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Jazz and Nation in Australia: Bridging the Gap on Screen, 1919–1933

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Abstract

When jazz arrived in Australia as live performance in 1918, it initially was taken by the establishment as a threat to national identity, in particular as that identity had been associated with masculinist rural mythologies centred on what was known as ‘the Bush’.¹ The Bush was where the nation was created, through the heroic labour required for the conquest of the land. With its roots in nineteenth century pioneer frontier narratives, the values of the Bush were at odds with urban modernity and the lifestyles it fostered. The musical expression of the latter was jazz – a cacophonous importation from the USA with connotations of ‘negroid’ savagery and decadent effeminisation. Jazz thus functioned as the ‘Other’ in received discourses of nation. By the 1950s there was a growing synergy between Australian identity and jazz, consolidated by the arrival of a new music of the Other in the form of rock’n’roll. But the beginnings of this rapprochement can be identified from the early thirties when changes in the understanding of both jazz and nation began to bring the two into closer alignment. This paper explores those early relational shifts as they

were manifested cinematically. Although it is widely held that the Great Depression ended the first phase of Australian jazz history, nonetheless it will be argued here that it was the search for solutions to the problem of the Depression that help to build a 'bridge' between jazz and Australian identity, in conjunction with a new appreciation of the meliorative possibilities of modernity, particularly as reflected in the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the transition from silent to sound films.

Jazz and the Bush Tradition – The Earliest Days

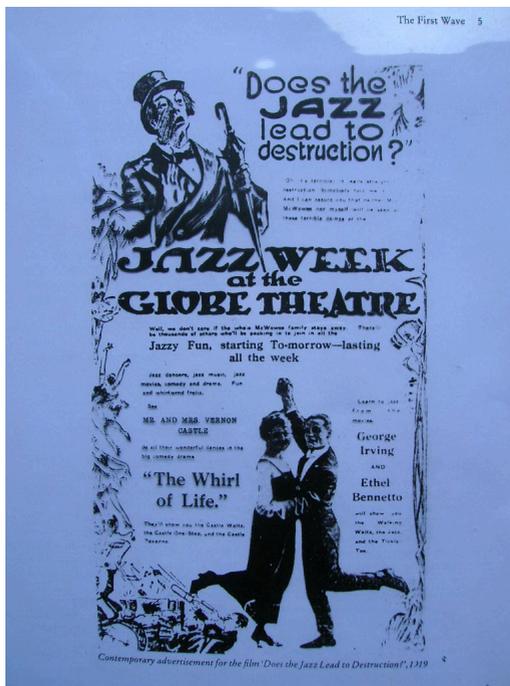
The theme of this conference is the jazz chameleon, the way jazz has been able to change its appearance, to cross borders and fit in with its new surroundings.² These borders are geographic, economic, demographic, national, and borders of class. My paper involves all these crossings because they all converge in what is to me a most fundamental transformation in diasporic jazz. It is the transformation of jazz from being a despised foreigner to becoming a respected citizen, and this transformation took place in virtually every international diasporic destination. My primary research question was: how and why did jazz, a music identified so closely with both 'primitive' blackness, and with US modernity, become assimilated to national identities in most of its diasporic destinations by the late twentieth century? In almost all its diasporic destinations jazz was initially regarded as deeply disruptive to the traditions, myths and power relations on which local identity was built. Yet within a matter of decades jazz was being made to feel fully at home in these diasporic sites, and by the late twentieth century it is certainly arguable that these sites had overtaken the US as the new 'centres' of jazz innovation. How was this radical reversal achieved? My presentation focuses on Australia, but because the pattern is global, it will cast explanatory light on all diasporic jazz. First, there are three important Australian words that I need to explain. Two of them are 'the outback' and 'the bush', and both refer to rural regions remote from major cities, and contrasted with them. The other word is 'station', which here means roughly the same as ranch or big farm. So a cattle station is a farm that might be hundreds or even thousands of square kilometres on which cattle are raised.

