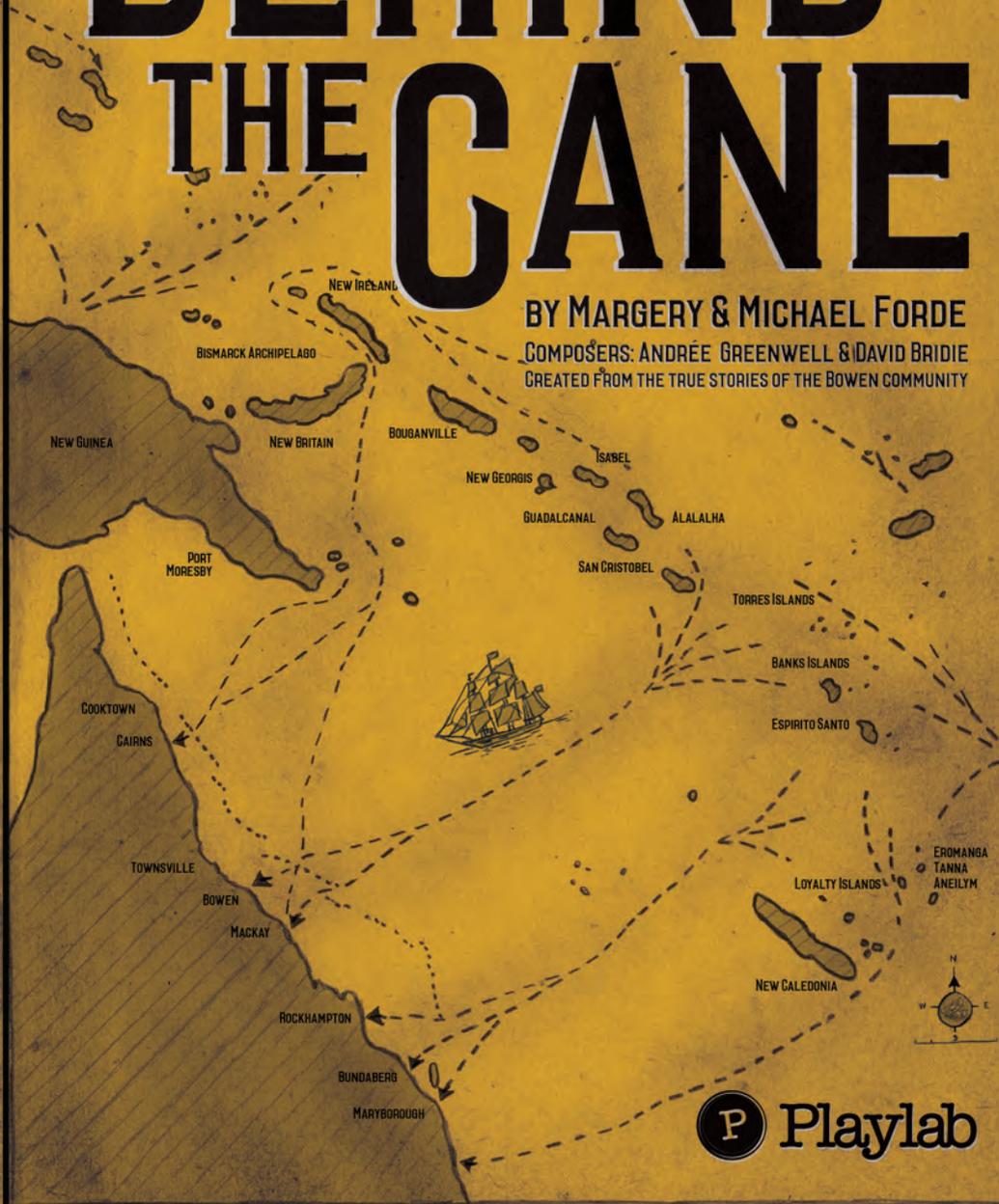


# BEHIND THE CANE

BY MARGERY & MICHAEL FORDE

COMPOSERS: ANDRÉE GREENWELL & DAVID BRIDIE

CREATED FROM THE TRUE STORIES OF THE BOWEN COMMUNITY



# Behind the Cane

Script & Lyrics by Michael and Margery Forde

Music composed by Andrée Greenwell and David Bridie



A Playlab Publication

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## Nigel Lavender

Queensland Music Festival's community engagement projects are the heart and soul of the Festival's Vision; to transform lives through unforgettable musical experiences. Public events like *Behind The Cane* are the result of years of engagement in which community members contribute stories, skills and talent, to create productions with the QMF team that reflect unique identities, hopes and aspirations, in turn effecting positive change in individual lives and whole communities.

