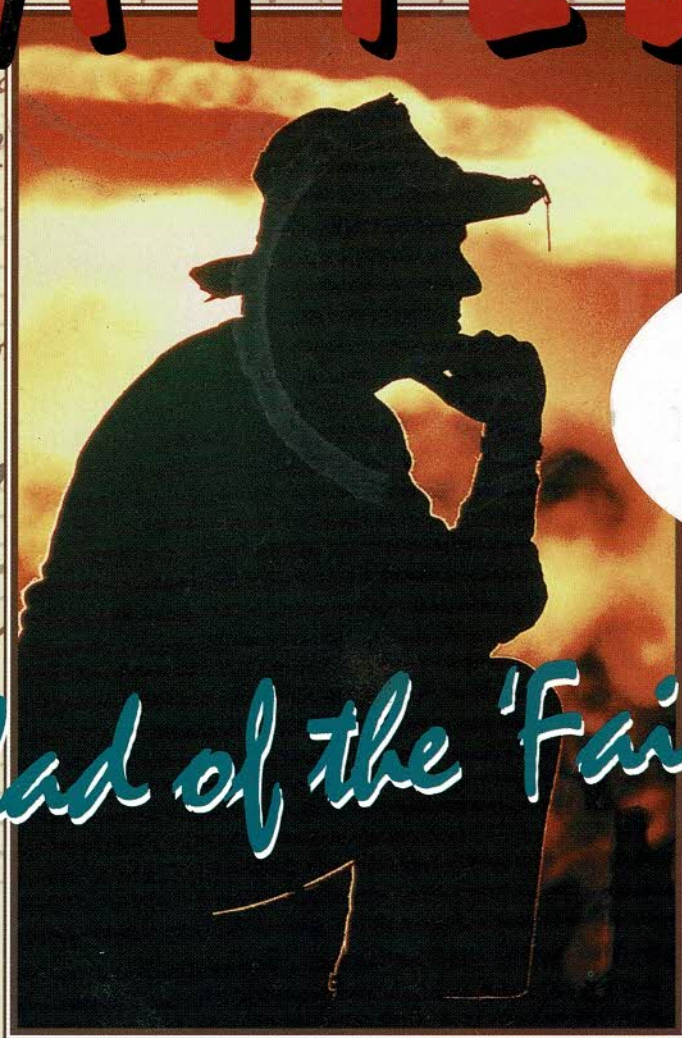


WALTZING MATILDA

1895

1995



Ballad of the 'Fair Go'



Richard Magoffin

Australia's foremost authority on the song

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INTRODUCTION

BALLAD OF THE FAIR GO

FROM THE DIAMANTINA

The search for the ancestry and history of our national song began, as the song itself did on the Upper Diamantina River, at Dagworth, Kynuna, and Winton and, in the end all trails led back to Matilda Country.

From the Upper Diamantina by a thousand channels, by the flickering flames of a thousand campfires, when this land was raw, the bush sang this haunting song and its people into History. Wherever the bush called them, its people answered and went: wherever cattle grazed or sheep were shorn. From the Diamantina to the Western River, to the Flinders, to the Maranoa, the Darling, and the Roper.

*Hurrah for the Roma Railway!
Hurrah for Cobb & Co.,
And oh! for a good fat horse or two
to carry me Westward Ho -
To carry me Westward Ho! my boys,
that's where the cattle stray,
On the far Barcoo, where they eat nardoo,
a thousand miles away.*

Wherever men worked stock, by the click of the shears, as they drifted with the dust of the muster, the songs of the bush went with them across the continent. Now these men are gone and their mustering camps, their wayside pubs, and most of their songs and stories have gone with them.



"Waltzing Matilda" remains because of a simple story carried on a great tune. That story began a century ago when Banjo Paterson heard it by the banks of a shady, red billabong. It will never die!

The swagman died, but his ghost lives on, calling us to remember the pioneers, including those who came in chains to this harsh land and others from many lands who came with little more than hope. He calls us to remember the weak, the poor, and the unemployed in our prosperous society. The ghost calls to authorities, too, warning them to respect that the rights of the individual are paramount in our democratic system.

The ghost of that long dead swagman lives on to waltz along with his faithful travelling companion, Matilda. Long live Matilda - song of Australia. May she live as long as Australians are prepared to say, "Fair go, mate!"



Aerial view of the Diamantina channels.

Thomson River at Longreach.