



## Actress, author Merridy Eastman discovers her Aboriginal family connection

936 ABC Hobart By Paul McIntyre

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**Actress and author Merridy Eastman grew up believing her ancestry was firmly based in Europe.**

"I was always told that our family's brown eyes, dark hair and dark skin were due to a Spanish connection," Ms Eastman said.

Then, about a year ago, she discovered the truth.

"It's not a Spanish connection, it's an Aboriginal connection," Ms Eastman said.

"It's a very exciting thing to discover."

The connection goes back several generations to Ms Eastman's great-great-grandfather on her father's side, John Jonas — a name inspired by ticket-of-leave convict George Jonas — who was Worimi Aboriginal.

"His son, Billy Jonas, was a famous buckjumper," Ms Eastman said.

### The Wild Colonial Boys on tour

So famous was Billy Jonas, that along with three other men he was sent to England in 1911 for the coronation of King George V.

Billed as The Wild Colonial Boys, Jonas and his colleagues were lucky enough to travel in a period when overseas trips were far from the norm and World War I was still years in the future.

But his fortune did not end there as, while away, Jonas met his future wife, Maude Stephens, who he married and later brought back to Australia.

"There must be so many of us who have these undiscovered Indigenous connections," Ms Eastman said.

"It just gets more and more fascinating."

### The family's former secret set for new book

Ms Eastman's book about her time living in a small town in Bavaria in Germany — *How Now Brown Frau* — was well received as a humorous piece of writing about her family's experience.

With her next book project she plans to reveal more about her discovery of her Indigenous ancestry.

Ms Eastman said her upcoming project had the blessing of her parents who were glad the family history was finally being discussed openly.

"I think it's funny that what we once tried to sweep under the carpet we're now trying to uncover," Ms Eastman said.

**Topics:** family, actor, author, indigenous-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander, tas



**PHOTO:** Merridy Eastman with her son and husband in Germany. She always knew about her European ancestry but has recently discovered her Aboriginal connection. (Supplied: Merridy Eastman)

**AUDIO:** Merridy Eastman (Life Matters)

**EXTERNAL LINK:** Merridy Eastman on The Guestroom in 2012

**MAP:** TAS



**PHOTO:** Billy Jonas renews his vows with the woman he fell in love with in the UK, and married, Maude Stephens. (Supplied: Merridy Eastman)