When jazz first arrived in Australia towards the end of the First World War, it carried in its luggage messages that were for many deeply

offensive to the idea of 'Australia'. These included its African or 'negroid' connections, which were prominent in the public consciousness from its earliest appearance in Australia. The statement in the July 1918 issue of *Australian Variety and Show World* says that "Jazz" is a Negro expression for noise, peculiar to music' (Johnson, 1987: 4). It combines racist and aesthetic primitivity, and establishes jazz as the noise of savagery, an enemy to civilisation and refinement.

In August 1918 the country's first public jazz performance was announced as part of a low culture theatre burlesque programme. Reviews of the performance refer to banging on kitchen utensils, effects of thunder and lightning, the firing of guns, and concluding with the drummer throwing his instruments into the air while the pianist played standing on his chair and the brass players collapsed in apparent exhaustion (Johnson, 1987: 3–4, 64–65). This anarchistic performance would not have pleased conservative ears, setting the scene for the tone of what appears to have been the world's first jazz festival, the Jazz Week held at the Globe Theatre in Sydney in 1919. The title of and publicity for a (now lost) locally made film that was featured at the event reflected a belief that jazz signalled the decline of western civilisation: *Does the Jazz Lead to Destruction?* This was

a widespread international response to the music, but what is notable in this case is a proud defiance of moral and aesthetic refinement. A publicity campaign during the week featured a character called McWowse who, on hearing of the event, announced a horrified determination to avoid it at all costs. He also declared it his responsibility to protect his wife from exposure to a music that, in the 1920s, had a particu-



lar association with women and forms of feminisation (Johnson, 2000: 59–76).

By the end of the week his attitude had changed. McWowse had now succumbed to the attraction of jazz and announced cheerfully that he would ‘jazz’ his way to destruction, no matter what ‘the congregation’ might say.³ Mr McWowse was evidently not alone, as the same advertisement also reported that ‘by special request of thousands’ the event would continue for another week. This publicity played to an attitude that was characteristic of international diasporic jazz; that is that the new music was a bearer of aspects of modernity that threatened local traditions and received values. This offence was also related to a widespread indignation at the modern lifestyles glamorised by US films, and their ‘unwholesome’ effect on Australian identity.⁴ As the main musical accompaniment to these lifestyles, jazz was decadent, transgressive, and its association with extravagant modern dance and its most notorious exponent the young female flapper, carried the suggestion of degraded effeminisation. While this association was not unique to Australia, it had particular implications in a country that was so strongly masculinised. The extraordinary imbalance between the numbers of men compared to women from the beginning of European settlement strengthened the masculinization that is characteristic of frontier societies.⁵

To an unusual extent, the physical development of this settler society was dependent on male strength and comradeship, and national character was defined through rural narratives associated with outdoor labour through which a man realised his spirit and resourcefulness and re-validated the work ethic. The city on the other hand softened and feminised, exposed one to, at trivial diversions, or at worst the depraved imported contamination of ‘jazz parties’. The dichotomy between rural and urban provided a foundation for various structuring devices in narratives of nation, particularly early film: the young country woman lured like a moth to the city or the young man throwing away his talents as a prodigal urban wastrel. Both moved towards destruction at jazz parties, quintessential sites of the dangerous influence of imported modernity. Both were then saved by a return to the solid values of the ‘bush’ tradition that underpinned all that was heroic in national identity. Australia’s early prolific feature film output thus became a medium for the negotiation between jazz and national identity, the latter most frequently articulated through the values of the bush. Film was a particularly effective forum for constructing and circulating these narratives. As a technology

born with the twentieth century, film was among the most effective vehicles for messages about the modern world.

One of the common scenarios in Australian films of the 1920s was the set of moral and ethical dilemmas arising from a new range of life-style possibilities during post-war social emancipation, particularly in relation to gender politics (Johnson, 2000: 69). The 'modern woman' as portrayed in Australian film increasingly transgressed into and threatened sites of

male power, and she did so to the sound of jazz. An advertisement for the 1926 film *Should a Girl Propose?* tells us that 'The modern Girl jazes, smokes, indulges in athletes [sic], enters law and politics, and, in short, does most things a man does, and in most things does better'. In the 1920s, jazz was the music which embodied the dangerous glamour of urban modernity and the threat it presented to masculine bush-based myths of Australian identity.

