

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD

By Timberlake Wertenbaker



Audition Pack

November 2022

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD: FROM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Our Country's Good is one of the most performed plays in theatre.

It concentrates on a group of convicts and officers setting up a new society in Australia in the 1700s. Once they arrive and get used to their new surroundings, a decision is made to stage a play, after much disagreement, to celebrate King George III's Birthday and give the prisoners some activity.

The play chosen is the popular comedy of the time, *'The Recruiting Officer'*. As rehearsals unfold, the officers and prisoners face many hurdles and challenges, and begin to understand the relevance of theatre and how it can educate as well as entertain.

Traditionally, the play is staged in the period with relevant costumes of the time. However, this production will be attempting something different. The setting will be a modern prison dayroom where the prisoners meet to receive a talk from a visiting teacher. They then begin to tell the story of the play just using their environment and a small amount of set and props. Therefore, the play becomes a play within a play...within a play!

By updating the surroundings and time it makes it a real 'Play for Today' and looks at crime, education, and redemption.

Auditions will be held on **Monday 11th July and Wednesday 13th July 2022** at the

WI Centre, 6a Walden Road, Huntingdon PE29 3AZ, beginning at **7.30pm**. The centre is just off the ring road so very central. If you're driving then we recommend parking in one of the town centre car parks & walking to the venue. Google maps link:

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Wi+Centre/@52.3294872,-0.1886309,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x4877dd31e3d894c7:0xd16a93755d33e369!8m2!3d52.329505!4d-0.1863876?hl=en-GB>

Rehearsals begin **Monday 29th August 2022** at the **Commemoration Hall**.

There will be two rehearsals per week, on **Mondays** and **Thursdays**.

Performance week is **Sunday 20th November** to **Saturday 26th November 2022**

(Including technical/dress rehearsals and performances).

CHARACTERS

Both the Officers and the Prisoners are played by the modern-day prisoners. The only non-prisoner role is Ralph Clark who is the visiting teacher to the modern-day prison.

‘The Officers’

Governor Arthur Phillips	Governor of the Prison	Male or Female
John Major Robbie Ross	Sadistic Officer	Male or female
Captain David Collins	Officer	Male or female
Captain Watkin Tench	Officer	Male or female
Captain Jeremy Campbell	Ross' sidekick	Male or female
Reverend Johnson	Chaplain	Male or female
Lieutenant George Johnston	Officer	Male or female
Lieutenant William Dawes	Officer	Male or female
Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark	Visiting history teacher	Male
Second Lieutenant William Faddy	Officer	Male or Female
Harry Brewer	Midshipman	Male

‘The Prisoners’

John Arscott	A carpenter convicted of theft	Male or female
Caesar	A prisoner of Madagascan descent	Male or female
James 'Ketch' Freeman	A prisoner but hangman. Seen as a 'snitch' by the other prisoners	Male or female
Thomas Sideway	A charismatic joker convicted of theft	Male of Female
John Wisehammer	Convicted of theft. An inspiring writer	Male or female
Mary Brenham	Convicted of theft. Aspiring actress. Has relationship with Ralph Clark	Female
Mary 'Dabby' Bryant	Convicted of theft of Cornish descent	Female
Duckling Smith	Ex prostitute. In relationship with Harry Brewer	Female
Meg Long	A lowly 'lag'	Male or female
Liz Moredon	A dangerous prisoner	Female
An Australian	A local observing the new arrivals	Male of female

Other Roles

3 x Prison officer/Front of House	Observing the prisoners performing	Nonspeaking but reacts to scenes
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Audition piece 1

Scene Four

THE LONELINESS OF MEN

Ralph Clark 's tent. *It is late at night. Ralph stands, composing and speaking his diary.*

Ralph Dreamt, my beloved Alicia, that I was walking with you and that you was in your riding habit – Oh my dear woman, when shall I be able to hear from you?

