

JACK DAVIS was born in Perth in 1917 and brought up at Yarloop and the Moore River native settlements. He first began to learn the language and culture of his people, the Nyoongarah of South-West of Western Australia, while living on the Brookton Aboriginal Reserve. He later worked as a stockman in the North-West which brought him into contact with tribal society.

He became an activist on behalf of his people and from 1967–71 was director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth. In 1971 he became the first chairman of the Aboriginal Trust in West Australia and from 1972–77 was managing editor of the Aboriginal Publications Foundation. He was a member of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra and established a course for Aboriginal writers at Murdoch University. He was also a member of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council.

His first full-length play, *Kullark*, a documentary on the history of Aboriginals in West Australia, was first presented in 1979. It was followed by *The Dreamers* (1983), which toured Australia under the auspices of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Following the success of this tour, the Trust commissioned *No Sugar* for the 1985 Festival of Perth and *Honey Spot*, a children's play, for the 1985 Come Out Festival in Adelaide. In 1986 *No Sugar* was remounted by the Trust for a season at the World Theatre Festival in Vancouver.

For services to his people Jack Davis received the British Empire Medal in 1977; in 1985 he became a member of the Order of Australia, received the Sydney Myer Performing Arts Award, an Hon. D.Litt from Murdoch University and was elected Citizen of the Year in West Australia. In 1986 *No Sugar* was co-winner of the Australian Writers Guild award for the best stage play of the year.

Jack Davis died in March 2000.

# No Sugar

---

Jack Davis



CURRENCY PRESS, SYDNEY

## CURRENCY PLAYS

First published in 1986 by  
Currency Press Pty Ltd  
PO Box 2287  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
www.currency.com.au  
enquiries@currency.com.au

Reprinted 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002  
(twice), 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014 (twice), 2015,  
2016, 2019.

Copyright © Jack Davis, 1986

### COPYING FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES:

The Australian *Copyright Act* 1968 allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act. For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions please contact CAL, Level 15, 233 Castlereagh Street, Sydney NSW 2000; tel within Australia 1800 066 844 toll free; outside Australia +61 2 9394 7600; fax +61 2 9394 7601; email: info@copyright.com.au

### COPYING FOR OTHER PURPOSES:

Except as permitted under the Act, for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the above address.

Any performance or public reading of *No Sugar* is forbidden unless a licence has been received from the author or the author's agent. The purchase of this book in no way gives the purchaser the right to perform the play in public, whether by means of a staged production or a reading. All applications for public performance should be made to the author's estate, c/- Currency Press.

### NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA CIP DATA

Davis, Jack, 1917–2000  
No Sugar  
Bibliography  
ISBN 9780868191461  
1. Aborigines, Australian—Drama. 1.Title  
(Series: Currency Plays).  
A822.3

Cover: Dorothy Collard as Gran in the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust production. Photo by Tony McDonough  
Typeset by Emily Ralph for Currency Press.  
Printed by Ligare Book Printers, Riverwood.



Publication of this title was assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

# Contents

Foreword	
<i>Wendy Blacklock</i>	1
<b>NO SUGAR</b>	
Act One	9
Act Two	49
Act Three	74
Act Four	83
Translation of Songs	106
Notes and Glossary of Aboriginal Terms	107
Background Reading	111

## Foreword

The unique collaboration and friendship between Jack Davis and Andrew Ross dates back to 1979 when Andrew directed Jack's first play, *Kuflask*, which toured extensively in Western Australia for the Perth Playhouse Company. By 1982 the Swan River Stage Company had been formed and Jack Davis's second play *The Dreamers* was seen at that year's Festival of Perth.

The production was such an important step in the history of Aboriginal drama that the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust toured the Playhouse Company's re-production for seventeen weeks around Australia. For many of the cast of ten it was the first time out of their home State, but they adapted to venues as different as the Sydney Opera House and the historic Theatre Royal in Hobart.

It was important that more Australians, and indeed the world, had an opportunity to learn about Aboriginality through the words of this amazing storyteller; so in 1984 the AETT commissioned two more plays with the support of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Literature Board of the Australia Council. The result was *Honey Spot*, a play for children that deals with the issues of race relations and the conservation of our environment; and *No Sugar*. *No Sugar* tells the story of a family's fight for survival during the Depression years and was staged in a semi-promenade setting in which the audience followed the players on their journey through the action of the play.

The first season of *No Sugar*, directed by Andrew Ross and presented as the inaugural production of the newly-formed Western Australian Theatre Company in association with the Trust, was an exciting success at the 1985 Festival of Perth. The production was seen by the producer of the World Theatre Festival and this resulted in an invitation to represent Australia at Vancouver's Expo '86. Performing alongside the Beijing People's Art Theatre from China and the Kirov Ballet from the USSR, *No Sugar* proved a sell-out success and received a standing ovation from its audience. After a further season as guests of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa

the Company returned to Melbourne to promenade with an equally responsive audience around the grand old Fitzroy Town Hall.

