

Gigging, Busking and Bending the Dots


How People Learn to Be Jazz Musicians

CASE STUDIES FROM BRISTOL

John Berry



Peter Lang



This book traces the learning experiences of the jazz community in Bristol, UK from 1945 to 2012. Grounded in a methodology of participant observation and case studies, it documents changes in the economic, cultural and educational circumstances faced by the players. In their own words, the musicians recall the influences that initiated and developed their musicianship.

Drawing on first-person accounts, the study traces the historical development of jazz music and musicians in Bristol. In the post-war years, players began to develop significant stylistic aspects in the jazz lexicon. Drawing on media sources and interaction in performance, players garnered a host of performing skills whilst suffering dwindling audiences and declining venues. Reforms in English music education in the 1980s offered formal opportunities to study jazz in the city's schools, drawing minimal attention from institutions. Practical learning and playing opportunities offered by the Local Authority music service sustained a modest membership over the years. Post millennium, local schools, with one or two exceptions, showed little interest in jazz education. Nevertheless, maintaining its traditional stance, Bristol's jazz community continues to exhort top quality jazz performances including compositions that match national and international standards.

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Abstract

This book considers the learning experiences of a jazz community in Bristol, UK. Set within a time span of sixty years [1945–2012] it documents changes in the economic, cultural and educational circumstances enjoyed by the players. Faced with a developing and complex international musical landscape, the musicians initiated, studied and honed a meld of instrumental and musicianship skills within the context of the city as a cultural host. Grounded in a methodology of participant observation and case study the players tell their own stories. They initially cite the post-World War Two dance bands in the city where they could learn orchestration and explore opportunities to improvise. In the changing styles which characterised jazz in the ensuing years they made choices, garnering appropriate skills. Drawing on media influences they learned and developed instrumental skills and musicianship in interaction within the community. Reforms in English music education in the eighties offered formal opportunities to study jazz in the city's schools. The local authority, by way of its Music Service through peripatetic instrumental teachers and the organisation of music centres and big band opportunities, gave excellent support to young players. Nonetheless, the musicians faced an exacting environment demanding high levels of performing skills, compounded by dwindling audiences and declining venues. At the millennium, people learning to play jazz in Bristol joined a community devoted to maintaining its traditions together with a small nucleus of players and composers in ascendancy. The restructured Music Service continued to organise and maintain junior and senior big bands to include both students and adults. In the meantime the city's schools, endowed with a National Curriculum where jazz had equality with other styles in terms of performance and composition, offered a patchy and slight profile of the music. A decade later in 2012, the schools generally showed little interest in jazz as the community presented a modest but significant profile of the genre within the context of the city as its cultural host.

Foreword

This is a comprehensive history of jazz which goes far beyond its apparently localised title. The word jazz can signify 'trad', dance music or big bands but the art of improvisation lies at the heart of the genre, and the author has given it appropriate emphasis.

The Associated Board, finally if belatedly, instituting graded practical examinations in the subject, defined jazz in cogent terms: '[Jazz] is a richly expressive contemporary musical language, combining the freedom of improvisation with the disciplines of musical structures and involves musicianship of the highest order'. However, as the author notes, school music teachers in general know little of the subject, while the woolly directives concerning jazz from responsible educational bodies make depressing reading.

John Berry's survey of the experiences of professional jazz musicians in the Bristol area makes clear the uphill struggle to keep the genre alive as gigging opportunities changed from Dance bands (with the disappearance of formal dances), to swing bands and then to big bands, later discouraged for reasons of expense. One jazz authority described improvisation as 'a leap into the unknown', a description that defines the genre most eloquently.

This book is a thorough and thoughtful look into a subject that has received less than its share of serious investigation.

— ERIC WETHERELL

INTRODUCTION

Gigging, Busking and Bending the Dots: How People Learn to be Jazz Musicians – Case Studies from Bristol, UK

The aim of this monograph is to explore the learning, cultural and economic processes experienced by members of an English provincial jazz community within the years 1945–2012.¹ The exploration was informed by an investigative methodology of case studies considered a unique and flexible mode towards understanding the environmental context enjoyed by the jazz musicians of Bristol.²

The historiography of jazz which developed concomitantly with the genre identifies a wealth of urban centres within the music's global spread. Indeed the notion of associative stylistic innovations with towns and cities are well documented from the early years of the twentieth century. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that away from the world spotlight in innumerable provincial urban environments, jazz communities flourish. In such circumstances a paucity of research masks the learning, practice and development of the music. Here it is suggested that the choice of Bristol and its jazz community is a worthy, if not atypical urban environment in which to explore the nature and nurture of jazz away from the world spotlight. Furthermore the wide-ranging fieldwork grounded in the case studies informing this research is indicative of the many agencies and influences which make up the dynamics of jazz education and musicianship.

