

Vertelli's Wire

Words & Music: Pat Drummond

For Signor Vertelli and Fred 'Thunderbolt' Ward.

Dateline- Wollomombi Gorge, Armidale, New South Wales.

A worksong from a slightly different perspective. The township of Uralla, which has neglected the graves of many of it's early settler's such as The Cruickshank Family has, ironically, spent a fortune erecting statues to and maintaining the grave of Captain Thunderbolt, a Bushranger who terrorised the area in the 1800's. This song, which tells the story of a 19th Century itinerant showman, who also performed in the area, is about the way that societies value people. For the all rhetoric to the contrary, there are many things that free market economies (even undistorted ones) do not do well. They do not protect the environment, which is considered an external by them; they do not care for the poor, who are considered relevant only as a labour resource, and they do not provide justice before the law except for those who can afford it. In 1996, when Sydney media owners chose to reward a notorious mass murderer with large sums of money for the rights to his story, it is surely a time for us all to question how 'rational' such economic judgements really are.

The tiny circus tumbler with the big Italian name;

upon the walls at Dangar Falls, his only claim to fame.

A plaque tells an extraordinary tale; 1867, twenty miles from Armidale.

Three cornered hat and buckled shoes; a spectacle for hire.

Above the black volcanic jaws Vertelli walked the wire.

Two hundred people frozen in surprise as the light of danger shone into their eyes.

Chorus: Upon the lives of all of us, from the humble to the high,

someone makes a judgment and somebody sets a price.

It was a moment in the history of us all

that walked that wire somewhere over Dangar Falls.

At the end of the performance they passed the hat around;

for stratospheric somersaults a bare eleven pounds.

Apparently that figure was the price that Armidale placed on Vertelli's life.

While barely fifty miles away, where Thunderbolt lay dead,

a thousand pounds was placed upon that reckless outlaw's head

and I wonder what Vertelli would have thought

of the ironies by which our lives are subsequently bought. Chorus.

**A sportsman makes a fortune on the vagaries of the ball;
a farmer slaves in poverty and strives to feed us all;
a boxer makes a hundred thousand dollars for a fight
while a nurse works for a pittance in the children's ward at night.
God, one wonders what we value, and though money is no curse;
it is a fool who weighs his measure by the money in his purse!**

**Like a dolphin in a Theme Park, for a moment clear and bright
Vertelli danced with Thunderbolt and leapt into the light.
Now the tide of time that runs within these pools
will eventually separate the heroes from the fools. Chorus.**