

# WALT ZING THE WILARRA

WRITTEN & COMPOSED BY DAVID MILROY



Currency Press  
Sydney



## CURRENCY PLAYS

First published in 2011  
by Currency Press Pty Ltd,  
PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia  
enquiries@currency.com.au  
www.currency.com.au  
in association with  
Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, Perth.

Copyright © David Milroy, 2011.

Reprinted in 2017, 2018

### COPYING FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (Act) 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 that educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency (CA) under the Act.

For details of the CA licence for educational institutions contact CA, 11/66 Goulburn 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 enquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Any performance or public reading of *Waltzing the Wilarra* 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 addressed to Paul MacPhail, 5 Serissa Lane, Stirling, WA, 6021, Australia; phone: 61 8 9440 0596; email: pcmacp@mac.com

### NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA CIP DATA

Author: Milroy, David.  
Title: Waltzing the Wilarra / David Milroy.  
ISBN: 9780868199092 (pbk.)  
Dewey Number: A822.4

Typeset by Dean Nottle for Currency Press.

Printed by Fineline Print + Copy Services, St Peters.

Cover design by Marie Triscari. Photograph by Eva Fernandez.

Front cover shows Irma Woods, Ernie Dingo and Trevor Jamieson.

# Contents

---

WALTZING THE WILARRA	
Act One	1
Act Two	34

---

*Waltzing the Wilarra* was first produced by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company at Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, on 5 February 2011 with the following cast:

OLD TOSS	Ernie Dingo
YOUNG HARRY	Jessica Clarke
MR MACK	Kelton Pell
MRS CRAY	Irma Woods
ELSA	Ursula Yovich
CHARLIE	Trevor Jamieson
JACK	Tim Solly
FAY	Alexandra Jones
ATHENA	Jessica Clarke

Director, Wesley Enoch

Music Director, Wayne Freer

Dramaturg, Sally Richardson

Set Designer, Jacob Nash

Costume Designer, Isaac Lummis

Lighting Designer, Trent Suidgeest

Sound Designer, Kingsley Reeve

Choreographer, Claudia Alessi

Musicians, Ric Eastman, Wayne Freer, David Milroy, Lucky Oceans,  
Bob Patient

## CHARACTERS

### OLD TOSS / SANDY BARR / DETECTIVE

Old Toss is a self-appointed elderly Aboriginal statesman and the purveyor of tainted wisdom to his sidekick Young Harry. He is adept in colloquialisms that are usually a few crumbs short of a biscuit.

### MR MACK

Mr Mack is the Aboriginal Master of ceremonies at the club. He demands respect from the patrons and keeps an eye out for any troublemakers. He fancies himself as a bit of a comedian and a singer.

### CHARLIE RUNAWAY / OLD CHARLIE

Charlie is one of the main Aboriginal performers at the club and quite the eligible young bachelor. He takes pride in his appearance and makes the most of his second-hand clothes.

### MRS CRAY / SPIRIT MRS CRAY

Mrs Cray is an Aboriginal nanny and housemaid by day and club organiser by night. The club is the bright light in Mrs Cray's ordinary life.

### ELSA / OLD ELSA

Elsa is Mrs Cray's daughter and the headline act at the club. Her clothes are often made of curtains but she holds her own in anything she wears.

### JACK / SPIRIT JACK

Jack is a white returned soldier. He is married to Elsa and suffers from post-traumatic stress.

### FAY GRIVER / OLD FAY

Fay is a young white woman from a well-to-do family. Mrs Cray is her Nanny.

### ATHENA / YOUNG HARRY / LEVINIA TEMPLETON

Athena is the granddaughter of Fay and has an interest in contemporary political movements and has taken on the reconciliation mantle.

This book went to press before the end of rehearsals, and may differ from the play as performed.

## ACT ONE

---

*Lighting effects of water, stars and the Wilarra moon overhead.*

OLD CHARLIE *stands centre stage.*

*Musical underscore: 'Waltzing the Wilarra'.*

OLD CHARLIE: I stood with my mother, beneath the paperbarks, at the edge of the Marble Bar pool. The night was so still, the stars floated on the water. She told me, 'Walk up to your chest and don't make any noise'. I could hear voices echoing along the edge of the pool. I looked across the water and the stars and the Wilarra moon shone so brightly, I couldn't tell where the night sky ended and the pool begun. I was standing in the universe... in the womb... of my new mother.

