

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The World Comes to Ingham

by John De Feu

EXTRACT

© 1998 John De Feu



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

SERENA You stayed for the sugar cane. There was something to build then. It's done now - there's nothing much for us to add.

MARIA You're soft, you people. We are the soul of this town. So much happened and we were there through it all. 1865 your grandmother was born, Serena. There was nobody here before that.

SERENA Mum, that's not true. What about ... ?

MARIA Nobody.

MARIA AND SERENA EXIT IN DARKNESS.

Act 1 Sc 2

ABORIGINAL GROUP TELLS A LOCAL DREAMTIME STORY IN DANCE.

Act 1 Sc 3

FOUR ABORIGINAL MEN SIT DOWNSTAGE ON THE FLOOR. ONE IS PAINTING. THE OTHER THREE, MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE, ARE TALKING ABOUT THE PAINTING, GIVING ADVICE, CORRECTING THINGS ETC - ALL OF WHICH THE PAINTER, JOHN, IGNORES. UPSTAGE THERE IS A SHADOW SCREEN. ACROSS IT WE SEE SILHOUETTES OF A GROUP OF MEN, LOADED DOWN, TRUDGING WEARILY FROM ONE SIDE TO THE OTHER. MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE SEE THEM AS IF THEY ARE PASSING ACROSS THE AUDITORIUM. THEY WATCH THE PROCESSION ALL THE WAY ACROSS IN AMAZED SILENCE.

MATTHEW Did you see what I just saw?

MARK Well, I saw something.

LUKE Me too

JOHN I didn't.

THEY ALL LOOK AT HIM.

MATTHEW What do you mean you didn't see anything?

MARK How come you didn't see?

MATTHEW They were large as life.

JOHN I didn't look.

HE REALISES THE OTHERS ARE STARING AT HIM

JOHN I was painting this picture.

MATTHEW You can paint your picture any damn time - this was weird.

MARK Uneearthly.

MATTHEW It was unnatural.

MARK And you didn't even look up.

JOHN I smelt them though.

MATTHEW And you still didn't look up.

JOHN I reckon if a bunch of blokes smell that bad they're not going to look much better.

MATTHEW I reckon you're crazier than they are.

LUKE He's got a point though.

MATTHEW What point?

LUKE They smelled pretty bad.

MARK You don't always smell so good yourself.

JOHN They got the wrong clothes for this kind of place.

MATTHEW How would you know? You didn't even look at them.

JOHN You can hear all this heavy stuff dragging through the bushes. They make a real mess. They break everything up where they walk.

MATTHEW You still should have looked at them.

JOHN I'll look at them when they come back - maybe I'll put them in my picture.

THE OTHERS ALL STARE AT HIM AGAIN

MARK Come back? What do you mean - come back?

LUKE You think they're coming back?

JOHN They broke bushes down. They made a big path. They filled in gullies.

MATTHEW Crap! I've been here all my life and there's not been anything like them come by. They don't belong here. My father never saw anything like them.

MARK They've gone down there - why would they come back again?

LUKE Maybe they went the wrong way. It can happen.

MATTHEW They're not coming back! Either they're spirits, in which case the elders need to decide if they're good or bad, or they're not, in which case they're dead meat.

MARK Yeah. See if anyone else is so polite about letting them pass through without permission.

LUKE Pretty weird to look at though.

MARK Spirits, I reckon. No human could be born that colour and survive.

AT THIS STAGE PETER COMES IN FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE. HE IS AN ELDER.

PETER Hey, you guys. I heard you saw something peculiar.

MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE GO TALK TO HIM. JOHN CONTINUES PAINTING.

LUKE Yeah, we did! We were just sitting here ...

PETER You should tell me and the other elders about it straight away - not go spreading panic all round the place. People are really upset.

PETER Sounds like someone from a long way away; maybe going somewhere to visit relatives. Got a few folks maybe from up the coast to show them the way.

MATTHEW They didn't ask permission to cross over here.

MARK And what do we do if they come back?

PETER Well, maybe we'll have a quiet word - tell them to walk more carefully and not to disturb our places. And we'll let them know they should ask before they come across here. We'll tell the black guys to lead them some other way - they'll understand that.

JOHN They don't follow the black guys.

MATTHEW They must do otherwise how would they know where to get food.

JOHN They've brought their own.

