

## **The Classical Road Show's *Dreamtime Tales***

**Music – Richard Brown**

**Words – Nigel Williams**

### **Notes on the stories in Dreamtime Tales for Teachers**

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1778 Lieutenant James Cook set sail on the ship Endeavour to explore the Pacific. His orders included going to King George's Island (now Tahiti) to make astronomical observations and then to search for the mythical continent *Terra Australia Nondum Cognita* (The Southern Land Not Yet Known).

2 years after leaving Plymouth on 29 April 1770, Cook landed on an unknown shore. He named the spot Botany Bay. He found a place teeming with life including native peoples who were generally regarded as primitive, savage, godless and ripe for civilising. In fact, although they had little material wealth they did have spiritual wealth:

*The Dreamtime is the foundation of Aboriginal religion and culture, dating back some 65,000 years and is the oldest, continuous culture on the planet. It is the story of events that happened in the far- off time of TJUKURITA – the Dreamtime , how the universe came into existence, how the land, the rivers, the mountains and human beings were created and the code of behaviour laid down for them by the Spirits who created them..*

### **The story of the first sunrise**

According to legend, in the beginning the sky was so close to the earth that it shut out all the light. The earth was dark and cold and everyone had to crawl about on their hands and knees. No-one could stand up without bumping their heads on the sky and all the animals complained.

The Magpies listened to all this moaning and squabbling. They gathered sticks and flew up lifting the sky on their sticks. They propped up the sky until everyone could stand upright. The Magpies kept flying higher and the sky grew tighter until suddenly, it split right open and the first sunrise flooded the land with light and warmth. The Magpies were so happy that they sang and the blanket of darkness that had covered the earth broke into smoky fragments and drifted away as clouds.

And ever since then, the Magpies have sung their song to celebrate that first dawn when they lifted the sky.

### **The story of the Rainbow snake and the Wawilak Sisters**

All over Australia there are Dreamtime stories of how the Creator told JARAPIRI, the Rainbow-snake to make the world.

At the time of the Dreaming, the Rainbow-snake arrived from the sea and travelled inland, making the rivers and the waterholes as he went. The waterholes in many tribal lands are supposed to contain enormous, fierce, bearded creatures called WANAMBIS. When enraged, they transform themselves into rainbows, paralyse all unwanted strangers and drag them beneath the water. When the world was young, in a waterhole at a place called MIRARRMINA in northwest Australia, there lived a huge olive-coloured python - the WITITJ.

This is the story of two girls of the WAWILAK tribe, GARANGARR and BUWALIRI and their pet dingo WULNGARRI, annoyed the WITITJ.

GARANGARR and BUWALIRI were travelling from BORROLOOLA, to NGILIPIDJI. BUWALIRI is expecting a baby. As they travel they hunt for animals and collect food with the help of their pet dingo (WULNGARRI). Some of the food they find is listed in the song - DJABAKALANG (blue tongued lizard) RINY'TANGU (blood yam), MIRRIWA, (frill necked lizard) and WAN'GURRA (bandicoot).

They make a camp by the water hole at MIRARRMINA. BUWALIRI has her baby. GARANGARR goes to fetch water from the pool. But GARANGARR is in a hurry and doesn't speak the sacred words or ask the pool's permission for the water.

Deep in the pool the WITITJ (giant snake) wakes up. On the surface, lies the food that the sisters have gathered, ready to be cooked and eaten - a feast!

The water in the pool starts to move and the WITITJ (giant snake) creates a whirlpool. GARANGARR and BUWALIRI cower in their shelter; all the animals they hunted come alive and run around. One by one they chase each other and jump into the whirlpool and disappear.

The WITITJ rises from the pool and lifts its head into the sky. The snake is angry that the sisters have been so disrespectful and spits a cloud into the sky. From the cloud comes thunder, lightning, and rain until the land is flooded. WITITJ stirs the water and tries to wash the sisters into the waterhole. The sisters are frightened and sing and dance to try and pacify the giant snake – by singing the magical chant **GAI-PA, GAI-PA, GAI-PA. (Chant in Dreamtime Tales)**

But they can't stop the storm. The sisters fall into the water and with a roar WITITJ opens his mouth and swallows them. Then WITITJ calms the storm and makes a rainbow across the sky.

