

Philosophical Gas 93

APRIL 1997

Done for ANZAPA by John Bangsund, PO Box 5005, Geelong North 3215, Australia

This issue consists mainly of things I have written for WordPlay-L, which is a bit like ANZAPA except that it has two electronic mailings a day and doesn't spend a lot of time talking about cats. My apologies if you have read any of this before.

Ombra, my foot!

Purcell: Songs and Interludes; Handel: Arias from *Xerxes* — Maureen Forrester (contralto), Alexander Young (tenor), Martin Isepp (harpsichord), Vienna Radio Orchestra, conducted by Brian Priestman. Recorded Vienna, 1966. MCA Millennium MCD 80102 (A\$9.95)

I fell in love with Maureen Forrester at first hearing, in 1959. I was a bookseller's assistant then, spending most of my pay on books and secondhand classical records, and leading a life of high culture and low hygiene in a shed in St Kilda. (It was a detached building of the sort that we call a "bungalow" here, but this one I swear began life as a garden shed. As well as books, Nippergram, bed, table and chairs, I remember I had a piano there, so it was a fair-sized shed.) One night I was listening to the radio and was at once transfixed and transported by the second symphony of Gustav Mahler, whose name I knew but whose music I had never heard. This was Bruno Walter's 1958 recording with the New York Philharmonic, the Westminster Choir, Emilia Cundari and Maureen Forrester. A finer noise, I decided (to quote or misquote someone), had never penetrated the ear of man; and so began two of my longest and happiest musical love affairs, with Mahler and Forrester.

I couldn't afford this recording: it was imported, so the two-LP set cost £5:15:0 – close to a week's pay. (The amount converts to \$11.50, but in today's money it was about \$150. My hefty portable radiogram had only cost about £8. Recorded music has become almost ridiculously cheap over the years.) I started saving for it, something I have never been good at, and a few months later, when my grandmother Holyoak (then almost 80 and living frugally on a government pension) asked me what I would like for my twenty-first birthday, I said that what I really wanted more than anything was this set of two records but that it was awfully expensive. She insisted that I have it. I have had many records of Mahler's 2nd since then, including four or five upgrades of the Bruno Walter (the latest one on CD), but I have never enjoyed the symphony more than I did the day after my twenty-first birthday.

By the time Maureen Forrester came to sing in Melbourne (I can't place it closer than some time in 1961-64) I had as good a collection of her records as I could afford: Mahler's *Song of the Earth* and *The Youth's Magic Horn*, Delius's *Songs of Sunset*, some Bach cantatas, a set of Shakespeare songs (or did

that come later?), and a collection of arias by Handel, Gluck, Mozart and Purcell. When Forrester appeared on the platform at the Melbourne Town Hall I felt faint. She was a mountain of a woman, and she was draped in a saffron tent. I couldn't believe that this was the woman I had so fervently loved from afar. The moment she opened her mouth I forgot about all that and just basked in the unique glory of her voice. Oh yes, this was the Maureen Forrester I loved all right, and she sounded better in person than I had ever heard her on records.

Some time after that I found a Purcell selection (probably the one resurrected on this CD), the Cherubini *Missa Solemnis* in D minor, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and possibly others that have not survived the great book-and-record purges of the mid-1980s. (These purges, I hasten to add, were in a good cause, like paying the rent; everything went for a short aria and recitative, and it's all too heart-breaking to bear thinking about, so I don't.) Then, where should Maureen Forrester pop up next but in a film of *Beauty and the Beast* on SBS-TV? That can't be right! Some other fairy tale, surely? Yes, I know she played the Witch in Humperdinck's *Hansel und Gretel*, but I haven't seen that.

Now, to the CD at hand. There's a bit of a wobble in track 2, a bit of wow-and-flutter as we used to say, that not even 1996 technology could correct from the 1966 tapes. Or perhaps someone slept through that interlude and didn't notice. That aside, the sound is pretty close to magnificent, and a lump lurked in my throat as I heard for the first time in years the Maureen Forrester of my youth. The first aria on my 1964 record (which I suspect is the version reproduced on this CD, but I could be wrong) was Handel's "Ombra ma fui", which used to just about reduce me to a whimpering heap, and it still has an effect of this sort when I hear Forrester sing it. When anyone else sings it, I tend to think of the scene in the opera and lose concentration.

