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My Sixties: A personal view by Roger Foley-Fogg - also known as Ellis D Fogg

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Abstract

Reminiscences of the 1960s by Australian light show pioneer Roger Foley-Fogg.

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My Sixties

A personal view by Roger Foley-Fogg - also known as Ellis D Fogg



Figure 1 Tully with Ellis D Fogg lightshow, circa 1969. Photograph: Fogg assisted by Rennie Ellis.

Albie Thoms, David Perry, Gary Shead, Ubu, OZ Magazine, Richard Neville, Richard Walsh, Martin Sharp, Mick Glasheen, John Allen, the Arts Factory, The Human Body, Rex Cramphorn's Performance Syndicate, Willy Young now William Yang, Sydney University Underground Society, Victor Kay, Watters Gallery, Mike Brown and Vivienne Binns, and many other young people were all 'happening'

in Australia during the 60s, and the best of them were included in my evolving Ellis D Fogg Lightshows and Lumino Kinetic work.



Figure 2 MR FOGG demonstrates his fogg machine to conductor John Hopkins AO OBE and composer Peter Sculthorpe AO OBE. Peter included Fogg in his score for 'LOVE 200' for the ABC Prom Concerts with the Sydney and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras, Jeannie Lewis, Tully.

Like many others such as Albie Thoms, my work as an artist rebelled against the usual model of exhibitions of paintings and other work on white-walled Galleries. We considered this boring and wanted a total multi-disciplinary art theatre. Frank Watters changed this in 1971 when I was asked to create a total environment “WOOM” with Vivienne Binns in his Gallery, and was subsequently invited by Albie Thoms and Martin Sharp to create a room at the Yellow House – this became the Capsule Room.

The press covered all this experimentation extensively and it became very popular and hip, which in turn encouraged many others to produce one-off lightworks and theatre pieces with varying degrees of success. In my particular area of Light Sculpture, Environments and Lightshows, Albie Thoms' Ubu group were the only other innovators that consistently came up with new ideas and productions. To finance these developments both Ubu and Fogg offered our art to commercial businesses as long as we were still in control of our work and retained artistic integrity.



Figure 3 Light Show – Ellis D. Fogg, Turkish Green Electric Band, Taman Shud, Lukes Walnut, Cleves, Hamul and Rebels, Elizabethan Theatre, 1pm Sunday 19 Oct. Poster by Gary Worley.

Our concerns as young people included: the Vietnam War, censorship, sexual liberation, state political and police corruption, the White Australia policy, republicanism, apartheid, the voting rights and civil rights marches in the USA and the treatment of our own black people, women's liberation, the pill and contraception, abortion, sexual repression and the general repression, malaise and boredom of society. I worked at making my Lightshows reflect these concerns in a manner that was entertaining. Our disrespect for authority figures, and encouragement to think for ourselves, came not only from Albie Thoms' obscenity trial of 1963 and the various trials of the OZ magazine in Australia between 1963-5, but also from Timothy Leary's writings throughout the decade and the fact that Nazi war criminals were denied the defence 'only following orders'. The 1961 Eichmann trial was a reminder that you have a responsibility to think for yourself and to not blindly follow authority.

I had been brought up by strong and artistic women - my mother Hazel Foley and my Aunt Eileen Foley, a musician, who had encouraged my interest in art. I had wanted to be a sculptor since I was 12, and had played with anomalous light and colour and imagined that I would work in theatre, perhaps making sculpture that could be used on stage. When I left school in 1959 my aunt advised that the coming big thing would be guitars and lights and my mother advised I should learn something that could support me financially. So I worked in a factory learning to use hand and machine tools during the day, went to the University of New South Wales and then Art School at night, and worked in the lighting departments of various theatres in my spare time.