This opposition was a staple of Australian films throughout the silent era. One of our pioneer film-makers was Charles Chauvel, who began his long career in 1926 with two films which present mirror images of precisely this tension. The heroine of *Greenhide* is a young city girl, Margery Paton, brought up indulgently by her father, Sam.⁶ She hatches a plot to spend time at Walloon, her father's distant cattle station, to sample the 'elemental' life. In the meantime we see her conducting herself as a frivolous young flapper, idly strumming a ukelele, eating chocolate, or holding a garden party for her equally frivolous girlfriends at which she performs an improvised solo dance in front of the jazz band that is entertaining them. As 'the jazz' was at that time in Australia understood to be a dance (like 'the tango', 'the waltz'), this means that in effect Mar-

MR. EXHIBITOR—What you have been waiting for!
 A 100 per cent AUSTRALIAN PICTURE
 AND WHAT A TITLE!!

“SHOULD A GIRL PROPOSE?”

“SHOULD a GIRL
 The modern Girl jazes, smokes, indulges in athletes, enters law and politics, and, in short, does most things a man does, and in most things does better.

the Picture with a PUNCH.

WHY SHOULD SHE NOT PROPOSE?

Premiere Australian Release at
PICCADILLY THEATRE
 SAT., APRIL 24th

Greater Imperial Films Ltd. Mutual Film Exchange.
34 PITT STREET, SYDNEY. BUCKE HOUSE, RUSSELL STREET, MELBOURNE.

COMING ATTRACTIONS.—“THE WRONG COAT” A Tiffany Production.
 “THE SPEED KING” Featuring Richard Talmadge.
 “THE TRAVIS COLP” Another Tiffany.

gery was performing a jazz solo. I will show some of this later in another connection.

Dancing also features in what little footage remains of Chauvel's *Moth of Moonbi* (NFSA 281), released a few months earlier. Dell Ferris, a young country girl goes to the city in search of the 'liberty and happiness she had read of in books'. She falls into a social circle of pointless and self-indulgent decadence, summarized in a seduction line from a young man on a yacht: 'Why try to understand the present – life is so short and full of good times – come let us dance'. Only when Dell returns to the country 'where she belonged', does she finally find 'sanctuary'.⁷

Although jazz or 'jazzing' (dancing) was clearly a relatively cheap and popular recreation, its association with decadent irresponsibility is confirmed by its location in both these films. Margery's highly indulged urban lifestyle is parasitic upon her father's rurally-based wealth, a parable of a larger mythology: that is the cities as parasitically living off rural labour. The distance between the sites of material production and aimless consumption is both literal and cultural, enacted in the unproductive self-indulgence of Margery's jazz party, while her father is seen working in the garden.

At this stage in the cinematic imagination there is no exchange between jazz and the nation-building labour of the bush. At best, jazz belongs to a world of unproductive and over-indulgent consumption. At worst, it is the music of moral degradation, from which it was necessary to rescue its devotees and restore them to decent Australian values. It was evidently used precisely as such to set up the scenario in the film *Tall Timber*. No copy of the film appears at this time to have survived, but there is a version of a shooting script (NFSA 561128). In *Tall Timber* it is a young man who initially loses himself in the temptations of the city, to find redemption in rural labour.

The 'Foreword Title' sets the scene:

The gorgeous arc light of Metropolitan gaiety attracts more moths than the tallow candle of sober pleasure.