Handel's opera *Xerxes* is, of course, about the mighty Persian king, considered by some biblical scholars to be the Ahasuerus mentioned in the books of Ezra and Esther. If you ever go to see it (which I wouldn't: I bought a videotape of a very fine performance, and after I watched a bit of it traded it, as I recall, on a good copy of *The Blues Brothers*), you must leave your Bible and history in the cloakroom, because Handel's business was entertainment, not scholarship. That he was a musical genius merely sets him apart from lesser entertainers who are perhaps justly forgotten, like Andrew Lloyd Webber. Handel's *Xerxes*, his lead character in this opera, has problems. For a start, he is a woman. That's OK if he's a magisterial sort of woman, a commanding presence, like Maureen Forrester, but it's still a bit of a worry. Next, *Xerxes* is in love with a tree. You

heard right: a tree. Not a big one, nothing too obtrusively Freudian, in fact not much more than a sapling in the videotape I had, but none the less a tree. Well, what can you add to that? I mean, this is a really severe psychosis we're talking about here. I didn't wait to discover how it all worked out in the end (its ramifications, if you like), so I can't tell you; it just seemed too hilariously sad for words.

When I listen to Forrester singing "Ombra ma fui" I am listening to music, sublime music, that catches the throat, stings the tear ducts, and sets off excited little synapses all through my system. My toes tingle. A friend of mine once described this as "making love to the music", which is fair, but it's a cathartic thing, and probably good for you, done in moderation. When I think too much about the words - "Ombra ma fui / Di vegetabile / Cara ed amabile / Soave piu" - all I can see is this pathetic, clinically infatuated, idiot king proclaiming his endearment to a tree. But that's opera for you.

I can't recommend this CD highly enough: 70 minutes of rare delight (plus one minute of dismay early on when you think you've made a terrible mistake), and dirt cheap.

Extracts from

All I know about Bangsunds

In the cause of science I recently bought *The World Book of Bangsunds* (Family Heritage, Bath, Ohio, 1996). If you have bought it too, you will know what a dismal waste of money it is.

There is an excellent (and very funny) review of the book on the Web at <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/1996/080896/screed.html>. Peter Gilstrap is writing about *The World Book of Gilstraps*, but it's pretty much the same book: just substitute "Bangsund" for "Gilstrap". That is what the publishers have done, after all. They started some years ago with more common surnames, and now they have reached us. (The main difference between the two books is that there is no attempt to explain the origin of our name.)

I thought the book would be worth having for its "Bangsund International Registry", particularly for the names and addresses of Bangsunds in Norway - but there aren't any! The "world" of Bangsunds, the publishers would have us believe, consists of the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK.

On 21 October 1984 I had a telephone call from an American who said his name was Bangsund - Clifford Bangsund. At first I thought he was joking. I have many American friends, most of whom I have never met, but some of them have visited Melbourne and have rung me and we have met. I thought this man must be one of them, one with an odd sense of humor, but as we talked he convinced me that he really was Cliff Bangsund, from Redlands, California, and we had a great yarn.

Cliff was in the habit of looking for Bangsunds in telephone directories on his travels, and I think he

was as surprised to find me as I was to hear from him. If it had ever been suggested to me that there were Bangsunds in America I would have agreed that it was possible, but I had never heard of any. I knew only of my relatives, most of whom are still in Norway. They came from Tromsø, in the far north, and many of them still live there. I mentioned the family timber and construction company, Bangsund Trelasthandel. When I was young, my great-uncle Erling used to send the company calendar to us each year, and I still had books that he had sent to his brother Sigurd, my grandfather. I once met Erling, and his son Ivar, and my sister Joy had visited them in Tromsø. Cliff had not heard of Tromsø or the company. Oh, and I remembered that Joy had once visited a Bill Bangsund in Wales.

Cliff had a full schedule in Melbourne, so we did not meet, which is a pity; but that, as far as I am concerned, is how it all began.

I wrote about Cliff's visit in a little magazine that I publish occasionally, called *Philosophical Gas*. (I may explain the title later, but it's unimportant. I publish it mainly to keep in touch with friends around the world.) John Berry in Seattle wrote and told me he had found two Bangsunds in his local telephone directory, and Denny Lien in Minneapolis sent me a list of eight in Minnesota, one in Nebraska, and one in Oregon. I intended to write to them all, but never did. Joy, the traveller in my family, visited Cliff in Redlands in 1985 (I think). When she returned she mentioned that one of his sons was about to set off for Africa as a missionary.

