

BIO

JAN 'YARN' WOSITZKY, OAM

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'..the ultimate yarnspinner: a singer, musician and writer who can hold audiences spellbound.' (The Australian)

'Ripping yarns and vibrant music.' (The Melbourne Times)

"...in an era when much local creative writing fails to probe beyond latte land... it's refreshing to see someone reach back to our spiritual roots.." (The Age)

Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky is a storyteller, musician, writer and producer, who for a half-century has been performing Australian stories, songs and music, on stage, in schools, on radio and television and in books. Along the way Jan has been recognised and respected for honest, entertaining renditions of our history, and for having an alternative take on famous stories.

Arriving in Australia in 1956 with his Scots-Czech family, Jan likes to say that his life's path was an accident, when in 1970, on his first day at La Trobe University, Jan met two mates - Dave Isom and Bert Kahanoff - and together they formed the *Bushwackers Band*.

The spirit of the band was born in a ten-day-non-stop music and beer drinking session at the 1971 Aquarius Festival in Canberra. By 1973 the band went full time on \$25 a week, and celebrated with a tour of New Zealand. They soon become famous, toured Europe for nearly three years, recorded six albums, published two best-selling books, and did thousands of gigs and television appearances around Australia. Then after ten years 'on the road' Jan left for a solo career ... with an eye on the Northern Territory.

On Bushwackers tours of the NT Jan had met Aboriginal people in communities, and fascinated, he wanted to learn more. So taking off in a panel van with his then girlfriend, theatre director and performer, Debbie Sonenberg, Jan travelled to Borroloola in the Gulf of Carpentaria where Yanyuwa, Garrwa and Mara people took them deep into their landscape of song and story. With these people Jan wrote two documentaries for television – *Buwarrala Akarriya – Journey East* and *Aeroplane Dance* – and in 1994 helped them produce their first *Lijikarda Festival*.

Whilst in the NT Jan discovered the historical character WE (Bill) Harney (1895-1962) - the writer and great yarn-spinner who was regarded in his day as the 'expert' on Aborigines. In 1987 Jan set out to write a play about Harney ... and it finally got to the stage as a piece of storytelling theatre in 2013. One of many sidetracks was that Jan met Harney's 'unknown' son, the Wardaman songman and leader, Yidumduma Bill Harney, and together they wrote his biography, *Born Under the Paperbark Tree*.

Meanwhile back down south Jan fortuitously met the great Tommy Woodcock – the boy who was strapper and best friend to the legendary racehorse Phar Lap. Tommy came to see a show, they got



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talking and ... out of that Jan recorded Tommy's life story, which became the best-selling book and CD set, *Me & Phar Lap*.

Back in the Territory, with Debbie and two beautiful, well-travelled daughters, the family lived in a bush camp by some tamarind trees by the mighty McArthur River at Borroloola, around a campfire under the stars. They continued to work with the local Yanyuwa and Garrwa people, but this bliss came to an end when some whitefellas who disliked them working with and supporting Indigenous people tried to burn down their camp. And so in physical danger they reluctantly left and towed a caravan back to Victoria.

Back home, the next move was to Castlemaine, the 'arts town' in central Victoria. Later Debbie and Jan split and the girls grew up went out into the world. Today Jan lives in Castlemaine, where he puts together one-man shows - to date *Canakkale*, *Gallipoli*, *The Go-Between: William Murrungurk Buckley*, *A Bundle of Sticks* and *Bilarni* - produces CDs and audio tours of local history, performs in schools and is currently going out with his 50th anniversary show, *Thank You For The Welcome*.

In January 2022 Jan was awarded an OAM, A Medal in the Order of Australia for his contribution to the performing arts, specifically music, theatre and storytelling.

2022

Brief CV below

CV in Brief

Awards

- *OAM, A Medal of the Order of Australia for his contribution to the performing arts, specifically music, theatre and storytelling 2022
- *National Folk Fellowship (National Library of Australia) 2013 for 'Bilarni' (see below)
- *Historical Interpretation Award, Vic. History Awards (for CD Monster Meeting) 2013
- *Best Community Event, Shire Mt Alexander (Monster Meeting Day) 2010
- *Pittwater Film Festival - Pittkuri Award (Aeroplane Dance) 1998
- *International Festival of Ethnographic Film - Basil Wright Prize (Aeroplane Dance) 1997
- *Chicago International Film Festival - Silver Hugo (Aeroplane Dance) 1996
- *Human Rights & Equal Opportunities Comm. Media Award (NT Trades Hall Magazine) 1994
- *Best Documentary & Best Aust. Production, Aust. Teachers of Media Awards (Buwarrala Akarriya) 1991
- *Gold Guitar, Best Instrumental, Tamworth Country Music Festival (Bushwackers Band) 1981

Books

Author	<i>The Monster Meeting</i> (Chewton Domain Society, 2014)
Author	<i>Me & Phar Lap</i> (Slattery Media) 2011
Report writer	<i>The Storytellers Guide to Community Building</i> (Dept. of Vic Communities) 2004
Co-author	<i>Li Wankala Kaluwinkayaninya li Wankala Buwarrala - In The Footsteps of Our Ancestors</i> 1996
Oral historian/ Writer	<i>Born Under The Paperbark Tree</i> (ABC Books) 1996
Oral historian/ writer	<i>I Was Born</i> (Selby Community House) 1992
Oral historian. Writer	<i>Tommy Woodcock</i> (Greenhouse Pub.) 1986
Co-editor	<i>The Fruitcake of Australian Stories</i> (Greenhouse Pub) 1984
Co-writer	<i>The Bushwackers Dance Book</i> (Greenhouse) 1979
Co-author	<i>The Bushwackers Song Book</i> (Anne O'Donovan) 1978