PETER You mean they're walking through an area full of nice things to eat and the people who know where they're going are following the people who don't and on top of that they're carting all their own food with them - in the rainy season?

JOHN Yeah

PETER Listen. If they come back just let them pass. Give them a hand. They're obviously crazy. They probably won't survive.

JOHN What happens if they do?

PETER If they do, good on 'em.

JOHN Put it down and get out of here. You're trespassing.

DALRYMPLE You wait 'til you see what we make of this country.

THE REMAINDER OF THIS SPEECH IS SAID SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH JOHN'S SPEECH

There'll be roads here soon. You'll be able to get from one place to another easily - you'll have wheels to help you go. There'll be electricity so you can see in the dark to read by - and you'll be able to read because we'll build schools, churches; courts so there'll be justice for everyone. You'll be able to speak to people wherever you want without even leaving home. You'll shop in supermarkets - with money to burn. This place will be one of the great success stories. People will come from all over the world to this valley. To live. To work. To make good, honest profits and a loving community. And you'll be there to meet them - the first immigrants. You'll be respected - ordinary people everywhere will respect you as the ones who lived here first. Only just for now - don't get in the way. We've got work to do.

JOHN You're trespassing and trampling on everything we are. We've lived here forever - it's our home. We've eaten and drunk this land and we eat and drink only that. What do we eat if you change it? Where are we supposed to find another land that fits our throats? This country will not forgive what you've done. If you take away the river, where will the water go that rushes down from the hills? It will flood your town and wash it into the sea. Can't you see you're killing us. The land is us. It's who we are - who our ancestors were right back to when the hills were made. By what right do you take it? By what right do you change it? By what right do you desecrate our land and tell us how we must live. At least leave us our dignity and our pride. At least share with us!

DALRYMPLE TRIES TO MOVE OFF TOWARDS THE END OF THE SIMULTANEOUS SPEECHES. HE IS STILL CARRYING THE PAINTING. JOHN FINISHES WHAT HE IS SAYING AND GOES TO STOP HIM.

DALRYMPLE Don't get in the way!

HE SHOOTS JOHN WITH A PISTOL. JOHN STAGGERS LOOKING SHOCKED THEN FALLS. HE IS WOUNDED BUT NOT BADLY. HE STARES AT DALRYMPLE AND HIS PISTOL.

JOHN Shit. What a foul trick - I didn't even get near him.

DALRYMPLE Sorry about that, Mate, but I did warn you.

JOHN We don't stand a chance, do we?

DALRYMPLE Come on, you'll live. We'll patch you up. If you can learn to paint properly you could probably make a reasonable living in time.

HE HELPS JOHN UP AND SUPPORTS HIM OFF THE STAGE. HE KEEPS THE PAINTING.

Act 1 Sc 4

Music and tabs. Whole company.

Song : Ingham Dawn

Dalrymple sailed to Cardwell
To see what it was worth
Then he came across the mountains
To the sweetest place on earth
Then he looked out on the river
He looked across the plain
He thought could this be God's own land?
And the answer fell as rain

chorus

Ingham dawn
 The world comes to Ingham
 People come and go
 Like the sun rises from the ocean
 To make the canefields grow

Ingham dawn
 The world comes to Ingham
 From far and wide, from everywhere
 To build a sweeter future
 And a town for us to share

Sugar cane grew tall and lovely
 Where the Herbert River sings
 So mills were built at Gairloch
 Hamleigh, Bemerside and Ings
 The Neames they built Macknade
 Upon a very pretty spot
 But it took the CSR to build
 The biggest of the lot

It wasn't always easy
 To earn a simple quid
 If the flooding didn't get you
 Then the fever usually did
 There were crocs and rats and snakebites
 The cyclones weren't a joke
 Then the cane itself went rusty
 And the planters all went broke

Chorus

The world it came to Ingham
 Despite its little faults
 The Italians and the Spanish
 The Chinese and the Balts
 They came from every country
 Every colour, creed and race
 They stayed to live and work
 And make the world a sweeter place

Chorus

**AT THE END OF THE SONG THE COMPANY DISPERSES LEAVING ONLY
 THE 'VALLEY OF LAGOONS' SCENE OPENERS. PEOPLE ARE SEATED
 AROUND A ROOM. THERE IS DANCING GOING ON IN THE CENTRE
 WHILE THE GENERALLY WELL-DRESSED GUESTS ARE ENJOYING**