

Shoalhaven Man

Words & Music: Geoff Drummond

Dateline: Nowra Base Hospital, Nowra, NSW

This is another of Geoff's songs; one which I left with the Bushwackers in 1986 when I was filling in on guitar with them. A classic tale of early timbergetters and the respect they had for the land, this song finally achieved the recognition it deserved at Tamworth last year. The song was released by the Bushwackers, who were nominated in the nationally televised 1990 Golden Guitar Awards as 'Band of the Year'. The nomination came ironically on the weekend the band was staging yet another of their Melba like 'final ever' performances.

One of those final shows in 1990 saw me teamed with the lads for a double bill at the Imperial Hotel. This concert kicked off in near scorching midday temperatures but if the day wasn't hot enough, the emotional climate was at fever pitch. The 'Bushies' set included a killer version of "Shoalhaven Man" and a real treat for me when I was invited to re-join the band on stage for "Brittania", the classic track penned by bassist Roger Corbett. The awards that night unfortunately brought yet another disappointment for the band that broke the ground that John Williamson, Redgum, myself and a host of others came to profitably build upon. The award for "Best Band of the Year" was won by their oldmates, "The Bullamakankas". It was sad, but almost fitting, for a band that never achieved the measure of recognition they truly deserved; whose rewards always went, as the Lawson poem predicted a century earlier, to "The Men Who Follow After". My version of the song was by way of recognising the long overdue debt so many Australian musicians owe to the Bushwackers.

(Epilogue: The Bushwackers reformed five years later in 1995 with, of all people, Peter Drummond, my son, on Drums. Peter attended his first Bushwackers Concert at The Paris Theatre in Sydney on 30/6/1980 when he was barely 5 years old. In 1999 he was receiving standing ovations for his solo 'showcases' during The Bushwackers sellout shows at The Toyota Country Music Festival.)

I was a timber cutter, up in the Cambewarra,

long before your mother ever gave you a thought.

There was no fancy schoolin' then, just some pioneering men.

The land was our teacher, hard lessons she taught.

I swung an axe handle, before I was eight years old;

cuttin' the timber and carryin' the load.

Then down to the Currumbene, beside some old bullock team.

We took what we needed, but we let the rest go.

Chorus: It was a wonderful land. I'm a Shoalhaven man.

From the slopes of the mountain to the shores of the sea;

a 'bushie' am I and I'll stay till I die. Shoalhaven's the country for me.

Now I ain't no saint, and I ain't no bloody scientist
but I still got my eyes and a feel for this land.
In sixty years of bravin' the bush of the Shoalhaven
I've seen me some changes and they're terrible plain.
Now the time came when some of them big city business men
bought boxes to put their retirements in
and they redone Vincentia as a three bedroom brick veneer
and sold 'em off for holidays to make a few quid.

Chorus:

They come for the stars at night,
they come for the peace and quiet.
They come for the bushland that no man can claim.
And they call themselves locals
with their haemorrhoids and their ulcers...
It's the damn city livin' that they've got to blame.
They don't like the snakes, so they flatten the greenery.
They can't take the spiders so they Baygon the halls.
And they bulldozed Culburra till it looked like Parramatta.
God! I wonder why they ever went movin' at all.

Chorus: It was a wonderful land till the damn caravans
spread like cancer from Canberra to the coast of the sea.
And it makes a man cry to see his land die.
No she ain't the place she used to be.
But, she's my home, and she's the country for me.

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