

Australian Histories Podcast: Episode 69. Waltzing Matilda

**Note: citations included in this transcript are used more as memory prompts for me in writing the episode than for strict academic purposes.*

Today I thought we might have a quick look at a well known and, I am advised, extremely well loved, traditional Australian song – Waltzing Matilda. I hope it's not unpatriotic of me to say, while I enjoy the ditty to a certain extent, for it's jaunty tune and fun language, it has always puzzled me as to why people see it as a sort of pseudo Australian anthem. It's a bit of a weird one, given it's about a sheep thief killing himself rather than surrendering to police, so hardly an uplifting little number.

But I recently came across a book by **Dennis O'Keeffe** called ***Waltzing Matilda: the secret history of Australia's favourite song***, so I think there's more to this song than I have been giving it credit for, and it may well deserve the deeper hold it appears to have on the Australian psyche. So here I am, reading O'Keeffe's thesis on the song, and we'll see if I feel any more impressed with it at the end of the podcast. I hope you'll enjoy the exploration too, fan or no fan of Waltzing Matilda.

Let's now have a closer look at our jolly swagman and his jumbuck pilfering story....

Now many Australians will know the words to Waltzing Matilda, and a good many international listeners may well have heard of it too. I am advised by a number of sources that Waltzing Matilda is in fact one of the most recorded songs in the world! (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 4) O'Keeffe notes there are over 700 versions collected so far, by the Australian National Film and Sound Archive. It was first recorded more than 30 years after it was written in 1926 or 27, depending on the source, by John Collinson, a tenor from Queensland, though it was in no way an instant success.

O'Keeffe suggests it was Peter Dawson's 1938 recording, played across radios world wide, that made it an international hit. (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 4) Soldiers would sing it, with various swing versions played throughout WWII, and international recording artists such as Burl Ives, Chubby Checker, Harry Belafonte, and Johnny Cash were just a few who did their take on the Aussie song. It was even covered by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. (Wikipedia: Waltzing Matilda 2024)

In Australia it was performed for Queen Elizabeth's Royal Tour in 1954, by the South Australian Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Singers, at the Royal Gala concert, (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia [no date]) and folk, country & pop singers, from Slim Dusty, The Bushwackers, and the Seekers, through to Cate Cebrano, Jessica Mauboy and Kylie Minogue, have also had a crack.

According to Wiki it is the theme song for Australia in the video game Civilization VI. (Wikipedia: Waltzing Matilda 2024) Who remembers that?

It's been called "the people's song" and is probably much more well-known than our actual National Anthem around the world. It's been played at the Olympic and Commonwealth Games, at our AFL and NRL grand finals, and O'Keeffe reminds us, it's also "marched Australian's home from several wars, walked Prime ministers into office, [and] echoed around every schoolroom" over time.

Still, given the topic, and later as we'll discuss, the potential history of the song, it still seems to me an odd one. Not as cheery & uplifting as you might desire for a pseudo anthem, if you actually listen to the words. The swagman (and as it will turn out, petty thief) only seemed jolly for a short time as he settles down at a comfortable camp. When he opportunistically nabs a wandering sheep, to keep as food, he is discovered by the sheep's owner and 3 police. Rather than be taken in and subject to the law, he instead jumps into the water and drowns himself?!? Surely Peter Allen's '*I still call Australia Home*' or Men at

Work's eminently danceable '*Down Under*' reflect a cheerier or more romantically sentimental Aussie spirit? But I'm being too harsh. It IS a catchy little ditty.

Lots of people outside of Australia will know it, or know of it, though I am guessing if you didn't grow up in Australia hearing it, you might find the language it uses a little puzzling? Indeed most Australians born post Second world war may well be struggling bit with some of the terms used too, given many of the interesting Australian slang words in the song were not really used much into the 20th century, let alone the 21st. But it is the language that makes the song so interesting, in my opinion.

While the versions might differ slightly in the words sung, let's have a quick look at the first verse and see if we can work it out.

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong.

I think we can read *jolly* here as cheery, happy?

