

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Yungaburra Road

by Noëlle Janaczewska

EXTRACT

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Yungaburra Rd requires four female actor/singers (RITA DA COSTA, FRANCESCA, NINA, CASS) and two male actor/singers (ED, MARTINHO).

RITA DA COSTA

Rita da Costa is a Portuguese woman from Madeira, in her forties or early fifties. Her husband was injured in an industrial accident a few years after their arrival in Australia. Rita then had to turn to the skills she had to earn the family living - cooking and singing. She now runs the Cafe Mundo in Yungaburra Road. There she offers 'bacalhau a gomes de sa', 'doces de ovos', conversation, a sympathetic ear and song - especially the 'fado' of her native Portuguese.

ED

Ed is about fifteen - a member of Yungaburra Road's 'Double D H Gang' - a loose collection of young people who hang out in the local Timezone (when they've got money) and at the railway station (when they haven't). Ed helps out after school in the Cafe Mundo, to earn money to pay for his boxing training.

FRANCESCA

A stylish woman in her thirties. A high school teacher by day and an out-and-about-town lesbian by night. At school, she is cautious and conceals her sexuality. After hours however, it's a different story as she visits bars and makes no secret of her inclination. Francesca lives in flat above a real estate agent on Yungaburra Road.

MARTINHO

A young man in his mid to late twenties from Dili in East Timor. He has been in Australia for a number of years, and quite recently made a return visit to his homeland. His father and eldest brother were both killed in the late 1970s when Martinho was a young child. Martinho speaks Tetun and Portuguese, and is often to be found in the office of the East Timorese organisation he's associated with, above the Cafe Mundo in Yungaburra Road. Rita da Costa, a fellow Portuguese speaker, is helping Martinho learn English.

CASS

Cass is a third generation woman of Eastern European descent in her late twenties. She is married to one of Rita da Costa's sons, and they have a baby daughter. Cass works part-time in a solicitor's office on Yungaburra Road, while her mother, Caroline, a freelance journalist who works from home, looks after her young daughter. Cass's mother and Rita da Costa are old friends.

NINA

A Bosnian woman in her late twenties, recently arrived in Australia with her surviving son. Her husband 'disappeared' early in the conflict, and nothing has been heard of him since. During an attack on Sarajevo, Nina's elder son was shot by a soldier. Later, she herself was badly burnt and spent time in hospital. After leaving hospital, she found her flat destroyed and had to struggle to survive. Had to try to imagine a future, and lay to rest her fantasies of revenge against the soldier who killed her son.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Husband (Rita's)

Kenny Spinoza

DSS Officer

Andrzej

Brother (Martinho's)

Businessman

Rico (Francesca's friend)

Attacker

Supervisor

Sister (Martinho's)

Mrs. York

Cully

Guardian Bagel

These characters to be allocated as director choses.

SCENE ONE

*Welcome all to the Cafe Mundo
 A little piece of Portugal
 In Sydney's west
 Rita da Costa here to greet you
 Come in, sit down
 What can I get you?
 Coffee perhaps?
 The best on Yungaburra Road
 Something to eat too?
 Favas guisadas com paio e chourico
 Caldo verde or saltfish stew?*

RITA DA COSTA It rushes at me sometimes
 This sense of home:
 The Portuguese island of Madeira/
 Nearer almost to Africa than Europe.
 I see the rusty harbour
 Smell air scaled like silver sardines
 And glimpse flaking whitewashed houses
 Before they fade into English words,
 And the rise and shine/ and grime/
 Of Yungaburra Road.

It's mornings when the streets
 And Atlantic blue,
 Cicadas frantic as my children's feet
 Jumping raindrop coins,/
 Swell behind my eyes to join/
 With the sounds and tastes of Sydney;
 Flaming canna lilies and wild ginger/
 Merge with cars and the late for work
 With traffic lights
 And the soprano-wail of a radio singer./

Years ago, I stepped into Sydney
 And a new-brick housing estate
 Between the caravan park
 And the sigh of the

ALL High/ high/ highway/
(The following sound mimics cars speeding past, and the actors' heads turn back and forth like watching a tennis game.)
 Shup/ shup/ shup/

