

Then it happened.

Harry M Miller was looking for a King Herod. He had looked "everywhere, London, New York, Los Angeles, everywhere" (my casting agent friend told me). Sounded to me like the Hunt for Scarlet O'Hara. Reg Livermore had set a benchmark in the days when it was becoming "trendy" to be "camp, outrageous, and to appeal to a burgeoning homosexual milieu. After all, we're talking Sydney".

They couldn't find anyone to take over and follow Livermore, by now a high camp household name, and who was by now playing "Frank 'n' furter", in the Rocky Horror Show, (for Harry M Miller, and you could bet, he was playing with an ironclad contract). Nobody would go through (twice) what I was about to go through. But I walked straight in to the alligator's maw.

The kitchen staff at the Restaurant, when they heard that I was going to audition for Herod, was gently disparaging and told the owner Frank Baden Powell after the show one night, "Jack's going to audition for Superstar".

Frank was very charming and said, "Are you Jack? What are you going to sing?"

I told him, "Herod's Song."

"OK," he said, "show me what you can do."

So unaccompanied, I sang the song. "So you are the Christ..." (you know the one)..

Frank applauded, "Now do it like a gangster". I did.

"Now do it like a Japanese Samurai". I did. ..."if it's all a lie" became if itsor awry" complete with facial distortions. (Dreadful) But they laughed.

"Now do it like a Russian Tsar". I did. They were certainly surprised.

Now do it like an Irish publican". And again they laughed.

"He'll get it" said Frank.

"Don't be ridiculous Frank. He's just Jack, the kitchen hand."

"He'll get it" repeated Frank, and we left it at that.

A few days later, I rolled up to the Balmain Theatre to the audition into a foyer full of dreadlocks, and, looking like a riverboat gambler. I pretended not to know the song, sang an old Hoagy Carmichael ditty, and sounded like FRED ASTAIRE!

"Do you know "Herod's Song?" asked the Musical Director, Michael Carlos.

"Hmmm" I mused, "Herod's song. Now how does it go...?"

Well, have you ever seen one of those old Hollywood movies where they hand the singer a sheet of music and say, "Try this," and he/she looks at for not more than three seconds, clears his/her throat and does it MAGNIFICENTLY, First time! Of course in Hollywood there would suddenly be a revolving stage, mirrors and hundreds of dancers on grand pianos. No. It was just me. I sang the song.

You got it. I got it. Name of the game.

Show biz.

### **.APPENDIX**

*Off the cuff? I don't think so.*

*I had sung the song about one hundred times a day, in the warehouse, in the kitchen, cleaning the cinema, for the previous fortnight, before rocking up casually, to audition, "Hmmm, How's it go?"*

It was lucky no one broke their legs getting up to me on the stage.

"Was that what you meant?" I asked? Of COURSE, THAT WAS WHAT THEY WANTED. BUT THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I'D DONE.

"Can you tap dance?"

"Sure" I replied.

"Great" said the choreographer, Chrissie Koltai who couldn't tap dance, but didn't want to admit it. "He's got my vote". Exactly what would have happened if she'd said, "Show me," I can't imagine. It took two minutes to get the job, and balls, and, could I suggest, a LITTLE ability.

While I travelled in a taxi across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, to an agent in North Sydney (at their expense, naturally, they weren't mucking around), they were dictating the contract over the phone, I said to her "What's in it?" She said "Just sign it". I did.

Welcome to the asylum. Someone said to me once, "No one worth his salt ever works for him twice".

I could believe it, although strictly speaking it wasn't quite true. Jesus, (Trevor White) and Judas (Jon English) did. I can't speak for anyone else. It was a nightmare for me.

(Memorable quote, "So this is the guy who's going to whip Reg Livermore's arse for me. Turn around.")

That was the approval system, apparently, for raising cattle. I had one charter. "Stop the Show" Every night, ("as directed" the contract said. And that became the root of the problem) with no help from anyone and sufficient hindrance

to mount a whole new production with a possible working title "Malevolence".

So it meant a quick trip to London, before rehearsals started three weeks later, to learn to tap dance, now at the not-so-tender age of 38! No one said it couldn't be done, but it could, though I had to sit in a warm bath, take massages, walk bowlegged into the Dance Centre London Covent Garden, and come out, able to tap dance rings around the choreographer, who could dance rings around me horizontally.

Later, (next year in fact 1976) after she was sacked (by company protest) she was doing the same "stuff" for another theatre group. All this "hug each other, and go Ommmmm". Yep, that should do it..

Not my style. Stuck in the sixties. Even the Maharishi Maheshi Yogi used to laugh when he saw people going through that rubbish. Do people still do that mumbojumbo?

But through the torture of the rehearsal period without one minute of instruction and mountains of obstruction...it was a torturous game that every Herod was put through, I was told. I just lasted longer, I believe, than Joe Dicker, Jon Finlayson, or Reg Livermore.

So I did my opening night performance only ever having heard my song played once in performance mode, no tuition, and obstruction all round,

Just "stop the show"

"It's a feel thing" "No, you can't do that" ... to whatever I offered.

Stefan Haag, the director of the exercise, said to me that my Song was the only part of the performance not directed by him.

So, by whom!??? It was a nightmare, a sloped glass stage, tap dancing?