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WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPIONSHIPS
GOLDBERG AND SOLOMON
The battle over State subsidy for the performing arts is being fought in earnest. Last month we published a coat-trailing article by Tom Markus (Subsidy 'A Cast to Answer'); since then an I.A.C. report has been released echoing much of what Markus was advocating. The report recommends phasing out subsidy for performing companies' running costs, thus throwing them to the mercy of the market place.

Earlier rounds of the battle established the principle that the governments had a duty to support the arts. A few massive organisations emerged, more-or-less effectively serving the cultural predilections of a minority. Audience numbers certainly increased but little impact has been made on the proportion of total population these numbers represent.

The justifications are various: *inter alia*, our cultural heritage, self-evidently important and preserved by productions of Verdi and Webster (too expensive to be paid for from popularity alone), and the chance is offered of developing a contemporary equivalent of that heritage through McGregor and Hibberd.

What happens if the money dries up? Some vested interests are very seriously threatened, obviously. It presumably would not mean the end of the performing arts; but it is arguable that, if those arts are forced to be popular and economically viable, they would more urgently seek ways to exploit "distinctive characteristics of Australian community" (I.A.C. report)? Left unaided in the market place, did J.C. Williamson's ever really do that?

In this issue we publish some replies to the Markus article - they necessarily relate to the I.A.C. recommendations too. But the debate will continue.

Two interesting side lights on the debate come from Fred Schaar and Bill Redmond. The former tells about a T.I.E. programme (under the segis of the Old Tote - one of those monopolists) which will see a small task force living in Armidale (NSW) for a period and fostering that region's own capacities to develop and appreciate drama. The I.A.C. would approve. Bill Redmond uncovers a desperate lack of technical expertise and resources in our theatre. Remedying that lack, Redmond persuasively argues, is a way forward. But who is to pay? Commercial theatre?

On the lighter side we publish a collection of pieces on Reg Livermore. The Australian Council's recently commissioned Meadows Report claimed we need to develop more stars. No one would really dispute Livermore, currently mounting his second one-man show written within a year, is one. Reg himself talks about why drag; Mary Davies bathes in the aura of the star; Ron Blair says Livermore's *Wonderwoman* isn't quite all she could be.

Theatres and their practitioners continue their real involvement in *Theatre Australia*. The M.T.C. who mounted a special benefit night (*Diary of a Madman* on 1st October (Perth's National Theatre on 1st October) have added the auras of the star to the market place, did J.C. Williamson's ever really do that?

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NEW SOUTH WALES:

**ACTORS COMPANY** (660 2503)
*Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett
Directed by Michael Edwards (Oct 27th for approx 4 weeks)

**BALMAIN BIJOU** (827 3652)
*Wonder Woman* Reg Livermore (continuing)

**CAROUSEL** (358 2333)
*Hello Hollywood* Tracey Lee (continuing)

**CIVIC, Newcastle** (2 1977)
Dick Emery (Oct 23rd)

**ENSEMBLE** (929 8877)
*Alphabetical Order* by Michael Frayn
Directed by Don Reid (continuing)

**GENESIAN THEATRE** (827 3023)
*School for Scandal* by R.B. Sheridan
Directed by Elizabeth Parks (continuing)

**HER MAJESTY’S** (212 1066)
*Private Lives* by Noel Coward
(Nov 17th - Dec 18th)

**HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY**, Newcastle (26 2526)
*Happy and Holy Occasion* by John O'Donoghue
Directed by Terence Clarke (continuing)

**INDEPENDENT** (929 7377)
*Bullshit Crummmond* by Ron House, Dez White, John Neville-Andrews, Alan Sharman & Derek Cunningham.
Directed by Rick Pellizzeri (Nov 10th - Dec 11th)
*Turbo Reversa* by Richmond Young (Every Sat afternoon)

**KILLARA COFFEE THEATRE**
*Memories – A Tribute to Ten Years*
Devised by John Howitt (continuing)

**MARIAN STREET** (498 3166)
*Getting On* by Alan Bennett
Directed by Alistair Duncan (to Nov 6th)
*Tarantara* Gilbert & Sullivan Music Revue
Directed by Ted Craig (Nov 11th - Dec 22nd)

**MINERVA** (358 1221)
*Saturday Night at the Tiv* Chelsea Brown (continuing)

**MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT** (909 8222)
*The Beast of Belgrave Square* by Stanley Walsh
Directed by Stanley Walsh (continuing)

**NEW ARTS THEATRE, Glebe** (660 3922)
*The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin* by Steve J. Spears
Directed by Richard Wherrett Starring Gordon Chater (starts Oct 22nd)

**NEW THEATRE** (519 3403)
*Falling Apart* by Monte Merrick
Directed by Brian Syron (Oct 23rd - end Dec)

**NIMROD** (69 5003)
*Upstairs: Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster
Directed by Rex Cramphorn (to Nov 6th)
*A Handful of Friends* by David Williamson
Directed by John Bell (Nov 12th - Jan 8th)

**OLD TOTE** (663 6122)
*Drama Theatre* "A Dolls House" by Henrik Ibsen
Directed by Alexander Hay (to Oct 26th)
*The Season at Sarsaparilla* by Patrick White
Directed by Jim Sharman (Nov 3rd - Dec 18th)
*Parade Theatre: A Toast to Melba* by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Mick Rodger (to Nov 16th)

**THEATRE ROYAL**
*Same Time Next Year* by Morris Slade
Directed by Gordon Hunt (to Oct 30th)

**SEYMOUR CENTRE**
*York Theatre: Equus* by Peter Shaffer
Directed by Ted Craig (to Nov 13th)
*Downstairs: Men Without Shadows* by J P Sartre
*Count Oderland* by Max Frisch (in rep Oct 18th - 30th)
NSW Theatre of the Deaf (Nov 10th - Dec 4th)

**QUEENSLAND**

**ARTS THEATRE** (36 2344)
*Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier
Directed by Jennifer Debenham (Oct, 21st - Nov 20th)
*My Foot My Tutor* by Peter Handke
Directed by Susan Parker (Oct 24th - 26th)
*Ac: Without Words* by Samuel Beckett
Directed by Rod Wissler (Nov 1st - 3rd)

**LA BOITE** (36 2296)
*Lysistrata* by Aristophanes
Directed by Ron Finney (to Nov 6th)
*How Could You Believe Me When I Said I’d Be Your Valet When You Know I’ve Been A Liar All My Life?* adapted from Goldoni by John Bell
Directed by Graeme Johnston (Nov 12th - Dec 18th)

**QUEENSLAND THEATRE CO.** (21 3861)
*The Big Men Fly* by Alan Hopgood
Directed by Murray Foy
Designed by James Ridwood. On tour throughout Qld in association with the Qld Arts Council (to Nov 20th) S G I O. (Nov 24th - Dec 11th)

**TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE** (52 5811)
*Children’s Theatre: Shockerlock and Millipilli* by Norbert Mayer (Oct 25th - Nov 12th)
*Children’s Day* by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall
Directed by Jeremy Muir-Smith (Oct 21st - Nov 13th)
VICTORIA

CAMEO THEATRE

Private Lives by Noel Coward (to Nov 13th)

HER MAJESTY’S

More Canterbury Tales (from Oct 23rd)

LA MAMA

Albert Names Edward by Louise Nowra (to Nov 7th)

LAST LAUGH THEATRE

Der Wunderkind Rocketship Show (to mid-Nov)

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 1100)

Russell Street: A Handful of Friends by David Williamson
Directed by Rodney Fisher
Designed by Shaun Gurnton (to Oct 30th)

Arden adapted by Mick Rodger
Directed by Mick Rodger
Designed by Tony Tripp (Nov 2nd - Dec 11th)

St Martin’s: The Nuns by Eduardo Manet
Directed by Ian Giles
Designed by Tony Tripp (to Nov 6th)

City Sugar by Stephen Poliakoff
Directed by Ian Giles (Nov 9th - Jan 8th)

Grant Street: The Gift by Michael Cove
Directed by Ted Craig (to Nov 9th)

Toppling by Simon Hopkinson (from Nov 9th)

ST. MARKS HALL

Peer Gynt by Henrik Ibsen (from mid-Nov)

WINDSOR REGIS

The Naked Vicar Show (from Oct 12th)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

COMPANY (51 5151)

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little by Paul Zindel
Directed by George Reilly (to Nov 6th)

Mail by Rodney Fisher
Directed by Rodney Fisher (Nov 11th - Nov 27th)

Lunchour: Joan by Atun Owen
Directed by Brian Debnam (Oct 25th - 29th)

Cowboys by Sam Shepard
Directed by John Dick (Nov 2nd - 5th)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)

Days in the Trees by Marguerite Duras
Directed by John Milson
Designed by David Young (to Oct 23rd)

The Maids by Jean Genet
Directed by Alexander Hay (Oct 27th - Nov 20th)

PLAYBOX (634 888)

Godspell
Directed & Choreographed by Betty Pounder

PRAM FACTORY (347 7133)

From the Theatre: The Overcoat by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Tim Robinson (to Nov 6th)

The Dudders by John Romeril & John Timlin
Directed by John Romeril (from 11th Nov)

Back Theatre: Stretch of the Imagination by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Paul Hampton (from Nov 22nd)

PLAYHOUSE (23 3344)

Habeas Corpus by Alan Bennet
Directed by Aarne Neeme (Return Season Nov 3rd - 6th)

Arsenic and Old Lace by Joseph Kesselring
Directed by Aarne Neeme (opens Nov 15th)

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A.B.C. AXES PLUG RADIO SHOWS

"It is true that Barry Eaton’s Showtime and the World of Entertainment will cease after 31st October as part of the arrangement for network relays. There are no plans to discontinue Soundstage and the theatre scene will continue to be covered by The Showman, though incidentally John West is on six weeks holiday, with Paul Maclay hosting the show for this period."

Peter Tranter, Head of Radio Publicity, A.B.C.

Raymond Omodei has been appointed towards developing theatre that is positive and dynamic. Naturally I am delighted to be change all this. They have taken a courageous efforts and intentions to maintain resident resources the Old Tote/A.T.Y.P. hopes to that productions were adversely affected — they are now prohibitive. And of course answer. Costs alone for such tours, indeed for production from the city repertoire is not the enthusiasm for the project have been returned from two days of discussion with Raymond Omodei.

"Showtime to me is a reflection of the growing interest in the Australian entertainment scene of things locally produced. Its demise will leave a gap which may never be filled. I have always endeavoured to give Australian actors, writers, directors, singers and musicians as much exposure as possible. Its loss, will, I fear, affect theatre in Sydney perhaps the most. The media is generally unsympathetic to theatre, particularly the smaller companies which are continuing to exist on a hand to mouth basis. Needless to say I am disappointed at losing the programme particularly in the light of recent audience reaction and support from all over New South Wales."

Barry Eaton

GRAEME, GARRIE AND GRANT ST.

"Graeme Blundell and myself, after a somewhat desperate search for a theatre have just reached an amiable arrangement with the Melbourne Theatre Company to take over the Grant Street Theatre in early December. We will be doing two plays there: Alma de Groen’s Chidley, directed by myself, and Dorothy Hewett’s The Golden Oldies to be directed by Graeme. Both of us, for different reasons want to do things in the theatre, as well as talk/write about it, and are especially happy to be able to make our comebacks with two such terrific plays — unaccountably produced by anyone else. I believe that the more critics can do in the theatre, the more they can get their hands dirty, then the better off they (and the suffering workers they write about) will be.”

Garrie Hutchinson

COCKSURE OR COCK-A-HOOPL? Is the grapevine right about the novel promotion being planned to launch the world premiere of More Canterbury Tales (Her Majesty’s Theatre October 23rd)? The competition is said to be for the biggest cock in Australia — but no Alvin Purple problems — it’s to be judged on the radio.

FEELERS?

"Actors are called actors because they act. If it was all about feeling they would be called feelers.”

Michael Blakemore, Director.

Raymond Omodei has been appointed Resident Director of the Armidale Project (P46)

"The project is unique, certainly in Australia, and of major significance. We have just returned from two days of discussion with community and educational representatives in Armidale and Tamworth where support and enthusiasm for the project have been tremendous.

The state companies do have a responsibility to people outside the capital cities and obviously the occasional country tour of a full production from the city repertoire are not the answer. Costs alone for such tours, indeed for any tours, have always been dangerously high — they are now prohibitive. And of course touring had to be restricted to big population centres. More importantly, the variable and unpredictable dangers of touring often meant that productions were adversely affected technically and artistically despite the best efforts and intentions to maintain resident theatre standards. By joining forces with local resources the Old Tote/A.T.Y.P. hopes to change all this. They have taken a courageous and imaginative step in a new direction towards developing theatre that is positive and dynamic. Naturally I am delighted to be associated with the venture.”

Raymond Omodei.

Dear Sir,

Two issues out already — high time I subscribed — hence the enclosed.

Congratulations, if that’s not too trite a comment. I give a special little cheer for the opera segment — because opera is so cumbersome and so costly, it is, I think, in even greater danger than most art forms of being “safe”, conservative, and, in a crucial sense, irrelevant. I would hope that including opera in an Australian theatre magazine may lend that little bit more support to the cause of making opera a Rub shoulders with what is happening in the rest of the real-political-social-artistic-theatrical world. (I could go on here at great length, but won’t...) Looking forward to the next twelve issues. Looking forward to the next twelve issues.

Peter Brock, Catholic Presbytery, Kurri Kurri, N.S.W.

Dear Sir,

I would like to thank you for a wonderfully informative and fascinating magazine. As a theatre fanatic it is extremely useful to know exactly what is going on in the Australian theatre world!

Gratefully

N I D A Student
Sydney

Dear Sir,

I think your so-called quote — “Quotes and Queries” — September-October issue — misrepresented our phone conversation and my thoughts concerning the future of La Mama. Either my explanation was unclear or you misunderstood it. The conversation I approached personally, rather than as material for your magazine.

The lines that bore any similarity to our conversation were printed out of context and do not represent the present or future situation of La Mama.

Also, rather than losing interest in La Mama, it has become geographically impossible for Betty Burstall to continue to run La Mama. I will continue to manage La Mama in the manner that it was founded — to encourage locally written theatre, nearly lacking in that to produce other relevant theatre. (Sic - Ed)

Yours faithfully

Ann Eckersley
La Mama Theatre, Carlton.

Dear Editors,

...Drop Drill, a play of mine, has gone into rehearsal with Ralph Wilson directing for a November 3rd opening at the new A.N.U. Arts Centre (which really isn’t ready to use yet...)

Roger Pulvers
Canberra.
I, sex. And, in the end, Dysart doubts his right to worship of horses a substitute for religion and can still frighten and move us. ... tngst theatre reviewers in this country and because it so effectively conjures up these

... because it so effectively conjures up these forces.

The boy's intemperate passion for horses becomes a metaphor for any form of deviant love.

... the boys (sic), for instance, seeking to become one with the horses.

... so that your own doubts don’t really start to nag until you’re out of the theatre.

... Without education, art, history, skills or friends to sustain him, the boy has found in his worship of horses a substitute for religion and sex. And, in the end, Dysart doubts his right to take away that worship — however perverse, however much pain it causes the boy — and the value of returning him to normalcy.

... But Shaffer’s thesis relies on sanctifying worship and passion no matter what form it takes.

Dysart should have more dimension — a hungry questing intelligence ...

Geraldine Pascall (Arts Editor)
The Australian September 28th 1976.

**THE EDITOR**

Dear Sir,

In your article "TIE-ing up Australia" by Margaret Laask printed in the first edition of "Theatre Australia" you stated that the Early Childhood Drama Project was based at Twelfth Night Theatre. In fact, the Project has always been based at La Boite Theatre where it was originally founded.

As the name may suggest the Early Childhood Drama Project’s programmes are specifically designed for children aged four to six. The project tours these programmes to Brisbane metropolitan schools, both junior primary and pre-school.

The Artistic Policy of La Boite Theatre voices a concern for children and their introduction to theatre. “Children’s introduction to theatre requires special care and deserves our finest efforts in communication; children give future meaning to our present aspirations. The recognition of this responsibility should be carried through all our work with these people”.

The early Childhood Drama Project has grown out of and identifies closely with this and other statements in La Boite’s artistic policy.

Yours faithfully,

Philip Armit
Early Childhood Drama Project, La Boite, Queensland.

Dear Sirs,

Congratulations on your first issue, and may it be followed by many others.

In the whole issue there is so little to cavil at and I feel something of a boor for saying that your book page was, to me, a disappointment. I thought it a pity that the first issue of Theatre Australia should feature on its book pate an illustration from the New York Stage, and that your reviewer should treat so cavalierly that eminentlyactable Australian play, The Currency Lass.

This play is, I believe, the right kind of play for amateur groups of all kinds. Lanty O’Liffe, properly acted, is anything but a tedious character, as audience reaction shows, and the part of Susan is not beyond the reach of any amateur who can “dance a bit and sing a bit,” as the original actress and those who have followed her have all been able to do. It is a part calling for neither a prima donna nor a prima ballerina.

In the hands of an enthusiastic producer with a sense of theatrical history this play can be brought to life very much to the satisfaction of modern audiences.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Irvin
Normanhurst, N. S. W.

**FUNDING FROM TAX RELIEF**

“I do wish that as well as making calls upon the private sector for financial assistance, arts administrators would direct their energies into seeking immediate action from the Federal Government to legislate for tax relief for contributions to the arts. Only then do we have a real chance of financial patronage.”

As in these times of economic difficulty we must be prepared to face cuts in subsidy, we must push for this alternate method of fundraising to avoid widening the financial shortfall with which we are encumbered.

In a labour-intensive industry — with a handcrafted product — in a mechanised age, we are just too vulnerable ...

Wayne Maddem General Manager South Australian Theatre Company.

**SECOND TIME ROUND**

“We’re currently advertising for our second intake of students. The thirty, who began in May this year, are well into the scripting and rehearsal process of adapting Xavier Herbert’s marvellous novel, Poor Fellow My Country. It will be presented for the public at the Grant Street theatre in March of next year — and you’ll have to come prepared to dance. We’re holding an old-time Aussie barn-dance in the interval — 1850’s style. So far we’ve learned Quadriddles, a Stockyard Dance, Barndance, Valetta Waltz, Thady U Gander ... it’s all going so well! There’s so many things happening! ... Sorry — I have to go and take my partner.”

Peter Oyston Dean of School of Drama, Victorian College of the Arts.

**M.T.C. ATTRACTIONS**

Is Australia to New Zealand theatre hopefuls what London is to Sydney? A recent article in the prestigious Christchurch Star about local N.Z. lass Catherine Wilkin who has done so well in Aussie theatre circles since she came here from N.Z., via other theatre centres, would seem to indicate this. The Star mentions the opportunities in Australia after a waiting period and comments on the differing pace of life across the Tasman. Catherine, who has become one of the M.T.C.’s attractions, is enjoying a well-earned working break in N.Z. We look forward to her return.

Another M.T.C. ‘gal to watch’ is Katie Shiel, currently appearing in David Williamson’s A Handful of Friends. Brains and looks ably blend.

Stan Marks

**NUNS AND THRINGS?**

Lots of spiritual, or spirited, comment about Frank Thring’s part of a nun in St. Martin’s very amusing The Nuns. Interesting to note that Thring’s first role many moons ago was in a Ray Lawler play, believed to be The Doll, the authors first staged play. With Lawler in residence at the M.T.C., and his trilogy coming up, it certainly is shades of many years ago. Is it some sort of good omen?

In March this year a small group of APG members presented a show called Stass in the Back Theatre of the Pram Factory, based on their own dreams and some of Sylvia Plath’s poems. A show centred solely round Plath followed. This committed, dynamic, outgoing, unpretentious, honest trio discipline themselves to a small space, a fruit box and no words but Plath’s (poems and letters to mother). They create true theatrical magic. The show is portable and still available (Melb 347 7131).

Dare I suggest that Melbourne at last has a theatre group able to give true substance to those hitherto hollow labels “Alternative” and “experimental”? They even give meaning to that bastard ideal, artistic and intellectual “freedom”.

But here is the awful irony: the APG collective which begat them is being less than supportive of its self-willed offspring both on financial (can they earn their keep?) and ideological (what is their political standpoint?) grounds. So they are forced to look elsewhere for funds and resources to keep their new Peer Gynt project going.

John Smythe
THE OLD TOTE THEATRE COMPANY

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The Diary of a Madman

Garrie Hutchinson

The Diary of a Madman
by Nikolai Gogol. Adapted by Jonathon Hardy and John Kim. Grant Street Theatre (opened 31.iii.76.) Director, Andrew Ross; Designers, Andrew Ross and Steve Nolan.

Ascenty Ivanov Propitchkin, JONATHAN HARDY.

Why Gogol of all the writers available should be privileged with two adaptions of his stories in the theatre in a city like Melbourne, within a couple of months ... is a puzzle. If you happen to have a copy of the Penguin Classic, Diary of a Madman and Other Stories handy, you'll have them both. The title story, Madman, and The Overcoat.

Actually Madman has been used as a star vehicle by actors before Jonathon Hardy in this current version at Grant Street, just as The Overcoat has been made into at least two movies before Jack Hibberd performed some sort of operation on it to turn it into a "haunting musical farce".

But Gogol like other nineteenth century Russians seems to have considerable attraction for 1970's audiences. Take Chekhov. One could make a case of him being a more bankable classic than Shakespeare, and certainly more actor proof. Gorky, too, has been making a new name for himself in English of late. Not to mention the novelists. Indeed the idea of Russia being a place where certain important issues are worked out for the benefit of Western intellectuals and artists is not deaf: vide Solzhenitzen and Yevtushenko, Mayakovsky and Lunacharsky.

We have an amount of angst 'Russian soul', a perception of the human condition that seemed to have applied under the sprawling totalitarianism of the Czars and the red meritocratic totalitarianism of Brezhnev and, it appears, Australia. For, unmistakably, Gogol appeals. He has something to say to us. (So do a hundred others, but leave that aside). Gogol's little people, clerks, driven made, fantasising, exploited, are understandable human beings. Simpatico.

And they live in a very modern city. Not only is it the sort of city in Fritz Lang's Metropolis it is also the city of Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver. It is the silent, whirring, shadowy, symbolizing, yes, Expressionist city inhabited by Bazi, and Lulu, Dr Mabuse, and Arturo Ui. By Pirandello, Wittkiewicz, and Pinter. Not that all (or any) are Expressionists, but they do operate in an urban environment full of significance. The significant city.

The problem then is that when thinking about Gogol there is the constant temptation to admire the stories. But the problem here is renovating these stories for the theatre. So, I admire the stories; I do not necessarily think they are best served by being read in the theatre.

In the case of Diary of a Madman, the adaptation is minimal. One section of the Diary, where Propitchkin awaits the deputation from Spain to take him there as King, has been put at the beginning. As for the rest the writing of this quill sharper are recited verbatim.

His tale is simple enough. Propitchkin is a clerk petrified in an eternal social system, on the bottom. He 'drives himself mad' by falling in love with the silly daughter of His Excellency. He begins to believe that dogs talk. And write letters to one another dealing with the scandals of the household. He muses on the problem of the Spanish Succession. He solves the problem of the Spanish Succession. He is the King of Spain. He becomes erratic and preoccupied with this startling turn of the wheel. He is carted off to a nuthouse. He believes the rigors of this place are initiation stunts. After a while he begins to wonder. He relapses.

This is wry, funny, ironical. It is the opportunity for Jonathon Hardy to give a bravura performance, a moving reading.
he does is certainly moving, but I kept wondering what it has to do with theatre, with the relationship between actor, audience, words. Being there was little different from reading Gogol in front of the fire.

There were some rather mannered effects — the revelation of Hardy's shaved head, an Artaudian pose of the head at the end — but mostly it was a case of walking up and down an arrangement of lengths of wood, and reading from a diary. For me, the story wasn't enough to really make it in the theatre. But, with the exception of comics, there are perhaps no one man shows that work really satisfactorily.

Hibberd's job on The Overcoat has been done not only with a scalpel but also with a bit of bionic creation as well. Here the idea is not to render a story in the theatre but to make a piece of theatre from a character and his fate, an idea given by another writer. Gogol. This is a kind of j'ai de theatre, pulling musical and theatrical ideas from all over the place, but especially from Brecht, Expressionist cabaret, literary bons mots, and the bizarre Hibberdian imagination.

