



ISABELLA

or

The trials of a convict maid

Libretto and music by

VIVIEN ARNOLD

Dramatis Personae

Oswald FitzOswald	A young heroic buck. Anglicized by a recent visit to England - pucker English accent. Good singing voice.
Isabella O'Lovejoy	Sweet heroine. Good singer. Irish accent.
Captain FitzOswald	A sea-faring man.
Settlers	Upper-crust snobs.
Convicts	All female. Loud, raucous. and with 'attitude'.
Sailors	Singers and dancers.
Mrs FitzOswald	Loud and overbearing in voice and size.
Mr FitzOswald	Weedy and hen-pecked.
Geraldine FitzOswald	A horsey type. Goofy and awkward. Bullied by her mother. A heart of gold. She carries a pencil and notebook in a reticule.
Lieutenant	A minor bully.
Mrs Ogden-Pugh	Sinister and sadistic under a genteel veneer. Play quietly but intensely - occasional outbursts of venom. As the play progresses she become overtly villainous.
Cuthbert	Butler to Mrs Ogden-Pugh. An incorrigibly cheeky cockney.
Mrs Pearson-Plunkett	A social wannabe. Sycophant to Mrs Ogden-Pugh - whom she fears.
Fritz and Jon	Prospectors. Strong German accents. Good singers.
Bushrangers	Chief bushranger (Jake) a black-hearted bully. Nifty and Pete -easily led. Jock - a taciturn Scot.
Sergeant	Incompetent and bewildered
Soldiers	Inept
Sharks	Vicious
Photographer	French

Scene 1

Time: July 1840

Place: Sydney quay side

#1 Overture No

The curtain opens to find the sailing ship 'Isabella' moored to the quay. Several well dressed settlers are on the dock to meet the ship. On board the sailors are busy with ropes, sails, anchor etc. The Captain stands on the bridge with Mr Bowles.

#2 Opening Chorus - Settlers and Sailors

Sailors

Our ship is back in port again
We're glad to be on land once more
To toss a pot at the local inn
And watch the sea from safe on shore.
The sea's a way to earn a crust.
The creaking ship is home enough.
I'll be a sailor if I must
But a sailor's life is very tough

Chorus - sailors and settlers

Yo heave ho mi lads
Pull the tired sails down
Yo heave ho mi lads
Soon we'll be up and off to town

Sailors

Bell-bottomed pants well pressed and smart
A pocket full of hard-earned pay
We'll sally forth to find some fun
And sing and dance the night away

Sailors dance a hornpipe

Sailors

With a saucy wench upon each knee
A black cigar between my lips
A pack of cards and a jug of ale
I'll forget what it's like to be mid-ships.

At the end of their song they return to their jobs laughing and shouting

Captain Mr Bowles

Mr Bowles Captain

Captain Get those convicts ready for disembarking

Mr Bowles Aye aye sir

Enter Oswald - (passing Mr Bowles in the hatch-way - like hens squeezing out of their coop)

Oswald Good morning Uncle. Ripping day isn't it?

Captain Ah Oswald! Here we are safe and sound. I told you I'd get you home in one piece didn't I?

Oswald Yes you did

Captain But you didn't believe me, did you. Swore we'd sink in the Indian Ocean during that storm. I told you I'd make you eat your words.

Oswald Yes you did. And at the time the mention of eating only made things worse. It didn't go down to well.

Captain Nothing was going down too well with you then. Are your father and mother meeting you?

Oswald O I expect so. Geraldine will come too. And i can see some of our neighbours waiting already. *(to settlers on the quay)* Coooooeee! Here I am! Safe and sound! *(to the Captain)* Oh it's ripping to be home again. It's ripping to have the chance to go off tripping abroad and i adored England and Europe, but there's no place like New South Wales!

Captain Better get your things on deck. We're about to disembark the convicts and you don't want to get yourself mixed up with that bad lot.

Oswald I feel rather sorry for them. It can't have been too ripping for them. Women chained up in the bowels of the ship.

Captain Don't waste your feelings on them, Oswald. They're a bad bunch

Oswald You make them sound like rotten bananas.

Captain If you ask me some of them are - bananas

Noise as convict women are dragged up from below. They are stropky and resentful

#3 Convict's Song - Convicts

I'm used to seeing the seamy side of life
I'm used to being in trouble and in strife
I've lived in the shadow of the noose
The consequence of a life that's loose
And now it's a convict's life for me.

