

The Billabong Prank



Fantastic, fantastic, fantastic! The kids loved it – as did the parents.
St Thomas Mores PS

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Bushfire Press

THE BILLABONG PRANK

a dinki-di aussie musical

book by Jan McLean & Doug Williams

music & lyrics by Jan McLean & Doug Williams



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PRODUCTION NOTES

SYNOPSIS

A Little History

This is a comedy about how the legend of the Australian song *Waltzing Matilda* began.

In the 1820's and 1830's, some 30-40 years after European settlement of Australia, free men ventured inland with mobs of sheep. When they found land that suited them they claimed it as their own and began vast sheep stations. These graziers were called squatters.

Later, in the 1850's, gold was discovered in Australia and thousands of hopeful immigrants from all over the world rushed to join the search for more. These people who hunted instant riches were called gold diggers, or diggers for short. They swarmed all over the country, even onto the squatters' properties, digging holes and panning in creeks.

Whenever there were rumours of a big gold strike, tent cities sprang up almost overnight and the whole landscape transformed into a 'digging'.

Oh – and also wandering around the country were men who travelled by foot, sometimes seeking work. They often rolled their meagre possessions into a blanket (a 'swag'), slung across their back, and carried a 'billy' (for cooking and making tea). These men were known as 'swagmen' or 'swaggies'.

The Story

It's dawn at a peaceful billabong (large pool of water in a treed area of the bush). A SWAGGY is lazily fishing. His peace is disturbed by the arrival of NUGGET and his digger mates. It's NUGGET's wedding day and the boys are here to dig a roasting pit for the feast. Ruthie and her bridesmaids appear and remind the boys that they have only 12 hours until the wedding. When they leave, NUGGET realises that they have not organised the food for the wedding feast. The SWAGGY suggests a method of 'acquiring' one of the SQUATTER's sheep. Now, as sheep stealing is a hanging offence, they are nervous, but the SWAGGY assures them that the plan will work.

Meanwhile in the homestead, the SQUATTER is complaining to his WIFE about the number of diggers on his property, digging holes and blocking off the creek etc. He goes to his FOREMAN and the SHEARERS with a plan: they'll push a sheep under the noses of the DIGGERS. If the DIGGERS take the sheep ... they'll be arrested by the TROOPERS. The TROOPERS will cooperate because the SQUATTER just happens to also be the District Judge ...

When RUTHIE hears that the boys have gone to 'acquire' a sheep, she takes off after them.

The SQUATTER has assembled a SERGEANT and a group of bumbling TROOPERS. They place a SHEEP in the path of the DIGGERS, who are about to grab it when they see a TROOPER hiding in the bushes. They realise it's a trap and try to push the SHEEP back onto the SQUATTER's land. The SQUATTER has it pushed back to the DIGGERS and during the slapstick episode of pushing and pulling, RUTHIE and the BRIDESMAIDS arrive. In the confusion, the sheep ends up in the SWAGGY's tuckerbag. He is, of course, arrested on the spot.

The DIGGERS and BRIDESMAIDS learn that the SWAGGY is to be hanged that afternoon and, though it's their wedding day, NUGGET and RUTHIE agree that they must do something to help the SWAGGY.

In the jail, the PRISONERS are concerned at the imminent hanging, but the SWAGGY assures them that 'she'll be right' and that something will turn up. THE DIGGERS arrive to break him out, but the SWAGGY has a better plan ...

The trial is held at the billabong and the SWAGGY is convicted and sentenced to be hanged immediately. The SWAGGY cries out that he would rather drown in his own billabong than be hanged and dives in. NUGGET appears in a sheet, pretending to be the SWAGGY's ghost, and scares off the SQUATTER and his cronies.

The wedding can finally go ahead and the SQUATTER's WIFE appears with a wedding gift of ... a sheep.