A clerk, Kak (Kark), whose job it is to transcribe letters and rectify procedural errors, full of pathos. Given a chance to improve from a diary. For me, the story wasn't enough to really make it in the theatre. But, with the exception of comics, there are perhaps no one man shows that work really satisfactorily.

Kak himself as played by Peter Cummins is full of shrugs and smirks, seizing the fun out of any bureaucratic irregularity in order to keep going. He is booted from pillar to post, but maintains a kind of determined happiness right to the end. Cummins obviously enjoys, and has mastered the Hibberdian language, the deliberately overblown images, continued undercutting of one sentence by the next, the self depreciation in nearly every line. There are flashes of Monk O'Neill now and again, just as there are quotes (theatrically speaking) from other Hibberd plays, and from the Expressionists. The whole play is more or less a jibe at that kind of theatre, and way for Hibberd to free up his language a bit.

There are many fine moments — Jack Weiner and Evelyn Krape as the tailor and his wife in a grotesquely effective parody of the more overblown Weidkindesque expressions of sexual relationships; Jan Friedl dressed a bit like an experienced member of some bordello singing to Martin Friedl's Weillian melodies in fine style; the ghostly apperance of a naked Peter Cummins haunting the high and mighty like an acerbic Cupid; the delightful image of The Man with The Big Red Fist (yes, it is a huge red fist) pounding Cummin's Overcoat away from him .. these all tend to create a strange amalgam of Hibberd and Gogol that actually works and is enjoyable. That Hibberd should turn to such an idea should be no surprise to anyone who has watched his plays closely: they are littered with abstruse literary references as befits an Australian student of the world's work.

In the aide production like this depends on its wit, humanity and theatricality as much as the text from which it started. Tim Robertson, perhaps the most wearily theatrical director there is in Melbourne fills it out well given the cramped and somewhat dangerous setting he is working in. The Overcoat will not be one of the lasting works of Australian theatre, though I daresay it will be often produced. But it does show that Hibberd and his imagination are still in there stretching.

Peter Cummins, Richard Murphett and Evelyn Krape. Photo: Larry Meltzer.

ALEXANDER THEATRE COMPANY

WHAT THE BUTLER SAW

Jack Hibberd


The decade in England between 1957 and 1967 probably produced only two playwrights of real stature: Harold Pinter and John Arden. Pinter's achievement was to dramatize the inexplicable murk behind the mundane sunshine of our lives, to create an image of contemporary existence where irrational events and malignant forces prey claustrophobically upon individuals. Working within an absurdist tradition, he wrenched English theatre out of its comfortable representational naturalism and forged an evocative dramatic language from the colloquial.

Arden, a stupendously neglected playwright, gave the corpulent theatrical anatomy of that same island some political sinew. More natively theatrical than Shaw, less bumptious than Osborne, opposed to the prosaic sentimentality of Wesker, he utilized his own poetic and intellectual gifts, as well as the techniques of Brecht, pageant and music hall, to sardonically examine social and historical processes.

Joe Orton, a contemporary of Pinter and Arden but by no means a minor in comparison, worked more directly and bewitchingly inside an established theatrical mode: farce. Hence his allure and popularity in mainstream, conventional theatre, where plays of political and pathological flavour are largely eschewed due to their ostensibly dyspeptic effect upon the patrons. The corrosating facetious surface of Orton's plays, and the farce tradition, has I believe seduced directors and actors into jolly and innocuous interpretations of works whose intent is much more toxic and displacing.

Traditional farce is a bourgeois entertainment form in which some benign deceit or folly leads ineluctably to a hectic avalanche of compromising circumstances —
untoward meetings, confused identities, disguises, characters hiding, characters exposed, characters at cross purposes, a plethora of puppet-like exits and entries; everything proliferating into a rampant and embarrassing confusion. Characters become for a time absurd and mechanical victims of social disorder. Farce is a comedy of the machine age, the industrial era, for the amusement and edification of its successful protagonists. For in traditional farce the tribulations are only temporary, the social order is re-established at the end and life's punches are seen as merely trite or ridiculous.

Orton, however, has taken the farce and warped it to his own expressive purposes, purposes that are disruptive and almost anarchic. Often his plays intend to deride and explode a lot of the values of the very middle-classes that typically blandify them. Like Orton's own life, his plays do not end on a reassuring note or as an endorsement of the status quo.

At the conclusion of Loot, for example, the innocent McLeavy is arrested by Truscott. The arrogant power-engendered logic of the policeman in the face of McLeavy's protestations force the victim to question his own sanity, yet it is really the authority figure that is unhinged and culpable in the sacred name of justice and social harmony.

What the Butler Saw concludes in a lucidous resolution which at one level lampoons the conventional farce denouement but at another level brutally confronts the characters with the demented nature of their behaviour and the sheer illusionary dimensions of normality and sanity. Built into Orton's plays then is a critique of the form he so suavely and precociously burglar of forms and relatively long-lived, went however on to other things.

The action of What the Butler Saw occurs within the confines of a psychiatric clinic, yet there is not one psychiatric patient in the whole play. It is populated with 'normal' folk — a secretary, a page boy, a psychiatrist and his wife, another psychiatrist, and a policeman. Ironically, their behaviour is more in tune with that of a ward of lunatics. The balance between sanity and insanity, sex and perversity, conformity and chaos, is in Orton's view an exceedingly tenuous and even arbitrary one. He uses the morally outrageous to re-examine the morality of a class and time. No traditional farce-monger would dare attempt this.

The cast of the Alexander Theatre production of What the Butler Saw have taken a customarily light, genial view of the play, despite some efforts I speculate on the part of the director Malcolm Robertson to have it done at least straighter and more hard-edged. In doing so the actors have supplied an hospitable and untaxing soiree at the theatre which, as Beckett has said in another context, is better than a kick in the crutch. A little lame at the beginning, the production then manages to antelope along with pace and coordination. There is humour in the performances but not the kind I'd imagine would do full justice to the text — humour that inverts our mores, knife through conditioned expectations, exposes us as creatures of habit and motiveless appetite.

Michael Duffield alone among the sextet of cast turns in an appropriately dead-faced yet mildly manic performance as the inspector-psychiatrist Dr Rance — a kind of gentleman snoop prone to instant and pat hypotheses. Nevertheless, even his interpretation finally lacks steel and real pressuring menace — the events that inundate him. Dr Rance is a paradoxic blend of many elements. He is a man of power, a rigid conservative, a threat; he is a fatuous psychoanalyst who embodies a satire of pseudo-science; he is also a detached observer and cynic.

PRENTICE: I'm a rationalist.

RANCE: You can't be a rationalist in an irrational world. It isn't rational.

Orton's twisted farces contain a dramatic correlate for a lot of modern instability — the bewildering and contradictory pressures that besiege his central characters force them into untenable corners and brittle states of mind, a condition not unlike that of neurosis and even schizophrenia.

What the Butler Saw is Orton's most powerful play because it incipiently questions and mocks a huge number of assumptions and compartmentalisations — those pertaining to normal behaviour, sex, gender, the family, mental hygiene, law and order. It finally erupts into macabre and violent imagery. Orton expressively pushes farce beyond its routine limits as cage-like grilles crash down around his characters and they are forced to climb a ladder into a blaze of light.

Orton's last play has some but not all the features of a modern horror fable. These possibilities were more like a slightly dated sexual romp yet updated boulevard farce.
To borrow from David Williamson's latest stage play film-maker Mark Marshall's judgement of his own most recent feature (a fiction based on real life people and situations), *A Handful of Friends* is "utterly competent". So too is this Melbourne Theatre Company production, which inherits director and part of the cast from the South Australian Theatre Company's premiere season.

One is tempted to add too "competent" or at least too obviously so. The relaxed proficiency with which the actors discharge their roles is so much to the fore that it inhibits our understanding of how and why the people portrayed are less than competent in living out their lives. More art is needed to bring out more understanding of how and why the people portrayed are less than competent in living out their roles and confidence even more noticeably garnished the competence.

But still I could not help feeling that the major events in the play had largely been reported on despite the fact that anyone could see that a lot had actually happened. So then I read the script.

*A Handful of Friends* is an ambitious and thorough play. The themes actions interactions dramatic devices and emotional structure all serve to illuminate and explore those complex convoluted interdependent relationships commonly labelled friendships. Love admiration aspiration competition envy wants needs drives strength submission using abusing caring sharing respect protection restriction destruction ... it is all there in Williamson's comprehensive and tightly controlled dissection/discussion of his subject.

Plot-wise it ranges over some thirty to forty years in probing the lives of five inter-acting individuals, although the physical action of the play is contained within eight scenes spanning less than a week. Personal and general history is recorded, individual and shared experiences are recalled and differing subjective responses to and interpretations of past and present events abound. Slowly but surely more details come into focus, new insights emerge, until the final composite is as complex and ambiguous as western life itself. Should be a rich and rewarding experience.

Dramatically the play demands a great deal from actors and director. Williamson is going for much more than easy laughs. It is much more subtle than *The Coming of Stork*, *The Removalists* and *Don's Party*, more objectively controlled than *Jugglers Three* and *What If You Died Tomorrow*, yet less restricted than *The Department*. And the female roles are no longer less substantial than the male roles. Each individual is liberally endowed with strengths weaknesses strike-capacity defence-mechanisms failabilities and saving graces.

The challenge in production is to make all that compelling. To stimulate a desire in the observer to note all the details seek further clues conjure with equations ponder and grapple with unavoidable truths. And this is where Rodney Fisher's otherwise utterly competent production falls down. He seems to have given equal weight to past and present whereas if the dramatic focus favoured the immediate present which then was enhanced by what we gradually gleaned of past events, it would have more impact and be more interesting, to my mind anyway.

Williamson has not made it easy mind you. There is lots of anecdotal chat over cups of coffee especially towards the end. For variety he uses Mark's recent film, an abrasively witty dictated (for transcription) attack on actress Sally and husband Mark by journalist Jill (in defence of brother Russell who was ridiculed in the film) and people's dreams as investigative devices. But still they are modes of reporting. And ironically the task of finding dramatic impact in the more immediate attitudes and responses is made all the harder by Williamson's verbal skill in evoking days gone by. The living present must actively compete with the past for attention.

I firmly believe there are given circumstances there in the script which could be used to greater effect. I know it says that history professor Russell McAlister, still famed for his highly entertaining lectures, has "lost a bit of sparkle over the years". But surely the business of setting up in a new home, coping with the in-fighting over his new position at Barton University, meeting a minor marital crisis when his wife whom he loves and needs very much discovers evidence of yet another sexual escapade (with a student back in...
his beloved sister (after seven years OS in the US), could have provided the basis for a bit more oomph and variation than emerged from Gerard Maguire's otherwise utterly competent performance. The weakness vulnerability and laxiness need not have merged so perversely into what seemed like relaxed complacency.

Kate Sheil gave us a real enough Sally and indeed her immediate motives and strategies were always interesting to observe. But her languid style totally belied her character's reputation for "amazing vitality" — an ingredient with which the production could certainly have done. Lyndall Rowe's Jill was bright brittle and strong on the attack but perhaps too neatly packaged. More compelling insights might have emerged had the defensive mask slipped a little less precisely, to reveal more of her loneliness and vulnerability.

Most successfully realised in all his complexity was Tom Oliver's Mark. To be sure he had the advantage of a dynamic volatile paranoid hypochondriac role but he astutely avoided obscurring the dangerous implications of his ego-bound naivety whilst thoroughly exploiting his character's entertainment potential. Julie Hamilton had the hardest job on the least obtrusive and most emotionally insecure role. Wendy's despair and disillusionment with herself husband and life in general was sensitively felt and subtly revealed as she vacantly coped with day-to-day life. The seemingly carefree moments added a lot to the overall texture, especially when one realised how much her low estimation of herself without making one person central, then maybe the answer could be a sequel built around Wendy's ongoing efforts to resolve her problems.

But back to the play as it is. The conclusion is neatly devised and provides much to dwell on. The strong volatile constantly battling couple fulfilled their needs achieve their aims and stay together. The weaker more vulnerable and falible couple fail on all counts. As for Jill, now left with the brother through whom she is said to have lived — has she "succeeded" or what?

It is a wrap-up which must move observers to back-track over the maze of paths leading up to it if that sense of satisfaction, of a night well-spent, is to be achieved. The aim in production must be to make each important component somehow memorable and to stimulate us into wanting to ponder in retrospect. More could be done to better effect at Russell Street, given the text as it stands and some rewrites might well be considered.

But let me in fairness conclude with questions we should ask ourselves. How much of the boredom and disenchantment we so often express? How much are we to blame for the boredom and disenchantment we so often express?
If David Williamson's new play, *A Handful of Friends*, is remembered for nothing else, it will be remembered for Mark's line: "Creative artists are the sacrificial objects of a bored society."

The play seems to have arrived at an appropriate moment this September at the Playhouse in Perth, where the press and her ex-husband, Perth barrister Lloyd Davies, are lambasting the playwright Dorothy Hewett, over her alleged libel of Davies and his family in her published poem, *The Uninvited Guest*.

The impending court case had, not surprisingly, been hanging like a sword over the heads of the Australian literary world, particularly poets, novelists and playwrights who are only too aware of how much they draw upon their own lives for source material and inspiration.

In the event Ms Hewett has settled out of court for $86,000, thus failing to be the first writer (so I am told) to be taken to court for libelling in a poem since Alexander Pope; and saving her fellow writers from a sticky legal precedent. Or has it? A court injunction has been granted against the poem being published again. Meanwhile a defence committee has been set up with headquarters in Melbourne; Mr Davies may prove to be the catalyst needed to explode the worst aspects of Australia's libel laws, which in the 50s sent Frank Hardy to gaol over *Power Without Glory* (and this year was still giving the ABC a few tremors) and in NSW still protect history from being granted against the poem being published again.

The existing laws of libel are of particular concern to dramatists, who are only too aware of how much they draw upon their own lives for source material and inspiration. The memory of which their return opens with Russell and Wendy - the ex-husband and his ex-wife - making it possible to libel the dead.

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Telephone 62 5001.
and Sally, Mark’s wife and Jill’s former work and play mate, has made a travesty of the role of the historian’s wife. The critics apparently agree with her.

Mark and Sally fly in to smooth things over. They first visit Jill, who welcomes them, pretends she has not seen the film to avoid a straight talk, and plans revenge in a magazine interview with Sally in which she alleges nepotism and the use of other foul means in Sally’s ruthless climb to success. Dinner, later at the McAlisters’, is an unfortunate affair, full of jolly reminiscence, evasions and a fierce quarrel between the Marshalls about the casting of Mark’s new film, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.

The clear cut situation at first outlined, in which two self-centred members of the Sydney smart set have damaged friends who respected them, begins to cloud. The studious McAlister is beginning to look a bit childish; Marshall’s ruthlessness takes on a tinge of artistic uncompromise. As they chew the fat together they begin to draw a picture of two country boys setting out in life together, ambivalently friends and rivals — one brilliant but weak, the other determined to be strong. We also get a glimpse of a society ungenerous and philistine, in which remarks like Sally’s “Anyone can do anything if they really want to” is interpreted not as hopeful courage but as sleazy opportunism. It soon becomes apparent that Russell and Jill by their self-deception have become the destructive forces. The audience’s sympathies have shifted and by this time the libel which began it all has become irrelevant.

Friendships, like anything that lives and grows, must be cared for. The five friends lose theirs through selfish obtuseness and a lack of moral courage to talk about what is most important for their spiritual health. The price of their failure to survive in company is the necessity to survive in isolation. And this the play evokes in a handful of scenes at the end in which the characters have retreated to their separate boxes.

It is not an easy play to perform and the Playhouse cast do not manage very well. Structurally it is sometimes uncomfortable, the set and the action split between Russell’s house and Jill’s flat. In both the Perth and the Adelaide productions blackouts and scene trucking were used to master the closing scenes at a moment when the play is contemplative and moving to its conclusion gently and musically — like the sound of the singing whales which ironically end Act One.

The structure has a dispirited fragmentation — the characters talk in pairs or alone — which underlines their isolation and timidity. In only one scene, in which Russell performs a party turn on the life of Hitler, do the five characters join in the same game. The rhythm is careful but it requires imagination from the actors to grasp the subtle circle in which the action moves and the larger canvas to which the apparently trivial incidents contribute.

Of the five Perth actors Pippa Williamson as Wendy stood out as the one most in sympathy with Williamson’s intentions. It is a moving portrait of a talented woman whose bruised sensibilities have taken, in a feminine way, the same path as Russell’s. The other four are pretty wide of the mark. Robert Faggetter’s Russell had a touching vulnerability and desire to be obliging which added a dimension to John Gaden’s asperity in the role in Adelaide. But he had nothing like Gaden’s grasp of the precise rhythm of Williamson’s lines, nor any sense of the intellectual rigour behind academic wit. Dennis Miller’s Mark is slow and easy-going, at odds with the restlessness and hypochondria indicated in the text; and as Jill and Sally, Mary Haire and Merrin Canning were too young and vocally unskilled. Aarne Neeme’s production, despite some good scenes does not serve the play well. It gives little indication of the elegance of Williamson’s dialogue and it draws unfavourable attention to aspects of the play which some critics will certainly call weaknesses but which I prefer to see as challenges which in this case the director has not met. One such aspect, a long sequence in which Jill dictates a monologue on Sally, places great demands on the actress if it is not to appear a clumsy variation on the letter scene of the classic plays. Lyndall Rowe in Adelaide executed it with skill and worldly wisdom but the credibility gap remained. If the criterion of a good play is that it will support less than adequate performers, then the Perth season proves that the play does not yet have the strength. But for me the play is a new confirmation of the growing subtlety of perception and maturing moral sense in Williamson’s work; and it extracts the playwright, probably for good this time, from his uncomfortable position as ruckman in the fray to that of referee. Only time and continued handling of his work will show whose judgement is fairest or best.
The play was performed by the workshop offshoot of the Hole in the Wall, and therefore had a mixed bag of talent and experience to keep it going. I think that the decision to work the play up from improvisation, confessed to in the programme, was a wrong one for such a play. In my view it is precisely the odd and unusual plays which need that strong control of the performances which only clear and firm direction can give. But it is also true that it is just such plays that inexperienced directors go for. Whether out of youthful enthusiasm (my own first full length play was Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuor) or because faults in direction don't show up so much in plays no one understands anyway, I couldn't say. Suffice it to say that if you get Arsenic and Old Lace wrong everyone knows, but if you make Waiting for Godot boring who is going to be the wiser?

The improvisation did lead to good rapport between the actors though, and I particularly like the performances of an actor new to me, Chris Ferguson, and of Elizabeth Crosby, rather odd last from the hall of the poutiness considered a teenager to which her part in Certain Women for a time condemned her. I suspect that performed in the context of German theatrical disciplines and traditions and with professional direction and design I might find my response to the work transformed; but done off in his gigant with both director and designer inexperienced, I wonder whether the Hole in the Wall was wise to give it a public showing rather than to leave it as a workshop exercise, to be judged in that context.

From Handke's panky to wanky Handke's Heathcote Williams' AC/DC. It opens with a bang, with what the tabloids would probably call a three-way sex act. Williams' stage directions say that the participants should be concealed — but for the odd arm, leg or piece of clothing — behind the curtain of one of those do-it-yourself photo machines. But Mike Morris, bless his heart, struck the curtain and presumably cried 'A lot more!'. I must admit to mixed feelings about viewing simulated sex in the whole style of the thing. It came across as the way it is, it is necessarily simulated, and since nothing so destroys the illusion of reality as the inescapable intrusion of reality itself (i.e. they're not doing anything), the whole exercise tends to be a fraud. Secondly, I am never quite sure what I am actually expected to respond by. Is it allowable, for instance, to grip the back of the seat in front and half rise out of your own to get a better view? Or should one study the decor of the theatre ceiling, thus not appearing too interested in what is going on? It is not a question of morals, you understand, but of decorum.

Apart from being quite farot in its action (masturbation, trepanning), AC/DC is couched in a wild, often exhilarating post-McLuhan/ Tim Leary lingio with a strong underpinning of technological jargon. Take Sadie's explanation of the way to stop psychic capitalism:

Cyberspace: Set up directional electrodes X Ray. Normal Videos, Meat Heap pickups
Set em all up outside Buckingham Palace, the White House, Apple, RCA, Ten Downing Street, wherever. Make a 5-D B- track Flesh Reception Movie of them all Fucking.

Or Maurice accusing Sadie of bad faith:

I thought you were going to discharge him. You been over-amping him. (To Perowne)

Never mind, I can still demagnetise you. I've got a lot of schizophrenia left. Tuffnell didn't hollow me out completely. Ha. Yes, well. Ha. Indeed. Such verbalization takes a lot of concentration and experience to keep it going. I don't think that the decision to work the play up from improvisation, confessed to in the programme, was a wrong one for such a play. In my view it is precisely the odd and unusual plays which need that strong control of the performances which only clear and firm direction can give. But it is also true that it is just such plays that inexperienced directors go for. Whether out of youthful enthusiasm (my own first full length play was Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuor) or because faults in direction don't show up so much in plays no one understands anyway, I couldn't say. Suffice it to say that if you get Arsenic and Old Lace wrong everyone knows, but if you make Waiting for Godot boring who is going to be the wiser?

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A Toast to Melba

Don Batchelor

A Toast to Melba by Jack Hibberd, S.G.I.O. Theatre (opened 15.x.76) Director, Alan Edwards. Designer, Peter Cooke; Nellie Melba, GERALDINE TURNER; Gottlob, DAVID CLENDINNING; John Lammone, PETER KOWITZ; Patto Cecchi/Buffalo Bill/Oscar Wilde/Censor, KEN KENNEDT; George Lupton/George Bernard Shaw/Frank Wedekind. BRUCE PARR; Frank Hackett/Duke of Orleans/Mayor of Brisbane/Sir Thomas Beecham. JOE JAMES; Tramce O'Can/Augustus Harris, WARREN MEACHAM; Madame Marchesi/Eunice, HAZEL HOWSON; Mother's Voice/Lady de Grey/Gladys Moncrief; KATE WILSON; The Girl/ Amy, GEORGIAN DANCE TROUPE, to the whoops.

The big mistake of her performance lay in trying to sing some of the arias seriously. Given the style of the rest of the performance, the singing needs to have its seriousness undercut in some way. The actress needs to let us know, by some gesture, that just as she does "Love Will Find a Way", which acknowledged in an amusing aside that she was trespassing on sacred Moncrieff territory, but intending only respect. That sense of respect was a feature of the production and Alan Edwards used every chance offered by the text to point up the pathos of Melba's life.

In this regard the staging also made a nice comment. The set consisted of a false proscenium of painted marble decked out in o so roseate plush — theatrical tawdry straining clearly within the confines of the theatre, defining it and shaping it in all aspects. The touching effect was compounded by having most of the people who influenced her life intruding upon it from a pair of on-stage boxes built into the false proscenium — as if Melba were a creature of her predatory patrons. Not all the staging was such a success. Why, for example construct an elaborate bar which rolls on impressively for a brief scene in a Mackay pub, and then have the actors drinking mimed beer out of mimed glasses and talking to a mimed bar-attendant? Surely, too, a subsidised theatre can afford a real flower or two instead of presenting Melba with a posy of plastics. The same applies to the curtain gimmick which has the assembled company raising their glasses to the lady and everyone of them is empty. We don't expect champagne, but surely the budget could stretch to Cold Duck.

And now the play itself. It seems to Australian theatrical culture what the hot pie is to our culinary arts. Lots of bits of theatrical scrap, indifferently mixed with some local flavoured gravy, spilling out of a very flaky crust. And I for one say "Good on yer Jack!". There are occasions when the meat pie is unmatchable, specially, as the Hibberd well knows, when dolloped with hot sauce. I offer as an example the piquant line "fuck civilisation", delivered by Charles Armstrong.

Since the author's avowed intention is to speak to a "popular" audience all this seems fair enough — as long as it doesn't try to dignify it all by describing it in elevated terms as "a theatre for the populace that deals with legendary figures and events, perennial and idiosyncratic rituals, mythically implanted in the nation's consciousness" — a chatty excerpt from a Q.T.C. programme note over Jack Hibberd's name. In the play itself words like "ebullition" and "hebetude" tumble from all his characters as if they had swallowed Roget's Thesaurus. 'Tis all, one suspects, "caviar to the general".

