

The last will & testament of  
john sangster

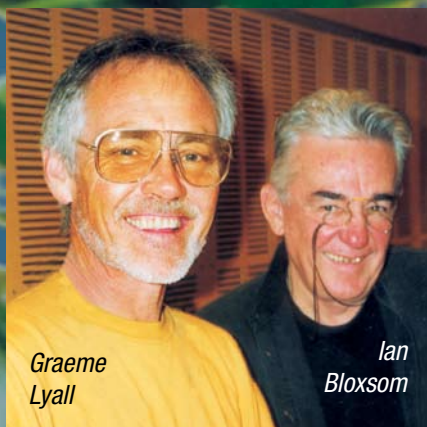
john sangster

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Jim  
McLeod



Graeme  
Lyall

Ian  
Blossom



Chris  
Qua

Tony Gould

Len  
Barnard



Bob  
Barnard

I would like to thank the following people for helping me fulfil John's wish to bring his last compositions to life:

The musicians (see photographs)

Yossie Gabbay and Neale Sandbach | *engineers*

ABC Recording Studios Sydney April and October 1997

Move Records | *track sequence and mastering*

Jim McLeod | *Jazztrack ABC Classic FM*

Lynette Irwin | *Queensland Jazz Coordinator*

Anne Chamberlain | *music editor*

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John Franklin | *front and back cover artwork*

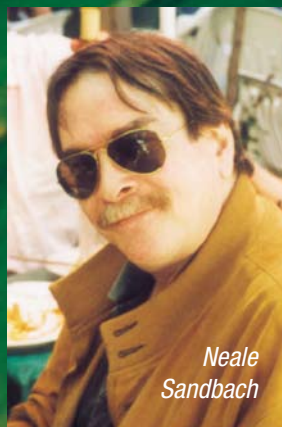
Susan Wright | *rainforest photographs*

And most of all ... thank you John

Petra Schnese-Kleist-Sangster



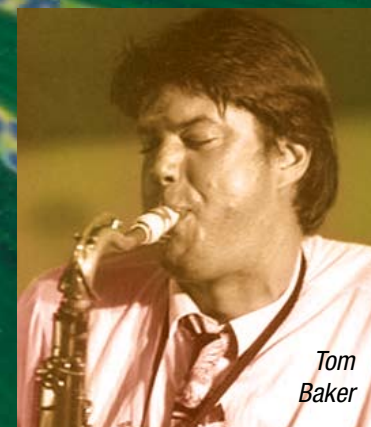
Yossi  
Gabbay



Neale  
Sandbach



Len Barnard



Tom  
Baker



Tony Gould



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# John Sangster

was one of the most talented of all Australian jazz musicians, a technician and creator who embraced and understood more styles of the music than any other. He was an expert drummer and vibraphone player, a soulful trumpeter and, in arranging and composing, he always took into account the personality of the exponent.

Australian reeds virtuoso Don Burrows wrote in his opening to the forward of Sangster's autobiography, *Seeing the Rafter*s: "The man is unique". Unique he was, this drummer, trumpeter, vibraphonist and composer who died in 1995 after a four year fight with a liver complaint.

In 1992, Sangster was saying with pride that the doctors could hardly discern his liver in their X-rays. In *Seeing the Rafter*s, a quote accompanying a 1950 photo of the Graeme Bell band (in which Sangster was drummer) reads: "Happy Days – May We Live Long and Die Roaring". Sangster, bon viveur, lived it up through happy days, nights, months and years. Sangster came on to the Melbourne jazz scene in 1946, the year of the first Australian Jazz Convention, but it was at the second convention that I first set eye and ear on him as he sat at the piano during a lunch break, playing a slow boogie-woogie piece, diffidently and reflectively but somehow individualistically.

It was at the third convention (Pahran Town Hall, 1948) that he made the first of several indelible marks on the Australian jazz scene, playing hot and exiting cornet in a style like that of New Orleans veteran Thomas 'Papa Mutt' Carey.

