BONDI
JITTERBUG

GEORGE CADDY
AND HIS CAMERA

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State Library
of New South Wales

George Caddy and Mavis Lang entertained more sedate dancers at the famous Trocadero with this jitterbug display. By 1941, it was estimated that there were 5000 jitterbug dancers in Sydney and contests were held every Saturday night at the Trocadero in George Street.

1941

EVENTS

Gallery walk

Dates: Tuesday 2 December 2008, Wednesday 14 January and Wednesday 11 February 2009
Time: 12.30 pm to 1.30 pm
Venue: Meet at the Information Desk, Macquarie Street wing
Cost: $15

Join Alan Davies, Curator of Photographs, for a guided tour and a view of the carefree life of Sydneysiders before WWII.

Booking is essential on (02) 9273 1770
or bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au

Special event: Free Gallery talk

Date: Wednesday 10 December
Time: Gallery is open from 9 am – 8 pm, talk starts at 6.15 pm
Venue: State Library of NSW Galleries
Cost: Free

Discover the fascinating stories, skill and style of George Caddy s extraordinary photographs with exhibition curator, Alan Davies, and the State Library s fashion expert, Margot Riley.

Bondi Beach: Photo call

Date: Tuesday 3 February
Time: 10.30 am to 12 pm
Venue: Dixson Room, Mitchell wing
Cost: Free but please book, light refreshments served

Bring in your early photos of Bondi Beach and the sea front in the '30s and '40s for information and advice on preservation by Curator of Photographs Alan Davies and conservator Lang Ngo.

In association with *Bondi Jitterbug: George Caddy and his Camera*

Bondi promenade: Beach fashions between the wars

Date: Thursday 19 February
Time: 6 pm for 6.30 pm
Venue: Dixson Room, Mitchell wing
Cost: $15 (Friends), $20 (seniors), $22, includes light refreshments

See the photos of George Caddy brought to life in a parade of classic resort fashions gleaned from the vast closets of the Vintage Clothing Shop and set to a jitterbug beat.

With an illustrated talk by Margot Riley about the evolution of 20th century beach wear.

SL★U35

FOREWORD

The State Library of New South Wales has Australia's most important photographic collection, with over a million images recording changes in our society and environment, from 1845 to the present. It is an ongoing collection, so that contemporary photographs continue to be acquired to give a fuller picture of our more recent history.

Sometimes images come to the Library from unusual sources. When Paul Caddy cleared out his late father's estate, he found a box of photographic negatives, neatly numbered and dated, but with no further information on them. Who they depicted was not known. Where they were taken was a blank. Mystified, he put them to one side and forgot about them for some years. Providentially, a friend contacted the Library.

The transformation of a box of unidentified pre-war film negatives to the exhibition *Bondi Jitterbug* is a lesson in determined sleuthing. From the beginning, the quality of the photographs had been recognised, but knowing nothing about them presented a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

The brilliance of George Caddy's short photographic career would have remained unknown, were it not for the Library's resources bringing his story to life. Books, magazines, newspapers, electoral rolls, telephone directories and the Manuscripts, Oral History & Pictures on-line catalogue all contributed to an understanding of George Caddy and his photography. The Library's media team placed a story about his photographs of beach acrobats in a local newspaper and several people replied. Gradually, an accumulation of information enabled the images to be identified and even led to the recognition of most of the individuals recorded by his camera.

Bondi Jitterbug is a celebration of the talent of George Caddy and testament to the wealth of information held by the Library. It is also a tribute to the Library's staff, who made this exhibition of George Caddy's astonishing photographs possible.

