

*Dickens
Down Under*

**A Victoriana Vaudeville!
By Melvyn Morrow**



World Premiere!

Genesian Theatre

21st Nov - 12 Dec 2009

The Entertainment

There have been any number of musicals based on Dickens: *Oliver!*, *Pickwick*, *A Christmas Carol*, *A Tale Of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *Smike!* (*Nicholas Nickleby*). The reasons why these novels appeal to music theatre librettists aren't hard to discern. The plots are unapologetically action-packed, cliff-hanging and sentimental; the characters are writ large and predominantly melodramatic, comic or sentimental; and Victorian parlour ballads are unashamedly melodious, comic or... sentimental! A perfect fit!

Once I'd made the equation, the agreeable problem was which excerpts from Dickens to choose, which ballads to top each episode with (absolutely an *embarras de richesse!*) and what premise to justify the show with.

Enter Alfred and Edward Dickens in Australia.

When I discovered that Alfred had, in fact, given lectures on his father's work, it didn't need much rocket science to imagine the brothers fallen on hard times (yes, I know!) and deciding to make a few quid by doing readings from Papa's works at those valiant Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts every city and town boasted.

Working on the principle that in those days (and, for all I know, still) every Melbourne lady of quality played the piano, I filled in the musical soprano line and theatrical distaff side with an invented Constance Desailly, Edward's wife.

The real life stories of the three characters were not, alas, the stuff of bodice-ripping drama. In their way, the trio were battlers of a kind, though the crises of their lives were hardly the stuff of a two hours' traffic of the stage.

But for a Victoriana vaudeville, they served the purpose deliciously: a little historical bush tucker, a generous serving of literary plum pudding and many large slices of musical pavlova!

And wouldn't it be louverly if, ironically and with twenty first century Dickensian intrepidity, we could revisit those Mechanics' Institutes and School of Arts thus transforming our theatrical illusion into regional reality?

Melvyn Morrow

The Characters

Alfred D'Orsay Tennyson Dickens (October 28 1845 – January 2 1912) was Charles Dickens' sixth child and fourth son, while Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens (13 March 1852 – 23 January 1902) was his youngest son.

Alfred was named after his godfathers, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Count Alfred D'Orsay. Persuaded by his father, he migrated to Australia in June 1865 aged 19, leaving behind many unpaid bills. Alfred settled in quickly, finding work on a property at Corona on the borders of New South Wales and South Australia. Charles Dickens having died in 1870, Alfred purchased Wangagong station near Forbes with his share of his father's estate.

Severely hit when depression struck Victoria, Alfred began to tour Australia giving lectures about his father's life and work. From 1905, he also gave the lectures in Europe and America. While touring America in 1912, Alfred was taken ill in the lobby of his hotel and died that evening. He is buried in Trinity Church Cemetery, Manhattan.

Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens (13 March 1852 – 23 January 1902) nicknamed 'Plorn', was clearly named after Edward Bulwer-Lytton, nowadays much satirised for the famous opening line of his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford*, "It was a dark and stormy night". His father encouraged Edward to migrate to Australia because Charles saw the colony as a land of opportunity. Edward arrived in 1869 and settled at Wilcannia, New South Wales where he became manager of Momba station. He married **Constance Desailly**, the daughter of a local property-owner, in 1880. He opened a stock and station agency, was elected as an alderman of Bourke Shire Council and bought a share in Yanda station near Bourke. He lost heavily from bad seasons and in 1886, he was appointed government inspector of runs in the Bourke District. He was never able to pay back a loan of £800 from his most successful brother, Henry.

Dickens was elected as the member for Wilcannia in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1889 and held the seat until defeated by the Labor Party candidate, Richard Sleath in 1894. Dickens then became a rabbit inspector for the Government of New South Wales and was afterwards an officer for the Lands Department in charge of the Moree district. He subsequently had difficulty finding employment and died after several months' illness in Moree, in debt and childless. He was buried in Moree cemetery.



MARIA OKUNEV - Constance Dickens Maria was born in Moscow, where she studied choral conducting and piano until moving to Australia in 1993. Maria performs in solo recitals, radio broadcasts for ABC classic FM and with OA. In July 2008 Maria won the MIETTA competition for outstanding lieder singer. She was the Audi German Award finalist - 2008, 2007; Covent Garden Award finalist-2007; National Aria finalist - 2006, 2008. New York award finalist-2009. Recipient of Goethe Artist scholarship - 2007. Pacific Opera young artist - 2007, 2008. Recent roles: Rosina - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Fiordiligi - *Così fan tutte*, Donna Elvira - *Don Giovanni*, Musetta - *La Bohème*. Maria has been the Director of Music with the Australian Youth Choir for seven years. Maria's ensemble *Marianna* performs her original compositions and world music.

PETER-JOHN LAYTON - Edward Dickens Peter-John has performed in a range of musicals, oratorios and operas since 1999 with companies such as Sutherland Shire Light Opera, the Oratorio, Opera & Theatre Company, Sydney University Graduate Choir and Rockdale Opera. He has sung the roles of Dickon in *The Secret Garden*, Cain and Japheth in Stephen Schwartz's *Children of Eden*, Obediah in *Elijah*, Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicci*, Harlequin in *Pagliacci*, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* and Borsa in *Rigoletto*. Peter-John's work with Rockdale Opera includes the roles of Count Panatellas in *La Perichole*, Laertes in *Mignon*, Colonel Fairfax in *Yeomen of the Guard*, Bartucci in *Paganini*, Uldino in *Attila*. He is also currently performing in a concert series with The Very Small Opera Company and Opera Bites.