Television/video

Presenter	<i>From Pub To Hub</i> (Environmental Prod.) 2010
Musician	<i>Home & Away</i> (1997)
Musician	<i>Nancy Wake</i> (1992)
Presenter	<i>One Nation, Many People</i> (Video Education Australia) 1998
Writer	<i>The Aeroplane Dance</i> (SBS) 1993
Writer, sound recordist	<i>Buwaralla Akarriya-Journey East</i> (ABC) 1990

ABC RN Features

Writer/presenter	<i>Bilarni</i> (Hindsight) 2010
Writer/presenter	<i>The Treaty</i> (Hindsight) 2006
Writer/presenter	<i>The Music of Gallipoli</i> (Music Deli) 2006
Writer/presenter	<i>The Tommy Woodcock Story</i> (Verbatim) 2005
Writer/presenter	<i>Honouring Mother - The Nelly Darby Story</i> (Hindsight) 2005
Musician	<i>The Quiz</i> (ABC RN) 2003
Writer/presenter	<i>A Long Lunch With Kenneth Cook</i> (Books & Writing) 2002
Writer/presenter	<i>The Ants That Ate Plutarch</i> (Bopoks & Writing) 2002
Writer/presenter	<i>Ned's Noggin</i> (Law Report) 2002
Writer/presenter	<i>Anzac Day Promotions</i> (774) 2002
Writer/presenter	<i>Wongar</i> (Books & Writing) 2002
Writer/presenter	<i>Yapucha</i> (Music Deli) 1996

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Writer/presenter
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The Aeroplane Dance (Music Deli) 1991
Buzarrala Akarriya-Journey East (Music Deli) 1990
Bill Smith Stories (ABC Classic FM) 1989
Travellers Tales (ABC Classic FM) 1987

School shows & Workshops

Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer
Writer/performer

Landmarks of Melbourne 2015 -
Gold in the Heart 2010 -
Lest We Forget 2004-
Buckley 2003 -
Australia In A Suitcase 2004-2010
Little Creatures 1997-1999
Jack The Dancer & The Krasnapolski's 1994-1998
The Music Tree (..and Jack the Dancer) 1985-1988
The Fruitcake of Australian Stories 1984-5

Music

Producer/performer
Producer/musician
Producer/musician
Musician
Musician/storyteller

Thank You For The Welcome 2021
The Monster Meeting Band 2012
Repetitive Strainz – 1985
The Kooka Brothers 1983
The Bushwackers Band 1971-81

Theatre

Writer/performer/producer
Writer/performer/producer
Writer/performer/producer
Writer/performer/producer

A Bundle of Sticks (2018 -)
Bilarni – 2014-
The Go-Between: William Murrungurk Buckley 2013-
Buckley: The First White Man (Castlemaine State Festival, La Mama) 2006
Canakkale. Gallipoli. Lest We Forget (Gallipoli) 2003-
Whitefella learns to Dance (Victorian tour & NT) 1996-7
The Fruitcake of Australian Stories (Universal Theatre/Troubadour (1984))

Writer/performer/producer
Writer/performer/producer
Performer/musician/producer

CDs, Cassettes, LPs

Producer/ musician, singer
Producer/ musician
Producer/ storyteller
Producer/ performer
Producer/ interviewer
Producer
Songwriter/ musician
Songwriter/ musician
Storyteller/musician. co-prod.
Singer, musician/storyteller
Singer, musician/storyteller
Singer, musician, dance caller
Singer, musician
Singer, musician

The Monster Meeting (Chewton Domain Society) 2012
Drum with Strings 2005
The Go-between 2003
The Secret Land 1999
Born Under The Paperbark Tree 1995
Elvis Would Be Proud 1991
The Magpie Army 1992
The Flag 1990
The Fruitcake of Australian Stories 1984
Faces in the Street (Bushwackers) 1981
Faces in the Street (Bushwackers) 1981
The Bushwackers Dance Album (Bushwackers) 1980
Bushfire (Bushwackers) 1979
Murrumbidgee (Bushwackers) 1976

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Singer, musician
Singer, musician, reciter

...and the Band Played Waltzing Matilda (Bushwackers) 1976
The Shearers Dream (Bushwackers) 1974

Commissions

Performer / writer / researcher
Musician in residence
Songwriter
Songwriter, musician
Producer
Co-producer
Musician / singer / producer

Five Flags Hotel 150th Celebrations 2003
Songwriter, Golden Square PS 1997
Artist in Residence, Brunswick 1990
Musician in Residence, Northern Territory 1987
Brunswick Children's Music Festival 1992-3
Lijikarda Festival 1994
Labour Day Project (Trades Hall, Melbourne) 1986

Audio Tours

Presenter / writer / producer / musician

A Storyteller's Guide to the Goldfields 2020
Living Stories of the Victorian Goldfields (Shire of Mount Alexander/ Bendigo City Council) 2007

Journalism

Editor
Writer
Writer

May Day Magazine (NT Trades Hall) 1994
Tracks (Dance Australia' Magazine) 1994
Melbourne Age 1990, 2013, 2014