

John Sangster

JAZZ
MUSIC
SERIES

5

Ripper



John Sangster

Jazz music series: volume 5

Ripper

- 1** What was that? 3'58"
- 2** Ripper 3'10"
- 3** Ponder this 3'36"
- 4** Darkly 7'13"
- 5** The engine room 3'03"
- 6** Lovely 3'46"
- 7** The right time the right place 3'18"
- 8** Near the lake 9'59"
- 9** That's it 4'55"

The music was recorded in 1980 and remastered from the original mixed tapes by Move Records in 2018.

This is the fifth of five volumes of “suites” written by John Sangster for this lively little orchestra.

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Here is the the fifth and final in a series of suites written for this lively little orchestra, a gathering that includes some of Australia's foremost jazz musicians:

Bob Barnard: Cornet

Ron Falson: Trumpet

Tony Gould: Piano

Chris Qua ("Smedley"): Tree-bass

Len ("Sluggsy") Barnard: Drums

Paul Furniss: Alto Saxophone and Clarinet

Errol Buddle: Tenor Saxophone and Clarinet

Roy Ainsworth: Baritone Saxophone
and Bass-Clarinet

Tom Sparkes: Clarinet and Cor-Anglais

John ("Darky") McCarthy: Clarinet

Herb Cannon or **John Costelloe:** Trombone

John Sangster: Vibraphone

Ian Bloxsom: Percussions

And the featured soloists: **Graeme Lyall**, Tenor Saxophone, and **Keith Hounslow**, Pocket-Cornet (with the little mute and the plunger) and Flugelhorn

1 What was that? 3'58"

Well, all I did was ...

2 Ripper 3'10"

Starting down the Spencer Street end

3 Ponder this 3'36"

Let's remember Charles Ives

4 Darkly 7'13"

A lighter side of dark

5 The engine room 3'03"

What the ... ?

6 Lovely 3'46"

Salute to the old South

7 The right time the right place 3'18"

You just never know

8 Near the lake 9'59"

Sounds of rain and water

9 That's it 4'55"

You're all mad, half of you

The music was recorded and mixed August/September 1980 in the Sydney studios of EMI by Martin Bengé and John Sangster, who also produced the album. The pieces are copyright JSM.

JOHN SANGSTER 1928-1995

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 Rafters*: "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 Rafters*, 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 (Prahran 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 and he won an award from Graeme Bell as 'the most promising player'. He first recorded 30 December, and participated in the traditional jazz scene, including through the community centred on the house of Alan Watson in Rockley Road, South Yarra.

At the fourth convention, Sangster (or Sango, as he liked to be called) stood one morning with a band in Greville Street, Prahran, 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 (youngers 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.

In August 1978 Sango was 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 *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy – the latter of which has, 25 years later, been 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 film *Fluteman* (available on Move) 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, *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.



John Grant Sangster, musician/composer, was born 17 November 1928 in Melbourne, only child of John Sangster and Isabella (née Davidson, then Pringle by first marriage). He attended Sandringham (1933), then Vermont Primary Schools, and Box Hill High School. Self-taught on trombone

then cornet, learning from recordings with friend Sid Bridle, with whom he formed a band.

Isabella’s hostility towards John and his jazz activities came to a head on 21 September 1946, when she withdrew permission for him to attend a jazz event; in the ensuing confrontation he killed her with an axe but was acquitted of both murder and manslaughter.

He married Shirley Drew 18 November 1949. In 1950 recorded (drums) with Roger, then Graeme Bell, and was invited to join Graeme’s band on drums for their second international tour (26 October 1950 to 15 April 1952). During this tour Sangster recorded his first composition, and encountered Kenny Graham’s Afro-Cubists and Johnny Dankworth, which broadened his stylistic interests.

With Graeme he toured Korea and Japan, 1954 to 1955, then the two worked in Brisbane, where Sangster began playing the vibraphone. Shirley filed for divorce in 1957 (the decree absolute granted 17 September 1959). Bell and Sangster relocated to Sydney from 3 February 1957 for a residency at the Hotel Bennelong. Playing little jazz, the band recorded current skiffle hits (Sangster on washboard), one of which, Rock Island Line, made the top ten, leading to radio/television exposure, and playing support for Johnny Ray’s

1957 Australian tour.

Freelancing from 1959, he also joined Ray Price, Don Burrows and Judy Bailey and became active in music for film and TV. By 1962 he lived in an apartment with his partner, nicknamed Bo Diddley (real name, Janice Patricia Byrnes. Her death at the age of 43 in 1980 inspired Sangster's the second album in this jazz series *Requiem for a Loved One*) above the El Rocco, where Sangster became central to jazz experimentation developments. Visiting US pianist Bob James introduced him to avant-gardists Albert Ayler, Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor, expanding Sangster's music to a degree unequalled in Australian music. On a 1966 ABC broadcast his trio freely improvised over pre-recorded percussion; he was 'one of only a few composers who used electronic sounds before the 1970s in Australia'.

His participation in Donald Westlake's 1966 *Best of Both Worlds* concerts, combining Don Burrows' Quartet with the New Sydney Woodwind Quartet, included his own compositions. The interest in fusions which informed his experiments with non-Western forms extended to the psychedelic counter-culture, playing in the pit band for *Hair* from 1969s and at Australia's first rock festival, at Ourimbah NSW, 1970.

His film music ranged from the experimental (Albie Thoms' 1969 *Marinetti*) to children's animation (Hanna-Barbera's *The Funky Phantom* in 1971). His fascination with the musical representation of Australian landscape emerged in his music for the ABC TV series *In The Wild* (1976-1981). In 1971, moving to Narrabeen, he began composing suites based on Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Between 1973 and 1978 he produced over eight hours of recorded music, spanning ragtime to avant-garde. The instrumentation expanded from the standard traditional jazz lineup to include woodwinds, brass, strings, electric guitars, vocals, synthesiser, and studio-produced effects.

In 1988 he was entered on the Montsalvat Jazz Festival Roll of Honour. He moved to Brisbane in 1992 where he met Berlin-born musician Petra Schnese and the two took up residency as partners. In spite of ill-health he continued performing, including at Wangaratta Jazz and Blues Festival, 1994. His final gig was at Noosa Jazz Party, September 1995. He died of liver cancer on 26 October with Petra at his side. In his honour, and that of both her parents, she later changed her name to Petra Schnese-Kleist-Sangster.

Sangster was central in several major developments in Australian

music. Bell's band was seminal in the formation of an 'Australian' jazz sound. Sangster was also at the forefront of progressive jazz movements in Australia: experimental, free-form, electronic and fusions. He had the broadest palette of any Australian performer/composer, with influences ranging from the 'classic' jazz corpus to jazz/pop avant-gardists and art music composers, notably Maurice Ravel. The result has been referred to as 'cosmic dixieland'.

His life and music disclose a far more complex sensibility than the ocker/hobbit persona that he cultivated on stage and in his memoir *Seeing The Rafters*. He was 'possibly the most talented of all the musicians who inhabit the jazz world of Australia ... one of the most intuitive musicians Australia has produced in any idiom'.

Compiled from material written by Bruce Johnson, Dick Hughes, Eric Myers, and Mike Williams