A *swagman* is a person who carries a swag; The Australian National Dictionary further describes such a person as "an itinerant worker, especially one in search of employment, who carries a swag; a vagrant", and notes the term's appearance into the lexicon in the 1860s. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

He camps by a *Billabong*; a waterhole. Once again the Australian National Dictionary defines Billabong as "An arm of a river, made by water flowing from the main stream (usually only in times of flood) to form a backwater, blind creek, anabranch, or, when the water level falls, a pool or lagoon..... Billabongs are often formed when floodwaters recede. The word comes from the south-western New South Wales Aboriginal language Wiradjuri: bila 'river' + bang (a suffix probably indicating a continuation in time or space, or functioning as an intensifier), the combination signifying a watercourse that runs only after rain. First recorded in the 1830s." (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

Under the shade of a coolabah tree,

Coolibah is another word borrowed from Aboriginal language, probably from Yu-waal-a-raay (and neighbouring languages), of northern New South Wales, being a term that describes several eucalypt species. With varied spelling over the years, the Dictionary records it's first noted use occurring the 1870s. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled: Fairly self explanatory, unless you're not sure what a billy is? So, just in case.... "A vessel for the boiling of water, making of tea, etc., over an open fire; a cylindrical container, usually of tin, enamel ware, or aluminium, fitted with a lid and a wire handle. It comes from the Scottish dialect word billy-pot meaning 'cooking utensil'. Possibly reinforced by [the] 'bully beef' [tin], [also] used as a container for cooking. It is not, as popularly thought, related to the Aboriginal word billabong. Billy is first recorded in the 1840s." (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me." And here the meanings get a little more perplexing.

For all it's 'Australianness' in the resulting song, it's surprising to think about the origins of the terms 'Waltzing' and 'Matilda'. In the Australian idiom 'Waltzing Matilda' means to tramp, to be on the road carrying ones swag, or 'Matilda', another term used for swag, from place to place, looking for itinerant work, or shearing jobs and the like, carrying ones swag containing your personal belongings along with you.

But interestingly, the origins of both terms appear to be German. Waltzing comes from the German term *auf der Walz*, meaning 'to go a-wandering'. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

O’Keeffe recounted that in Germany trade apprentices were required to travel for a period of time, gaining wide experience and honing their skills as itinerant tradesmen, working with a range of master craftsmen, over a three year period. They would carry only their tools and bare necessities in their bedroll or ‘swag’ with them during this period, and would record their progress and gather references from the masters worked with. When this apprenticeship was completed the craftsman could return to his home village and work as a qualified tradesman. (O’Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 8)

In Australia those ‘Waltzing’ were more likely unskilled itinerant workers, such as farm hands, or perhaps experienced jackeroos or skilled shearers, rather than anyone associated with a craft guild undergoing official training. But we can see enough similarity to understand why the term was adopted. It’s likely the terminology arrived during the 1850s gold rushes, with German immigrants.

The anglicised ‘Matilda’ also has ancient largely northern European origins, the name meaning ‘mighty battle maiden’. O’Keeffe goes even further, suggesting it was a term applied to female camp followers during various European wars, whom he suggests would sleep with the soldiers at night, keeping them warm, and thus the name was later used for the warm grey army coats the soldiers wore. Hmm... interesting origin story perhaps? Though we assume any association of those terms with Germans, was already lost by the approach of the 20th century, otherwise it doesn’t seem likely the diggers would have patriotically sung Waltzing Matilda in the trenches, as they faced a German foe over no-mans-land, as it appears they did.

In Australia the name Matilda was used as another term for ‘swag’, or blanket they carried for warmth, which they would use to wrap and carry their goods in, when travelling. (O’Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 9) So here, if you were Waltzing Matilda, you were travelling, carrying your Matilda or swag, with your tools and necessities of life rolled up in that blanket and tied across your shoulder, for comfortable tramping between one outback station or job, and another. So not really a term that would apply to dancing or waltzing with a woman named Matilda that might sometimes get imagined, and indeed sung, today. Matilda is the swag, not a women, though we can see how the meanings can morph and we do see it sort of applied that way in the chorus perhaps?

