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# The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert - Psychedelia, Sydney, 1967

## **Abstract**

On the evening of Sunday, 27 August 1967, *Jazz Happenings - The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert* was held at the Cell Block Theatre, Darlinghurst, Sydney. The event was focussed around the performance of a jazz rhapsody entitled *Psychedelia* written by saxophonist Graeme Lyall. It also featured a lightshow and film by artist and sculptor Gordon Mutch.

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# The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert - Graeme Lyall's Psychedelia

Live at the Cell Block Theatre, Sydney, 27 August 1967

Michael Organ

University of Wollongong



Jazz Happening '67, Sydney, 27 August 1967. Photograph: Grant Mudford.

*The lights go out, only candles glow.*

*Incense twitches the nostrils: kaleidoscopic colours begin to claw the eyes*

*Music - shattering, ominous - blends in and your mind takes off.*

*You're on your way, baby.*

*Next stop, Dream Land*

(James Hall, *The Australian*, August 1967)

On the evening of Sunday, 27 August 1967, *Jazz Happenings - The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert* was held at the Cell Block Theatre, Darlinghurst, Sydney. The northern hemisphere summer of 1967 - the so-called *Summer of Love* - marked the high point of the hippie movement and psychedelia in places such as London, Greenwich Village and the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. Amidst Cold War paranoia and the horror of war in Vietnam, young people sang of wearing flowers in their hair and living a utopian existence where justice, equality and peace prevailed. The Monterey International Pop Festival had taken place between 16-18 June and, a week later, the Beatles presented the world's first satellite broadcast on 25 June with their live performance of the anthemic *All You Need is Love*. A genuine belief in a new dawn prevailed. Meanwhile, in Australia the locals were living through another cold winter, creating their own version of the radical, cultural change they saw elsewhere through the lens of a generally conservative media, an ever-broadening popular music scene, and alternate, underground film production. In such a heady environment, attaching the label 'world's first' to an event was not lightly done. So when a group of young Australian musicians - led by saxophonist Graeme Lyall - announced the staging of 'Jazz Happening '67 - The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert' at the Cell Block Theatre in Sydney on 27 August 1967, eyebrows were undoubtedly raised. 'World's first' was controversial, as was use of the word 'psychedelic'. The latter was a relatively new term, having only entered common usage the previous

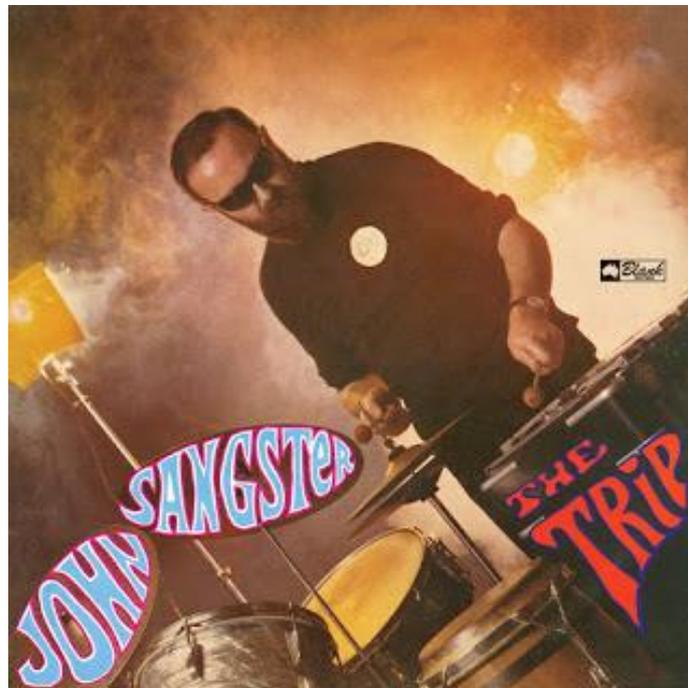
year in connection with the use of hallucinogenic and latterly illegal drugs such as LSD (acid), hashish and, to a lesser extent, marijuana (pot, grass). LSD induced a 'psychedelic trip' in which brightly coloured images appeared, and time and space were subject to distortion. A trip could be extremely pleasurable and mind expanding, or a terrifying, psychotic experience. Famous musicians such as Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd, Rocky Erickson of The Thirteenth Floor Elevators and Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac are two prominent acid casualties, victim of the oft mentioned, and sung about, psychotic reaction. Sixties psychedelia is now most commonly associated with rock and pop music and bands such as *The Beatles*, *Jefferson Airplane*, the *Grateful Dead* and *Cream*. The related album and concert poster art reflects elements of a trip as experienced by the artist, with swirling, multi-coloured graphics and Aquarian motifs common. Prominent young jazz musicians of the era, such as John Coltrane and Miles Davis, partook in the mind-expansion offered by LSD, and this impacted upon their performances, both live and in the studio. For example, in 1965 Coltrane recorded an album entitled *Om*, supposedly under the influence of LSD (Moody 2012). Saxophonist Tom Scott's *Honeysuckle Breeze* album, recorded with *The Hollywood Dreamers* in late September 1967, is a good example of jazz / psychedelia interaction, with appropriate album cover art.