My next contact with overseas Bangsunds was in 1994, when my second-cousin Anne Grete Bangsund rang me from Sydney. She and her husband, Espen Sather, were here on Norwegian government business to do with the Olympic Games. Anne Grete grew up in China, where her father, Johan, was the Norwegian ambassador.

About 1970 I met Anne Grete's grandfather Erling and her uncle Ivar (who was one of my father's cousins). They had come to Melbourne to see my grandfather Sigurd. As I recall, they were not sure whether he knew who they were (he was about 90 then), but he was courteous and spoke with them in Norwegian.

On 22 September 1996 I lurched onto the Internet. Naturally enough, I was interested to see how many Bangsunds I could find there. The first was Darryl, principal of Langenburg High School in Saskatchewan, Canada. He astounded me by saying that his great-grandfather's surname was Olson: he had adopted the name Bangsund because he came from the town of Bangsund in Norway.

Since then I have talked on the Net to Anne Grete, Per, Rebecca, Naomi, Dean, Robert, Jenny, Galen, Heidi and several Johns; and I have talked to people who live in Bangsund, and people all over Norway who have been most kind and helpful in my search. In October I started drafting a little essay called "The Bangsunds In History, and How They Got There"; before the month was ended, just about everything I had written had been proved wrong (or not quite

right) by all my new friends on the Net. I decided that a lot more work was needed. The beginnings of it you now have. They are small beginnings, and I will need a lot of help, but for what we have here we can thank above anyone and anything else - Cliff Bangsund and the Internet.

The name "Bangsund"

Bangsund is a small town in the county of Nord-Trøndelag, a few kilometres south of Namsos. During the nineteenth century it was a flourishing timber town, said to have the biggest sawmill in northern Norway. Today its population is about 1000 (which is why you won't find it in most atlases; you can find it on the Web at <http://www.mapquest.com/>). Many of the people who live there work in Namsos (pop. 12,000). The general view is that everyone named Bangsund is ultimately named after this town. Many emigrants adopted the name when they left the town for America. When and why Norwegian Bangsunds adopted the name, and whether all of those families lived in the town at some time, remains unclear. The man who seems first to have adopted the surname was born in 1690.

The 1801 census mentions a farm in the area called Bangsund, and some think that this predates the sawmill and the town, but the spelling Bangsund was current by then. The town is on the river Bogna, and it has been suggested that the name of the area may originally have been Bognasund (meaning fjord, or sound, of the Bogna), but so far I have seen no suggestion that the town's name was ever spelt any way other than Bangsund.

[*Instant response to the above*]

Hi John,

Professor Rygh has observed the following spellings: Bangxsunde; Bangswñ; Bangsun 1559; Bangsundt 1590; Bagsunnnd 1926; Bangsund 1669, 1723; and he says the first part (Bang) may relate to the river Bogna but also to old norwegian bagr (difficult, mean) so the terrain may have something to do with it, or bagn (noise). The last part (sund) means a narrow part of the water (useful for ferrying across the fjord).

— *Bjoern Solheim*

♦

Gerry of the Mounties: That's fascinating stuff about hurdy-gurdies. My paperback *Grove* (from which I take the spelling of the plural: *New Shorter Oxford* is silent on the matter) tells me that "hurdy-gurdy" is the English name for what the French call a "vielle". It's very like a violin, but you press keys instead of bowing it. There's a picture of one in volume 8 that makes me think I might get a tune out of it. (I have no talent at all for stringed instruments, or woodwinds for that matter, but I play the piano by ear and can probably still get a tune of sorts from a euphonium.) Frank Kidson, who wrote the *Grove* entry, says:

By some strange misconception, a common example of the erroneous nomenclature which exists among average non-musical persons regarding the lesser-known instruments, it has long been the practice, both in literature and in speech, to refer to the barrel

and piano organs as "hurdy-gurdies". This has probably arisen from the fact that the Italian street-boy, who early in the 19th century perambulated town streets with this instrument, in due course discarded it for a primitive form of organ which simulated the then popular cabinet piano. Out of this the modern piano organ has evolved.

So I turn to "barrel organ" in vol. 2, and there find a passing reference to "grinder organ", which doesn't get a guernsey in vol. 3, and there now being five volumes of *Grove* on my desk, I pursue the matter no further. What I have thought of until today as a hurdy-gurdy must be a barrel organ or grinder organ.