In short the thing I like least about Hibberd's writing is the words, and there is little excuse for such verbal excess, unless, like Dame Nellie herself, he has decided to "give 'em much".
GRIN AND TONIC
THEATRICAL TROUPE AND
CIRCUS

AS YOU LIKE IT

Richard Fotheringham

As You Like It the central preoccupation.
In North Queensland the Troupe is thought
of as a distinguished local company, and
the local Arts Council branches that would
rather present their shows than those of the major
state companies. The Queensland Arts Council
denies local branches the right to discriminate
in this way, and their administrator recently
went to North Queensland to enforce Arts
Council policy — which is simply to ensure that
the big official tours are always booked and
that all other companies are denied local
branch funding. He was met in many places
with a flat refusal. The North stays loyal to the
friends who prove themselves and who give
them what they want, and Nason and the Grin
and Tonic are on top of the list. Whether or not
you can get into schools to perform is another
power the Queensland Arts Council holds. It's
a power they've only just gained from the
Education Department, and bods ill for the
unorthodox.

Townsville, July. Will Shakespeare in Love
at Pimlico High School (the largest in the
State Four actors, four pattern 123 lamps, and
the back of an old red utility parked in a covered
courtyard. Simple tie-dyed costumes. All
admirers teacher begs forgetful students to
pay their $1.00 to assist the poverty-stricken
actors (gesture indicating set and a gentle
stamp on the rusty tailgate). He assurs them
they're going to see Shakespeare as it hasn't
been done since the Bard himself went to the
provinces and several students stand by as
gravediggers and Audrey's goats. The show is
an inconsequential bauble, but the Troupe's
energy and enjoyment of the texts is real, and
they create an atmosphere with colour and
music which holds thee attention of
students, and particularly the young. On that
basis alone the Troupe deserves all the
assistance it can get.

But when you draw back again and look at
the achievements of the Grin and Tonic as a
total phenomenon, its virtues are so great that
you wonder how they could possibly invoke
such antipathy in the offices of the Arts
Council. Surely if there's a place for the
classics on the modern Australian stage, then
it must go to companies who can make them
accessible and enjoyable to large numbers of
people, and particularly the young. On that
basis alone the Troupe deserves all the
assistance it can get.

But in Queensland it's considered heresy to
suggest that theatrical excitement isn't
exclusive to the orthodox club. And it's got
to the point where the Arts Council is busy
rushing around the back blocks trying to
suppress the unorthodox. You'd think that
with rather than against the distractions, and
rushing around the back blocks trying to
suppress the unorthodox. You'd think that
with rather than against the distractions, and
exuberance of visual semaphore, verbal
underlining, and textual updating — but the
meaning of every line gets across. The one
outstanding stylistic quality which the Troupe
has is so obviously one learnt in circumstances
like this — the ability to look an audience in
the eye and present the text with that same kind
of knowing directness that stand up comedians
have. Acknowledging the laughter, working
with rather than against the distractions,
and playing off the realities of time, place,
and people.

Brisbane, September. A large company of
twenty plus actors presenting As You Like It in
the Theatre Studio at Kelvin Grove College of
Advanced Education. A large besser brick and
steel environment, with strong white light on a
white floorcloth and the audience all around.
Again the style is vivid and direct. Every section
of text seeks an objective correlative in action.
The actors are always doing something, and
the play is choreographed like an artificial
ballet. The results are not always helpful to the
text, occasionally downright infuriating, and it
was at a second performance (when it was
possible to balance the text against the visual
dazzle) that I warmed to the production. But
occasionally the words and the actions really
click, and the result is superb. Touchstone's
description of the seven points of argument, as
dull and obscure a piece of Shakespearean
clownery as you can find, is gloriously set off
against the actions of a wrestling match and
bring the house down.

If the production has an immediate flaw, it's
that in its excess of fruit, flowers, and
exuberance As You Like It becomes a paean to
romantic love which it isn't — quite. Rosalind,
that more realistic lover, tends to be carried
away on the bright surface of the production
and it's left to Jacques to provide the
discordant note of another view of things. By
casting himself in this crucial role, Nason has
felt allowed a major weakness to creep in. A
competent actor, he nevertheless stands out
from his fellows by the lack of directed clarity of
purpose which any actor/director risks. His
interpretation varies from an extremely
democratic distribution of focus in the seven
generations of man speech, to some wildly self-
indulgent melodramas.

Ivey in Queensland you have to begin
with the political perspective. That the Grin
and Tonic Troupe exists at all is a result of the
political situation. That they remain on the
fringe of things (with a repertoire no more
dangerous than first rate productions of
Shakespeare) is a further result. That they can
repeatly come up with excellent work is a
measure of the depth of talent which prefers to
work outside the profession. And that they are
being actively persecuted by that profession (in
the shape of the Arts Council of Australia,
Queensland Division) is a good illustration of
the kind of bigotry which exists here and which
sets out to repress (usually with indifference
but in this case by more direct means) any local
or unorthodox theatrical activity.
The core of the Troupe is a small group of
production workers and actors who worked
semi-professionally in Queensland (as the
College Players) long before the State
Government moved in with substantial arts
funding. When funding did arrive in 1969,
none of it went to them, in spite of some
strenuous lobbying. The Troupe went into
limbo and its members dispersed. Their
principal director, Bryan Nason, continued in
the theatre. He combined freelance directing
with finding a new home base at Innisfail in
North Queensland where he directs, takes
workshops, and runs an annual drama school.

Occasionally Nason comes back to Brisbane
and the company regroups to help him present
a major show. Shakespeare is their first love,
and fine renditions of Much Ado and Romeo
and Juliet in previous years have been
followed by the present As You Like It. As in
other years, the production was preceded by a
tour up the coast of Queensland. This time it
was Will Shakespeare in Love, an anthology of
scenes which gave the troupe an opportunity
to experiment with styles and themes — with

Jan Irvine and Pennie Wissler

Photo: Sunday Sun
KID STAKES

CANBERRA REPERTORY

EQUUS

Roger Pulvers

The Melbourne Theatre Company's production of Kid Stakes had a very lovely, mellow feel about it. The cast harmonized. The director, John Sumner, was as scrupulous with the rhythm of the piece as designer Anne Fraser was with the set. The play itself is a daily-line work of characterisation of very neat structure. It is smack in the middle of the super-naturalistic mainstream; so much so, in fact, that if the mainstream had a dotted yellow line streaming down it, Lawler would be paddling his canoe right down the center!

I am brimming with admiration for this cast. But among them, Peter Curtin and Carole Skinner, as the young lovers Roo and Olive, were superlative. Both of them acted with the intense subtlety. Roo's part is full of melodramatic traps, but he hopped over them. Sure, he was out for a holiday fling too, but he got stuck on Olive. His sincerity was believable! In another actor's hands, Roo can be a first-class drip.

Carole Skinner, too, put the stars in her eyes for this performance: now I know what Simone Signoret Was like as a teenager!

In this way, John Sumner's direction avoided caricature and travesty. This is difficult, given characters which are essentially nostalgic portraits. Sandy Gore, as Nancy, chose an over-compensating technique from the start. Histrionic semi-burlesque gestures did more than communicate a certain slick vivacity of her character. They reached beyond that and played up to the audience in the beginning. This got a response. But it was a dangerous thing to do in the beginning. With skill, however, she gradually toned this down and turned it into something extremely effective. Bruce Myles's Barney was perhaps a bit meek.

With that pinch-lipped pietz and artistic control that come from seven years on the stage in England, Ann Grey, as the nurse, managed to do something with a non-descript part by creating a comic style. Her portrayal of this character stands out among three other drab nurses around the world.

The one drawback of the Canberra Rep production was the horses, not the main horse, Nugget, played brilliantly by David Bennett, but the bit parts, if you will, to express the emotion. They clomped their feet flat down, producing a very un-horse-sound. Their miming wasn't up to the rest of the cast's perfection.

The main character in the play is, unfortunately, the psychiatrist. Alan's Bible-pounding mother and hypocritical father are exposed before him. The boy himself is forced to confront his fixation before him. It is the who has the last word, who makes the pronouncements. Equus is, in a word, dated. It is written in the early 70's but its confrontation is of the early 60's. It was then that people even believed in psychiatrists, in confessions, and psychologism. One reason, I believe, why this play became such a hit, on Broadway no less, is that it may appeal to the average theatre-goer who may just be catching up with to 60's himself. As in graphic art, it takes some time before the established viewer comes to grips with what is happening. Fifteen years ago may be his present.

Of the four Equus I saw, the Tokyo production had the most stunning mime. The boy blinded the horses in six arched jumps. Abstraction underscored the act. And the owner of the stables was portrayed as a slick Japanese-mafia type, in shark-skin suit and wrap-around sunglasses. Perhaps this difference was due to the translation of "owner" as keiyo, a word in Japanese that is used in the high echelons of business. Or perhaps stable-owning is not such a bad job in Japan.
Theatre Australia

South Australian Theatre Company

The Last of the Knucklemen

Guthrie Worby

What's in a name? In the case of John Powers' Last of the Knucklemen, a great deal, I'd say! To begin with there is a paean to the past, which finishes off the job started by Ray Lawler twenty years ago, with Summer of the Seventeenth Doll; a reprise for the old myths.

In the Roo — and — Barny 50's the city was the arsehole of the earth, and the wide-open North was the Sun country, the country of the Gods. In the Tarzan-and-Methuselah 70's it is the great outback that has become purgatory and the North is only the sun country in T.V. ads for God's own state of Queensland.

Powers packs into his play the reverberations of generations of Australianism: the sentiment of Esson's The Drovers; the irony and malaise of Locke Elliot's Rusty Bugles; the Darwinian fundamentals of Pritchard's Brumby Innes.

Tarzan is the foreman of a wild-cat mine in northern W.A. His crew have gone on strike, led by a city gambler, con-man and tough called Pansy. This precipitates a feud which epitomises the challenge of new to old — new misfits, old diehards. The men gamble, argue and whore, and finally witness the inevitable showdown between Tarzan and Pansy. Tarzan's law of the Jungle is all but obsolete. Pansy has nothing to offer the group. Honour among thieves is a poor code of ethics. Tom, the payroll — robbing, Cop — clobbering Kung Fu expert with a heart of gold, shows that the new way might just be hit-and-run, not stand-and-deliver. The setting is the miner's bunkhouse.

When first presented, in November, 1973 by the M.T.C., the play received a standing ovation. A U.S. tour was mooted, and now the play is to have an Edinburgh season. Meanwhile it has slowly moved West whilst waiting to go East, as if to meet up with the living fossils — the Stone-Age Whitemen who are still out there somewhere — for a final tryst.

It is part of the irony of our theatrical heritage that plays which celebrate the end of an era are heralded as the banners of new beginnings. So we mark time with the fervour usually characteristic of great leaps forward. Perhaps this feeling which grips audiences, is a sublimated fear of letting the past slip away; a fear of facing new frontiers.

Anyway, when the Knucklemen hit town the audience was in there boots and all, cheering with an enthusiasm which was purely Primitive (a good feeling whatever the inspiration). Like true believers in the Lang Hancockian philosophy that the earth is the Source, we praised this manifestation as though the Salt and none of the scum had been vouchsafed to us.

Like old Methuselah, Tarzan's sidekick, we felt it mostly in our water. Maybe, like Methuselah, we also paid for it later with pains in the plumbing. I hope so, because only then would the full impact of the play have made its mark.

David Williamson, the director, neglected much of the pain in the play. The production lacked an awareness of the vulnerable belly of Act two, the almost tragic ballast, which keeps the genuinely celebratory qualities in perspective. Williamson stays close to the play's own punctuation. Acts and scenes are end-stopped with the severe blackout convention, which is hard to take even when coupled with a 'regulation' three-act form, and presentation from within the oblong mouth of a lowered proscenium, and walled and roofed facsimile bunkhouse. The dark gaps are

South Australian Theatre Company

at the Playhouse presents PAUL ZINDEL'S

AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE

Directed by George Ogilvie

Three sisters live out their fears and anxieties as women in modern New York society.

with Jude Kuring, Myra Noblet, Daphne Grey, Barbara West, Diane Chamberlain, Leslie Dayman and Doug Gautier.

October 14 – November 6
PLAYHOUSE, Festival Centre

BOOKINGS at Festival Theatre and John Martin's (City and Elizabeth)
evidence of missing teeth.

In essence the rough-diamond excitement was promoted above its station. It appeared unconnected to the second act confessions which reveal the dark fears which finger and stir this pocket of flotsam, where guns and knives are brandished to ward off the menace of things that go bump in the night. The whoring and mauling of the following day could have been tinged with nightmare overtones. The trip to town, and its four-wheeled ladies, might have been as much for exorcism as exercise. The punchups could have been confrontations of the possessed, Mr. Williamson didn't take up the options. Despite intimations to the contrary, these escapees from life, these inmates of the far Northwest appeared, in this production, to be having a good time ... or maybe it was just the beer talking.

Detached from the pile of sweaty pent-up frustration is Methuselah — so called, according to the anonymous but insistent ways of the camp, because he's an 'old bastard'. The old timer has uncommon insight amongst these physical men, and the immunity of age permits him to use it with the subtlety of a roundhouse right ('... your balls stop being the centre of the universe. You adjust. Maybe that's what growin' up's all about ...') He recalls the days when the outback was 'wild' with men who really mattered: men who had done something; men who courted trouble as naturally as these blokes queue up for their warmed-up, chewed-over ration of other men's doings. Tarzan is the last of the breed, a one-time splitter of skulls, now broken-winded and bruised by the upper-cut of time. Moreover, 'civilization', in the form of 'these city kids' has cast its furtive and greedy eye over his pitch, his 'piece of turf'.

Tarzan and Methuselah, these days, are keepers and curators in a zoo of endangered species — alimony dodgers cleaned out gamblers, Kung Fu bandits, one-legged helicopter jockeys and lapsed monks. The animals turn nasty and try to claim Tarzan's turf. He realises that he can't rule unchallenged indefinitely, but when the challenge comes, it is in city-slick form, with Pansy backing a hulking German, Carl, to do the Gladiatorial work for money. As it happens the Kung Fu renegade makes chop suey of the sour Kraut before Tarzan has a chance to do any more than protest and shape up.

The city-outback confrontation is one of the preoccupations which magnetises writers in this country. Others which underpin the play are the Individualist and the Pack, Man communing with the Elemental Outback, Man and his Mate, Ritual Violence, invertebrate Gambling, beery Anaesthesia of Feeling and Memory, and Men without Women.

David Williamson and cast have scored with the Individualist and the Pack, Man and his Mate, Ritual Violence, invertebrate Gambling, beery Anaesthesia of Feeling and Memory, and Men without Women.

David Williamson and cast have scored with the Individualist and the Pack, Man and his Mate, Ritual Violence, invertebrate Gambling, beery Anaesthesia of Feeling and Memory, and Men without Women. Lloyd Cunningham, Frank Gallacher and John Clayton. Photo: S.A.T.C.

That the outcome is by no means a foregone conclusion, but the production had the Knuckleman home by a K.O. before a punch was thrown.

Neither play nor production inspires great individual performances, but the teamwork is certainly good. Lloyd Cunningham (the original Tarzan) makes hard work of the first act, but given the circumstances of the buildup to his entrance, that is to be expected. He'd need to be as big and unpredictable as a N.T. buffalo to pull it off. He tried to match his performance to the mythical anger conjured by the men, when he might have done better to let it do the work for him. For the rest of the play he had Tarzan's measure.

The other characters who need to rise above the ruck are Pansy and Tom. John Clayton, as Pansy, managed the taking-care-of-number-one aspect, and brought some tension to the poker game in which Methuselah loses his life savings, but by and large he was not a contender for the title of King of the Apes. His performance had the right amount of flab but insufficient genuine malice.

As Tom, the outsider, David Hursthouse exploded like a well planted time-bomb in his fight with Carl. However, the precise choreography of the fight sequences, and the obviously figurative exchange of blows, were at odds with the naturalistic techniques of the rest of the play. The director might have prepared for this quite workable stylistic departure, earlier in the piece, by, for example, incorporating stylised transitions into the otherwise blacked out scene changes.

As Methuselah, Edwin Hodgeman managed to blend the old no-hoper's bulldust and dreams with a stubborn courage in the face of losing odds, which humanized and heartened the production. His final shout might just have turned the clocks back for a moment ... "GO old knuckleman ... go, go, go!". Blackout.
The world premieres of John O'Donoghue's award-winning play was a wholly happy occasion for Terence Clarke and the Hunter Valley Theatre Company; the response of the first night audience was the warmest and most immediate that any H.V.T.C. production has been greeted with so far. It is, of course, a home grown play, and the jokes and references to the Newcastle locale and situation were enthusiastically siezed upon, particularly the Irish and Catholic ones. The play is based around that tightly-knit community which has always had a strong hold in Newcastle.

In fact the more superficial humour about this way of life went down so well — there were clearly many Catholics, including clergy, in the audience — that it seems at least debatable as to whether the real point of the play was taken, that the Catholic Church is a killer. All the characters are victims of the Church except the devouringly wealthy and witheringly ancient spinster Miss Sis, who by coming to represent the spirit of the Catholic Church in Newcastle, remains the only victor.

The 'occasion' of the title is the small party held in Newcastle, 1942, at the home of B.H.P. worker Denny O'Mahon and his wife Mary, on the eve of their twelve years old son, Christy's entering the minors' seminary to train for the priesthood. Their respective choice of guests reveals their individual attitudes to and victimisation by the Catholic Church, and as the party progresses through the beers and merriment to tears and violence, everyone's interdependent insecurities and tensions are laid bare.

Shades of Virginia Woolf, Don's Party, Long Day's Journey into Night — certainly, but in this play there is one crucial difference because of which there can be no hope at the last, of possible fresh beginnings after the walpurgisnacht. The first half of the play is pure naturalism where real time and stage time are correspond — Christy's last supper is eaten on stage during the interval — which leaves us unprepared for the surreal macabre flash forward in time of the second half. Miss Sis, an evil black crow of a woman, takes on the full force of her role as the Church and administers a communion of death to the others, relating in place of the words of communion the time and manner of each's death, and gives not bread and wine but a pinch of the cheek — a habit of hers to ensure corpses are not buried alive. She herself outlives them all 'physically, mentally or spiritually' and only young Christy is left to describe her death, but not to administer her last rites, implying that he later escapes the Church and priesthood. This scene sheds a whole new light — or darkness — on previous and following events; there can be no hopeful ambiguity in our view of them at the end because we know they all die victims — of the Church and the deformities of character it has wrought in them.

'Houses' O'Halloran (Michael Taper), Mary's father, partially escapes the pain by consciously keeping in with everyone, but it is this superficiality that kills him; he dies of laughter. Breda, played with zest by Kerry Walker, the barmaid invited by both Mary and Denny, tries to escape the Church altogether but is persecuted by the two guests of Denny's choice, Miss Sis (Jacqueline Simon) and his best friend Tocky. Tony Sheldon's Tocky had all the physical characteristics of the bitter misogynist Irishman, but did not convey early enough the jealous, mentally almost homosexual attitude he has to Denny. He and Miss Sis pull Denny toward the celibate and sterile side of the Church which conflicts in a straightforward way with his natural desires and love for Mary. Robert Alexander's compelling and versatile acting made Denny, though weak, a thoroughly likeable and sympathetic man, which sadly was not adequately backed up by Nancy Tarran's Mary, whose knife-edge hold on sanity was not sufficiently delicately portrayed. Nor was there enough evident sexuality — albeit sublimated — in her relationship with her invitee, Father

O'Gorman (Vic Rooney). To the Catholic Church, as Breda says to Tocky, "all women are either whores or virgins"; Breda is a whore, Miss Sis is the virgin, but Mary as a wife and mother can find no place for herself in the Church's scheme. Mary's powerful imagination isolates her from Denny, and in the end he too endorses Tocky's hatred of her, leaving her still more confused as to her own identity. Only after her 'mental death' when she goes insane, does "poor, silly Mary" find an answer; "God the Father, God the Son — so God the Holy Ghost must be a woman!" Somewhere there must be a place for woman.

The set designers, Terence Clarke and John Woodland, are certainly to be congratulated on their use of the problematically deep stage of the Arts/Drama Theatre. By placing the semi-naturalistic set to the back and blacking out the often cumbersome apron, rather than increasing the distance between stage and audience, we were drawn right into the claustrophobic lives of the O'Mahons, and the apron simply disappeared until darkly lit for the black communion.

"But will it transfer?" everyone seemed to be asking afterwards. It would seem to be part of the Newcastle inferiority complex to think a play written about the town could not be of interest to others. The play has a lot to say far more than local interest; the influence of the Catholic Church in Australia has been strong, and though there are excellent reasons for setting the play particularly in Newcastle, for instance the strong worker/shareholder discrimination that is less evident in the bigger cities, it can be seen as an archetype of the Australian industrial town.

The play is quite a marathon for present day standards — it ran for over two and a half hours; the form is still loose, especially in the first half where for example Miss Sis at least, could easily appear to still dominate the conversation without actually having so many lines. But this makes it an even greater tribute to Terence Clarke and the H.V.T.C. production team that there was no sense of restlessness in the audience, indeed there was a feeling that with this production came the theatre company's true inauguration with the people of Newcastle.

A HAPPY AND HOLY OCCASION by John O'Donoghue. Arts Drama Theatre (opened 1.x.76.) Director, Terence Clarke; Designers, Terence Clarke, John Woodland; Mary O'Mahon, NANCY TARRAN; Denny O'Mahon, ROBERT ALEXANDER; Christy O'Mahon, STEPHEN CLARK; Rev Fr Thurlagh O'Gorman, VIC ROONEY; Tocky Keating, TONY SHELDON; Vincent de Paul O'Halloran, MICHAEL TAPER; Breda Mulcahy, KERRY WALKER; Cecilia McManus, JACQUELINE SIMON.

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company takes on the full force of her role as the Church and administers a communion of death to the others, relating in place of the words of communion the time and manner of each's death, and gives not bread and wine but a pinch of the cheek — a habit of hers to ensure corpses are not buried alive. She herself outlives them all 'physically, mentally or spiritually' and only young Christy is left to describe her death, but not to administer her last rites, implying that he later escapes the Church and priesthood. This scene sheds a whole new light — or darkness — on previous and following events; there can be no hopeful ambiguity in our view of them at the end because we know they all die victims — of the Church and the deformities of character it has wrought in them.
MUSIC HALL THEATRE

RESTAURANT

THE BEAST OF BELGRAVE SQUARE

Maria Prerauer

THE BEAST OF BELGRAVE SQUARE by Stanley Walsh, 25 ¢. AUS Qrs. Director, Stanley Walsh. Music, Don Harve. Choreography, Michael O'Reilly. Autrey Courtney, STANLEY WALSH; Lord Cedic Harmsworth, DON PASCOE; Nellie Wood, ANNE SEMLER; Penelope Harmsworth, CATHY GRAY; Col Redvers Fuller, RON HACKETT; Lydia Fowler, ANNE CHARLESTON; Craven T Blackmore, ALFRED SANDOR; Gilbert Mortlock, HENRI SZEPS; Ernest Murgatroyd, DAVID WATERS; Howie Dunn, BARRY LOVETT; Wee Willie Wild, TREVOR McCOOKER, Charmain, PETER MINELL; Wan Low, BARRY LOVETT; The Daisy Belles, KERRY WOODS; SALLY CAHILL.

Maria Prerauer is music critic and arts feature writer for The Australian and writes by kind permission of the Editor.

Hiis...ss...ss! Don’t look now but that’s the villain right behind you. What a cad, sir! He struck a woman! Watch it, mate. She’s busting out all over... Dr Jekyll I presume...

The scene is Sydney’s leading theatre restaurant the Neutral Bay Music Hall. And the current neo-Victorian melodrama The Beast of Belgrave Square is in full Blarney Street Swinging. In the audience the traditional hiss-villain routine is mounting to a crescendo. All around in the vast old cinema haunted by the ghosts of those fabulous flicks of yesteryear the capacity crowd of diners is jam-packed against a backdrop of stripped drapes and views of old London.