Two periods of research inform the work. The first was concerned with events from the end of World War Two until the Millennium. Changes in performing styles characterised developments over six decades. The changes grounded in the traditions of jazz were extended and developed by innovative players elsewhere, becoming powerful influences on the world stage promoted by global media sources. Succumbing to the influences, Bristol's

players firstly attempted to copy the new styles and then adapted, moulded and developed the music within their individual expertise. Working in the context of their local groups, ensembles and bands, they pursued and practised emerging jazz traditions during the five decades from the mid-twentieth century to the Millennium. Drawing on international aspects of form, orchestration and the development of stylistics over time inspired principal themes for players as they gained practical instrumental skills and musicianship. The environment of the city with its clubs, pubs, dance halls and other venues for performance set the stage for many bands, groups and ensembles and their players. However, throughout this period people learning to play jazz in the city faced a culture of increasing difficulties. Instrumental skills became ever more demanding and performing opportunities declined as popular tastes changed.

An emerging jazz pedagogy harnessing international stylistic development brought associative changes to formal jazz education in instrumental and theoretical methodology. In England, jazz courses were initiated and developed in higher education colleges. Reforms in secondary education under the banner of the National Curriculum provided opportunities to study jazz as part of the provision for music. In the first part of this monograph, a survey of both State and Independent schools in the city revealed a mix of approaches to jazz education. In some instances there was no evidence of practical jazz opportunities, but there were also big bands organised by the local Music Service and others together with a number of school groups.

At the Millennium, many courses in jazz education were available in English colleges and universities. At the same time national conservatoires generally responsible for external instrumental graded examinations developed instrumental courses based on jazz performance and musicianship e.g. Guildhall Trinity; LCM. In particular the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music [ABRSM] offered a syllabus of five grades based on a portfolio of skills drawn from traditional jazz performance. At this stage there was no evidence to suggest that such approaches informed Bristol's jazz community. Indeed the range of instrumental skills demanded by stylistic developments ensured that members of Bristol's jazz community were faced with a basis of formal and informal approaches to jazz education as

they learned through performance 'on the job'. Many players retained an interest in styles which suited their technical expertise, content to reiterate a familiar repertoire as others sought to constantly develop their work. Throughout the research the notion of context has been a constant thread. Players gained and honed their skills in local groups and in local venues. Small groups, big bands and other ensembles were organised, rehearsing wherever and whenever, exchanging ideas, experiences and instrumental characteristics. They copied what they heard and experienced from many sources as they developed musicianship and instrumental skills in their quest towards jazz performance. To that end the research was informed by an assembled sound archive of jazz recorded by Bristol's musicians.

The second period of research grounded in the years 2011–2012 was concerned with changes as the circumstances of players and students were re-examined. The notion of Bristol as 'Cultural Host' in the matter of venues in pubs, clubs and a concert hall suggested a fall in performing opportunities. Generally the music scene for rock groups and other popular forms was buoyant throughout the city and orchestral concerts were well attended whilst jazz was modestly represented. People learning to be jazz musicians faced the same challenges in the development of instrumental and musicianship skills. In that sense the jazz life for Bristol's musicians continued in much the same manner as in earlier years. To this end a representative sample of musicians was interviewed and their experiences presented as case studies.

Developments in English Music Education during 2010–2012 generated a wealth of discussion from the government, interested parties in arts, music and educators, who called for all styles of music to be represented in schools. In this, jazz in Bristol's schools enjoyed an equal stylistic footing with other forms and styles. To that end a letter together with a range of suggested topics was sent to twenty-three schools in the city by the author, requesting information concerning the organisation and performance of jazz. The schools were not identified and information was treated in the strictest confidence, their responses being organised as individual case studies.