The Australian National Dictionary also adds “The term to waltz Matilda is first recorded in the late 1880s, and is likely to have had a fairly short life, if it hadn’t been for the poet Banjo Patterson [using it in 1895]. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date]) So we’ll talk more about that in a minute.

Just to finish off the etymology of the term swag though, the swag as a bundle of goods carried by the swagman, was a term that was already known in Australia from early convict times. Again, our National Dictionary reminds us “The Australian sense of swag is a transferred use of swag from British thieves’ slang ‘a thief’s plunder or booty’.” Australians slightly altered the meaning, from the booty itself, to the booty and its *container*) and this language use was recorded by convict James Hardy Vaux in 1812 and published in his Memoirs in 1819. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

James Hardy Vaux was a convict who compiled a *Dictionary of Criminal Slang*, that would help the snooty Judges understand what an accused in his court may be talking about, when relating his story in his own convict vernacular. And what a publication! I’ll put a link to an online version of that slang dictionary in the Reference list. It notes “SWAG: a bundle, parcel, or package; ... etc. The swag, is a term used in speaking of any booty you have lately obtained, be it of what kind it may, except money, as ‘Where did you lumber the swag?’ that is, where did you deposit the stolen property? To carry the swag is to be the bearer of the stolen goods to a place of safety. A swag of any thing, signifies emphatically a great deal. To have knap’d a good swag, is to have got a good booty.” (James Hardy Vaux [no date]) This bloke deserves an episode all to himself one day I think. Anyway, back to Waltzing Matilda for today....

So now the Chorus:

Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda my darling?

*Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
Waltzing Matilda and lead-ing a water bag,
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?*

Not all versions include 'leading a water bag', but Macpherson's notes do, so it was in the original. It probably refers to using the often canvas water bag carried, holding the bag out front, in lieu of a woman, whom the swagman is leading in a dance (waltz)? (mjc [no date])

Sometimes the first line is just *Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda*, then *Who'll come a Waltzing matilda with Me*. And then the third line in the verse is used, so repeat, *And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled*. Then maybe *You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me*. Lots & lots of slight variants out there.

So now, before we continue looking at the song itself, let's have a look at how and when it was written. The majority of credit goes to the famous Australian poet, best known as 'Banjo' Paterson, though the music that inspired him to pen the words, appears to have been provided by Christina Macpherson. Macpherson's papers held in the NLA, include an undated letter she wrote around 1934, describing exactly how *Waltzing Matilda* came about.

Andrew Barton Paterson, or Barty as they called him, was born in 1864, near Orange in New South Wales. He lived his young life with his family on Stations near Orange and later Yass, NSW, where he developed a deep love of the bush, station life and horsemanship. His family had done pretty well on the land and they moved in wealthy squatter and landholder circles. Paterson was sent off to Sydney Grammar School for his education and ended up becoming a solicitor in Sydney. (Semmler [no date])

Despite his city life in adulthood, he was still able to socialise with the more well to do station families, and his love of the bush life found another outlet, in poetry. Along with Henry Lawson, and many others, Paterson became a regular, and very popular contributor, to the *Bulletin* in the 1890s, at just about the height of its popularity and circulation as "the bushman's bible", and he took on the pen name 'Banjo Paterson' at that time. For a little more on his work published in the *Bulletin* and his relationship with Lawson you can listen to *Episode 44: Henry Lawson*. Paterson was probably best known for his poem "The Man from Snowy River", though I have always personally preferred "Clancy of the Overflow" or the very humorous "Man from Ironbark".....

In 1895 Paterson was on holiday in Queensland, and he and several companions were all staying at Dagworth Station, near Winton, pretty much in the centre of the state. He was accompanied by his fiancé of 8 years, Sarah Riley, and amongst the others at the station was Christina Macpherson and her brothers. At some point in the proceedings Macpherson played, on her Zither apparently, and you'll need to look that up yourself, a jaunty little tune from memory, something she had heard played "by a band at the races in Warrnambool, a country town in the Western District of Victoria." (Macpherson, Christine. 1934)

When Paterson asked her the tune's name she was unable to recall, but most sources suggest her rendition of what she heard was probably based on something called "the Craigielee March". (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 13) She wrote "he then said he thought he could write some lines to it. He then and there wrote the first verse. We tried it and thought it went well, so he then wrote the other verses." (Macpherson, Christine. 1934) Paterson seems to have used some local information that he had discovered, and heard about during his stay, to flesh out the storyline.

