



On the Wallaby

by Nick Enright

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First Production of the Play

On the Wallaby was first performed by the State Theatre Company of South Australia at the Playhouse, Adelaide, on 4 July 1980 with the following cast:

The O'Brien family:

KATH Nancye Hayes

DES Edwin Hodgeman

KITTY Christine Mahoney

JOHN Wayne Jarratt

LILY Chrissie James

All OTHER ROLES played by:

Simon Burvill-Holmes, Robert Grubb, James Laurie, Susan Lyons, Tony Prehn, Philip Quast, John Saunders, Peter Schwarz, Tony Strachan.

Directed by Nick Enright

Designed by Richard Roberts

Lighting design by Nigel Levings

Musical direction by Leonie Hempton

Choreography by Michael Fuller and Nancye Hayes

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C H A R A C T E R S

KATH O'BRIEN

LILY O'BRIEN, her younger daughter

JOHN O'BRIEN, her son, a wharf labourer

KITTY O'BRIEN, her elder daughter, a shop assistant

DES O'BRIEN, her husband, a motor industry worker

ALBERT, a vaudeville comedian

M.C., of the vaudeville house

STANLEY MELBOURNE BRUCE, Nationalist Prime Minister, 1923-9

SIR RICHARD BUTLER, Liberal Premier of South Australia, 1927-30, 1933-8

SIR GEORGE STEPHENSON BEEBY, Arbitration Court judge

THREE WHARFIES

J. G. MORPHETT, Adelaide shipowner

MISS COLLINS, his secretary

JAMES HENRY SCULLIN, Labor Prime Minister, 1929-31

CAPTAIN BLACKBURN

BURNSIDE LADY, a member of Adelaide society

WHITFIELD, a wharfies' shop steward

BRIGADIER LEANE, Commissioner of Police in South Australia

LABOUR EXCHANGE CLERK

JIM McBRIDE, Kitty's fiancé, a Communist

MR PERKINS, a Myer's departmental head

5AD RADIO ANNOUNCER

PICCOLO PETE, a busker

SIR OTTO NIEMEYER, a Bank of England expert

LIONEL LAUGHTON HILL, Labour Premier of South Australia, 1926-7, 1930-3

CUSKELLY, DIMMOCK and REIMANN, unemployed protesters

DIVER, MURPHY, TOMMY and HARRY, bagmen on the road

JACK LANG, Labor Premier of New South Wales, 1925-7

CAPTAIN F. E. DE GROOT, an officer of the New Guard

BOB McBRIDE, Jim's brother, unemployed

MARGARET, his wife

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Figures in the South Australian centenary pageant:
SPIRIT OF THE PIONEERS, SPIRIT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, STURT PEA,
VINEYARD, WHEAT, BLACK OPAL, SHEEP.

Other characters:

WHARFIES, POLICEMEN, UNEMPLOYED, A CLERK OF COURT, A SILLY ASS, AN
EVICTED WOMAN, TWO BAILIFF'S MEN, TWO LEADERS OF THE UNEMPLOYED,
TWO BOXERS, A SIDESHOW SPRUIKER

SINGERS

A CHORUS OF PREMIERS

S E T T I N G

Adelaide, Sydney and on the road in Queensland and New South Wales
during the Great Depression.

For Nancye with admiration and affection.

'Mister Depression' by Alec Regan and Art Gee. Copyright C.J. Albert & Son Pty Ltd.
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ACT ONE

A dark, empty stage. Begin slide sequence one: Scenes of Australian prosperity. As the sequence begins the piano plays the 'Golden Fleece' vamp. Figures appear in dim light and slowly the number builds.

'GOLDEN FLEECE'

- VOICE ONE: Australia's on the sheep's back,
So we're often told.
Clip that wool,
Three bags full,
The fleece is spun from gold.
- VOICE TWO: You know that sky's a goldmine
Just waiting to be mined.
Australia's booming
And if clouds are looming
They're always fleecy-lined.
- ALL: Markets, money and men.
- VOICE ONE: Stanley Melbourne Bruce says
- ALL: Markets, money and men
- VOICE TWO: Turn the sheep to golden geese.
- ALL: That sky is one big goldmine,
Stake your claim and grab your piece.
- VOICE ONE: Time is racin',
- VOICE TWO: Hasten, Jason,
- ALL: Get that golden fleece!
We're ploughing golden wheatfields,
Spreading gilt on gingerbread,
And we'll roll right over
In the green green clover
Till we wake up in the red.
Markets, money and men.
- VOICE ONE: While the fleece is golden,
- ALL: Markets, money and men.
- VOICE TWO: For BHP and Holden.

