

# UTTERED NONSENSE

(The Owl and the Pussycat)

Music

JOHN SANGSTER

Words

EDWARD LEAR

Spoken

IVAN SMITH



move



Music  
JOHN SANGSTER

This much-loved classic double LP is now on CD for the first time! Eight works of Edward Lear, spoken with the utmost gravity by Ivan Smith, and set to music of the most nonsensical nature by John Sangster. These eight word-pieces embedded within fourteen more instrumental excursions which take their titles and their inspiration from the Nonsense Books of Edward Lear.

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# UTTERED NONSENSE (The Owl and the Pussycat

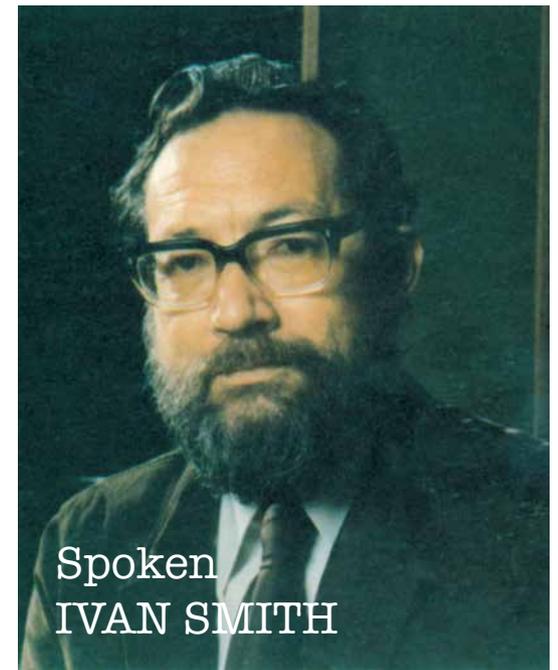
Words EDWARD LEAR

## Part one

- 1 **Propter's Nicodemus Pills** 3'17"
- 2 **The Owl and the Pussycat** 5'04"
- 3 **The Akond of Swat** 2'56"
- 4 **The Pobble Who Has No Toes** 5'34"
- 5 **The Yonghy Bonghy Bo** 5'27"
- 6 **The Heraldic Blazon of Foss the Cat** 3'44"
- 7 **The Runcible Hat** 5'32"
- 8 **The Jumbles** 5'20"
- 9 **The Beautiful Pea Green Boat** 3'26"
- 10 **Gosky Patties** 5'38"
- 11 **Mr and Mrs Discobbolos** 3'50"

## Part two

- 1 **Incidents In the life of My Uncle Arly** 4'38"
- 2 **Phits of Coffin** 2'20"
- 3 **The Cumberbund** 7'28"
- 4 **The Omblomphious Dolomphious Ptilinorhynchus** 2'40"
- 5 **The Diaphanous Doorscraper** 4'44"
- 6 **Mary Squeen of Cots** 3'34"
- 7 **The Otion Blue** 6'26"
- 8 **The Dong With a Luminous Nose** 6'42"
- 9 **Learizing** 3'23"
- 10 **The Quangle Wangle's Hat** 2'40"
- 11 **The Co-Operative Cauliflower** 4'11"



Spoken  
IVAN SMITH

"Uttered Nonsense. Nonsense-Music. Goodness knows there's not much of it about. Things being what they are nowadays. Nonsense-Music should be provocative, silly, amusing, curious, thought-provoking, complex and direct, full of quotes and mis-quotes, puns, malapropism, musical spoonerisms, tight-ropes negotiated and bear-traps set up and then avoided, satisfying, adroit, nimble, fanciful, and above all entertaining and jolly."

John Sangster

## Uttered Nonsense:

eight works of Mr Edward Lear, spoken with the utmost gravity by Mr Ivan Smith, and set to music of the most nonsensical nature by John Sangster. These eight word-pieces embedded within fourteen more instrumental excursions which take their titles and their inspiration from the Nonsense Books of Edward Lear (the first published in 1846).

It's been said, of these writings, that innocence and humour are by nature fragile, and that nonsense, an eccentric species of both, is very definitely not no-sense; that the fine line that separates the rational from the ridiculous, the lifeline of nonsense, is a line difficult to draw but all too easy to cross. This is especially true of nonsense-music.