Macpherson wrote "There are always numbers of [swag]men travelling about the country, some riding and some on foot, and they are usually given rations at the various stations that they come to, but in Queensland the distances are so great that they help themselves without asking. On this occasion my brother and Paterson were out riding, and they came to a waterhole (or billabong) and found the skin of a newly killed sheep – all that was left by a swagman - and [Paterson] made use of this incident." (Macpherson, Christine. 1934)

The pair apparently spent some hours fine tuning the new song, and she noted “I might add that in a short time everyone in the district was singing it.” So it looked already like it was going to be a hit, but apparently other occurrences may have soured the experience for her & Paterson.

It’s been suggested by some that Paterson may have been a bit of a pants man? Or at least prone to sudden infatuations because the salacious gossip suggests that while cosyng up over the Zither and the note pads, and while long standing fiancé Sarah was somewhere nearby, Paterson & Macpherson were conducting some kind of affair, or a major flirtation at least, and it all blew up in a rather uncomfortable way. It’s been suggested the engagement was abruptly called off and that Paterson left the station in a hurry. (O’Keeffe, Dennis 2012) (Wikipedia: Banjo Paterson 2024) I have not gone into Paterson’s biography in any detail, or chased down this gossip any further, but I can say, when Paterson did marry in 1903, it was neither to his previously long standing fiancé Sarah, nor to Christina Macpherson, so his original plans all went pear-shaped somehow.

Macpherson’s letter did add that “After Mr Paterson returned to Sydney he wrote and asked me to send him the tune. I am no musician but I did my best and later on he told me he had sent it on to a musical friend of his who thought it would make a good bush song.” (Macpherson, Christine. 1934) And so it did. Nearly a national anthem in time!

Let’s take a quick look at Verse two – and again, I’m using the words from Macpherson’s manuscript. Sometimes they are sung slightly differently.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong, A Jumbuck being a sheep, the term possibly coming from an Aboriginal pidgin English for sheep - from Jump Up – being a gambolling sheep. Use of that term was recorded from the early 1800s. (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee,
And he said as he put him away into his tucker bag, Tucker is food, so a tucker *bag* is used to hold food.
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."

So there Macpherson supplies us the explanation for the swaggie nabbing the sheep idea, but the question remains, what else prompted the later verses, and what is it actually about?

So after stuffing the jumbuck in his tuckerbag, and the rendition of the chorus, the next verse begins;

Up rode the squatter, mounted on his thoroughbred.

A squatter is referring to the station owner. Squatters were men who simply took possession of land outside of official government settlement areas, and grazed them, cleared, developed & perhaps fenced them, simply ‘squatting’ there and making money from their ventures. Over time the government legitimised their holdings and many later cheaply leased and then gain title hold to the land they had begun illegally using.

The Australian Dictionary further elaborates “A **squatter** is a person who unlawfully occupies an uninhabited building. But in early nineteenth-century Australia a **squatter** (first recorded 1825) was also a person who occupied Crown land without legal title. From the 1840s it began to refer to any person who grazed livestock on a large scale, without reference to the title by which the land was held; and the term **squatter** also referred to such a person as being of an elevated socio-economic status. **Squatters** became wealthy and powerful, and the term **squattocracy** (recorded in 1841) alludes to their aristocratic pretensions.” (Australian National Dictionary Centre, [no date])

This squatter, confronting the swagman, has clearly done well for himself. He rides around his estates on a thoroughbred horse. No bush nag for him!

*Down came the troopers, one, two, and three. Troopers are the police.
"Whose is that jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag? I think the implication here is that it is the
rightful property of the Squatter and that the Swagman has stolen it?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."*

Some think Waltzing Matilda to be simply a fun ditty with no real meaning. Others feel that there is a much more interesting back story, that drew it into Paterson's consciousness. Macpherson already explained that Paterson's experience of finding the sheepskin at a billabong got him thinking about a swaggie opportunistically stealing the sheep, and translating that experience into the song. But there had been a lot of other activity going on locally, that Paterson would have heard about on his visit, and it seems very likely he drew on some of those tales as well.