*Old-style red curtains are drawn across the stage in front of OLD CHARLIE.*

*A marching band enters.*

*Two vaudeville tramps dance behind the band.*

*The band exits behind the curtain.*

YOUNG HARRY *goes to follow but is stopped by OLD TOSS.*

OLD TOSS: Hold your corsets, Young Harry!

YOUNG HARRY: Fair whip of the crack, Old Toss! What's the go?

OLD TOSS: It's after six o'clock!

YOUNG HARRY: That's nothing to gum ya flaps about!

OLD TOSS: When the hands are lined up, I can't cross the Caucasian Chalk Circle. So cop that, Young Harry!

YOUNG HARRY: The Caucasian Chalk Circle?

OLD TOSS: And unless I'm mistaken I sees no Cork or Asian in me.

YOUNG HARRY: Who's responsible for this travellers' tea, Old Toss?!

OLD TOSS: The Royal Order of the Boot!

YOUNG HARRY: The Royal Order of the Boot?

YOUNG HARRY *stands to attention and blows a fanfare on a toy trumpet.* OLD TOSS *pulls out a scroll.*

OLD TOSS: [*reading*] ‘Therefore, thereby and thus far, the city of Perth has been declared a prohibited area under Section Thirty-Nine of the Aborigines Act of 1905.’ So cop that, Young Harry!

YOUNG HARRY: Sez who, Old Toss?

OLD TOSS: Why, Mr Neville of course!

YOUNG HARRY: Well, flog me chops! Who’s he?

OLD TOSS: The King made him Protector of Aborigines from white people, and white people from Aborigines! We all need protecting around here, Young Harry.

YOUNG HARRY: God save the King!

YOUNG HARRY *blows a fanfare.*

OLD TOSS: [*reading*] ‘By the Royal Order of the Boot, therefore, thereby and thus far, Aborigines found loitering, littering, laughing, leaping or lolly-popping will be accosted and arrested if they cannot explain their presence in the city.’

YOUNG HARRY: Flatten me feet and call me a duck!

OLD TOSS: Quack! Quack! Young Harry! I has to be out of the city by six o’clock and look out if I get caught.

YOUNG HARRY: Don’t worry, Old Toss. I’m white so you can be my black shadow.

OLD TOSS: Fair suck of the old sovereign, Young Harry! You can’t mix black and white.

YOUNG HARRY: Hmmm! Sounds like a bit of a grey area to me.

OLD TOSS: We’d be arrested for consorting!

YOUNG HARRY: By my gummy mud boots! We’s can’t go courting if there’s no resorting to consorting.

OLD TOSS: Cop this, Young Harry. There’s one place we can go.

YOUNG HARRY: Spill the baked beans on me, Old Toss?

*The band’s big drum can be heard from offstage.*

OLD TOSS: Can you hear that, Young Harry?

YOUNG HARRY: It’s rattling the bales off me wickets!

OLD TOSS: You in for a squiz, Young Harry?

YOUNG HARRY: If you’re in for a penny, I’m in for a throo-pence!

*The curtain opens to reveal the club. There are a few chairs and a table with an urn for tea and biscuits. Centre stage is the band.*

OLD TOSS: People pour into city from country towns and camps along the

railway. They get here *any* way they can. On the top of wheat trains, on the back of trucks, even on the back of someone else's back.

YOUNG HARRY: I detect a glimmer in ya Zimmer, Old Toss!

OLD TOSS: *Luna azure!* Young Harry! The proverbial blue moon, and once in a blue moon we's gets to have some fun!

MR MACK *moves to the microphone and sings.*

'LITTLE BIRDY'

MR MACK: [*sung*]

Choo! Choo! Sugar, I have to confess,  
There's a bird on my shoulder that's building a nest.  
Perch, little birdie, on top of my head,  
Singing in the morning till I get out of bed.  
But when the night-time comes,  
Me and little birdie like to have a little fun.

CHORUS:

The stage is set for a party tonight,  
The stage is set for a party tonight,  
The stage is set for a party tonight,  
Look to the left,  
Look to the right,  
The stage is set for a party tonight.

MR MACK:

Little birdy doing what a birdy gotta do,  
*Djitty djitty* wagging all his tail feathers too,  
*Wardung* in the corner as the *coolbardi* sings,  
Every birdy dancing and a shaking their wings.