All the officers dined with the Governor – I never heard of any one single person having so great a power vested in him as Captain Phillip has by his commission as Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales – dined on a cold collation but the mutton which had been killed yesterday morning was full of maggots – nothing will keep twenty-four hours in this dismal country I find –

Went out shooting after breakfast – I only shot one cockatoo – they are the most beautiful birds –

Major Ross ordered one of the Corporals to flog with a rope Elizabeth Morden for being impertinent to Captain Campbell – the Corporal did not play with her but laid it home which I was very glad to see – she has long been fishing for it –

On Sunday, as usual, kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times – was very much frightened by the lightning as it broke very near my tent – several of the convicts have run away.

He goes to his table and writes in his journal.

If I'm not made First Lieutenant soon . . .

Audition piece 2

Sideway Top of my profession, Mr Clark, pickpocket, born and bred in Bermondsey. Do you know London, sir, don't you miss it? In these my darkest hours, I remember my happy days in that great city. London Bridge at dawn – hand on cold iron for good luck. Down Cheapside with the market traders – never refuse a mince pie. Into St Paul's churchyard – I do love a good church – and over to Bond Street to begin work.¹⁵ There, I've spotted her, rich, plump, not of the best class, stands in front of the shop, plucking up courage, I pluck her. Time for coffee until five o'clock and the pinnacle, the glory of the day: Drury Lane. The coaches, the actors scuttling, the gentlemen watching, the ladies tittering, the perfumes, the clothes, the handkerchiefs.

*He hands **Ralph** the handkerchief he has just stolen from him.*

Sideway Here, Mr Clark, you see the skill. Ah, Mr Clark, I beg you, I entreat you, to let me perform on your stage, to let me feel once again the thrill of a play about to begin. Ah, I see ladies approaching: our future Woffingtons, Siddons.

Audition piece 3

Harry Brewer, Duckling Smith. *Harry is rowing, Duckling is sulking.*

Harry It's almost beginning to look like a town. Look, Duckling, there's the Captain's house. I can see him in his garden.

He waves. Duckling doesn't turn around.

Harry Sydney. He could have found a better name. Mobsbury. Lagtown. Duckling Cove, eh?

He laughs. Duckling remains morose.

Harry The Captain said it had to be named after the Home Secretary.²⁸ The courthouse looks impressive all in brick. There's Lieutenant Dawes' observatory. Why don't you look, Duckling?

Duckling *glances, then turns back.*

Harry The trees look more friendly from here. Did you know the eucalyptus tree can't be found anywhere else in the world? Captain Collins told me that. Isn't that interesting? Lieutenant Clark says the three orange trees on his island are doing well. It's the turnips he's worried about, he thinks they're being stolen and he's too busy with his play to go and have a look. Would you like to see the orange trees, Duckling?

Duckling *glowers.*

Harry I thought you'd enjoy rowing to Ralph's island. I thought it would remind you of rowing on the Thames.²⁹ Look how blue the water is. Duckling. Say something. Duckling!

Duckling If I was rowing on the Thames, I'd be free.

Harry This isn't Newgate, Duckling.

Duckling I wish it was.

Harry Duckling!

Duckling At least the gaoler of Newgate left you alone and you could talk to people.

Harry I let you talk to the women.

Duckling (*with contempt*) Esther Abrahams, Mary Brenham!

Harry They're good women.

Duckling I don't have anything to say to those women, Harry. My friends are in the women's camp –

Harry It's not the women you're after in the women's camp, it's the marines who come looking for buttock. I know you – who do you have your eye on now, who, a soldier? Another marine, a corporal? Who, Duckling, who?

Pause.

You've found someone already, haven't you? Where do you go, on the beach? In my tent, like with Handy Baker, eh? Where, under the trees?

Duckling You know I hate trees, don't be so filthy.

Harry Filthy, you're filthy, you filthy whore.

Pause.

I'm sorry, Duckling, please. Why can't you? – can't you just be with me? Don't be angry. I'll do anything for you, you know that. What do you want, Duckling?

Duckling I don't want to be watched all the time. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. What do you think I'm going to do in my

sleep, Harry? Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME.