Whilst schools and Examination Bodies generally retained the status quo, the Bristol Music Service underwent a degree of change. Following

reports from the English government, the Arts Council and other interested bodies, the Service together with similar organisations throughout the country was reorganised within a system called 'Hubs' where the service is a commissioner rather than a deliverer. At the same time, the Music Service continues to organise instrumental teaching, music centres and two jazz groups.

Two appendices are attached, devoted to the critical rise of a jazz pedagogy and the development of jazz in the twentieth century. They inform the data, promoting a broad contextual canvas grounded in the literature. In addition, they define and illustrate many of the influential players who inspired the jazz musicians of Bristol.

CHAPTER ONE

Jazz in Bristol 1945–2000

Bristol: Historical and Geographical Sketch

This historical and geographical sketch of Bristol, establishes the general environment and context enjoyed by the city's jazz musicians. Situated in the South West region of Britain, Bristol owes its location and prosperity to its geographical position as a seaport and Bridge-town. Its architectural heritage includes surviving medieval buildings dating its history back to the Norman Conquest. From those early days until the nineteenth century, Bristol became the largest seaport in the country with trade outlets to Europe, North America and the West Indies. As a regional metropolis for the south west, the city attracted a growing population from all over the British Isles. In 1801 the population of the city was just over 40,000, with a further 28,000 in the suburbs. By 1901 337,000 persons lived in the city, which altered its boundaries to cope with the growing population. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, Bristol's demographic composition, occupational characteristics and industrial distribution, generally resembled that of England and Wales as a whole. During the years following World War One and prior to World War Two, Bristol developed industries and attracted labour from the north of England. Existing tobacco and chocolate industries, together with Bristol's role as a distribution centre for the south west 'cushioned the worst effects of unemployment' [Brown & Harris, 1979].

Bristol was badly damaged by bombing during World War Two. Due to its geographical position, it housed many troops both national and foreign with a large contingent of Americans in 1944. The early post-war years throughout the 1950s were dedicated to repairing the city's war

damage, together with redevelopment schemes, whilst previous industries such as shipping, declined. Aviation, a principal industry in the city since World War One, flourished throughout the 1950s and development of the 'Concorde' aircraft gave the city a prestigious image. New industries included many financial institutions such as banking and insurance companies and for some years, Bristol became a magnet for companies wishing to decentralise [Little, 1991]. By 1981, Bristol was mooted as a 'Sunbelt City' at the forefront of wider developments in the British economy, with a small but significant number of new jobs being created in high technology occupations [Boddy, 1986]. Generally throughout the post-war years, the city has provided a reasonable level of employment opportunities for its citizens.

In education, the post-war years have seen a considerable expansion of the city's existing University with a major building programme to accommodate over seven thousand students. A new university was created from the old Polytechnic, attracting further students to the city. Furthermore, Bristol has a broad mix of independent and state schools together with a range of colleges offering facilities for further education to include youngsters and adults.

Socially, the city faced similar problems to those of contemporary British cities following World War Two. At the end of 1945, 'a number of West Indians who had served in the RAF, took up residence in the city' [Pryce, 1986: 300]. Later, following significant migration from the West Indies to Britain, the West Indian population in Bristol grew and by the 1980s 'the attempted escape from the West Indies ended in bitterness and frustration' [Pryce, 1986: 272]. This was expressed following concerns of poor housing, poor education, serious and growing unemployment for black people in violent clashes between police and black youths [Joshua & Harris, 1983].

At the close of the twentieth century, the city generally retained its employment levels and significant student population. The city's schools underwent a vigorous reorganisation within a philosophical change from the notion of comprehensive to community education. In the final years of the twentieth century an extensive building programme was in place. In particular the city centre and the dock area were being restored. Sansom

[1997: 96] notes that ‘The Bristol Harbourside developments when completed will be a triumph for co-operation between the city council, the local business community and the government agency, English Partnerships’.

The city has several choral societies, amateur orchestras, brass bands, marching bands and other instrumental combinations. In this sense there is a tradition of music making within the city. Indeed, one Choral Society in particular bears its name and celebrated its centenary in 1989 [Bowen, 1988]. However Bristol does not have a modern, prestigious concert hall in the manner of some adjacent cities.