CHARACTERS

NUGGET	- a gold digger
RUTHIE	- Nugget's bride-to-be
THE SWAGGY	- an experienced man of the track
NUGGET'S MATES	- Bill, Fred & Charlie
RUTHIE'S BRIDESMAIDS	- Sarah, Sally & Sue
WEDDING GUESTS	- other diggers and their families
THE SQUATTER	- special parts for Frank, Betty and a Child
THE SQUATTER'S WIFE	- a mean old rotter
THE FOREMAN	- also known as "thoughtful and caring scatterbrain"
THE TROOPERS	- who is in the Squatter's pay
SHEARERS	- Sergeant, No. 2, No. 3 (a little different), No. 4, No. 5 & No. 6
PRISONERS	- who work for the Squatter
THE SHEEP	- No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, others
	- also known as the jumbuck

SCENES

- I THE BILLABONG**
- II THE SQUATTER'S HOMESTEAD**
- III BACK AT THE BILLABONG**
- IV THE SQUATTER'S PROPERTY**
- V BACK AT THE BILLABONG**
- VI AT THE JAIL (Spelled "gaol" in the olden days)**
- VII AT THE BILLABONG**

SCENERY

The scenery can be kept very simple to enable easy scene changes. For example, the Billabong can be a tree, and some cardboard or P.M.P. boxes draped with green or brown hessian/calico, with blue calico/plastic for the water, and a papier mache' rock or two, perhaps a tree stump. The Squatter's homestead could be represented by a table and chair and a cardboard sideboard. A cardboard wall, complete with bars, could set the prison scene, with a box and chair for the Swaggy. You can be as elaborate as you like, bringing on a flower covered arch for the "WEDDING SONG", with some of the chorus as flower girls, and creating walls and doors for the Homestead and Jail. Potted plants can also be effective. The Billabong can be brought on from P.S., the Homestead and Jail (GAOL) can be brought on from O.P. For Scene VII, bring on a trestle table and stools/chairs for the Squatter to "preside" over as magistrate, and hang the noose from the tree.

PROPERTIES (PROPS)

- SCENE I** Billy (blackened jam tin with wire handle), fishing line, swag (blankets rolled up and tied), tuckerbag (large hessian/calico bag), campfire, picks and shovels.
- SCENE II** Tea tray, handkerchief.
- SCENE III** Hair rollers.
- SCENE IV** Shrubs, rocks.
- SCENE VI** Meal tray, serviette, cutlery, boiled egg and other bits and pieces.
- SCENE VII** Noose, ribbons, breathing pipe, white bedsheet, false beard, fish, pond weed, gavel.

SONGS

WALTZING MATILDA
THE WEDDING SONG
PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1
DIGGERS ARE A CURSE
WHERE'S MY MAN?
TROOPERS ARE WE
YOU CAN'T LET A GOOD MATE DOWN
SHE'LL BE RIGHT
POSSESSION IS NINE TENTHS OF THE LAW

MUSIC

The music can be played by solo piano (score in back of book), stage band or the performance backing CD. Simple children's parts (melody & harmony) are available. They are suitable for recorder, flute, tuned and non-tuned percussion.

THE BILLABONG PRANK

SONG: 'WALTZING MATILDA' (INSTRUMENTAL)

AS CURTAIN OPENS BAND PLAYS VERSE OF WALTZING MATILDA. BIRDS HEARD IN THE BUSH. BILLABONG SCENE/SHADY TREE/SWAGGY LAID BACK/FISHING LINE ON TOE/HAT OVER EYES/ BILLY/CAMP FIRE/DAYLIGHT.

SWAGGY JOINS IN SINGING WHEN CHORUS IS REACHED. SINGS A FEW BARS/WHISTLES/FIDDLES WITH BILLY/HUMS/SINGS.

"...WAITED TILL HIS BILLY BOILED." GROOM AND MATES BURST INTO THE SWAGGY'S PEACE.

NUGGET : Over 'ere Charlie. Come on. Hurry up.

CHARLIE : Boy you're anxious to tie the knot.

NUGGET : Stone the crows mate. It's me wedding day. Ya only get one.

BILL : We've only gotta dig a roasting pit mate. We've been digging holes looking for gold all our blooming lives. This one won't take long.

NUGGET : Yeah but the girls will be along soon to check the billabong out. Ruthie said she'd knock me block off if it wasn't ready.

FRED : Told ya we should've done it yesterday.

CHARLIE : But then we couldn't have organized Nugget's buck's party.

NUGGET : The way my head felt this morning I wish you hadn't.

(all chuckle)

FRED : Sounds like we better dig softly - Anyone bring a rubber shovel?