Regina A Sutton
NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive

BONDI JITTERBUG

GEORGE CADDY AND HIS CAMERA

Above: George Caddy and the camera he used to make many of the 'beachobatic' photographs.
30 June 1940

Right: This Graham Gymnasium tableau was published in *Health and Physical Culture*, 1 February 1939.
12 December 1937

Bondi Beach has always been a theatre for the ostentatious. These days, it's hard to escape buffed body builders, beach volleyball, capoeira and other displays of physical prowess on Australia's most famous beach. However, in the 1930s and 1940s, the more physically fit entertained beach crowds with 'beachobatics' [1] or clever gymnastic displays on the sand. The best shows were said to be staged by members of the Graham Men's Gymnastic Club, formed in Waverley around 1921. By the late 1930s, there were about 30 gymnasiums in Sydney and numerous individuals were involved in physical culture, driven by the belief that personal fitness contributed to the nation's strength. [2]

Nevertheless, beachobatics would be unknown today if it weren't for the amateur photography of Bondi resident George Caddy, who took his camera to the beach on weekends. He not only recorded parading lifesavers and leisure seekers wearing the latest beach fashions, but also photographed the astonishing gymnastic feats of his friends. George's negatives were mostly unpublished and remained undisturbed in a shoebox for 40 years. When he died in 1983, his son Paul retrieved them from a flat in Maroubra, but the box and its cache of 290 medium format negatives [3] disappeared among his father's unsorted possessions for some years. It was another two decades before their significance was realised.

George Caddy was from that generation which survived the hardship of the Great Depression, only to find itself involved in the turmoil of World War II. He was born in Fitzroy, Melbourne, in 1914, youngest of three children. His father was a printer and his mother's occupation was 'fancy box maker'. As a student at the Melbourne Technical Preparatory School, he was described as 'a very careful worker', although his results were average. He did, however, show a remarkable flair for geometry, with maximum marks.

In 1929, just before the disastrous Wall Street Crash, 15-year-old George moved with his family from Melbourne to Sydney. Within a year, unemployment in Australia reached 21%. The economic stresses of the time affected

many households and in 1931 his father walked out after 30 years of marriage, leaving George, his mother Ellen and middle sister Vida living in Bennett Street, Bondi. Vida, employed as a 'tailoress', married the following year, so that only George and his mother remained.

By 1936, economic conditions had improved and George found employment as a paper-pattern cutter for the *Australian Home Journal* in Kent Street in the city. A skilled occupation, paper-pattern cutting would have suited George's schoolboy forte in geometry. His hobbies were dancing and photography and the period from 1936 to 1941 was particularly creative for him. By 1941, he was described as one of Australia's leading jitterbug dancers, being photographed in both *The Daily Mirror* [4] and *Sunday Telegraph.* [5]

Jitterbug was a general term for dances we now call swing. It developed in America in the mid 1930s with improvised steps taken from the Charleston, Lindy Hop, Suzy-Q and Truckin'.

Reports of its frenetic and energetic movements worried local commentators and gave rise to dire predictions of its effects, were it to reach Australia.

> Jittermaniacs. Doctors warn of the danger of such eroticism … Some have dropped dead, many collapsed, after a night of jittermania. At first it was confined to negroes in Harlem. Now it has spread to the rest of America. Will this craze come to Australia? [6]

The answer came three months later in September 1939, when visiting Harlem 'swingster' Sleepy Williams coached Sydney dancer Della Davis, who then performed with her partner Bill Robinson at the Tivoli. [7]

By 1941, it was estimated that there were 5000 jitterbug dancers in Sydney [8] and contests were held every Saturday night at the famous Trocadero in George Street. Jitterbugging was performed close to the Trocadero's stage, where the orchestra would 'hot up' the music for the jitterbug crowd. [9]

George Caddy and partner Pearl Scott surprised patrons at the Trocadero with a hot jitterbug movement called 'side throw with splits'.
1941

This image of a tram in Eddy Avenue displays the hard shadows and unusual viewpoint of the modernist photographic aesthetic.
July 1936

George won many contests and his partners in 1941 included Pearl Scott, Muriel McMahon and Mavis Lang, who held the Australian jitterbug championship. Despite its popularity with the younger generation, not everyone was impressed with the new craze. As music critic George Hart put it:

> … what makes the jitterbug jit? Is it some glandular deficiency that causes the youngsters to behave like war-whooping savages every time they hear a 4/4 rhythm? Is it a case of ineffective secretion of the thyroid glands, defective hormones, or what? [10]

At that time, George's photography was not as well-known as his dancing, but some of his images of beach acrobats had appeared in *Health and Physical Culture* from 1938 to 1942. [11] George seems to have been a self-taught photographer, who won prizes in the junior (under 16 years) section of the monthly competitions held by *Australasian Photo-Review*. Indoor portraits of his sister Vida won him first prize and photographic goods to the value of ten shillings and sixpence ($1.05) in November 1930 and again in February 1931. A portrait of his father came second in December 1930, as did yet another portrait of his long-suffering sister in September that year. A further image submitted in 1931 received criticism about depth of field from the editors. Even his winning portrait for February 1931 was tempered by a comment about its tonal range. It was tougher in the senior section. In April 1930, nineteen-year-old Max Dupain of Ashfield came third with a soft-focus picture of a tree and received five shillings ($0.50) worth of photographic goods. From 1932, George Caddy entered the senior competition, but must have been discouraged by his lack of success. One of his photographs was thought too out-of-focus, even for the prevailing diffuse aesthetic.

> In 'Gums' the main tree is too central and there is considerable loss of definition; in fact, it might be described as particularly fuzzy. [12]

Not surprisingly, George, like Max Dupain, soon outgrew fuzzy gum trees and pursued an entirely different style of photography.

In fact, his early modernist images from 1936 clearly show the influence of overseas magazines, such as *Popular Photography* from New York, which he read, rather than the locally published *Australasian Photo-Review*, which continued to promote soft-focus pictorialism. His family still holds George's copy of *US Camera 1936*, in which modernist images abound. His photographs of a tram at Eddy Avenue and women entering Town Hall station, taken that year, display the hard shadows, raking light and unusual viewpoints of the new photographic aesthetic.

George converted the front room of the modest cottage at Bennett Street to a makeshift studio, equipped with an array of home-made floodlights. His portraiture lighting arrangements were dramatic, in the manner of black and white cinema at the time. The only exceptions to this style were soft-focus portraits taken about 1942 of Hazel York and her sister Betty, who George married in 1943. He was either a romantic, or aware that razor-sharp likenesses were not always appreciated by the sitter. In 1939, he acquired an ancient wooden Dallmeyer studio camera with a huge brass lens, complete with a wheeled tripod. This was probably used as a prop, as it was incapable of producing the type of Hollywood portrait he liked.

He owned a range of cameras, including an early 5 x 4 inch Auto-Graflex and a Kodak Retina II 35 mm camera, but most of his beach images were made with a Rolleiflex Standard and a Voigtlander Bergheil plate camera with a 6 x 6 cm roll film attachment. A flashgun helped bring out detail in shadows and stopped movement. His 1936 flash photograph of two gymnasts somersaulting on the beach has frozen them mid-air, with glistening sand particles suspended beneath their bodies.

The cache of negatives contained nearly 130 photographs of beachobatics, all carefully dated, often to the day. George clearly knew the Graham gymnasts well and photographed some of them over several years. Alf Stanbrough, who usually appeared as the strongman supporting his fellow gymnasts, was photographed from 1936 to 1941.

This soft-focus portrait of George Caddy's fiancée Betty York is posed to display her engagement ring. George and Betty married in 1943.
c. 1942

North Bondi local Valmae Maher turned heads in her lace-up Canadian swimsuit. This style of costume became known as a 'swoon suit'.
3 February 1940

Born in 1883, he was a local builder who had served in the Boer War. The best known of George's subjects was Wal Balmus, a professional strongman and equilibrist, who had achieved fame as Tarzan in the Tarzan's Grip adhesive logo. His handstands and daring feats of balance, from buildings high above Sydney's streets, were the subject of articles in *Pix* magazine. [13]

