

Mickey Felute

Paddy O'Brien

I once had a mate called Mickey Felute, drunk and disorderly with a
wobbly boot
He guzzled down beer and whiskey as well, not one to wash, dogs would
follow his smell, he never did work and he slept all day, he was too
bone lazy to shoo flies away
His mother was hairy and smelt like a boot, and his father they say was a
silly galoot
He was a big useless lad all of eight foot, but he couldn't remember
where his trousers he put
His face was all lumpy, like crocodiles' skin and where it pocked out, it
should have pocked in
Hands upside down, feet the wrong way, eyes twice double-crossed, folk
said he was gay
But he met a sweet girl, the love of his life, they had ten mongrel kids,
that caused trouble and strife
They fought with the neighbours from dawn till sun down, but the cops
said 'Go on get out of our town'
With bad tempers they fought, like wild howling dogs, got into trouble
clogging up drains with dead strangled frogs
They pulled all the feathers out of the neighbours' prized chooks,
couldn't read so they burnt their school books
Ate other kids lunches, broke the principal's chair, when they had
nothing to do, they taught Catholics to swear
The children services were called but left in a fright, with sedatives and
aspirin, had nightmares all night
A priest did baptize them, but he christened them deranged, they drank
all his holy water then ate a dog with the mange
They would dribble and spit from morning till noon, groan and winge,
like a bagpipe off tune
Stole cars, caused airplanes to crash and when their parents died, they
sold their ashes for hash

When they arrived at the pearly gates, St. Peters said 'Here you'll have to
go to hell cause you guzzle your beer'
You've been rotten and stinkin', and pretty bad as well, but the devil said
no, you're too bad for my hell'
So they're all up there circling, floating in space, I hear they're startin'
their own human race
Nobody wants them, and I give you my word, it's them belching not
thunder you heard
So they scattered the stars, killed the man on the moon, broke the
Southern Cross, bent the big dipper and the spoon
So god called on the devil and said 'Let's compromise' well that's when
they found out I was just telling lies
But I guess its no secret, poets try real hard, to stretch out an inch and
make it a yard
And I reckon it's fair play, and you must admit, there's nothing no better
than listening to a bit of good old Aussie bull whatever rhymes
with it

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And What of the O'Briens of Murwillumbah?

The above laconic, bemusing and very Australian poem is a fresh and engaging form of the crisply distinctive popular ballads made and presented by the much revered Paddy O'Brien of Murwillumbah, a fine folk poet who has done so much for the people of the north east of New South Wales as a solo performer over the last few years. And this achievement has been particularly enforced by his offerings in major poetry competitions. Indeed, he was again, and typically, the winner in two sections of the Land of the Beardies Folk Poetry events in that same larger Festival, one held over the last weekend of October 2009, in the town sponsoring these events, Glen Innes, on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. Somewhat earlier, with his CD of poetry entitled 'A three-Legged Jockey and a Two-Legged Racehorse' he had been a finalist at the 2005 Australian Bush Laureate Awards.

With his wife, Glori he has also been performing in public since 2002, they also creating in 2004 the group 'The Irish Trio' (known as The Two of Us), a variety show of song, dance and poetry that they have taken around Australia, and becoming the winners of many awards in the process. Meanwhile, as their grandchildren became older, they would

turn to producing rhyming verse for them/other younger children, who might want to perform engagingly, very like them. The first so-written collection, *Take Time to Rhyme* (2006), is a nice small collection of lightly nonsense verse, with some faint echoes of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, and other late Victorians, despite its very Australian atmosphere and thought patterns, with bush rats, 'Emu Town', 'Friendly Bunyip', or the foregrounded creature in their 'Hairy, Hairy Grub' The authors' fine line sketches are also quite charming, as in the appended illustration. [p.14] The style of all this is zestful, witty, gentle and wise, and peculiarly appealing to family audiences, at school social events, or, and perhaps more significantly, to all Australians who are young in heart.

Similar, but more socially mature/ sophisticated effects are achieved in their CD, *Waratah*, while like qualities are discernible in the companion volume, *Holiday Time in the Australian Bush* (2006).¹ The disc itself has much gentle but fine folk singing, muted duet phrases, and folkloric materials, like the very early 'Waltzing Matilda' story from East Gippsland, which, it is maintained had a much better known form of rebirth in Queensland much later in the century, and then its attachment to an old marching tune.

The repeated motifs are of the lonely man often has a dog as his sole companion, while parsons and so many other solitary characters of the bush are to be found limned in, as are some hauntingly affecting laments at the emptiness of the lives of swaggies—the resonances seeming to cover a period from the 1880s to the eve of World War II.

The most moving of their elegies and muted reflections - yes, muted rather than sad comments on the bush life—all seem to come in the most heartfelt reflections of solitaires, or from the notion of a lost love somehow waiting for the lover of long ago in a hereafter. All of this is excellently blended with the mournful associations of 'Danny Boy', white swans, a small pub in Eire, and the wife of such a man being his best friend, the one with whom he has quietly chosen to spend the rest of his life.

Reflective, gentle, haunting, and both proud and trusting, these are the hall marks of this style of writing that the O'Briens have produced for the older audience, and it is this which marks his *Waratah* disc, one which has put a stamp on the areas to the north of Nimbin, a place of the sad in most of the twentieth century.

J.S.R.

¹ The volumes are modestly priced at \$6.00 each, and the CD at \$16.00, all obtainable from the producers themselves.