The last of the lobster cocktails (delicious!), the rare roast beef and tender steaks, the strawberries in cream and the real liqueur-centred cassata are vanishing fast. The guests, relaxed and replete, go on sipping wine, letting their hair down and dropping their everyday inhibitions. They shout advice to the actors, the wardrobe-wits keep the parties around them in stitches and at one point there is as much funny dialogue being tossed about on the floor as the stage. And when they stop the show to announce the Mafeking has been relieved and a girl in a Union Jack bikini comes shooting out of a cannon the entire auditorium leaps to its feet to join in the rollicking Land of Hope and Glory chorus.

You could be — you are — back in the good Queen’s final years when the sun never set on you-know-what, when Britannia ruled the waves and views of old London.

Alfred Sandor; turn of-the-century naughtiness. In Belgrave Square heroines meet fates-worse-than — well, almost — and the basement lodger is a second Mr Hyde with a lust for fresh corpses. Patter songs and dance, a sword-sticking variety show within the show, high kicks, black garters, Can-Can frou-frou, tongue-in-cheek double entendres, and risque jokes are presented with enormous high-spirit and with pace and zest. And for anyone who wants to see it there is much light-hearted sending-up of anything from a patriotism bordering on xenophobia to the whole unbuttoned melodramatic genre itself.

Yet it is still genuine melodrama, the kind great grandfather would recognise instantly, not so great grandmother. Xenophobes knock about the kind of variation on the theme. And the audience participation — jolly-humored, unforced, whole-hearted — is not only an integral part of the farce but also turns out to be as good a way of exercising hangups as any psychoanalytical cure. What a revivifying night it reveals, more to it than mere museum-walking. It begins to assume the proportions of a cheapo therapy that sends you back to the late 20th century revived and renewed.

Just as in its long-running predecessor The Spectre of Wycombe Manor when skeletons not only popped out of cupboards but swung across the theatre at you too, a large part of the Beast’s success is due to designer Tom Lingwood of the Australian Opera. His revolving sets which waltz in a flash from fashionable drawing room to sinister laboratory or the stage of the Empire in Leicester Square, and his lavish period costumes recreate the atmosphere quite uncannily. And the music under the direction of Don Harvie is kept going at a bouncing speed with plenty of rhythmic zing and sparkle.

The vital, nastily fascinating presence of Alfred Sandor’s eminently hissable villain dominates the proceedings right through. Whether he looks like a marine or being suavely genteel, whether dancing a heel-clicking, teeth-flashing Claws-Jaws fandango burlesque or quaffing pink tonic to change into a beast complete with fur and paws, it would be difficult to imagine a more loathsome Craven T, Blackmore. And what better praise is there than that?

Anne Semler as Nellie Wood the saucy blonde bombshell who looks as if butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth when at home, while enjoying, after hours, a secret life of delectable vice walking streets and stage, is just as good value, full of bravura and bust. Barry Lovett as Howie Dunn, a plain clothes sleuth straight from the Noo York Police Department (hurrah! hurrah!) Don Pascoe as the peniless peer Lord Cedric Harmsworth, Sally Cahill as sweet heroine Lady Penelope, Ron Hackett as a tipsy kilted Scot, Anne Charleston as Blackmore’s s’sister’ and Henry Szeps and David Waters as shady undertakers are all most able at aiding and abetting. Indeed the whole cast, right down to the smallest parts, is professional in the very best sense of the word. They make it look darned easy, but that is just the art. One slip and the whole illusion is quickly destroyed in Music Hall. Timing is of the essence.

And in the true must-go-on tradition it would have been hard to guess that director Stanley Walsh was stepping into the role of our cowardly hero Autrey Courtney because a fatal accident had just robbed the performance of Andrew Grant.

The Beast is now much more hilarious than when I first experienced it earlier this year. Not that it wasn’t already most enjoyable then. But it has been tightened up, changed a little, rewritten here and there. And it now runs smoothly and irresistibly without having lost any of that first fine apparently careless capture and spontaneity.

It now seems set for as long a life as its predecessor which lasted twenty months before it gave up the ghost (sorry).

Even Queen Victoria after a few quickies with the blue pencil would surely this time round have been most amused.
A Doll's House is a sparse and clever play which the Old Tote has given an effective production. When I first saw it in London in 1973, where it was dominated by Claire Bloom's triumphant performance, I thought it more of a preamble than a play. What happens to Nora on the other side of the door she slams on her home? Does she find self-fulfillment? Or does she get a boring job like everybody else? Or what? The curtain fell just as things were warming up.

Given a lower voltage Nora in the Tote production, the questions are answered by the minor characters. Christine assets herself through Dorothy Vernon's forceful performance and it is extremely tempting to see her as Nora's alter ego; that what happens to Nora is a Long March from a loveless marriage through poverty and unfulfilling jobs (“Yes, I'm very experienced at office work” says Christine with regret) to a little wedge of happiness with a fellow castaway (Krogstad). Similarly, Krogstad, rejected earlier by Christine, could be Torvald's alter ego, and demonstrates that Torvald must take a walk on the wild side before he has learned enough of human values to be re-united with Nora. This is all very cunning of Ibsen and is one in the eye for those wet souls who accuse him of being a "social critic".

As it stands before the split, the relationship between Torvald and Nora is an empty shadow. No feelings above domestic trivia are displayed and both characters have evolved a park ranger/squirrel charade that is an excuse for not facing themselves or each other. Christine, coming in from the cold, is envious until she realises the ice they are jumping on is very thin indeed. But by forcing Nora into a confrontation with Torvald, she destroys the relationship, for the better. She has learned a lot on the outer, and the chastening hope in the play is glimpsed in her reunion with Krogstad.

Peter Sumner's Torvald is an extraordinary achievement. Apart from the technical accomplishment he grimly drags the character away from the natural bias towards caricature and beefs up the pace of a rather sedate production. Jessica Noad and Martin Harris bring their characters more finely into focus than their London counterparts, giving more sense of a whole society, as does Peter Collingwood, although Dr. Rank's most important scene, his moving confession of love for Nora, is horribly muffed by the direction.

Jane Harders' Nora is technically superb, eclectic (G. Jackson/D. Rigg/J. Greenwood/G. Johns), riveting, stylistically accomplished, and quite unmoving. The earlier scenes of fun and games seem to work better for this Nora than the dramatic naturalism of the last act.

A Doll's House is not an adventurous choice of repertoire, and the competent production could not be classed as electrifying, but it is nonetheless absorbing and worth seeking for the kaleidoscopic picture it offers of an excellent play which is usually seen as a one character show. In decanting the text it also demonstrates that A Doll's House is a play, not a preamble.
On the night I attended these plays, which comprise the fifth season of the Actor's Company, it drizzled continuously and at the time I found the rain an appropriately sobering backdrop to the thematic concerns which unite The Lesson and Lunchtime Concert. Their particular savagery and relentlessly cyclic schema of hostility and torment could reduce anyone to a bout of depression.

Of the two, however, Olwen Wymark endorses a more lighthearted aspect, particularly in the fine construction of the dialogue with which she articulates the relationship between the Old Woman and the Boy in Lunchtime Concert. In this play we are invited to observe a bizarre picnic where our moderate curiosity is shared by another onlooker, an ornithologist, hidden, quite inadvertently, in a tree. Betty Cheal fills out the Old Woman with a vaguely pugnacious certainty that re-created for the more nostalgic, the shadow of Bea Miles. She and her puckish companion the Boy, are quick to draw us into their delicate matrix of love and dependence. Were it not for the impertinent tongue of Don Chapman's Boy we would happily forget the fact of their fifty year age difference. The power struggle which preoccupies their wit and cunning has a suburban familiarity; as a matter of course and course, have to scuttle back to his enveloping reality, but the Old Woman and the Boy know its hollow visions; reality follows them only as a grim shadow in their unfinished stories.

Matthew O'Sullivan's adept production of The Lesson touched off some old regrets. I have often wished for the stolid, burlesque comedy of Ionesco's plays in vain during the productions which are non-European. His characteristically Gallic excesses are so markedly diminished by Anglo-Saxon humour; the broadly comic style comes to us cramped and cramped, in tight gestures and even tighter facial expressions. We are unable, it seems, to maintain those qualities which make the European productions of Ionesco so funny.

In The Lesson Ionesco addresses himself, once more, to the petty-bourgeois, this time indicting its quasi-priesthood, the professors and their chicanery. Briefly the play exposes the implicit brutality of the teacher-pupil relationship, throwing into relief, on this more literal level, the associated evils of lust, physical violation and the sadistic victimization. During this, the fortieth lesson of the day, we flinch before a harsh transaction where the new pupil, a vivacious, fetching girl, is subjected to humiliation, rape and murder. It is part of Ionesco's cynical appreciation of 'education' that we cannot decide if she is stupid or intelligent, just as we do not know whether the Professor is learned, or an intellectual buffoon. At any rate, it's certainly impossible for them to understand each other.

With the notion of communication out of the way we are free to concentrate on the true purpose of the lesson: it is a power game of ensceration, thus confronting a truth he dared not face as the Ornithologist. He may, of course, have to scuttle back to his enveloping reality, but the Old Woman and the Boy know its hollow visions; reality follows them only as a grim shadow in their unfinished stories.

Matthew O'Sullivan's direction indulges Ionesco's flair for parody; we see, through the figure of the Professor, how easily language provides a vehicle for power. The political implications of the hysterical monologue with its compressed banalities and pedantry are there to be drawn. Grim stuff you might say, and hardly comic, yet Ionesco calls this a 'drama comique'. I was left with the impression that Dick May's interpretation of the Professor took cognisance of the more apparently grotesque in Ionesco and left the playwright's more subtle and keen sense of the ridiculous to fend for itself.
Self pity is a potent ingredient in the theatre. It surely accounts for much of Hamlet's durability, though that play does have one or two other things to commend it. Self pity runs through the work of Reg Livermore like a flood tide — he projects the lonely clown who if he was aware that expectations were not being met. A rapture of joy and relief would greet a good joke to make up for the last half dozen flat ones.

In Wonder Woman — his follow up to Betty Blokk Buster — both the songs and the revue sketches are below the standard he has already set. If anything, the evening must go to Thomas Edison and the electric light bulb. If all those gyrating lights could contrive to have a voice box it would not surprise me to hear it break into the Hallelujah chorus.

However, on the first night anyway, it seemed for most that the presence of Mr Livermore was more than enough. At the same time one was aware that expectations were not being met. A rapture of joy and relief would greet a good joke to make up for the last half dozen flat ones.

One of the opening numbers extols the delights of Josephine Baker and when Mr Livermore sets up an entrance for someone who could only be Miss Baker's double as she looked fifty years ago, two of the Reginas (the quartet of dancers) walk on and shake a feather or two. Not quite the same as one legendary black cabaret star.

Possibly the biggest mistake of the evening is the Death of Butterfly, a monumental piece of self indulgence which satisfied neither the freckled fatties (who make up a large part of Mr Livermore's following) nor those who admire what he can do well. For one tense minute I thought he was going to sing “One Fine Day”. As it was, he tried to out — Lindsay. Lindsay Kemp with a seppuku to climax in blood red streamers and a fluttering, dying fall. It did not come off. In fact, Mr Batey should take it off.

But how much attention does Mr Livermore pay to his producer? Is the latter as demanding on the star as he ought to be? Mr Livermore writes the revue sketches between the songs but does Mr Batey say what stays and what goes?

I feel that a tougher producer would not have let so many of the sketches get past the first read-through. Only one had, to my mind, any real wit and that was of the fat lady who is addicted to stronger and stronger analgesics until she finally draws from her shopping basket a gas mask. Here is a character drawn with affection and compassion.

Joyce, “the known prostitute” has potential but Mr Livermore doesn’t quite know what to do with her. Beginnings are his forte but not endings. He doesn’t know how to get his characters off stage although they invariably make very good entrances. The second time Joyce appears (in “Hi-Jack”) the sketch just dwindles to nothing.

As for Wonderwoman herself — nippled falsies and Aztec head dress — I am at a loss what to make of her at all. She seemed the culmination of the evening’s anti-feminist bias. The lady I went with was in a high rage by the time Wonderwoman appeared. It was only when I got home and read the programme that I realised that Mr Livermore had intended a thesis for our delectation.

Wonderwoman is meant to be his tribute to the pantomime dame. “My approach to drag is greatly overstated. It is in the grand tradition of the overkill. It is hanging somewhere between vaudeville and burlesque.”

That’s about the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, for the traditions belong to the U.K. and the U.S.A. respectively. However there is nothing to be gained by hitting an artist over the head with his own program note. The two traditions do meet in the offensive Archie Rice character Mr Livermore calls Mr Pig. Meant to be a send up of the male chauvinist pig stand-up comedian, Mr Pig is simply very boring indeed and should also go.

What are the good things in Wonderwoman? One sketch I have mentioned already. I enjoyed hearing “Lay Lady Lay” and the Brecht/Weill “Surabaya Johnny”. Otherwise — I missed a sense of positive growth.

Mr Livermore has an electric stage presence and his face is as fascinating as ever. One minute it belongs to mother’s little helper and then, quite suddenly, it can age a million years, the eyes becoming glinting embers in black holes, the mouth a sagging mulberry gash.

Everyone in this country knows the talent is there and when he is content to feel, and not intellectualise, the talent is uncovered. He needs an editor as much as a producer.

One technical moment of brilliance: when the closed circuit TV (as it seems) catches the performer backstage in a quick change. The zest and confidence of the on-stage Livermore is stripped to show the tense private person in the shadowy wings. Reality and myth merge for a split second.
"They were children," writes Dr. Rowse. "They rioted in extremes of opulence, ardour, joy; they must even have derived pleasure from their exaggerated griefs."

The Elizabethans continue to fascinate and at a time when England's fortunes tremble, the English — through television series — are anxious to renew their acquaintance with their purposeful ancestors perhaps in an attempt to rediscover a sense of destiny which motivated the small population of an island which was, after all, considered by Europe as something of a barbarian outpost. The language was one, no one of any sense would actually learn if he could speak any of half a dozen others.

Art and manners came from Italy and France and even the plots for their plays came from aborad. But a miracle was happening and we loathed his masters yet no man has worked with such zeal for so little. One is tempted to conclude that the play was written in a hot rush that must have been part of the technique of the time, particularly as Webster spent most of his writing life working with other dramatists like an Elizabethan version of a Hollywood scriptwriter. But consistency never made a part of a plot to drive the Duchess mad.

The supporting actors are — with one exception — all well cast. I did not enjoy Mr Ohlin's acting. Although he has fine looks, he has not sufficient vocal flexibility or grace of gesture to be given the important task of saying the play's last speech.

Now a word about Bosola, the play's malcontent. This is a curious part. While we know what Hamlet was like before his father's death — at least on hearsay — we can never believe what anyone says about Bosola, least of all himself. It is like the image of a man in a shattered mirror. He seems to have been a scholar and a pedant at that. Then he has been so many years in the galleys. He loathed his masters yet no man has worked with such zeal for so little. One is tempted to conclude that the play was written in a hot rush that must have been part of the technique of the time, particularly as Webster spent most of his writing life working with other dramatists like an Elizabethan version of a Hollywood scriptwriter. But consistency never made a part of a plot to drive the Duchess mad.

Mr Cramphorn has succeeded magnificently. As the Duchess, Jennifer Claire achieves the difficult fusion of dignity and passion, humility and pride. She plays a woman who, though past her best, can still employ her charms and the scene in which she woos her steward (Ivan Kants) was played with delicacy and concentration by both actors. The audience paid them appreciative attention, not missing a point — a feat in the close packed verse of this writer where complicated conceits are piled one upon the other.

The terrible pair, cardinal and duke, are played by John Krummel and John Gaden with varying degrees of silken ferocity and fanged madness. Mr Krummel was particularly repellent in his frenzy of heterosexual lust but I sometimes wished he spoke his lines less like tracer bullets. This has the effect of giving individual words more emphasis than the sentence or sometimes the meaning of the sentence. Mr Gaden's face is a gift to any actor and even the plots for their plays came from aborad. But a miracle was happening and we loathed his masters yet no man has worked with such zeal for so little. One is tempted to conclude that the play was written in a hot rush that must have been part of the technique of the time, particularly as Webster spent most of his writing life working with other dramatists like an Elizabethan version of a Hollywood scriptwriter. But consistency never made a part of a plot to drive the Duchess mad.

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The play opens with tense London set-dressing as the stock characters — entitled Perfect Strangers — Robert and Peter, who have married in a whirlwind of love and passion, now find themselves committed to each other and must redefine their relationship. The “possession” in the play is the Jewish tradition which the father, David Singer, has neglected to pass on to his two children, James and Wendy. Together with the mother, Frances, the four characters introduce themselves to us in a series of soliloquies broken only here and there by passages of brief conversation. Then comes the confrontation: the articulate Wendy, with her brother’s support, states her case for going away to begin a new life of her own, away from the family, and with a gentle, a man already married. The parents are uncomprehending. Their bewilderment, and their last minute attempts to find out more about the man for whom their daughter is prepared to leave them, merely expose the shallowness of their relationship with their daughter. The stock responses no longer serve.

The children depart for the station, leaving the parents resigned over their cup of tea. David, however, left alone, ponders on the Jewish inheritance he has failed to bequeath his father. He comforts himself with the self-justification that he has left James and Wendy to find their own values in their own world. Even so, the play closes ritually — with him donning the skull cap and prayer shawl to recite the mourners’ Kaddish for his “dead” Wendy, the daughter who has left the family. The play is shot through with a Jewish humour familiar to us from many a T.V. serial. The author’s achievement, however, is to invest the relationships with a reality immediately and universally recognisable, and on a battlefield crossed continually by the playwrights of every age — the family. The characters are rounded and avoid the stereotype, surprising us with unexpected and illuminating comment in a way which any brief outline of the play does not begin to convey. In a country like Australia, which continues to attract the immigrant and the traditions and attitudes they bring with them, the play is both compassionate and relevant. Of equal importance — it plays well.

MICHAEL COVE was born in London in 1946. He worked as a film editor in England and in Australia when he came over to live here at the end of 1971. Since 1973 he has been a full-time writer.

In the theatre many of his plays have been produced since April 1973; Dazzle at the Australian Theatre, Sydney, Dappling and The Convict Cakewalk at the Q Theatre, Sydney Kookaburra, Jesters and Happy Landings (which opens at the South Australian Theatre Company in November), and The Gift, recently produced at the Stables Theatre, Sydney and now at the Melbourne Theatre Company’s Grant Street Theatre.

For TV Michael has written many episodes of Certain Women and for The Piggybilla Players, the A.B.C. half hour comedy programme. At the moment he is writing regularly for Crawford Productions’ The Bluestone Boys and The Sullivans.

He has done many adaptions for A.B.C. Radio’s Morning Serial, and his one-man radio play All the Livelong Day has been broadcast nationally.

Michael has written the screen plays to three full-length feature films; The Death Cheaters — Brian Trenchard Smith’s film — is being shot at the moment.

He lives with his Australian wife and lots of animals at Cobbity.
Family Lore

by

michael cove

Family Lore by Michael Cove was first produced by the University of New England Drama Department at Theatre Foray, U.N.E., Armidale. The cast was:

The Father (David)  Kit Taylor
The Mother (Francis)  Maggie Kirkpatrick
The Son (Jim)  Joe Gibson
The Daughter (Wendy)  Meg Gould

Directed and the lighting designed by Colin George

First Performance: Thursday 12th August 1976.

Photograph from the Q Theatre, Sydney, production, September 13th to October 2nd, directed by Kevin Jackson.

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48 Darlinghurst Road,
Kings Cross N.S.W. 2011

Three Areas: Centre, a combined living/kitchen area; Downstage the Man is studying "Trotguide", Upstage of him the Woman is going about the preparation of the evening meal.

To one side, a small bedroom where the Girl is packing a suitcase, to the other side, a similar space where the Boy sits at a desk studying.

The Man and Woman are nearly dressed, he perhaps seven or eight years her senior, in his late fifties. The Girl, about twenty, is smart in a denim suit; the Boy a couple of years older, is also in denim, but crumpled and untidy.

The Woman looks up briefly, as though to acknowledge the audience, then continues with egg-dipping and matzo meal coating some fish.

Woman: Children are a blessing, they bless the marriage. I know. I'm a mother. I have two.

James, my boy, was the first born ... then a daughter.

(Man's head goes up, and continues with his study.)

Man: Wendy — my daughter — never answers my questions anymore. Why not? Doesn't she hear? or doesn't she listen? — or do I call as loud as I used to? It might be that, I'm getting old ... in the first leg —

(He scratches on a piece of paper as the Woman looks up.)

Woman: My husband. David, he's been a good father — you know? I mean, whatever I might say about him as a husband, he has been a good father.

Man: Be a father? — it's a mitzvah — but also it's aggravation.

Woman: James is named for his zada — that is, for David's father, ova-sholom. Not that poppa's name was James, it was Jacob; but, Jacob, I think, is not a good name for our modern day and age; so we kept the initial going at least. It's only a gesture when all's said and done.

Man: In the first leg, number six ... I seem to have spent my whole life working for this family. And number two in the second leg,

(He notes his decision down on the piece of paper.)

Woman: I have always had expectations. Not to say James should be prime minister, like politicians get spoken to now-a-days, on the television and everything. People don't respect their leaders anymore, don't look up to them. I think that's wrong. I did look up to Mr. Whitlam, for a little while, and now I think Mr. Fraser is quite a good man — we should give him a chance at least. James — he should just be happy — you understand? It's only a mother's expectation. I never did pluck because my husband wasn't a millionaire. Why? David has always been a good father. That gunna mucker with the iron ere — whosis? — Lang Hancock!

is he a good father? He is a millionaire ... I'd be a liar if I didn't admit that I've always hoped for James not to become one of the crowd. The "crowd", you know: a shipping clerk or a car salesman. That's natural too; a mother wants a good life for her only son and we have tried to give him that.

Man: It's hard to look at Wendy now, without wanting to cry.

Woman: The girl, of course, we don't talk about.

(The Woman moves through the kitchen, perhaps to collect, bring centre, and start chopping some potatoes. The Man stands, moves to his jacket draped over the back of a chair, takes out a fountain pen and goes to sit at the table to neatly write out his selections.)

Man: I used to talk baby-talk to her; that was my sin. Home from work I'd ask did she have a "goony-goony" day, and she'd say "goony goony Diddy" ... It made me smile; I loved her — Wendy ... Was that poisoning her mind?

Woman: She was always her father's favourite.

Man: She's a bright kid, and pretty. She's not as pretty as I thought she was going to be, she doesn't go to a lot of trouble. Like her brother, a pair of school kids. Me, I've always taken a pride in my appearance. When you're dealing with people, day in and out, you've got to be presentable. I'm careful about that; I go to the barber once a fortnight, I always have. Once a week when I was in the Air Force. But that was different. She is bright but, they both are; spirited. She is hurting her mother badly though, and she shouldn't do that.

Woman: Both of them have always had it too easy, too much their own way — the three of them! I've waited on them like a skivvy. Which is why they treat me like dirt.

Man: Frances —

Woman: I'll show them.

Man: — My wife, Frances, is a good honest woman. I married her because she was attractive, sensible, spoke well — good family ... good legs. And now? — a ballabusta, you know? Not as good a cook as she thinks she is; my mother was the cook.

Woman: I will show them.

Man: Cooking is in the hands; my mother's hands were so fast, light, chopping fish or liver, so fast you never saw it. My Frances, she has a wood-chopper's hands — by comparison I mean.

Woman: What will I "show" them? Me, a woman. I'm not the type who'll push my bags. Miriam Gold packed her bags, she went to live with a sister in New Zealand. Me, I'm married for better or for worse": I believe that ... I won't show them. But, I ruck sometimes.

Man: She's honest, clean — keeps everything clean — and a good mother. Nobody could say a word against her where that is concerned.

Woman: Gratitude I don't expect — I just do my work. But respect? — it's not a lot.

Man: As far as being a wife ... We've been married a long time, she's part of the way my life goes now.

(Stands, folds the piece of paper on which he has written his selections, takes it and the pen to the inside jacket pocket, comes down and sits. He remains still, then languidly leans down to scratch his ankle.) All as:

Woman: When we met, me and David, you know what I thought? You'll laugh, it's girlish, but, I was a girl so anyway. I thought he looked a bit like Montgomery Clift. You know. Truth to tell, I thought he looked a lot like Montgomery Clift. Now? — oy gevalt ... I'm not sure what he looks like, maybe now he looks like an old Montgomery Clift. I should worry what he looks like, so long as he's well. He looks like he looks, it isn't important to me anymore. But when we met, I had to catch my breath, that sort of feeling. James has a bit of that. But better looking, better features, more like my side. He has got David's colouring. A good looking boy, and sensitive.