It's [sic] gilded halls of revel; are but palaces of mockery, wherein Bacchus reigns supreme, and rich men's sons scatter the golden grain of currency with prodigal hand and reap the husks of disillusion.⁸

Following this opening title, we are taken directly to a 'jazz party', where we meet Jack Maxwell, 'The most reckless spendthrift among the city's fastest set'. Drunk, he disgraces himself in some unspecified way, and on

the next day is confronted by his father with the words: 'Last night's disgraceful orgy is the last straw. You are no longer son of mine. Go wallow in the sty among the swine of your own choosing. You have made my name a target for the gibes of the gutter press. I never wish to see your face again'. Jack goes to the country and finds a job with a timber mill, where, in this wholesome context of honest labour and the blooming friendship of a good country girl, he shows such industriousness and talent that he is taken on as a partner. The story climaxes, as it began, with a party, but this one is a bush party in clear structural opposition to the decadent jazz party of the opening scene. There is a band, with the traditional and unsophisticated instrumentation of violin, accordion and cornet. Maxwell's father arrives at the office of the mill owner, who tells him, 'Your son is a born organizer and a fair and tactful administrator. The men swear by him'. The son and father encounter each other in the warm communality of the dance hall, and Jack introduces Betty: 'Dad I have come to the rainbows [sic] end & here is my pot of gold'. The final scene is of a double wedding of Jack and Betty and of Jack's new-found rural mate Dick, and Agnes. Redemption is achieved in the values of the bush, in a brotherhood of nation-building labour and the love of an honest country woman. It is acted out in the fellowship of bush parties and articulated musically through a rough bush band. It has been a long journey from the economically parasitic and morally empty world of alcohol-hazed jazz parties in the cities.

Bridging the Gap: Tradition and Modernity

In cinematic representations, jazz and the ideal of nation are unambiguously opposed over this early period in the history of the music in Australia, and given the broader cultural significance of jazz, this relationship is instructive to any attempt to study the evolution of the sense of Australian identity. Yet from the end of World War Two Australian identity and the bush mythology increasingly converged with jazz, and indeed by the end of the 1950s, they will be well on the way towards an active synergy.

I want to turn to a preliminary account of the beginnings of this transition, and some hypotheses as to why and how it occurred. Jazz was the music of a modernity originally seen as decadent, especially in opposition to the bush tradition and the agricultural sector that had sus-

tained both our economy and our national mythology. The rehabilitation of jazz is therefore enabled by two significant cultural shifts. From 1929, income from wool and wheat exports collapsed, partly because of foreign competition and partly because of tariff protectionism. British money lenders would normally provide a safety net, but they were suffering themselves from the international Depression, and were now unable to help. With public expenditure slashed, Australia's unemployment rate rose until it became the world's second highest after Germany. Australia had relied in the flow of agricultural exports and this now let them down. This contributed to several shifts in orientation:

1. The recognition, from the Depression-afflicted 1930s, that Australia's future lay in the highly technologised secondary industry sector and public works investment

2. A sense that there needed to be some bridging of the hostile gap between the city and the bush.

Two of the primary symbols of these processes were to be found in the way jazz was situated in the national imagination, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. And I will suggest that a further technological development that activated this symbolism was the coming of sound to movies.

An intensive viewing of Australian feature films of the late 1920s to early 1930s, shows the image of the Sydney Harbour Bridge to be insistent, and entangled with other forces in the development of the Australian film industry, the idea of Australia, and the location of jazz. This image of a bridge under development is, along with a shift in the representation of jazz, a metaphor of a significant transition in the discourses of nation. I want to illustrate the way cinema used these connections.

A film called *The Cheaters* was one of a number of films that were made during the shift from silent to sound film. This crime story was completed as a silent film in 1929, but the timing worked against it because it was made just as US talkies were having their first impact on the Australian market. The film-makers shot extra footage and added sound-on-disc music in the hope that this would make the film more attractive to the public. One of the reasons for adding sound of course was to emphasise that this movie was up to date with all the latest developments in Australia. And this is also where the Bridge came in.

