

The One Day of the Year

by Alan Seymour

General Information

The One Day of the Year was written by Alan Seymour in 1960, and first performed by the Adelaide Theatre Group (an amateur society) in July of that year. Although primarily about Anzac day it addresses a lot of issues more at heart than that.

The play recounts the story of the Cook family around the Anzac day week. Alf has hit the bottle, and his mate Wacka Dawson helps him reminisce, much to the ire of Dot Cook. Hughie (Alf's son) is attending university where he meets a new girlfriend Jan Castle. It is clear that Hughie's higher education has opened a communication gap between himself and his parents. Whilst Alf sees Anzac day as a great day where old diggers get together and can feel special, Hughie regards it as merely a great excuse for them all to get drunk – very drunk.

Jan and Hughie set out to do an article for the University paper, with Hughie taking photographs of Anzac day revelers in somewhat compromising situations (e.g. vomiting). When Alf sees the article even Dot cannot bring peace to the family and the gap between parents and son grows even more unbridgeable.

The questions of class difference, age difference, educational difference, communication between parents and children, free expression, old times' sake and respect for people all make this a fine play and an excellent study of Australian (although not exclusively Australian) character.

Despite being written in 1960 the play is supposed to be set in "the present". Unfortunately it's just too dated to be set in 2000. When Seymour was writing the world had not seen The Beatles, Vietnam nor the video recorder and too many changes would be needed to bring it up to date. Accordingly I'll take it as a period play set in 1960. Alan Seymour has done a revision of the work published in 1985. It is this revision we will use as our performance text. It has several cuts over the 1960 version, a few minor revisions, but a better characterisation of Jan and a few more lines for her. If an author revises a successful play, it's definitely worth looking at the revision.

Personally, the play means a lot to me. I can relate to all of the characters but I mainly relate to Hughie. I only hope I can present it so it is as moving to the audience as it was to me when I first read it.

Casting Information

The play has five characters, all Australian. Because of the nature of the play, its success will lie in the creation of character. The plot is great – suspenseful and enthralling – but the play is mainly a character study. The characters must be alive – real. If the audience does not believe in the characters, it will not fully appreciate the play, and the dramatic impact will be completely lost.

Here is a very brief description of the cast members:

Alf Cook – very nearly fifty. As ocker as they come – likes his beer and his mates, and tries to keep in Dot’s good books with varying degrees of success. Comes from a working class background and is proud of it. In the TV series which was based on this play *The Last of the Australians*, Alf was played by Alwyn Kurts.

Dot Cook – his wife, lets say 47(?). Again very Australian. She likes her euchre nights and housie. Typical of such a person she is the conciliatory type, often acting as go between for Hughie and his father. She tries to keep the house in order both physically and socially.

Hughie Cook – their son, 19 or 20. A university student confused as to his social position. His education means he finds communication with his parents difficult but also finds it hard to relate to his new girlfriend Jan. He is just past the “troubled teenager” phase and is starting to emerge as an adult in his own right – and is finding it difficult.

Jan Castle – Hughie’s new girlfriend of the same age. She too is a university student, but quite definitely upper class. Seymour has written that she turned out as a stock character despite (or because of) extensive re-writing of her part*. Even so, played correctly she will be just as accepted as the rest of the cast.

Wacka Dawson – Alf’s long suffering mate who lives on his own despite his age. We don’t know how old he is – he put up his age to go to WWI and put it down for WWII and forgot what it was, so we can only guess that he is around seventy. Although slightly affected by Alzheimer’s disease he is a lovable character, truly Australian and is very loyal to his mate Alf.

* The 1985 textual revision solves a lot of these problems.

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Name _____ Age (range) _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____

Mobile _____

I am interested in the following roles (please tick all that apply)

Wacka Dawson

Alf Cook

Dot Cook

Hughie Cook

Jan Castle

I am interested in assisting in a non-acting role, such as (e.g. Makeup, Lighting):

If unsuccessful for an acting part I am interested in helping in a non-acting role. (Please be honest with this last choice).

I have experience in the following shows: (please list details of show, group, date and function performed, or state that you're a novice)

Any other information to help in casting the play?
