

Bruce Johnson , *The Inaudible Music: Jazz, Gender and Australian Modernity*

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This is an important addition to the literature on Australian music, and in particular on Australian Jazz and its place in society and culture. For too long writers, whether by choice, through ignorance, or in deference, have failed to bring jazz into the broader, cultural scheme of things.

Here is a work that begins to correct this; and it is timely, especially considering the continuing rush in music education to leap (often blindly) onto the bandwagon of creativity and improvisation. Jazz remains one of the vital stepping stones to these wonderfully mysterious aspects of music-making, and its character and history deserve stronger recognition in all cultural domains than it has had thus far.

Of course, those who attempt to discuss such complex and diverse issues as announced in the title, in just over two hundred pages (even someone as articulate and scholarly as the author) leave themselves open to all sorts of argument. Inevitably, the subject matter compels a 'touching on' only of some areas rather than an exploration in depth. The author's comment in his preface that many of the areas he covers receive only passing mention in other publications may also be applied fairly to this book.

Nonetheless, this is a fascinating examination of a minority music, which, paradoxically, has always had a significant following; a silent, inaudible majority if you like. It is clearly the lot of a genre which, since the 1950s has been largely neglected in the print and electronic media and is still fighting to enter through the front door, so to speak, of academia. It remains sandwiched between the rock/pop world and so-called high art music. The brilliant, arguably uniquely Australian musician John Sangster, whose death the author cites as a prime example of media neglect, is one of numerous important figures in Australian music virtually ignored because their music was/is jazz. This is one of the book's central themes and it is delivered with justifiable candor.

Pertinent, too, is Johnson's reference to Roger Covell's important but embarrassingly elitist work of the 1960s, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society*. The fact is that in it, jazz (and most other non-classical music for that matter) is barely mentioned, despite, as Johnson argues, its significant place in the society to which Covell refers. Questioning of these sorts of spurious titles, the content and the false image that they (still) give has been long overdue.

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