Not all of his beach subjects were gymnasts. Dancers, friends and casual acquaintances all posed for his camera. Valmae Maher, a statuesque North Bondi local, appeared in George's photographs for several months in early 1940, wearing a new Canadian swimsuit with adjustable drawstrings. [14] She was also captured by a *Truth* photographer in the same costume, with the caption:

> Grandmother would have been popeyed had she sighted Valmae Maher yesterday at Bondi [15]

George's outwardly carefree life ceased with the outbreak of World War II. He enlisted in the Army and spent the years 1941 to 1945 as a gunner in a heavy anti-aircraft battery, stationed near Brisbane. Although he returned to his former occupation of paper-pattern cutter in 1946, he does not seem to have gone back to dancing or photography. This puzzling transformation might be explained by his marriage in 1943 to Betty York and the birth of his son Paul the following year. It appears that family obligations simply curtailed his previous interests and his focus on beachobatics is limited to the six-year period before his military service.

It is providential then, that a selection of his Bondi negatives and the newspaper articles about dancing survived their six-decade confinement in a shoe box. For his son Paul, the tabloid images of George as a jitterbug champion were a complete surprise. He knew his father had been involved in photography, as he'd seen cameras, magazines and some loose prints of beach acrobatics when he was young, but he was amazed at the cache of negatives, with its extensive coverage of beach culture.

George Caddy's precious negatives are the only record we have of the beach gymnasts who entertained crowds on Bondi Beach in the 1930s and 1940s. They are a remarkable documentation by a gifted amateur, reminding us not only of the popularity of physical culture at that time and the iconic status of Bondi Beach, but also of the ability of the camera to capture the ephemeral nature of our changing society.

Alan Davies
December 2008

Notes

1   *Health and Physical Culture* 1 November 1941; 1 January 1942

2   'Your Health is the Nation's Strength' *Truth* 22 October 1940

3   Numbering on the negatives indicates at least 900 were made originally

4   *The Daily Mirror* 10 June 1941

5   *Sunday Telegraph Color-Pictorial* 16 March 1941

6   *Pix* 9 July 1939

7   Elements of jitterbug had already reached Australia. In February 1938, Cecil Miles taught the Big Apple, which included Suzy Q and Truckin', at his Pitt Street studio, Sydney (see *Pix* 12 March 1938). Visiting American dancer/choreographer Frankie Manning and his Big Apple Dancers had performed fast Lindy Hop at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, on Christmas Eve 1938.

8   *Sunday Telegraph Color-Pictorial* 16 March 1941

9   Joan Ford *Meet me at the Trocadero* Cowra 1995

10 George Hart 'Let us contemplate The Jitterbug' *Music Maker* 20 June 1941

11 *Health and Physical Culture* 1 October 1938; 1 February 1939; 1 May 1939; 1 December 1940; 1 November 1941; 1 September 1942

12 *Australasian Photo-Review* March 1932

13 *Pix* 12 February 1938; 10 June 1939

14 *Pix* 1 October 1938

15 *Truth* 11 February 1940

George Caddy loved dancing. Here he leads his partner on Bondi Beach promenade to the music of his wind-up gramophone and probably to the annoyance of the elderly couple nearby. An editorial in the *Sun* (20 February 1937) commented on generational differences.

> Dancing has been the theme of complaints by greybeards from time immemorial ... perhaps some of us of the older generation do not quite understand the revolution which has taken place in youth since the days when chaperones were a necessity, mixed bathing was an unheard-of indecency, and ballroom dances were the road to perdition.

20 January 1940

This image brings a smile to most people familiar with Max Dupain's iconic *Sunbaker 1937*. In fact, it is an exercise designed to strengthen the chest. As *Health and Physical Culture* (1 May 1935) noted:

> ... the breath is literally trod out of the figure on the floor. The idea is to make the chest as elastic as possible — hence full inhalation followed by treading and then complete relaxation and inertion.

