

# Black Cockatoo

by Geoffrey Atherden



A Playlab Publication

# Publication and Copyright Information

## Performance Rights

Any performance or public reading of any text in this volume is forbidden unless a licence has been received from the author or the author's agent. The purchase of this book in no way gives the purchaser the right to perform the play in public, whether by means of a staged production or as a reading. Inquiries concerning performance rights, publication, translation or recording rights should be addressed to: Playlab, PO Box 3701, South Brisbane B.C, Qld 4101. Email: [info@playlabtheatre.com.au](mailto:info@playlabtheatre.com.au)

## Copyright

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of study, research or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. For education purposes the Australian Copyright Act 1968 (Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is greater to be copied, but only if the institution or educator is covered by a Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licence. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

*Black Cockatoo* © Geoffrey Atherden  
First Published April 2020 by Playlab

General editor: Alexander Bayliss  
Copy editor: Danielle Carter  
Cover design: Sean Dowling  
Cover Graphic Design: Alphabet Studio  
Cover photography: Christian Trinder  
Appearing on cover: Aaron McGrath and Chenoa Deemal

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:  
Catalogue in publication  
Geoffrey Atherden — 1943 –

*Black Cockatoo*  
ISBN: 978 1 922424 00 6



## Notes

The play is set in three time periods, the distant past (1868-1869), the recent past (2018) and the present moment of the performance (now).

### **1868-1869**

Principle characters

Johnny MULLAGH (Unnaramin) — a young Jadawadjali man from Western Victoria — 27

Lady Lydia BARDWELL — an English woman of the upper classes — late 30s.

Charles LAWRENCE — English cricketer — 40ish.

#### 1 MALE ACTOR

GOODWIN — Head Butler in Bardwell's house in York

MR NORTON — Father in an upper middle class family in Maidstone

BURRUP — President Surrey Cricket Club

MC and MINSTREL PUPPET in a music hall

DRUMMOND — Head Butler at Mote Hall

OTHER TEAM MEMBERS

#### 1 FEMALE ACTOR

MAID — a maid in the Yorkshire house

MRS NORTON — mother in an upper middle class family in Maidstone

OTHER TEAM MEMBERS

### **Recent past (2018)**

Characters

These four people know each other as classmates in a course in Indigenous History and Politics at a Melbourne university.

ALEX — working class background, a very capable high school teacher with a natural tendency to want to organise.

Alex will play Charles Lawrence.

TINA — A lawyer with thoughts about a possible future in politics. And a cricket fan.

Tina will play Lydia Bardwell

KIMBERLY — has a casual position at a university which suits her while she's a single mother but she'd like to gain additional qualifications so she can move up the pay scale and into a more secure position. Her playful attitude to life is a protection.

Kimberly will play the multiple female roles

BRANDON — He's been an actor who was briefly famous for a role in a soap. Can be a bit all talk not much action.

Brandon will play the multiple male roles

**Now**

A CURATOR who will also play Mounted Constable KENNEDY, a member of the Colonial police

NOTE — this script uses the conventions of 'enters' and 'exits' even though the intention may be for all cast to remain on stage.



# Black Cockatoo

## 1 THEATRE

*The set establishes a museum storage space.*

*While the audience is entering and taking their seats, the CURATOR, wearing white cotton gloves, is on stage, looking through boxes until he finds each of the five objects detailed below. Each one is unwrapped and placed carefully where they are accessible.*

*During this, the CURATOR may chat to the audience and reassure them that the play hasn't started yet, that they haven't missed anything, that he is just getting a few things ready.*

*House lights down.*

CURATOR

Right, we're about to get going. But before I do, I want to acknowledge that we're here on Cammeraigal land. The Cammeraigal people were part of the Eora nation, and the Eora nation stretches from the Hawksbury River to the north, the Nepean River to the west, the Georges River to the south and our beautiful coastline here in Sydney. And we pay our respects to their elders past and present.

In addition, our story concerns people from three tribes in Victoria, three different tribes but connected through song lines, and they are the Watjabaluk, Gunditjimara and Jardawadjali people and we pay our respects to them and to their elders past and present.

*A pause for a moment of respect.*

And now I need to ask for some help from you, the audience. Don't worry. You're not going to have to come up on stage and do anything. It's not that sort of play. This is *The Ensemble*, it's not *Carriageworks*. You can stay sitting right where you are. During the show, you'll see me coming out with a cricket bat and I'll be calling out some cricket scores. And remember, you're here to support the Australians. So if I call out Australia wins, how will you show that support?

*Waits for crowd reaction. Encourages if necessary.*

And if I say Australia loses?

*Waits for crowd reaction.*

And if I say match drawn?

*Waits for crowd reaction.*

Excellent.

*(Repeat the above if it seems like a good idea.)*

In addition, we have a number of valuable objects, valuable things here and I'm going to ask you to help me to look after them during the performance. For example, this boomerang is believed to be one that went to England in 1868.