There are several surviving versions of *The Cheaters*, including the original silent version and the one with sound and extra footage. They raise several mysteries. One concerns footage of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The film was completed as a silent in 1929, and the extra footage

with sound-on-disc was supposedly shot in Melbourne in March 1930. Its first trade screening was in June 1930. Here is the puzzle: although the extra footage was supposedly shot in Melbourne, following an intertitle '20 Years of progress' there is a shot of the gap that would later be filled by the Sydney Harbour Bridge, with some construction work apparently about to start (cranes are at both landfall points); that is, from barely begun to near completion.

It is significant that the intertitle does not say something like 'Twenty Years Pass', but 'Twenty Years of Progress'. The word progress is important. And that progress is represented by the completion of the Bridge. The importance of the bridge as a symbol of Australia's 'progress' is emphasised by some curious contradictions. The second shot of the bridge spanning the harbour was supposedly shot in time for that first trade screening in June 1930. But the bridge did not reach that stage of completion until at least three to six months later. That means that the makers had either taken the trouble to add this footage after the trade screenings, or that the cameraman experimented with optical tricks to introduce an image of the bridge as it was planned to look. This might also be connected with a continuity problem: somewhat later in the movie and the chronology of its plot, in the background are visible the two ends of the span barely begun, yet which had been seen as completed earlier in the narrative.

NFSA holds a further version of *The Cheaters*, which also incorporates added sound footage. The 'Twenty Years of Progress' footage is now simultaneous collage which is itself a self-conscious manifestation of the magic of technology. And again the wonder of progress is shown in the jump from the early stages of the bridge is to its near completion. I will talk more about the stages in the Bridge's construction in connection with *Showgirls' Luck*. This is the point: to take so much trouble to introduce an image of the bridge into the movie tells us that, in cinema at least, Australia was re-imagining itself as an industrialised, modernised urban society.

Now of course, there is only one Sydney Harbour Bridge, so it might seem that, so far, this process has no relevance to anywhere but Australia. The point, however, is what the bridge represented in the public imagination. And that was the positive potential of industrial urban modernity. Of course jazz was the musical representation of modernity, but initially it was a modernity that for many represented a threat to the idea of nation. But now, in the midst of a global Depression, modernity was

being reassessed in many ways. Public works like dams, modern transport systems, and bridges were coming to appear as solutions to unemployment and poverty when the traditional rural economy had failed. Large scale industrial projects could save an economy. Modernity was being reimagined and that included its music: jazz.

My general point, thus far, is that our understanding of the history, reception and function of jazz is greatly enriched by going outside the music itself, to consider economic and political contexts, and how those were represented. Other regions had their own nation-building versions of the symbol of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The bridge was thus an essential representation of a sense of national pride in the possibilities of modern technology in literally and culturally mobilising the nation, 'bridging' the gap between rural tradition and modern mass culture. Or, to lead to another movie from this transitional period, from an old-fashioned rural tent show to the contemporary film industry – as in *Showgirl's Luck*, generally regarded as Australia's first full talkie.

Sound Film and the Changing Representation of Jazz

Showgirl's Luck, from 1931 is from the outset an aggressive advertisement for a modern Australia, but with its roots in rural tradition. It opens with a fluttering Australian flag filling the screen, with a voice-over announcing an event 'in the history of this country' and trumpeting Australia's modern technological savvy, as reflected in the production of this 'first Australian talkie, made with Australian capital, Australian actors, and recorded on Australian made recording machinery'. This will also, we are told, keep money in Australia rather than losing it to the US film industry. It represents an attempt 'to found a new Australian industry and to keep Australians in employment'. This is not only the first 'Australian all talking picture', it is a film about the arrival of the talking picture. It includes extensive footage of the sound-on-film technology, including during one of its featured songs, the ironic 'We can't sleep in the movies any more', which I will show later in another connection. The heroine and her rival travel from performing in a rural tent show to participation in the production of a sound movie. In relation to the present discussion, there is a further anomaly concerning the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The movie was ready for a trade showing in January 1931, and premiered in December 1931 (Pike and Cooper, 1998: 156), but Like *The*

Cheaters it also includes an image of the bridge as it would not be until over a year later. The point again is that by some extraordinary and expensive post-production labour, the image of the apparently completed bridge was added to the film, emphasising the enormous imaginative power of the new Sydney Harbour Bridge as a visual addition to the plot-line about major cultural transitions in the discourse of nation. What the bridge brought to that discourse was the image of technology and secondary industry as a path to the future. And what kind of music provides the sonic supplement to these visual images of the positive potential of modernity? In one scene we see a female dance troupe, along with a male 'rubberlegs' style performer, rehearsing to music, and the music is jazz of the time. That is, jazz is now aligned positively with the Australia and modernisation.