F.W. Galpin's addendum to Kidson's article informs me that the medieval Latin name for the hurdy-gurdy was "organistrum" - "and under this title it is described by Odo of Cluny, who died in A.D. 942, in his tract *Quomodo organistrum construat* (how to make an organistrum)". I might have known that Odo of Cluny would get into the argument sooner or later.

The "cross between an ornate cuckoo clock and a grand piano on wheels" might therefore be what Kidson calls "the modern piano organ". Or could it be a steam calliope? Then there's the bath tuba (dealt with in the tract *Quomodo tubam balnearum construat* by Odorono of Sputum), which handles water music.

I'm getting a bit delirious here, Gerry.

Jack Oakie, now. Never heard of him. But courtesy of Microsoft Cinemania '95 I can list five films he appeared in that may include "We joined the navy to see the world" (a song my father used to sing, and I still remember the tune for the first two lines): *The Fleet's In* (1928), *Hit The Deck* (1930), *Sea Legs* (1930), *Sailor Be Good* (1933), *Navy Blues* (1941).

Keele-halled John: "Oops!" indeed. It's an example of Chaos Theory, this is. You innocently type Rachel when you mean Rebekah, and halfway round the world some bloke picks up a Bible he hasn't looked at for years and reads half the book of Genesis - and it's the wrong half! (But I forgive you, for a reason that shall emerge.)

"I'd walk a mile for a Camel" is how I remember it. Not much of a bloody clue, was it? (But that's OK. You are forgiven.) "Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also" (Genesis 24:14). Right, and that turned out to be Rebekah. "And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth" (24:57). So that explains the cat. And in one sentence you have said plainly what I was struggling to express the other day: that the composer was being rude about the princeling and his little host of hangers-on. That's pretty damn funny, John. It reminds me obliquely of Weber's immortal musical comedy *Der Freischütz*, of which I have a legal, bought-and-paid-for, videotape. It's a hoot, or so I'm told. After several attempts to watch it I realized that the only way I would ever enjoy the thing would be to turn the picture off and just listen to the music. I like the music.

Keats and Chapman (or: Why I Have Forgiven You): "but surely", you write, "we have in this case a production of the divine Miles na Gopaleen before us".

Lord bless you, sir, and your camels and your cat! For nigh on thirty years I have been composing spurious anecdotes of Keats and Chapman, in imitation indeed of the divine and late lamented O'Nolan (who wrote in the *Irish Times* as Myles na gCopaleen (or Gopaleen)), and never once has anyone mistaken them for the real thing

You have no idea what this means to me, John. In 1972 I said to the poet and literary critic A. D. Hope that the book I would most like to have written is *At Swim-Two-Birds*. "Ah," he said, "the throwaway Irish novel." I wondered what he meant, but wasn't game to ask. I had the feeling that he disapproved of the trinitarily divine O'Nolan/O'Brien/Myles. That scholarly reprimand (or such I took it to be) has kept me humble. (Although Alec did introduce me to his wife as "the funniest man in Canberra, and one of the most serious", which was rather nice.) Now someone with a proper appreciation of the genius of Myles has mistaken my work for His. I am so overcome, I will never wash this computer again

Robots: You'd think I would have learnt by now not to trust my memory. (Consider the logic in that statement. Go on, be a devil, don't mind me.) Karel Čapek may have invented the word "robot", or if not, put a new spin on it - I'm not clear about that - but if I said that *RUR* was a novel (I think I did) then that was pretty silly. What I meant to say is that the word "robot" (for an automaton) came into English from Čapek's play *RUR* (1920). The excellent Professor Doctor Alois Čermak, in his *New Bohemian-English and English-Bohemian Pocket Dictionary* (Třebíč, n. d., Kčs 70 or 25s.6d. new, my copy 2s. s/h 1954), translates *rob* as "slave, thrall", *robotu* as "villain labour, corvee; (fig.) drudgery", and *robotník* as "villain". Čermak's "villain" is not exactly wrong, just an old spelling of "villein", and his "corvee" helps to make the meaning clear: the *rob*- words imply forced labor, slavery, drudgery, rather than plain "work" (which he translates as *práce*).

Once, trying to explain the essential difference between my Keats & Chapman anecdotes and Myles na Gopaleen's (which I could easily have summed up in one word: genius), I wrote that Keats and Chapman had advised me that they would not be party to a proposed anecdote in which they were to conduct a dodgy evangelical crusade in Prague, on the ground that they refused to be involved in the fraudulent conversion of Czechs.

