

JAZZ AUSTRALIA: IS THERE SUCH A THING AS AUSTRALIAN JAZZ?

by Gil Wahlquist

[Editor's note: This newspaper clipping, most likely from 1967, apparently was part of a regular column written by Gil Wahlquist called "What's New On Record". It is known that Wahlquist wrote a record column for the "Sun-Herald" for nearly two decades until 1974, so it's most likely that this article appeared in that newspaper. The famous album "Jazz Australia" was issued in 1967. This clipping was found in the memorabilia of bassist Ed Gaston, who died in October, 2012. My thanks to Ed's daughter Victoria for providing this valuable document.]



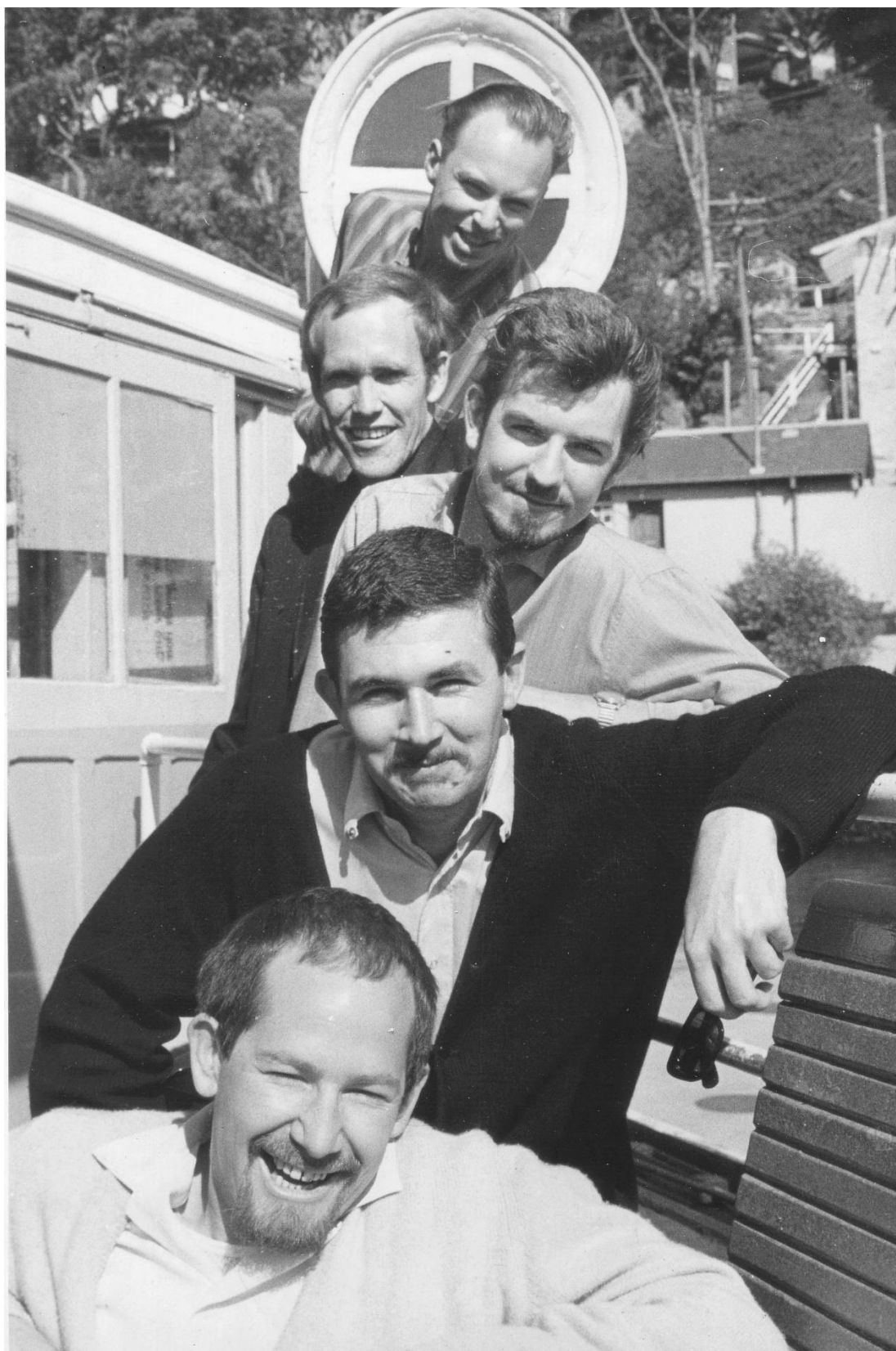
You ask a silly question and the answer might not be what you expect. The Australian Performing Right Association Music Foundation recently asked four Australian jazz musicians to lead groups of their own choosing for the performance of original works. Each composer was given 13 minutes on an LP to do whatever they liked. The only limitation placed was in the number of musicians, which was to be no more than eight. The result is *Jazz Australia* (CBS SBP 233450) a remarkable and important record.