So too in one more film to be considered here. A further Australian word that I need to explain is 'squatter', which referred to a generally wealthy rural property owner. *The Squatter's Daughter* premiered at Sydney's Civic Theatre to inaugurate an all-Australian-made film policy, and, appropriately, it opens with a nation-building agenda, written out on a scrolled on-screen text. It begins:

I believe that Cinesound, in producing *The Squatter's Daughter*, has created a picture that will redound to the credit of Australia wherever it is shown. The picture breathes the spirit of the country's great open spaces, and the romance, adventure and opportunity in the lives of those who in the past pioneered, and are today building up our great primary industries.

It is signed by the nation's Prime Minister. This kind of patriotic message is like the opening of *Showgirl's Luck*, and may reflect (and attempt to deflect) the pain of the Great Depression, to restore confidence simultaneously in tradition and modernity, past and future, and the state of Australian cinema. The plot (which in broad outline would later serve Baz Luhrmann for his recent film *Australia*), centers not on the heroic labour of men, but on young Joan Enderby who manages her own sheep station in rivalry with Clive Sherrington the manager of another station, Waratah, on behalf of his supposed father who, as the film opens, is returning from England where he had sought medical treatment for encroaching blindness, treatment which though initially promising, turns out to have failed as the film proceeds. Joan receives assistance from a stranger, Wayne and following a series of plot developments, we discover that he is the true son of Sherrington Senior, while Clive's father

was a station hand. The marriage of Joan to Wayne thus unites the two stations.

There is much else that is brought together harmoniously. Sherrington Senior and his friend Cartwright, from London, are on board ship as it arrives in Sydney. They survey Sydney Harbour and Sherrington proudly points out the cargo ships, 'treasure ships', that carry Australian wool ('the spirit of our country's in it') to the world. Again in the final shot of this sequence, we see a view of the bridge that is not required just by the plotline. Sherrington Senior's eyesight thus survives long enough for him to link the symbolism of the new Harbour Bridge with a rural tradition, and international modernity with the Bush.

There follows a party at Waratah Station. The sequence is surprising, a clear and deliberate rewriting of the rural mythology, and a long way from the tough and gritty stereotypes of the harsh but redemptive bush life. Here, city comforts come to the bush: a swimming pool in a space traditionally seen as tending to aridity, leisure fripperies, and women who are at ease with the menfolk, who in turn negotiate good-humouredly with comparatively immodest modern fashions – and hedonistic clowning around in the pool by a young man with the supreme jazz instrument of the day, the saxophone. Then, indoors, we see jazz-based music transposed to a rural recreation setting for dancing. The bridge between primary industry and modern internationalisation which Sherrington described as his ship entered the heads, is being constructed in this party scene. During a lengthy shot of the band, the physical demeanour of the musicians is notable for later reference: they are in dignified dinner suits and play the music without any extravagant gestures, as would any other group of musicians with a sense of professional gravitas.

This is a very modern version of the bush-life, with a swimming pool, sophisticated cuisine as waiters serve hors d'oeuvres, stylish costuming, and an up-to-the-minute dance band, with an independent minded young woman taking charge of her own fortunes in a masculinist environment. While the fashionably modern dance band continues to be heard playing a waltz in the background, the dialogue is about new liberating gender roles, but harnessed to rather than threatening the national interest: young Joan Enderby has just sold 3,000 head of sheep and has decided that she will personally drove them a hundred miles to the buyer.