(RUTHIE AND BRIDESMAIDS ENTER)

RUTHIE : Nugget! You got that pit ready yet?

FRED : *(to Charlie - aside)*: Struth he's in trouble now.

NUGGET : Just getting started.

RUTHIE : Oh you boys! You never do anything right. Get movin! Come on, there's a wedding here today And it's mine!

PEOPLE ENTER**SONG: 'THE WEDDING SONG'**

SALLY : Come on Ruthie, we better get going. We still have to do your hair.

SUE : And I haven't ironed the dress yet.

SARAH : That's right. You people get on with things here. We have to get the bride ready.

BEGIN TO HUSTLE RUTHIE OFF STAGE. THEY COME FORWARD.

NUGGET : (*looking at the sun*) You've still got about twelve hours. Do you think that's long enough?

RUTHIE : You pull your head in and get on with that pit.

NUGGET : Oh come on. I was only joking. How about one more dance?

REPRISE: 'THE WEDDING SONG'

RUTHIE : See ya later Nugget.

RUTHIE, BRIDESMAIDS LEAVE STAGE. NUGGET AND HIS MATES BEGIN WORKING ON THE PIT. OTHERS ON STAGE BUSY THEMSELVES WITH OTHER PREPARATIONS.

NUGGET : Come on - let's get on with this pit.

THEY BEGIN WORK

CHARLIE : Righto. I've got the shovel.

BILL : And I've got the pick.

NUGGET : That reminds me. Did you get the sheep Fred?

FRED : Nope. Charlie was getting it.

CHARLIE : Me! I thought Bill was!

BILL : Don't look at me.

NUGGET : Crikey! Don't tell me no-one's got the blooming sheep!

MATES SHRUG AND LOOK AT EACH OTHER.

This is a great state of affairs. All these people coming to my wedding and no tucker.

MATES SCRATCH THEIR HEADS.

FRED : Well we can still get one.

NUGGET : Where?

FRED : Well, we could ask.....

NUGGET : Who? Who could we ask?

FRED : The squatter.

NUGGET : **THE SQUATTER !!!**

VOICES : The squatter
The squatter
The squatter

NUGGET : He's so mean he uses his toilet paper on both sides.

SONG: 'PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1'

FRED : O.K. then. We can't ASK the squatter for a sheep because he hates us.

CHARLIE : We can't offer to BUY one because he's too mean.

BILL : But he **IS** the only person around here who has sheep. So **HOW DO** we get one?

SWAGGY : Pinch it.

NUGGET : (*Annoyed*) Who are you?

SWAGGY : Well I was just a swaggy enjoying a quiet snooze by the billabong until youse lot came with all ya yelling and disturbed me peace. Sounds like ya got a problem ... and I've got the solution.

NUGGET : Some solution! Stealing sheep's illegal. We could all hang.

SWAGGY : Well ... not exactly pinch it. I've had many a good feed from a jumbuck that just happened to wander down to a billabong and jump into me tuckerbag.

BILL : Ya mean sort of encourage it to come through the fence for a drink.

FRED : Like convince it that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

SWAGGY : Yeah. You've got the idea. That's exactly what I mean.

NUGGET : Cunning little bloke aren't ya. The more I think about it ... it just might work.

SWAGGY : Piece of cake mate.

CHARLIE : But we'll have to be careful my digger friends.

REPRISE: 'PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1'

BLACK OUT

INSIDE SQUATTER'S HOMESTEAD. SQUATTER IS PACING UP AND DOWN AGITATEDLY. WIFE ENTERS WITH TEA TRAY AND PUTS IT ON SIDEBOARD. SHEARERS ARE IN FROZEN POSES OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

WIFE : *(Nicely but dumbly)* Are you worried dear?

SQUATTER : Worried! No, I'm just pacing up and down for exercise. Of course I'm worried. *(Aside)* Stupid woman!

WIFE : Well what is worrying you dear?

SQUATTER : *(Pulls handkerchief from waistcoat)* Sheep! Sheep woman! And diggers! Diggers! Diggers and sheep don't mix!

WIFE : Oh, I didn't know you wanted to mix them dear.

SQUATTER : Of course I don't want to mix them! I want to get rid of them.

WIFE : All our lovely sheep dear?

