

SYNOPSIS – THE DON

It is 1920 and Donald Smith is born in poverty in a Bundaberg cane cutter's shack with a harelip and a cleft palate. He is tormented by his classmates, and is traumatised when he learns that Ray, his narcissistic father, a handsome, knockabout rugby league player and gun cane cutter is ashamed of his ugly son. Don takes refuge singing romantic ballads on his mother's knee.

But his father and the brutal Bundaberg culture soon knocks that out of him.

At age 12, he steals a car to put bread on the family table and subconsciously win his father's approval, but is caught and sentenced to two years in juvenile detention. The bullying is savage, but a boozy old choirmaster discovers his magnificent voice. Donald refuses to join the choir, preferring to emulate his father's feats on the rugby league ground, but he is drawn to singing and his one friend, Charlie, who is a choirboy. When Donald decides to sing in the choir instead of playing rugby league he knows he's lost his father.

In his mid-20s, Donald works with his father cutting cane and playing rugby league and longing for love. A Country and western band plays in Bundaberg – led by the devilishly handsome Charlie. Charlie invites him on stage and Donald realizes the power of his golden voice. For the first time in his life he is admired and envied. That night he loses his virginity to a local girl, Joy.

Charlie invites Donald to join the band. Ray is furious that Donald is quitting his cane cutting gang to sing – real men don't sing, and it isn't Australian, is it? But it's lock up your daughters, Queensland, as Donald and Charlie sing and booze, fight and fornicate across rural Queensland.

But Joy is pregnant and Donald does the right thing. They marry and Donald quits the band and it's back to ugly reality and the drudgery of the cane fields.

Donald hears Puccini one night and this time there's no escape. He returns to the juvie and his boozy old choirmaster to learn to sing opera. In secret, because Joy doesn't want him singing – she knows the seductive power of that voice. And Bundaberg in the 50s is no place for an opera singer.

Donald has always believed that he is as ugly within as without and the harsh and repressive Queensland culture has reinforced it. But the ugly little bastard from Bundaberg must journey to London and the hallowed house of Sadler's Wells where he must face the elitist Opera establishment in the most confrontational and demanding art forms and where the sheer beauty of his voice will transform him into Madame Butterfly's handsome and dashing Pinkerton.

Donald, the ugly little bastard from Bundaberg must escape his father and the repressive Queensland culture and journey to London and the hallowed house of Sadler's Wells where he will the sheer beauty of his voice will transform him into Madame Butterfly's handsome and dashing Pinkerton.