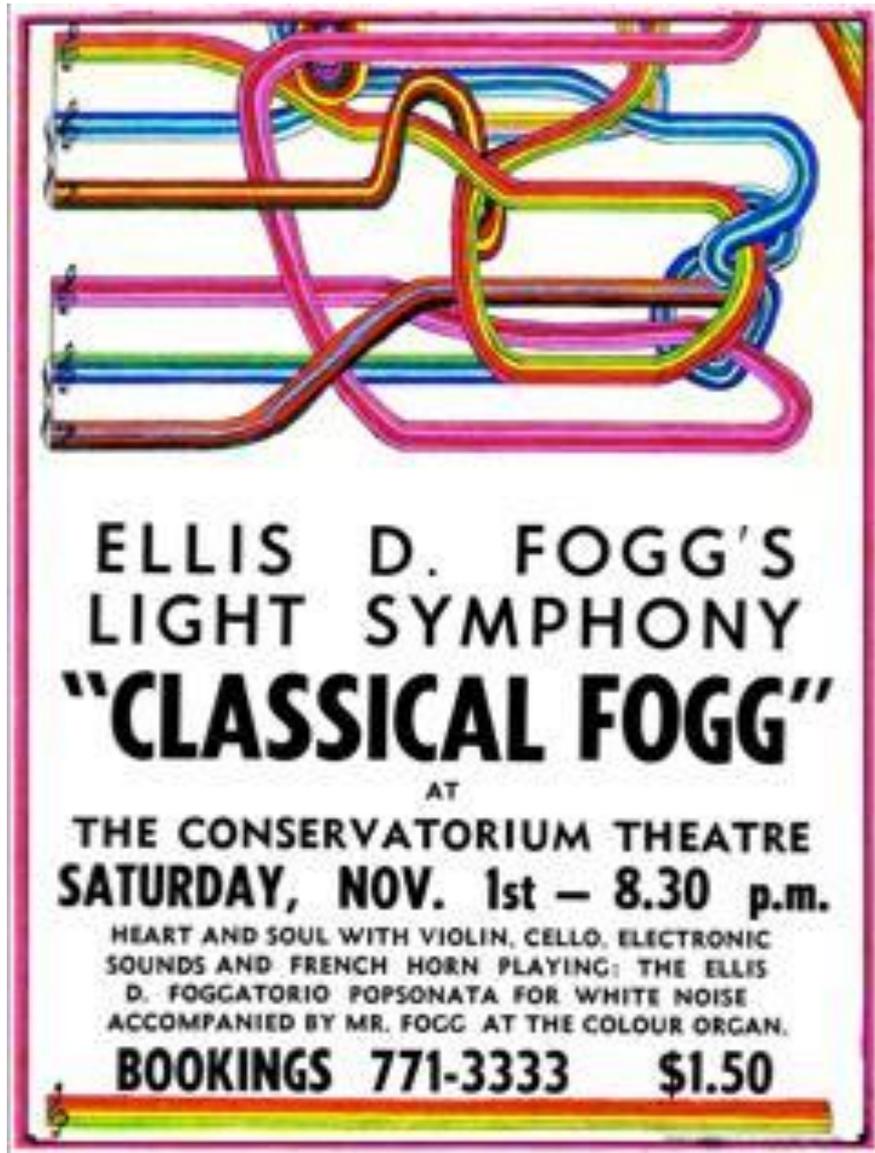


Figure 4 Classical Fogg. Poster by Xavier Cross.

I was aware of the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's India and the colourful Hindi Gods on the counter culture movement then sweeping the Western world - young folk particularly liked the fact that multinationals such as Coca Cola were banned in India. I was also inspired by New York's The Living Theatre - still performing in 2012; Albie Thoms' Theatre of Cruelty at Sydney University; the American West Coast hippie movement which became Flower Power; the contrasting Andy Warhol Exploding Plastic Inevitable with Lou Reed and The Velvet Underground on the East Coast; and the

power of rock and roll music and its message, which I added to my theatre shows. The first of these was at a small hall in Kensington for The Psychedelic Party, Mixed Media and Banana Freakout show with Brian Robson's band, and then later at the University of New South Wales Roundhouse with Tully, where we had a full house. A thousand people could not get in to the show and had to watch through the glass walls.