During the verses individual convicts act out the words

Verse 1

Pretty Polly Palmer Looks a proper charmer
You've never see a sweeter smile.
She'll ogle at a gent till all his money's spent
She has a heart full of guile.

Chorus

I've pinched and picked the pockets of the rich.
I know what it's like to doss down in a ditch.
I've face a judge and taken a sentence,
Showed no sign of any repentance
Now it's a convict's life for me.

Verse 2

Bess the governess suffered awful stress
The children put spider in her bed.
For her crime she's famed, but she can't be blamed
For biffing them on the head.

Chorus

We aren't exactly loveable gentle folk.
But we like to sing a song and tell a joke.
We joke to cover our distress for we are in a terrible mess
What is a convict's life going to be?

Oswald No! No!

Isabella Yes! Yes!

Oswald *(to the Captain)* I say Uncle, have you got any bathers?

Captain No time for that

Oswald No I suppose you're right. Oh well here goes

Mr Bowles hands him a life saver's hat which he dons. He leaps into the water shaking his fist at the sharks. They retire abashed. Oswald helps Isabella back onto the gangway. They are transported with each other. The Love Song begins to play. Everyone else freezes to leave them alone in their dream. The lights turn rosy pink

#5 Love Song - Oswald and Isabella

You are my sugar-plum, my darling turtle-dove.
You light my life, you cool my brow with words of love,
Of love. You cool my fevered brow with love.

How happy we will be, just wait and see, my love.
Together we will soar to realms of heaven above.
In love, we will always be in love

(The music continues under as they say...)

Oswald Sweet and neat, from head to feet

Isabella Big and strong! I can't go wrong.

(They sing the repeat. Then music continues under following dialogue)

Oswald Will you marry me?

Isabella This is so sudden *(pronounced 'sudden' because of Irish accent)*

Oswald Life is short and brutish. Let's not waste a minute

Isabella Oh no! I mean, Oh yes.

Oswald Which, oh which?

Oswald Issie

Isabella Is it because you are an Ozzie?

Oswald That I make you dizzy, Izzy?

(Reprise second verse of song)

How happy we will be, just wait and see, my love.
Together we will soar to realms of heaven above.
In love, we will always be in love

Mrs FitzOswald *(arriving through the audience followed by her husband and daughter.)*

Oswald! My baby!

Shouting and fussing she reaches the stage and trots along the quayside up to Isabella and Oswald -arriving as she finished her speech

Oswald! Are you alright? The risk! Diving into the harbour and braving the sharks! You'll catch your death of cold! Geraldine! Make a note to rub his chest with oil of wintergreen tonight - and a hot mustard bath for his feet - write that down too! And we'll have to get his red flannel nightshirt out of mothballs. What a home coming! Eighteen months in England and you have to fall in the harbour the minute you get back! Silly boy! Geraldine make a note about the hot water bottles for his bed. You really must tell us all about England. You can't think how we've missed you. Every day we've sat and pined for you - haven't we Geraldine? Geraldine's never stopped talking - have you Geraldine? - about how we'd sit and listen to your stories and adventures for hours and hours. How was Paris? Oh Paris! I remember Paris. When I was eighteen - no older than Geraldine - but she's such a little goose. Goose! Geraldine! Make a note about stuffing for the goose for dinner. We've goose for your dinner Oswald. To think you're back! Come on! Give your mother a big hug!

She closes her eyes, opens her arms, purses her lips, and leans forward. Oswald is still gazing at Isabella and doesn't respond to his mother

Mrs Fitz *(opening her eyes in shock)*

Oswald! You're not attending to a word I say!

Oswald *(Recovering himself)*

Mother allow me to present Miss Isabella O'Lovejoy. I have just had the ripping honour of saving her from a ripping by the sharks.

Mrs Fitz *(Ignoring Isabella after a 'take' in which she recognises her as a convict)*

My brave, upright and gallant boy!

Mr Fitz I say! Well done son!

Mrs Fitz O do stop wittering Charles. What a hero you are Oswald! What an example to young men of your age! I'm so proud of you!

Oswald I'm going to marry her.

Mrs Fitz *(instant change)*

You stupid clod!

Oswald I love her!

Mrs Fitz Rubbish! No one loves anyone who's beneath them! This girl is.... well... she's not even human really! She's a convict!

Oswald I adore her. She is beauty incarnate! She is light and life...