Bristol’s players: conversations¹

Conversations began with general questions asking players to:

- i. describe why and how they started to play
- ii. the influence of formal education
- iii. choice of style
- iv. aspects of development as a player
- v. personal experiences of playing jazz in Bristol

Dialogue inspired further questions within the five general areas focused on the musician’s experiences in their playing life in the city.² Narratives generally follow a chronological path influenced by stylistic variants from the USA, reaching Britain in the post-war years. The dance bands of the 1940s gradually made way for the revivalist and modernist bands and combos, all of which contributed to a stylistic mainstream. At the same time individual styles were retained and developed by innovative players. Big band jazz was sustained through the organisation of rehearsal bands meeting on a weekly basis. A modest avant-garde and fusion movement flourished briefly in the 1980s, and by the 1990s a range of jazz styles were represented, although players were indicating a significant decline in performing outlets for jazz

in the city. Players are identified by initials, with profiles from ensembles where appropriate. The names of contemporary local and national bands and groups which feature in the musician's dialogue are retained.

Interviews with surviving musicians from the immediate post-war years suggested that their principal performing outlets at that time were those of social dances. AP, a pianist, trombone player, bandleader and arranger, returning to the city following his army service, described the post-war scene:

After the war it was a scene of church halls like St Albans, St Marys at Fishponds, Long Ashton village hall, Bishopston Parish hall, the British Legion Hall, the prime venues were the Winter Gardens in Weston Super Mare, the Victoria Rooms in Bristol, the Wills hall in Bedminster or the Bristol South Baths, which had a dance floor over the pool in the winter, eventually, I formed my own band and was able to make a living at it.

GS a drummer noted:

The Church halls abounded with enthusiasm in those days, St Marys Church Hall was packed out on a Saturday night, there were many small bands playing. I was with a five piece, which we called the 'Modernaires' and we had been round all the military camps, ARP posts and American Red Cross in the war ... Choruses or improvisations; we didn't call it jazz then were mostly provided by people who could play and read ... I was obliged to mix my playing with a day job because there was not a living in it for me and as I remember, it was very tiring at times. I had been unfit for the army and became a civil servant.

JTF a saxophone player, returning from the war, found the local scene to be uninspiring:

One of the first people to see me after the war was AP, he was starting a band and wanted to know if I was interested, well I had just left a band in the army which had a number of ex-pros in it and it was great. I found the local standard appalling and one of the local bands I worked for had an estate agent as bandleader who organised functions. He couldn't tell a crotchet from a quaver and just stood in front of us with a stick, there was never a living in it for me as I had a family to support and I tried many things for a day job. I sold furniture, TVs and even became a small-holder and a representative for a football pools Company, eventually, I trained as a class teacher ...

SS, a trombone player in the BBC West of England Light Orchestra and later a conductor, composer and musical director for a television company, supplemented his orchestral work playing in dance bands:

There were some very interesting players in Bristol, AP always used large bands, at least eight players and he knew what it was all about. The first gig I did in Bristol was at St Aldwyn's Church Hall, there was no rehearsal and there were some fine players in the band, particularly JT the guitar player, who would certainly have had a lucrative career had he been prepared to work in London, but he liked what he did in Bristol.

JT a guitar player, bandleader and arranger, assesses the post-war scene in Bristol:

When I first started playing guitar, there were a few plumb jobs where you worked, usually in hotels. Top London cabaret acts would come down with their band parts and they would sling them at you on a Saturday night. If you were lucky, you got a band call, if not, you got a talk through, that was as far as it went and then you went on the stand and played them. At the end of the war, I was working mainly with small groups, I formed the 'Blue Star Quintet' and we had some broadcasts pushed our way by DW [a BBC producer and trumpet player] in the West region. It was good publicity but we found ourselves doing more broadcasts than gigs, we got good reviews in the Melody Maker³ it didn't get us any gigs, the dancing public didn't seem interested in the music as such, I managed to make a living out of playing, I ran a band at a local holiday camp for many years and I mixed gigs with a bit of private teaching.