Man: You know what I wonder sometimes? I ask myself if, maybe, my children are what I would have been if I had had their chances, and their anxieties. I ask myself, would my dad, Jacob, would he have been what I am if he had had my chances, my fears. And his father, and so on. Are we all really only one man, the one Singer man (that's the family name, Singer), and is it only the world that has been changing?

Woman: We've got a very nice house. Nice, comfortable. Not one of the better suburbs, but comfortable, well-appointed. David and Frances Singer, they're a happy couple. People say that, you can hear them — 'a happy couple' — very fond of each other.

Man: And children bless the marriage.

(He looks around as the Woman, who has finished and set aside the chips, enters from the kitchen.)

Woman: So, that's all done.

Man: What is it?

Woman: The supper, it's all ready.

Man: What is it?

Woman: Fish.

Man: Good.

Woman: And tomorrow, you can take cold.

Man: Very nice.

Woman: So — not a good day?

Man: Alright.

Woman: You seemed brogious.

Man: Course not.

Woman: Oh.

Beat:

Man: The train was full.
Woman: You had to stand?
Man: About half the way.
Woman: So, put the tele on, it'll relax you.
Man: We won't have it on tonight.
Woman: No, quite right.
Man: Tonight, Wendy is leaving us.
Woman: Yes ... Whose fault is it?
Man: I'm not talking about faults.
Woman: You're the head of the family.
Man: All of a sudden.
Woman: You are who you should have led us.
Woman: Gibber-kick "led" her — I'm a wage-earner, I'm not Moses ... My grandfather brought the family from Russia, my father brought it here, I'm staying put.
Woman: And Wendy is going.
Man: Wendy is good for both.
Woman: I shouldn't say her name. The shame she's bringing on us, I should say "I have no daughter." But I can't; she's of my blood, I carried her.
Man: And if, I if I had the money, I would have liked her to go to Europe, England, have a look. A girl should see Europe, it's elegant there. But I never had the money.
Woman: And now, she's leaving home.
Man: I'm staying Frances — James is staying.
Woman: I'll get on.
Man: You can't for a minute?
Woman: There's always something to do. (She turns back and starts towards the kitchen as the Boy leans over his desk and sweeps the text books to the floor.)
Boy: Sweet bleeding Jesus, it is all so far beyond the reach of my crippled ambition and that is what they have done to me.
Man: I'm not brogious Fellga.
Woman: Good.
(And the Woman exits to the kitchen and from there moves off as the Man rather lounges back, the Boy slouches in his seat, and the Girl comes towards the end of the packing.)
Boy: They've encouraged my cowardice, all along the line — and they've bred what a fool. To state it nearly. I have no interest in achievement and no desire to compete; not even against myself. In truth, I only want to stop in bed, not from fear of failure, but terrified by success. I don't have reason for attempting anything more strenuous than sleep. Good old David will always want to see me fed — I wish him long life already. I can't even get involved in my Jewishness. Frances, my old dear, she does the cooking for both of us. I am not a cygic, I am almost messianic: I have the weariness of the world on my shoulders — I shall die to save it from fatigue ... But, I shall die a natural death. I read novels. Wendy, is different.
Woman: (Off) What time is it Dooy?
Man: Twenty past!
(The Woman returns to the kitchen, still calling through — a racket that the Girl responds to with a small smile.)
Woman: Already?
Man: I set it by the wireless.
Woman: I believe you.
(The Girl strangely walks away from the case, finding and lighting herself a cigarette as.)
Girl: It's a miracle of their marriage — the union of two empty lives whose emptiness does not seem to prevent conversation. They've evolved a staggering facsimile — small-talk of the formal lobes. It's a ritual, rather than communication. Every day they find something to say — even to me ... But I have never had anything in common with them; not even in etero.
(Boy starts to fidget towards a move which will bring him to the Girl's area.) They say they loved me, especially the old man, but I can find no reason why they should have. I am a bitch — one of us has to be, we're a coincidence of strangers and there's no way under the sun we could be friends. Although unlike them. Jimmy can make me laugh, Diddy — dad can make me smile. And Mum can make me grateful, which is all she can expect to get out, considering what she puts in ... I don't honour them, right enough. Well, I'm just trying to ease out, painfully. Out, away, leaving home — which is what's broken them up though I'd try to explain. I mean, I didn't have to do that, I could have just stood up with the convivial "happy chanukah, take care on the roads." But I didn't, I made an effort, after that it's up to them. Jesus, they are my parents, who else can they blame? ... Blame for what?
(She looks up to a light tap and the Boy enters. She smiles and he looks at her.)
Boy: You really going?
Woman: Yes James.
Boy: It'll destroy them.
Woman: Don't be so melodramatic.
Boy: I mean it.
Woman: They'll explain it away somehow.
Boy: You're wrong.
Woman: We'll see.
Boy: I'll see, you'll have gone.
Woman: So, you move out.
(They cross to the case and fiddles with the last of the packing, and she sits, looking at her.)
Boy: Why didn't you lie, Wen?
Woman: They would have found out.
Boy: No, because it's what they'd have wanted to hear ... You're going off to live with a man and that is not what they wanted to hear — the lie would have been better.
Girl: But I love the man.
Boy: But the man is married and is not Jewish.
Girl: Oh, shit.
(She slams down the lid of the suitcase and sits on it. He smiles at her as the Woman calls from the kitchen.)
Boy: What time is it?
(The Man just starting to doze, jerks awake.)
Man: Uh? what? — you asked me that.
Woman: I forgot.
Man: You seen the newspaper?
Woman: Not lately in the side of the lounge.
Man: Yes, but I mean, have you read it?
Woman: Oh, no ... Anything in it?
Woman: Nah.
(Boy has crossed to the Boy who looks at her.)
Boy: You right?
Girl: Oh, Jimmy — why don't you get your head together?
(He looks at her, then moves across to lock her case as she straightens her hair.)
Boy: Why should I? I don't hurt anyone; I don't get hurt.
Girl: That's why.
Boy: You what?
Girl: Please say something nice to me.
Boy: Wendy needs comfort.
(Boy turns to him, they hold a look, and the Boy sits on the edge of the bed as the Woman enters to the Man.)
Woman: Her brother will miss her.
Boy: Of course.
Man: Yes ... I'll do your fault.
Boy: Too.
Woman: That.
(And he pulls the newspaper from the side of the chair as the Boy sets off and the Girl reaches for the case.)
Girl: I can manage that.
Boy: Yeah, you're a liberated woman, terrific.
Girl: You should leave home you know.
Boy: What? — as a matter of principle?
(He hoists up the case and leads the Girl off. The Woman finds and attends to some sewing and the Man lifts his newspaper.)
Girl: You didn't speak to her strongly enough, you never explained how I feel. (Slopes, the Man looks long and favel at the Woman and speaks very flat.)
Man: You want a sherry?
(He looks at him for a beat, then stiffly nods assent. The Man folds the paper, stands and moves upstage to pour two small sherrys as.)
Woman: She is going away to live with a man, a married man. She's traded the knife between her mother's ribs but she isn't sorry.
Man: Perhaps she is? ... It's twenty years later.
Woman: I don't want it to be twenty years later and maybe Wendy would sooner she was still a baby. Who knows? — who knows where the twenty years went? The world spins quicker, costs more — you tell me we should hire a colour television and Wendy tells me she's a 'young woman' and me? — I don't know anything.
(He shakes his head ruefully as the Boy appears at the entrance to the living area, carrying the suitcase.)
Boy: This won't be fun.
(Boy appears at his shoulder.)
Girl: This won't take long.
(He turns to stroll down with the drinks, He is just handing the Woman her when the children enter. The Woman looks across and the Man moves away, sipping his drink.)
Woman: You're ready, packed?
Boy: Yes.
Girl: You didn't need help?
Boy: I don't think much.
Man: You don't have clothes.
Girl: I have plenty of clothes Dad.
Man: Sure.
(And he moves slowly to sit.)
Girl: But I'm not taking them all.
Woman: You don't like the things we've bought for you?
Girl: Yes. I — but, I'm starting a new life.
Man: You can't do that.
Girl: Why not?
Man: To start new, you have to stop the old, you can't change the case off. No one can.
Girl: I can try.
Woman: How will you try?
Girl: I'll catch the Southern Aurora at central, and Robbie will meet me in Melbourne, and we'll try.
Boy: Talk to your sister, James.
(Boy looks at the Woman with a rather incredulous smile.)
Boy: What about?
Woman: You think it's right, what's she doing? (He sets the suitcase down)
Boy: It isn't up to me.
Girl: You're older, you're a man, and you don't leave home, leave Sydney, to lie with a married chickas — you don't do that!
Boy: No, but I'm not sure that what I do do is right.
Man: You do nothing!
Boy: What?
Man: Understand them.
Woman: I can't.
Man: Me neither.
Girl: I just have to lay my own life — make my own life. You know.
Man: Wendy, I don't know.
Woman: Attack this boy, this —
Girl: Robbie.
Woman: Robbie, yes, is he your life?
Girl: I think so.
Woman: You "think" so? — don't you know?
Girl: Not yet.
Man: With your mother. I knew.
Boy: Oh, really?
Man: Straight away. She looked, I thought, a bit like Greer Garson and straight-off, I knew.
Boy: Well, maybe Wendy thinks Robbie looks like Robert Redford.
Woman: That's a reason to live with a man?
Boy: Mum, she is old enough to make her own mistakes.
Man: There, at least, you are right. Listen, Wendy, I would be the last person in the world who would want to stop you from making your own mistakes. Only, I can’t see why making mistakes is so important. Not when an older person, who cares about you, who knows a little more about life, is prepared to give advice.
Girl: Why should you know more, just because you’re older?
Man: Excuse me, not about everything — but some things.
Woman: When you were a baby, wanting to jump out of your high chair, we stopped you because we were old enough to know that you would break both your legs.
Girl: But I’m not a baby now.
Man: But you still want to jump out of the bloody high chair?
Boy: That’s a non-sequitur.
Man: I’m talking to you.
Boy: You’re shouting.
Man: Not at you!
Woman: It’s good to be such a scholar — me, I’m only a mother.
Girl: And only a mother knows how a mother feels?
Woman: Mock me.
Girl: No, I don’t.
Woman: They hate us, our children.
Boy: Oh, garlic.
Woman: It’s a sin to care about them... when they had measles and mumps it wasn’t a sin.
Girl: You care?
Woman: Of course.
Girl: You have never once asked me about Rob.
And I do think I love him.
Woman: Do you?
Girl: I think so... Do you love Dad?
Woman: We’ve been married a long time — we love each other.
Boy: Are you “in love”?
Man: You only know from reading books.
Girl: I know, that I want to be with Rob. He wants to be with me. That’s as much as I know about love... But, you’ve never asked me about him!... as though he was a boy on the end of my nose, polite people don’t mention it, they just wait for it to drop off.
Woman: What is she talking about?
Boy: About Rob.
Woman: What should I have asked her?... he’s married.
Girl: And not to me.
Woman: No! and not Jewish.
Girl: How do you make me “jewish”? — I haven’t been to school since Rosh Hashona 1968.
Boy: I went to Yom Kippur, in ’71.
Man: So what? — being Jewish is what makes you a Jew, what you do about it doesn’t change a bloody thing.
Girl: So you make me a heretic or something?
Man: What’s that?
Girl: Oh... understand ME... understand yourselves!
Boy: It has all been gone over — hasn’t it? One way or another, the hair-tearing and the chest-beating, who’s she going? So can’t we manage a quiet parting? You know, can’t we wish Wendy “bon voyage”?
Woman: Bon voyage.
(There is a slight beat, then the Girl turns slowly to go.)
Man: Bon voyage... You alright for money?
Girl: I’m alright.
Man: Is your ticket paid for?

Boy: She hopes you settle down, have kids, be happy.
Boy: That’s a good name.
Man: ’s what I told your mother.
Woman: Bring it up now why not?
Girl: I — I have to go.
Woman: What time is it?
Girl: Really I do.
Man: You got a sleeper?
Girl: Yes.
Woman: Should I put the kettle on? — a quick cup of tea.
Girl: No thanks, Mum.
Woman: James?
Man: You going to run her to the station?
Boy: I thought I’d take her in to Central.
Man: I mean to Central.
Boy: Yes.
Woman: What time will you arrive, in Melbourne?
Man: In the morning, she said.
Woman: Don’t forget to eat.
Girl: I will eat.
Man: He’s a nice boy, this Robbie?
Beat
Girl: Yes Dad, he’s a nice boy.
Woman: Why doesn’t he get a divorce?
Man: Jamie, the car keys are on the hall table.
Boy: Good.
Man: You’d best get her warmed-up.
Boy: Oh, yeah, alright.

(He looks briefly around, then he goes out. A sleepy beat.)
Girl: He — we have discussed divorce.
Woman: Is he a Catholic?
Girl: No.
Man: Are there children?
Girl: No.
Woman: Thank God for that.
Man: How old?
Girl: He’s — thirty-three.
Woman: An older man is good.
Man: Like Robert Redford?
Girl: No:... Peter O’Toole a bit.
Woman: What does he do?
Girl: He’s a teacher.
Woman: That’s good, a profession.
Man: What does he teach?
Girl: Languages.
Woman: Is he foreign?
Girl: I — oh, there’s such a lot... I’ve been aching to tell you.
Man: So you should have told us.
Girl: But, I said, you never asked me.
Man: You know your mother and we, don’t like to seem pushy.
Beat
Girl: Mummy still doesn’t approve.
Woman: It isn’t quite what we hoped for, that’s all.
Man: But, it’s your life.
Girl: Yes.
Man: Whatever we say, it won’t change your mind.
Girl: You never know.
Man: Wendy, you know! — you’re determined.
Girl: Aah... not really.
Woman: Just, there is one thing, you have to remember, if it’s wrong, if you’re wrong, then you don’t be proud, you come home, you come back to your family. You understand? We won’t ask questions. Your room is always here. Just come — if it’s wrong. Please God, it won’t be wrong.
Man: Amen.
(He looks across to where the Girl leans in to gently kiss the Woman; then she turns to the Man as the Boy enters to wait on the edge of the area. The Girl kisses the Man gently and that position is held as)
Boy: They’ve been good parents, according to their understanding of that role... I’m not sure what other definitions there could be. Anyway, good parents — but very dull. And my sister and I have been led through the marbled halls of learning, to climb out the far end with fevered imaginations — we want to crush everything dull. Whammo — we have a downer on poor old David and Frances... But I think they are inevitable human beings and Wendy thinks they’re dull because they’re married, devoted, Jewish, work for a living and
year for grandchildren. Not so, they’re dull, because they’re dull. I am single, apathetic, agnostic, a blunder and a creature of supreme inconsequence: a genuine, stonebroke bore. And my sister may smoke on the weed with her estranged boyfriend and claw her way through the Kama Sutra and none of it would stop her from being Wendy Singer. She’s stuck with that. Is this reconciliation, truth, or fraud? —we’re not a very demonstrative family. (And he steps into the group as the animal with the Girl stepping back.)

Boy: All set?

Man: I didn’t hear you start up.

Boy: Because I don’t rev the guts out of it, the way you do.

Woman: Get your own car, then you can make sure it’s driven properly.

Man: Thirty years I’ve been a driver.

Boy: I only said you over-rev.

Man: Then get your own car.

Boy: I don’t think my grant will stretch to it.

Man: So moonlight; you won’t be the only one at the University with a part-time job.

Boy: Dad, you are a terrible driver — ok? finish girl? Is this what I leave behind?

Man: Aaah — we always fight, it’s natural, we always fight.

Boy: I don’t fight.

Woman: He’s clever you know, a genius.

Boy: What is this?

Man: It’s — we need a bit upset, eh?

Woman: You should ask him to play the guitar.

Boy: Oh, what? — not that one!

Woman: He beggs us for a guitar.

Girl: I know.

Woman: He has, he says, a “feeling” that he could be a really good guitarist. So, your father buys him a top-class guitar; ninety something dollars.

Man: Eighty, eighty-two.

Woman: It’s still a lot of money.

Girl: I know Mum.

Woman: At night he sits in his room, and at the end he has learned two chords, but, he has not become a virtuoso. So, from that day to this he has not touched the guitar.

Boy: So what?

Woman: So, that’s what sort of a boy you are.

Boy: So what?

Woman: So, your sister is leaving home shemie, say something to her.

Man: You mother, Wendy, is asking you, roundabout, that you shouldn’t leave her alone with us terrible men.

Woman: You can cope with.

Girl: I will write.

Woman: For sure, you might even ‘phone, it isn’t so expensive.

Man: Reverse the charges.

Woman: Yes.

Girl: I’ll ... We right?

Man: What’s that supposed to mean?

Woman: Do you know what James is?

Man: You’re going to tell me.

Woman: Our only son, is a sob. Whatever else, at least Wendy is not a sob.

Man: He’s young.

Woman: You’ve been a girlfriend? He talks to you about his ambitions? Speak with him, David, speak ... He will end up living with a swarmer in Alice Springs, playing two chords on his guitar.

Man: He’ll be alright — he’s Singer man.

Woman: What is that?

Man: Alright. I’ll I’ll speak to him.

Woman: Yes ... I’ll make the tea now.

And she moves off, rather warily, to busy herself making a cup of tea in the kitchen. A beat, then the Man looks to the audience. He is tired and he speaks slowly, thoughtfully.

Man: To my father, the candles, the family, the Shema, they were the pillars of life. They were the values that possessed me. I cannot escape that anchor. I don’t want to; it is my anchor, holding me to my father and mother who cannot, therefore, die until I die. Now my daughter, Wendy, has left home. I fret for what of my daughter, I travel with her. She talks about a “new life”; but she is trapped by the one life, embraced by the people who will go on living with her and loving her — even if she loathes them and wishes their memories dead. I am inside Wendy now, and she can never be rid of me. What value possesses her? We, do not light the candles, she doesn’t eat kosher; she cannot receive the Shema ... Shema vishara adeni echolouin adeni echolouin ... and shall shout them up upon the doorposts of your house and upon they gates. No’muzza is screwed to our doorpost. The old light in a small life — James and Wendy won’t see me that way ... Me, I stayed put — as for our harps, we hanged them upon: upon the trees that are therein ... and my right hand did lose its cunning, maybe. Maybe as they grow up, grow into my problems they will say I was the man who let them find their own values, in the dust. They cannot do it without a light. (He holds his look on the audience, and his head will slowly drop as he dozes. The Woman’s voice plays over as she finalises the preparation of the tea things.)

Woman: (V.O.) What can I say? Wendy is like me. My parents didn’t want me to marry David, they thought I could do better. I think maybe. I could have. But, he looked like Montgomery Clift and now he’s just part of the way I live my life so I don’t ask those questions, anymore. Neither does he.

(He lifts the tray and enters the living area, gently waking him with.)

Woman: Tea, Doov. (And she moves to set the tray down and pour, and)</p>
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in

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After all the hassles of just trying to interview Reg Livermore I was quite justly antagonistic. The previous day I had sat for forty minutes during rehearsals, impotently waiting for the promised interview. Not that the time was wasted, it was a delight to see this magnificent stage presence without the aid of makeup, costumes and props, making the words he had written and the characters he had created come alive. Dressed in a blue shirt unbuttoned at the wrists, a red T-shirt with white stripes across the chest, faded denims thrust into black socks and incongruous patent shoes, he reflected all the colours of the garish, vulgar upper lip of the proscenium. He won me completely. I was transfixed by the talent that strutted, challenged and cared, on the tongue of a stage set like a primeval scream. And amazed at the concentration of this consummate artist who can rehearse for seven hours a day to the backing of the Baxter Funt Bandsband, a buzz saw, an intermittent hammer and a liberated toddler with an apparently unconcerned mother and a limitless vocal range. I was not surprisingly shocked to be told that Reg was 'too nervous to be interviewed today' — Too nervous? A man who could transcend all that cacophony to do his job. I left in quiet fury not with Australia's home-grown 'Superstar' but with his army of starstruck protectors.

The following day everything was different. 'Yes Mr Livermore can give you fifteen minutes at 1.30.' I cancelled a lunch and whipped my complaining mini to the Bijou convinced that this would be yet another abortive trip. But No... director Peter Batey met me at the door. 'Terribly sorry' he explained 'but no one had told us you were coming yesterday'. Reg was really upset 'sorry about all the noise let's find you somewhere quiet'. Any antagonism I still felt fell away when we found Reg, in a cloud of multi-coloured costumes issuing from four steaming sewing machines in the circle foyer, and he led me into the theatre and dusted off a seat for me. The greatest star in Australia's theatrical firmament was looking after me like a solicitous usher in the theatre his father Bert Livermore managed in 1940. Had he ever been to the Bijou in those days? 'No.' he grinned 'I was a screaming kid in a flat in Strathfield then, not the sort of thing you would dare to
Drag shows have proved to be nothing short of a phenomenon here, in everything from backstreet clubs, to R.S.L.'s to glittering theatres. Recently two of Australia's leading lights of the form Reg Livermore and Tracey Lee had shows opening. Mary Dagmar Davies in interview with each looks at the men behind the feminine masks and the theatricality of their work.

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Does anyone ever recognise themselves? ‘I don’t think they’d dare’ he laughs, ‘I don’t think anyone would come up and say ‘that was me you bastard’ and smash me in the face’.

Is he nervous about comparison to Betty? ‘I wouldn’t compare it to Betty in any way. I don’t think the audience will. Wonderwoman is a visual assault glaring and different. Of course Betty is still there, she is still in my mind but there are more of us on stage (the characters he has created) more problems to be shown and explored.’

What about the responsibility? Suddenly the impish face looks tired ‘Yes the responsibility. It has to be mine there is nobody else — I don’t mean there is no one backing me and I am obviously not alone on stage there are the Reginas who are brilliant and the Baxter Funt Band. But I must pace the show and make it work for the audience. Eric Dare has lavished an enormous budget on my fantasies (Wonderwoman has cost $110,000 to stage). It’s not a wank by any means. I hope it says something to people.’

‘Please don’t think that I dislike women’, as though it is something he has forgotten to mention. I didn’t, anyone who can spend as much time as Reg Livermore searching for the sources of the myriad of problems that beset women in our society is certainly not a woman hater.

And the music, why not original music for this very original talent? ‘I suppose the ultimate is a show with original compositions. But I respond to the music I hear and if the feeling in a song is right there is no point in me writing a song that is going to say the same thing. My response to music is part of the context of the show and the show is about response to events and feelings.’

How does he prepare? ‘I get to the theatre about one and a half hours before the show. Then I wander round for a bit and talk myself into it. Then I might go and paint my fingernails and walk around again. It’s really like putting it off because I know I am in for a gruelling time once I am up there. Twenty minutes beforehand I throw the face on and that’s it — I’m committed’.

And afterwards? ‘I’m buggered. I’ve done it — there is no more’.
LIFE IS NOT A DRAG — Reg Livermore

You might say that drag for me is a tulle of trade. Contrary to popular belief I do not consider myself a drag queen. How could I entertain a future of serious drag, for God’s sake? I am simply too beefy, too squat, too much a football hero physically for me ever to be a serious contestant in the Miss Australia quest. I have occasionally harboured secret ambitions to appear at Capriccio’s and before that at The Purple Onion, but only on the understanding that it be known as the Ugliest Show in Town...

Now I have my own shows and my females are disturbingly and compromisingly masculine because I am a man. They are a healthy comic ruse.

But my own interest in drag or otherwise is the least important aspect of my work. I have not spent hundreds of years aching to slip into a frock, a divine frock, nor have I considered shaving my legs or armpits. If I truly wanted to be a woman I would probably begin by having an operation...

It is important to remember that in most cases the performer has a task before him (or her); a duty to the audience. I don’t believe the theatre is the place for self-indulgence. The artist must speak for everyone. As a solo performer, therefore, I have to make use of every bit of talent and skill I have. Perforce, therefore, I must appear as both sexes.

I use drag as a means of awakening audiences to their own strengths and weaknesses.

My particular approach to drag is the great overstatement. It is in the grand tradition of overkill, hanging somewhere between vaudevillian and burlesque. It is grotesque, it is outrageous, it is bizarre. It is not pretty or glamorous. It is ultimately, I hope, poignant, lonely, pathetic and then beautiful. But I never want my audience to believe I am the woman in question.