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ACT ONE

ALL: There's a goldmine in that wheatfield,
Golden eggs in golden geese,
Phar Lap's racin',
Hasten, Jason,
Get that golden fleece!

Exit the singers and the slide sequence finishes, with the caption: 'PORTADELAIDE, JUNE 1928'.

The lights go up on the O'Brien house. LILY, the younger daughter, sits reciting her tables. KATH is preparing food, perhaps peeling potatoes.

LILY: Twelve pence, one shilling,
Five shillings, one crown.
Twenty shillings, one pound,
Twenty-one shillings, one guinea...

What's a guinea look like, Mumma?

KATH: It doesn't look like anything, Lil. It's just a pound and and a shilling.

LILY: Oh. Do you know what a aeroplane looks like?

KATH: An aeroplane? Oh, Lily, I can't say that I do.

LILY shows her a drawing in her schoolbook.

LILY: It looks like this.

KATH: That's good, love.

LILY: Miss Hutchins gave us a lesson today about aeroplanes. Because this man is going to fly all the way across the sea to Australia, all the way from... from the other side.

LILY starts being an aeroplane as KITTY, the older daughter, enters.

KATH: Any luck?

KITTY: No. What are you doing, Lil?

LILY: Can't you tell? I'm driving a aeroplane.

KITTY: You going to get a job with whatsiname...?

LILY: Kingston Smith.

KITTY: Yes, you going to get a job with him? Now there's someone I haven't tried, Mumma.

KATH: Be about the only one.

KITTY: I tried John Martin's again, and Charles Birk's, and Foy and Gibson's, and... oh, here's your change... and Charles Moore's in Victoria Square.



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ACT ONE

KATH: [*taking the change*] Kitty! Did you skip your lunch again?

KITTY: I forgot. When I'm up there, all I can think about is a job.

KATH: You'll get a job. You're a good girl.

KITTY: There's a lot of good girls doing the rounds of those shops. What are you going to be when you grow up, Lily?

Enter JOHN, with a handful of money.

KATH: Well, hello, stranger.

JOHN: Don't go crook on me, Mumma. I've worked three pick-ups on the trot. When's tea?

KATH: When's tea! I had to throw yours out last night.

JOHN: You take it up with the captain of the *Arethusa*.

KATH: [*irritated*] Oh!

JOHN: She took forever getting docked, and she had a hold full of coke. And there's nothing harder to shift than coke. Is there, Lil?

LILY: I'm not here. I'm in a aeroplane.

KATH: If I had a shilling for every hot meal I've had to give to Rita Cuskelly's chooks—

KITTY: At least he's working, Mumma.

KATH: Yes. But the chooks are getting sick of mashed potato.

JOHN hands over his money.

JOHN: There you go. Two pound thirteen-and-eightpence. You can't argue with that.

KATH: I don't know, it's feast or famine on the wharves. Eighteen hours on the go for this, and then nothing for a week. And do you know, your father misses it!

JOHN: How'd you go today, Kit?

KITTY: Terrific. The man at Charles Birk's said I was that well spoken he wouldn't believe I was from the Port. 'Ai'm not, ektuelleh,' I said. 'Mai people are on the land, Ai'm just living down the-ah for a lark.'

KATH: You didn't!

JOHN: Mumma! [*To KITTY*] Well, did he give you a job?

DES enters.

KATH: You're early.

LILY: I'm in a aeroplane, Dadda.

She makes aeroplane noises.

JOHN: Ey, Dad, old Snowy from the woolsheds said to say—

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ACT ONE

KATH: [*motioning him to be silent*] What's up, Des?

DES *sits*.

DES: Ted Holden says no-one's buying any cars. So he's laid off two hundred men.

KITTY: Including you?

DES: Yes, including me.

LILY *becomes aware that something is wrong, and sits quite still*.

KATH: How long for?

DES: Well, you know... they say come back to the gate Monday morning and we'll see what we can do.

JOHN: What do you reckon?

DES: Two hundred of us'll turn up. They'll pick up maybe half-a-dozen, mates of the foremen, most likely. [*Pause.*] I might try and get back on the wharves.

KATH: Des, your back's no better than it was when you came off the wharves. You can't—

DES: Light duties, Kath. They know about me back.

KATH: They oughta do, after years of making you lift loads that no human being should have to—

DES: All right, all right. It's just to tide me over.

JOHN: Yes, things are bound to pick up at Holden's in a bit.

KATH: 'Course they are. Well, I'd better do something about tea. We're not on half-rations yet.