Tom Scott with the California Dreamers, *Honeysuckle Breeze*, Impulse LP, 1967.

Rock musicians who freely used hallucinogens adopted many of the traditional improvisational techniques of jazz, and cross-over players such as British bass player Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker - both of whom were members of jazz bands prior to forming the rock supergroup *Cream* - were able to blur the lines between the two forms. Baker was a heroin user and Bruce, Baker and Clapton indulged in psychedelics during their time with Cream. Guitarists such as Clapton and the American Jimi Hendrix extended the range of their instrument from traditional rhythm and blues and pop into psychedelia, often distinguished by lengthy, improvised jams and distorted sounds, as evidenced in songs such as *Purple Haze* and *Tales of Brave Ulysses*. Hendrix was a heavy user of hallucinogens during this period. Locally, in 1967 jazz percussionist John Sangster released an album on Festival Records entitled *The Trip* - an eclectic mix of pop, rock, folk, jazz and soundtrack themes.

The title, cover image and fonts used throughout were decidedly trippy - or psychedelic - and very much reflecting the times.



John Sangster, *The Trip*, Festival Records, Melbourne, 1967.

Sangster's involvement in the counterculture and psychedelia extended through to at least early the following decade. He worked with progressive rock band Tully, on the Australian production of the musical *Hair*, and performed at, and prepared a movie soundtrack for, the Ourimbah Pop Festival of January 1970 - Australia's first such event (Sexton 2019).

The term 'psychedelic jazz' is not one commonly used, or even well known, though some assert it can be traced back to the 1920s when jazz musicians were influenced by 'new' drugs such as cocaine and heroin, or subject to the so-called 'reefer madness' associated with marijuana use (Ray and Boggs 2011). So it was somewhat surprising to encounter the term within Deborah Beck's history *Set in Stone: The Cell Block Theatre* (Beck 2011). Therein Beck chronicles a variety of popular and *avant*

*garde* performances and exhibitions which took place in this three storey, convict-era sandstone building located near the centre of Sydney.



The Cell Block Theatre, Sydney, July 1962 (National Art School Archives).

Originally built in the convict era between 1836-41 as part of the Darlinghurst goal complex, it operated as a women's prison through to 1912, then remained derelict until conversion into a theatre during the mid 1950s. It was officially opened in 1955 by the visiting Hollywood actress Katherine Hepburn, accompanied by Australian actor and dancer Robert Helpmann. Thereafter the theatre became part of the East Sydney Technical College and a popular space for use by students enrolled in performing arts courses.

The 1967 psychedelic jazz concert at the Cell Block Theatre is a noteworthy event. A search of the internet reveals musician Jarrod Zlatic's account in the blog [Jazz, LSD & Lightshows in Australia: Graeme Lyall, Gordon Mutch & Psychedelia '67](#) (Zlatic 2014). Therein he approaches the show from

the perspective of a jazz fan, and posts a number of contemporary newspaper clipping notices and reviews. It is an interesting retelling and appears to be the only substantial discussion of the event, apart from Beck. The present article seeks to expand upon Zlatic's work, for Jazz Happenings '67 (also referred to as Jazz Happening '67) remains a little known event in the annals of Australian popular culture and jazz history.



*Sydney Morning Herald, 10 August 1967*

### **The Cell Block Theatre concert**

*Jazz Happenings '67* took place at the Cell Block Theatre, Darlinghurst, Sydney on the evening of Sunday, 27 August 1967. It was produced by Sydney Symphony Orchestra musician Donald Westlake, with lighting direction by artist and sculptor Gordon Mutch (1933-2012). Initial advertisements for the event indicated that it would feature the performance of a new musical composition by Graeme Lyall entitled *Psychedia*, along with a light show and screening of two short, experimental films by Mutch. A host of well-known jazz musicians were set down to perform, including Judy Bailey, Graeme Lyall, Don Burrows, Charlie Monroe, Neville Blanchett and Johnny Sangster. According to Beck, on the night:

*The Cell Block was so full of people that hundreds had to be turned away. The show involved projections of slides onto the stone walls, movies, stroboscopes and rotating mirror machines, while a jazz rhapsody by Graeme Lyall was played live by some of Australia's 'International Jazz*

*Stars', the biggest drawcard being renowned woodwind player Don Burrows. As well as the concert, this event featured a film sequence Hallucigenia by painter and sculptor Gordon Mutch, designed to 'simulate the feelings and emotions of an LSD taker on his first trip' (Beck 2011).*