*Wendy Blacklock*  
Director, Australian Content Department  
Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Sydney

*No Sugar* was first performed by the Playhouse Company in association with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust at the Maltings, North Perth, for the Festival of Perth on 18 February 1985 with the following cast:

JIMMY	Jim Holland
GRAN	Dorothy Collard
MILLY	Lynette Narkle
SAM	Morton Hansen
JOE	John Pell
CISSIE	Lynley Narkle
DAVID	Kelton Pell
FRANK BROWN	Shane McNamara
SERGEANT CARROL	Bill McCluskey
CONSTABLE KERR	Shane McNamara
JUSTICE OF PEACE	Dibbs Mather
MR A.O. NEVILLE	Dibbs Mather
MISS DUNN	Annie O'Shannessey
MR N.S. NEAL	Bill McCluskey
MATRON NEAL	Sally Sander
TOPSY	Charmaine Cole
TURVY	Brooke Michael
SISTER EILEEN	Annie O'Shannessy
MARY	Jedda Cole
BILLY	Ernie Dingo
BLUEY	Richard Walley
PETER	Colin Kickett
DANCER	Colin Kickett
MUSICIAN	Richard Walley

Directed by Andrew Ross

Designed by Steve Nolan

Choreography and music by Richard Walley

The play was then revised and remounted for participation in the Expo '86 World Theatre Festival in Vancouver. This version was first performed on 15 May 1986 at the West End Community Centre, Vancouver, with the following cast:

JIMMY	Ernie Dingo
GRAN	Dorothy Mallard
MILLY	Lynette Narkle
SAM	Morton Hansen
JOE	John Pell
CISSIE	Lynley Narkle
DAVID	Kelton Pell
FRANK BROWN	Shane McNamara
SERGEANT CARROL	Ben Gabriel
CONSTABLE KERR	Shane McNamara
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE	James Beattie
MR A.O. NEVILLE	James Beattie
MISS DUNN	Annie O'Shannessy
MR N.S. NEAL	Ben Gabriel
MATRON NEAL	Doreen Warburton
TOPSY	Charmaine Cole
SISTER EILEEN	Annie O'Shannessy
MARY	Jedda Cole
BILLY	Jack Davis
BLUEY	Richard Walley

Directed by Andrew Ross

Designed by Steve Nolan

Choreography and music by Richard Walley



## CHARACTERS

JIMMY MUNDAY

GRAN MUNDAY, Jimmy's mother

MILLY MILLIMURRA, Jimmy's sister

SAM MILLIMURRA, Milly's husband

JOE MILLIMURRA, their eldest son

CASSIE MILLIMURRA, their daughter

DAVID MILLIMURRA, their younger son

FRANK BROWN, an unemployed father

SERGEANT CARROL, sergeant of police at Northam

CONSTABLE KERR, of the Northam Police

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, a Northam cocky father

AUBER OCTAVIUS NEVILLE, Chief Protector of Aboriginies

MISS DUNN, his secretary

MR N.S. NEAL, Superintendent of the Moore River Settlement

MATRON NEAL, (*Koodjie*) his wife, matron in charge of the  
Settlement hospital

TOPSY, a Settlement girl, assisting matron

SISTER EILEEN, a missionary

MARY DARGURRU, a young girl from the Kimberly region

BILLY KIMBERLY, a black tracker

BLUEY, a black tracker

## SETTING

The play is designed for a dispersed setting on an open stage. On one side is the Avon Valley town of Northam, including the Police Station with two cells, a main street and the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve. Also on this side should be the office, in Murray Street, Perth, of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, with an entrance front and rear for whites and blacks respectively. The scene on the other side is the Moore River Native Settlement, near Mogumber in the Victoria Plains district. The areas include the Superintendent's office, the Millimurra tent and camp at Long Pool, a clearing in the pine plantation and a dais and flagpole. Other parts of the stage serve as an area by the railway line at Moolumbeene and a meeting room of the Western Australian Historical Society.

## ACT ONE, NORTHAM

---

### SCENE ONE

*Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, Northam, morning, 1929. SAM MILLIMURRA prepares mugs of tea, lacing them generously with sugar. He passes one to JOE who is absorbed in the special centenary edition of the Western Mail. GRAN and MILLY sort clothes for washing. DAVID and CISSIE play cricket with a home-made bat and ball. JIMMY sharpens an axe, bush fashion.*

DAVID: Bowl overarm!

CISSIE: I can't.

DAVID: Well, try.

*She does, clumsily. JOE bashes the paper into shape and reads aloud falteringly. His father, SAM, listens with great interest.*

JOE: 'The— blood— was stirred as if by a trumpet... by the historical...