EJ was a clarinet and saxophone player who worked with 'all the local bands' in Bristol during and after the war. He became a professional player with many national 'name bands', worked in ships orchestras and was a bandleader for Mecca⁴ during the 1960s:

As a sixteen year old, I played with all the local bands and also organised a jazz trio of piano, drums and clarinet which played at the American Red Cross Club in Berkeley Square. At the time, somebody described me as a 'jam session clarinet player'; I was never a trad jazz player. I returned to Bristol from the army in 1946 and managed to make a living from playing. I worked with the Allen Grey band and also did a season with Ralph Bright at the Weston Super-Mare Pier. We played jazz on the gigs whenever we could and some of the gigs I did were all busking, so you could play a jazz chorus followed by the middle eight and back again, if you played stock arrangements, there was

no rehearsing, you played arrangement No 1 followed by No 2 and so on, later I worked with professional 'name bands' [Tommy Sampson b. 1919, Carl Barriteau 1914–1998 and Oscar Rabin 1899–1958] before forming my own band and working the Mecca Circuit.

JTF continued:

Most of the bands sounded the same. The orchestrations were commercially available and were flexible, you could get by with a piano bass and drums and then add trumpets, trombones, saxophones and strings if you wanted. You could move from band to band and find the same arrangements to play. Some small groups worked without music, and there were many drummers and bass players who were not able to read music ... the only bands with special non-commercial arrangements were AP and the Allan Grey Band.

The Allan Grey Band was organised and managed by DC, who later emigrated to Canada and was traced by the author. He was a multi-instrumentalist, arranger, composer and some-time conductor of the BBC West of England Variety Orchestra. In a letter to the author, he explained:

The Allan Grey Band was oriented to music for listening as well as dancing and had a considerable following of young people who enjoyed off-tempo swing and jive dancing. To this end I transcribed a number of Glen Miller scores and featured a good sprinkling of other American Big band scores, as conductor of the variety orchestra, which used mainly professional players with a sprinkling of local musicians I made many arrangements for the Jimmy Young show and the Benny Hill Show. During the years of the 1940s and 1950s, I made a living as a player. In later years, I qualified as an Aeronautical engineer and emigrated to Canada.

MW a guitar player, teacher, bandleader and some-time actor worked with DC in a quintet at a local hotel just after the war:

I had been in the Navy during the war and played in many small groups during those years in a sort of Mills Brothers style. When I returned to Bristol I organised a quintet at the Grand Spa Hotel but also played in the main orchestra there which was run by Teddy White. DC was in the orchestra and he was one of these incredible musicians you came across, he could play almost anything, he was a brilliant arranger quite an incredible musician. It was a good little orchestra, constructive in the main. We were doing broadcasts which meant nice interesting arrangements The worst of the work was playing social functions, we played pretty well every night and they were long gigs, trotting out

the same old stuff, the Hokey-Cokey and all that. I thought life could get so boring, but there was a pub in Ashley Down Road, I forget the name now and a few of us used to meet in an upstairs room to play jazz, there was no dancing or anything like that you just went there and played. In the 1950s, I combined playing with teaching and opened a Spanish Guitar Centre in the city which proved to be a great success.

JTF saxes, flute, clarinet, bandleader, recalls:

After the war, about 1948 I suppose, a small group of us used to meet in a pub at the end of Ashley Down Road, the arrangements were mostly head stuff on standards which most of us knew anyway, and we worked things out between us. EJ was often there and so was MW and the music was for us.

EJ clarinet, saxophones, remembers:

There was a pub called 'The White Swan' at the end of Ashley Down Road in Stokes Croft where we used to play jazz. As far as I remember there were about seventeen players although they were never all there at the same time because they might be working.

The many dance bands in Bristol following World War Two were mostly small ensembles of three to six pieces playing in church halls and hotels and supported by the popularity of social dancing. With a repertoire of popular songs of the day scored commercially by music publishing houses, the bands had a similar sound varied only by the instrumentation. The expectations of dancers for quicksteps, foxtrots, waltzes and party tunes were met by the commercial scores and memorised pieces which the players called 'buskers'. In this environment, some musicians maintained a dual role by playing the commercial scores and improvising [taking a chorus] with the buskers as a basis. For them, improvisation was the hallmark of jazz and they seized every opportunity they could. Players returning to the city having experienced skilled ensembles in the military were critical of the local groups. There were exceptions as groups used non-commercial arrangements written for the players which demanded high individual and ensemble skill levels. There were few books available for would be arrangers who learnt by studying and adapting commercial scores, listening to records and copying and adapting what they heard. Most of the popular dance tunes of the day were published as piano pieces, providing a basic

melodic and chordal structure. In turn, the melodic and stylistic patterns introduced by the arrangers were learnt by the instrumentalists leading to the artistic development of many bands in the city. The organisation, traditions and styles of Bristol's dance bands of the 1940s had been imported from elsewhere, reinforced by the national media. Yet the lively performing environments encouraged and inspired the innovative characteristics of jazz. In turn, players organised special meetings in pubs and clubs with colleagues, to experiment and improvise.