20 February 1937

Max Stewart entertained a youthful audience by hand-balancing atop the Bondi Beach flag. How he reached this position is not known, but height was never a deterrent for skilled hand-balancers. Wal Balmus had 25 years experience as an equilibrist, including hand-balancing on the edge of Niagara Falls, Bulli Pass and the Sydney Gap. *Pix* magazine (12 February 1938) published a photograph of him, aged 46, balancing atop the tower of the *Sun* building, 54 metres above Phillip Street.

6 October 1940

Page 10: A flash bulb on George's camera has frozen the twin backflips by these two gymnasts mid-air and illuminated the sand suspended beneath them. This ability to anticipate and compose a fleeting moment is a measure of his photographic skill.

4 October 1936

Despite the commencement of war, Bondi Beach continued
to attract crowds. At the start of the 1939 surfing season,
The Sydney Morning Herald (13 November 1939)
commented on the phenomenon.

> There is perhaps a warplane overhead and a warship to seaward,
> and men in khaki lounging on the esplanade, but the beaches
> this season are as crowded as ever. To the casual eye, there
> are as many young men as usual in these crowds, but actually
> enlistments have hit the surf clubs hard, and, although they are
> maintaining their patrols, many of them are very short-handed.

12 November 1939

Freshwater surf-lifesaving club took part in a march-past at Bondi, specially staged for American travelogue cinematographer James A Fitzpatrick, who had brought a prototype three-reel colour movie camera with him. Remarkably, until 'Black Sunday' — 6 February 1938 — no one had drowned on any beach while surf-lifesavers were on duty, and each year established new records for the number of rescues. The 1938 season saw 3442 rescues, which brought the total for thirty years up to 39 149. At that time, by way of comparison, 2000 people drowned in England each year.

3 April 1938

In 1935, Eric Spooner, Minister for Local Government, introduced an ordinance which prevented men wearing swimming trunks which exposed the chest. No portion of the stomach could be seen and costume legs had to be three inches (8 cm) long. Males over twelve also had to be skirted at the front, up to the waist. Although the regulation was enforced, most bathers regarded it as a joke and by 1938 most men wore trunks. As *Man* magazine (December 1937) reported: 'The battle of trunks versus shorts seems to have been won by the advocates of trunks.'

10 February 1940

George's friends seated at Ben Buckler are probably hiding from the purple prose of *Man* magazine (December 1937):

> ... To-day the beach assumes due colour and importance only when the Australian girl beats time to the music of the surf with a damp and lovely leg. The fit of her costume is a marvel of skill; world's belle-honours may be claimed for the Australian girl — the brightest of all the gems which a benevolent Providence has flashed across a dazzled world.

31 March 1940

Max Stewart hand-balances off Alf Stanbrough's posterior, while Wal Balmus is in a reverse hand-to-hand balance. Bearer Alf Stanbrough is in the jackknife position, which places great strain on his triceps. A professional equilibrist, Wal Balmus also ran a body-building and fitness school in Sydney and Alf Stanbrough was one of his prize pupils, used in the school's publicity, because of his age. At this time, Wal was 47 and Alf was 56 years old.

5 November 1939

John Henry holds his partner aloft in a 'one-hand back lift to over-head arch', known locally as a 'back lift'. This seems to have been popular with couples, as George Caddy photographed at least three pairs executing this advanced lift. *Health and Physical Culture* (1 October 1933) cautioned:

> Do not persist in your efforts with a girl who is nervous ... Never attempt an overhead lift or throw for the first time without a friend or two standing by you in readiness to catch the girl should she fall.

5 January 1941

In a basic triple balance known as a 'candlestick', Roya Geale stands on the necks of Vic Whitehead and Frank Cottier, who in turn are shoulder-balancing on the feet of Alf Stanbrough and Jack Goldberg, to form a five-person centrepiece. In an article in *Health and Physical Culture* (1 February 1939), Wal Balmus saw 'beachobatics' as an ideal way to a healthy mind and body.