A fascinating man, Lear. Gave drawing lessons to Queen Victoria. A wandering artist who lived to the fine old age of seventy-six, and died a famous man. But, like Lewis Carroll, who came twenty years after him, he was celebrated for his children's books rather than for the work to which he had devoted his life.

He loved children, but not the sounds of them. Loved composing, set many of Tennyson's poems to music, which he sang at social occasions "in a tiny voice but with intense feeling". Loathed the concert hall with its "snarling, barking, squalling, snoring,

coughing, caterwauling", wrote in disgust to a friend, from his rooms in Rome, that "a vile beastly rottenheaded foolbegotten pernicious priggish screaming tearing roaring perplexing splitmecrackle crachimecriggle insane ass of a woman is practising howling below-stairs with a brute of a singing master so horribly, that my head is nearly off!".

And wrote "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat". For children. And, as it turns out, for us adults too. He knew that what a child feels is not often the same as what he can say; what an adult can say is not always the same as what he feels. And he came to the rescue.

## Part one

### 1 Propter's Nicodemus Pills

A heart-starter, for the three clarinets, John McCarthy being the soloist of them. McIvor, then Bob Barnard on the stop-chorus, having the decorations, and of course, the ensemble leads. A potent nostrum to liven things up a bit.

### 2 The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

Without doubt Mr Lear's best known. Love Song. A very tender and moving ode to one of the most unlikely (although, apparently, highly successful) couplings in the Bestiary. A

duet, really, for Jim Kelly's guitar and the voice of Ivan Smith.

### 3 The Akond of Swat

Mr Lear says, of this Potentate, to check the Indian newspapers. And to make an immense emphasis on the final syllable. Ian Bloxsom does the accent, on an instrument named, delightfully enough, the "Slap-Stick". The sopranoist is Graeme Lyall, the sitarist Terry Walker.

### 4 The Pobble Who Has No Toes

Saddest tale I ever did hear. Poor unfortunate creature. Feel for him. Ivan's reading: runcible.

### 5 The Yonghy Bonghy Bo

Two vibraphones are better than one (John S.); two saxophones also (Paul Furniss.) Then Mr Gould. From the Faculty of Music. Bachelor of Nonsense. And the two vibes out. Scroobious.

### 6 The Heraldic Blazon of Foss the Cat

Mr Lear's cat. Weareth a runcible hat. A suite in minus seven movements: couchant, a untin, rampant, dansant, regardant, Pprpr, and passant. Ian's variable-pitch gongs introduce the three clarinets again (for the "Meows"); Graeme Lyall (he had to be talked into it) playing the clarinet solo. Says he doesn't play the instrument nowadays. Ha. No, it isn't "When Dogs

Bark, Is It Music?" It's only Graeme's tenor saxophone, initiating the cat-and-dog fight. Barnard has the cornet improvisation, McIvor the trombone. Roy Ainsworth the voice. Rather nonsensical.

### 7 **The Runcible Hat**

A flumpy sort of tune that goes backwards. Harmonically. In the Interlude part. The soloists: Bob's cornet and John's Maroubra. Ian calls it the Remember. Some Tony Gould, then the silly time again. Really its correct name should be the Board-Walk-at-Atlantic-City. The dis-member, that is, not the tune.

### 8 **The Jumblies**

Nonsense was a way in which Lear often expressed deep feelings; the poems are fraught with floating mines. Particularly this one. So the setting is a simple repetitive figure which alternates between bass-clarinet and recorders, and the baritone-sax and orchestra. Over which is placed a series of quiet comments from muted cornet, tenor, and clarinet. All very "undercurrent", to give the words more room to move.

### 9 **The Beautiful Pea Green Boat**

Sailing songs usually have the flute so I thought I'd try the cor-anglais. For the pastoral that's in it. They sailed

to the Western Sea, they did, to a land all covered with trees. And since it's a Horn (English) I've put it in with the cornet and the trombone where it sits very comfortably. With the principal theme ... How very pleasant to be out on the water. With forty bottles of Ring-Bo-Ree. Forty. Wow. No stereoptic sophisticate steamer this.