Beck went on to suggest that, 'for many in the audience it was their first experience of a phenomena called a 'happening', one of the manifestations of American culture that was transmitted to Australia in the 1960s and early 1970s. Happenings were not the sole purview of the Americans, for Australians were reading about, and seeing on TV and in the cinema, reports of happenings, love-ins and similar gatherings of young people in large numbers around music, art and issues of concern. Locales such as San Francisco, London and Paris were hot spots for these outpourings of spontaneity and youthful visibility, driven by the experiences and insight gained as a result of the use of drugs such as LSD and opposition to the Vietnam War, censorship, nuclear proliferation, environmental destruction, racial and sexual discrimination, and the conservatism and restraint of the post-war years. A lot was happening outside Australia, however according to local artist Martin Sharp - who left Sydney for London in February 1966 - "there was something in the air" in the mid' Sixties, especially within metropolitan centres such as Sydney and Melbourne (Gleeson 1979). This "something" was reflected and reported upon in, for example, the countercultural and satirical magazine *OZ*, which first appeared on the streets of Sydney during April Fool's Day 1963. Sharp's artwork from as early as 1965 revealed elements of psychedelia, though he had apparently not, at that point, consumed any drugs, apart from the Aussie male staple - alcohol. Throughout the 1960s music, art, drugs and the cultural revolution instigated by young people was at play, leading the Antipodeans down their own unique, and often ground-breaking, path. Whilst they took much from the United States and the United Kingdom through, for example, the Beatles landmark LP *Sgt.*

*Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* which was released locally in August 1967, young Australians were experiencing their own cultural upheaval. A multi-faceted counterculture was evolving which would reach its zenith locally during the first half of the 1970s. The Jazz Happening concert of 1967 was just one manifestation of this. It was a "happening", a reaction to LSD, and a response by young jazz musicians to the prevailing zeitgeist. Exciting, youthful, innovative - it was indeed the "world's first" despite the fact that jazz and psychedelia had been mixing elsewhere on stages and in studios around the world for a number of years. The Cell Block Theatre concert was built around a jazz rhapsody by 24 year old tenor saxophone player Graeme Lyall. Entitled *Pyschedelia*, it comprised three movements:

1. Take off minus Five;
2. The Trip; and
3. Re-entry.

On the night it was performed by the following musicians:

- Graeme Lyall (b.1942) - tenor saxophone
- Don Burrows (b.1928) - clarinet and alto flute
- Charlie Monroe - alto saxophone
- John Sangster (1928-1995) - vibraphone
- Judy Bailey (b.1935) - piano
- Neville Blanchett - trumpet
- Bob McIver - trombone
- Barry Stewart - drums
- Cliff Barnett - bass

In the week before the Cell Block concert Lyall had performed at the El Rocco Jazz Cellar in Sydney with the John Sangster Quintet and Judy Bailey, whilst the Don Burrows Quartet had appeared there the previous Wednesday. According to the Zlatic blog, the photographer Robert Walker took a number of shots of the musicians rehearsing *Psychedelia*, and copies of these are to be found within the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. There is also reference to a rough recording being made on the night, though this has never surfaced. From contemporary reports it appears that the program opened with the performance of three separate pieces of music, followed by *Psychedelia*. Gordon Mutch's film *Hallucigenia* ran for approximately 15 minutes and was most likely shown as part of the backdrop to the musical performances. His light show also appeared throughout the night. *Hallucigenia* was cut down from 15 to 4 minutes in length when publically released the following year through UBU Films as *Hallucinogenia*. At the time it also included a soundtrack put together by Albie Thoms and Gerry Dupal of UBU. In its original, longer form, this soundscape was entitled 'De Moon Service' (Mudie 1997, Achuma 2010). According to Thoms:

*I had a taste of what it [psychedelic jazz] might be like when Johnny [Sangster's] group participated in Jazz Psychedelia, staged by the sculptor Gordon Mutch at the Cell Block Theatre. It had the musicians playing Graeme Lyall's eponymous composition, surrounded by small mirrors on string that moved to the music and reflected coloured lights, while Gordon's films Hallucinogenia and Psychedelia screened behind them. Though somewhat formal in its presentation, it was another step in the development of the new art form that became known as the 'Lightshow' (Thoms 2012).*

A number of contemporary newspaper reports record the event and various elements of the public and critical reaction. These combine to provide a broad picture of what occurred, in the absence of

first-hand accounts from the main players such as Lyall and Mutch. The earliest noted advertisement is in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 10 August 1967 (reproduced above). This was followed by a detailed report in the same newspaper on 25 August, two days prior to the concert:

### **Pooled talents**

*Sydney Morning Herald, 25 August 1967*

*Some of Australia's best known jazz musicians, painter and sculptor Gordon Mutch, and producer Donald Westlake have pooled their talents for "Jazz Happening '67" at the Cell Block Theatre on Sunday. Described as "The World's First Psychedelic Jazz Concert", the program has been designed to simulate the feeling and emotions of an L.S.D. taker "on his first trip." Sound is supplied by Graeme Lyall (tenor sax), Johnny Sangster (vibes and percussion), Judy Bailey (piano), Neville Blanchett (trumpet), Bob McIver (trombone), Barry Stewart (drums), Cliff Barnett (bass) and Charlie Monroe (alto). In the first half the audience will hear "Sack Full of Soul (Roland Kirk), "Two Part Sketch" (Judy Bailey) and "Lunar Loco Blues" (Johnny Sangster). The second half will be occupied by Graeme Lyall's "Psychodelia", a jazz rhapsody in three movements. Gordon Mutch, in charge of lighting, will contribute effects from a 30,000 watts battery of slide and movie projectors, stroboscopes, rotating mirror machines, a pulsating light machine and 40 coloured lamps. One visual effect will be a 15-minute fill sequence, "Hallucigenia", made by Mr Mutch.*

