

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Cockatoo Hall

by Nick Hughes

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS.

SUGATHA

Age 37. First came to the area when she finished her degree (Town planning). She lived on local communes for 5 years. During this period she had many lovers and her only Daughter: Jasmine. Sugatha never told Jasmine's father that she was pregnant. She took Jasmine with her when she went to Poona for a year (where she got her name). She also took Jasmine with her when she went O.S. ;to England where she worked as a model, waitress, shop assistant and Town Planner with the Selly Oak Council in Birmingham. Then toured to Greece and then returned to Sydney and spent 5 years working for Y.A.C.S. She is now a refugee from the Welfare Profession and has come back to the area and is looking to buy a house in town. She is temporarily minding a house on the "Limpid Pools" Multiple Occupancy for a friend. (Jasmine is now at a private girls school in Sydney paid for by Sugatha's parents - a successful engineer and his housewife who live in Killara).

JUNE

In her 60's. Her grandfather was one of the first timber getters in the area, working later as a bullock drover and later still as one of the early selectors of the area, clearing his block with an axe and a box of matches. Her father cleared more land in the same way and grew fruit and kept a few cows. She and her husband, Tom, (now dead) went into Dairying until the bulk handling regulations came in when they moved to beef cattle. She had four children. The three girls are interstate. When her father died, she and Tom took over the family farm. She just remembers the Depression and the very last of the bullock teams

DAVE

32. June's only son. Bit of a larrikin. Has tried several farming ventures - all failed. He's now back helping Mum on the farm. He married Penny in his early 20's and they have two kids (Susan, 10 and Amy, 8) Penny left and divorced him four years ago. He has been wary of emotional entanglements ever since. He tends to go directly at whatever he's doing, like a bull at a gate. He believes in action and has no time for intellectuals, hippies, bureaucrats or politicians.

IVOR MARSH

40's. Real Estate Agent. Has had several businesses: Import-Export(toys and novelties) Prides himself on being able to sell anyone anything. Used to make a speciality of buying up stock at bankruptcy auctions and flogging it until he got caught with several containers of defective yo-yos from Taiwan. Has been bankrupt himself three times. Came to the area from interstate three years ago and set up business. Joined Rotary. Has been setting up hobby-farm size plantations of trendy and exotic (and unsuitable) crops (guavas, durians etc) to sell to unsuspecting city folk. He has also been running a sideline of employing a couple of local lads to cultivate marijuana in the State Forests. He has talked June into letting him have a key to the hall by telling her that he's learning to play the trumpet and needs somewhere to practice where he won't disturb the neighbours. He stashes his crop in plastic bags in the ceiling of the hall. He sells the crop to a dealer in the city

STICKY PETE:

80's. Wizeded old descendant of the first selector of the area. President of the Cockatoo Astronomical Society. Has been on the Hall Committee for all but 7 of the last 35 years.

CUTHBERT:

80's. Slightly less wizeded traditional farmer. President of Cockatoo Hall Committee and has been for the last 5 years. Treasurer of the Cockatoo Astronomical Society

RICHARD:

Muso and chief organiser of the band: "Bright Starlight". Late 20's. Fresh faced. Marilyn's lover.

KENNY:

30's. Local who has grown up with Dave. Bowler with the Cockatoo Cricket Club. Dave has employed him from time to time on his various ventures. Bit of a dil.

MARILYN:

Just 20. Has just moved with Richard onto the M.O. "Limpid Pools" She believes in: communes, universal love, any "alternate" belief system: tarot, astrology, etc; and that all people are inherently good, that all government is inherently evil.

TWISTER:

A thug who works for the dealer in the city who buys Ivor's crop.

CASTING

There are seven male roles and three female roles. Depending on the musical abilities of the cast it may be helpful to have one or more musicians as well.

However, the following roles can be doubled:

DAVE & STICKY PETE (There is a quick change in and out of Sticky Pete at the beginning.)

RICHARD & KENNY (This actor also needs to have some musical ability.)

IVOR & CUTHBERT

It is also possible to double MARILYN & TWISTER

So, at a minimum, the play can be produced with three men, three women and a musician.

The play was first produced by the Nomads Theatre Company of Lismore, N.S.W. in April 1987. Directed by Peter Duncan.

A Note On The Music

The music for the first production was composed by Alan Hughes and can be obtained via Nick Hughes.