Music helps us celebrate who we are, as well as providing a safe ground for exploring stories that are difficult to tell. The welcome extended by the people of Bowen to the QMF team was unparalleled, and as Margery and Michael began their journey of discovery in making this show, we were humbled by the community's response and belief this powerful story could finally be told. Thank you to our partner Whitsunday Regional Council and the people of Bowen for everything you gave to us in making *Behind The Cane* the remarkable experience it became.

QMF continues to work with diverse regional communities around the State. Please visit [www.qmf.org.au](http://www.qmf.org.au) to find out more.

Nigel Lavender  
Executive Director  
Queensland Music Festival

## Horace Paul

I would like to thank the Queensland Music Festival for their time in putting together this outstanding show of *Behind the Cane*. It was a privilege for me to be able to share with others the stories that my dear old dad had told me to help make this show.

My dad was only ten years old when he was blackbirded from his homeland in Vanua Lava in the Banks. If my dad was still here today, he would have been absolutely overwhelmed at the making of such a show as *Behind the Cane*. I found this show to be not only of sad memories and tears, but also of laughter and joy that came to the South Sea people years later as they came together and began to raise families of their own. They were strong and hardworking people in their own right. I can say this because my dad was one of them. And he is one I will always look up to. He was blackbirded, with many others, from South Sea Islands. And they've lived to tell their story through us, their children, their grand children and their great grand children. And all the credit goes to those who made it possible, the cast and crew of *Behind the Cane* and the Queensland Music Festival.

God bless! On behalf of myself, my Dad and all South Sea Islanders.

Our story's been told!

Written by Horace Paul.

P.S. By the way, my surname is my father's first name. His real name was Paul Lorrull.

## Vera Bezgovsek (nee Merrypor)

This book, *Behind the Cane*, is dedicated to all South Sea Islanders who were blackbirded from Vanuatu, the Solomon Islanders and other islands of the Pacific. It is also dedicated to the local South Sea Island Community of Bowen who contributed their families' stories to the book.

*Behind the Cane* captures the essence of our story, from the anguish of blackbirding and our people's fight to survive to today when we hold our heads high and look to the future with the knowledge that our story has finally been told.

We refuse to let the sadness of our beginnings define us. Instead we define ourselves. I am so proud of our people, our history and what we have been able to achieve. This book will now enable others to share in our trials and our triumphs, and our story will live on.

## From The Writers

### Margery and Michael Forde

When someone shares their history with you they are sharing something very precious. We feel very privileged that the Bowen community shared their stories with us. By doing this they illuminated part of Queensland's history that is often hidden or ignored. The stories we heard were tragic and heartbreaking but also inspiring and funny. They had a great strength of spirit. We interviewed over fifty people, histories were recorded and then we transcribed them. Then, from many hundreds of pages of transcripts we began to painstakingly weave a tapestry of stories to create the script and song lyrics for this epic music theatre piece. *Behind the Cane* is about our shared history. It's the story of the South Sea Islanders who were brought to Queensland, often by force or trickery, as part of the so-called "labour trade". It's the story of people who endured the worst of the White Australia Policy and survived. It's the story of the generations that followed - their gratitude to their ancestors, and their pride in being Australian South Sea Islanders. We were thrilled to collaborate on this work with two brilliant composers, Andrée Greenwell and David Bridie. We thank Deborah Conway, formerly Artistic Director of the Queensland Music Festival, who invited us to be the writers on this project. The first production played to over eight thousand people over three nights in the sound shell in Bowen.