SQUATTER : *(Wipes brow and continues to use handkerchief through scene)* Not the sheep, lamb brain, the diggers! I want to get rid of the diggers.

FOREMAN : *(Rushing in)* Boss! Boss! They've done it again! Those dirty diggers have blocked off our creek.

SQUATTER : Pests! Pests! I hate gold miners. They dig more holes than blooming rabbits and they breed like them too! Half of Melbourne's down by the creek.

FOREMAN : And the other half's on the track heading for it.

WIFE : Then maybe **WE** should go Melbourne with the sheep dear?

SQUATTER : You muttonhead! We have to get rid of the diggers **BEFORE** any more come.

FOREMAN : That's right boss. That's right.

WIFE : But dear they're such nice people. So hard working and their little tents look so pretty down by the creek.

SQUATTER : Nice people! Nice people! All they do is dig holes and muddy up my creek. Diggers have no right to this land.

WALKS TO DOOR

It's sheep country!

STEPS OUTSIDE

Isn't that right boys? (*Addresses assembled shearers*)

SHEARERS : Yes boss. It's sheep country!

SONG: 'DIGGERS ARE A CURSE'

FOREMAN: How will you get rid of the diggers, boss? What's the plan? Tell me about the jumbuck.

SQUATTER : (*Chuckling evilly*) Ha Ha! It's beautiful. Can't fail.

FOREMAN : What boss? What?

SQUATTER : Well sheep stealing's a hanging offence, isn't it?

FOREMAN : Yes boss.

SQUATTER : So if we push a sheep under their noses

FOREMAN : Yes boss, yes.

SQUATTER : And they take it

FOREMAN : (*Getting excited*) More boss, more.

SQUATTER : And we catch them...

FOREMAN : (*Very excited*) Yeah, yeah.

SQUATTER : **THEY'RE GONE!**

SHEARERS : **HOORAY!**

HATS THROWN UP. WIFE WIPES HER EYE AND GOES INSIDE.

FOREMAN : Great idea boss. Great idea.

CALMING DOWN

But don't we need the troopers to arrest them.

SQUATTER : That's the best part of my plan. They will be there ... waiting for the lambs to come to the slaughter. Digger lambs! (*Evil chuckle*)

FOREMAN : How do you know boss? How do you know?

SQUATTER : (*Pompously*) How do I know? Have you forgotten that I am also the District Judge and they'll do as I tell them. They don't like the diggers any more than we do. Diggers are a problem to everyone!

SHEARERS : Diggers are a curse!

REPRISE: 'DIGGERS ARE A CURSE'

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE TWO

THE OTHERS WHO WERE AT THE BILLABONG AT THE END OF SCENE 1 ARE STILL THERE CONTINUING WEDDING PREPARATION. A LITTLE MORE DECORATION HAS BEEN ADDED. THESE FOLK ARE BUSYING THEMSELVES AS RUTHIE, SARAH, SUE AND SALLY ENTER.

RUTHIE IS IN PART OF HER WEDDING DRESS BUT HER HAIR IS IN ROLLERS.

- RUTHIE : *(Speaking over her shoulder to Sarah as she enters)*. What do you mean he's gone! I'll find out.
- SARAH : He has Ruthie. He's knicked off. Bluey told me.
- SALLY : That's right Ruthie. I heard Bluey tell her.
- RUTHIE : *(On stage)* NUGGET! ...NUGGET *(Threateningly)* Nugget, if you don't show yourself right now you're mince-meat boy.
- BETTY : He really has gone Ruthie.
- RUTHIE : **WHAT!** On my wedding day. Four hours to go! **WHERE!** Where have he and his no-good mates gone?
- CHILD : I know. I know. He's gone off to get a sheep.
- RUTHIE : What?
- FRANK : *(Apologetically)* They forgot the sheep for the feast tonight.
- RUTHIE : Well where are they going to get one?
- CHILD : They're gonna pinch it!
- RUTHIE : You're kidding. Surely Nugget wouldn't be that stupid. Does he want to dance on a rope at our wedding?!
- BETTY : It was the Swaggy's idea.
- RUTHIE : Swaggy! How does a swaggy get into the picture? The more I hear about this, the less I like it. Those boys can never do anything right. I'll have to find Nugget. He's in enough trouble with me, without getting into any more. What a wedding day!