About twenty years ago, when I was living in Adelaide, I visited a small winery in the Barossa Valley. It wasn't much to look at, just an unprepossessing concrete building with a corrugated-iron roof in a drab paddock, but the wine was absolutely vile. I was standing in a large room, rather like an oversized garage, with lots of vats and stuff, when I ruined some bloke's day. Maybe he was the owner, I don't know. He pointed to a big barrel and a much smaller barrel beside it and asked if I could describe their relationship. "This one's a step farther," I said, malevolently.

I came over all nostalgic yesterday, reading stuff I wrote in Canberra in 1972-75. In a few weeks it will be twenty-five years since the day I walked into Parliament House, wandered through King's Hall, up stairs, down stairs, until at last I found someone, a girl at a photocopier, and asked her where I might find Hansard. "Oh," she said brightly, "which department is he with?" I got to Canberra by passing a test. This is how I described it in *Meanjin* (Winter 1994).

In 1972 I applied for a job as sub-editor with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Reporting Staff, and was invited to sit their entrance examination. It was exhaustive and exhausting, page after page testing your knowledge of words and usage, and then a practical test of sub-editing: a dozen pages of unpunctuated gibberish, which I later learnt was a verbatim transcript of part of a speech by Senator J. A. Mulvihill (Labor, NSW). At this point many people who sat the test gave up: they couldn't make sense of it, and besides, if this was the sort of rubbish they would have to work on (and it was), they would rather not. I hacked into it, didn't finish it in the time allowed, and left the test thinking I might get by on the first part. I was wrong about that. For a start, my brief definitions of "pungent", "importunate" and some other words were inadequate. I was appointed a Hansard sub-editor because I had done the best job on Mulvihill that anyone had seen. (A remark at the time that my work consisted in "making Montaignes out of Mulvihills" appealed to Stephen Murray-Smith and got me into his *Dictionary of Australian Quotations*.)

Before 1972 the Committee Reporting Section had been an ad hoc sort of unit, set up to deal with the sudden proliferation of parliamentary committees, especially in the Senate, where Lionel Murphy (Attorney-General in the Whitlam government until he was appointed a Justice of the High Court) used the chamber's powers to get a whole lot of things moving that the government of the day might have preferred left alone. As the work grew beyond Hansard's ability to cope with it, a fairly sophisticated system of tape-recording committee meetings evolved, and casual workers (typists by the dozen, and retired journalists and former Hansard reporters) were called in as needed. The unit was moved out of Parliament House and into the Government Printing Office at Kingston.

I was the first person ever appointed a Hansard sub-editor who was innocent of shorthand. (The chief reporter at Parliament House in Melbourne, who conducted the test, said he would have offered me a job on the spot if I had had shorthand. God, I was marketable in those days!) My colleagues were Bob Lehane, a young local journalist with a string of letters after his name and a profound knowledge of science (he left to edit a new CSIRO magazine in 1974, but remained a good friend of Sally's and mine and was best man at our wedding), and Alf Blair, a retired Hansard reporter from Sydney, who was wonderfully wise and genial in a dour sort of way. In 1973 we were joined by two more retired men, Arthur Cosford, who had been a local ABC radio reporter, and Ted Angel, who had been a very senior journalist on the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

All of us except Bob were heavy smokers. Arthur smoked Woodbines, and had a particularly bad cough. We had a technician, who repaired and tested the Tandbergs on the other side of a partition behind me. From the weird noises I once accused him of secretly constructing an atomic absorption spectrometer there; he cheerfully admitted it, then asked what it was – would the Russians be interested? One day he produced a tape that consisted entirely of bits of Arthur's ABC reports, the bits where he coughed or cleared his throat. We thought that was a bit rough – Arthur was a lovely, gentle man, always cheerful, full of kindness and laughter – so we didn't talk to our technician for days; but we knew then why Arthur had retired relatively early from radio.