CHRISTOPHER HAMILTON - Alfred Dickens Christopher makes a welcome return to the Genesian Theatre having previously appeared as Lord Fancourt Babberly in Peter Adam's production of *Charley's Aunt* and Tony Hayes' *Coward & Co. Dickens Down Under* marks Christopher's second collaboration with Melvyn Morrow. In 1999 he completed a regional tour of Melvyn's *A Song To Sing O*. Christopher received critical acclaim for his portrayal of Pancrazio in *The Venetian Twins*, for the Perth Playhouse. Christopher's previous productions include *The Lion In Winter*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Arms and The Man*, *Follies*, *The Department*, *Mack & Mabel*, *Simon & Laura*, *The Producers* and the eponymous role in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. For 5 years he was a guest soloist with Sydney Symphony Orchestra for the popular ABC family Concerts and recently appeared in Julian Temple's short film *Eternity Man*.

AUTHOR - Melvyn Morrow Melvyn's first scripts were performed by Gordon Chater and Jill Perryman at the Phillip Theatre, the Downstairs Revue and on The Mavis Bramston Show.

His musicals (book & lyrics) include: *Morality!* (Edinburgh Festival, London Fringe, off-off-Broadway and Sydney (retitled *Between Earth and Sky*); *Postcards From Provence*, (starring Opera Australia baritone, John Pringle - Zenith Theatre and ABC Radio); *Vroom Vroom* (Theatre South); *Mad Louisa Lawson* (Stables); *Offenbach In The Underworld* and *When It Happens* (Café Basilica); and seven *Christmas at The Opera House* pantomimes including the nationally popular *Santa Meets The Bushrangers*.

TV work includes *Sons and Daughters*, *The Mike Walsh Show*, *Star Search* and many ABC/Opera Australia simulcasts including the Tribute to Dame Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé. Melvyn's musical, *A Song To Sing, O*, the story of Gilbert and Sullivan and George Grossmith, was produced by Dame Bridget D'Oyly Carte at London's Savoy Theatre directed by the author.

Australian productions have starred Anthony Warlow and Dennis Olsen. Melvyn has updated book and lyrics for Opera Australia's *The Gondoliers* (four productions) and *The Mikado*, and for Simon Gallaher's G & S trilogy, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado* and *H.M.S. Pinafore*. With David Mitchell, Melvyn wrote the musicals *Peter Dawson - Off The Record* (Adelaide Festival 1988) and *Jack O'Hagan's Here Comes Showtime* (Marian St) and the lyrics for the song 'Lest I Forget' (Rebel) recorded separately by Debra Byrne and Judi Connelli.

Melvyn's plays include *Beating A Retreat*, (Stables 1995) and *A Touch Of Paradise* (Downstairs Belvoir St 2000). He devised and directed the cabarets *Broadway Bard* (Bell Shakespeare Company & Café Basilica) *Tae Kwon Shakespeare* (festivals Australia wide) and the showcase of *Shakespearean Idol* (music by Joe Kelly). *Shakespearean Idol* won the 2006 AWGIE for Music Theatre and is due for national production next year.

In 1996, Melvyn was nominated for a Mo Award for Outstanding Contribution to Australian Musical Theatre. With David Mitchell and John Michael Howson, Melvyn is the co-writer of the hit musicals *SHOUT!* and *Dusty, The Original Pop Diva*.

PRODUCTION

Director	Roger Gimblett
Musical Director	Maria Okunev
Choreography	Debbie Smith
Set Design	Owen Gimblett
Costume Design	Nicola Griggs
Lighting & Sound Design	Michael Schell
Costumes Associate	Susan Carveth
Prompt	Joyce Birch
Set Construction	Grant Fraser, Paul Gilbert, Members of the Company
Rigging	Timothy M Carter
Photography	Craig O'Regan
Graphic Design	Tom Massey, Michelle Hickson
Acknowledgements	Hutchings Pianos

CREW

Stage Manager	Caroline Gage
Lighting & Sound Operation	Amy Roberts

CAST

Constance Dickens	Maria Okunev
Edward Dickens	Peter-John Layton
Alfred Dickens	Christopher Hamilton

About the Genesian Theatre

Born in 1944 and named for St Genesius, Patron Saint of Actors, The Genesian Theatre Company has developed into a strong community-based organisation that boasts among its alumni numerous household names in Australian theatre.

The Company is a non-professional group operating from an historic church in Kent Street. While still retaining links with our origins, the Catholic Church, we do not shy away from meeting the challenges of plays that comment on the human condition.

The building which houses the Company was originally St John's Church, and dates from 1868. It has served as a church, a poor school, and was the first Matthew Talbot Hostel. Since 1954 it has been the home of The Genesian Theatre Company.

Over the years The Genesian Theatre Company has become a community theatre group providing a training ground for young actors and a place where those who love the theatre can meet, share, and extend their knowledge of the performing arts. The Genesian Theatre is one of Sydney's most active theatre companies. In addition to six main stage productions each year we run classes, workshops and many other activities.

Membership

If your interest is in acting, directing, stage management, sound, lights, publicity, admin, etc, or if you just want to experience being a member of the group, we would welcome you as a member. You don't need to be experienced, we can provide training and can cater to different levels of involvement. Please see our web site for further information.

Coming next to the Genesian Theatre...

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

**By Constance Cox
From the Story by Oscar Wilde**



16th Jan - 27th Feb 2010

**Subscriptions are available
www.genesiantheatre.com.au**