Harry You want to leave me. All right, go and live in the women's camp, sell yourself to a convict for a biscuit. Leave if you want to. You're filthy, filthy, opening your legs to the first marine –

Duckling Why are you so angry with your Duckling, Harry? Don't you like it when I open my legs wide to you? Cross them over you – the way you like? What will you do when your little Duckling isn't there any more to touch you with her soft fingertips, Harry, where you like it? First the left nipple and then the right. Your Duckling doesn't want to leave you, Harry.

Harry Duckling. . .

Duckling I need freedom somet imes, Harry.

Harry You have to earn your freedom with good behaviour.

Duckling Why didn't you let them hang me and take my corpse with you, Harry? You could have kept that in chains. I wish I was dead. At least when you're dead, you're free.

Silence.

Harry You know Lieutenant Clark's play?

Duckling *is silent.*

Harry Do you want to be in it?

Duckling *laughs.*

Harry Dabby Bryant is in it too and Liz Morden. Do you want to be in it? You'd rehearse in the evenings with Lieutenant Clark.

Audition piece 4

Ketch I understand, sir, and your soul in peace, I won't take up your time, sir, I'll be brief.

Pause.

Ralph Well?

Ketch Don't you want to finish your prayers? I can be very quiet. I used to watch my mother, may her poor soul rest in peace, I used to watch her say her prayers, every night.

Ralph Get on with it!

Ketch When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt. How can I be sure God is forgiving me? What if he will forgive me, but hasn't forgiven me yet? That's why I don't want to die, sir. That's why I can't die. Not until I am sure. Are you sure?

Ralph I'm not a convict: I don't sin.

Ketch To be sure. Forgive me, sir. But if we're in God's power, then surely he makes us sin. I was given a guardian angel when I was born, like all good

Catholics, why didn't my guardian angel look after me better? But I think he must've stayed in Ireland. I think the devil tempted my mother to London and both our guardian angels stayed behind. Have you ever been to Ireland, sir? It's a beautiful country. If I'd been an angel I wouldn't have left it either. And when we came within six fields of Westminster, the devils took over.³⁶ But it's God's judgement I'm frightened of. And the women's. They're so hard. Why is that?

Ralph Why have you come here?

Ketch I'm coming to that, sir.

Ralph Hurry up, then.

Ketch I'm speaking as fast as I can, sir –

Ralph Ketch –

Ketch James, sir, James, Daniel, Patrick, after my three uncles. Good men they were too, didn't go to London. If my mother hadn't brought us to London, may God give peace to her soul and breathe pity into the hearts of hard women – because the docks are in London and if I hadn't worked on the docks, on that day, the 23rd of May 1785, do you remember it, Sir? Shadwell Dock. If only we hadn't left, then I wouldn't have been there, then nothing would have happened, I wouldn't have become a coal heaver on Shadwell Dock and been there on the 23rd of May when we refused to unload because they were paying us so badly, sir. I wasn't even near the sailor who got killed. He shouldn't have done the unloading, that was wrong of the sailors, but I didn't kill him, maybe one blow, not to look stupid, you know, just to show I was with the lads, even if I wasn't, but I didn't kill him. And they caught five at random, sir, and I was among the five, and they found the cudgel, but I just had that to look good, that's all, and when they said to me later you can hang or you can give the names, what was I to do, what would you have done, sir?

Ralph I wouldn't have been in that situation, Freeman.

Ketch To be sure, forgive me, sir. I only told on the ones I saw, I didn't tell anything that wasn't true. Death is a horrible thing, that poor sailor.

Ralph Freeman, I'm going to go to bed now –

Ketch I understand, sir, I understand. And when it happened again, here. And I had hopes of making a good life here. It's because I'm so friendly, see, so I go along, and then I'm the one who gets caught. That theft, I didn't do it, I was just there, keeping a look out, just to help some friends, you know. But when they say to you, hang or be hanged, what do you do? Someone has to do it. I try to do it well. God had mercy on the whore, the thief, the lame, surely he'll forgive the hang – it's the women – they're without mercy – not like you and me, sir, men. What I wanted to say, sir, is that I heard them talking about the play.

Pause.

Some players came into our village once. They were loved like the angels, Lieutenant, like the angels. And the way the women watched them – the light of a spring dawn in their eyes.