*CISSIE bowls again. DAVID bashes the ball out of sight.*

DAVID: *Woolah!* Don Bradman.

*DAVID and CISSIE scamper after the ball.*

JOE:... Headed by a tableau...

MILLY: David, where you goin'? Gimme that shirt, it's filthy.

*DAVID removes it and inspects it but continues after the ball. He and CISSIE exit.*

JOE:... Commemorating the pioneers whose lives...

GRAN: [*to JIMMY*] James, you put that bucket a' water on?

JIMMY: Yeah, Mum, boilin' and waitin' for you by now.

JOE:... Were a steadfast performance of duty in the face of difficulty and danger. With them was a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries... carrying Aborigines.

*They all stop what they are doing and listen.*

*Aborigines, incong... incongruously...*

SAM: Come on.

JOE: All right! ‘... Dancing... to a brass band.’

*SAM laughs.*

SAM: *Koorawoorung!* Nyoongahs corroboroein’ to a *wetjala*’s brass band!

JIMMY: Ah! That beats everythin’: stupid bloody blackfellas.

GRAN: Ay! You... *dawarra* you *mirri* up and get them clothes down the soak, go on!

*JIMMY gets up, but can’t resist the final word.*

JIMMY: You fellas, you know why them *wetjals* marchin’ down the street, eh? I’ll tell youse why. ’Cause them bastards took our country and them blackfellas dancin’ for ’em. Bastards!

*He nicks his finger with the axe and watches the blood drip to the ground. GRAN gives him a piece of cloth for it.*

MILLY: Don’t worry, if you woulda been there you woulda been right with ’em.

JIMMY: No bloody fear I wouldn’t have.

*He drives the axe savagely into a log.*

GRAN: Eh! Now you take them clothes down the soak, you ’ear me?

*JIMMY reluctantly obeys, DAVID and CISSIE return with the bat but no ball. DAVID wears his shirt inside out.*

DAVID: You’re the fielder; you’re supposed to chase it.

CISSIE: Well, you shouldn’t hit it so hard.

DAVID: Yeah, well it’s lost now.

MILLY: Come on, you two, get to school.

*Reaching into a pocket.*

Here’s twopence, you can buy an apple each for lunch.

*She gives it to them.*

DAVID: Aw, can’t I have enough for a pie?

MILLY: It’s all the money I got.

CISSIE: Aw mum, Old Tony the ding always sells us little shrivelled ones and them *wetjala* kids big fat ones.

JOE: Here’s thrippence each.

*JOE flips them sixpence.*

DAVID: Aw, thanks, Brudge.

MILLY: Where's that shirt?

DAVID: [*tapping his chest*] 'Ere.

MILLY: Take it off.

DAVID: But it's clean on this side.

MILLY: Come 'ere.

*She tugs it off him and swaps it for a clean one.*

And you go straight down the soak after school. [*To SAM and JOE*]  
And you fellas, we got no meat for dinner or supper; you'll have to go out and get a couple of rabbits.

GRAN and MILLY exit. JOE continues to read to himself.

SAM: Ba, ba, what else?

JOE: 'The pag... page... page – ant pre – sented a picture of Western Australia's pre-sent condition of hopeful optimum – optimistic prosperity, and gave some idea of what men mean when they talk about the soul of the nation.'

SAM: Sounds like bullshit to me. Come on, let's get these rabbits.

JOE springs to his feet and walks off. Dogs bark.

Bring Ruffy and Moonie; don't bring Spring, he's too slow.

JOE returns with a dowak. He picks up the camp oven.

JOE: *Allewah wilbra, gnuny barminy barkiny.*

*He mimes throwing the doak at a rabbit and runs off after his father.*

## SCENE TWO

*A street in Northam, day. FRANK BROWN rolls a cigarette from stoopers. SERGEANT CARROL enters from the police station and approaches him.*

SERGEANT: Hey, just a moment you!

FRANK: Yes?

SERGEANT: How long you been in Northam?

FRANK: About a fortnight.

SERGEANT: Where are you camped?

FRANK: Down near the saleyards.

SERGEANT: By yourself?

FRANK: No, there's about ten other blokes.

SERGEANT: White blokes?

FRANK: What?

SERGEANT: Not abos or half-castes?

FRANK: No, why?

SERGEANT: Your name Francis Brown?

FRANK: Yes.

SERGEANT: You've been seen hangin' about with natives.

FRANK: It's not against the law.

SERGEANT: No, Mr Brown, it's not, but it is an offence to supply liquor to an Aboriginal native under the Aboriginal Act.

FRANK: Thanks for the information.

SERGEANT: Oh I've got plenty of information, mate. Last Friday, James Munday, a native, took a bundle of fox scalps to the Shire Office and collected a bounty of three pounds.

FRANK: Very interesting. And?