SONG: 'WHERE'S MY MAN'

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE THREE

AT THE BOUNDARY OF THE SQUATTER'S PROPERTY. THERE IS A ROW OF SHRUBS AND SOME ROCKS BEHIND WHICH FIVE TROOPERS ARE HIDING. THE SERGEANT ENTERS FRONT STAGE AND IS OBVIOUSLY LOOKING AROUND. HE PASSES THE HIDING PLACES IN TURN AND A TROOPER POPS UP, AND DOWN AGAIN, BEFORE THE SERGEANT SEES HIM. THIS HAPPENS A COUPLE OF TIMES. THEN TWO EXCHANGE PLACES UNSEEN. THEN ANOTHER TWO.

FINALLY THE FIVE SIMULTANEOUSLY BURST FROM THEIR PLACES, RUSH ACROSS STAGE TO A NEW PLACE, COLLIDE WITH THE SERGEANT, AND EACH OTHER, AND KNOCK THE SERGEANT DOWN.

IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE TROOPERS ARE ABOUT TO COLLIDE.

TROOPER 2 : Get out of my way!

TROOPER 6 : Look out!

AS THEY COLLIDE

TROOPER 4 : Mind out!

TROOPER 5 : Ouch!

IMMEDIATELY AFTER COLLISION AS ONE OF THE TROOPERS STEPS BACK.

TROOPER 3 : *(In an affected manner)* My toe, my toe. You get off my toe you big bully!

SERGEANT : *(Shouting from the floor)* Fools! Nincompoops! Pick me up! *(They start to pick him up)* Why were you hiding?

TROOPERS : *(together)* Ssshhh! *(They drop the sergeant to raise their fingers to their lips.)*

TROOPER 2 : Quiet Sarge, they'll hear you.

TROOPER 3 : Yes, you naughty little sergeant. Diggers have big ears.

SERGEANT : *(Still shouting from the floor)* Dolts! Idiots! Fools! **PICK ME UP!** *(They start to)* The plan hasn't started yet. The squatter has to bring the jumbuck.

TROOPERS : *(together)* Aaahhh!

THEY DROP THE SERGEANT AS THEY RAISE THEIR HANDS TO THEIR HEADS TO INDICATE UNDERSTANDING. THEY

REALISE HE'S ON THE FLOOR AND ALL DIVE TO PICK HIM UP AGAIN.

Sorry Sarge! Sorry Sarge!

SERGEANT : It's all right ... I'll get up myself.

HE STANDS

SERGEANT : **ATTENTION!**

TROOPERS MUDDLE TO ATTENTION. THE SERGEANT CARRIES OUT AN INSPECTION. HE IMPROVISES LINES LIKE.

"Back straight"

"Head up"

"Feet together"

"Chin in. Chest out"

SERGEANT : *(With his back to the audience)* You're troopers boys. Start acting like it.
LEFT TURN!

TROOPERS AND SERGEANT TURN IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.

SERGEANT : **QUICK MARCH.**

THEY MARCH ACROSS STAGE IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION. SERGEANT DOESN'T REALISE THEY ARE NOT WITH HIM. BUT TROOPER 6 NOTICES AND TAPS TROOPER 5, WHO TAPS TROOPER 4, ETC. THE TROOPERS STOP AND SCAMPER BACK TO THE SERGEANT. AS THEY CATCH UP AND TURN TO COME ACROSS STAGE TOGETHER "TROOPERS ARE WE" BEGINS.

SONG: 'TROOPERS ARE WE'

SQUATTER STRIDES IN FOLLOWED BY FOREMAN WHO IS LEADING THE SHEEP.

SQUATTER : Everything ready sergeant? Do your men know their hiding places?

SERGEANT : Yes sir. *(Troopers all nod vigorously)*

SQUATTER : Good. Now tell me the plan I told you. I want to be sure you have it right. I don't want any slip ups.

SERGEANT : Diggers always walk down this track to the billabong. *(Pause)* We put the jumbuck on the track where the diggers must see it. *(Moves to spot and points)* Then we'll all hide behind those bushes. *(Moves to other side of bushes and waves arms to show spots)* When the diggers come and take the sheep, we'll jump out and arrest them.