

# **FOX**

## **A new Australian opera for young people.**

**Based on the picture book by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks.  
Created by Monkey Baa in association with Siren Theatre Co.  
Composed by Daryl Wallis.**

### **Preparing young people for their visit to a performance of FOX**

**FOX is a beautiful story told through movement, puppetry, projections and opera. Created especially for young people it is a unique and stimulating piece of Australian theatre.**

**In order to assist audience members connect effectively with this production of Fox, we have developed a set of guidelines to help teachers, parents and carers prepare young people for what may be their first experience of Opera.**

**At the end of this document we have added the entire text from the book with the titles of each song. We strongly recommend that you read the text and/or the picture book prior to attending the performance**

#### **Synopsis**

Magpie is injured in a bushfire and can no longer fly. She is rescued by one-eyed Dog who takes her back to his cave above the river to tend her burnt wing. They become firm friends and spend the seasons running through the bush - with Magpie on Dog's back. "Fly Dog Fly. I will be your missing eye and you will be my wings." Magpie discovers that riding atop Dog feels almost the same as flying.

When Fox arrives, he tempts Magpie with an even faster ride. Desire and loyalty become confused and Magpie eventually gives in to Fox and leaves Dog. Magpie feels like she's *really* flying on Fox's back as he streaks past coolibah trees and pelts over rocks.

Fox then dumps Magpie in the hot desert and tells her "Now you and Dog will know what it is like to be truly alone." And he leaves her there. Magpie is alone. She could just die in the hot desert. But then she thinks of Dog waking to find her gone. Slowly, jiggety hop she makes the long journey home.

Some questions answered.

#### **What is opera?**

*An opera is a play that is sung.*

*Opera is a complex art form that has been around since about 1600.*

In the production of Fox, the words from the book by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks, are sung entirely by Sarah Jones, who plays Spirit. She is the storyteller in the production.

The other 3 performers Jane Phegan, David Buckley and Jay Gallagher play the roles of Magpie, Dog and Fox. They help tell the story with movement and puppetry. The production also includes a sequence of projections which also aid the telling of the story.

### **How will I know what's happening?**

*Traditional operas have surtitles projected on a screen to help the audience follow the story.*

The production of Fox does not have surtitles because as a company we decided we wanted to make the experience of this production a visual and sensory experience and not a reading experience.

### **What should I expect?**

*Opera encourages engagement with emotion and the journey that changing emotions and connections provide. The voice in Opera can be viewed as another storytelling instrument equally as important as the music, sets, lighting etc*

The most important thing when attending Fox is to allow yourself to be taken away to another place and time by the power of the music and the drama. Encourage the young people attending to listen for the words being sung, but not to be relying on those words solely for an understanding of the journey. Be receptive to all aspects of the performance designed to aid the understanding.

### **When do I applaud?**

If you are unsure, play it by ear and follow along with the rest of the audience. However, audiences generally applaud at the end of each song - and of course wildly at the end.

Below is the entire text of Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks' picture book. Every word is used in the play. The headings are the titles of the songs.

## **Fox by Margaret Wild**

### **Charred Forest**

Through the charred forest, over the hot ash runs Dog, with a bird clamped in his big, gentle mouth.

He takes her to his cave above the river, and there he tries to tend her burnt wing; but Magpie does not want his help.

"I will never again be able to fly" she whispers

"I know" says Dog.

He is silent for a moment, then he says,  
“I am blind in one eye, but life is still good.”  
“An eye is nothing!” says Magpie.  
“How would you feel if you couldn’t run?”

Dog does not answer. Magpie drags her body into the shadow of the rocks, until she feels herself melting into blackness.

### **Rush of Grief**

Days, perhaps a week later, she wakes with a rush of grief. Dog is waiting. He persuades her to go with him to the riverbank.  
“Hop on my back,” he says. “look into the water and tell me what you see.”  
Sighing, Magpie does as he asks. Reflected in the water are clouds and sky and trees – and something else.  
“I see a strange new creature!” she says.  
“That is us,” says Dog. “Now hold on tight!”

### **Dogfly**

With Magpie clinging to his back, he races through the scrub, past the stringybarks, past the clumps of yellow box trees, and into blueness. He runs so swiftly. It is almost as if he were flying.  
Magpie feels the wind streaming through her feather and she rejoices. “Fly Dog, Fly! I will be your missing eye, and you will be my wings.”

### **Seasons**

And so Dog runs, with Magpie on his back, every day, through Summer, through Winter.

### **Fox Arrival**

After the rains when saplings are springing up everywhere, A Fox comes into the bush. Fox with his haunted eyes and rich red coat. He flickers through the trees like a tongue of fire, and Magpie trembles.

But Dog says “Welcome. We can offer you food and shelter.”  
“Thank you,” says Fox. “I saw you running this morning. You looked extraordinary.  
Dog beams, but Magpie shrinks away.  
She can feel Fox staring at her burnt wing.

### **Creamy Blossom**

In the evenings when the air is creamy with blossom, Dog and Magpie relax at the mouth of the cave, enjoying each other’s company.  
Now and again Fox joins in the conversation, but Magpie can feel him watching, always watching her.

And at night his smell seems to fill the cave – a smell of rage and envy and loneliness.

### **Warning**

Magpie tries to warn Dog about Fox.

“He belongs nowhere,” she says. “He loves no one.”

But Dog says “he’s all right. Let him be.”

### **Three questions**

That night when Dog is asleep, Fox whispers to Magpie, “I can run faster than Dog. Faster than the wind. Leave Dog and come with me.”

Magpie says, “I will never leave Dog. I am his missing eye and he is my wings.”

Fox says no more that night, but the next day when Dog is at the river, he whispers to Magpie, ‘Do you remember what it is like to fly? Truly fly?’

Again Magpie says, ‘I will never leave Dog. I am his missing eye and he is my wings.’

But later that day, as Dog runs through the scrub with Magpie on his back, she thinks, “This is nothing like flying. Nothing!”

And when at dawn Fox whispers to her for the third time, she whispers back, “I am ready.”

### **Foxfly**

While Dog sleeps, Magpie and Fox streak past coolibah trees, rip through long grass, pelt over rocks. Fox runs so fast that his feet scarcely touch the ground, and Magpie exults, “At last I am flying. Really Flying!”

Fox scorches through woodlands, through dusty plains, through salt plains, and out into the red hot desert.

### **Scarcely panting**

He stops, scarcely panting. There is silence between them. Neither moves, neither speaks.

Then Fox shakes magpie off his back as he would a flea and pads away.

He turns and looks at Magpie, and he says, ‘Now you and Dog will know what it is like to be truly alone.’

Then he is gone.

In the stillness, magpie hears a faraway scream. She cannot tell if it is a scream of triumph or despair.

### **Scruff of feathers**

Magpie huddles, a scruff of feathers adrift in the heat. She can feel herself burning into nothingness. It would be so easy just to die here in the desert.

## **Dog**

But she thinks of Dog awaking to find her gone.

## **Jiggety Hop**

Slowly, jiggety-hop, she begin the long journey home.

THE END