### 10 **Gosky Patties**

Lear wrote three nonsense "Recipes", of which this is one. Told in Ivan's very best BBC news-reader's voice. Over a background which is a development of the figure from the Jumblies music. With Graeme's tenor.

### 11 **Mr and Mrs Discobolos**

Two more of Mr Lear's people. Who, although entirely charming in every way, have the delightful habit of falling off walls. Solos from Bob, Paul Furniss, Graeme, Darky McCarthy, Tony; the cor-anglais again as a second "horn".

## **Part two**

### 1 **Incidents In the life of My Uncle Arly**

His shoes were far, far too tight.

### 2 **Phits of Coffin**

Further uttered nonsense. For a quartet of vibes, piano, electric bass and drums. The title from Mr Lear,

the utterances being alternately in the quarter-note and the crotchet-triplet signatures.

### 3 **The Cumberbund**

An Indian Poem, Mr Lear calls it. First published in the "Times of India", Bombay, July 1874. Instrumentally, a duet for Terry Walker's sitar and Graeme Lyall's tenor saxophone. Written in one of the (myriad) Indian modes or "Ragas". Lots of bazaar wailing. Jazz interpolations, with, of course, the cor-anglais again. For the camels. Stench of the ghats and dung-fires. Tiffin. Sounds of the Raj hitherto unheard.

### 4 **The Omblophious Dolomphious Ptilinorhynchus**

My very very favourite bird is the Satin Bower-Bird. Whose cry, as heard in this piece, is just so utterly nonsensical as to have had Mr Lear on the floor in hysterical delight. His group (he is indigenously Australian) is the Ptilinorhynchidae, his genus Ptilinorhynchus, his species Violaceus. Again Edward, author of "The Parrot Book" of 1832, "Top toises, Terrapins and Turtles", 1872, and "Illustrations of the Family of the Psittacidae", 1832, would surely have loved these wonderful names. One of which I have joined with two of Edward's most beautiful words in the title. The piece itself is a tender waltz theme using

piano, Jim Kelly's guitar, and Martin Benge's bass-clarinet to accompany some more uttered nonsense, the Satin Bower-Bird in his curious and most moving song.

### 5 **The Diaphanous Doorscraper**

A Friendly and Helpful Rhinoceros encountered by the Four Little Children Who Went Round The World; on their return safely home, in token of their grateful adherence, they had him killed and stuffed directly, and then set him up outside the door of their father's house as a Diaphanous Doorscraper.

### 6 **Mary Squeen of Cots**

Again the title from Edward Lear. An Hebridean song for jazz-orchestra and Pipes-and-drums band. Very Spoonerismistical.

### 7 **The Otion Blue**

Mr Lear's spelling of course. Sea-birds, foghorns, eight bells, storms-at-sea, forty years before the mast man and buoy. The soloists: Tony, Bob, and the demented seagulls from Martin's bass-clarinet. Port out and starboard Home.

### 8 **The Dong With a Luminous Nose**

Truly the saddest and most moving of all Lear's poems. (Ah the lost Jumbly gel.) Something of a tour-de-force for Ivan; it's a long poem, full of nuance, climax and drama; he set out to record

it in one go and made it. One first and only performance. Beautiful.

### 9 **Learizing**

For the quartet of vibes, piano, electric bass and drums. I'd hope that Mr Lear would forgive this very Antipodean title, a nonsense name for a nonsensical piece.

### 10 **The Quangle Wangle's Hat**

This fascinating creature (sometimes spelled Clangel-Wangel) whose habits of life, we're told, are domestic and superfluous, and whose general demeanour is pensive and pellucid, subsists entirely on vegetables, excepting when he eats veal, or mutton, or pork, or beef, or fish, or saltpetre. Not to be confused with the Duck-Billed Platypus who really should be one of Lear's inventions.