ACT ONE

COCKATOO HALL

Let me tell you 'bout a place I knew,
It's a tiny little place called Cockatoo.
It's so small, no-one lives there at all
The only thing there is Cockatoo Hall

The windows won't close cause they're all askew
And it's commonly said around Cockatoo
That one of these days the old walls will fall
And that'll be the end of Cockatoo Hall.

Cockatoo Hall
Cockatoo Hall
It leaks and it squeaks and it's much too small
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo Hall

But then they'd have to build it anew
Cause they need a little hall in Cockatoo
It's not very wide and it's not very tall
But it's all they've got; it's Cockatoo Hall

And though it's tiny it still gets used
By the people who live around Cockatoo
For parties and weddings and dances and balls
And committees and meetings in Cockatoo Hall.

Cockatoo Hall
Cockatoo Hall
It shudders and it judders and it's much too small
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo, Cockatoo
Cockatoo Hall

So leave your worries, your troubles and blues
And come and have a chuckle down at Cockatoo
Come along inside, welcome one and all.
Welcome to the story of Cockatoo Hall.

SCENE 2

[Dim lighting. The shape of Cockatoo Hall can just be made out. After a few moments the shadowy figures of Dave and Kenny are seen moving around the stage. We cannot make out what they're doing but can hear them moving chains about.]

KENNY: Gi's a bit more if you can Dave!

DAVE: Keep your bloody voice down.

KENNY: What you say?

DAVE: Keep your bloody voice down.

KENNY: What?

DAVE: Shhhhh!

KENNY: Oh.

DAVE: Try that. Lucky that wind dropped.

KENNY: Yeah. [More chain rattling. A pause.] Righto! That's got it!

DAVE: Shhhhh! Right. I'll start her up.

KENNY: What?

DAVE: I'll start her up!

KENNY: Shhhhh!

[Kenny exits. A tractor starts up, revs, idles, runs slowly with chain dragging sounds as Kenny takes up the slack. Then the tractor strains against the load and the Hall creaks and groans.]

KENNY: She's not going to go Dave!

DAVE: Just needs a few more herbs.

[Enter Kenny.]

KENNY: Dave?

DAVE: Yeah.

KENNY: You sure this is a good idea?

DAVE: Best I've ever had.

KENNY: Where's the cricket club going to have its meetings?

DAVE: In the hall.

KENNY: Dave. We're gonna pull the hall over.

DAVE: In the new hall, you dill. The one that's going to be built with the insurance money from this one.

KENNY: Oh. You think the Hall Committee will do that?

DAVE: They'll have to won't they. Look, that Hall Committee's about as much use as hip pockets on a bull's arse. They'd sit in there while it fell down around them and not even notice. All we're doing is helping them get their fingers out. Me mum's on the Committee. Says it's the biggest waste of time she's ever come across. Told me about their last meeting. What a classic...

SCENE 3

[Four chairs around a table. Two are occupied by June and Cuthbert.]

JUNE: I do hope that we can get a bit more done this month. I'm beginning to find these meetings a bit frustrating.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. I'm glad you said that. I'm very glad you said that. Right, good. We'll see if we can't make this one a little more snappy shall we?

JUNE: It's not so much the speed of the meetings. It's... It's that...Well, we don't seem to get much done.

CUTHBERT: Right, Mrs. Herrington, good. As soon as Sticky Pete gets here, we'll fly through it, you'll see.

JUNE: I don't think you-
[Enter Sticky Pete.]

STICKY PETE: Sorry I'm late

CUTHBERT: Mrs. Herrington was saying she wants a speedy meeting.

JUNE: Well, actually, I was-

STICKY PETE: Suits me.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. We'll take the minutes as read. What's the first item?

JUNE: The Freeborn Bequest, Mr. Chairman, the interest from which is to be spent on the upkeep of the hall.

STICKY PETE: What about it?

JUNE: Well Gentlemen, as you are aware, the income from the Freeborn Bequest now stands at \$475.29 I don't think that we can defer the decision on how to spend this money again. Especially because at our last meeting we declared the position of Treasurer vacant till the AGM.

CUTHBERT: Why?

JUNE: Well...well,because Mr Evans passed away.

CUTHBERT: Poor old Jimmy.

[Cuthbert gets up and moves the fourth chair away from the table and sits again.]

CUTHBERT: What's that got to do with the Freeborn Bequest?

JUNE: If the Treasurer can't transfer the interest, it'll complicate the accounts terribly.

CUTHBERT: I Don't see why.

STICKY PETE: That's cos you never do the accounts.

CUTHBERT: I'm the president.