At the fourth convention, Sangster (or Sango, as he liked to be called) stood one morning with a band in Greville Street, Pahran, playing chorus after chorus of Mahogany Hall Stomp. One afternoon, in a Town Hall backroom, he produced two pieces of wood (whatever they were, they weren't drumsticks) and beat out a crackling, stimulating rhythm on the back and seat of a wooden chair.

Next thing we knew, he had bought the drum set of Russ Murphy, Graeme Bell's first drummer, and on that kit he recorded on drums for the first time, on a classic revivalist survivalist jazz session led by Roger Bell (younger brother of Graeme) in mid-winter 1960.

The bassist on those records was the powerful – musically and physically – Lou Silbereisen, who had spread the good word about Sangster so that he became the drummer for the second British and European tour of Graeme Bell's band.

Sangster was now up and away on the international drum scene, recording on drums with black blues singer Big Bill Broonzy in Germany, and recording on trumpet and drums in the Abbey Road studios in London with a combination of the bands of Bell and English trumpet master Humphrey Lyttleton. Jumping ahead twenty-seven years, we see Sango in August 1978 on the television program *This is Your Life*, in an episode that paid tribute to Graeme Bell. Sango is thanking him for allotting him a trumpet solo on the Bell-Lyttleton recording sessions. We also see Lyttleton that day, waiting to surprise Bell on *This is Your Life*, saying of Sangster, after seeing him for the first time in twenty-six years: "He's changed".

Sangster had changed into the most complete Australian jazz musician, a change that first became apparent after he returned from Japan and Korea with Bell (Sangster's second overseas tour with him) and came to live in Sydney. He expanded physically and musically. He had never been one of the totalitarian, crushingly restrictive traditionalists, and it was in Sydney that he composed his *Hobbit Suite* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy – the latter of which will, after nearly twenty-five years, be at last re-released on Move. In the musical styles and compositions of these extraordinary works (musical 'plays', Sangster used to call them) one catches glimpses not only of the best old Australian jazz tradition of Bell's early revivalist bands, but also of Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie, and of Nat and Cannonball Adderley.

At the same time, Sangster the listener was

becoming more involved with such avant-garde players as Sun Ra, Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman, and also with Japanese traditional music, Sangster even taking up the shakuhachi, if only briefly. He also toyed with the idea of scoring for film – a winner, both artistically and financially – and his original scores found their way into the two well-known Australian television series *Peach's Australia* and *Harry Butler in the Wild*, as well as several animated features and a series of environmental films for the Australian Museum. It is not merely coincidence that Sangster's concern for the environment would later result in his recording label, Rain-forest Records.

The ever busy Sangster managed to continue to still play with Bell from time to time, but he also worked with the Ray Price Quartet on trumpet and played drums with the Port Jackson Jazz Band. He later played vibes and drums at El Rocco, Brougham Street, Kings Cross, the headquarters of modern jazz in Sydney, with such pianists as Col Nolan and Judy Bailey. He also played drums for a long time with Don Burrows, one of his most ardent admirers, who – to thunderous applause – played the Sangster composition, **5** *Rivera Mountain* at Carnegie Hall, New York City, in July 1972.

It was with Burrows that Sangster went to Expo 67 in Montreal. We saw him off at Sydney Airport. He wept when I gave him a bulky, Large Type Edition, of Gracie Field's *Sing as We Go* ... not because of the gift or the girl he was leaving behind, but because of the cat he was leaving in his flat above the old El Rocco.

This new Move recording, *Last Will and Testament*, lovingly produced by many of the friends and jazz colleagues who knew and played with Sangster is then a fitting tribute to a composer whose own music will undoubtedly survive. Australian jazz owes him at least that much.

*Written by Dick Hughes (with additions by Alessandro Servadei)*



## The Sangster Bequest

From some 45 years of knowing John Sangster I could probably simplify his musical proclivities thus: Sangs would take real plums and put them in imaginary cakes.

The music herein was written in Brisbane, when he knew he was on borrowed time and the cancer could no longer be pacified, and yet there is no inkling of self pity. Petra was his love and his strength in this last phase of life. The old humour, optimism, and the knowledge that he had given life a hell of a shake anyway shines through these pieces.