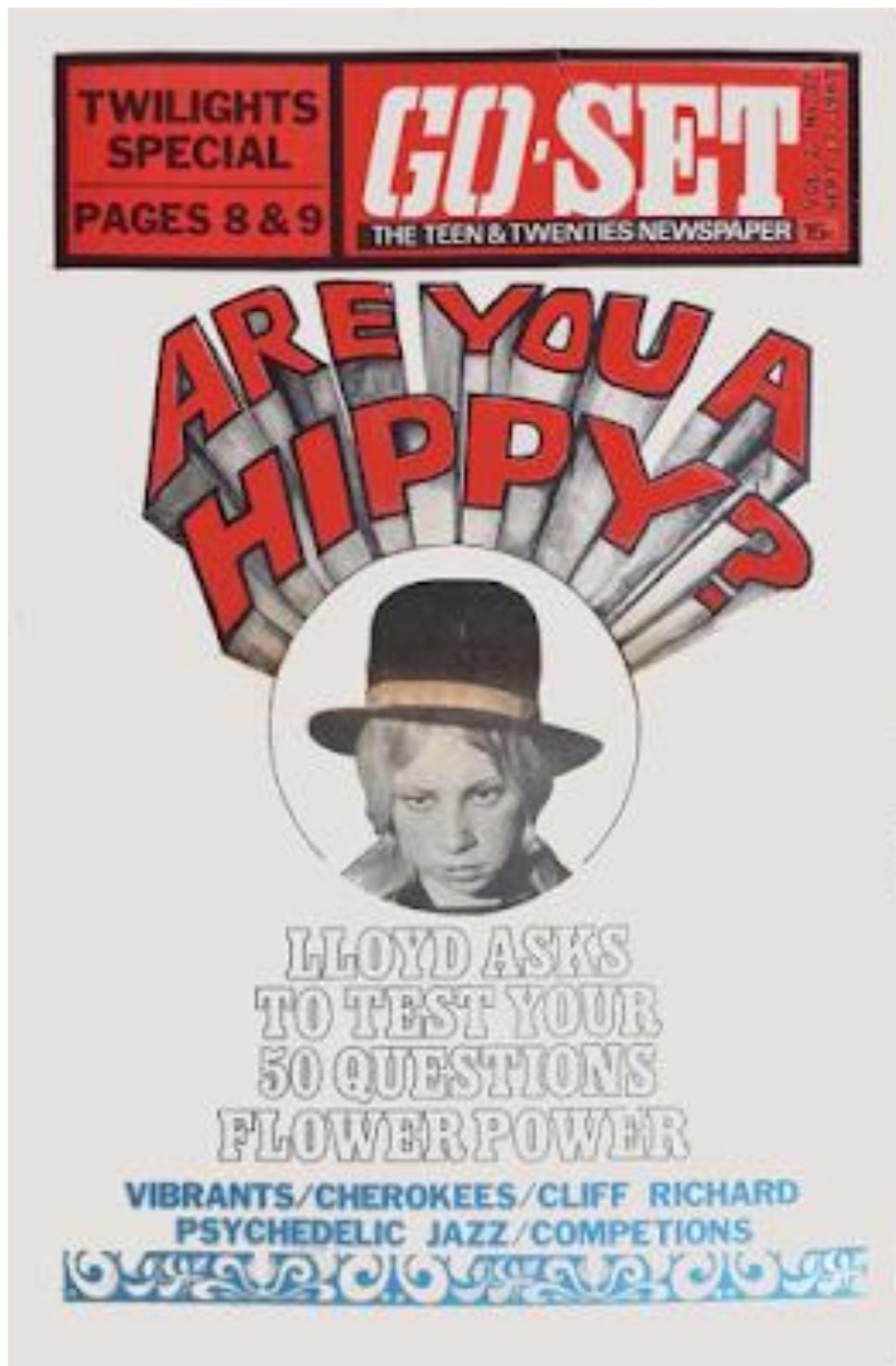
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Such was the impact of the concert, that a number of reviews were published over the following weeks. The Melbourne-based rock and pop magazine *Go-Set* of 13 September 1967 reported on the concert in a full page spread, with photographs by a young Grant Mudford:

## Psychedelia without L.S.D

*Recently a group of enterprising people organised a psychedelic jazz concert at East Sydney Tech's Cell Block Theatre. Visually and sound-wise the occasion was mind-bending to say the least. This, explained the organisers, was the purpose of the programme. The theatre itself, a converted stone jail from the early days, was jammed to capacity before the show had started. The stage was backed with large white paper screens onto which were projected movies, slides, coloured lights, huge shadows of the musicians on stage and whatever else lighting director, Gordon Mutch, thought appropriate. He used 24,000 watts of lighting, represented by three slide projectors, a move projector, two stroboscopes, two mirror rotating machines, one pulsating light machine, and 28 coloured lamps, most of which he designed and constructed himself.*

*The musicians, including Graeme Lyall, Judy Bailey, Johnnie Sangster, produced music of a very progressive nature. The main arrangement was 'Psychedelia' which set out to simulate the feeling and emotions of an L.S.D. "first trip". By this stage of the evening the building wafted with incense of many types and Mutch and his two assistants worked frenziedly at their task, gyrating large coloured spot lamps around the entire building and operating a large switchboard like some sort of bizarre piano. The idea was to make the audience much more than mere observers, to force some sort of participation in the inter-play of music and lights, through the whole atmosphere of the house. The overall effect at times seemed almost overwhelming for some of the audience, particularly those in the front row, whose participation was enormous as strobe lights froze their swaying heads in jerky movements. This, up to date, has been the most successful of such mind-invading occasions and its success, we hope, will lead to another and possibly more spectacular psychedelic jazz concert.*



Go-Set, Sydney, 13 September 1967.



Turned on with strobo lights.



Light-distorted audience.



The girl's head, and neck, is bombarded with strobes and colored lights.



Large shadows of musician interplay with projected video and audio.

Jazz Happening '67, Sydney, 27 August 1967. Source: *Go-Set*, 13 September 1967. Photograph:

Grant Mudford.

Judy Bailey's *Two Part Sketch* from the first half of the concert features on the November 1967 CBS LP *Jazz Australia*, whilst Lyall and Sangster also perform on the disc (Wahlquist 1967). The liner notes by Trevor Graham, Australian correspondent for *Downbeat* magazine, make reference to Lyall's *Psychodelia*:

*Melbourne tenor saxophone player Graeme Lyall, considered as Don Burrows' protégé and Australia's most promising young composer, wrote the major work 'Psychodelia' for Australia's first series of Psychedelic jazz concerts held in Sydney and Canberra.*



*Jazz Australia*, CBS 12" LP, Sydney, 1967.

It is interesting to observe that at the same time as the concert was being planned and promoted in newspapers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that same paper was reporting on the trial in Sydney of four young people for possession of LSD. Therein the judge noted his desire to impose lengthy prison sentences, but alas he would have to wait until the passage of new legislation in November

1967 when sentences amounting to 2 years with hard labour and fines of up to £2000 could be imposed. As it was, the police, judiciary and conservative elements of society were demonising the psychedelic experience, in the face of widespread use by young people. Some two weeks after the event, leading Sydney magazine *The Bulletin* mentioned the Cell Block concert in a general article on local hippies. Of note is reference to the role played by artist Gordon Mutch.

### **Sydney's Happy Hippies**

Margery Davis, *The Bulletin*, 16 September 1967

*...Recently, within 10 days, three public happenings took place. The most professional of these took place on a Sunday night at the Cell Block Theatre, where promoters, well-known jazzmen, and Gordon Mutch's posters attracted 800; 200 had to be turned away. One of the promoters was Don Westlake, a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, who had promoted four classical concerts. A serious, sound, unlikely sort of man to invade psychedelia, he is overjoyed that a rabbi, several over-sixties, and many serious music lovers had obviously enjoyed his psychedelic jazz happening. Westlake does not take LSD, but he told the musicians to simulate a "trip." The climax came in the second half when the musicians blew wild sounds and wailed against flashing lights, revolving prisms, and Mutch's psychedelic films. Mutch and Westlake will take their concert to Canberra to play at the Canberra Theatre on Saturday, September 16. .... At a psychedelic jazz concert he helped promote recently, Gordon Mutch sold hundreds of his posters at 30c each and a Melbourne fashion company is anxious to pay a lot to hire one of his psychedelic films for a promotion of a new dress material...*

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Gordon Mutch, lighting director of Jazz Happenings '67.

According to one account (Thoms 2012), two of Mutch's films were screened on the night - *Hallucigenia* and *Psychedelia*. The role of Gordon Mutch in creating, or rather replicating, a psychedelic experience through the use of coloured light, film, posters and art was a central part of Jazz Happening '67. He undoubtedly sought to enhance the performance of the musicians within the harsh sandstone walls of the Cell Block Theatre. Though it remained unstated in any of the newspaper reports of the time, this would assist in providing an appropriate atmosphere to support a "mid-blowing" trip for those in the audience under the influence of LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs. It is unknown whether any of the musicians took LSD as part of the performance. Some musicians, such as American guitarist Jerry Garcia of the *Grateful Dead*, found the drug enhanced and transformed their playing, whilst others, such as Pete Townsend of *The Who*, found it difficult to perform complex musical pieces whilst tripping, with the latter noting such after being spiked prior to his 1969 performance at Woodstock. LSD had a profound effect on the work of many artists and graphic designers of the day, moving them beyond the world of Pop Art and traditional forms into areas of