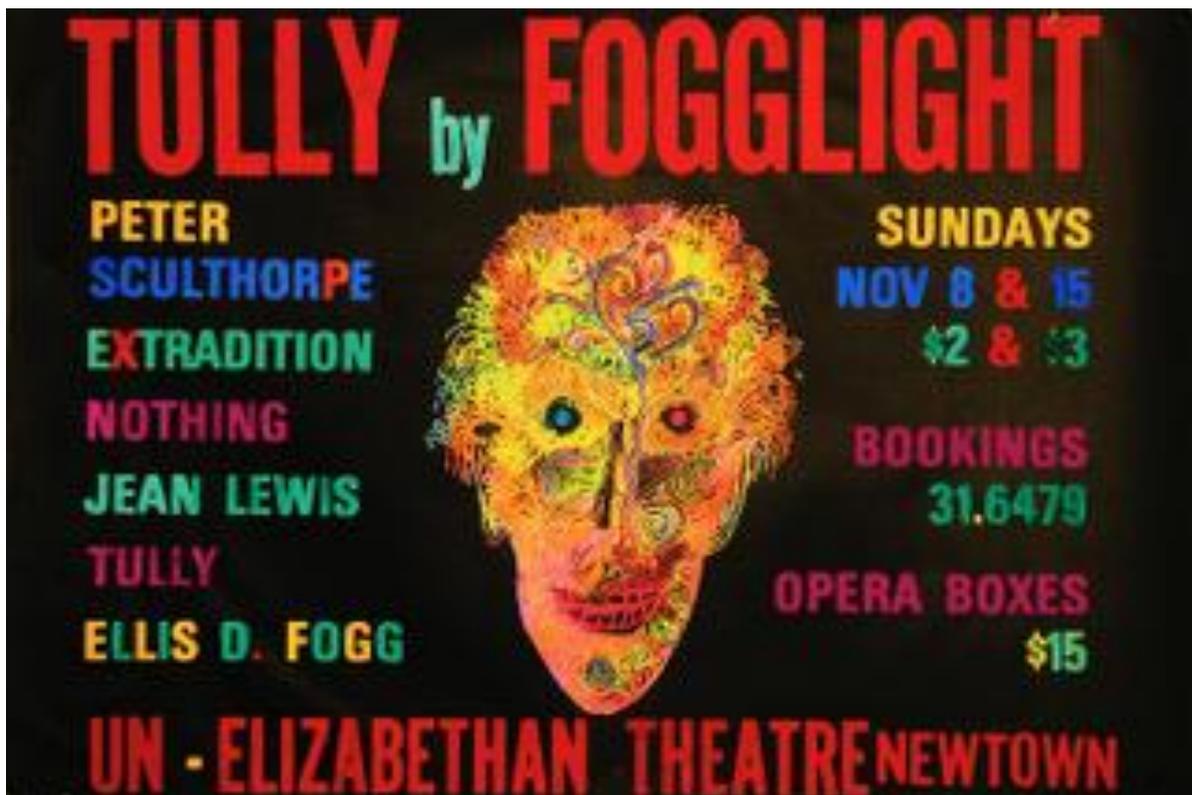


Figure 5 Tully by Fogglight, Poster by Xavier Cross.

I continued to make Light sculptures, first maquettes and then larger versions to use on stage. I devised, designed, directed and produced the Lightshows utilising the best artists and equipment I could find. This included Ubu films, Victor Kay's curved screens and handmade 35mm films, Aggy Read's hand painted slides, Eddie Van Der Madden's Wetshow and beautiful handmade Kaleidoscope projectors, Geoffrey Rose's painted scenery, Alex Boyd's stroboscopes, Vivienne Binn's

paintings, Christine Koltai's dance, with some very impressive bands and musicians including Tully, The Nutwood Rug, Company Caine, Heart and Soul, The Turkish Green Electric band, Jeff St John, Wendy Saddington and the great Jeannie Lewis. This work led to later productions with Jazz men such as John Sangster and with composer Peter Sculthorpe and the Sydney and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras.



*Figure 6 Front page of Yellow House catalogue/poster for the Spring Show, 1 September 1971.
Artists: Dick Weight and Albie Thoms.*

My shows are always sexy and pushed the boundaries, because conservative attitudes to censorship and sexuality have never gone away. Beautiful girls were always coming up to me at concerts wanting

to take their clothes off and dance around the band as living screens for our projections. I always said yes. Then late in 1969 I met Gretel Pinniger - a beautiful arts student who earned money as an artist's model, by making leather clothes, and by working the strip club circuit at Kings Cross as Madam Lash. We struck up a friendship and determined to put her handmade costumes and her friends in our Lightshows which we did at the beginning of the following decade. But that is another story.

