

★ SONG ORIGIN ★

Australians have written many famous songs. 'Along the road to Gundagai' by Jack O'Hagan (1898–1987) is one of the early ones. It also made Gundagai famous.

It starts off with words familiar to many musicians:

There's a track winding back
To an old-fashioned shack,
Along the road to Gundagai.

Jack O'Hagan became Australia's most prolific songwriter for over four decades. He began his musical career as a song 'plugger' at a music store where he played sheet music on the piano to customers.

In 1922 an English operatic star noticed a copy of 'Along the road to Gundagai' and asked for it to be sung, then predicted fame for O'Hagan. The song was first performed by Peter Dawson in 1924 and recorded in London, selling 50 000 copies in three months. Not bad in those days!

O'Hagan wasn't a 'one-hit wonder'. In a career that spanned forty-five years he wrote over 600 songs with more than 200 published, many being sold overseas. His songs were proudly and sentimentally about Australian people and places. Many featured famous identities such as Kingsford Smith, Donald Bradman and Olympian Marjorie Jackson.

Songs from the United States dominated the Australian music scene for many decades. In 1974, O'Hagan said, 'Many people in the 1920s weren't interested in songs about Australia. I had called one of my songs "Down Carolina way" but when a publisher saw it and exploded, "Why don't you write Australian songs?" I went away and wrote "Along the Road to Gundagai".'

As guest of honour at Gundagai's centenary celebrations in 1956 O'Hagan confessed it was his first visit to the town. There was no truth in the words:

Where my Daddy and Mummy are
waiting for me,
And the pals of my childhood once
more I will see,
So no more will I roam till I'm headed
right for home
On the road to Gundagai.