bright, fluorescent colours and spiralling, inflated fonts. This is seen in the San Francisco Fillmore and Avalon auditoriums series of concert posters issued between 1966-68, and the work of Hapshash and the Coloured Coat artists Michael English and Nigel Waymouth in London during the same period. Terms such as "blowing the mind" were applied to the LSD experience, and Martin Sharp's iconic *Blowing in the Mind* Bob Dylan poster from September 1967 is reflective of that. Unfortunately the art of Gordon Mutch from this period has either not survived or is publically inaccessible at this point. No copy of the poster sold at the Psychedelic Happenings '67 concert in Sydney is known to this author. That Mutch added colour, light and images to the experience within the walls of the atmospheric Cell Block Theatre is evident from contemporary reports. The actuality of this is unclear. What is clear, however, is the generally positive reception the event garnered on the night. According to producer Donald Westlake, in a review later published in the *Canberra Times*, the concert was an overwhelming success:

*...The response was staggering; people sat on ladders around the hall, in the aisles and hundreds were turned away. Encore after encore was demanded and given, bringing the final curtain down an hour after the scheduled time.*

Not all reviews were positive. For example, an unsourced report published less than two weeks after the event entitled 'The Happenings Get Under Way' labels use of the term psychedelia as "tired", even in 1967, and addresses some of the issues and items raised in the later *Bulletin* article of 16 December, though it also adds further detail concerning the concert and similar events in Sydney at the time:

## The Happenings Get Under Way

*"Jazz Happening '67" at the Cell Block the Sunday before last was both a promise of things to come and a mild disappointment. Whatever the future of "psychedelia" - already becoming a tired word - happenings of this sort will inevitably inject new life into theatre, in the broad sense of that word. Basically it was a jazz concert with colored lights and films. The jazz was very good - Johnny Sangster, Judy Bailey and the gang - but the formal positioning of the musicians on stage was reminiscent of a big band of the forties, each man dark-suited behind his music stand. Gordon Mutch's lighting, though sometimes tough on the eyeballs and paying too much attention to the walls, was imaginative though hardly mind-bending. The films and slides were thrown on to a screen behind the musicians, which was as much Brechtian as psychedelic. Nevertheless the overflow audience - largely mid-twenties jazz generation - seemed appreciative, and though their more active participation was prevented by the conventional seating, no doubt they will keep coming.*

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Whilst the critical reviews were mixed, the large, overflowing Sydney crowd would suggest there was a level of excitement, if not novelty, surrounding the concert, and the audience attended from an interest in either jazz, psychedelia or the burgeoning counterculture.



Canberra Times, 19 August 1967

## The Canberra event

Westlake and the team took Jazz Happening '67 and *Psychedelia* to Canberra for a performance at the Canberra Theatre on Saturday, 16 September. It is clear that this was planned prior to the Sydney concert. There were numerous advertisements in the *Canberra Times* in the lead up, and music reporter Garry Raffaele wrote a number of pieces on the event. The first appeared on 19 August, and followed on his review the previous week of the *Sgt. Pepper* album, wherein he mentioned how the song *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* "sets the tone for an LSD trip." Tempering this was a report in the same newspaper the following week on a presentation to a group of Victorian high school students by Allen Bartholomew, head of the Psychiatric Division of Pentridge Prison, wherein he stated: "The real problem is that LSD makes you completely mad... you are out of touch with reality. The hallucinogenic drugs, like LSD, are infinitely dangerous." It was into such a heated environment that Jazz Happening '67 was presented to a Canberra audience. As a lead-up to the concert, promoter

Donald Westlake visited Canberra and spoke to Garry Raffaele on the background to the event and how it was received in Sydney. Raffaele's headline *Lyall in 'potland'* was perhaps a play on the famous New York jazz club Birdland, which had operated from 1949 through to 1965. 'Pot', of course, referred to the mildly hallucinogenic drug marijuana.

### **POP CULT - Lyall in 'potland'**

Garry Raffaele, *Canberra Times*, 2 September 1967

*The world of Donald Westlake this year has polarised into musical schizophrenia. In real life, Westlake - an intense but vague musician who looks exactly the way a musician is thought to look - is the principal clarinetist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. But, in a Walter Mitty like move, the classical clarinetist has branched out into the field of promoting jazz concerts. At the Canberra Theatre on September 16, he will present a Jazz Happening - Psychodelia, a new concept, at least for Australia, in the more erudite of the modern musics. From Sibelius and Bach to psychedelics and jazz is a big step, but one for which Westlake made no apologies when he was in Canberra last week to make preliminary arrangements for the concert. Far from being apologetic, he boasted that the main piece in the concert - Psychodelia by tenor player Graeme Lyall - would become one of the classics of modern music. I asked about the apparent incongruity - after all, jazz promoters are generally thought to be sharp little men with snap brim hats, chewing gum, snapping fingers and calling everyone "baby".*

