

PREFACE TO SEEING THE RAFTERS

by John Sangster*

This is the Preface to John Sangster's memoir "Seeing The Rafters: The Life and Times of an Australian Jazz Musician", published by Penguin Books Australia Ltd in 1988.

I'd like to thank, early on, my friends Jane March, Howard Hughes and Norm Linehan, who helped me with some of the photographs. Most of the stuff, however, I retrieved from the attic, as they say.

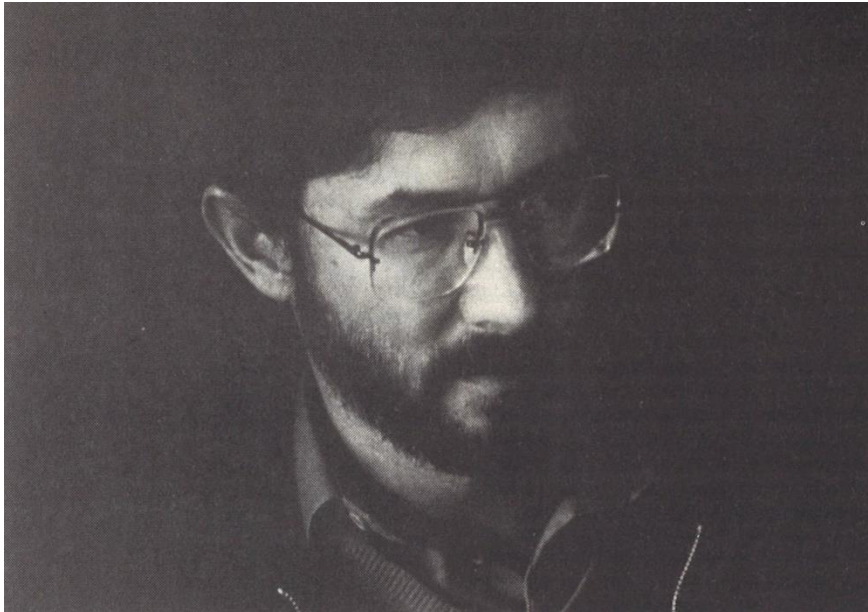


Two of Sangster's friends, who helped him with some of the photographs: Jane March (left) & Norm Linehan (below)...



** John Sangster was born in 1928 in an outer suburb of Melbourne. He developed an interest in jazz at an early age and learnt to play first the trombone and the cornet and then drums and percussion, and finally the vibraphone. He toured the United Kingdom and Europe with Graeme Bell's Australian Dixielanders, then joined the Ray Price Quartet. He was also a member of the Don Burrows Quartet and for some years led his own quartet at the El Rocco jazz club in Sydney. In 1978 he established Rain Forest Records in partnership with Martin Goring Bengé. Sangster is a prolific composer and still performs regularly around Australia, despite having retired from the 'Bigs Moke' to Narrabeen, on Sydney's northern beaches.*

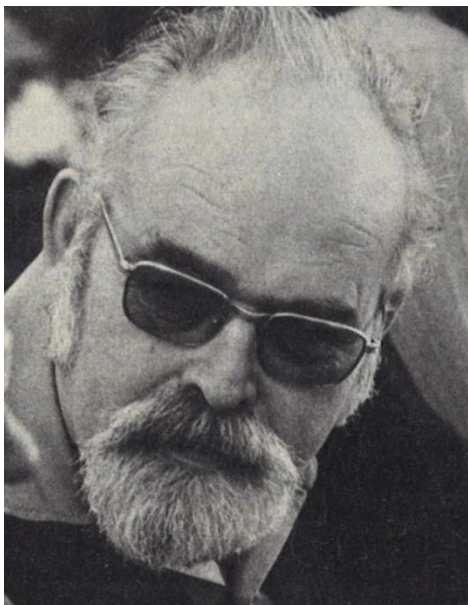
I thank also Eric Myers, for his help in steering me towards Penguin Books. At last I know what a 'Jazz Co-Ordinator' does. Had me baffled for a while there.



*Jazz Co-ordinator
Eric Myers, who
found Sangster a
publisher, Penguin
Books, for “Seeing
The Rafters”...PHOTO
CREDIT PETER
SINCLAIR*

A couple of people who read the manuscript reckoned I was 'too self-effacing', that I 'belittled myself too much, and minimised my own contribution to Australian jazz'. One of them said 'you are a much more important contributor to Australian culture, a much-more creative artist in this country, than you yourself allow for'. (Shuffles feet, gives nervous cough.)

Mike Williams, in his fascinating book *The Australian Jazz Explosion*, which is chock-a-block with nice Jane March photographs, nominates me as 'possibly the most talented of all the musicians who inhabit the jazz world of Australia'. He raves on: 'I am not alone in believing that Sangster is one of the most intuitive musicians Australia has produced in any idiom.' (Gee whiz.)



*Mike Williams, author of “The Australian Jazz
Explosion”, who described Sangster as “one of the
most intuitive musicians Australia has produced
in any idiom”... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH*

Len (Sluggsy) Barnard, without doubt one of the finest drummers we have, wrote me an 'Appreciation' once. *Jazz Magazine*, March of 1982 it was*. Slugs said of me: 'He was, and still is, one of the best drummers in Australia, but it is difficult to get him on the tubs these days. Probably sheer cussedness.' Too much like hard work, Sluggsy.



Len (Sluggsy) Barnard on the drums, with bassist Ed Gaston out of focus in the background... PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON

Slugs rambles on: 'He has found his true place in the scheme of things as a creative composer, and a superb vibraharpist . . . vet he will spend hours talking to a bricklayer in a pub, who is, on the subject of bricklaying, vastly superior to Richard Wagner, John Sangster, or anybody else who can't lay one brick on top of another. That shows a lack of preciosity, and a glut of largesse . . . John, a roundish genial man, although no dandiprat or polished dresser, could talk his way into Government House in the morning, and be thrown out of The Drum and Trumpeter in the evening. He holds the dubious record of having been asked to leave the Musicians' Club when he was the only customer on the premises. This was mid-afternoon, not closing time.' I went quietly, Leonard; I know when I'm licked.

**Len Barnard's piece "John Sangster: An Appreciation" can be read on this website at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/essays-16>*

Sluggsy has, I think you'll agree, a fine turn of phrase ('no dandiprat', indeed). When he fronts the barmaid during the 'band-break', his order is, often as not, 'Double Gordon with lottsa Legal, please miss.' As the hapless serving-wench reaches for the bottle of Gordon's Gin, Slugs explodes with, 'No, no . . . Gordon and Gotch: Scotch.' Then she has to figure out lottsa Legal'. 'Legal advice: ice!' he cries querulously.



This shot was taken in 1977 when Bob Barnard & Friends recorded Dave Dallwitz's "Ned Kelly Jazz Suite", back row L-R, Dave Ellis, John McCarthy, Len Barnard; front row L-R, Don Burrows, Bob Barnard, John Sangster...

This little charade is accompanied by lots of arm-waving and general exasperation, and it all takes quite a while. By which time the 'band-break' is over, and he has to go back behind his drums, cranky and thirsty. We calm the waitress down and someone passes his drink up to him. I asked him the other day, 'How was the party, Slugs?'

This is a useful question, and one always gets some sort of response from a Muso. Len's reply: 'There was one bloke there who was so out of it at the end of the night his face looked like the last four bars of *Tiger Rag*.' Sluggsy's comment on my manuscript was the best. He quoted Mae West at me, over the old Eau-de-Cologne: 'Kid, I like your style.'

Well that's enough of that. Now you know all about my Famosity, now we can get on with this seeing-the-rafters business.