SERGEANT: And, on Friday night he was apprehended drunk in Bernard Park after you were seen purchasing two bottles of port wine in the Shamrock Hotel.

FRANK: I'm a wine connoisseur.

SERGEANT: [*intimately*] Listen, mate, don't try being smart. This time I sent Munday back to his camp with a warning; next time I'll nail him and the bloke that buys wine for him. The last bloke I nabbed for supplying is doing three months hard labour in Fremantle.

FRANK: Thanks for the tip.

SERGEANT: Why don't you think about movin' on?

FRANK: Where to? I been on the road already for six months. Kondinin, Merredin, Kalgoorlie: no work. Headed up the Murchison, Mullewa, Northampton: nothing. I got a wife and two kids staying with her parents in Leederville. I can't even raise a train fare to Perth to go and see them.

*The SERGEANT takes out a packet of cigarettes and gives a couple to FRANK.*

SERGEANT: Look, mate, I understand; I hear it every day a' the week, but I got a job to do, so don't forget what I said.

FRANK: Thanks.

SERGEANT: Natives best left to keep to themselves.

FRANK: I was only tryin' to do—

SERGEANT: [*interrupting*] You might think your doin' 'em a good turn, but you're not. Take it from me, I been dealin' with 'em for years. I got nothin' against 'em, but I know exactly what they're like.

*FRANK carefully puts the cigarettes away as the SERGEANT enters the police station. MISS DUNN enters an office with a sign displayed, reading 'Government of Western Australia, Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife and Aborigines'. There are two desks, each with a telephone. She goes immediately to one, takes a note from her handbag and dials. FRANK exits. The SERGEANT settles behind his desk and busies himself.*

MISS DUNN: [*into the receiver*] Hell... Hello, good morning. Is that the West? Yes, thankyou... I'd like to place an advertisement, 'Wanted to Sell'.

*NEVILLE enters. He takes some files from his briefcase and settles down at his desk with the West Australian.*

NEVILLE: Good Morning, Miss Dunn.

MISS DUNN: [*into the receiver*] A motorcycle. [*To NEVILLE*] Good morning, Mr Neville. I'm sorry, it's a personal... [*into the receiver*] sorry. Twelve pounds, in, Douglas, 1923 Model, one forty-eight Stirling Street, Highgate... Please. [*To NEVILLE*] Sorry, Mr Neville, it's a personal call... [*Into the receiver*] Thankyou... Dunn... Miss E.

NEVILLE: I didn't know you were a motorcyclist.

MISS DUNN: No, it's my brother's. He's down the South West, looking for work, and his wife and children are with me.

NEVILLE: Couldn't find anything in Perth.

MISS DUNN: No, and not for want of trying. He eventually got work selling wirelesses. Door to door.

NEVILLE: Doesn't sound very suitable.

MISS DUNN: He only sold one in three weeks, didn't even cover the cost of the petrol.

NEVILLE: Well, he's certainly not on his own. Unemployment's hit thirty per cent according to the *West*.

MISS DUNN: There's some mail for you, and an urgent internal one from the Minister's Office and one from the Northam Town Clerk.

NEVILLE: Goodness me, the *West*'s scraping the barrel for a bit of good news. Results of the 'Most Economical Housewife Contest'... What next?... I'm afraid you're not the lucky winner, Miss Dunn.

*He shows her the paper.*

MISS DUNN: 'Mrs Hill of Greenmount on two pounds five shillings a week... ' Rent, seven shillings; light, one and threepence.

MISS DUNN *reads to herself.*

NEVILLE: She's ingenious, alright: makes tap washers out of old car tyres.

MISS DUNN: Yes, and slippers from her husband's old felt hats.

NEVILLE *picks up the mail and starts to read it.*

NEVILLE: Perhaps the West could run a contest for the most frugal civil servant... Could you get me Sergeant Carrol in Northam on the line, please?

*He gets out files and makes notes while MISS DUNN dials the exchange.*

MISS DUNN: Trunks please... Hello... Northam nine please... Yes, BM nine-seven-oh-seven... Thankyou operator.

*She hangs up.*

NEVILLE: Can you take down a note for the Minister, please?

*He shuffles through the files and documents.*

My dear Minister, herewith the information requested. I know I don't need to remind your good self of the extreme budgetry constraints under which this Department operates. Item one: the native weekly ration currently costs this Department two shillings and fourpence per week. Perhaps this bears comparison with the sustenance paid to white unemployed which I believe is seven shillings per week.

*The phone rings in the Northam Police Station. SERGEANT CARROL answers it.*

SERGEANT: Hello, Northam Police Station. Thanks, Sybil.

NEVILLE: Item two: off the cuff, the proposed budget cut of three thousand one hundred and thirty-four pounds could be met by discontinuing the supply of meat in native rations. Soap was