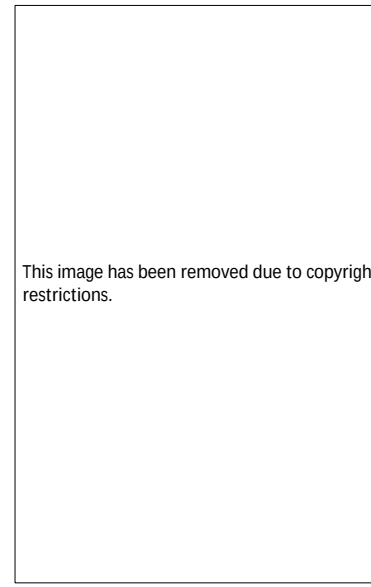
# REZENSIONEN / REVIEWS

**Kay Dreyfus: *Silences and Secrets. The Australian Experience of the Weintraubs Syncopators.*** Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2013. 305 pp. ISBN 9781921867804. AUD 29.22.
**Reviewed by Norbert H. Platz**.




This book is a rewarding read for everyone who is interested in Australian cultural history and its links with Germany. It is divided into three major sections, each subdivided into several 'parts' and organising their material under stimulating headings. The knowledgeable introduction to each 'part' offers readers a navigational line to orient themselves in the considerable diversity of details and arguments.

In Part I, "Silences and Secrets", Dreyfus offers a lively survey of the Weintraubs' achievements as a band in Berlin throughout the 1920s and in the early 1930s. Their outstanding skills are vividly recalled here (as well as in various subsequent passages of the book). The German musical conventions and cultural context, plus the innovative arrival of 'jazz' in Berlin, are given due and knowledgeable consideration. Readers are also informed about the genesis of this study. Significantly the first chapter is titled "'*Truth' and the telling of the past in the Bio-Documentary film* WEINTRAUBS SYNCOPATORS: BIS ANS ANDERE ENDE DER WELT". Having watched this movie, the author developed a keen interest in the Weintraubs' story as a whole. She could not ward off critical questions about the film's historical truth. In her view, the "film succeeds as a tribute film because the musicians it celebrates were first class entertainers and because the European context in

which the band lavished is lovingly recreated through period footage …. The account of the band's story, however, and in particular its Australian wartime experience, is less convincingly handled" (28).

Consequently she devotes the following parts of her study to what the Weintraubs experienced in Australia after their arrival in 1937.

Part II, "The Encounter with the Musicians' Union", clarifies that one major zone of conflict sprang up because the Musicians' Union of Australia attempted to do everything in its power to protect the jobs of its traditional members, and to prevent the employment of foreign musicians. Foreign musicians were not wanted even though they were often better skilled as was the case with the Weintraubs syncopators. The latter were considered "One of the finest small bands in Australia" (89). A noteworthy subchapter deals with the treatment of Jews in relation to the Musicians' Union and the general psychological climate. Some light is thrown on the post war development of the music industry. It still seemed to be important that musicians were Australian-born, but the rules were rewritten. After ABC had established professional orchestras in six cities, foreign musicians were required. Thus the nationality quota was gradually given up. The opportunity of citizenship through naturalisation was opened for all immigrants.

Part III, "The Encounter with the State", explores the thorny issue of how all the members of the band were individually under surveillance from Australian intelligence services. Dossiers had been established, and police interrogations were also conducted. Being enemy aliens some of the Weintraubs could not avoid falling victim to private denunciation as well. The author makes an admirable effort to get access to the files held in the National Archives of Australia. Her aim is to come closer to what she calls "a file biography" (189). She is intrigued by the 'file selves' that are documented in bureaucratic dossiers labelled with a person's name. The filed person could not comment on the collected statements or their arbitrariness. Dreyfus analyses in detail the files relating to the internment process of Graff and Weintraub. It was as late as 1946 that a member of the Government spoke in Parliament about the stored transcripts of Committees and Tribunals: "… one has the feeling of utter despair at the lack of not only humanity but also of common sense" (252-3).

Chapter 6 deals with Buchan's denunciation. In this connection some light is thrown on the circumstances of war overshadowing the relationship between Australians and aliens. The procedure of internment and its complicated legal mechanisms are made clear through the inclusion of much detail. To the reader's benefit, the threatening scheme of denunciation is also explained, and in historical terms to boot: "…denunciation fed into complex ideologies, uncertainties, paranoia and legitimate fears, with profound and often damaging effects for the individuals concerned" (227).

Part IV, the conclusion, raises the question: "What destroyed the Weintraubs?" The author testifies to "the discrepancies between the musicians' self-representation and the designations that were ascribed to them" (264). The fact that some of the members were Jewish was not to their disadvantage. They all had been caught in a maze of socio-historical tensions and perplexities.

As a reader one is impressed by the storehouse of knowledge and the fecundity of ideas displayed by the author. She manifests a strong endeavour to familiarize herself with hitherto disregarded aspects of the Weintraubs' story. Dreyfus breaks new ground by heuristically developing her own method. The presentation of controversial issues that needed discussing is sharp and extensive. The handling of the great variety of ideas is systematic. This shows mainly in the structuring of the individual chapters. The links between the many varying threads and diversive themes are developed by way of explicit reasoning. One cannot but acknowledge the mammoth task the author undertook to unearth and scrutinize the huge amount of archival sources. Last but not least, a major asset of the book is the presentation of eye-catching pictorial material. The book is to be recommended to both Australian and German readers.