

BUSH CHRISTMAS

For voice & piano

PROGRAMME NOTES

It was in the autumn of 1994 that I was told Elizabeth Connell, the famed Wagnerian opera singer, was looking for an Australian Christmas song for her Wigmore Hall recital. I didn't have anything already written that fitted the bill but agreed that it would be a great opportunity to write for such a wonderful singer. The next challenge was finding a text in London; it was in the days before great swathes of information were available on the internet and even so, it could still take time to find the right material. Australian literature could be found at Australia House where a very helpful librarian pulled a few books from the shelves. David Martin's *Bush Christmas* fell, as it were, right into my lap.

David's poem described the older family members sleeping off the Christmas lunch on the verandah while the younger cousins "Play the goat with Dulce and Larry, By the creek below the shed". And he conjured up the still heat of an Australian Christmas: "Dogs are dreaming in the shade. Fat and white, the mare is browsing, Cropping softly blade by blade. It is hot. Mosquitos whirring."

David Martin was still living and I was intrigued to meet the man. I pictured a sunburnt Australian brought up in the outback but met, instead, an elderly Hungarian Jew born Ludwig Detsinyi who had emigrated to Australia via Britain, India and the Spanish civil war. Obviously a keen observer of life and human nature, he directed me to more of his poetry and books which resulted in *Grace in the Bush* for bass/ baritone & piano.

Bush Christmas received its premiere performance on 20 December 1994 by the soprano Elizabeth Connell, accompanied by pianist Eugene Asti, at the Wigmore Hall, London.

Bush Christmas

Stuffed with pudding to his gizzard
Uncle James lets out a snore,
Auntie Flo sprawls like a lizard
On the back verandah floor.

Grandpa Aub sits with a flagon
On the woodheap 'neath the gums,
And he thinks he's seen a dragon
Where the pigs are munching plums.

Cousin Val and Cousin Harry,
Cousin May and Cousin Fred,
Play the goat with Dulce and Larry
By the creek below the shed.

In the scrub the cows are drowsing,
Dogs are dreaming in the shade.
Fat and white, the mare is browsing,
Cropping softly blade by blade.

It is hot. Mosquitoes whirring.
Uncle Jamie rubs his knee.
'Flo,' he whispers, 'are you stirring?
It's near time to get the tea.'

David Martin

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Vol. 2: 1930-1980. Edited by Dame Leonie Kramer. Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1985

