

Prof. Bruce Johnson

The Redemption of Jazz

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 they 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. On its arrival in Australia in 1918 jazz was immediately situated as un-Australian, but by the early 1930s it was already becoming 'Australianised'; this general process of adopting the local 'cultural camouflage' was found in other countries. But there were also changes internationally, including economic lessons of the Great Depression, especially in countries that had not yet become fully industrialised, which made it necessary to reassess pre-modern traditions. I will also argue that the coming of sound to movies was a significant factor in the global 'redemption' of jazz, illustrating the point with Australia's earliest silent and sound jazz footage.

Biography

Bruce Johnson, formerly Professor in English, is now Adjunct Professor, Contemporary Music Studies, Macquarie University, Sydney; Honorary Professor, Music, University of Glasgow; Visiting Professor, Cultural History, University of Turku. Author of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz*, his recent publications include, with Martin Cloonan, *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence* (2008) and an edited collection, *Earogenous Zones: Sound, Sexuality and Cinema*, 2010. His current research field is acoustic cultural history. Jazz musician, broadcaster and record producer, he was prime mover of the Australian Jazz Archive, and co-founder of the International Institute for Popular Culture in Turku.

Contact details

Mobile: +358 (0) 440877061

Email: brujoh@utu.fi