

The Cake Man was first performed by the Black Theatre at the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre, Sydney, on 12 January 1975 with the following cast:

ABORIGINAL WOMAN	Justine Saunders
ABORIGINAL BOY	Teddy Phillips and Lisa Maza
ABORIGINAL MAN	Zac Martin
PRIEST	Dan Adcock
SOLDIER	Rob Steele
CIVILIAN	Max Cullen
RUBY	Justine Saunders
SWEET WILLIAM	Zac Martin
PUMPKINHEAD	Teddy Phillips and Lisa Maza
MISSION MANAGER	Dan Adcock
MISSION INSPECTOR	Rob Steele
MR PETERSON	Max Cullen

Designed by Nick Hollo and Sandy Gray
Directed by Bob Maza



*Justine Saunders and Brian Syron in Bondi Pavilion's production of
THE CAKE MAN, 1977 (Photo: John Pearson)*

CHARACTERS

ABORIGINAL WOMAN

ABORIGINAL BOY, aged about eleven

ABORIGINAL MAN

PRIEST

BRITISH SOLDIER of the Colonial period

CIVILIAN, a Colonial squatter

RUBY, an Aboriginal mission woman

PUMPKINHEAD, her son

SWEET WILLIAM, her husband

MISSION MANAGER

MISSION INSPECTOR

MR PETERSON (CIVILIAN), a neighbour



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THE CAKE MAN, 1977 (Photo: John Pearson)*

ACT ONE: GOD AND GUN

A bush scene: a bark humpy, a tree, shrubs, a stream. An ABORIGINAL WOMAN sits by the humpy working, singing to herself and watching a BOY, about eleven years old. The BOY is playing with some pebbles, holding about four of them, tossing them up and trying to catch them on the back of his hand. Earth, water, sky: nature at ease.

The WOMAN looks off and rises, smiling. The BOY pauses in his play and an ABORIGINAL MAN strides on, carrying spear and club. He throws two goannas down in front of the WOMAN. She picks them up and takes them over to the humpy, expressing her admiration of him. He nods, casual, strong and proud, then lays down his weapons and sits. She fetches him a vessel of water. He takes it from her, nodding, and drinks, then hands the vessel back. She puts it away, embraces him briefly and returns to her chore. The BOY approaches the MAN from behind while he is drinking, and stands there watching him. The MAN turns his head slowly and growls at the BOY, who giggles excitedly and runs stealthily behind the humpy. The WOMAN stifles a laugh, and the MAN grins at her. The BOY creeps back, carrying a toy spear and club. He erupts into screeching noise, stamping his feet. The MAN spins about, growls and falls to his hands and knees, imitating an animal. They play for some time at hunter and savage beast until the MAN grabs the BOY'S leg, snapping at it with his teeth, and the BOY strikes him in the back with the spear three times. The MAN gurgles, collapses and falls in defeat. The BOY dances victoriously around the 'body', looking to the WOMAN for praise and getting it. When he finishes his dance, the MAN sits up. All three embrace. They sit contentedly together, requiring no more.

Pause.

A kettle drum is heard, off. They sit up stiffly, staring in alarm. Three white men march on, dressed in styles of long ago: a PRIEST, a SOLDIER, a CIVILIAN. The PRIEST carries a Bible and a long crucifix. The CIVILIAN carries a bag slung from his shoulder. The SOLDIER carries a musket. The drum noise fades away. The ABORIGINES stand quietly to

face the white men. The PRIEST comes towards them waving a blessing with a hand. The MAN pushes the WOMAN and BOY behind him.

PRIEST: Greetings! And God's blessing. I bring you good news! Here it is, my child, [*offering the Bible*] for you and your little family. And this also I bring to you [*wagging the cross*] and to your people. The gift of love. The promise of salvation. Yours.

He stands offering the book and the cross. The MAN stands, shielding his family. Pause.

You don't understand me! No speakee?

The MAN shakes a slow head, dumb and proud.

Oh, come now, take these I say!

The ABORIGINES move backwards together. The PRIEST pauses, turns to his companions.

He doesn't understand me. [*Shaking his head sorrowfully*] Who would dream, in this age, of such ignorance?

