

Waltzing Matilda • And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

Written by bluelover

Sunday, 02 February 2014 17:10 -

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If there is one song that lives in the hearts of all Australians, it is **"Waltzing Matilda"**. The song, written by

A. B. "Banjo" Paterson

in 1895, has played a significant part in defining the Australian character. "Waltzing Matilda" inspires the Australian spirit. It can be a feel-good song, a rousing chorus or simply impart a feeling of nostalgia. It is sung at sporting events, in schools and by expatriates all over the world.

Waltzing Matilda

The Australian poet Banjo Paterson wrote the words to **"Waltzing Matilda"** in January 1895 while staying at a bush station in western Queensland, the Dagworth Homestead near Winton owned by the Macpherson family. The words were written to a tune recited by 21 year-old Christina Macpherson, one of the family members at the station. Macpherson had been taken with "The Craigielee March" which she heard played by a military band.



Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson

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Waltzing Matilda is, briefly, a song about a tramp who camps by a creek and steals a sheep. Three policemen arrive; rather than submit to capture, the tramp commits suicide by drowning himself in the creek. Remember that Australia was colonised by convicts sentenced to "transportation" from England, often for trivial property offences; Australians are still suspicious of authority, and cynical about the pomposity and hypocrisy of the judicial and police systems.



Christina Macpherson

Banjo Paterson based Waltzing Matilda on a true story. The central character is based on a man named Samuel "Frenchy" Hoffmeister. In September 1894, on the Dagworth sheep station north of Winton, some shearers were in a strike that turned violent. The strikers fired off their rifles and pistols in the air and then set fire to the woolshed at the Dagworth Homestead, killing over a hundred sheep. The owner of Dagworth Homestead and three policemen pursued Hoffmeister who, rather than be captured, shot and killed himself at a billabong.



Dagworth Homestead today

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Waltzing Matilda has become one of the world's ten most recorded songs. The origins of the song, and the meaning of the lyrics have been argued over by many researchers and performers since it was written over 100 years ago.



Bob Macpherson (farmer/station owner)

In 1977 a new government under Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser held a referendum which included a national plebiscite to choose a new National Anthem. "Advance Australia Fair" was the most popular, with a vote of 43%, compared to just 28% for "Waltzing Matilda", while "Song of Australia" gained 10% of the vote and 19% were in favour of keeping "God Save the Queen".

And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

"And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda" was written by Scottish-born **Eric Bogle** in 1971

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two years after moving to Australia. It has been interpreted in highly varying ways. But the expression 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' is central to the chorus, and many of the versions that have been recorded end with a haunting rendition of a few bars of 'Waltzing Matilda'.



Eric Bogle

Bogle wrote his song in two weeks as an anti-war song, nominally about Gallipoli in 1915, but really about Vietnam either side of 1970. He originally performed it with eight verses and later cut it back to five verses. In 1974 he performed it in a song contest (he didn't win) and did not release his own recording until his 1978 album *Now I'm Easy*. By then, there were cover versions in Australia, UK and USA. The author is often incorrectly attributed as 'traditional'.



Gallipoli (Turkey) 1915

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The song's explosion in popularity began in England. It was taken there in 1974 by Jane Herivel, who had heard it at the 1974 National Folk Festival in Brisbane. It was performed in England by her, and then by June Tabor. From the U.K. it was taken to the U.S. by Archie Fisher, in about 1975-76. It migrated to Ireland, where it reached number 1 on the pop chart during 1976 and it's also been recorded in Danish, Spanish, French, Portuguese and more besides.



Gallipoli 1915

By 1996 one researcher tracked down 130 recordings, 10 in languages other than English. In May 2001, the Australasian Performing Right Association, as part of its 75th Anniversary celebrations, named **"And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda"** as one of the Top 30 Australian songs of all time.



Swagman with Matilda

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Waltzing Matilda

*Oh there once was a swagman camped in the billabong Under the shade of a Coolabah 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 leading a tucker 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 said as he
put him away in the tucker bag You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me You'll come a waltzing
Matilda my darling You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me Waltzing Matilda leading a tucker
bag You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me Down came the squatter a riding on his
thoroughbred Down came policemen one, two and three Where is the jumbuck you've got in
the tucker bag You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me You'll come a waltzing Matilda my
darling You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me Waltzing Matilda leading a tucker bag You'll
come a waltzing Matilda with me But the swagman he ups and he jumps in the water hole
Drowning himself by the Coolabah tree And his ghost can be heard as it sings in the billabong
Who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me* What the words mean waltzing Matilda ~ to go
walkabout carrying your swag walkabout ~ walking in the bush for an extended period of
time swag ~ a pack or bundle containing the personal belongings of a swagman.
swagman ~ a drifter (person without a permanent place to live) who carried his swag as he
travelled the country on foot looking for work.

He was a common sight during the depression of the 1890's and 1930's. squatter ~ a
grazier or station (ranch) owner especially with a large landholding. Today squatter means a
person illegally occupying a property. billy ~ a tin can with a wire handle or a pot. To make
tea, water was boiled in it and handful of tea thrown in. tucker bag ~ bag to carry your tucker
(food) jumbuck ~ sheep coolabah ~ E.coolabah is a species of gum or eucalyptus tree;
coolibah is an alternate spelling. billabong ~ a dead-end channel extending from the main
stream of a river filled with water only in the rainy season.



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Now when I was a young man, I carried me pack, and I lived the free life of a rover From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback, well, I waltzed my Matilda all over. Then in 1915, my country said son, It's time you stopped rambling, there's work to be done. So they gave me a tin hat, and they gave me a gun, and they marched me away to the war. And the band played Waltzing Matilda, as the ship pulled away from the quay And amidst all the cheers, the flag-waving and tears, we sailed off for Gallipoli And how well I remember that terrible day, how our blood stained the sand and the water And of how in that hell that they called Suvla Bay, we were butchered like lambs at the slaughter. Johnny Turk he was waiting, he'd primed himself well. He shower'd us with bullets, And he rained us with shell. And in five minutes flat, he'd blown us all to hell Nearly blew us right back to Australia. But the band played Waltzing Matilda, when we stopped to bury our slain. We buried ours, and the Turks buried theirs, then we started all over again. And those that were left, well we tried to survive, in that mad world of blood, death and fire And for ten weary weeks, I kept myself alive, though around me the corpses piled higher Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head, and when I woke up in my hospital bed, And saw what it had done, well I wished I was dead. Never knew there was worse things than dyin'. For I'll go no more waltzing Matilda, all around the green bush far and free To hump tent and pegs, a man needs both legs-no more waltzing Matilda for me. So they gathered the crippled, the wounded, the maimed, and they shipped us back home to Australia. The legless, the armless, the blind, the insane, those proud wounded heroes of Suvla And as our ship pulled into Circular Quay, I looked at the place where me legs used to be. And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me, to grieve, to mourn, and to pity. But the band played Waltzing Matilda, as they carried us down the gangway. But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared, then they turned all their faces away And so now every April, I sit on me porch, and I watch the parades pass before me. And I see my old comrades, how proudly they march, reviving old dreams of past glories And the old men march slowly, old bones stiff and sore. They're tired old heroes from a forgotten war And the young people ask, what are they marching for? And I ask myself the same question. But the band plays Waltzing Matilda, and the old men still answer the call, But as year follows year, more old men disappear. Someday no one will march there at all. Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda, who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me? And their ghosts may be heard as they march by that billabong, who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?



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