Lieutenant –

I want to be an actor.

Audition piece 5

Mary *is copying* The Recruiting Officer *in the afternoon light.* **John**
Wisehammer *is carrying bricks and piling them to one side. He begins to hover over her.*

Mary ‘I would rather counsel than command; I don’t propose this with the authority of a parent, but as the advice of your friend –’

Wisehammer Friend. That’s a good word. Short, but full of promise

Mary – ‘That you would take the coach this moment and go into the country.’

Wisehammer Country can mean opposite things. It renews you with trees and grass, you go rest in the country, or it crushes you with power: you die for your country, your country doesn’t want you, you’re thrown out of your country.

Pause.

I like words.

Pause.

My father cleared the houses of the dead to sell the old clothes to the poorhouses by the Thames.³⁷ He found a dictionary – Johnson’s dictionary – it was as big as a bible. It went from ‘A’ to ‘L’.³⁸ I started with the ‘A’s. ‘Abecedarian: someone who teaches the alphabet or rudiments of literature. Abject: a man without hope.’

Mary What does indulgent mean?

Wisehammer How is it used?

Mary (*reads*) ‘You have been so careful, so indulgent to me.’

Wisehammer It means ready to overlook faults.

Pause.

You have to be careful with words that begin with ‘in’. It can turn everything upside down. Injustice. Most of that word is taken up with justice, but the ‘in’ twists it inside out and makes it the ugliest word in the English language.

Mary Guilty is an uglier word.

Wisehammer Innocent ought to be a beautiful word, but it isn’t, it’s full of sorrow. Anguish.

Mary *goes back to her copying.*

Mary I don’t have much time. We start this in a few days.

Wisehammer *looks over her shoulder.*

Mary I have the biggest part.

Wisehammer You have a beautiful hand.³⁹

Mary There is so much to copy. So many words.

Wisehammer I can write.

Mary Why don’t you tell Lieutenant Clark? He’s doing it.

Wisehammer No . . . no . . . I’m –

Mary Afraid?

Wisehammer Diffident.

Mary I’ll tell him. Well, I won’t. My friend Dabby will. She’s –

Wisehammer Bold.

Pause.

Shy is not a bad word, it's soft.

Mary But shame is a hard one.

Wisehammer Words with two 'L's are the worst. Lonely, loveless.

Mary Love is a good word.

Wisehammer That's because it only has one 'L'. I like words with one 'L':
Luck. Latitudinarian.

Mary *laughs.*

Wisehammer Laughter

Audition piece 6

Liz⁵¹ Luck? Don't know the word. Shifts its bob when I comes near. Born under a ha'penny planet I was. Dad's a nibbler, don't want to get crapped. Mum leaves. Five brothers, I'm the only titter. I takes in washing. Then. My own father. Lady's walking down the street, he takes her wiper. She screams, he's shoulder-clapped, says: 'It's not me, sir, it's Lizzie, look, she took it.' I'm stripped, beaten in the street, everyone watching. That night, I take my dad's cudgel and try to kill him. I prig all his clothes and go to London to my older brother. He don't want me. Liz, he says, why trine for a make when you can wap for a winne? I'm no dimber mort, I says. Don't ask you to be a swell mollisher, sister, men want Miss Laycock, don't look at your mug. So I begin to sell my mother of saints. I thinks I'm in luck when I meet the swell cove. He's a bobcull: sports a different wiper every day of the week. He says to me, it's not enough to sell your mossie face, Lizzie, it don't bring no shiners no more. Shows me how to spice the swells. So. Swell has me up the wall, flashes a pocket watch, I lifts it. But one time, I stir my stumps too slow, the swell squeaks beef, the snoozie hears, I'm nibbed. It's up the ladder to rest, I thinks when I goes up before the fortune teller, but no, the judge's a bobcull, I nap the King's pardon and it's seven years across the herring pond. Jesus Christ, the hunger on the ship, sailors won't touch me: no rantum scantum, no food. But here, the Governor says, new life. You could nob it here, Lizzie, I thinks, bobcull Gov, this niffynaffy play, not too much work, good crew of rufflers, Kable, Arscott, but no, Ross don't like my mug, I'm nibbed again and now it's up the ladder to rest for good. Well. Lizzie Morden's life.