*He retrieves the boomerang and approaches a member of the audience.*

Would you mind looking after this? Have you ever thrown one of these and made it fly? Don't try. It's on loan from a private collection and at the end of the run, we've promised to get it back in good condition.

*The CURATOR retrieves the next object, a prayer book.*



This is an English prayer book from the Victorian era, probably printed in about 1860, roughly. It has some nice prayers in there and they might come in handy some time. Can I ask you to hold this for me? Thank you. Don't worry, you won't have to hold these things through the whole play. I'll come and get them when we need them.

*He collects a battered gold pocket watch with a gold chain. On its back is a worn inscription, hard to read.*

Here's a watch and again, it's Victorian era. We think it belonged to Johnny Mullagh. If you haven't read the program, you won't know who he is, but don't worry, by the end of the play, you'll know. It's not a stopwatch so you can't use it to time the play. Doesn't work anyway. Can you hold this? Thanks.

*Next are two Victorian photographs of English society ladies.*

These are a couple of Victorian era photos of English society ladies. Photography was still pretty new back then and young ladies of the English upper classes used to get themselves all dolled up and have their picture taken and then the photographer used to put them up for sale. Would you mind? Maybe hold them face to face so there's no risk of getting fingerprints on them. Or I could get you some gloves? No, just hold them carefully. Thank you.

*The final object is Johnny Mullagh's 1868 cap with the boomerang and bat emblem.*

And this is very special, this is one of the actual caps worn by one of the members of the 1868 Aboriginal team that went to play cricket in England. It's been repaired a few times, a new little badge was made for it, the old one fell off or was possibly stolen, it's had a new lining put in and new fabric on the outside, but it's basically the original cap that went to England just over a hundred and fifty years ago. You? Don't put it on. Just hold it. Thank you.

*The CURATOR returns to centre stage.*

Thank you everyone for looking after these. It's a big help.  
You see, we're expecting a bit of trouble.

*Off stage, the sound of glass being broken.*

*The CURATOR reacts to the sound and exits quickly.*

*Lights down to as dark as possible.*

*Off stage, the sound of more breaking glass and a window  
or door being forced open.*

## 2 WIMMERA DISCOVERY CENTRE

*The sounds of entry.*

TINA *[off stage]* I don't want to cut myself.

ALEX *[off stage]* Step around it.

TINA *[off stage]* How? You've got it everywhere.

ALEX *[off stage]* Just be careful.

TINA *[off stage]* Give me a hand'd be more useful.

*Sounds of footsteps on broken glass.*

*ALEX, TINA and BRANDON enter, using their phones as  
torches. They're dressed in ordinary day clothes appropriate  
for a cool, country night. ALEX has a backpack.*

I didn't know we were going to smash our way in.

ALEX We said we were gonna break in. How do you break in  
without breaking something?



- TINA                    You look for an open window?
- ALEX                    So you come to break in, you look for an open window, can't find one, oh dear, that's a shame, go home.
- TINA                    I suppose I knew we were going to break and enter, I just didn't think we'd break and enter and make such a horrible mess.
- BRANDON                If you remember, I wanted to blow the door off, but, you said no to that, so ...
- ALEX                    Can we just stop arguing over nothing for a sec and acknowledge that we're on other people's country and take a minute to reflect on that?
- TINA and BRANDON join ALEX and stand silently for a moment.*
- TINA's mobile chimes with a text message. She takes it out of her pocket and looks at it.*
- Is that Gary?
- TINA                    Kimberly. She's coming after all.
- ALEX                    When?
- The sound of knocking on the front door causes everyone to turn to look in the same direction.*
- BRANDON                Through the front door. See, that's what I wanted to do. Boom!
- TINA makes a call.*
- TINA                    *[into her phone]* Kim, no, round the back. Round the back. We're in.
- She ends the call.*
- BRANDON                I'll get her.
- BRANDON exits to get KIMBERLY.*

ALEX                      Kimberly, who would've thought?

TINA                      At least it'll help with gender balance.

ALEX                      Sure, but Kimberly, I like her, we all do, but is she ever really serious about anything?

*ALEX locates a switch and turns on the storeroom lights.*

*Phone/torches are turned off.*

*Offstage sounds of a difficult entry.*

KIMBERLY              [*off stage*] God, what a mess. Who did this?

BRANDON              [*off stage*] Alex.

*BRANDON enters with KIMBERLY. She's much more glamorously dressed than anyone else.*

TINA                      What are you wearing?

KIMBERLY              What's wrong?

ALEX                      You do know this is a protest.

KIMBERLY              Yeah. I want to look glam for the photographers. When do they get here?

ALEX                      Who?

KIMBERLY              Journos. News crew.

ALEX                      Possibly in the morning when they open up and find us here.

KIMBERLY              We're here all night?

*She takes off her high heels.*

I wish someone'd told me.

BRANDON              She'd've brought a sleeping bag.

KIMBERLY              No thanks. I don't do tent embassy.