## Acknowledgements

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that the following acknowledgement may contain the names of deceased persons***

Margery and Michael wish to thank all those who shared their stories with us: Horace Paul, Muriel Paul, Isaiah Paul, Vera Bezgovsek, Gwen Watego, Phil Watego, Dorothy Enid Miller, James Miller, Dianne Bickey, John Clyde Parter, Noel John Yasso, Alfred Corowa, Robyn Lillas and family, Naomi Smith, Rose Cora, Amie Batalibasi, Jacintha Batalibasi, John Batalibasi, Joshua Batalibasi, Dan and Edith Merrypor, Olwyn Merrypor, Avalyn Smith, Granville Willie, Jessie Willie, Jason Fallon, Merwez Whaleboat, Raelene Montagna, Mark Montagna, Pastor Des Power, Del Power, Reynold Power, Gwen Power and the extended Power family, Raymond and Pat Geesu, the Querro family, Cecillia Upkett, Des Upkett, Sharon Stacey, Mark Stacey, Simone Stacey, Val Dean, Esme Power, Ida Youse, Errol Youse, John Finlay, John Warby, John and Beverley Wilcox, Mark Steen, Stephen Darwen, Mark Gaudrey, Dave Clark, the students of Bowen High School and everyone in the Bowen community who shared their stories with us and made us feel welcome. Without you this story could not have been told.

## First Production Details

*Behind the Cane* was first performed at the Bowen Soundshell, Bowen on 28 July 2011.

### PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR	Sean Mee
COMPOSERS	David Bridie and Andrée Greenwell
WRITERS	Margery Forde and Michael Forde
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Josh McIntosh
LIGHTING DESIGNER	George Meijer
PRODUCER	Marguerite Pepper
CHORAL DIRECTOR	Mark Dunbar
COMMUNITY CONSULTANTS	Vera Bezgovsek and Gwen Watego

### CAST (in order of appearance)

WOMAN 1	Amanda Parter
VOICE 1, 2 & 3	Grace Power, Jazmin Henaway, Rainer Power
NARRATOR	Aicey Zaro
THE BOY	Darius Miller or Bryce Power
SAILOR 1 & 2	Andrew Beck, BJ Freeman
FOR THE GREATER GOOD	Dirk Hoult
CLERGYMAN	Roger James
MOTHER'S SONG	Georgia Corowa
CANE CUTTING SONG	Karmon Power
LAND OF THE FAIR & FREE	Roger James
WOMAN NARRATOR	Jazmin Henaway
FARMER	Dirk Hoult
BEHIND THE CANE SONG	Priscilla Miller, Marcus Corowa
WALKING TO BOB MOSES	Children's Choirs
YOUNG MAN & WOMAN	Rainer Power, Shaniah Power
DAD	Grenville Willie
GRANDDAD	Sam Merrypor
GRANDMOTHER	Ida Youse
BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND	Jeni Borellini
SALT PAN MAN SONG	Aicey Zaro
RISIN' UP SONG	Priscilla Miller, Amanda Parter, Bianca Paul
MILL BOSS & BAKER	Andrew Beck, BJ Freeman
SHE'S GOT HER EYE ON YOU	Dirk Hoult, Bianca Paul

YOUNG MAN  
SOMEWHERE LISTENING &  
GRANDDAUGHTER'S SONG

Rainer Power

Amanda Parter, Georgia Corowa Karmon  
Power, Marcus Corowa, Cecilia Upkett,  
Vera Bezgovsek, Abby Paul

MUSICANS

David Bridie, Wes Bust, Clare Cheesman,  
Marcus Corowa, Sam Denning, Karlee  
Haansberg, Ben Hakalitz, Airi Ingram, Will  
Kepa, Kyle Lynch, Kathryn McKee, Dan  
Merrypor, Emma Monsour, Reynold Power,  
Youka Snell, Leon Stucas

BACKING VOCALS

Amanda Parter, Priscilla Miller & Bianca Paul

ADULT CHOIR

Vera Bezgovsek, Gillian Berry, Rose Cora,  
Michal-Rae Cruz, John Finalay, Pam Finlay,  
Laurel Henaway, Pauline Kreyborg,  
Lorraine Maltby, Dan Merrypor, Edith  
Merrypor Rebekah Merrypor, Maria  
McDonlad, Sarah Miller, Shirley James,  
May Parter, Johnny Parter, Donald Power,  
Gwen Power, Isaiah Power, Selwyn Power,  
Shaniah Power, Sharmica Power, Tiana  
Power, Helen Tawse, Gwen Watego, Stacey-  
Lee Watego, Lyndrea White, Melessa Yasso,  
Angela Zyla — Led by Annette Mitchell

CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

Queens Beach Primary School — Led by  
Pauline Kreyborg  
Whitsunday Christian Collage — Led by  
Melissa and Paul Saunders  
Collinsville State School — Led by  
Sam Denning

