

BARBARA AND THE CAMP DOGS

By **Ursula Yovich & Alana Valentine**



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Theatre Program at the end of the playtext

*Dedicated to our mothers, Janice and Pauline, both passed,
both carried in us into the future.*

Barbara and the Camp Dogs was first produced by Belvoir and Vicki Gordon Music Productions at Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, on 6 December 2017, with the following cast:

BARBARA	Ursula Yovich
RENÉ	Elaine Crombie
JOSEPH	Troy Brady
THE CAMP DOGS	Jessica Dunn (bass guitar) Michelle Vincent (drums) Debbie Yap (lead guitar)

Director, Leticia Cáceres

Songwriters, Alana Valentine, Ursula Yovich & Adm Ventoura*

Musical Rehearsal Director, Adm Ventoura

Musical Performance Director, Jessica Dunn

Set Designer, Stephen Curtis

Costume Designer, Chloe Greaves

Lighting Designer, Karen Norris

Sound Designer, Steve Toulmin

Stage Manager, Luke McGettigan

Assistant Stage Manager, Cecelia Nelson

Rehearsal Stage Manager, Brooke Kiss

Rehearsal Assistant Stage Manager, Bronte Axam

Directorial Secondment, Riley Spadaro

*Vicki Gordon contributed music to 'Tick Sista'. Merenia Gillies contributed to 'Chained to You' and James Warwick Shipstone contributed to 'Pieces'.

CHARACTERS

BARBARA

RENÉ

JOSEPH (doubles as TOADIE, the roadie)

THE CAMP DOGS band:

CAMP DOG 1, lead guitar

CAMP DOG 2, bass guitar

CAMP DOG 3, drums

The band enter before the performers and remain onstage for the entire show. They should always be visible to the audience.

SETTING

Barbara and the Camp Dogs is set in the theatre in which the work is playing, transformed into a low-rent music venue—either inner-urban or regional—with the priority for a small stage on which the musicians are featured. The action of the play shifts between the two sisters in storytelling narrative/performance mode, and moments where they move into the historical present, a kind of flashback. The set should reflect the reality of touring musicians, where one venue seems to bleed into the next in a continual space of ugly beerstained carpets, worn and battered bar furniture and the tangle of microphone stands, leads and foldback boxes.

This play went to press before the end of rehearsals and may differ from the play as performed.

Rock chick BARBARA and her sister RENÉ claim the stage.

SONG: 'LOOK AT THE SUN'

BARBARA: [*singing*] Look at the sun
And do not even flinch

RENÉ: [*singing*] Look at the sun
And never give an inch

BARBARA: Liquid starts to cool
Starts to boil
Everything comes down
Down down

RENÉ: Mirror distorts
The wind blows around
And changelings arrive
On the evening bus

BARBARA: Look at the sun
Ash and aggravation

RENÉ: Look at the sun
Burning sweet sensation

BARBARA: Phantom wears a mask
Toy boy drops his watch
Newspaper blows
Catches on a tyre

RENÉ: Angel flaps a wing
This dog drags her chain
Fortune friends are made
Then gambled away

BARBARA: Look at the sun
The pain is nothing new

RENÉ: Look at the sun
It's only me and you

BARBARA: Look at the sun

RENÉ: And do not even flinch

BARBARA: Look at the sun

RENÉ: And never give an inch

BOTH: Never give an inch
Never give an inch
Never give an inch

RENÉ: You got to fight it, fight it
You got to fight it fight it fight it

BARBARA: You got to fight it fight it fight it, fight it

RENÉ: And destroy hypocrisy when she comes.

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] So, a while back I tried to start doing some exercise. And then two days later I came down with the flu. So I spent quite a lot of that week on the couch of my sister René, not able to do very much. I notice that I didn't have much on last week and I think my body said to my brain, 'Go now'.

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] You never have much on.

BARBARA: [*to RENÉ*] I get gigs.

RENÉ: If you call busking a gig.

Pause.

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] My sister René is so desperate for a gig that she's down at the casino doing a Singing Sheilas cover show.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] Judith Durham, Olivia Newtown-John, Chrissie Amphlett.

BARBARA: [*to RENÉ*] Yeah, do you have to touch yourself?

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] No, I get volunteers to come up from the audience. Want me to show you?

BARBARA: No.

RENÉ: [*to an audience member*] You'd like to participate, wouldn't you?

BARBARA: Yeah, but that's Belvoir audience. They'll touch anything.

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] Who you calling anything, sister?

BARBARA: I'm just saying casino audiences, they can't tear themselves away from the pokies.

RENÉ: I can get them away from the pokies to have a poke.

BARBARA: Where'd you get that filthy mouth, girl?

RENÉ: Just lucky I guess.

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] This one, sweet as a smile, filthy as a public toilet.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] Barbara and me both grew up with my mother, Jill.

BARBARA: Mum Jill.

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] These people would say your adopted mother.

BARBARA: [*to RENÉ*] I don't give a bag full of smashed arseholes what these gangstas would call her, if I call her my mother then she's my mother.

RENÉ: Don't say that to them. You gotta be nice to an audience, Barbara. This is why I never invited you down to see my show.

BARBARA: You never invited me to see the show because you're scared of what I will call it once I do.

RENÉ: Oh, I'm so scared of you, Barbara. I can hardly stop my minge a-quivering for t-repid-ashon [*trepidation*].

BARBARA: You dare me to come see you?

RENÉ: No, I don't dare you because I'm not twelve.

BARBARA: So I can come?

RENÉ: You won't mention anything about world music?

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] Did you all know that? Any Aboriginal language in a song makes it officially world music ... What does 'world music' even mean? It's all fucking world music.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] My sister Barbara is angry about the music industry. Very angry. And she'll tell you.