The 1890s were difficult times in Australia. There was a deep economic depression affecting all walks of life. In particular, wool prices were down and the Station owners were looking to cut costs, particularly labour costs. Meanwhile, shearers and associated station labourers had for a long time, been unhappy with their working conditions and pay. Many had banded together and joined unions, and by 1890 many sheds were in the throes of becoming union only sites, causing some friction between those who supported unionism and those who did not, including station owners. Many station owners were keen to break the union hold on such arrangements and as the industry in general contracted, and work became more scarce for the ordinary man, the environment was ripe for unhappy industrial action.

Members of the *Amalgamated Shearers' Union of Australasia*, were soon pitted against those willing to work under individual agreements. The tension between the shearers, squatters and non-union workers grew, and as more work sites attempted to push the unions out, requesting their shearers sign individual contracts, rather than work under union mandated conditions, the Unionised men felt they had to make a stand. Strike action was called, and the shearers made camps near various work sites, intending to thwart the employment of non-union labour. The actions continued for many months, and became so disruptive and antagonistic, that it was considered Queensland was on the brink of a civil war.

After the union shearers set up armed camps outside of towns in shearing districts, the government responded by sending armed soldiers in to protect non-union labour, and to arrest strike leaders. In some areas the confrontation escalated to substantial violence, with unionists raiding shearing sheds, harassing non-union labour and committing acts of sabotage, but in the end, the shearers were unable to hold out. The strike was broken after some months, and the squatters had prevailed by mid year, just as the shearing season began.

But it was all a long way from being settled. Discontent and aggravation continued throughout the industry. As wool prices continued to fall and unemployment rose, many shearers felt their poor conditions were receding even further. It all came to a head once again in 1894, with a second mass strike, this time being enacted in NSW as well as Queensland. Once again there was unrest, confrontation, sabotage and some violence.

In September of 1894, Dagworth Station, where Paterson & Macpherson were to write Waltzing Matilda the following year, had been the site of some substantial unrest, and no doubt Paterson would have heard all about it during his stay. The Dagworth Shearing Shed had been the site of violent confrontation, the story retold as a group of striking shearers coming to site, firing their rifles and pistols, and setting fire to the woolshed there, as they did to several others in the district too. (Wikipedia 2023)

Most of the sources are unclear about the exact timelines or details, but some suggest Mr Macpherson and three policemen had given chase to those suspected of involvement, one in particular a man named Samuel Hoffmeister – otherwise known as "French(y)", who was said to have been responsible for starting the fire. (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 14) (Wikipedia 2023)

They didn't catch Hoffmeister, but the following day he was found dead, killed by a gunshot wound, at the Four Mile Billabong, known as Combo Waterhole near Kynuna, western Qld. (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 112) (Monument Australia [no date]) After a judicial enquiry his death was declared to have been suicide.

Verse 4 concludes the swaggie's story;

Up jumped the swagman and sprang into the billabong.

"You'll never catch me alive!" said he

And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me." And the Chorus is sung one last time.

While many who knew Hoffmeister, and gave evidence at the inquiry indicated he appeared to be quite an unstable fellow, perhaps we can see how his suicide might have been interpreted, as him taking his life rather than being further pursued by the troopers one, two three, and taken prisoner? *You'll never take me alive said he?* Indeed there are a number of sources who like to imply he might have actually been murdered, perhaps by the squatter or his companions? But certainly the story seems to have stuck with Paterson.

In a radio interview in 1936, Banjo Paterson said, "The shearers staged a strike by way of expressing themselves, and Macpherson's woolshed was burnt down, and a man was picked up dead". (Waltzing Matilda - Song, Lyrics, Meaning, Analysis, Story [no date]) So it's clear he knew of the death, and there seems little doubt Hoffmeister's suicide was loosely translated into Paterson's swaggie jumping into the billabong, rather than be taken by the troopers.