Mrs Fitz He's gone bonkers *(she grips her husband by the lapels and berates him)*
It's all your fault! Your side of the family always was peculiar. Your great uncle FitzOswald may have been in the guards but he went mad. They took him away when he tried to ride a pig in the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. And your cousin Mary spent her whole life knitting socks for rabbits! Quite loony. *(During this speech she forces him further and further backward, leaning over him)*

Mr Fitz It was your cousin Mary, not mine.

Mrs Fitz *(Releasing him abruptly so he falls to the floor)*

Stop wittering and stop making excuses!

She turns to Oswald who is holding his arm out, palm up, in rejection, while facing the other way. She walks into his hand

Oswald Mother, my mind is made up. I am determined.

Mrs Fitz Oswald! Take your sister to her room and then go down to Harradines and buy a dozen....a score.....no a GROSS of new note books. Confetti! Brides! What are young gels coming to?

Exeunt severally.

Enter 2 sharks (balletically). They sweep up the paper. Exeunt.

Enter 2 more sharks (also balletically) They carry a placard reading 'Four Months Later'. Exeunt.

#7a Play Out - he wanted to marry a beauty

Scene 3

The summerhouse at the homestead of Mrs Ogden-Pugh

OPEN CURTAIN

Mrs Ogden-Pugh is entertaining Mrs Pearson-Plunkett and several friends to afternoon tea. As the curtain rises they are posing for the photographer. He takes photos as they sing the chorus in a frozen position. he changes plates during the agitated verses.

#8 Settlers from the old countree - All except the photographer

Chorus

Settlers from the old countree, we very bravely put to sea
Sailed with all our worldly wealth, risking life and limb and health
To Australia (*Sung Orstralia*)

Verse (women)

How we wish we were back home in England's green and pleasant land
No Hampton Court in Sydney Town. No Palace, Tower, no Bridge or Strand.
The weather's hot, the land is harsh, the animals are very queer
What's more the spiders and the snakes are highly poisonous we hear.

Chorus

To try to keep the status quo our young men to England go
For polish and for education which is befitting of their station
in Australia

Chorus

Ev'ry husband, ev'ry wife pledged to build a pleasant life
Emulating if we could all that is in England, good
In Australia

Verse (Women)

It's hard in such a baking land to keep our skins from getting tanned
And petticoats of calico are really awfully hot you know!
The weather's hot. I have a thirst. The country's well and truly cursed.
How I wish I were back home in England's green and pleasant land.
No Harrods here in Sydney Town. No Palace, Tower, no Bridge or Strand.

Chorus

Settlers from the old countree, we very bravely put to sea
Sailed with all our worldly wealth, risking life and limb and health
To Australia

Mrs O-P *(to photographer)*

Clear up and go now, as fast as possible

Photographer

Madame! I am a Frenchman and an Artiste!

Mrs O-P

You are a tradesman. Get out! *(to her guests)* What are the lower classes coming to! Just because he's invented some new-fangled machine he dares to presume equality! More tea Mrs Pearson-Plunkett?

Exit Photographer with his equipment

Mrs P-P

Thank you. Tell me, how are you finding your new maid?

Mrs O-P

Actually she's the best I've had. Clean, honest and hard-working, but I'd never tell her that of course. You have to be hard on servants or they try to take advantage. And that would never do.

Mrs P-P

She seems a polite little thing

Mrs O-P

She never speaks unless she's spoken to. I insisted on that right from the start. *(During the rest of her speech she hand Mrs P-P a meringue. On the word 'boss' - which is delivered with some harshness - Mrs P-P in surprise, crushes her meringue. It flakes all over her velvet dress. Without pausing for*

Jon It's the Tomkins Gang alright. Quick! Hide!

They all hide behind the big rock. During the following scene their heads pop up at appropriate moments.

As the intro music to #15 starts, enter the bushrangers each with 2 coconuts to sound like clopping hooves. They mime dismounting and pile their coconuts neatly just into the P side wings.

#12 Bushrangers' Song - The bushrangers

Jogging along the highway on a sleepy afternoon
We sure are happy whistling this tune
For even bad bush rangers love fresh air and fun
And we wouldn't all be baddies if we'd had a loving Mum.

We may be bad bush rangers but we all admire the bush
We'd be into conservation if someone would give a push.
And though we might seem heartless, we all say feelingly
that the sunshine makes us happy as we plan a robbery.

