

Diaphon presents . . .

# "Reedy River"

Excerpts from the Sydney production, with the original cast—and their soloists—Milton Moore, Cecil Grevas and Jack Barry

*“ . . . Now still down Reedy River . . . ”*

I suppose that if I had not been pestered by members of the cast who were friends of mine, I would never have seen "Reedy River." It's funny how reticent most Australians (myself included, I must confess) feel about seeing and hearing the characters of our own country in epics about Australia. Australia to us often seems to lack the romance and colour of other countries, whose histories are forced with monotonous regularity down our throats, often in a very subtle and palatable way per medium of novels and films. That's how I felt about it all, anyway. I was very wrong, and, if you feel at this moment as I did then, my advice to you is, see "Reedy River," or, if you can't do that, relax and listen to this recording a few times. For here in Dick Diamond's play and in the authentic Australian bush

songs that wend their way through it as surely and calmly as Reedy River itself (if it really exists!), you will find the real Australia. Here is no "Collet's Inn" in which the characters are merely European shadows against a highly romantic Australian setting. In "Reedy River" you will meet living people, and what colourful personalities they are! . . . Squatters, swaggies, barmalms, country schoolmarm, shearers and, of course, the eternal lovers. You will be carried by them to their campfires; to the country hop at the old school house, the Reedy River Pub, and even into the shearing sheds. You'll join with them in their joys and their little sorrows; and, what's most important, you'll feel very proud and very warm. That's why we, at Diaphon, were so eager to put Reedy River on disc. We felt that lots of people who had seen the show would like the opportunity of having a permanent memory of it, and we knew also that there were many people who would not have the opportunity of seeing it. For them, this Album will be the first collection of Australian folk music sung by ordinary men and women, whose forebears helped to create it. It is the sincere wish and hope of Diaphon that we have been able to catch a little of the sincerity, the excitement and simplicity of the music which goes to make what the theatre itself terms "a show as warm as a handshake".

We take this opportunity of thanking the Management of New Theatre for their permission to incorporate many of the notes on the songs in our own cover notes. These are taken largely from the excellent Reedy River Song Book, which is available from any of the Australia-wide New Theatres.

## Side One

### Band One—"CLICK GO THE SHEARS."

Perhaps the most famous of the Australian bush songs, the tune is derived from an old English song, "Ring the Bell, Watchman". On this recording you hear Milton Moore with the Shearers and Bushwhackers' Band, consisting of lagerphone, bush bass, harmonica and guitar.

### Band Two—"EUMERELLA SHORE."

Louis Lavater set these words to music. Originally they were sung to the tune of the old American song, "Darling Nellie Gray". This is the number that opens the show and is sung around the campfire by the shearers. The Eumerella, incidentally, is a river in South-

Western New South Wales, and to-day the township of Neweralla is set on its banks.

### Band Three—"FOUR LITTLE JOHNNY CAKES."

The scene is the Saturday night hop at the Reedy River Schoolhouse. Everyone is there; the girls in their Victorian best and the men for the most part looking most uncomfortable in a variety of "Sunday bests". In comes an old swaggy, who adds to the proceedings with this rendition of traditional lyrics set to music by Louis Lavater. The song is variously known as "The Whaler's Rhyme", "The Shearer's Song" and "The Black Fish Song". Cec. Grevas is the soloist.

### Band Four—"REEDY RIVER."

Side one concludes with the "name song" of the show—"Reedy River". Chris Kempster, one of the cast of the Sydney production, and himself a well-known collector of folk music, has arranged the setting for the well-known Henry Lawson poem.

## Side Two

### Band One—"OLD BLACK BILLY."

We feel that if anyone was collecting recordings of authentic folk music from any part of the world he would find it very difficult to overlook this lovely example of the "troubador" styles. The tune is traditional, but the words were written or restored by Edward Harrington. On this particular recording the chorus work behind Cec Grevas' solo gives one a feeling of acute nostalgia. This version was collected from a shearer in Melbourne.

### Band Two—"BANKS OF THE CONDAMINE."

Like "Click Go The Shears", "Banks of the Condamine" has enjoyed a great amount of popularity since the late last century. Margaret Sutherland restored the music and Vance Palmer collected the words. It is in the usual line of British folk songs, which have for their story the wish of a girl to follow her lover to the sea or to the wars. However, in this case she merely wants to become a shearer.

### Band Three—"REEDY LAGOON."

In its original version, this song was a swagman's lament. Both words and music are traditional, and it was collected by Lance Carew and Jeff Wills at Mataranka, in the Northern Territory.

### Band Four—"BALLAD OF '91."

Comparatively recent in origin (although it probably was written for the first time at the end of the last century), this recording is, perhaps, the one that calls for the greatest vocal effort of the whole collection, for it is written in three parts, to be sung unaccompanied. The song tells, roughly, of the gaoling of a number of shearers at Rockhampton who refused to work in non-union sheds. The words are by Helen Palmer, and Miss D. Jacobs wrote the music.

### Band Five—"WIDGEEGOWEERA JOE."

John Meridith, also a member of the Sydney cast and, perhaps, the possessor of the best collection of Australian folk music in the Commonwealth, collected this song on tape, from old-timer Jack Lee, who has since died. It is a parody on a very old Irish transportation ballad called "Castle Gardens", and is, therefore, possibly the oldest tune in the show. Jack Barry's boisterous rendering of this shearing song gives it a charm and drive that a more polished arrangement would completely lose. Once again he has the support of the shearers' chorus and the Bushwhackers' Band.

—KEN HANNAM.

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