This is followed by a patriotic speech by Sherrington Senior to Cartwright about the spirit of Australia, still backed by the music of the band throughout. He speaks of the process whereby the nation was built, what

makes us what we are, the conquest of the land. This is literally nation-building rhetoric, and its musical accompaniment is what was at that time referred to in the east of Australia as a 'jazz waltz'. It's a modern dance orchestra that the audience has heard playing jazz as a sign of the voguishness of this version of the bush. This is the bush tradition that is modernising itself and taking on the trappings of contemporary sophistication, 'bridging' rural and urban.

The new Sydney Harbour Bridge was not simply a massive technological object. The visual record of its construction was a narrative about transition. It was a landscape-dominating proclamation of the power of modern technology to alleviate unemployment, an industrial and urban-based alternative or supplement to agricultural production. It 'bridged' the country's highest density commercial and industrial urban centre with its more rural northern outskirts. It was a bridge to modernity, to technology, and its image was circulated through the most powerful medium of twentieth century mass culture: film, which was 'bridging' sound and vision at exactly the same time. The bridge, as both national object and national metaphor, as transformer of infrastructure as well as imagination, has great explanatory power in the attempt to trace the evolution of 'nation', the reconciliation between tradition and modernity, between the bush and jazz.

This particular discussion takes the arrival of the talkies as its cut-off point, an appropriate transition to pause in a discussion of jazz and nation. I finish with a hypothesis that illustrates possible connections. In its earliest Australian phase, jazz was regarded as a form of extravagant and rather inelegant dancing. I have seen no surviving film of the 1920s in which that connection is not explicit. Gradually that connection weakens, and by the time Rolph de Heer made the jazz film *Dingo* in 1991 with Miles Davis – largely in an outback setting, be it noted – there is no link between jazz and dancing. There are many reasons for this shift, but one which has not been explored is the coming of sound to cinema. My interest is in how this might have helped to legitimise jazz. Before the talkies, the way jazz was represented cinematically was too undignified to achieve this legitimisation within the discourses of nation. The arrival of sound shifted the emphasis from zany visual antics to sonority.

Let us briefly revisit three films. The oldest surviving cinematic representation of an Australian jazz band is in Chauvel's film *Greenhide*, referred to above. It is at a garden party held by Margery and her circle of

irresponsibly emancipated 'New Women' friends. In a silent movie, how does a band display its jazz credentials? By extravagant visual tomfoolery: the musicians prance around, wave their instruments about, and indeed at one point the drummer appears to spit casually across the lawn. *Show-girl's Luck* is on the cusp of sound, with performance rhetoric still in the silent tradition, still to come to terms with the sonic possibilities of film. Although it is a sound movie, the musicians therefore present the idea of jazz through extravagant and absurdly clownish gestures, and like the musicians in *Greenhide*, waving their instruments about with alarming abandon.

It is a transitional moment between the visual nonsense of *Greenhide*, and the more visually composed and dignified jazz demeanour of later sound films like *The Squatter's Daughter*. The arrival of talkies enabled the sound of jazz to be projected directly. It turned cinema jazz from visual display to sonority. This allowed its semi-comic, undignified clowning to be dispensed with, and the cinematic depiction of the music brought it closer to respectable popular music performance. In musical terms, jazz is gradually being assimilated into the approved mainstream of advancing modernity. In moral and cultural terms it is beginning to come to an accommodation with an Australian identity which itself is increasingly reconciling a bush tradition and the imperatives of modernity.

Hitherto the portrayal of jazz in silent film required extravagant visual effects, like prancing musicians and dancers. The advent of the soundtrack enabled film to present music directly, and this almost certainly contributed to the shift in the way jazz is conceptualised, from visibility to sonority, a shift also accelerated by the sudden arrival of electrical amplification in live jazz performance.⁹ This seems to be one of the factors that nudged jazz into a more favourable alignment with national identity. Apart from the fact that vernacular dance does not carry the same cultural capital as instrumental skill (dancing appears to be abandoned corporeality, instrumental performance is disciplined and more cerebral), dance is also more feminised – the stereotypical image of the irresponsible 'jazz age' is the dancing flapper. Originally conceived as separate from and in opposition to the rural mythology, jazz becomes one end of a 'bridge' between the city and the country that holds the promise of self-generated national economic renewal.