*Repeat chorus.*

Welcome! Welcome and welcome! We have a fine line-up of—

MRS CRAY *enters.*

MRS CRAY: Excuse me, Mr Mack!

MR MACK: Yes, Mrs Cray.

MRS CRAY: I'm not happy!

MR MACK: And why not?

MRS CRAY: The girls can't tell who the single mans are?



MR MACK: Well, that's easy. They're the ones that are still smiling!

[*Sung*] Every little birdie needs another birdie too,  
 One little birdie in a nest won't do,  
 Two little birdies dancin' on the wall,  
 Little birdies jigger bugging, havin' a ball.  
 And when that night-time comes,  
 Me and little birdie like to have a little fun.

*Repeat chorus.*

*The song ends.*

*Patrons clap and whistle.*

Thank you! Thank you! And thank you! Tonight we have a fine line-up of performers accompanied by none other than Mr Wallace and the Fabulous Swing Quartet.

*Drum roll.*

*Patrons clap and whistle.*

MRS CRAY: We ask for a small donation to cover the cost of tea and biscuits, and for the enjoyment of others, please conduct yourself in a sober and orderly manner.

MR MACK: That means no getting pissed or fighting! And now, ladies and gentlemen, how about a big hand for Charlie Runaway and... the singer you've all come to see... Elsa Hammond!

*Musical intro: 'I've Got Eyes'*

*ELSA and CHARLIE sing.*

**'I'VE GOT EYES'**

ELSA & CHARLIE: [*sung*]

I've got eyes for someone,  
 I've got eyes for no-one,  
 Except the man with the spurs,  
 Buckle, hat and curls,  
 A cowgirl in love,  
 I've got a coat and a flash hat,  
 This country girl don't care about that,  
 I want the man with the spurs,

Buckle, hat and curls,  
A cowgirl in love.

CHORUS:

We can go driving in my new car,  
I'd rather be camping beneath the stars,  
We can park and listen to the radio,  
I'd rather be riding in a rodeo.

*Repeat verse.*

*Instrumental.*

*Repeat chorus.*

*Repeat verse.*

JACK enters.

*He staggers past the dancers and slumps at the front of the stage.*

*The song ends.*

*Patrons clap.*

JACK: I got a song!

MR MACK: How about a big hand for Elsa Hammond! What a star! And, Charlie, you'd better buy a horse, you might have more luck with the ladies.

JACK: Are you deaf or something!

MR MACK: That's right, everybody! You heard Mrs Cray, a *sober* and *orderly* manner!

JACK: I wanna sing a song!

MR MACK: And good for you, Jack. Put your name on the performers' list at the side of the stage. And now, ladies and—

JACK: Bugger the list!

MR MACK: Not now!

JACK *sings*.

'DESERT RATS'

JACK: [*sung*]

In one hand we held a rifle,  
With the enemy at our gates,  
In the other was a shovel,  
To bury all our mates.

*Patrons murmur.*

MR MACK: Settle down! Settle down!

JACK: [*sung*]

The cowards sat at home,  
With white feathers in their hats,  
While we starved and fought in Tobruk,  
God save the Desert Rats!

*Patrons clap politely.*

MR MACK: Thank you, Jack, for that heartfelt song.

*ELSA stands with JACK.*

JACK: I wanna go home.

ELSA: Not yet, Jack, let's have a bit of fun!

JACK: We can have fun at home!

ELSA: Tonight's our special night.

JACK: Then let's spend it by ourselves!

MR MACK: Great song, Elsa. You're certainly pulling a crowd.

ELSA: Thank you, Mr Mack.

MR MACK: I was thinking next week you and Charlie could do an extra—

JACK: Ya can find someone else, she's taking a break!

MR MACK: Is everything okay?

ELSA: It's our wedding anniversary.

MR MACK: Been celebrating, hey Jack?

JACK: Too right!

MR MACK: What's in the bottle?

ELSA: Medication.

MR MACK: Ya shouldn't mix it with beer.

JACK: I'm mixing it with whiskey!

ELSA: He's only joking.

MR MACK: Just remember, the police are keeping an eye on this place.

JACK: Hey, I'm not a blackfella, I can drink where I want!

MR MACK: Not here you can't, and the next time you wanna sing, put  
your name on the list, happy anniversary.

*MR MACK leaves.*

JACK: Prick!

ELSA: No, Jack! He's doing a good job running the club.