All of us except me were keen cryptic crossword puzzlers. In Sydney Ted had done the cryptic for the next day's *Herald* on his way to work, just to make sure it was right. I had been brought up on synonymic crosswords, and I didn't understand the clues, so I gave it up as an unfathomable mystery and waste of time, until one day . . . One day there was no work to be done and the accumulated cryptics were brought out. I was listening to Mozart on my headphones and reading something. Suddenly there was a commotion and I realized they were all yelling at me. They were stuck: they needed a writer, probably English, who had three names, each of six letters, and the middle name was probably George. "Walter Savage Landor," I said, and replaced my headphones. "Bloody hell!" Alf said, "You've been holding out on us, haven't you, all this time!" Eventually they accepted my pleas of innocence and agreed to teach me how to do cryptics. I still haven't

mastered the damn things. The one in the *Melbourne Age* on Saturdays is about my standard, good for an hour or two's more or less pleasant frustration. But I have never since matched that fleeting moment of glory when Walter Savage Landor came unsuspected from some deep recess of my mind.

In May and September there were nights when we worked back until all hours on the Senate Estimates Committees. The committees might not adjourn until 1 or 2 a.m., sometimes later, but the transcripts of their sessions had to be printed and ready for Senators and Members by 10 a.m. This was normal work for the Hansard reporters, who were very well paid, took long holidays, aged quickly, and retired early (or died young). It seemed insanely abnormal to me, but in a way I used to look forward to Estimates time. This was the time when the old journoes around Canberra were roused from their retirement to help us. We would take two-hour dinner breaks at a local restaurant, and talk and listen and be amazed. One night I got them going on the subject of Lennie Lower, the greatest Australian comic writer of the 1930s, who died, aged 44, in 1947 – and yes, almost to a man, they had known him or met him and had stories to tell of him. I wish I could remember those stories.

After about a year in Adelaide I felt an urge to return to Canberra and work for Hansard again. I rang a friend named George, a Hansard clerk at Parliament House who invariably elected to work with us at the Printing Office, and asked after Alf and Arthur and Ted and Kelly and Doug and all the others, and George said sadly "They've all gone, John." It took a moment to sink in.

3 April 1997 Um, let's rephrase that, or:

The name "Bangsund" revisited

A great disappointment in my Net researches is the depressing number of Bangsunds I have found named John. Today, after not quite six months at it, I discover that the earliest recorded Bangsund is . . . Jon.

Bangsund is a small town in the county of Nord-Trøndelag, a few kilometres south of Namsos. During the nineteenth century it was a flourishing timber town, said to have the biggest sawmill in northern Norway. Today its population is about 1200. (This is why you won't find it in most atlases; but you can find it on the Web - <http://www.mapquest.com/> - and Jan-Erik Saur, who lives in Bangsund, has a photograph of the area at <http://194.198.38.70/pub/janeriks/index.htm>). Many of the people who live there work in Namsos (population about 12,000).

The general view is that everyone named Bangsund is ultimately named after this town (or the farm from which the town took its name). Some emigrants adopted the name when they left the town for America. When and why today's Norwegian Bangsund families adopted the name, and whether the people they are descended from all lived in the town or on the farm at some time, remains unclear.

The town is on the river Bogna (which flows from the Bangsjøene lakes), and it has been suggested that the name of the area may originally have been Bognasund (meaning sound, or a narrow stretch of water, of the Bogna), but so far I have seen no suggestion that the town's name was ever spelt any way other than Bangsund.

As I said, the town is named after a farm. The authority on Norwegian farm-names is Professor Oluv Rygh. In his huge work on the subject he notes these spellings: Bangxsunde; Bangswm; Bangsun (1559); Bangsundt (1590); Bangssund (1801); Bagnsund (1926); Bangsund (1669, 1723). Rygh writes that the first part of the name (Bang) may relate to the river Bogna, but also to the old Norwegian *bagn* (noise) or *bagr* (difficult, mean). So, as Bjoern Solheim (who kindly sent me this information) says, the terrain may have something to do with it.

Jan-Erik Saur (quoting Ivar Berre's book *Berre i Bangdalen* (1980)) notes that the first recorded farmer at Bangsund was Jon Bangsund (1521), but that the farm was a very old settlement: in 1886 a grave-mound was found there that dates from the sixth century.

Bjoern Solheim notes that a lot of confusion about Norwegian surnames arises from the fact that people were commonly named after the farm that they owned or worked on; people who moved about often changed their names; and the farm-name wasn't always a person's last name. Dr Ole Martin Skilleås (Associate Professor of English at the University of Bergen), confirming this, writes: "It was common in Norway to take one's surname from where one lived. My great-great-grandfather changed his name to Skilleås when he bought the farm. Also, it was perhaps more prestigious to have a geographical name than a patronym, such as Olsen, Hansen or whatever, the latter signifying a lower class. Those sailing to and from Bangsund may have thought it a good alternative."