Other factors appear to include disillusionment with the Anglo-American axis of economic and political influence during the 1930s, and the arrival of US service personnel from 1941 was ambiguous, often

generating resentment at patronising attitudes. This appears to have been duplicated in the jazz community whose surviving members have reported to me in interviews that they often felt 'we could do it as just as well'. A nationalist spirit enters Australian jazz during World War Two becoming more aware of its own robustness, as evidenced particularly in the emerging revivalist or traditional jazz movement. Somewhere between the early 1930s and the end of the war there is a transition from opposition to collaboration in the relationship between jazz and established models of Australian identity. The jazz enthusiast crossed a line from being at best an effeminate champagne debauchee, to at worst a masculine beer drinker, and with a greater affinity for the bush mythology.

By the late twentieth century, jazz had become so assimilated as one of the most pervasive musics of Australian identity, that it has largely gone un-noted as such. The contrast with the 1920s is radical, and further enquiry will be instructive regarding the evolving Australian self-consciousness and its place in a global context throughout the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Since colonial times 'The Bush' has been an essential component in any attempt to discuss Australian national identity. It was a motif in the nationalist journal *The Bulletin*, and has been a central theme in academic studies in the field, as in the example of Blainey, cited elsewhere in this essay (Blainey 2003). On the Bush in early Australian film, see for example Collins 1987. For a useful introduction see the Australian commonwealth government at <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/bush/>

2. I want to acknowledge with thanks the research fellowships awarded to me for two successive years by Australia's National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), and which provided me with access to the material I use in this presentation. NFSA hold and provided most of the extracts I will use here today. This paper is a development of work published as 'Jazz and Nation in Australian Cinema: From Silents to Sound', in *NFSA Journal* 2009, 5(1), pp. 1–12. My thanks also to the anonymous referees, whose comments prompted useful revisions.

3. The first reference to 'Wowser' in Australia is dated by Wilkes at 1899 (Wilkes, 2008: 406). Its emergence at this time may be seen as reflecting growing tension between a dour conservatism (the prefix 'Mc' in this case is significant) and the increasingly transgressive profile of modern recreations. Apart from any jazz content, the popularity of film was ominously noted in the journal *The Bulletin* as early as 1909 as 'a habit, not to say a vice ... there are people going around who would sooner miss two meals a week than their regular 'picture night' (cited by Shirley and Adams, 1989: 23). McWowse's defiance of 'the congregation' is also notable, given that by that year, 1919, cinema attendance had outstripped church attendance in Australia (see further Johnson, 2000: 68).

4. Shirley and Adams, 1989: 96. Shirley and Adams provide an extended account of the threat posed by the US domination of the film industry, see particularly Chapter 4.

5. See for example Blainey, 2003: 336.
6. The absence of a mother represents a deficiency in the model of the contemporary family which itself is worth noting. The 'deficient' motherless family is surprisingly common in this category of films, as also in the case of *Tall Timber*, discussed below. The urban melodrama *The Cheaters* from 1930 is another apparently motherless child scenario; in fact in this film a central character Paula manages to be the motherless 'daughter' of two fathers: the one she thought she was, and of the real father she discovers at the end. The same elements are present in *The Squatter's Daughter*, of which more below. The pattern invites comparison with the tradition in Australian folklore of the 'lost child'.
7. On the function of jazz and dance in both films, see further Johnson, 2000: 69–76.
8. Because the work is in manuscript which is not always completely legible, the detail is sometimes a matter of conjecture. In order not to break the flow, however, the reader is asked to trust this transcription and the pedantic '[sic]' in what follows will be omitted unless it appears to be particularly needful.
9. This is traced in Johnson, 2000: 81–105.

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