Audition piece 7

Phillip I hear you want to stop the play, Lieutenant.

Ralph Half of my cast is in chains, sir.

Phillip That is a difficulty, but it can be overcome. Is that your only reason, Lieutenant?

Ralph So many people seem against it, sir.

Phillip Are you afraid?

Ralph No, sir, but I do not wish to displease my superior officers.

Phillip If you break conventions, it is inevitable you make enemies, Lieutenant. This play irritates them.

Ralph Yes and I –

Phillip Socrates irritated the state of Athens and was put to death for it.⁵⁵

Ralph Sir –

Phillip Would you have a world without Socrates?

Ralph Sir, I –

Phillip In the *Meno*, one of Plato's great dialogues – have you read it, Lieutenant? – Socrates demonstrates that a slave boy can learn the principles of geometry as well as a gentleman.⁵⁶

Ralph Ah –

Phillip In other words, he shows that human beings have an intelligence which has nothing to do with the circumstances into which they are born.

Ralph Sir –

Phillip Sit down, Lieutenant. It is a matter of reminding the slave of what he knows, of his own intelligence. And by intelligence you may read goodness, talent, the innate qualities of human beings.

Ralph I see – sir.

Phillip When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, and he becomes a competent mathematician. A little more encouragement and he might become an extraordinary mathematician. Who knows? You must see your actors in that light.

Ralph I can see some of them, sir, but there are others . . . John Arscott –

Phillip He has been given two hundred lashes for trying to escape. It will take time for him to see himself as a human being again.

Ralph Liz Morden –

Phillip Liz Morden – (*He pauses.*) I had a reason for asking you to cast her as Melinda. Morden is one of the most difficult women in the colony.

Ralph She is indeed, sir.

Phillip Lower than a slave, full of loathing, foul-mouthed, desperate.

Ralph Exactly, sir. And violent.

Phillip Quite. To be made an example of.

Ralph By hanging?

Phillip No, Lieutenant, by redemption.

Ralph The Reverend says he's given up on her, sir.

Phillip The Reverend's an ass, Lieutenant. I am speaking of redeeming her humanity.

Ralph I am afraid there may not be much there, sir.

Phillip How do we know what humanity lies hidden under the rags and filth of a mangled life? I have seen soldiers given up for dead, limbs torn, heads cut open, come back to life. If we treat her as a corpse, of course she will die. Try a little kindness, Lieutenant.

Ralph But will she be hanged, sir?

Phillip I don't want a woman to be hanged. You will have to help, Ralph.

Ralph Sir!

Phillip I had retired from His Majesty's Service, Ralph. I was farming. I don't know why they asked me to rule over this colony of wretched souls, but I will fulfil my responsibility. No one will stop me.

Ralph No, sir, but I don't see –

Phillip What is a statesman's responsibility? To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey the law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannise over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs. And you must help me, Ralph.

Ralph Yes, sir. The play –

Phillip Won't change much, but it is the diagram in the sand that may remind – just remind the slave boy. Do you understand?⁵⁷

Ralph I think so.

Phillip We may fail. I may have a mutiny on my hands. They are trying to convince the Admiralty that I am mad.

Ralph Sir!

Phillip And they will threaten you. You don't want to be a Second Lieutenant all your life.

Ralph No, sir!

Phillip I cannot go over the head of Major Ross in the matter of promotion.

Ralph I see.

Phillip But we have embarked, Ralph, we must stay afloat. There is a more serious threat and it may capsize us all. If a ship does not come within three months, the supplies will be exhausted. In a month, I will cut the rations again. (*Pause.*) Harry is not well. Can you do something? Good luck with the play, Lieutenant. Oh, and Ralph –

Ralph Sir –

Phillip Unexpected situations are often matched by unexpected virtues in people, are they not?

Ralph I believe they are, sir.