So rather than just being an amusing little ode to a feisty swagman, O'Keeffe and others suggest it's actual conception arises from some pretty awful incidents that occurred around Dagwood during the 1894 Shearers strike, and some which Paterson both heard about and witnessed himself while visiting in 1895. Paterson has made some alterations to the stories, but obviously some of the tales he heard had inspired the sad rather than jolly swagman's demise.

The ABC quoted a Queensland history & politics professor concluding; "There seems to me no doubt that Waltzing Matilda wasn't just a little romantic ditty, it was a very deep, multi-faceted political allegory and lament," ... "It followed on directly from Banjo Paterson's first-hand account of what had happened in the 1894 shearers' strike in general, and what had happened specifically at the Dagworth Station, and he was aware of the suicide or murder of Frenchy Hoffmeister." (ABC News (Australia) 2010)

The Australian Workers Heritage centre reminds us that "Australia has only seen two armed insurrections between white settlers and government backed forces – the Eureka revolt of 1854 and the Queensland Shearers' strike of 1891." (Australian Workers Heritage Centre [no date]) Just as the Eureka Stockade was a watershed for a developing democracy, so the Shearers strike, while perhaps not immediately successful in the sheds around the country, proved to be a defining moment for the labour movement in Australia.

Henry Lawson wrote of the confrontations of the strike, the poem "Freedom on the Wallaby" in May 1891,

We'll make the tyrants feel the sting

Of those that that they would throttle;

They needn't say the fault is ours

If blood should stain the wattle.

Although both major strikes in 1891 & 1894 failed in their objectives of having all shearers covered by a single award, with reasonable pay & conditions negotiated collectively, the movement and many of the

men involved were instrumental in the formation and development of the *Australian Labour Party*, with its early manifesto declaring its party principles, calling for better working conditions, fair wages, and the recognition of workers' rights. (Flinders Shire Council 2023) (Australian Workers Heritage Centre [no date]) (Byrne 2021)

So how did the little ditty, penned by the flirting pair in Winton, become the widely known pseudo anthem of today? What really brought *Waltzing Matilda* to the tips of everyone's lips, was that in 1903 the Billy Tea Company chose Paterson's bush song as their jingle, printing slightly modified words & sheet music to go with the packaging. (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 3)

A great marketing ploy perhaps, with a certain symmetry of product with swagmen boiling tea in their billies too, at a time when there was nostalgia for the bushman's way of life. The NLA wrote "the Billy Tea Company used on its packet an image of a swagman, or 'swaggie', boiling his billy. Early in the twentieth century, Billy Tea's owner James Inglis purchased the rights to the song *Waltzing Matilda*. Some of Banjo Paterson's original words of *Waltzing Matilda* were changed for an arrangement of the song, which was published in 1905, and was the earliest printed version of the song." They proposed to include a free copy of the newly arranged sheet music of *Waltzing Matilda* with every packet of tea sold (National Library of Australia [no date])

And it certainly created a level of cut through, because long before it was ever recorded, it was reportedly sung by the Australian 'diggers' in the Gallipoli trenches in WWI. O'Keeffe chronicles Paterson hearing parading troops in Sydney singing his song, and commented "I only got a fiver for the song, but it's worth a million to me to hear it sung like this." (O'Keeffe, Dennis 2012, p. 4)

Paterson may have been a little surprised, as I was myself, to note that when Australia held a Poll in the 1970s, to identify the preferred song to replace our National Anthem, which was originally *God Save the Queen*, and then *Advance Australia Fair*, *Waltzing Matilda* came in a very respectable second to the winner; *Advance Australia Fair*!

Advance Australia Fair, while extremely old fashioned and a little obscure, with its "girt by sea" and "joyful strains", it does at least embody some very picturesque and uplifting lines, to pull on the heart strings of the patriotic and buoyant crowds that might gather to sing it. Honestly, apart from the fun in singing *Waltzing Matilda*, who could really be delighted at the image that the suicidal, thieving old jolly swagman encapsulates for our national pride?