DES: Now, what's all this about aeroplanes, Lily

Exit the O'Briens.

A small draped proscenium flies in creating a vaudeville theatre. The piano plays 'Ain't We Got Fun' as four singers enter. Two of them are the M.C. and ALBERT.

SINGERS: There's nothing surer,
 The rich get rich
 And the poor get laid off.
 In the meantime,
 In between time,
 Ain't we got fun?

They do a big finish. The M.C. steps forward.

M.C.: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the rich get rich and the poor get pushy. A funny thing happened on the way to the theatre tonight. A



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ACT ONE

poor man stopped me in Rundle Street and said: 'Sir, I haven't had a bite in weeks.'
So I bit him. [*Pause.*] Here's another one you'll hate. Albert?

ALBERT *sidles up.*

I say, I say, I say!

ALBERT: What do you say, squire?

M.C.: Albert, what's worse than finding a worm in an apple?

ALBERT: I don't know, squire. What is worse than finding a worm in an apple?

M.C.: Finding half a worm.

ALBERT: [*to the audience*] Think about it, think about it.

M.C.: Do you know, they're dumping apples these days down at Semaphore Beach?

Whole bushels of good apples. Did you hear that, Albert? They're throwing Grannies
in the sea.

ALBERT: I hope the poor old dears can swim.

M.C.: No, Albert, no, Albert, no, no, naaow. Granny Smith apples.

ALBERT: Cor! What for?

M.C.: To keep the prices up.

ALBERT: Wouldn't that give you the pip?

M.C.: Albert, I think you're going to seed. [*To a member of the audience*] Don't groan
too loud, sir, it's an old house.

He becomes serious. The other singers step forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, you all know the hero of the moment. He's just completed
a record-breaking flight across the Pacific Ocean, and in tribute to him, we would
like to bring you the new song-hit from Sydney.

'KINGSFORD SMITH'

SOLO ONE: It's a long long way from Frisco Bay
To Aussie's distant shore.
And yet one day there flew away
A plane with a crew of four.
They took their lives right in their hands
And flew across the foam,
To see a sight of Aussie's sands,
And the dear ones here at home.

SOLO TWO: Kingsford Smith was pilot,
He had no thought of fear.

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ACT ONE

And now that he has landed
Let's give a mighty cheer, for:

Chorus:

SINGERS: Kingsford Smith, Aussie is proud of you,
Proud it's true,
Of you and your gallant crew,
Through the storms so terrific,
Flying o'er the Pacific.
Kingsford Smith, flying by day or night,
Proved you were true blue.
In flying, Aussie will never be at a loss
While we've sons like the boys
In the Southern Cross.
Kingsford Smith, we'll tell the world
That we're proud of you!

SOLO ONE: Though the way was long and the flight was hard
They did not hesitate,
But just pegged on from dusk till dawn
And, taking a risk so great,
The Southern Cross like an albatross
Just flew and flew and flew,
And when old trouble struck at them
They just kept smiling through.

SOLO TWO: But now that they've arrived here

SOLO THREE: And in our sunny land

M.C.: Let's give the boys a welcome
And a mighty big glad hand, for:

Chorus repeated.

The SINGERS exit.

Begin slide sequence two: 'JUNE 1928, UNEMPLOYED TRADE UNIONISTS: AUSTRALIA—11.5%, S.A.—16.1%'. Bank of England cheque: '1928, NATIONAL DEBT £510 MILLION'.

Enter BRUCE and BUTLER, one on each balcony, each addressing a separate meeting. Each has a glass of port.



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PLAYWRIGHT'S BIOGRAPHY

Nick Enright (1950–2003) trained for the theatre at New York University School of Arts after early experience in Australia including with Nimrod and Melbourne Theatre Company. He was an actor, director and teacher as well as a writer. His plays include *On the Wallaby*, *Daylight Saving*, *St James Infirmary*, *Mongrels*, *A Property of the Clan*, *The Quartet from Rigoletto*, *Blackrock*, *Good Works*, *Spurboard* and *A Man with Five Children*. With Justin Monjo he adapted Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* for the stage. He also wrote for film and television, including co-writing with George Miller the screenplay for *Lorenzo's Oil* which was nominated for an Oscar. He wrote a number of musicals including *The Venetian Twins* and *Summer Rain* with composer Terence Clarke. He wrote the book for the Australian production of *The Boy from Oz*.

Among many awards were two Green Room Awards for Best Play, and four Gold AWGIE Awards, the 1998 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award and the NSW Premier's Special Award.

As well as being a prolific writer, Nick Enright was a noted acting teacher, particularly at NIDA and WAAPA.