SOLDIER: Well, Father, he must be one of the last. I mean, I've heard it told that God's word has been told the length and breadth of the country. So this lot ought to be about the last lot.

PRIEST: Ah! All our black brothers.

SOLDIER: Aye.

PRIEST: Saved.

SOLDIER: God be praised.

PRIEST: From their ignorance and sin.

SOLDIER: Yes Father, indeed.

PRIEST: And from hell.

SOLDIER: Oh, aye.

PRIEST: Through God's mercy and love.

SOLDIER: Amen.

CIVILIAN: Amen.

PRIEST: I notice, however, that this particular fellow is, ah, well he strikes me as being more of a heathen, poor devil, than most heathens.

SOLDIER: It's as you say, Father, aye.

PRIEST: Very backward indeed. Unfriendly, even.

SOLDIER: Aye, very.

PRIEST: Yes, very very very.

They regard the ABORIGINES thoughtfully. The ABORIGINES regard them fearfully.

CIVILIAN: Here, I'll reach them with my pretties.

He steps forward, reaching in his bag to bring forth bright beads, ribbons, and so on. He offers them in a coaxing way to the MAN, WOMAN, and BOY. They step back and away from his pretties.

You refuse? [*Angrily*] Well!

He stuffs the pretties back in his bag. Another pause.

PRIEST: [*sighing*] Well. He refuses, yes.

SOLDIER: Savage ingrate.

PRIEST: Alas, yes. Too ignorant for light, too old for change ...

SOLDIER: Too stupid for words.

PRIEST: Oh, now they are harsh words.

SOLDIER: Well, it's a brute, Father. So it is.

CIVILIAN: No child is a brute, surely?

PRIEST: Exactly not. We must save the child, by all means we must do that. He is, they are, and we all are God's own children, strange as it is, and we must love one another ... or be damned, and lost, and defeated utterly by the power of darkness.

The SOLDIER hefts his rifle.

SOLDIER: Never, so long as I live!

PRIEST: Ah! Christian soldier!

The SOLDIER holds the gun out. The PRIEST blesses it briefly.

SOLDIER: Thank you, Father.

PRIEST: Alas! I have failed.

CIVILIAN: Don't blame yourself, now.

SOLDIER: Aren't the two of us here, Father, both witnesses to your patience?

PRIEST: Bless you, bless you both.

SOLDIER: Aye. Now my duty is plain.

He lifts his rifle ominously.

PRIEST: I must pray!

He falls to his knees, praying, head down. The SOLDIER shoots the MAN dead. The PRIEST looks up to see him fall, the WOMAN and the BOY crying, falling on him in grief.

Murder! What doest thou? [*Weeping*] Oh, oh, my children! Why killest thou each other? Why murdereth thou each othereth?

The CIVILIAN is inspecting the corpse.

[*To the CIVILIAN*] Is it dead? Oh, woe, then, woe to him whose hand obtained the deed! [*Turning to the SOLDIER*] Was I not praying for our answer to this problem? Did you not see me at my prayers? [*Sadly*] Oh, why did you kill this child of God?

SOLDIER: Well, you blessed me rifle.

PRIEST: Thank God for that.

SOLDIER: Anyway there's no law against it.

PRIEST: God's law is against it!

SOLDIER: Well, I wish I hadn't done it.

PRIEST: You confess to the deed?

SOLDIER: To you, Father, aye.

PRIEST: And are you truly sorry?

SOLDIER: Aye. I am indeed.

PRIEST: And was there anything else?

SOLDIER: No, not offhand Father.

PRIEST: Say three Hail Marys, two Our Fathers. And mind, before you go to sleep this night.

SOLDIER: Aye. Thank you, Father.

PRIEST: And remember in the future: heathens they might be, ignorant and superstitious they might also be; but they, as we, are God's own sweet children.

CIVILIAN: Amen.

SOLDIER: Amen.

PRIEST: Yes, and make that six Hail Marys.

SOLDIER: Oh, but Father!

PRIEST: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

CIVILIAN: Amen.

SOLDIER: Oh. Well, all right. Six it must be.

PRIEST: And remember again: your duty is one thing, your immortal soul is another.