Remember I do occasionally appear before the public as myself. I sometimes appear as a man also.

Printed from the introduction to DRAGSHOW with the kind permission of Currency Methuen. The book, to be published in late November, not only includes the Elocution of Benjamin Franklin by Steve J. Spears and Mates by Peter Kenna but also over a hundred photographs (with eight pages in colour) of drag queens and transvestite shows such as Lindsay Kemp’s and Reg Livermore’s. To complete the material on the drag scene there are interviews with Rose Jackson, Holly Brown, and members of the Seahorse Club of Australia.
Tracey Lee's real success, as a female impersonator, first came 18 years ago at the 'Carousel' in Paris; it is ironic that he should say goodbye to the drag at the Carousel in his home town. Why is he giving it all away? 'Because' he says, 'There are not enough opportunities to progress. Who is there today to impersonate? There seems to be an absence of striking distinctive, womanly women. How could any of us do Raquel Welch or Fay Dunaway.' What a sad indictment — soon the female impersonators will have to impersonate the female impersonators. One gets the impression women are simply dying out of the theatre.

Will Tracey Lee miss the drag? 'No, not at all. It is a phase I have completed. I will write, hopefully do some straight acting and I can produce — I have a couple of ideas for television.'

But where did this man, who knocked out London when he replaced Danny La Rue at Winston's. As a little boy sitting in the local cinema he fell in love. He fell in love with women, the glamorous women who paraded across the screen Marlene Dietrich, Dorothy Lamour, Bette Davis, and so many more. With kindness and integrity he built a living monument to the ladies he loved.

...as Margaret Rutherford

Even as a child he was a brilliant mimic. He started by imitating his mother on the telephone, cancelling dental appointments she had made for him, saying he wasn't well and couldn't go to school. He always mimicked women never men. His mother had a theatrical flair but it was his aunt who nurtured the talent and taught him to sing, dance and recite. His father was very strict and hated the theatre — his parents were, not surprisingly, less than enthusiastic when they found where in the theatre their son's ambitions lay.

His first booking was at Andreas Night Club in Sydney in 1959. He auditioned in a dress and after he had signed the contract the management was amazed to discover they had hired a man. That was even better, an added bonus. The French impresario Coccinelle saw his performance at Andres and booked him for 'Le Carousel'. That was just a start, he has played most of the big theatres and topped the bill in the finest nightclubs throughout Europe and Africa.

Eventually the stars he was impersonating came to see him. The first was Dorothy Lamour, they formed a lasting friendship and he stays with her whenever he is in the United States. It was Dorothy Lamour who introduced Tracey Lee to Bette Davis, who was fascinated to hear that he was playing the Margo Channing role in the stage version of All About Eve in Australia. (One can't help feeling that had Tracey Lee produced and starred in Applause here it might still be running). Bette Davis then came to Australia. She was appearing in the Concert Hall at the Opera House playing herself and presenting clips from her films. In the Opera Theatre next door Tracey Lee strutted, and snapped the staccato, smoking doppelganger of the great lady.

Hello Hollywood naturally features Bette Davis together with Mae West, Marlene Dietrich plus a number of other characters we have not yet met. He has written most of the show himself, gathered and editorialised on people he knows personally. Quick changes and even quicker quips, all the verve and polish that eighteen years at the top can give you. Swirled in sequins and sentiment, he gives the audience what they want — a look back at happier days. His show is unashamedly aimed at the mums and dads. 'I like to play to a heterosexual audience who are out for a good time and like fun and glamour — not to mention a bit of spice.'

How does he prepare? 'Well first of all there is a two hour makeup-job after all I'm not a woman so I start somewhere behind scratch. Then I don't do anything. I just switch on the moment I hit the stage. I know people who get right into the part and even must be called Miss Garland or Miss Streisand as soon as they are made up and costumed. I think that is sick. A good actor can be standing in the wings and be just ordinary Joe Blow who happens to be dressed as Mae West. It is on the stage where it must all happen. The moment I am off stage I am Tracey Lee and no one else.'

But why does he want to give it up? Hello Hollywood has all the earmarks of another success for him. He does brilliant character impersonations. His Margaret Rutherford is a delight right down to the quivering jowels. His Edith Evans is spot on. He admits he finds kindness lacking in the theatre. 'I still do Marlene as the great cabaret star she was when I first met her — but people have suggested that I come on and do Marlene wearing a cast. Now just what is funny in that? What sort of mind would want to see me brutally feeding off someone's disasters. I don't believe it is clever or funny to denigrate anyone. How dare they want to destroy. There is enough backbiting and viciousness in the world without making the theatre into a bloodletting gladiatorial sport.'

...as himself...
Dr. Markus refers to David Williamson as a fine writer. He then goes on to suggest that Williamson is crass enough to allow his plays to be premiered by a company that understands neither his potential nor his needs. In other words, Markus thinks Williamson is a fine fool. For the record, the South Australian Theatre Company has established, in the past four years, a policy by which new Australian scripts have been more thoroughly prepared for production than has ever before been the case in Australian regional theatre. After several drafts of the play had been written, The Department was rehearsed for ten weeks during which the script underwent many small changes. The third draft of A Handful of Friends was accepted and then rehearsed for six and a half weeks, again in consultation with the playwright, resulting in a play which is probably Williamson's most concise and penetrating to date. I am currently directing the play for the Melbourne Theatre Company; between productions no script alterations were thought necessary.

It seems to me that Dr. Markus has overlooked a very basic aspect of theatre in his Australian theatre study: theatres. That is the problem, I guess, with such a study in only four months: you cannot find the wood because you are so busy on a guided tour of the trees. And, in Markus's case, his guides appear to have been theorists rather than the theatre practitioners who might have told him that most, if not all, Australian playwrights tend to be businessmen, a term I thoroughly concur) that three theatres do not dominate an Australian city its size — and that the policy, around this, is to build several theatres in each major centre, serving a variety of needs — but this is a pipe dream. Just as Markus's suggestion (with which I thoroughly concur) that three theatres in each major city should be subsidized is also a pipe dream, at the moment. But what a dream! In my three years as Associate Director of the South Australian Theatre Company, I would have given a great deal for some good solid professional competition instead of the limbo in which that Company exists; a flabby, uniformly local press and a loose elitist forum of discontented "authorities" who carve up the local product and devour it.

A lot of the suggestions that Dr. Markus makes are good, in theory, very good. They are the same recommendations that have been made by others, myself included, many times for the past fifteen years. Some of them work, some of them might work, and some of them do not work in Australia no matter what limited success they have enjoyed elsewhere. The fact remains that Australia is a land of conformity. There is little sense of adventure here, least of all in the arts — either administratively or aesthetically.

I worked for three and a half years, until March this year, for a subsidized theatre in which, as Markus says, "a director is rewarded for such non-theatrical achievements as coming in on budget and offending no member of the Board or the audience". Therefore, it is reassuringly optimistic that I can report that I succumbed to neither of these pressures. It's really possible! If Markus is right in saying that the standard of directing in this country is at a level of "smug mediocrity", then I am all the more determined to pursue a personal policy of independence which, even as a lackey of subsidized theatre, enabled me to introduce to Australia new plays, to work closely with the same actors over a lengthy period in work that extended both them and me, to write and direct plays of Brecht, Pinter and Williams, and to directly effect policy relating to conditions, salaries, and work opportunities for theatre artists.

My one regret is that I was not able to do more to encourage respect, in the community and the profession, for the role of the theatre. And, like it or not, respect is an increasingly necessary ingredient for the theatre's future. Television has usurped entirely the theatre's meaningless entertainment role (part from the 'nice night out for Beryl' circuit) and if theatre in Australia is to realize its potential, then respect for the actor, respect for the playwright and respect for the audience must all grow in importance — both in the community and the profession. Only then will true contact be made.

I am sorry that Dr. Markus did not set himself a more specific and less unwieldy task. Without a great knowledge and experience of Australia's scattered society, an in-depth study of Australian theatre seems a tall order. Perhaps there's a lack of innovative or experimental work, but one can't just impose artistic decisions on audiences. A show might be superbly experimental, crisp and vibrant, but people won't come. It takes time to educate audiences away from that with which they're familiar towards new styles. That's been shown time and time again. Witness the Nimrod and APG: and even they tend to be less adventurous now, because they're under financial stress.

Markus argues for a 50 per cent drop in the subsidy level. In a way this has already been achieved. The top six to eight regional companies are already getting 30 to 50 per cent less than their real needs — and particularly if they are to operate with the type of programme he suggests. And by the way, directors' development fellowships have existed for the past couple of years under the Theatre Board.

In the late 60's society was starved for high quality performances. Audiences were panting to get to shows. The Opera Company, even at Newtown, was operating on 100 per cent sales.

Therefore when in about 1972 under the newly formed Australia Council there were very substantial increases in subsidy, there...
complex even if a satisfactory definition of quality can be agreed upon. The playwrights most admire have only had their plays produced with the aid of subsidy. (Should Bond be dismissed as a playwright because Saved played to 28% capacity at the Royal Court in 1976?) Markus’ dismissal of my latest work as being “muddy” because it confused its message is ludicrous. I don’t write thesis plays and never have and if I did I certainly wouldn’t write a play to propagate the idea that “incest was a device to shore up the family defences against creeping vulgarism.”

I never pursue intellectual debate in my plays or construct them to illustrate an impossibly general and highly improbable sociological thesis; — they’re about language, social process and in this case the irrationality of charismatic attraction.

Markus’ implication that the play was rushed, half-written, into production is also offensive. Handful of Friends was written over a period of six months and three drafts.

God knows what theatre is about or what it’s able to achieve but if plays are not regarded partly as aesthetic constructions (akin to music and sculpture) and not as theses or intellectual messages then we may as well give the game away and all become academics. ALEX BUZO

Playwright

Dr. Markus is right when he says my play Martello Towers was put on before it was ready. Any new play needs a try-out, and this wasn’t possible under present conditions. I would have liked a week’s run in Canberra before opening so I could make the adjustments I later made during the seasons. The result in Sydney, for example, was that the production was much better over the last two to three weeks of the season — at the state is should have been on opening night.

As anything innovative or effective in Australia only happens through subsidy, my suggestion is that the Australia Council fund a theatre in Canberra which would be used by all companies to try out new plays they think would benefit from it.

Dr. Markus also says that there are flaws in the play. I accept the charges and can only say that after having lived with the play through rehearsals and discussions with the directors Richard Wherrett (Nimrod) and John Sumner (MTC) and both casts, who tried out different sequences which were added or dropped, what stands now is finally what seems to work.

The first point is undeniable — the play would benefit from an inventive scene concerning sleeping arrangements before interval, but this would also make the play more conventional and shift it into a genre. Martello Towers isn’t a sex comedy; it only pretends to be. Accordingly, I chose not to try to write such a scene.

The second point, that Edward’s father is merely a deus ex sun deck, is more difficult. In an appalling piece of self-justification, I can only say that I intended to hold him back and then unleash him as one of the final keys to Edward Martello’s character. He is of course meant to be a character in his own right, but like everyone else in the play is subordinate to Edward. Luckily, the part was played by Freddie Parsons (MTC) and Alex Ciobo (Nimrod) who established themselves forcefully despite the lack of build-up. It seemed to work, so I chose not to build up the character in the first act, despite several opinions to the contrary. Had I followed these contrary opinions, I think, once again, a more conventional play would have resulted.

It is of course a toss-up as to which direction is the better one, and it’s not known whether playwrights back off from certain scenes because they can’t handle them or because they choose not to. My point is that Martello Towers was not rushed on half-baked; the flaws mentioned by Dr. Markus, and a few hundred other ones mentioned by members of the audience and several dressing room identities, were all worked on exhaustively in rehearsal and performance. The play might have opened prematurely, but we continued to work on it, and soon made up for the lack of try-out conditions.

The only way we are going to overcome this problem is by creating try-out centres through subsidy, as no commercial management will put on new plays (they don’t seem to put on anything at all these days). The malaise Dr. Markus has detected in the Australian theatre is not caused by the subsidised companies, as they provide the only energy and innovation we have. I don’t condone for one minute the Byzantine Parkinsonian excesses of some companies, but solutions to the problems we have must come from redistribution of subsidy, not reduction or abolition.

Dr. Markus sees half-baked work as the major factor in the Australian theatre’s failure to reach a wide cross-section of the public. But as fully baked work (it does happen) doesn’t get the attention it deserves, it is obvious that other forces are at work, chiefly popular prejudice against the theatre.

Given the philistine malice of the press and the endemic Australian suspicion of the arts, it’s no wonder that theatre is not as popular as it could be. 2JJ posits an ermine world of dahings and luvs, the theatre-is-dead brigade possess beards which reach to the footpath, but they’re still hopeful of vindication: “theatre is capitalistic and expensive” say young radicals off to a $9 rock concert promoted by Trotskyte Paul Dainty; the bourgeois are convinced theatre is for freaks; the freaks are convinced theatre is for the bourgeois.

A campaign to overcome popular prejudice is obviously needed, but where would the money come from? The Catch 23 of Australia is that initiatives only come from subsidy. Australian films which have made millions of dollars of profit were subsidised because no private backer would touch them. Capitalism has shown itself to be a noble theory, but it just doesn’t work in practice (eg. the bankruptcy of J.C. Williamson’s). Australian plays have similarly proved their popularity and worth, but they all come from subsidised companies.

I agree with most of the general points made by Dr. Markus, particularly those concerned with the raising of standards and the concentration on human resources, but to claim “excessive subsidy” is at fault is to misunderstand the peculiar local conditions of Australia.

NEXT MONTH

Theatre Australia begins its series on Federal and State government politics on the arts, particularly in relation to the theatre. We hope to begin with a statement from Anthony Staley, Minister Assisting the P.M. for the Arts.
Before there can be any "way forward" in the theatre in Australia a giant step back is urgently needed — back to tragically neglected basic training in every single department.

There is a tremendous — a quite simply frightening — lack of trained personnel in all "backstage" departments of the theatre.

Not, be it noted, lack of talent, but lack of opportunity and teachers to develop the talent that is undoubtedly here.

Sadly one has to say that in matters of design, lighting, scene painting and construction, creation of props and production management we are the backwoods nation of the world.

The few top people we have in these areas, very sparsely scattered throughout the continent, are fighting a losing battle against ignorance, insularity, apathy and lack of funds.

We freely talk of "international standards" in our theatres when mostly we put on our stages in the way of sets, costume, lighting — and the time we take to put it there — would be better and quicker done by any provincial rep.

And this applies equally to Opera, Drama and Ballet.

Leading designers and directors leave our shores never to return, so appalled are they by what they find. And those few top designers who are here admit to designing down to what they know the various production departments can provide.

One designer on working in Australia — "No-one able to paint, texture, cut, light, create wigs or hats — greatly willing but no skill and no hope of developing it. Were it not for the character of the people it would have been the most depressing experience of my life".

And a director — "The production week was depressing to the point of despair. I felt I would never again direct — it simply wasn't worth it".

Harsh words perhaps, but until and unless we can face the truth of them, we will never be able to develop the talents and technical expertise that is necessary for the sort of theatre we so often pretend we have.

Talking with designers throughout the Eastern States the consensus of opinion is that the "J.C. Williamson workshop has the greatest expertise"; "the best and nearest thing to a workshop such as one would find in London in expertise ...", "... a building specially put together as a workshop and run like a workshop on the professional, business-like lines that you can find in London and New York".

And what has happened to this workshop? With the demise of J.C. Williamson it has been disbanded.

All are agreed that the Tote's new premises at Alexandria hold great potential "... as a building they are tremendous, but why no paint frames? Some things are better painted on frames and it saves floor space".

"To be able to set up the complete sets of two productions as you can in the Tote's workshop is quite something".

"Great potential — a lot of opportunity there to plan a large workshop — to be able to take on a lot of outside work".

"I think the problem with a building of that size is to be able to encourage enough talented persons to get together to make use of it, and I have a feeling that in many ways this tremendous potential may be left wasted — there's a lot to be said for one very good production division for everyone in Sydney — or even to be used by the other States as well".

Various designers on other workshops — "Just extensions of what would be considered to be a repertory company's workshop activities and that's not good enough!".

And again — "None is good enough in either facilities or talent or administration for what is being demanded now by the public and the press in terms of the so-called international levels of theatre activity which we are supposed to have attained".

And another — "There are various degrees of adequacy as small company workshop set-ups. There is a big gap between that and first class facilities. You know, it is just not there".

These, then, are the areas into which the young, the talented and the enthusiastic come fresh and eager from their various schools.

A Production Manager — "Young people aren't attracted to want to work in them. When they see something higgledy-piggledy, unimaginative, uninspired, they just aren't attracted".

Spokesman for a group of students — "Well, why go into these areas which are terribly depressing with really no-one who is going to be of any value to our continued training".

Asked where he and his particular group would find their "continued training".

"Overseas of course — there just isn't any hope here".

And so the endless, hopeless dreary round of driving away from Australia the very people we should be keeping here, begins again.

A few tales taken from the Opera Company will illustrate vividly the morass into which we have sunk.

Henry Bardon — about whom more later — designed, for Sydney and Covent Garden, a leaf border for Cosi Fan Tutti. At Covent Garden this was a brilliant feature of the work. In Sydney — after five attempts — we ended up with a deplorable and sketchy painted border which had no relation to Bardon's original concept. There was nobody who could realise his original design, simply nobody who could do it. And the five attempts must have cost as much as having the talent to do it in the first place.

It was impossible to have the backcloth and gauzes designed by John Stoddard for Magic Flute, done in Australia — once again no-one capable of realising them. So it was decided to have them done in London where John could supervise them and then ship them out. Considerably increased cost, but necessary.

And they got wet on the way out!

Costumes for Ralph Koltai's Tannhauser — the sets were very imperfectly realised and the design itself won an International Gold Medal — also posed insuperable problems. There were simply no cutters who could do them. Certainly they were complicated to make; they posed a sort of technical engineering problem and demanded certain skills to construct, but there was no hope of them being done in this country.

So the Opera Company was forced to fly from England a cutter and his assistant and keep them here for eight weeks.

The same company found a splendid New
Zealand scene painter working with London's Royal Shakespeare Company and she agreed to come to work in Australia because she was close to her home in New Zealand (contrary to a popularly held myth, talented people in Europe are not waiting to rush here the moment we ask them — though many never want to leave once they do come).

When she got here she found no adequate building, no adequate working facilities at all and was so dismayed that she fled back to Europe as soon as she could — and doubtless will influence a number of others against coming here.

A tragedy for us, and a preventable one. Visiting designers suffer most because they design for the facilities they are used to in Europe and America. A great deal of trouble arises when work is designed overseas because the designers work on the labour and material costs they know, only to find that we have the highest labour costs in the world — I don't think New York can touch us.

Sad mutilation of their original concept is then inevitable and inevitably ill done.

What goes on our stages is only a rough approximation of the designer's concept. Il Seraglio in design was a thing of delicate beauty. I personally thought what I saw on stage was both clumsy and coarse.

Neither Boccanegra nor Carmen did more than vaguely approach their original concepts.

That remarkably talented man Desmond Healey who delighted everyone with The Merry Widow sets and costumes — incidentally it is heartening to hear the warmth and respect with which his fellow designers and co-workers in Australia speak of both his work and his work — had to remake and paint some of his own gauzes simply because they could not be done to the standards to which he was accustomed.

A leading Australian designer — "You take a look at the set when it finally arrives on the stage and you think 'Oh dear! Now what do I do?' And you then have to beg for a night or a Sunday when you can patch and make do in an effort to salvage something out of it. But it is never what you wanted.

And if you're unable to do this yourself there's nothing you can do about it. I often ask myself — "Why do they pay me this money if they don't intend to put on the stage what I've created?"

I don't mean to use the Opera Company as an Aunt Sally. Its problems are the problems faced by every company (Drama, Opera, Ballet) in Australia today — an almost total lack of craft skills.

And nothing — nothing whatever is being done about it. There is a great generation gap. We are relying on a few older and trained people most of whom came into Australia from other countries. But where are there replacements? What is happening to our young people? What is being done for the future?

Are we to repeat the appalling mistakes of the 60s when the Opera House was built with no thought for the future? The specifications called for a small orchestra with a chorus of 32 because that is what existed then. Nobody thought of the future and nobody seems to be thinking of it now.

It is pointless — quite pointless — bringing people here for the short term. In the first place we must find the money to attract the best people. (Let's not talk of "Afford" — we cannot afford Not to do this.) We must hunt out and find a voice expert who is prepared to spend three years here training teachers who will remain in Australia and spread the benefits of their training. We need to bring great cutters, milliners, tailors, scenic artists, lighting designers, wig makers, and a naturalistic wardrobe suitable for the Drama as opposed to the more flamboyant requirements of Opera and Ballet (quite impossible) to teach their skills. They need to work in a supervisory capacity, watching over apprenticeship training.

It is the essential craft skills which are in most urgent need of attention.

Then it is possible that one day the theatres will be able to offer a suitable "back-up" to the young people coming from the academic training of the schools. A young designer may actually go into the workshops and wardrobes and learn how to paint, texture, cut, sew, make millinery, construct a set, make props, light, all of which his European and U.S. counterpart has had to do as part of his exhaustive apprenticeship.

Perhaps we may even get to the stage to be found in America where he has to pass a special examination to be allowed to practice in New York.

And workshops in which vital and interesting things are happening will attract the young into the careers from which they now turn away.

That fine designer, Henry Bardon, who started his international career as an assistant painting sets for Lila de Nobili — one of the world's greats who could make a piece of hessian look like a genuine tapestry curtain from a distance of 3 feet — had been asked to give a short course for designers and students when he was in Australia to design for the Opera Company. Regretfully that had to be abandoned when his visit was cut short by ill health.

However, he returns to do Butterfly next year so something may eventuate then. Here is a man with the talents, the craftsmanship, the historical and practical background that Australia desperately needs. Bardon and Healey are two men we can scarcely afford not to have.

Richard Bonynge brought with him from Canada a voice coach whose work has resulted in some quite amazing improvement in individual singers with the Opera in the short time she has been here.

It can be done, but only the very best must be brought here to do it. The next best or the one below that, simply will not do; that is a waste of money — money that should be found by the Federal and State Governments to institute some sort of future for Australians who find themselves crippled in a rapidly expanding industry, by lack of training and skill in the job they are asked to do.

There is no "way forward" until we are prepared to go back to do these things. The cracks are beginning to show; papering over will do no longer. Bringing fine people here to light or design a single show is a disservice to them, and in such a brief time, they can contribute little or nothing to the development of their Australian counterpart.

It is a practice made necessary by the continued and disgraceful neglect of our native talent — and a costly practice at that. But it is still necessary. The government, which has the wisdom, the foresight and the courage, to spend money on proper training in these areas will not only save money in the long run, but will restore confidence and pride in their skills to a sorely neglected band of craftsmen.

An Australian lighting designer had this to say to me recently: "I've gone as far as I can by myself; I feel I'm standing in front of a brick wall; I know there's another world on the other side. It frustrates me all the time. I can't get through to it; there's no-one to show me how; no-one to open it up to me".

For generations now he and the people like him have had to leave the country to get to "the other side". They don't come back.

The Old Tote Wardrobe Department, Alexandria Photo: Old Tote
After munching the last crumbs of dietetic pizza, and before the credits of her daily show, Dinah Shore manages to carefully farewell her guests. 'And Carol, you’re opening at Tahoe on the tenth. Raquel, your new movie should be out for Fall. Rabbi, your congress will be at the Hollywood Bowl till the fifth. And Glenda you’re at the Shubert with your wonderful British company. Thank you all for being so wonderful. Bye now.'

As a general rule, the television industry is quite happy to plunder the other media to provide ‘talking heads’ for ‘talk shows’. Australia’s daytime Mike Walsh Show is no exception. The problem confronting producer, David Price, is that Hollywood stars are rather thin on the ground. The myth that well-known actors are by definition fascinating talkers was exploded in the first few shows when Walsh episode, and shows no sign of flagging. Mike Walsh began four years ago. And yet the programme has managed to last into its nine hundredth episode, and shows no sign of flagging.