Away from the popular social environment of dances and dance bands, a different style of playing known as the revivalist movement attracted a new body of players. The revivalist movement was a stylistic return to the early jazz of the black pioneers, beginning in the USA and disseminating world-wide through media sources. At the end of World War Two, it became very popular in Britain. According to Godbolt [1984: 266] it was 'a truly astonishing happening' as the 'Trad Boom' involved literally hundreds of young men copying the jazz of the New Orleans pioneers. Hundreds of clubs, pubs, palais and drill halls throughout the country were obliged to accommodate the 'legion of revivalists and their following'. Bristol spawned many bands which played in local pubs and clubs in the 1940s and 1950s, indeed some of them were still performing fifty years on.

AB is a [self-taught] clarinet player, composer, band-leader and sometime singer, who played in local revivalist bands in the early 1950s after army service. He went on to achieve national and international commercial success [Godbolt, 1984: 268] and with his band was still in demand towards the millennium [Australia 1989; Los Angeles 1989 and Switzerland 1990]. His albums are currently available in local shops. He described his experiences in Bristol:

I got back to Pensford (a local village near to Bristol) in 1950. The army had given me a clarinet when I was in Egypt and I was copying the playing of George Lewis a New Orleans clarinet player from the early years. I formed a band in Bristol with trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piano, drums and a tea chest bass. The repertoire was assembled by listening to records from early 'Jelly Roll Morton', through to 'Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Seven'. The arrangements were all head arrangements; I am an ear man and only read the odd note. I played regularly at the 'Crown and Dove' for two years because

there were very few venues and dancing was not allowed in pubs. Later I left the band to go with the Ken Colyer band [Godbolt, 1984: 199] and after another stint in Bristol, took a band to Dusseldorf for a while, returned to London and went on from there.

The Avon Cities Jazz Band began in the late 1940s–early 1950s, achieved national success, toured abroad and survived in the city until the millennium, with the same personnel. One of its founders, trumpet player JN remembers:

In the late 1940s, I had become contemptuous of swing music. I used to go to a jazz club, run by dance band musicians where they played stuff like ‘Cherokee and I Got Rhythm’ as arrangements of standards. I asked to sit in, but I could only play things like Basin Street Blues and Royal Garden Blues which they thought to be very old hat. Then somebody telephoned me and arranged a meeting together with seven or eight like-minded players and we decided to form a band which became the Avon Cities. To begin the repertoire was taken from records and memorised with players like Bunk Johnson and George Lewis and I remember being smitten with the wonderful new world of jazz, playing, imitating and learning the records of King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton and his Red Hot Peppers and Freddie Keppard. We were then a band with a cause, for us the music was simple, yet thrilling, nostalgic and romantic and we were probably the only organised band in Bristol. At first there were no venues and we rehearsed at the YMCA at the top of George Street, which we then made into a club. After that it was gigs for the university students and at the Art College, the Corn Exchange and other places such as Bath. In Bristol, we had a great following in the 1950s, they just liked a cheery sound and it became a cult sound really ... it became quite big particularly among the students. We were amongst students and always playing in the Vic Rooms and in Rag Week the Avon Cities Jazz Band were on every night virtually. We did the same as professionals who were doing it seriously, like Chris Barber, Ken Colyer, Humph (Humphrey Lyttleton) Kenny Ball and then Acker (Bilk) and Terry Lightfoot. We used to meet them in all night cafes and they were clapped out. I was starting out to be a teacher and sometimes I had to be ‘ill’ in order to get to the jobs but we didn’t know how long this thing would last and it didn’t last.

In the mid-1950s we changed to a small swing band, we left out the banjo and included a saxophone [doubled by the trombone player] and were booed at a trad festival in London. By then we were making original arrangements with persona memorized parts for the players as in Duke Ellington’s work and I was starting to be a teacher, although I wasn’t very interested in it, but it seemed secure and all the others had good jobs.