But it does hold a place in Aussie hearts of course. Its lyrics have been micro-printed into our passports in the past. Banjo's image and the words he wrote have graced not only tea packaging, but our \$10 note. Kids study the song in primary school.

The National Film & Sound Archive notes, *Waltzing Matilda* was broadcast from space when the Space Shuttle *Columbia* astronauts played Slim Dusty's rendition, as it passed over Australia on its maiden flight in 1981. (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia [no date])

The song has its own museum in Winton, (*WaltzingMatildaCentre* [no date]) and related memorials & monuments at numerous sites. (*Waltzing Matilda Swagman | Monument Australia* [no date]) (Monument Australia [no date]) (Arthur 2012) (Wikipedia 2023)

Soldiers in WWII were still marching to the jaunty tune, and it's been sung at numerous sporting events, galas and official gatherings since it reached wide circulation in the early 20th century. So to date it has shown great staying power. Not bad for a few hours at the Zither, with a notepad!

I'll see if I can create an audio mash up of a number of versions, to finish of today's episode.

But before I go, I'd like to remind you about Dennis O'Keeffe's great book on Waltzing Matilda if you'd like a more detailed look. From the book bio of the late *Dennis O'Keeffe*, we learn he was "one of the nation's leading performers of Australian traditional songs, and was a successful song-writing teacher for over ten years. For as many years, he led the Australian traditional song sessions at the National folk Festival in Canberra. Dennis played the anglo-concertina, an instrument that came to Australia during the gold-rush of the 1850s. Dennis was at the birth of hundreds of songs, having written some forty songs about Australian history, and nurtured many song writers from their first idea through the first public performance of their song." (Allen & Unwin) O'Keeffe was one of Australia's most respected music researchers, singers and writers. <https://tintean.org.au/2014/05/05/the-man-they-call-the-banjodennis-okeefe/>

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Other Links:

Intro/Exit music modified from: 'Grand Canyon' by Löhstana, DAVID [CCFM Music]

Sound snippet: from Ray Chen – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c364LnyOU4>

WM Mashup from:

- Nunawading Pipe Band: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKKli1B1S9c>
- Kylie Minogue – (Paralympics) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmEnymAMBR8>
- Seekers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBvdhvUBpLw>
- Australian Troops sing – AWM: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWqmQISScl0>
- Tommy Emmanuel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUqgniVGYrk>
- Chubby Checker: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hu32ily2eyg>
- The Wiggles feat. Troy Cassar-Daley – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiZnmPhmcl4>
- Slim Dusty – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Bd5QPvu_G0
- Tina Areana (at AFL Grandfinal): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kr3FymbMps>
- Bushwackers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJXepcP726c>

- Little River Band: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzG0_hzonms
- (Helen Barrell) – Ice Cream Truck music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzHX53wnh78>

Bushwachers: **And the band played Waltzing Matilda** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8HLDpu_2Xk

WM on Zither: <https://trishansoz.com/trishansoz/waltzing-matilda/Waltzing-Matilda.mp3>

Youth Orchestra – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQHUrdrJiM>

Cobbers – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koBV4Acx1H8>

Dennis O’Keefe: <https://tintean.org.au/2014/05/05/the-man-they-call-the-banjodennis-okeefe/>

Waltzing Matilda lyrics - NLA version Macpherson:

Oh there once was a swagman camped in the billabong
Under the shade of a Coolibah tree
And he sang as he looked at the old billy boiling
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me

Who'll come a waltzing Matilda my darling
Who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me
Waltzing Matilda and leading a water bag
Who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the water hole
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him in glee
And he sang as he put him away in the tucker bag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker bag,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

Down came the squatter a riding on his thorough-bred
Down came Troopers one, two, & three
Whose is the jumbuck you've got in the tucker-bag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with we

You'll come a waltzing Matilda my darling
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me
Whose is the jumbuck you've got in the tucker-bag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me

But the swagman, he up and he jumped in the waterhole
Drowning himself by the Coolibah tree
And his ghost may be heard as it sings in the billabong,
Who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.'

OR

Up jumped the swagman and sprang into the billabong.
"You'll never catch me alive!" said he
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong:
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda, with me."