However, interviewing visiting actors to plug their latest play, film, or concert is still part of the game, and the task is to make the interview entertaining for the ninety-nine percent of the audience who has no intention of patronizing the said play, film or concert. This task is shouldered by the show’s research team and Walsh himself. He admits, “I am a showbiz person and I have to keep a check on myself to make sure the talk doesn’t become too ‘in’ for our viewers. The ‘cough count’ among the studio audience is fairly fair indication of whether the interest level is being maintained.” One of the more eagerly awaited guests was the late Sid James who was touring Australia in The Mating Season. It was hoped that he would be a riot. In fact, the most riotous thing he said was ‘yes’, closely followed by the hilarious rejoinder, ‘no’. The interview lasted a record three and a half minutes.

Walsh is an unabashed fan of musical comedy. When Gypsy made the transfer from Melbourne to Sydney he architected a special edition of his show to celebrate it. It was not a fundamental departure from the show’s usual format, but all of the segments had a relevance to the play. Included were a panel of stage-mothers, a chat with Alfred Sandor and Denise McLaughlan: veterans of the original Broadway production, and several musical selections performed by the cast, in costume. Alistair Mitchell has attributed the comparative success of the Sydney season of Gypsy to promotion such as that given by Mike Walsh. So the Mike Walsh Show audience is the potential commercial theatre audience. This assertion is born out when give-away tickets are offered as an incentive to encourage an audience for the monthly show which is commended by Philip Brady in Walsh’s absence. The response to theatre tickets is markedly higher than to movie passes.

Helping a musical to get an audience can be a headache. Yvonne De Carlo was in Sydney to star in No, No, Nanette. The lady was slightly distressed about the trip to Channel 10’s North Ryde Studios. She feared that the ‘Mafia’ were out to get her, and insisted on two other hircars to precede and follow her. She made it to the studio and the interview chair. The chat got off to a fine start when Walsh introduced a clip from her 1947 epic, Slave Girl. The picture hit the screen. De Carlo whispered through gritted teeth. ‘That isn’t me’. Walsh’s smile froze on his lips. Christ, it isn’t her. The producer was summoned, the show (fortunately being pre-taped) ground to a halt. After much argument it was resolved. The lady was mistaken. She was the slave-girl in question. She had just forgotten.

It was a far easier job helping Eve Arden plug Applause. She appeared with Walsh several times, discussing her marriage, her career, her adopted daughter, everything but the show she was rehearsing. The reason for her silence on this subject became apparent when the play opened ... and closed some days later.

The Mike Walsh Show thrives on juxtaposition: from a mother talking frankly about killing her child to the presentation of the ‘Raw Prawn Awards’ for the worst in television. But one segment of the programme has proven too much for several visiting personalities. Glenda Jackson was touring A Doll’s House at the same time as the Osmonds were promoting pre-pubescent as an art-form at the Hordern Pavilion. They were guests on the same Mike Walsh Show. At the end of each show is a segment called, somewhat dauntingly, ‘Group Therapy’. It requires a selection of guests to answer the same trival question: ‘Who is your favourite world leader?’, ‘What is your pet hate?’, ‘What turns you on?’ Great fun. However, Miss Jackson did not see the advantage in appearing on the same panel as Donny Osmond, Jack Mundey, and Jeannie... from Dame Edna (Barry Humphries).
Little, Ah, well... Lady Fairfax was delighted to fill the gap.

The most successful way of putting in the plug for a play is to present a short segment from it on the show. It takes the form of a "sneak preview" for those people in Sydney who are a potential audience, while still entertaining the viewers on the forty other stations on which the show is seen. Drawbacks to presenting these play segments are multitude: The actors cannot be adequately rehearsed with the cameras; the theatre sets and props must be approximated with bits and pieces left over from 'Number 96'; because of staging problems, the segments have to be pre-taped without an audience present; any four-letter words have to be deleted; etc. etc. ad nauseam. But these play segments are still worth all the trouble. They stretch the studio staff, they stretch the actors who have to adapt to the different medium, and they stretch the audience, introducing them to a level of writing and performance not often seen on television. So it balances out the hassles. And what hassles they are.

Bedfellows was playing at the Bondi Pavilion Theatre. The cast came to Channel 10 and presented a short segment before the cameras at 11.00 a.m. The show was due to go to air at 12.00. A junior executive happened to catch the tape of the scene being previewed by the technical staff. Fearing objections from the Broadcasting Control Board, he gave orders that the scene was not to go to air. The spot was cancelled and the actors sent home before the interview. The producer bellowed, the executive bellowed and Dr. Wright was called in to discuss haemorrhoids or tampons or something more 'acceptable'. Memos shot back and forth, and a much-bleeped version of the scene went to air a couple of days later. The resulting publicity was gold at the box-office and Bedfellows was a smash.

It is difficult to dispute the appeal of a 'safe' comedy or musical to a daytime audience. But scenes from Flowers and Cycle Sluts have met with even more enthusiastic approbation from Mike Walsh's 'mums'. What fascination the decadent and grotesque has for the ladies of the suburbs has yet to be studied... but the standing ovation the Guildford Mothers Club and the Mormon Relief Society accorded the Sluts' rendition of "You Made Me Love You" provides evidence that the programme for the ABC? theatre and films? has a large viewing and buying segment.

Wendy Hughes:

TV STANDARDS SHOULD BE HIGHER

Stan Marks

Wendy Hughes is much more than a pretty face, eye-catching figure and one of Australia's most talented young actresses. She is a concerned person, especially about Australian television, its achievements against its failures over 20 years and, above all, the place of women in the medium.

She has appeared in a diversity of stage and television roles, including with Harry Miller productions, but it is as Mary West, daughter of controversial John West, in Frank Hardy's even more controversial Power Without Glory, on Channel 2, that she is becoming best known. And, those who know, predict that she will over the next few months emerge (in the role) as one of Australia's best talents, even becoming the female star. She has appeared in many Australian films, including Peterson and with American star Peter Graves in Sidecar Races. Modest Wendy, with sparkling eyes and a personality to match, sees Mary West as a challenge.

"After all, Mary West of the programme was brought up a Catholic. I wasn't brought up anything — challenge one," she insisted. "But, it's a wonderful role and I'm working with a great team where everything functions well — it's quite an amount of teamwork, planning and effort from more people than viewers realise. Just think what a huge undertaking it really is, and what it has done for Australian TV and drama in many ways."

Wendy said she really enjoyed the part because Mary West was three dimensional.

"She is a rare part in so many ways, because TV women don't generally get to say much in Australian productions — they are restricted," she added. "Mary West gets to say what is inside of her. That is different from those women who only get to talk because something has to be said. There is in Power a consistent personality."

She added that she often became so involved in something, she felt like crying — that was sometimes also the case for the general state of Australian television.

"TV is a large slice of family and community life here and has a great responsibility which it doesn't seem to acknowledge," she said. "We need more in-depth dramas and short writing dealing with real issues."

"The only way to get good TV is by producing it," she insisted. "This means the only way to get first class television is for those in it to be professionals or working towards this goal, perhaps stumbling and falling along the way, but, above all, learning."

Theatre training was good for TV, but the box was a different medium with its own special dos and don'ts and lessons to be learnt.

She thought training schools such as N.I.D.A. (to which she went) were useful for the theatre and TV. She also felt there was more need for strengthening methods of testing for TV roles.

There was urgent need for in depth probe programmes in TV drama, including that of male-female relationships.

"You know, nothing locally-made has really explored male-female relations on all levels, probed the whole female situation that is altering so much," she said. "After all, there is a change. Women are becoming more independent. Let's probe this in TV drama."

She enthused as she urged — give women a chance on TV, on all levels. And right now. After all, women have talent and comprise a large viewing and buying segment.

Wendy said if in charge of programming she would go on a talent hunt from designers to directors. After all what profession or trade would allow anyone to practise without knowing one's craft and being willing to learn constantly from professionals? Why should TV, theatre or films be any different? Because of their influence they should be professional, care what they do and keep improving standards. Wendy thought there was some lack of spark in the ABC but even though it did, at times, seem to miss out, it was certainly the flagwaver for Australian drama. She did feel the ABC should, like the BBC, have its own independent charter — this should be a must.

"Yes, why discriminate — if the talent is there, use it be it male or female. Whatever has artistry to do with sex?"

On that note, we had another champagne —"
DIGITAL CHANNEL CALL UP OR LEVER PER CHANNEL — STRAND HAVE BOTH

In the past, any kind of memory lighting control system has tended to be rather expensive. But now there's the Rank Strand Compact from the people who invented the Modular Memory System.

It's a compact, economical and fully portable unit with a memory that can cope with 200 cues or more so you can concentrate on the visual effects of lighting design. Yet at any time there is instant manual override.

The Compact has a solid state core memory, which remains secure whether the equipment is switched on or off, and is almost immune to physical wear and damage.

MULTI-Q
A PRICE & PERFORMANCE BREAKTHROUGH

For theatrical productions — on the road or permanently based, for television studios large or small, Multi-Q gives you a choice of options to fit your specific needs. Select any or all of them and you'll have a virtually custom designed Memory Light Control System at about half the cost of most Memory installations. Multi-Q, Strand Century's new, programmable, software computer lighting control system is expandable to an unlimited number of channels and pre-sets. But its uniqueness lies in this fact: Now you can have a system with as few as 16 channels and still get the advanced features of the largest, most expensive, most complex Memory Installations.

- CRT dynamic video display
- Fail-safe Back-up Module
- Disc Library Storage operation
- Individual controller for each dimmer — and much more.

Multi-Q combines the most advanced computer technology and Strand Century's extensive systems design experience to give you flexibility, reliability and creative potential unequalled in any competitively priced system available up to now.

**BACK-UP MODULE**
Allows for operation completely independently of main lighting control, Records 16 complete pre-sets, Allows cross-fading between pre-sets, selected via thumb wheel switches.

**SPLIT-FADE MODULE**
The E-F split fader fades between any pre-sets loaded in the E and F displays, Allows for sequential operation.

**CONTROL MODULE**
Features 2 dipless cross-fade units, each with automatic sequence and with manual speed override, A single 12 button keyboard allows for the generation of pre-set, channel level time and link numbers.

An independant manual Preset, Record and Stage Record. A Channel Control area allows either direct key-board entry of channel level or modification via an infinite rotary control without matching.

Features fade time recording. Cue insert/delete capability. Combinations of manual settings and memory pre-sets can be played back and recorded, live or blind.
THE S.G.I.O. THEATRE

Richard Fotheringham

Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow

The dully named State Government Insurance Office Theatre faces into Turbot Street; a one way road circumnavigating Brisbane’s city centre. Apart from one or two very small stencil-light namestrips on the exterior and the poorly lit foyer displays behind glass walls, there is nothing to identify this square box of a building from the skyscraping insurance office it nestles under. It looks like a semi-detached annexe, a sub-department of the insurance business. It’s an accurate impression.

The story is told of Mr. Kenn Brodziac (of Aztec Services and now J.C. Williamson) arriving in Brisbane shortly after the building’s completion to see the General Manager of the S.G.I.O. Mr. B.E. Riding. Riding announced the total ban on external identification and advertising, and Brodziac agreed not to book any of his entertainments there. In that block of Turbot Street there’s not a single building to which the general public would ordinarily go, and the street isn’t visible from anywhere in the city. People can tell you where the S.G.I.O. is (the digital clock on top is a city landmark) but most still don’t know there’s a theatre there.

Back in the sixties when the theatre was conceived, Brisbane had two city theatres generally acquainted with the live arts. The then artistic director of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Stefan Haag, was asked to prepared a brief for just such a building. He did so. He was thanked for his pains, his name duly acknowledged by the architects, and then forgotten. The Brisbane architectural firm of Conrad and Gargett proceeded with the project under the stern financial thumb of Mr. Riding. No-one who had any theatrical expertise or who might conceivably work in the building had any real say in the final result.

The auditorium was reduced from about 1000 in Haag’s original brief to 615; while the stage, wing space, flies and hydraulic equipment were kept up to the dimensions of grand opera. The central design concept—an Armadillo shell with the armour on the inside — was extended to give a three dimensional parabolic prosenium curving backwards over the stage so that the curtain, fire curtain, and first fly line were 7’-10’ behind the front edge the stage. The stage edge itself curves backwards in fright away from the audience the actors on the stage are trying to play to. It’s an astonishing design statement which has imposed itself on almost every performance which has taken place there.

The theatre opened in May 1969 and for a time looked as if it would indeed be multi-purpose. The Old Tote came up from Sydney with a season of plays, G.M.H. used it to unveil new Holden models; the Australian Opera moved in for a sellout season. The Opera discovered that they could average 200 patrons more per performance than they could fit into the S.G.I.O.; more than enough to cover the higher rental at Her Majesty’s. So they moved out again.

Pious hopes were expressed that the dispossessed “little theatres” would grow up and use the S.G.I.O. as a venue and the three main amateur groups promptly went ahead with their own plans for new theatres more suited to their needs. Occasionally a very successful amateur show did go professional and transfer to the S.G.I.O., and a few entrepreneurial groups risked musicals there. In spite of the already evident design flaws (the small seating capacity, the ban on advertising, the arch which they now discovered made the first 8 rows of counterweights and fly bars inoperable) it nevertheless appeared that the theatre would be commercially viable, if for no other reason than lack of competition. Her Majesty’s was considerably more expensive, unless you were sure of audiences comparable to those drawn to the Australian Opera.

But in November 1969, six months after the theatre opened, a bill went before State Parliament for the establishment of a Queensland Theatre Company, commanding it to present plays “at the S.G.I.O. Theatre and elsewhere”. An artistic director was appointed, one condition being that he/she was under no condition to be a Queenslander. The amateur groups naturally chose to pursue their own paths, and a totally new company moved into the S.G.I.O.

As the Q.T.C. grew, its offices took over most of the available administrative space and its bookings, second in priority to the Methodist Church, now consume 36 weeks of the year. A subscription scheme (which costs as much as the ticket sales it produces) was introduced and lifted the average attendances to just over 50%, and the company pays out over half of its annual grant from the State Government straight back as rent into the coffers of the State Government controlled Insurance Office.

The consequence is that no-one’s happy. The seating capacity is too small for the national ballet and opera companies, and too big for the legitimate theatre which the Q.T.C. offers. The commercial circuit can hardly ever get into it, and the Q.T.C. isn’t allowed to get out of it. Mr. Riding’s vision of an international cultural centre has been overruled, Mr. Haag’s workable theatre design has been butchered, the architects feel bewildered and persecuted by the buckets of criticism poured over them, directors and designers abhor it, and the taxi drivers still can’t find it.

All this might have been relegated to a small scale Opera House scandal — all in the past and nothing to be done — if it were not for three new developments. The S.G.I.O. has just asked the architects for a feasibility study on ripping out the boxes at the back and adding another 400 seats. J.C. Williamson’s has gone to the wall and will presumably sell off Her Majesty’s at some stage, and the State Government has just given out the first contract for Brisbane’s Cultural Centre — a $47 million complex for all the arts — on the South Bank. There was to be a fourth factor — a Brisbane City Council/Michael Edgley Centre (a la Perth) which seems to have ducked hastily out of sight later a barrage of criticism.

It’s made 1976 a time to ask some basic questions about what we need in Brisbane and why, to find homes for the Queensland centre for all the live arts, drawing the famous companies of the world to Brisbane. The then artistic director of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Stefan Haag, was asked to prepared a brief for just such a building. He did so. He was thanked for his pains, his name duly acknowledged by the architects, and then forgotten. The Brisbane architectural firm of Conrad and Gargett proceeded with the project under the stern financial thumb of Mr. Riding. No-one who had any theatrical expertise or who might conceivably work in the building had any real say in the final result.

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It’s made 1976 a time to ask some basic questions about what we need in Brisbane and why, to find homes for the Queensland...
Theatre, Opera, and Ballet Companies which are suited to their needs and capabilities; and to review existing facilities to find out what's worth preserving. What is desperately needed is an independent and powerful committee of review convened to assess those facilities, to recommend what new theatres if any are needed, and generally to sort out the present mess.

Needless to say it won't happen, and in fact the mire is getting deeper. The Minister for Works (responsible for the design and construction of the Cultural Centre) is a Liberal politician. The Minister for the Arts is a Country Party man. So amicably do Queensland's coalition partners get along that until very recently the Minister for the Arts was refused permission to even see the plans for the Centre - and has been presented with a fait accompli. And so the farce goes on, while artists try to make the S.G.I.O. work.

Directors and Designers in the S.G.I.O.

It's hard to find a director or designer who has a kind word for the S.G.I.O. With the help of Mr. Rick Billinghurst (director of two of the Q.T.C.'s biggest hits Godspell and Pygmalion) I compiled the following detailed notes on some of the major flaws:

1. The notion of a consistent actor/audience relationship is the crucial and fundamental omission in the theatre. The vertical section drawing shows some of the problems. The steeply raked auditorium is placed so that the front 4 rows look up at the actors and cannot see the floor; the next 8 or so rows have an acceptable middle distance view; and the back rows look down from a seemingly vast distance onto the actor's heads. An audience member in the front rows is confronted with looming father-like figures framed by an infinity of lights, borders, and flies; one at the back is treated to a cricket match taking place on a vast floor area. It makes the floor the major design component for most of the audience and the rest can't see it.

2. Both vertical and horizontal plans reveal sight lines which diverge at a wide angle. To minimize this and also to cut down the vast distance between actor and audience the No. 1 Stage Hoist is almost always used. Drama performances in particular tend to be set on the front lip of the stage, ignoring some 80% of the stage area and all of its facilities.

3. The curved proscenium shape imposes a central focus on the stage beneath. The effect is akin to that of a religious painting where all the lines of perspective converge onto the central Christ figure. One of the reasons for the standard rectangular shape of painting canvas and the film screen is its neutrality - it allows the artist to determine mass, balance and focus. Like Jonah, very few sets seem to know how to cope with the gigantic yawning throat into which they are hurled.

Technically speaking:

the theatre is a disaster. The high concave curve of the roof means that the Front of House lighting is an enormous distance from the stage, resulting in dim, generalized lighting straight down onto the top of the actors' heads. The curve of the arch also means that there is a huge gap between F.O.H. and the first on-stage lighting bridge, that the first 8 counterweights are inoperable, and that all sets have to be able to break along the line where the concave curtain would descend if by some lucky chance the whole place went up in smoke. The loading bay is halfway between the basement and the stage — you have to load down and then winch up — and the stage hoists are so noisy they cannot be used during a performance. Trains rumble by a few feet under the building, and the air conditioning vents crash about in a high wind. The acoustics are uneven due to a two-way spaghetti effect caused by the perforated holes in the walls and roof and the acoustic reflectors behind. There are huge rooms in the labyrinthine recesses which can only be reached by ladder; they were at one stage optimistically designated "workshops".

So Where Do We Go From Here?

The astonishing thing about Brisbane when compared to the other state capitals is that almost all the theatre groups are housed in new theatres built in the last 15 years. The only shortage of space is in the 600-1000 seat range; the size of the theatre required by commercial managements. If the S.G.I.O. expands to about 1000 seat capacity, then the city will have the following major live theatre premises:

1. Her Majesty's Theatre. Seating 1387, suitable for conventional large scale opera/ballet/musicals, but likely to be closed within 5 years. Rental $3500 bare walls plus staff salaries.


3. The Schonell Theatre, (at the University of Queensland) A well equipped end stage theatre seating 450; would be ideal for Q.T.C. but location, politics, and the present trend towards using it as a cinema make this highly unlikely. Rental $2400 all inclusive.

4. Twelfth Night Theatre. A sparsely equipped building only two-thirds finished which the state government has just bought. It also would be a better home for the Q.T.C., but the now fully professional Twelfth Night Company appears to have been saved by the government takeover and to be setting up in as a viable alternative professional company with a similar repertoire and standards as the Q.T.C.

In addition the Arts Theatre and the Brisbane Repertory Theatre, housed in two small but also modern buildings, attract significant numbers of patrons to their shows, and further divide up the field for legitimate theatre.

It seems clear therefore that there will be no increase in the number of theatre companies, nor will any one of them grow to eliminate the others. This is a very different situation from say a year ago when Twelfth Night seemed about to collapse. If the Q.T.C. could go to the Schonell, if Her Majesty's stayed open, and if the S.G.I.O. wasn't such an artistic disaster zone, then there would be no need for further theatre buildings.

But the Cultural Centre will forge ahead in different to even the most constructive criticism. It's a State which is obsessed by bricks and mortar in matters cultural, which has yet to support in any significant way whatsoever alternative companies who could successfully operate in low cost premises or on the road. And the S.G.I.O. Theatre may well be only the first in a series of enduring disasters caused by political bigotry, bureaucratic stupidity, and sheer blood-minded indifference to what's happened in world theatre since the nineteenth century.
The National Theatre Inc. of Western Australia is seeking an Artistic Director to succeed the present director, Aarne Neeme who will be leaving the theatre for overseas at the end of 1977.

The appointment is envisaged for a period of 3 years and the appointee would be expected to join the company between July and September of 1977.

The Artistic Director is directly responsible to the Board of Management for the artistic policy and conduct of the theatre, and will be expected to direct a majority of productions and with the Administrator is responsible for the General Management of the Company.

The National Theatre presents productions at the Playhouse Theatre, Perth, and other venues from time to time and receives financial assistance from the Federal and State Governments.

Interested persons should write to the Administrator, National Theatre Inc., 3 Pier Street, Perth, Western Australia, before October 31st, 1976.

Newcastle Repertory Club is anxious to retain the services of a professional Artistic Director for a sixth month period covering approximately February to July, 1977.

The successful applicant would be expected to direct four full length plays, conduct acting and technical classes and generally advise the Club on the organization and improvement of the Club's own theatre.

A fee of $6000 is offered for the six month period.

For further particulars contact the President, Mr. Peter Bloomfield, 30 Invermore Close, Wallsend, 2287 Phone (049) 51-2870 by 6/11/76 giving a brief outline of qualifications and experience.

Nimrod Theatre is looking for a Theatre Manager to join its small team of all-rounders who manage the Upstairs and Downstairs spaces in this exciting theatre in Surry Hills. The ideal person will be between twenty and thirty with experience in front-of-house and box-office management, finance, wages and book-keeping, publicity and supervising a licensed bar. A knowledge of industrial awards and an interest in negotiations is desirable. After three very successful years the present manager is leaving and applications are now invited from people who would like to further a career in arts administration.

Apply in writing with the names of two referees to the General Manager, Nimrod Street Theatre Company limited, 500 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, 2010.
ARMIDALE AMBITIONS

Diana Sharpe

DIANA SHARPE is Programme Controller for the Old Tote and Executive Director of the A.T.Y.P. She recently got an Australia Council grant to make a world tour looking at the concern of Sydney playwright Eleanor Witcombe at the abysmal standard of entertainment offered to young people, particularly those under age of eighteen years.

A meeting, an appeal — a joining together of talents resulted in an organisation which has progressed in numerous directions over the years. Based on a policy of total professionalism in all areas, plays were commissioned for holiday presentations and early casts read like a Who's Who of the Sydney Theatre.

The very first production, Hullabaloo Belay, was written by Barbara Vernon, directed by Nigel Lovell and featured among others the late Neva Carr Glynn, Marion Johns, Don Pascoe and John Norman. Artists of the calibre of Ron Haddrick, Diana Perryman, Max Madrum, Ruth Cracknell and Alastair Duncan gave freely of their time and Reg Livermore, Owen Weingott, Wendy Blacklock and Gordon Chater were among the many involved in getting the project off the ground. Within six months requests came from Arts Councils and the Department of Education for special productions for primary schools and the first fully participative class room drama was launched. The time was right and schools productions proliferated with the demand. By 1967 there were four companies touring N.S.W., A.C.T. and Queensland and other programmes offered to speciality audiences at senior school level. Major productions toured the suburbs and played in city theatres each school vacation and in 1968 a brand new Australian play by Eleanor Witcombe was commissioned and presented at the Adelaide Festival of Arts starring Margo Lee, Ric Hutton, Jacki Weaver, Peter Whitford and Don Crosby. All this without subsidy or working capital. Eventually some small funding was afforded by the State Government, but significant assistance was elusive until 1969 when the first major Grants were made by the newly established Australian Council for the Arts.

Major subsidy in N.S.W. went to the Old Tote Theatre Company and it was clear that part of that organisation's brief would be to undertake youth work. So the A.T.Y.P. approached Robin Lovejoy and his Board with a request for a permanent home for its productions at the Parade Theatre and a base office, on the grounds that a sharing of facilities and expertise could only benefit both organisations.