When the sun glints on our rifles as we point them at our prey
As he cowers and shakes and trembles, our hearts are light and gay.
For there's nothing in Australia that is nearly so much fun
As taking some cove's money in the dappled Summer sun.

Jake Okay, now we all know why we're here. Young Oswald FitzOswald...

Is (*Popping her head up*) Oswald!

Fritz and Jon place hands on her head and push her down

Jake There's no need to repeat me!

Niffy I didn't say nuffing

Pete Neither did I.

Jake Shut up! As I was saying, Oswald FitzOswald....

Is Not Oswald!

Os Giddy-up Moo-Cow! So now I can go to her with her pardon in my hand.

Is O justice!

Os I must hurry.

The bushrangers pounce on him.

Jake What's all your hurry sir? Care to pass the time of day with a few friendly bushrangers?

Os O horror!

Is O horror!

Os Unhand me villains! How dare you!

Pete Shut up!

Os I say! Manners old chap!

Jake Shut up!

Niffy (*Jumping up and down*) Can I kill him? Can I? O please! You promised me I could kill the next one.

Jake So I did. You're the next one. Go hang yourself!

Niffy Gulp

Os What do you want with me?

Jake First to hold your tongue

Oswald does so - looking puzzled

Then five hundred pounds from your rich granddaddy for the price of your life.

Niffy Send him an ear to show we've got 'im

Pete and Jock 'ear, 'ear!

Jake Good idea. Tie him down

They force him onto the floor (he is still holding his tongue)

Jon Not them! Not them! They're the heroes!

They abruptly switch their attention to the bushrangers

Serg These men will get their just desserts

Jock Pudding! Yum!

Fritz Speaking of rewards, isn't there a price on the heads of the Tomkins Gang?

Serg A hundred guineas it is.

Jon Fritz! We found our fortune at last! I can learn the harp like I've always longed!

Fritz And I the bagpipes!

They caper around in glee.

Cries are heard from the back of the hall as Mrs FitzOswald enters with Mr FitzOswald and Geraldine.

Mrs Fitz Oswald! Oswald! What are you up to now? I can't let you out of my sight for one minute. I go down to see poor Mrs Cullen about her rheumatism and when I get back Geraldine babbles on about some pardon and your going straight away to the Ogden-Pugh's to see that frightful O'Loveless girl.

Ger O'Lovejoy Mother

Mrs Fitz Do be quiet Geraldine! Did you bring the pickled onions for Mrs Ogden-Pugh? And make a note ask her for some of her wattle-berry jam. i want to donate it to the new church bazaar - but we won't tell her that. Make a note not to tell her that. Now Oswald.....

Mrs Op's voice sounds from the back of the audience calling 'Isabella!!'

Why that Mrs Ogden-Pugh's voice! I'd know it anywhere.

Enter Mrs Ogden-Pugh still piggy-backed by Cuthbert. They gallop towards the stage

Mrs O-P There she is! There she is! Let me gets my hands on her! Got you now young lady!

She stretches from Cuthbert's back to grab Isabella.

Os Not so fast Mrs Ogden-Pugh. Here is this young lady's free pardon. She was wrongfully convicted. Her accuser was converted by a travelling Methodist preacher, and in reforming his character he found he could no longer live with the burden of his conscience. He freely admits he framed Isabella and perjured himself to ensure her sentence of deportation. She is now free to return to Ireland at any time.

Mrs O-P (*dismounting*) Curses! She was the best servant i ever had.

She stomps up-stage

Os But I hope you will not return to Ireland but remain here as my wife, with servants of her own.

He kneels in proposal

Mrs Fitz Curses!

She joins Mrs Ogden-Pugh upstage.

Ger and Mr Fitz

Oh goody!

Cuthbert Can I be your servant Isabella?

Is Of course! O I don't know what to say!

Cuthbert crosses to Geraldine and makes eyes at her - to her delight and confusion

Os Will you marry me Mis O'Lovejoy?

Is This is so sudden

Os Life is short! Let's not waste a minute!

Is Oh No! I mean, Oh yes!

Os Which O which?

Is Yes, yes, yes!

Os Ripping rapture!

Is Oh, Oswald!

Os Oh, Isabella!

Is Ossie

Os Issie. Miss Isabella O'Lovejoy, welcome to Australia.

#14 Love Song reprise - company

Curtain calls

#15 - Digging Australian Gold reprise - company

#16 Play out - Trooper's march reprise

CURTAIN