and a five-month tour with the Graeme Bell Band, with the Bells given credit for conceiving and organising the tour.¹⁸ Sandford's meticulous research shows that this tour was organised by Eve Dennis, a Canadian painter living in Australia and a friend of McIntyre's (p. 85). On arrival, after being greeted on the tarmac by Roger Bell and friends, with their instruments, Stewart headed for a jam session with the Tony Newstead Band. McIntyre and Stewart improvised together on a blues theme, before the Tony Newstead Band opened the first concert of Stewart's tour at the Melbourne Exhibition Hall in front of 4,000 people. Sandford documents how this was the highlight not only of the Tony Newstead Band members' careers but for many other jazz musicians to hear the 'staggering' form and quality of their fellow jazz musicians as they played with Stewart. The song order was remembered by many of them half a century later. Consequently, the Tony Newstead Band took over the Leggett Ballroom gig held by the Bells while the Bells toured with Stewart. A decade later in New York, in 1959, Tony Newstead joined Rex Stewart on stage for a night with the Eddie Condon band, in a style characterised as 'Nixieland', and a tribute to Tony Newstead notes that Newstead released more records in the United States than he did in Australia.¹⁹

Back in Melbourne, after the Bells finished touring with Rex Stewart and the Tony Newstead Band was renamed the 'South Side Gang', McIntyre and the others finished the year playing at Claridges Club with Stewart and Georgia Lee, the stage name of Dulcie Pitt, a singer of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Jamaican descent. While not documented by Sandford, Lee was well known from singing with the Red Cross Jazz Unit in Queensland during the war and in Sydney by 1948 for her interpretation of 'Strange Fruit', a song later made famous by Billie Holiday. In Melbourne across the club scene she was initially co-billed with Graeme Bell as well as Bruce Clarke, the Port Jackson Jazz Band, the Quintones and George Trevare before headlining her own shows, touring New South Wales and Queensland and then onto Gerald's in London. In 1956 Georgia Lee returned to tour Australia in a feature spot with Nat King Cole, and again with Cole and his third Australian tour in 1957.²⁰ Thus, a very subtle picture of the depth of playing interaction between different jazz players on different stages is revealed by Sandford's musical biography of McIntyre, relatively unknown historically to date. We see how McIntyre, along with others, like Georgia Lee, contributed to the depth of Australian jazz here and in the international jazz scenes.

18 See Bisset, *Black Roots White Flowers*, 161.

19 Victorian Jazz Club, 'Tony Newstead Tribute—Jazz, Family and a Wonderful Life', YouTube, 14 November 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWA7pZ2V4cc.

20 See Kathryn Wells, 'Georgia Lee—"Original Diva of Jazz and Blues Down Under" (1921–2010)', Indigenous Biography Conference Slam, ANU, Canberra, 16 November 2018.

In a steady, even-handed chronological narrative, Sandford steers a course between the rocky shores of the exponents of different styles, with acknowledgement and without disparagement of the Bells and their Dixieland revival playing partners. Nevertheless, Sandford offers insight, through emphasising an aural awareness, of how McIntyre contributed to a new jazz style that ‘mediated transitions’ to modern jazz,²¹ part of the sound of a modern Australia. Both the early, raspy live recordings and later studio-produced sounds found on the accompanying CD and website have some value, as do the small selection of relatively low resolution black-and-white photographs, but it is through extensive interviews, event lists, a discography and references to contemporary media, along with the use of thorough footnotes, that Sandford details how musicians of different styles contributed to the development of jazz in Melbourne. Sandford’s well-documented research will be much appreciated by historians of Australian jazz.

Sandford is keen to provide an evaluation of McIntyre through an analysis of his unique style, noting characteristics such as his use of a percussive right-hand attack and a Cuban bass line, as well as stride, playing right-hand chords on the beat and single notes on the left, sometimes with chordal interjections and counter melodies. Yet he considers his unique style was always permeated by his knowledge of the blues. Furthermore, McIntyre sung directly to the audience without looking at the keyboard and often used gags and humour, in the tradition of vaudeville, to engage with the audience. Sandford documents the comments of many of his contemporaries, with Dave Dallwitz describing McIntyre as:

an enigmatic blues singer, his work being an unfathomable mixture of genuine expression, calculated satire and perhaps bad taste [and yet] ... His pianistics are staggering. He loves to dream along for, say the first four bars of a twelve-bar blues, only to break out on the fifth bar into the most incongruous display of musical fireworks that you can imagine (p. 151).

Drummer and cornet player Wes Brown said simply, ‘he was one of the leading players in the trad jazz world’. Bill Haesler, the jazz historian, recalled that Graeme Bell used to say, ‘I wish I could play with the spontaneity that Willie had’ (p. 153).

It is hard to disagree with Sandford’s arguments that McIntyre should be regarded as a historical jazz figure as they are well supported. His work offers a unique perspective of the Melbourne jazz scene from the 1930s to the 1950s, engaging the reader with McIntyre’s musical network. While there is little formal theoretical, historical or thematic analysis, nor exploration of McIntyre’s personal life and views (perhaps unknown?), Sandford’s musical biographical approach of presenting an individual artist within a cultural web, creating music outside the norm of social

21 For a discussion of the importance of styles generally in postwar Australia; see Nicholas Brown, “Sometimes the Cream Rises to the Top, Sometimes the Scum”: The Exacting Culture and Politics of Style in the 1950s’, *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 109 (1997): 49–63, doi.org/10.1080/10314619708596042.

practice, offers a timely and relevant contribution to the history of Australian jazz. The lived experiences of musicians developing new styles shows the relevance of both exploring niche historical episodes and, in particular, changing styles to understanding changing times. Understanding the music making of McIntyre and his fellow band members as they developed their style will interest any student of jazz or Australian cultural history.

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