> Pictures of the stunts which we perform on the Bondi beach, illustrate another very good form of healthy, interesting, invigorating and thrilling recreation, which require the perfect co-ordination of mind and muscle.

6 December 1936

In this complex group pyramid (from left to right, top row) Max Stewart, Charlie Lusty, Frank Cottier and Jack Goldberg hand-balance off Tim Holman, Vic Whitehead and Ken Cumming, in a range of positions, supported by bearer Alf Stanbrough in the white cap. In *Health and Physical Culture* (1 February 1939), Wal Balmus claimed responsibility for teaching hand-balancing to the Graham Gymnasium.

> At the commencement they did not have one outstanding balancer, but now they have the largest number of balancers of any gym, in Australia and I am certainly proud of them.

8 October 1939

ITEM LIST

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are taken by George Caddy between 1936 and 1941. The number shown below can be used to order prints from the Library Shop. Images in this exhibition are from negatives held by Paul Caddy. All images are digitally printed on Somerset Photo Satin 100% cotton rag. Copyright Paul Caddy.

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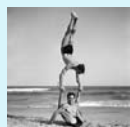
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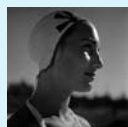
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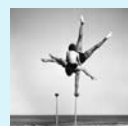
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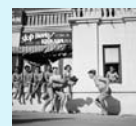
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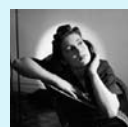
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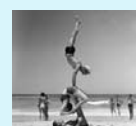
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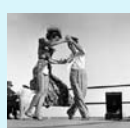
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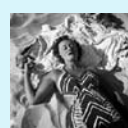
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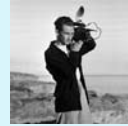
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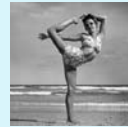
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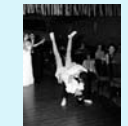
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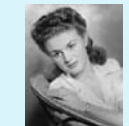
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George Caddy's studio camera
(private collection)

Health & Physical Culture
1 February 1939
Q613.05/H

Australian Home Journal
1 March 1938
Q640.5/9

Australian Home Journal
1 April 1938
Q640.5/9

George Caddy's first photograph album
(Caddy family)

Sunday Telegraph Color-Pictorial
16 March 1941
(reproduction)

US Camera 1936 (Caddy family)

Daily Mirror
10 June 1941
(reproduction)

Pix
12 February 1938
(reproduction)

TAKE HOME YOUR OWN JITTERBUG

Fine art prints of all the *Bondi Jitterbug* exhibition photographs are available from the Library Shop.

The prints, the same as those on view in the exhibition, are printed to order by one of Australia's finest digital art printers on 300 gsm mould-made traditional artist paper that is 100% cotton, acid-free & archival.

(Image size 40.5 x 40.5 cm on a 50.5 x 50.5 cm sheet)

Individual prints are $295.

They can be ordered framed with a suitable white acid-free matt and backing for $450.

These prints are offered for sale by agreement with Paul Caddy.

the
library shop

OPEN 7 DAYS
Weekdays 9 am – 5 pm
Weekends 11 am – 5 pm

Ground floor, Macquarie St
Telephone: (02) 9273 1611
Fax: (02) 9273 1249
Email: libshop@sl.nsw.gov.au
sl.nsw.gov.au/shop

Acknowledgments

The following individuals generously provided information which helped identify George Caddy's photographs.

A free exhibition from December 2008 to February 2009
Exhibition opening hours: 9 am to 8 pm Monday to Thursday,
9 am to 5 pm Friday, 10 am to 5 pm weekends

State Library of New South Wales
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Fine art prints of artworks from this exhibition can be ordered from the Library Shop, telephone (02) 9273 1611 or email libshop@sl.nsw.gov.au.

Cover image:
Roya Geale poses on Bondi Beach. Her spectacular display of flexibility and balance is similar to 'needle scale' positions struck by professional adagio dancers and contortionists, in which a standing front split is done, while holding the back leg overhead.
5 January 1941

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