MALE ENSEMBLE & DANCE  
ENSEMBLE

Jazmin Henaway, Shanice Henaway,  
Zeccheaus Henaway, Ezra Miller, Darius  
Miller, Isaiah Miller, Sarah Miller, Tim  
Miller, Xavier Miller, Kelly Parter, Luke  
Parter, Grace Power, Jevon Power, Karmon  
Power, Rainer Power, Selwyn Power,  
Shaniah Power, Troi Querro, Micheal  
Watego, Karlee Yasso

# Behind the Cane

*To begin ...*

*Conch shells call people to “Storian”.*

## OVERTURE

*Island dance and Island music with chorus voices.*

# Act One — Blackbirded

## SCENE 1 LITANY OF NAMES

WOMAN 1

These are Queensland stories. They are our stories, and until now, they haven't been told. From 1863 until 1901 — tens of thousands of South Sea Islanders were brought to Queensland to work in the sugar plantations. We are going to tell you the stories of some of those people — and the stories of their descendants here in Bowen. These are their names.

*LITANY OF NAMES [Choir sings the names]*

Yasso ... Merrypor ... Corowa ... Power

Watego ... Willie ... Neehow ... Neyow

Parter ... Wommel ... Youse ... Paul

Lorrull ... Batalabasi ... Falinga ... Cora

Bickie ... Miller ... Querro ... Upkett

Kai Kai ... Bobbert ... Geesu ... Kyliff

Dreammoss ... Barramanus ... Killier ... Moses

Yowyeh ... Hansen ... Wanem.

*Music continues under the following ...*

- WOMAN 1            Our people came from the Islands of Melanesia. Many of them were blackbirded. Kidnapped.
- VOICE 1            My great-grandfather was blackbirded from Tanna. He was in the very first lot that came over.
- VOICE 2            My great-grandmother came from the New Hebrides — or Vanuatu as it's known now, eh.
- VOICE 3            My great-grandfather was blackbirded from the Island of Malaita in the Solomons.
- VOICE 1            My great-grandmother came from Gaua ...
- VOICE 2            He was blackbirded from Espiritu Santo ...
- VOICE 3            Malakula ...
- VOICE 1            Pentecost ...
- VOICE 2            Epi ...
- VOICE 3            Tongoa ...
- VOICE 3            Ambrym ...
- VOICE 2            Mota Lava ...
- VOICE 3            Vanua Lava ...

*Lights up on Woman 1 and Narrator.*

- WOMAN 1            When we were kids, our family used to sit around the table listening to Dad telling stories of growin' up here in Bowen.
- NARRATOR           I'm Bowen born and bred, eh. I was born in Gillett's Lane — up on the rise there. Yeah.
- WOMAN 1            And he'd tell us about our Grandfather, and where he'd come from.

NARRATOR

My Dad come from Vanua Lava — up in The Banks. A village called Quisue. His kastom name was Lorrull, but he was christened “Paul” by the missionaries, eh. He said there was only one white sand beach on his Island. All the rest was black sand from the volcanoes. And from that white beach you could look out — and see three other Islands.

## SCENE 2

## FOR THE GREATER GOOD

*A young boy on a white sand beach. It is late afternoon. He is looking out to sea. Off in the distance, he can see three other Islands.*

*Warning sounds of conch shells. A blackbirding ship looms up on the horizon. The boy is captivated.*

NARRATOR

My father was playin’ on that white beach when the blackbirdin’ ship pulled in.

*We see two recruiters. They carry guns. They talk coaxingly to the boy in pidgin and sign language. One of them holds out a bag of lollies.*

SAILOR 1

Hey, yangfala. Yu laekem lolli?

SAILOR 2

You come out big sip. Plenty more lolli. Plenty more on big sip.

NARRATOR

Dad was ten years old.

*Drumming. The drumming builds to a crescendo. Fathoms of red calico cascade over the side of the ship. The boy is ensnared by the calico. He is dragged aboard. Drumming stops. We see the mother.*

NARRATOR By the time his mother got down to the beach, the ship was startin' to move. Dad could see her — runnin' along the beach — yellin' at him to jump off. But they told him he'd get shot if he jumped.

*The distraught mother collapses to her knees and wails her grief.*

MOTHER [*Pidgin*] Boe blong me!

NARRATOR My father was put in the hold of the ship with other Islanders. The voyage to Queensland took seven weeks.

*Intro to the song "For the Greater Good" begins.*

*A tempest at sea. The boy and the other terrified Islanders are illuminated by a wildly swinging lamp. The Recruiter appears holding a gun.*

SAILOR Youfella! Settle down! You listen to big fella captain!