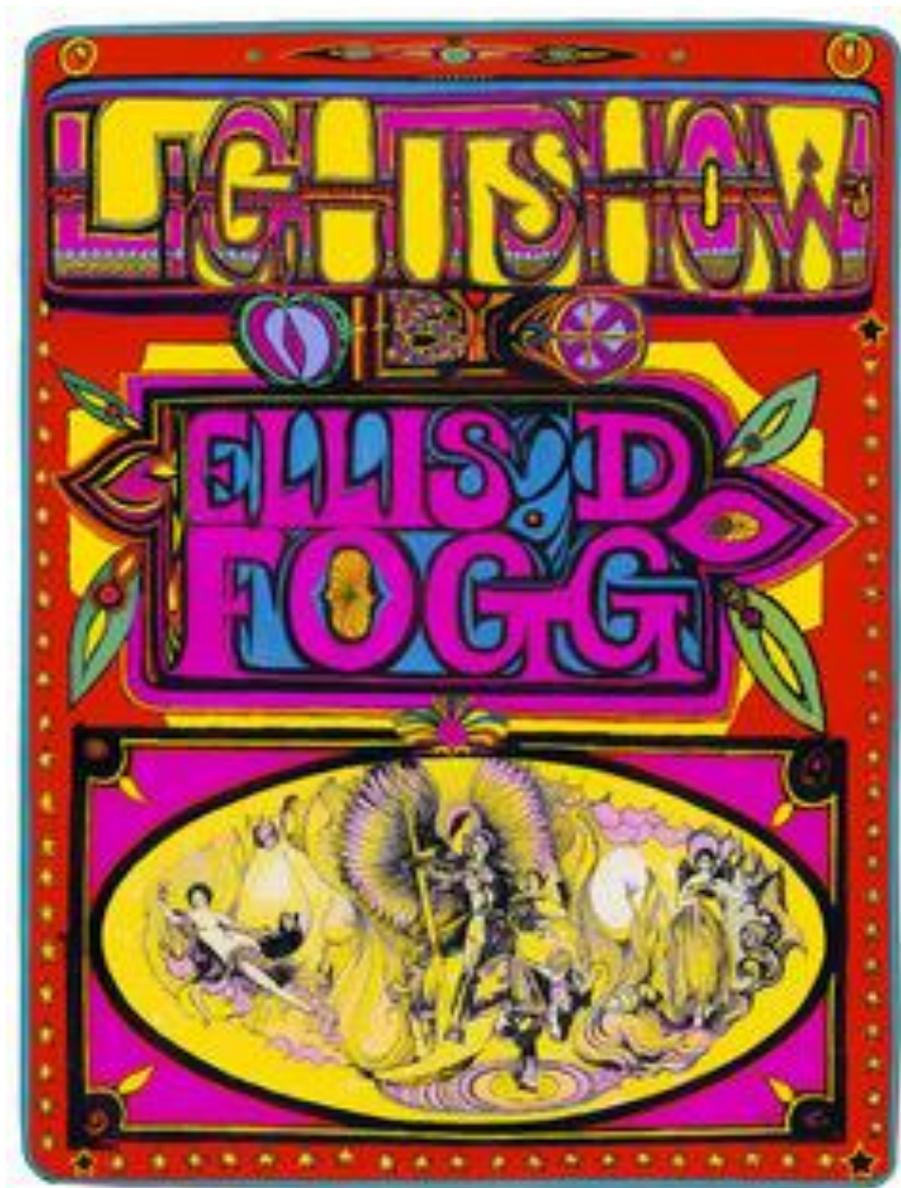


Figure 7 Lightshow by Ellis D. Fogg, poster by Gary Worley and Jim Anderson.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the archives of Albie Thoms for assistance with this memoir.

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Roger Foley-Fogg September 2012