STICKY PETE: Aye. And you never let us forget it!

CUTHBERT: Somebody's got to do it!

JUNE: Gentlemen! Please.

STICKY PETE: I move we defer the matter.

JUNE: We've deferred the matter for the last six meetings.

CUTHBERT: Won't harm to do it again then will it?

JUNE: But the bequest is there for the upkeep of the hall. Goodness knows it needs it.

STICKY PETE: That's right.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. It certainly could do with a new coat of paint.

STICKY PETE: If you don't shore up them stumps, there won't be a hall.

JUNE: I still think that the most pressing need is the new curtains.

CUTHBERT: There's nothing wrong with the stumps.

STICKY PETE: Curtains seem alright to me.

JUNE: The paintwork's fine. Apart from the colour.

STICKY PETE: Why paint it if it's gonna fall down?

JUNE: You're exaggerating. It's not going to fall down.

CUTHBERT: We've got to re-paint it.

STICKY PETE: We've got to re-stump it

JUNE: We have to buy new curtains.

CUTHBERT: Paint.

STICKY PETE: Stumps.

JUNE: Curtains.

CUTHBERT: Paint!

STICKY PETE: Stumps!

JUNE: Curtains!

CUTHBERT: Paint!

STICKY PETE: Stumps!

JUNE: Gentlemen! This will never do.

STICKY PETE: I move we defer the matter.

JUNE: Again!

CUTHBERT: Seconded. All those in favour? All those against?

JUNE: No.

CUTHBERT: Carried. The matter of the Freeborn Bequest is deferred till the next meeting. What's next on the agenda?

JUNE: A request from Mr Marsh.

STICKY PETE: What does 'e want?

JUNE: He wants to move his trumpet practice night from Wednesday to Monday.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. Well, that should be alright.

STICKY PETE: Why's 'e wanna move, eh?

JUNE: He says he needs to practice every week and the Cricket Club Film Night means he has to miss the first Wednesday of every month.

STICKY PETE: I've never 'eard 'im play 'is trumpet.

JUNE: Neither have I. But I don't see what that's got to do with it.

STICKY PETE: I've been past the Hall 'eaps of Wednesday nights, but I've never 'eard 'im playing 'is trumpet.

JUNE: Perhaps he was cleaning it.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. If no-one has any objections,

I think we-

STICKY PETE: Must be very shiny.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. I think we can tell-

STICKY PETE: 'E prob'ly shaves in front of 'is trumpet.
'Stead of a mirror.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. I think-

STICKY PETE: Must do. Doesn't play it.

CUTHBERT: Look, have you got any objections to Mr. Marsh using the hall on Mondays instead of Wednesdays?

STICKY PETE: Yes.

CUTHBERT: What?

STICKY PETE: I don't like 'im.

JUNE: That's hardly a re-

CUTHBERT: Right, good. Apart from not liking him, do you have any objection.

STICKY PETE: Yes.

CUTHBERT: What is it?

STICKY PETE: I don't trust 'im either.

JUNE: What nonsense! Ivor Marsh is a perfectly respectable man. You don't like anyone who wasn't born and raised in the valley.

STICKY PETE: Yes, yes, the johnny-come-latelys always stick together.

JUNE: Johnny-come-latelys! My grandfather Henry was one of the early selectors here, as you well know.

STICKY PETE: Yeah, and me great gran'dad, 'oo was the first selector 'ere, always said as 'ow 'Enry was a johnny-come-lately 'oo'd never come to any good.

JUNE: You're impossible. That was eighty years ago!

STICKY PETE: Ninety! An' it's still true.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. I move we defer the matter.

STICKY PETE: Seconded.

JUNE: Not again!

CUTHBERT: Those in favour. Those against.

JUNE: No

CUTHBERT: Passed. The matter is deferred till the next meeting. What's the next item?

JUNE: What am I going to say to Mr. Marsh? I already told him I didn't think there'd be any problem.

STICKY PETE: Tell 'im 'e'll 'ave to wait. What's next?

JUNE: Mrs. Andrews Yoga class want to know if we can fix the loose floorboard by the stage.

STICKY PETE: Shouldn't be too hard.

CUTHBERT: Doesn't that come under upgrading the hall?

JUNE: I suppose it does.

STICKY PETE: That's been deferred.

CUTHBERT: Right, good. All those in favour of deferring this? Carried. Unanimously. Right, good. I declare the meeting closed. Thank you very much. Right, good. Right. Quick enough for you Mrs Herrington?