Some are reflective and evocative of a wistful farewell. I think he may have wanted the band to be bigger, but our budget had to be carefully marshalled. Tony Gould was monumental throughout and his care and application in converting the scores into trio format and melodic lines for Graeme, Tony, Bob and Smedley was more than admirable. A musicologist. There are whimsical pieces like **3** *Raggedy Ann doll* and **9** *Fallin' out the window*. One of his earlier compositions was **5** *Rivera Mountain*, but we decided it was a *must* for this collection and it turned into a performance of quiet deliberation with an air of puzzled sadness. Ian Bloxsom played the Sangs parts on vibraharp with taste and aplomb.

Some pieces may have developed into something John hadn't meant them to, but I can imagine him chortling and nodding approval. There was an honesty about all of them and they add to his fine works of other years. A *very* useful life.

Len Barnard January 2000

## This music has that rare gift of humour and joy

The music on this recording is indeed a last personal testament.

Anyone who had the pleasure of making music with John Sangster will likely acknowledge that he was some kind of genius. This is a well worn and often misplaced description of achievement. But if one takes in the entire compositional output of this remarkable man, and just as importantly the profound affect he had on many musicians who enjoyed his musical company the term seems appropriate.

John's music has always had what is often sadly lacking in 'serious' music and that is a sense of humour and joy. This in itself is an uncommon gift. One could never separate this man from his music.

He has left a wonderful and large body of works to be sure, and it is Australian music through and through.

He has left something to those who knew him which is equally important, and that is an attitude about his beloved art form – in all its shapes and styles – which saw music for what it really is, a joyous expression of the heart and soul.

Despite all the unsolvable mysteries of the art, the humanity of 'Sango's' sounds are clear and there for all to hear.

A truly great Australian musician.

Tony Gould 2001



# The last will and testament

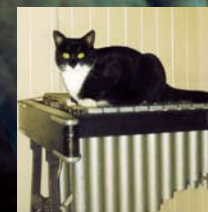
heralds the forthcoming John Sangster jazz series on Move Records, featuring some of his best music on CD for the very first time. The series includes the epic LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy, rare albums from Sangster's own Rain-forest Records label and previously unreleased material from the early 1980s, as well as archive and newly shot video.

We would particularly like to thank Petra Schnese-Kleist-Sangster for her tireless campaign to have her late husband's wonderful music heard again, and for providing access to archival master tapes without which this series would not be possible.

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Drawing of John Sangster by  
Lance Bressow, Brisbane March  
1992, Melbourne Hotel



John Sangster  
(1928-1995) and cat  
Ellington



# The last will and testament of John sangster

(1928-1995)

CD PREMIERE  
RECORDINGS



- 1 Sunup 7'40"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*
  - 2 Mistlestone 3'33"**  
Tom Baker | *sax*
  - 3 Raggedy Ann doll 7'06"**  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*
  - 4 A little while longer 5'36"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*
  - 5 Rivera Mountain 2'38"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*
  - 6 Dead on the level 4'17"**  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*
  - 7 A posy for Petra 4'09"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*
  - 8 Blues 4'58"**  
Bob Barnard | *trumpet*  
Tom Baker | *tenor sax*
  - 9 Fallin' out the window 3'57"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*
  - 10 Scrub up 3'08"**  
Len Barnard | *washboard*  
Bob Barnard | *trumpet*  
Tom Baker | *reeds*
  - 11 Bist du es mon Brave 4'18"**  
Tom Baker | *alto sax*  
Bob Barnard | *trumpet*
  - 12 Last pound of flour 3'54"**  
Tom Baker | *alto sax*  
Bob Barnard | *trumpet*
  - 13 Rain on the roof 5'47"**  
Graeme Lyall | *soprano sax*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes – soprano sax*
  - 14 Out the window 8'21"**  
Ian Bloxsom | *vibes*  
Tom Baker | *trumpet*
  - 15 Sundown 4'15"**  
Bob Barnard | *trumpet*  
Tom Baker | *baritone sax*
- Tony Gould | *piano*  
Chris Qua | *bass*  
Len Barnard | *drums*

*All compositions by John Sangster*