



Media Release

THE “REAL STORY” OF THE NOT-SO-JOLLY SWAGMAN

While many know the words by heart, few know the “real story” behind Australia’s unofficial national anthem. *Waltzing Matilda* may be the country’s most loved and recognised tune, but its meaning is still shrouded in mystery...and the truth behind the myth is a thrilling, controversial and largely untold tale.

On a new website accompanying a series of programs on ABC Radio National to be launched next month, the case is made that the real swagman immortalised in our “Ballad of the Fair Go” didn’t drown himself in a billabong but was most probably murdered beside one...assassinated to silence the rebellion of the 1894 Shearers Strike. The contentious hypothesis, based on the life’s work of folk historian Richard Magoffin and several other respected scholars, also implicates our most well-known bard in a murder conspiracy cover-up few have wanted to believe.

There is nothing “jolly” about the story of Samuel “Frenchy” Hoffmeister, the shearer referenced in the original version of *Waltzing Matilda*. The seemingly simple ditty, penned in early 1895 by the lawyer by the name of Banjo Paterson, was in fact a cunning allegory based on explosive events of the Shearer’s Strike of the previous year. There were gun battles and arson attacks on shearing sheds in violent protests at harsh new industrial laws.

Hoffmeister, a staunch unionist, ended up dead. A decade later, the word “jolly” was added and the music of the original tune changed to become an upbeat jingle for Billy Tea, cementing its popularity. The darker meanings of the song have been hidden ever since.

During February, **THE MATILDA MYTH** digs deep behind this story across two ABC Radio National flagship programs, *Background Briefing* and *Hindsight*.

The shows have also spawned an interactive website which invites the audience to make their own connections between historical fact and myth, as well contribute their own short story or version of the song.

THE MATILDA MYTH is the brainchild of broadcaster and documentary-maker **Ian Walker** who filmed what would become the last media interview with Richard Magoffin, who spent most of his life investigating the story of *Waltzing Matilda* until his death in 2007.





THE MATILDA MYTH on ABC Radio National,
Sunday, February 14, 2010

PART ONE – SILENCING THE SWAGMAN

Background Briefing (after the news at 9am)

Gonzo history detective Ian Walker travels to Central Queensland to re-investigate the events surrounding the 1894 Shearer's Strike and the mysterious death of the not-so-jolly Samuel "Frenchy" Hoffmeister, who some claim is the "real" swagman immortalised by Banjo Patterson in the song *Waltzing Matilda*. The show puts together new theories on Patterson's motives for writing the song which could change the way we hear it.

PART TWO – WHO'LL COME A WALTZING?

Hindsight (2pm)

The program explores why we are so attached to *Waltzing Matilda* and how, across more than a century, we've come to invest the song with ideas and meanings possibly at odds with its' origins. Featured is the last recorded media interview with legendary folk historian Richard Magoffin and a host of *Matilda* "experts", some who fiercely dispute Magoffin's theories. This whimsical show delves deep into the national collection of innumerable obscure recordings of *Waltzing Matilda*, remixing them into a wonderful audio smorgasbord...from Harry Belafonte (pretending to be ocker!) to 80s Spandex rock to an Indonesian gamelan band.

***Preview CDs of both programs available on request.**

Further information:

Nicole Fern
ABC Radio National Marketing

Fern.Nicola@abc.net.au

03 9626 1758