### 11 **The Go-Operative Cauliflower**

Wears a white wig, and, although he has no feet at all, walks tolerably well with a fluctuating and graceful movement on a single cabbage stalk, an accomplishment which, naturally, saves him the expense of stockings and shoes. On being affrighted, he hurries off, in a somewhat plundomphious manner, towards the setting sun, his steps supported by two, superincumbent confidential cucumbers, to disappear in a crystal cloud of sudorific sand.

My acknowledgements and thanks are due to the following:

To the orchestra, for entering so thoroughly into the lunatic spirit of the thing; to the soloists, for their sensitivity towards and their understanding of the words; to the fine rhythm-section ... you'd think Doug Gallagher had been playing "dixieland" all this life; to Tom Sparkes, the poor benighted cor-anglais player being second "cornet" in a jazz-band; to Martin Goring-Benge, sound-engineer and bass-clarinettist extraordinaire, without whose fevered imagination and energy the journey along Nonsense-Music's Rocky Pathway would be hazardous indeed.

And special thanks to Mr Ivan Smith himself author, producer and narrator for ABC radio, in whose studios we've worked together more times than I care to count. And each time I'm amazed at the scope, the variety, the depth, the complete professionalism of his work. He really knows what he's about. (Ivan is also an Umpire in the game of Cricket. I wonder if that explains anything?)

And, of course, how pleasant to know Mr. Lear!

From the enjoyment of and love for his works comes this Uttered Nonsense. Nonsense-Music. Goodness knows there's not much of it about. Things being what they are nowadays. Nonsense-Music I guess

should be at the same time provocative, silly, amusing, curious, thought-provoking, complex and direct, full of quotes and mis-quotes, puns, malapropisms, musical spoonerisms, tightropes negotiated and bear-traps set up and then avoided, satisfying, adroit, nimble, fanciful, and above all entertaining and jolly.

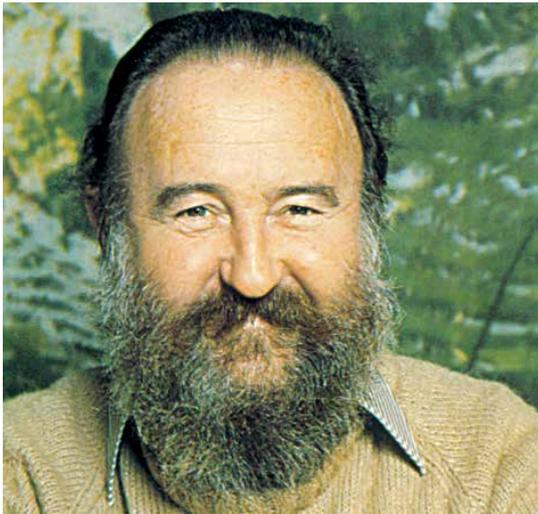
I think we made it.

John Sangster,  
Sydney 1978

The album was recorded and mixed in 1978 in the Sydney studios of EMI by John Sangster and Martin Benge and produced by John Sangster. The cover by Gwyn Perkins. The two-record set was released in 1980 on John Sangster's own Rainforest Records. The music is copyright. J.S.M.

This album was re-mastered for CD by Martin Wright of Move Records in 2008. Thanks to Petra Sangster for preserving the original tapes, and to Tony Gould for his advice and encouragement.





THE PLAYERS:

**Bob Barnard** / cornet

**Bob McIvor** /  
trombone

**John McCarthy** /  
clarinet

**Tom Sparkes** / clarinet  
and cor-anglais

**Mal Cunningham** /  
recorders, bass-flute  
and piccolo

**Paul Furniss** / alto-  
saxophone and  
clarinet

**Graeme Lyall** /  
tenor and soprano  
saxophones and  
clarinet

**Roy Ainsworth** /  
baritone-saxophone  
and bass clarinet

**Tony Gould** / piano

**Greg Lyon** / electric-  
bass

**Chris Qua** / tree-bass

**Doug Gallagher** /  
drums

**Ian Bloxson** /  
percussions

**John Sangster** /  
vibraphone, marimba,  
glockenspiel, swanee-  
whistle, piano, celeste  
and percussions

**Jim Kelly** / electric  
guitar

**Terry Walker** / sitar

**Martin Benge** / bass-  
clarinet

The verses spoken by  
**Ivan Smith**