RB is a clarinet and soprano saxophone player who organised and played in bands called the Vieux Carre Jazz Band and The Climax Jazz Band in the early days of revivalist jazz in Bristol, and later founded 'The Blue Notes Jazz Band' which played at the Zurich Jazz Festival, Malta and the Albert Hall in London, and has survived past the Millennium. He has written:

At first we relied upon the Avon Cities and Chew Valley Bands for leadership. We rehearsed in the front room of G's house and the better we got the louder we got, so we began hiring the Foundry. The Foundry was in Newfoundland Road and I think we paid five shillings for a room. Eventually we were ready for public performance, we called ourselves the 'Vieux Carre Jazz Band' and appeared first at Acker's pub at the Crown and Dove and then at the YMCA in Great George Street [Bennett, 1988].

In interview RB described the Blue Note Jazz Band as:

stylistically owing more to New Orleans white players. The arrangements were head arrangements [RB is not a reader], although the sound tends to change as members arrive or depart. We used to try to get the strict New Orleans sound but we are now somewhere short of John Coltrane but it has become a hobby and something you do for beer money.

RC a saxophone player remembers:

In 1954, I saw the student rag procession coming down over Park Street. There was float after float of jazz bands, traditional jazz bands, there were probably fifteen bands. Every department had a jazz band, the sociology department had a jazz band, the medical school had a jazz band, every faculty had a jazz band. They were all good players, in fact the university held a jazz contest every year.

Bristol's revivalist players were mainly 'ear men'. Listening to records and where possible to other players and bands, they copied and memorised ensemble passages and improvised solos 'note for note', attempting to emulate the sound, style and articulation of the early New Orleans jazz players. Instrumentation was also copied with trumpet, trombone, clarinet, banjo, piano, bass and drums. At first, local players in Bristol amassed a repertoire of music committed to memory from records made by aging American pioneers, many of whom were also playing from memory. From domestic rooms to public houses and clubs they progressed, copying players on original recordings [e.g. Louis Armstrong's 'Hot Five' and 'Hot Seven'] made

in the 1920s. They were part of a national, even international phenomenon as ‘trad jazz’ as it came to be called, achieved popularity throughout the country. Some bands gained national status, through media coverage, becoming ‘copy groups’ for others. Strong interest from Bristol’s large student population not only helped to provide audiences, but inspired the organisation of bands within the University itself. In the city, bands established performing venues in pubs and clubs. Players were amateurs and played ‘for beer money’ rather than a fee, which differed from the economic circumstances of dance bands whose members expected to be paid. Most bands maintained a constant repertoire of pieces but in many cases, innovative players extended personal and ensemble styles with changes in instrumentation and special head [memorised] arrangements. At much the same time as the revivalist resurgence, new and innovative stylistics inspired what initially became bebop or ‘modern’ jazz, based on the work of a small group of American players in the late 1940s.

A group of jazz players, mostly from the local dance bands, became the nucleus of modern jazz in Bristol during the 1950s and into the 1960s AH a pianist recalls:

I had one year as a pro when I came out of the army but there was no money in playing, especially in Bristol. I auditioned for bands on the trans-Atlantic ships so that I could go to New York and hear the modern jazz as some other players from London had done but I never heard anything. I had nothing to do with trad during the time of the revivalist bands, I was very much a modernist, we started off the first modernist club in Bristol with a trio, it was the Buffalo Club in Lawrence Hill and I played in other clubs as well. I suppose it went on for five or six years and I was doing gigs with dance bands as well and with some big bands like the Raymond Kay Band from Weston Super Mare. There were a lot of players from the RAF on that band, it was very good and we used to do six nights a week on the Pier or on the Winter Gardens. We had jobs galore in those days, often playing for six nights a week and I was carrying on with my job as a representative.

GT a drummer who also became a bandleader and agent recalls that:

I played in the dance bands in Bristol during the 1950s and 1960s, there was a lot of dance bands then because there was a lot of hotel work. I played with the Ken Lewis Band and was with various bands of AP for years and was at the Hawthornes Hotel with him for three years doing a couple of nights a week As well as the dance band side of things I