Don Burrows is first on the disc with a suite called *Lonely Girl*. It's a story, played out by the instruments. The Burrows flute is a young girl. Graeme Lyall's tenor saxophone is the young man who picks her up, and Bob McIvor's trombone is the voice of conscience when the girl succumbs to basic instincts. It's the sort of jazz Peter and the Wolf. The Peter is spelt PETA. Although the plot has a B-movie atmosphere, the jazz is tasteful, swinging and enchanting.



Three musicians who appear on the "Jazz Australia" LP, L-R, Don Burrows, John Sangster & Graeme Lyall... PHOTO COURTESY JOHN SANGSTER'S BOOK SEEING THE RAFTERS

Bernie McGann used his time for two blowing sessions by his quartet. The first tune *Lazy Days* has a Monkish sound about it and this is emphasised by the rhapsodic piano playing of Dave MacRae. McGann also performs a waltz *Spirit Song* which he says was inspired by the modern architecture of churches in St Ives district. It has more of a blues than a devotional atmosphere about it. There's something lonely about a waltz and McGann makes the most of it as a jazz form.



This shot of the quintet The Heads, taken in 1966, the year before “Jazz Australia” was recorded, includes four of the musicians who played on the album: from top to bottom, Dave MacRae, Bernie McGann, John Pochée, Bob Bertles (not on “Jazz Australia”) & Andy Brown...

Judy Bailey led a quintet for her contribution which she calls *Two-Part Sketch*. She too likes the waltz and the two parts of the sketch are a section in fast 4/4 time and a second section in slower 3/4. The soloists slip from one time signature to another. This provides a contrast between the two elements which you may regard as conversation — fast — and contemplation—the waltz. The composition comes to a release point in a bass solo by Ed Gaston, in which accompaniment is provided by Miss Bailey stroking the wires of the piano with her fingernails.



Two participants in Judy Bailey’s “Two-Part Sketch”: Bailey herself (above, pictured in 1967) and Ed Gaston (below) whose bass solo provides a release point in the composition... BAILEY PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ DOWN UNDER; GASTON PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON



John Sangster winds up the LP with a happening rather aptly titled *Conjur Man*. This opens like the sound-track of a Tarzan movie, with bird and animal noises mimicked by members of Sangster's octet. The performance is dedicated to the idea that the spontaneous act of noise-making is as important as the rules of form and style which we customarily impose on such things.



John Sangster, pictured in 1966... PHOTO COURTESY VICTORIA GASTON

Sangster and his musicians are aiming for direct contact by being uninhibited. If a musician feels like barking like a dog, he lays his instrument aside and barks. In this way, he lets you know how he feels. But does the audience want to know their musicians as well as all that?

When I hear a blue note played I get a certain reaction. The bark of a dog will arouse a completely different set of associations.

The music of *Conjur Man** is good although slow to warm up. It is not hackneyed, nor is it, I believe, a put on. I see it as a satire on music and musicians. This is a good thing. but I would be just as pleased if Sangster's next satire took a different form — less bark and more bite.

[*Editor's note: The musicians who appeared on "Conjur Man" were Charlie Munro (bass clarinet, percussion); George Thompson or Ron Carson (bass, percussion); Derek Fairbrass (drums, percussion); Bobby Gebert (piano); Graeme Lyall (tenor saxophone, percussion); Bob McIvor (trombone, percussion); John Sangster (vibraphone, drums).]