Phillip A play is a world in itself, a tiny colony we could almost say.

Pause.

And you are in charge of it. That is a great responsibility.

Ralph I will lay down my life if I have to, sir.

Phillip I don't think it will come to that, Lieutenant. You need only do your best.

Ralph Yes, sir, I will, sir.

Phillip Excellent.

Ralph It's a wonderful play, sir. I wasn't sure at first, as you know, but now –

Phillip Good, good. I shall look forward to seeing it. I'm sure it will be a success.

Ralph Thank you, sir. Thank you.

Audition piece 8

Harry sits, drinking rum, speaking in the different voices of his tormenting ghosts and answering in his own.

Harry Duckling! Duckling! ‘She’s on the beach, Harry, waiting for her young Handy Baker.’ Go away, Handy, go away! ‘The dead never go away, Harry. You thought you’d be the only one to dance the buttock ball with your trull, but no one owns a whore’s cunt, Harry, you rent.’ I didn’t hang you. ‘You wanted me dead.’ I didn’t. ‘You wanted me hanged.’ All right, I wanted you hanged. Go away! *(Pause.)* ‘Death is horrible, Mr Brewer, it’s dark, there’s nothing.’ Thomas Barrett! You were hanged because you stole from the stores. ‘I was seventeen, Mr Brewer.’ You lived a very wicked life. ‘I didn’t.’ That’s what you said that morning, ‘I have led a very wicked life.’ ‘I had to say something, Mr Brewer, and make sense of dying. I’d heard the Reverend say we were all wicked, but it was horrible, my body hanging, my tongue sticking out.’ You shouldn’t have stolen that food! ‘I wanted to live, go back to England, I’d only be twenty-four. I hadn’t done it much, not like you.’ Duckling! ‘I wish I wasn’t dead, Mr Brewer I had plans. I was going to have my farm, drink with friends and feel the strong legs of a girl around me –’ You shouldn’t have stolen. ‘Didn’t you ever steal?’ No! Yes. But that was different. Duckling! ‘Why should you be alive after what you’ve done?’ Duckling! Duckling!

Audition piece 9

The beach. Night. Mary, then Ralph.

Mary (*to herself*) ‘Captain Plume, I despise your listing-money; if I do serve, ’tis purely for love – of that wench I mean. For you must know’ – etc.

‘So you only want an opportunity for accomplishing your designs upon her?’

‘Well, sir, I am satisfied as to the point in debate; but now let me beg you to lay aside your recruiting airs, put on the man of honour, and tell me plainly what usage I must expect when I’m under your command.’

She tries that again, with a stronger and lower voice. Ralph comes on, sees her. She sees him, but continues.

‘And something tells me, that if you do discharge me ’twill be the greatest punishment you can inflict; for were we this moment to go upon the greatest dangers in your profession, they would be less terrible to me than to stay behind you. And now your hand – this lists me – and now you are my Captain.’

Ralph (*as Plume*) ‘Your friend.’ (*Kisses her.*) ‘’Sdeath! There’s something in this fellow that charms me.’

Mary ‘One favour I must beg – this affair will make some noise and I have some friends who would censure my conduct –’

Ralph Silvia –

He kisses her again.

Mary ‘I must therefore take care to be impressed by the Act of Parliament –’

Ralph ‘What you please as to that. Will you lodge at my quarters in the meantime? You shall have part of my bed.’

Silvia. Mary.

Mary Am I doing it well? It’s difficult to play a man. It’s not the walk, it’s the way you hold your head. A man doesn’t bow his head so much and never at an angle. I must face you without lowering my head, let’s try it again

Ralph ‘What you please as to that. Will you lodge at my quarters in the meantime? You shall have part of my bed.’

She holds her head straight. Pause.

Will you?

Pause. **Mary**

Yes.

They kiss.

Ralph Don’t lower your head. Silvia wouldn’t.

She begins to undress, from the top.

I’ve never looked at the body of a woman before.

Mary Your wife?

Ralph It wasn’t right to look at her.

Let me see you.

Mary Yes

Let me see you

Ralph. Yes

He begins to undress himself