

ANDREW DADDO

A LITTLE MORE OPEN-MINDED FROM BOOK TO STAGE

I remember clearly the sheer joy at being told that *Sprung!* had been chosen by Monkey Baa Productions for their next production. I'd seen 'The Bugalugs Bum-Thief', knew they were absolute professionals and that their shows toured Australia, so I thought this would be a great chance to get the book into areas it might not have been before.

I mean - a play of *Sprung!* When I wrote that first collection of stories, I was warned there was a fair chance no one would ever buy it, let alone read it. So this was fantastic.

Monkey Baa wanted me to work with them on the script and I felt this was a generous offer. They managed to turn eleven short stories into one long one and, after a bit of tweaking, editing and a lot of laughs, they had a script we were all thrilled with.

Really.

And then there was the read-through. I thought I was going to die. Real actors in front of real government people, who could provide the funding.

From the very first line I was embarrassed. To hear these actors give a different (or should that be new?) voice to the voices I'd only had in my head was wild. And hysterical. I had no idea how funny the script was. I tried to stifle my laughter. I was like a school kid giggling. It was a great experience.

And Monkey Baa got the money they needed to perform the show. As an author, I couldn't have been more pleased.

I can't remember where the national tour of *Sprung!* started, but I finally caught it at Glen Street Theatre in French's Forest, a Sydney suburb on the way to the northern beaches.

The crowd rolled in – kids, of course, but I doubt any of them would have been as excited as I was.

The lights dimmed, we all went silent.

An actor came out of the darkness. Fergus Kipper. Not exactly as I saw him, but not far off. And then he started talking. It wasn't exactly as I'd imagined it. And it was a fair way off – as was most of the performance.

Ouch!

In fact. It was nothing like I had pictured it. There were parts of the story I didn't recognise, jokes that were not funny, and things that were never meant to be funny being played only for laughs.

Eva, the producer, asked me after the show how I felt about it. I said great, she called me a liar, I said no really and she shook her head. The actors came out and said they'd managed to wipe about ten minutes from the show by going faster.

No kidding, I thought.

And there was the problem – most of it, anyway. There were no spaces for breath, or thought, or anything. The production itself was terrific. The sets were top-notch and the staging was brilliant – especially the egg-chuck with Mr Humpy. How they came up with that is anyone's guess, but they did, and it really worked.

Eva and I did have a long discussion about the play. Against some pretty sharp advice I told her what I thought, and it was what she had thought as well. She said she'd take care of it.

I finally saw *Sprung!* again at the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne. That was a kick, because I used to work there as a waiter.

It was brilliant.

The actors did a great job. The script breathed, it was funny when it was meant to be. The emotion was there; the pathos. Everything.

At least, it was for me, and I think it was for the audience as well.

It was a very exciting day, and fulfilling.

And I realised that when you hand over your thoughts to someone else – whether in a book or a script for a play or movie – they are up for interpretation by others. It sounds obvious, I know. But since it was my first time, I'd naively expected *Sprung!* to be the way I saw it in my head. Which is weird, seeing as I've spent so much of my life working in television.

I really enjoyed the show at the VAC. In fact, I loved it. I also loved the process of seeing all those separate but vaguely related stories become one coherent play. And I'd do it again with Monkey Baa anytime they liked. Only, if there is a next time, I'll be a little more open-minded about what I may see.

Copyright © Andrew Daddo 2006