

REEDY RIVER

Text: Dick Diamond; **Music:** Various traditional; **Additional Music:** Doreen Jacobs; **Lyrics:** Helen Palmer;
Additional Music/Lyrics: Chris Kempster,

Set in the 1890s the play's narrative concerns a group of shearers and their women who resist the conditions of a sheep station owner over the question of black-legging. This eventually led to a strike. Containing a trade union bite it introduces audiences to a number of traditional folk songs (and some new ones in the folk tradition) reviving within its story line songs such as "Click Go The Shears," "Flash Jack From Gundagai," and "The Old Black Billy." The title song, written by Kempster, is based on Henry Lawson's words. The "Ballad of 1891" was written by Helen Palmer (lyrics) and Doreen Jacobs (music).

The majority of revivals of *Reedy River* have been staged over the years by the New Theatre movement. With its roots in the Workers Theatre Movement of England in the 1920s and the New Theatre of America, the Australian movement was ideologically affiliated with the Communist Party. In this respect the emphasis was firmly on the class struggle, using the agitprop style of the Soviets.

New Theatre groups in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, and later Newcastle, all mounted their own *Reedy River* productions. The groups would perform either in their normal venues or in various city, suburban and country halls. The New Theatre of Sydney estimated in 1959 that the musical had been seen by no fewer than 130,000 Australians, and by 1992 it was further estimated that some 450,000 people had seen the work (350,000 in Sydney alone). An English production is also believed to have been staged at the Unity Theatre (London), although no details have yet been established. *Reedy River* has been published by Heineman Educational Australia (1970) and by Currency Press (1989).

PRODUCTIONS

- 1953:** New Theatre (Melb) 11 Mar. – ca. June [13 weeks]
- **Director** John Gray; **Choreographer** Peggy Campbell; **Conductor** Miles Maxwell; **Designer** William Marsden; **Stage Manger** Butch; **Lighting** Dot Thompson; **Sound** John Paton; **Costumes** Eileen Edson, Edna Cox, Jean Dingle, Joye Mobbs.
- **Cast:** Don Munro (Dixon), Jim Buchanan (Alf), Ted Thompson (Thomo), Len Dowdle (Irish), Eric Colladetti (Bill), Bill James (Snowy), Herman Carlton (Nuggett), Charles Allen (Joe), Margaret Wilson (Mary), Mark Albiston (Brodie) Ron Pinnell (Glover), Judy Dean and Chris Williams (Rose), Bill Strickland (Elderly Character), Arthur Greig (Swaggie), Margaret Taggart (Schoolmistress), Pam Horsburgh, Vivian Stouts, Doug Horsburgh, Brian Harris. - **Ballet Dancers:** Unity Dance - Rae Hollis, Jean Dingle, Ila Spicer, Peggy Campbell, Pam Blackham, Terryu Charelsworth, Frank Butson, Lou Delaney.
- **Musicians:** The Bushwhackers.
- 1953:** New Theatre (Syd) 5 Dec. – ca. Feb.
- **Directors** Bob Matthews, John Armstrong, Keith Gow; **Designer** Keith Gow.
- 1954:** All Saints Hall (Bris), New Theatre 4 Sept. – ca. Nov.
- 1954:** New Theatre (Adel) Oct. -
- 1954:** New Theatre (Perth) 22 Oct. -
- 1957:** Roxy Theatre (Newcastle);
- 1959:** New Theatre (Melb);
- 1960:** W. W. F. Theatre, Sussex St (Syd), New Theatre Company; 16 Jan. - 24 Apr. (Sat and Sun shows only)
- **Directors** Roger Milliss **Producer** W. W. F. Cultural Committee (Waterside Workers Federation); **Designer** Clem Millwood.
- 1963:** New Theatre (East Sydney); 7 Dec. 1963 - 16 Feb. 1964
- **Director** Shirley McDonald; **Designer** Robert Bruning, David Milliss.
- 1969:** New Theatre (Newtown, Syd); 1 Nov. -
- **Director** John Armstrong; **Designer** Roderick Shaw.
- 1973:** New Theatre (Newtown, Syd); 10 Mar. - 15 Apr. [return season 11-12, 18-19, 25-26 May]
- **Director** Joy Browne; **Designer** John Cervenka.
- 1979:** New Theatre (Newtown, Syd); 6 Jan. -
- **Director** Frank Barnes; **Designer** Robin McLaughlin.
- 1981:** Theatre 3 (Canberra, ACT) CRS; c Nov.
- **Director** Pam Rosenburg; **Music Director** Greg Smith; **Designer** Ian Telford; **Lighting** Jane Bayles; **Costumes** Maureen Newman; **Stage Manager** Kevin O'Loughlin.
- **Cast** included: Joan Richards, Phil Perman.
- 1982:** New Theatre (Newtown, Syd); 20 Mar. - 12 Apr.
- **Director** Frank Barnes; **Designer** Robin McLaughlin.
- 1985:** Q Theatre (Penrith, Syd); 22 Nov. - 15 Dec.
- **Directors** Ben Gabriel and Jennifer West.
- NB: This was possibly the first professionally staged production of Reedy River.
- 1988:** New Theatre (Syd); 2 Apr. - 4 June
- **Director** Rob Steele; **Designer** Anna Huppauf.