*"I had very little to do with jazz until Graeme became a pupil of mine at the Sydney Conservatorium," he said. "We were talking jazz and he showed me a sketch for a suite he planned. It was a fine piece of music". Lyall's idea was to recreate musically a "trip", a psychedelic experience on the drug which is now rating almost as much space as the Vietnam War in the Sydney papers - LSD. "We contacted*

*an LSD user in Sydney", Westlake told me, "and I spent several hours talking to him about its effect; I taped what he had to say, gave the tape to Graeme and from it and the sketch came Psychedelia". The suite is in three parts - Take Off Minus Five, The Trip and Re-entry - leaving no doubt as to what it represents. "We thought about externals very carefully", Westlake said. "What we were afraid of is that people would think it was all a gimmick, getting on the psychedelic band wagon." In spite of this, the lighting for Psychedelia will be more way-out than the Canberra Theatre has yet seen. Stroboscope effects, light patterns whirling around the auditorium and a muted overall lighting are all designed to make the atmosphere in the theatre as stimulating as possible.*

*Of Lyall, Westlake says he is the major jazz talent in Australia today. Both his playing and his composing have reached outstanding proportions in a country which, at this time, is suffering its worst modern jazz drought in 20 years. The musicians who will interpret Lyall's jazz rhapsody in Canberra are among the best in Australia. The group includes Judy Bailey (piano), John Sangster (vibes), Charlie Munro (alto) and Neville Blanchett (trumpet). An integral member of the group will be Gordon Mutch, Sydney sculptor, whose work with the lighting will make Psychedelia one of the first son et lumiere performances to come to the National Capital.*

*In Sydney last week Psychedelia was given its first public performance at The Cell Block to a sellout crowd of 800. The response, according to Westlake, was staggering: people sat on ladders around the hall, in the aisles and hundreds were turned away. Encore after encore was demanded and given, bringing the final curtain down an hour after the scheduled time. Jazz in Australia needs a boost from its lethargy; it seems as if Psychedelia, with its social relevance and reputed musical value, could be just the spur.*



Tenor player **Graeme Lyall** whose idea it was to recreate musically a "trip" – a psychedelic experience on the drug LSD. It seems he did just that with the concert entitled *A Jazz Happening – **Psychedelia***.

Graeme Lyall, *Canberra Times*, 2 September 1967.

Raffaele published another promotional piece on the day of the concert.

### **POP CULT - Tonight's new music**

Garry Raffaele, *Canberra Times*, 16 September 1967

*Graeme Lyall's musical sketch Psychedelia, which tells of an "acid trip" - plays the Theatre tonight and Canberra will hear a major contribution to Australian music. In one of those rare works which transcend classification, Lyall's composition is about as vital, as earthy and as musically valid as anything to come out of Australia thus far. On Thursday night I listened to a tape of the first public performance at The Cell Block in Sydney. In spite of some inadequate recording, what came through*

*was no less than brilliant. Although it is based on the jazz medium it would be completely unfair to limit it to this; true, much of the music is improvised, either free form or time structured, yet its overall sound is the voice of the Sixties. Jazz musicians seem to have lost the feeling for getting their hands dirty, for involving themselves in the sounds, smells, loves and tastes of the world. Even avant garde classical musicians appear to be following the same trend. Lyall is perhaps swimming against the tide but I will take his music any time.*

### *Three part suite*

*This composition is a three-part suite, beautifully constructed and aimed at recreating the sensations of an LSD trip. Lacking first-hand knowledge of such an experience, I have to take Lyall's word for what happens but, from published accounts of a trip, *Psychodelia* tells it the way it is. I wonder if Canberra is afraid of unconventional art, in spite of its value. Lyall's music is unconventional yet tremendously enjoyable even on the surface level of rhythmic excitement - in other words it swings like hell. Lyall deserves a full theatre for the second performance of' this concert; after hearing the Sydney version, I can only hope that he gets it. Judy Bailey, the Sydney pianist, is a member of the orchestra which will perform *Psychodelia* at the Canberra Theatre tonight.*

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Following the two preview notices, Raffaele published an initial review of the concert three days later:

### **A New Jazz Experience**

Garry Raffaele, *Canberra Times*, 19 September 1967

*There is little doubt that Psychedelia - a musical acid trip in three movements which played at Canberra Theatre on Saturday night - is a work which will attract controversy. To many in the audience Psychedelia was not music but a cacophony of notes - disorganised, grating and strange. But I must disagree. I saw the young Sydney composer, Graeme Lyall's work as capturing what I understood to be the essence of a trip. The use of joss sticks, ultra-violet lights and penny whistles, along with the hypnotic, intense rhythmic patterns, the coloured movie and the solid musical construction, were instruments Lyall wielded to paint his LSD picture. The movie bears special mention. Made by UBU Films, who exhibited in Canberra recently, the film reproduced graphically the scenes which can be part of a trip - the beauty in a simple hand movement, the drama of a staring cat, the convolutions of a neon clad city. Overall, Lyall's writing is strong but, in one or two spots, it falls down. The second of three movements is the focal point of the suite, but the emotional drive evident in the opening measures fades away towards the end.*