RITA DA COSTA All day/ every day/ lonely days/

- Kids off to school, husband
- HUSBAND Out at work
- RITA DA COSTA No one to talk to/
A full hour walk to/
The nearest shops.
Hours rolling ahead of me
Like a view to the hills.
Sometimes my sister
Collects me in her new car
Takes me into the city/
To David Jones/ - oh so pretty/
Where our fantasies foam/
Like the ice-cream sodas
We drink in a bistro
All hard black chairs and chrome./
- HUSBAND Don't worry Rita -
Things get better soon
- ALL (*Cars speeding past as before.*)
Shup/ shup/ shup/
- RITA DA COSTA My husband works late shifts
In a factory
Beside a scummy slug of a river.
It isn't what we'd hoped, but -
- HUSBAND It's only for a while
'Til something better turns up.
- RITA DA COSTA But the months fall into years
And my husband is still
At the same factory -
- ALL (*Cars speeding past as before.*)
Shup/ shup/ shup/
- HUSBAND You worry too much, Rita
Something will come along soon.

*Who was I then?
From an island of sun and cobblestone
Of terrace vineyards and fragrant orange groves.
Arched bridges and palm fronds tilting.
Buying fish and fruit from markets
Pungent with pepper and cinnamon*

Who was I then?

SCENE TWO

RITA DA COSTA How d'you get that cut
Over your eye, Ed?

ED Boxing.

RITA DA COSTA Boxing!

ED Yeah. What about it?

RITA DA COSTA It's so brutal -

ED No more that footy.
I go down the ring/
Swing/ a few punches/
Sawdust and sinew/
And I'm someone
To be reckoned with;
Respected when I raise my fists.

RITA DA COSTA That's not sport

ED Is so.

KENNY SPINOZA Thousands of people
Enjoy a good prize-fight
Live, or later - on the telly.

ED When I was a real little kid
I was kind of weedy, you know
Skinny and small/
'fraid of a brawl/
Got picked on by others
Bullied and beaten up.
At school,
Teachers didn't want to know/
Boys will be boys/ will be macho./
I wanted Mum to let me stay home
But Dad stepped in
Took me along to meet his mate
Kenny Spinoza

- KENNY SPINOZA I'll teach you
How to fight back
Make you firm of foot
And flint of fist.
- RITA DA COSTA There are other ways
To stick up for yourself
- ED Yeah, but I like boxing
And I'm good at it
Kenny Spinoza says:
- KENNY SPINOZA There's megabucks in boxing
Ed, my lad
If you don't mind the odd knock -
- RITA DA COSTA But you go into the ring
Aiming to hurt someone
- KENNY SPINOZA Keeps them off the streets
- RITA DA COSTA What's wrong with them
Being on the streets?
- KENNY SPINOZA Directs their aggression
Into controlled channels
- ED It's a good career
- KENNY SPINOZA Every boxer who enters the ring
Knows the odds
Has regular medical check-ups
- ED We are sons of fathers
With callused hands
Who labour early mornings
In factories;
Stand in water-logged holes
And throw up shovel-loads of clay.
- RITA DA COSTA But the risks, Ed ...
- ED We are sons of fathers
Who frown
When faced with English words.
- RITA DA COSTA *(The following list is muttered under ED's speech - an undercurrent rather than dialogue.)*

Injury ...

ED We are sons of fathers
Cut off from their land.

RITA DA COSTA Fractures ...

ED We are sons of fathers
Who toil twelve hours a day
To fall home ragged with fatigue

RITA DA COSTA Concussion ...

ED Into fast-lane fantasies
Of Ferraris and harbour views.

RITA DA COSTA Brain damage ...

ED We are the sons of fathers
Who want more for their sons

KENNY SPINOZA Fighting's natural
Adds zest and spice/
Life would be dull
All peace and sweetie-pie nice./

RITA DA COSTA But can't we disagree and argue
Compete and protest
Without resort to
Physical attack?

ED Smack/ thwack/
Wisecrack/
Words can be weapons too, you know.

ED/CASS Thwack/

SCENE THREE

CASS Thwack/ The flyscreen door
Smacks/ shut.
I'm back in my mother's house
The street I grew up in
About to become a mother myself.
There's a rip in the mesh of the screen