Then the voices of the sisters come from deep within the python, "We have mingled all our secrets, and now our spirits speak through him." So the sacred ceremonies of the WITITJ and the sisters and the laws of right and wrong were given to the WAWILAK tribes. The WITITJ (snake) slumbers quietly in the pool until the WAWILAK tribes need him once again.

### **The Story of the Spotted Cat**

In Central Australia, the WARLPIRI people call the dreamtime, JUKURRPA. This is a JUKURRPA story about a man-eating monster and a tribal hero called the Spotted Cat.

The Spotted Cat is travelling from a place called KUNJUWUNJU. He hears a message from far away "There's danger coming. A man-eating monster is coming from the east. He's coming closer, run away!"

**"Don't make a noise, don't make a sound, don't let the children run around, don't light a fire, not even a spark, hear the beast, hear the beast in the dark."** (This forms the chorus of the song in Dreamtime Tales)

The Spotted Cat takes his spears and decides to set off to find the monster and kill him. He paints his body, decorates his face, he chants and dances, practises his magic disguises.

What shape should he turn into? A kangaroo, emu or a crow? But the monster is bigger and stronger than them all and if the cat is caught, he'll die. So the cat becomes a tiny, stinging ant. He hides in the long grass by the lake. The monster comes to the lake and kneels down for a drink. As he puts his tongue out, the ant leaps up and bites him. The monster jumps and roars with pain and every time he tries to get a drink the Spotted Cat is waiting there. The monster, mad with anger and thirst claws at his face to tear the pain away!

The Spotted Cat becomes himself again, and lifts his spear and stabs the beast dead.

The Spotted Cat returns in triumph to his village and his wife and children and they are all safe to dance and sing again.

### **The Story of Rebirth**

Long ago, before Man lived in Australia, when all creatures still spoke the same language, all the tribes of animals, birds, reptiles and insects would gather together during the summer months for a great CORROBOREE (a big party).

A Cockatoo was dancing at the top of a very high tree, when he fell... and broke his neck and died. The other animals were mystified.

The animals asked the Eagle-Hawk, the chief of all the birds to explain what had happened. The Eagle-Hawk thought hard. Then he threw a pebble into a pool of water. "See," he said, "we can no longer see the pebble, but it is still there. It has entered into another existence. So it is when we die."

The Crow disagreed. He threw a short spear into the pool. It disappeared beneath the surface of the water, but after a short time, popped up again. "There," he said, "when we die, we do pass into another existence, out of sight and sound of this existence, but after a while we return."

"Who will test this?" asked the Eagle-Hawk. The Goanna (a lizard), the Opossum, the Wombat and the Snake volunteered. When winter came, they crept off into holes and were not to be seen. The following year, looking half-starved, they returned to the other animals.

"But you haven't left this life and returned again," said the Eagle-Hawk, "You've just been sleeping. If you were returning from another existence, you would return in another form."

"Let us try," said the Insect tribe, and the Caterpillars and the Water-Bugs stepped forward.

The other animals laughed "You're too small and stupid." "No, let us try," insisted the insects.

The Insects didn't crawl out of sight. Some of them asked to be put under the bark of trees, some asked to be put underground and the Water-Bugs asked to be wrapped in a fine bark and thrown into the pool.

Next year the animals gathered again for their CORRABOREE (party) and to see the insects re-appear. That night, the Dragonflies, Gnats and Fireflies flew round the camp-fires. The flowers put on their most colourful display. The WATTLE (plant) covered itself in bright yellow and the WARATAH (plant), in brilliant red and all the animals waited.

Then, just as dawn was breaking, a vast, rainbow-coloured cloud floated up from the valley, and the animals were surrounded by millions and millions of fluttering, multi-coloured butterflies.

Welcome in the beauty of the light, the dawn, the spring.

"Have we solved the mystery of death?" the Butterflies asked.

"Yes you have," said the Eagle-Hawk. "We die, we go into another existence, and then we return." And so it happens every spring. The old year dies, a new one is born, and the cycle of life is repeated.

There are many stories... too many to tell here.

The stories only live when they are told, and there are fewer and fewer story-tellers, fewer and fewer listeners.

Maybe the culture that bred these stories will be lost. This is what one of the story-tellers had to say..."My people are all dead. We've only got a few left... that's all... Not many. And we're getting too old. Young people...?

I don't know if they can hold on to this story..." We are like shadows on the sand.