#### *Masterful tenor*

*The production would also improve with a little more stagecraft. There are blank spots which could prove valuable links if a stage producer were allowed to work on them. The musicians here were superb; Lyall's masterful tenor shared the limelight with John Sangster's mellow, fluid vibraphone and his provocative percussion. Charlie Munro's alto was a fine solo voice, also Neville Blanchett's trumpet; Bob McIvor on trombone played the comic role for part of the performance. I felt this was out of place but his main solo work was more than adequate. The concert also served to increase my respect for Judy Bailey as the major talent in Australian jazz piano. She uses a brutal, dark style which cleaves through the unnecessary to the heart of her ideas. In the rhythm section, Bob Stewart (bass) and Cliff Barnett (drums) were a formidable duo; unfortunately it was Stewart's written part in the middle movement which allowed what was a strong atmosphere to slip away. Yet generally*

*Psychedelia made its point most forcefully; it was a new experience and one in which I became easily involved.*

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Raffaele returned to the subject the following week with a second review:

### **The Arts**

Garry Raffaele, *Canberra Times*, 23 September 1967

*I have already reviewed Graeme Lyall's Psychedelia, which played at the Canberra Theatre last Saturday night, but I think some reactions to the music were almost as interesting as the rhapsody. The audience of 600 filed slowly into the comfortable theatre, looking as if they were not sure quite what to expect. The first half of the concert was almost reassuring. Lyall's group played first and set the modern jazz tone, then Don Burrows wooed the audience with saxophones and flutes in a gentle selection. At interval few people realised what was to come: even the opening vibraphone section lulled us into a false sense of security. Then the sky opened and a musical maelstrom fell on the 600. Directly in front of me a young girl almost writhed with pleasure as sledgehammer phrase after phrase rolled over the floodlights. Just over the other side of the aisle, however, a young man in cords, tweed jacket and check shirt, squirmed under the pressure; and there were more squirmers than writhers. Then two dozen ultraviolet lights flicked on in the theatre roof and the audience was speckled with eerie blotches of phosphorescent glow. Two rows away the white dress of a girl looked alive and she jumped noticeably. Judging by the final applause, the audience was not on the side of the composer. Apart from a small, enthusiastic section, which called for more, most put their hands together, perhaps politely, and left Psychedelia for the more reassuring aspects of their hearths and homes. But I must say this: I saw no one walk out of the performance which suggests to me that, even if many*

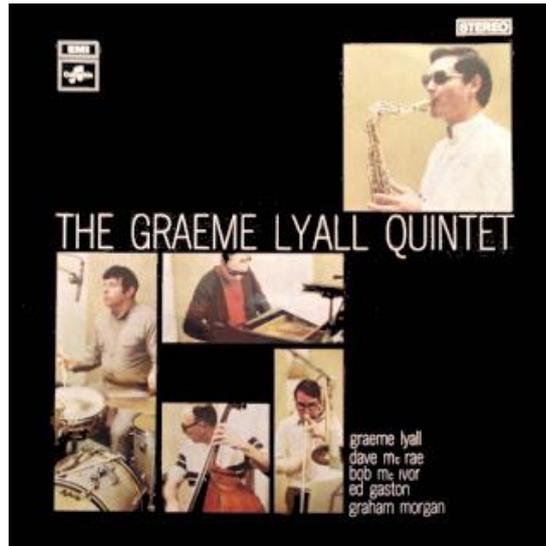
*hated Psychedelia, they did react to it and I think that this may have been enough to satisfy the young Sydney composer.*

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The lukewarm response in Canberra, compared to the ecstatic and even rowdy reaction in Sydney, contrasts the two audiences and reflects comments noted in Zlatic's blog by Melbourne rock guitarist Lobby Lloyd, who observed the widespread use of marijuana and LSD in Sydney from 1966. According to Lloyd, "*the psychedelic crew up there were way harder and more bizarre.... Every time we went up to Sydney to play I'd fall into the bad company of all these musicians who were playing jazz and the early sounds of the Sydney underground. They'd pass you silly cigarettes and pieces of blotting paper and say "Try this man!"*" The blotting paper was laced with LSD, also known as acid; whilst the 'silly cigarettes' would have been reefers, or marijuana.

### **The Graeme Lyall Quintet LP 1969**

Lyall's *Psychedelia* did not disappear following the two concerts in 1967. The third section - *Re-entry* - appeared on the EMI LP *The Graeme Lyall Quintet*, which was released in May 1969. Therein it was presented as a 10 minute performance entitled *Psychedelia - Part 3*.



*The Graeme Lyall Quintet*, LP, EMI, Sydney, 1969.

No recording of the original 1967 3-part work is known to the author, despite a tape having circulated shortly thereafter. As a result, the world's first psychedelic jazz concert remains a footnote in the history of jazz in Australia, and Garry Raffaele's contention at the time that it would become an Australian classic remains untested.

### **Acknowledgements**

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