*The Recruiter sings — partly in broken Pidgin*

*FOR THE GREATER GOOD [song]*

RECRUITER [*Sung*] Yu fella go katem sugaken long Kwinsland  
Yu fella wok for very nice waetman  
Yu laki tumas, so be happy, yes you should  
What mefela do is for the greater good

Plenty kind boss man to take care of you  
Plenty nice kai kai under sky of blue  
Yu fella work in sun like no white fella could  
So what you do — you'll do for the greater good  
Big fella captain tell you gospel truth  
I'll swear on the bible if you need more proof  
Yu oli go home in three moons — understood?  
Yufala savvy — it's all for the greater good.

*Music continues under as the stage transforms into a wharf. There is a burst of confusion and movement as freight is hauled aloft and tramway trucks of goods rattle by. Wharf workers, merchants. People meeting incoming ships, toffs and workers, migrants, wheelers and dealers, whores etc.*

VOICE [Wharf worker] Righto! Haul up the cargo!

VOICE [Wharf worker] Watch your heads!

VOICE [Seaman] Lower the gang plank!

VOICE [Salvation Army] Donations — donations for the poor and needy!

VOICE [Lady of the night] Like some company, mister?

VOICE [Wheeler and dealer] Care to buy a nice watch, lady? Only two bob!

*[The recruiter hustles the boy and other South Sea Islanders onto the wharf. The Islanders are now dressed in trousers and flannel shirts. The boy is jostled by the crowds. He is terrified.]*

RECRUITER [To the Islanders] Here we are boys! Welcome to sophistication! Welcome to civilisation! Welcome to Maryborough!

*The recruiter takes the chance to spruik his trade to the people on the wharf.*

[Sings] We don't cut cane like a good kanaka can  
We don't clear land like a big strong Tanna man  
The labour is cheap — their pay is so small  
You might as well say it's no pay at all.

*Some people come forward with orders. As the recruiter sings — he collects the orders.*

It's supply and demand and my business is brisk  
So you pay a pretty penny for the hardship and the risk  
You can always count on me to deliver the freight  
Ten pound for each man — that's the going rate.

*Music continues under as the mill owner and the agent enter ...*

MILL OWNER      *[To recruiter]* I ordered kanakas for Farleigh Mill.

RECRUITER        And here they are! Willing workers every one!

*Mill owner casts a disapproving eye over the boy.*

AGENT             You have the Agreement?

*The recruiter hands "the agreement" to the agent.*

*[To Islanders]* As Government agent, I must now read this to you — so you all understand the terms of your indenture.

*He begins reading the "agreement" to the Islanders. They are bewildered.*

Memorandum of Agreement made this day between  
Farleigh Mill of Mackay of the first part and the undersigned  
labourers of the second part, the conditions are ...

RECRUITER        *[Cutting across him]* Yufella kanakas blong this fella.  
*[He holds up three fingers].* Go home three yams. *[To the agent]* They understand.

AGENT             *[To the Islanders]* Alright you boys — make your marks!

*In sign language, the agent indicates to the Islanders that they should make their marks on the agreement. (Thumb prints). As this happens, the mill owner gives a wad of money to the recruiter.*

MILL OWNER      Ten quid each. And five for the kid.

RECRUITER

*[Mutters]* Mongrel.

*As the recruiter walks away counting his loot, he passes a clergyman and his wife who have witnessed some of the transaction.*

*Music up under song ...*

CLERGY

Sir, your despicable trade is vile  
That boy you have there is no more than a child  
This traffic in kanakas is slavery  
And you sir, a disgrace to humanity!

RECRUITER

*[Spoken]* Hypocrite!

*[Sings]* You missionary mob and your mealy-mouthed crew  
With your prayers and your hymns and your hullabaloo  
Face up to it mate — we're playin' similar roles  
I harvest their bodies while you harvest their souls.

*The Clergyman and his wife begin to move away.*

You promenade town in your linen and your laces  
With self-righteous sneers on your smug little faces  
And you stir refined white sugar in your tea  
While you thank your sweet God — there's things you  
don't have to see.

*Recruiter alone.*

Gammon 'em with fathoms of red calico  
Then catch 'em, and latch 'em under the hatch below  
And if there is a little spilling of blood  
I'm making a killing all for the greater good