BARBARA: I am angry. That's what rock is supposed to be. Angry, full of pain.

RENÉ: Which would be fine by me. Except that it's not just Barbara who has to feel the pain, it's all the rest of us. And she says it to people in the industry.

BARBARA: The music industry—who love blackfella singers as long as you're the *one* that they decide is outstanding and a real Aborigine—the music industry who love women to *look* like nasty trouble but not *really* have a voice. They pretend it's all about *merit* when really it's all about what they think they can *sell* to suburban Sally and her dick-shaped hairbrush.

RENÉ: Yeah. So why come down to the show and have all that in your face?

Pause.

BARBARA: [*to RENÉ*] What sort of grog do they give you in the rider?

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] You wouldn't want to drink a rider that come from the proceeds of a piece of tourist-pleasing crap.

Pause.

BARBARA: I could make an exception.

BARBARA *moves to 'get ready'*. RENÉ *puts on her 'casino show' costume.*

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] Barbara is the arse-burning, eye-watering fart that you do in a room full of strangers. Barbara is the face-filling burp you make in a room full of haters. The long streak of piss that dribbles out of you when you're so scared of what might happen that you can barely control your bladder. And yes, I have invited *that* Barbara down to the casino to see my show.

Sounds of the casino are heard.

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] Down at the casino, no-one is really listening to René's show because they're in the spell of all the one-armed bandits. You know the look—blut blut blut, cachin, blut blut blut—and the carpet stinks of stale beer and the room smells of fake tan and the ceiling is spattered with the spray from where these people have ripped all hope out of their souls. [*Getting drunk*] And so I have a couple of beers. No more than two. And René sings a few songs and I would have kept it together. I would have been fine ... Until right toward the end of the show when they let René sing one of her songs.

Lights change as the action 'shifts' into the casino.

SONG: 'MYSTERY'

RENÉ: [*singing*] And here I am confiding there's a me that you can't see
 I want to start abiding with the me that you can't see
 A perfect mess of wildness makes the me that you can't see
 I need to show some kindness to the me that you can't see

 You don't need to know it all
 You don't need to strip me bare
 I don't need to show it all
 There can be a mystery there.

BARBARA: [*to the audience*] And she's brilliant, you know, so brilliant, but this room full of dickheads are talking and there's this one guy he's like yelling at the top of his lungs and so, *nec minit*, I go over to

his table and I say, ‘If you kept the noise down, mate, you might be able to actually hear what she’s tryin’ to sing to you’. And he says, ‘Fuck off, you stupid black bitch. Who let you in?’ And I looked at him and I smile and I say, ‘Dickhead, you just made my day’, and I thumped him—*poom*, one to the face; *poom*, one to the groin. Yes.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] And what am I going to do? I jump off the stage and start thumping him too.

BARBARA: That’s when this security guard the size of the Big Banana starts to do his thing, you know, and I say, ‘Don’t you push me, you prick. Get your hands off me. Don’t think I’m gonna take it like a good little girl?’ So I headbutt him and I fucking cut. I’m runnin’.

RENÉ: See, when Barbara headbutts anyone she has to jump. Like a soccer player heading the ball. It’s quite a picture.

BARBARA: [*to RENÉ*] How fast did they both call me a black bitch?

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] Lightning fast. So that’s when Barbara gets cornered by the security guard and quite rightly kicks at him like she’s kicking in the door of a brick shithouse, which is basically how this guy is built. And that’s when both of them end up—you know that fountain at the entrance to the casino—that’s when both of them end up, arse over tit, in the fountain.

BARBARA: It’s supposed to bring you luck, that fountain. I was just following the money.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] And now Barbara is on top of him, holding him under the water.

BARBARA: Yeah, it felt good ... What, you wanted to be on top of him yourself?

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] No.

BARBARA: Why not? Your mulga bush isn’t dead, is it?

RENÉ: You keep your nose out of my mulga, sister.

BARBARA: Eh, I know you wanna call him. I know what you wanna say.

She does an over-the-top girly impression.

‘Hey, sexy, you wanna come over my place and make me ... *some breakfast!*’

RENÉ: He won’t know who I am.

BARBARA: You say, ‘Um ... it’s me ...’

She simulates having an orgasm.

‘Just in case you forgot me.’

RENÉ: Girl, put that in your hole.

BARBARA: In your hole.

They are laughing hard.

RENÉ: [*to the audience*] That was a regular gig. A regular gig in Sydney.

And what did our mother say about a regular gig, Barbara?

BARBARA: Harder to find than a black cat in a coal cellar.

RENÉ: [*to BARBARA*] Rarer than rocking horse shit.

BARBARA: Rarer than a man without self-pity.

Beat.

Yeah, you didn't want that stinking job anyway.

RENÉ: Yeah. I did.

BARBARA: Why?

RENÉ: Because we need to go and see Mum.

BARBARA: I'm not going back home to Katherine. Not even for her.

RENÉ: And that's how much you know, Barbara, 'cause our mother is in Darwin.

BARBARA: Since when?

RENÉ: Since they took her up to a pulmonary disease specialist in Darwin.

BARBARA: How serious is it?

RENÉ: Well, how fucking serious does a pulmonary disease specialist sound, Barbara?

Pause.

BARBARA: Tell me.

RENÉ: We need to be there. I won't know how bad it is until I see her.

But I think she's really scared this time.

BARBARA: Mum Jill's not scared of anything.

RENÉ: Maybe you've forgotten what it's like to be scared, Barbara.

Maybe you've forgotten how she held your hand when you were scared. I wanted that job so I could go hold her hand. And take you to hold her hand too because that would comfort her. But now she's in there, alone. And I've got as much chance of getting there as I have of taking a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut.

SONG: 'NEW GIRL'

BARBARA: [*singing*] Take this here

It's a