In spite of gloomy predictions by critics, the Old Tote did not swallow up its unpaying guest, but assured total artistic freedom whilst offering a great deal of support. This situation still applies. Whilst the administrator of the A.T.Y.P. is now also an executive of the Old Tote, the two companies are separately boarded, funded, and administered with separate artistic staff but share technical and service departments. Over the years, activities have spread into many areas unforeseen at the beginning. Large scale professional productions have, perforce, been replaced by other endeavours because of economic limitations. The last major production staged at the Parade, The Owl and the Pussycat, played to capacity houses, but still lost money and it became apparent that either ticket prices would need to double or that we must move to a larger commercial house and take risks that could not, in all conscience, be afforded.

Workshops were established for young people from twelve to twenty, first under the founding wing of Frank Hatherley who had had a great deal of experience in the U.K. He was succeeded by Richard Wherrett and he in turn by Raymond Omoei, before the appointment in 1975 of John Wregg as Artistic Director.

The period 1975-1976 saw many areas of expansion, research and development. Three new plays were commissioned for schools. Infant Primary and secondary. Workshops were streamlined to encourage greater development of the individual's potential creativity and, most excitingly, a new Theatre-In-Education programme was researched, tested and found to be successful beyond our expectations.

Money, Money, Money, examined the use of role playing and simulation games as a teaching method in the junior high school. In this we were fortunate to obtain the help of six metropolitan schools which acted as guinea pigs. The programme, although based on the economic systems of the world, was designed as a broad stimulus which could be used for almost any subject. A five part programme of ten hours (two hours each fortnight) is augmented by its application by the teacher between visits. The results of this project were quite spectacular and the In-Service Division of the Department of Education funded a ten week programme for Central Metropolitan Schools in 1976. To our knowledge this was the first time a Theatre-in-Education team had been funded outright by the Department — a break-through indeed. Requests for the development of a similar programme for the primary age group have led to further investigations and research in co-operation with the Five Dock Public School in Sydney.

So much for the past! What of the future? Every so often a stock-taking is necessary in any organisation. I believe this applies (Colorado) and renewing his acquaintance with
especially in the area of children’s theatre. We can be so easily lulled into a sense of our worthiness — so readily fall into the trap of “culture provision” — so quickly be soothed by the sounds of the “god words” in the learned (and often mistaken) treatises on educational drama and children’s theatre that there is a danger of providing what we would like to see required rather than serving needs which actually exist.

There has been gross misuse of funds and resources here and overseas as fashion swings in this vulnerable field indicate possible avenues of prestige and money getting and it is very easy to be self indulgent in the name of progress.

Stocktaking for us came early in 1976. The resumption of touring renewed all the old difficulties conveniently packed off to the backblocks of memory. There must be an alternative to the never ending “ribbon” tours. The one day - half day - stands; the weariness of constant travel and the boredom of evenings in a country town bedded down for the night. There must be more stimulation that can be afforded by a group of three or four souls soldiering through the State for months with themselves for company and the same product for performance without the support of a base close at hand. And there must be an economical way of developing material, of harvesting the talents of a company tuned into the requirements of a particular audience.

There has been gross misuse of funds and resources here and overseas as fashion swings in this vulnerable field indicate possible avenues of prestige and money getting and it is very easy to be self indulgent in the name of progress.

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The decision was not taken lightly and in reaching it we were greatly assisted by the enthusiasm and support of the Arts Council Regional Officer, Anna Glover, who paved the way for discussions with other organisations and was dynamic in her insistence that this region was the one which would serve — and would be served — the best. So in March 1977, God and funding willing, the Old Tote and A.T.Y.P. will, in association with the University of New England, field a company of eight which will be resident in Armidale for the first academic semester.

The company will include a director and company manager and will have a repertoire of productions for all levels of the education system — infants, primary, secondary and tertiary. It will also offer the Money, Money, Money programme for those schools requiring a full T.I.E. programme and a play for the general adult public. Research is already in progress concerning the special features of the area and it is intended to develop material particularly germaine to the district for future presentation. The Company’s policy is dynamic — the repertoire will be in a state of constant change and expansion and there will be ample opportunity to test, evaluate and re-examine and to adjust the programme to current needs.

Indeed, it is intended to undertake research into one particular field — drama and the infant child — in association with the staff and students of a College of Advanced Education in the area.

Since, with the generous assistance of the University, the company will be fairly centrally located, it will be possible to avoid the long tedium of most country touring and arrange “loops”, generally limited to four days. This will allow the actors a much more secure leisure pattern within a community, a greater opportunity for exchange of ideas both among themselves and at an interested, but non professional level and a solid framework within which to work.

Their residence in one particular area over a period of months will also allow return visits and the possibility of resource availability for youth drama groups, amateur theatres and students. Liaison has already been established with several University Departments and special projects are envisaged in co-operation with both Drama and English. External students visiting the University in May will doubtless see something of the Company’s work and the school vacation in that month will allow concentration on more general work within the community. This is a most exciting project — one to which we look forward with pleasure and a certain amount of trepidation.

To date there has been a great deal of encouragement and support, but this, a pilot scheme, must be soundly based with good forward planning and an assured box office. Naturally considerable amounts of subsidy will need to be applied, but the object of the exercise is to serve a region according to its needs and the availability of local support as long as that support is forthcoming. There will be a saturation point and it is important to establish the parameters of possibility for future planning — and not just for ourselves. For this is not to be a “regional company” foisted holus bolus onto a country centre from the city, but a rationalisation of the touring mode intended to build, not spread, and to foster perhaps the seeds from which future grass roots in theatre may spring. Other times — other areas, if this one succeeds. Though naturally such a company will not replace the occasional touring of large scale productions.

I should not like it to appear that all activity will be out of town in the foreseeable future. New aspects of theatre-in-education for the junior school will be researched in Sydney in 1977. A Summertime Youth Theatre will be held in January at N.I.D.A. to which we hope to attract over a hundred and twenty young people to develop their own production for the first Festival of Sydney, and Youth Workshops will continue to expand. The long search for premises to establish a proper Performing Arts Resource Centre continues and perhaps 1977 will be the year to see the realisation of this particular ambition.

Thirteen years is a long time. Since 1963 there has been a slow acceptance of the importance of this work — incredibly slow, with miniscule funding, evidence of total apathy in areas which should be demanding and exciting and frustrations at every corner. But we have. I suppose, come a long way from the time when a small school girl in the country, nose pressed to staff room window, gazed wide eyed at the visiting actress having morning tea and said in awe to her small companion “Gee Shirley, — it eats!”
THE JAPANESE SCENE

A FRESH CONTEXT

Solrun Hoas, Roger Pulvers

SOLRUN HONAS is a Noh Mask maker. She has written on theatre for many newspapers in Australia, Norway and Japan. She is at present Research Assistant in the Department of Japanese at the A.N.U.

ROGER PULVERS is a playwright who has had six Australian productions of his work, two at La Mama. He has also had two of his translations — one of a Japanese and one of a Polish play — performed in Australia and New Zealand. He is a Lecturer in Japanese at the A.N.U.

It's a good year. The recent recession that found more than a few small theatres and theatre workers out in the cold seems to be over now, that interest in traditional forms of theatre and how they can be blended, theatrically, into the modern, has created a fresh context.

Last year and the year before it definitely looked as though the front line of the avant-garde (called ananga, from "underground") were collapsing. Little was heard from Sato Makoto or the Black Tent theatre of which he was a leading light. This group had done some little space in Roppongi barely functions now. Kara Juro and his Red Tent theatre seemed to be one of the world's leading humorists.

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The youngest (27) playwright is Tsuka Kohei. He is riding a crest of popularity and manages to keep a theatre group, "Tsuka Kohei's Office", for the purpose of performing his own plays. Tsuka began as a director, at Waseda University, and this shows in his work. He directs his plays without going into the red, an admirable feat in itself. He has a tremendous following, especially among the young. It is obvious that he knows what appeals to the public and is trying hard to give it what it wants. "I know the stage like the back of my hand," he told us recently. "The trouble with actors and established theatres today is that they have no philosophy. Even when my plays are put on by other theatres, then ... they are directed poorly — structure only, no soul!"

Tsuka has an average of three productions a month now, mostly in little La Mama-type theatres in Tokyo or the Kyoto-Osaka area. Last year we saw a production of his Wait, Wait a Minute Mr. Postman, a play that takes place in a country post office where the clerks are reading everybody's mail and acting out everybody's problems. Other important plays by Tsuka are A Lifetime, about an old man who appears at his own funeral and forms a club for other theatricality and his language; and the comparison is apt. Perhaps he is an outsider in the new knock-about styles of Japanese theatre, but he is no less brilliant than Inoue and Kara.

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A FRESH CONTEXT

Solrun Hoas, Roger Pulvers

SOLRUN HONAS is a Noh Mask maker. She has written on theatre for many newspapers in Australia, Norway and Japan. She is at present Research Assistant in the Department of Japanese at the A.N.U.

ROGER PULVERS is a playwright, has had six Australian productions of his work, two at La Mama. He has also had two of his translations — one of a Japanese and one of a Polish play — performed in Australia and New Zealand. He is a Lecturer in Japanese at the A.N.U.

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The Waseda Little Theatre, the team that presented a highly original explosion of a show in Seeking the Theatrical, a piece that explored the theatricality of both ancient and ultra-modern Japanese dramatic forms, was putting on only one or two shows a year.

But now, if the loci of presentation have changed, theatrical activity is peaking. Playwrights are active: Inoue Hisashi, Betsuyaku Minoru, Tsuka Kohei. And directors and actors are inventive in some very exciting experiments: Kanze Hisao, Suzuki Tadashi, Ozawa Shoichi.

Inoue Hisashi is presently Japan's most popular playwright and novelist. He recently spent five months in Australia, and the play he wrote here, Rain, ran to full houses throughout July in one of Tokyo's biggest theatres. Inoue usually works in period themes, but his plays are about the most present-day themes: exploitation, power struggle, and society. His earlier plays, like The Belly Button of the Japanese and The Adventures of Dogen were noted for widely complex structure, fantastic word-play, and quick-changes of characters and situations. Dogen is an irreverent spoof about the monk who popularised Zen in Japan.

Then came The Blind Master of Yabuhara which was a black comedy about killing to get ahead. Again he used many scene changes, songs, and super-presentation. Lately his plays seem to be more complex. He even wrote one with one set! The last time we saw him he said he intended to write a one-man show featuring a baseball player. Baseball has had a tremendous impact on Japan and it will no doubt allow him to discuss all sorts of political and social question through the drama. Inoue has to be one of the world's leading humorists.

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Tokyo production of Betsuyaku Minoru's The Chairs and the Legend

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this play in three or four different venues, over a two-year period. In each case he revises the piece totally to suit the new audience. He also is able to discard what is not effective and polish the style as he goes along. The last presentation of Stripper was in July in one of Tokyo's biggest halls, in Shinjuku. There was rioting at the box-office. This, it must be said, was somewhat due to the very low cost of admission — less than two dollars Australian. But Tsuka is emphatic when it comes to access and the students appreciate this. Tsuka always uses the same actors, from his "Office", and in Kato Kenichi and Miura Yoichi he has two amazing performers. As the tent theatres of a few years ago, Tsuka has been able to invent and perfect a new acting style within a totally new group. There is always the danger of becoming manneristic this way, but as so much good Japanese theatre is precisely this, in style and presentation, there's no faulting him for keeping his group to himself.

Kanz Hisao is one of the few actors who have successfully bridged the very wide gap between traditional and modern theatre in Japan. Perhaps Japan's most brilliant Noh actor and an amazing intellect, as much at home discussing anti-theatre in terms of the west as articulating his vision for a renewal in classics and the avant-garde. Anything in between bores him, especially anything that happens in or near drawing-rooms. He has acted in drama from Sophocles to Beckett. We first saw him on stage seven years ago in Yeats's At the Hawk's Well done as a Noh play. Last year he appeared in the title role of Medea, Greek tragedy done as Noh in Greek dress, wearing a Noh mask created especially for the production by Japan's only professional female Noh-mask maker, Taniguchi Akiko.

Kanze wants to return the softened present-day Noh to the vigour of the times of Zeami when it was ever-changing and innovative. "The Noh of the future," he told us earlier this year, "should not worry about the conflict of the rational versus the irrational. In true Noh, everything is revealed — suddenly. The power of Noh is revelatory, in a sudden glimpse of truth."

Kanze has often teamed up with Suzuki Tadashi, the director who began the Waseda Little Theatre and first directed Betsuyaku's Elephant back in 1963. Suzuki used Kanze in his The Trojan Women last year, a highly acclaimed but not altogether successful experiment in classic-mixing. Suzuki here used principles from Noh, with actors entering in a formal way, accompanied by music from the shakuhachi (traditional bamboo flute) and electric guitar. The main actors then took up fixed positions from which they hardly moved. The play was literally recited.

Suzuki's Waseda Little Theatre folded in the northern spring. He has now moved to a farm house several hours by train from Tokyo and, using actors like Kanze Hisao, is continuing his experiments far away from the center. If Betsuyaku is the Japanese Pinter, then Suzuki is the Japanese Grotowski. He is deep into experimentation of form in theatre, concentrating on the actor's art.

Finally there is Ozawa Shoichi, actor/producer/comic/balladeer who can make everything from housewives on morning TV shows to Buddhist sermons come alive. Ozawa has been in everything! He has probably acted in every play Chekhov, Ibsen, Ionesco and Beckett ever wrote. He's been in all Sartre's plays. His approach is totally dynamic: "There is nothing said about the loss of tradition," he said. "If people are no longer interested in something, it need not be continued and maintained."

Two years ago Ozawa formed his own theatre group, The Gein-za (Arts Theatre). They've put on a great variety from one of Inoue's plays about the 3-billion yen gangster, to musicals. Shortly he'll be doing kabuki! (He didn't say what kind of kabuki, however!) Ozawa has asked Inoue to write him a play a year, for production. It is an amazing combination of these two, and God knows what they'll come up with.

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**AUSTRALIAN CENTRE—INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE**

THEATRE DIRECTORY SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER PUBLICATION

Orders are now being taken for the new 1976-77 THEATRE DIRECTORY in advance of its October publication date. The new edition of this convenient-sized booklet includes information on approximately 180 non-profit professional theatres in the U.S. and brief descriptions of more than 20 service organizations, leagues, resource centers and other associations serving the profession. Theatre listings include names, addresses, phone numbers, artistic and managing directors and general performance schedule information. The DIRECTORY has been expanded to include theatres and updated to reflect the numerous changes in staff, addresses, phones and performance information that have occurred since the last edition. Order forms at the ITI Sydney Office or write to Publication Dept., TCG 355 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Cost $1.00

TCG NATIONAL WORKING CONFERENCE. The 65 page Report on the Theatre Communication Group's National Working Conference is now available. The conference was held on June 13-17 in New Haven. Two hundred and twenty-three theatre people convened for four days of panel sessions, addresses, and informal meetings designed to confront the conference title, "Examining Priorities and Changing Perceptions."

The full report also contains speech transcripts, panel reports and a participation list. Copies may be obtained from TCG for $2 but please note that only a limited number are available.

BERLIN BECKETT IN LONDON. Just a few days after his 70th birthday, Samuel Beckett went to London to transplant his Berlin production of Waiting for Godot from the huge stage of the Schiller-Theater to the Royal Court Theatre where only a third of the width was at his disposal. The ten days of German guest performances, backed by the London Goethe Institute inaugurated a festival in honour of the Irish playwright, which also included the premiere of two new short plays, That Time and Footfalls — both of which will be given their first German performance at the Schiller-Theater in September during the year's Berlin Festival. The British Press was unanimously enthusiastic about two aspects of the Godot production — the clarity and the articulation of Beckett's power of theatrical imagination and the unusually impressive achievement of the ensemble. Beckett himself was said to be "a masterly advocate of his own work" (The Times), providing practical refutations of the English disinclination to let authors into rehearsals. Kulturbrief.

LONDON HONOURS WAGNER. An exhibition on "Bayreuth 1876-1976" was opened at London's Festival Hall on May 21st in the presence of Wolfgang Wagner, the composer's grandson and director of the Bayreuth Festival. 400 exhibits document 100 years of Wagner productions, the opera house the composer built, and the festival he established. BBC Television's Second Channel transmitted two programmes on the history of the Bayreuth Festival on May 22 and 23rd. The exhibition was sponsored by the Bavarian Joint Bank and the BBC.

THE N.S.W. THEATRE OF THE DEAF will present King Lear directed by Adam Salzer at the Seymour Centre in Sydney commencing on the 10th November, 1976. This first public season is a turning point for the N.S.W. Theatre of the Deaf "which we believe will firmly establish themselves in the minds of the public as a fully professional group with a great future." The season is presented by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and applications for attendance are now being received by them for — General public, A.E.T.T. Members, Children/Students, Pensioners and Party Booking (20 or more) Tel. 692 0555 or Seymour Centre, Box Office, 7 Cleveland Street, N.S.W., 2006.

June Collis, ITI Editor
Michael Moody and Jeanne Roberts in S.A.W.C.'s Marat-Sade

The inevitable spills and cliff-hangers both in 
was opened for the first time to a season of 
flexible venue in Adelaide's Festival Centre, 
with musicians.

They hung from railings, swung from ropes. 
They shouted and screamed; they laughed and 
jeered, dancers combined with actors; puppets 
with musicians.

No, it was not quite a circus. The sawdust 
was missing. But excitement was plentiful and 
the inevitability spills and cliff-hangers both in 
evidence. For three weeks the South 
Australian community at large was let loose in 
The Space.

From August to September the 380-seat 
experimental theatre, the smallest, most 
flexible venue in Adelaide’s Festival Centre, 
was opened for the first time to a season of 
community theatre. It was a fitting culmination 
of sixteen months’ activity by the Association 
of Community Theatres, formed in May 1975 
by various non-professional theatre groups of 
South Australia who recognised the advantage 
of a united front for the furthance of their 
common objectives and interests. A.C.T. has 
already set up an office as a central clearing­ 
house of information. In November 1975 and 
March 1976 two successful and well­ 
supported full days of community theatre were 
held. In Space Eight barriers dissolved 
between the ivory tower of the Festival 
complex and those unpaid theatre enthusiasts 
of Adelaide who swarmed around, over and 
about the Centre (but never inside it) on 
Community Theatre Days.

The community, by definition, comprises a 
range of aims and standards. It would be 
invidious, therefore, to judge all the 
productions by the same critical yardstick. 
Indeed, as it progressed, Space Eight was 
clearly setting up its own yardstick for the 

consecutive items. We were left alone and 
unentertained for long periods, increasingly 
measurement of success: the use (or misuse) 
of The Space area.

The Space, when empty, is an 
uncompromisingly vacant hole. It is essentially 
-square, and the cumbersome banks of seats 
cannot, it seems, be shifted in any position to 
diminish the squareness, nor to eliminate the 
curious lack of intimacy that results from the 
steepness of the tiers and the coldness of the 
blue-grey interior. (To say nothing of the 
crammed discomfort suffered by long-legged 
patrons). The Space, as I say, is an empty hole.

So those productions worked best which 
seldom left the hole unfilled.

Eminently successful, then, were 
Community Celebrations, a locally based group 
of trained dancers and musicians who came 
together under the guidance of New Yorker 
Marilyn Wood during this year’s Adelaide 
Festival. Led now by movement director Julia 
Cotton and musical director Nick Lyon, they are 
fast proving to be a tight, dedicated company of 
creative, talented people with a fine sense of 
their own capabilities and limitations. In a 
specially designed programme, Spacial 
Celebration, they provided a lively, polished 
and professional opening to the season.

Variety of mood and movement was 
intelligently exploited in contrasted items 
which ebbed and flowed over the whole area 
without pause up steps, along galleries, on 
ropes between gallery and floor. Changeovers 
were smooth, one item often overlapping 
other in pleasing concealment of that gaping 
hole. Choreography was entertainingly 
imaginative without being over-ambitious;

changes of attention deftly handled with light 
and sound. Direction of the spoken piece, 
The Apology, an incident by Bruce McKendry, was 
less sure, though even here the natural 
humour of visual and aural contrasts tipped the 
final balance. Less comfortable was the South 
Australian Creative Workshops’ presentation 
of Marat-Sade by Peter Weiss. The original 
production had depended on the smaller, more 
congenial auditorium of the University of 
Adelaide’s Little Theatre for which it was 
designed. There a claustrophobic intimacy had 
often compensated for lack of visual and vocal 
focus. Transferring uneasily to the larger 
Space, it became, through a tendency to make 
every point with equal weight, over-long and 
even tedious in parts. Nevertheless, it 
remained a daring spectacle demonstrating 
the element of risk that is often only possible in 
alternate theatre. To attempt to walk the tight­ 
rope is better than never to be aware of the 
rope at all. And where Marat succeeded, it did 
so brilliantly. One will not readily forget the 
long heavy silence as de Sade prepared for the 
whipping scene; his shirt buttoned on to the 
back of a chair; his arm strapped to the arm of 
the Corday then whipping the shirt while de 
Sade flinched; the Herald finally streaking de 
Sade’s back with red ink and wiping it off with a 
white towel in two rapid movements.

Acutely aware of the visual, this was a 
company too who showed sensitivity in their 
exploration of the area, particularly in the 
second half when the lunatic chorus spread all 
around the audience and the place 
reverberated with chanting and drumming.

Such sensitivity was hardly apparent in 
Adelaide City Ballet’s performance. To seek to 
produce classical ballet in a limited area with 
dancers in close proximity to the audience shows 
courage but little wisdom, especially 
when the programme is so designed that 
performers have to change costume between
Richard Morecroft, Leon Gunn and Ciarissa Zorzan in Spacial Celebration

conscious of the empty hole and its coldness. The items themselves, though competently and sincerely performed, lacked the imaginative flair of unpredictable choreography and gained little from the ingenuousness of Kingston College of Advanced Education Dancers, who shared the bill with the City Ballet. This large group of women students stepped and hopped their way through folk and ethnic dances with no pretensions to professionalism. Still, they filled the hole; costumes were neat and simple; the ingenuity of Kingston College of Advanced Education Dancers, who shared the bill with the City Ballet.

More daring was the unaffected performance of the Good Doctor, which was best in the one original modern piece, inspired by Newton’s Laws of Motion, and surely altogether a more worthwhile exercise than repetition of the incisiveness of comic wit to appeal to an audience from a distance. And none of the actors, caught between the awkwardness of communicating across the gap. Nor did they choose, as did every other group in the season, to leave the seats along two adjoining sides of the square. Consequently, their two similarly constructed one-act plays sat uncomfortably across one corner. Neither Can’t You Hear Me Talking To You? Nor Bananas.

Q Theatre would have benefited from this arrangement. Instead, they chose, as did every other group in the season, to leave the seats along two adjoining sides of the square. Consequently, their two similarly constructed one-act plays sat uncomfortably across one corner. Neither Can’t You Hear Me Talking To You? Nor Bananas.

Endearing too was the Everyone Company in Puppet Patchwork. With lights, costumes and music, they transformed The Space to a place of puppet magic for children. They were less than artless enjoyment, with an edge of nervousness, betrayed at times by lack of concentration. Concentration was best in the one original modern piece, inspired by Newton’s Laws of Motion, and surely altogether a more worthwhile exercise than repetition of historical dances. Endearing, as I say; the kind of programme where enjoyment is increased if one knows someone in it.

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It's hard enough starting any sort of dance company in Australia, a country by and large without a dance heritage, unresponsive to the more subtle language of dance and with a body movement marked by its gracelessness, but to start up a company that bases its framework on the "modern" technique is asking for trouble.

Audiences can adapt to Swan Lake and Giselle, but a short, dense, unpretty dance theatre piece, unaided by such props as "story" leave them floundering, thrown back on their own sensibilities, and as such demands total concentration from an audience as well as an innate ability in them to fill and colour in the spaces.

As one repeatedly notices at performances, audiences dislike having to do it and dance, especially modern dance, has been a bit of a theatrical Cinderella in Australia.

To make matters worse, we are living in a cultural vacuum here. Audiences have never seen Martha Graham's company, or Alwin Nikolais or Paul Taylor or any of the myriad modern dance groups in America and Europe.

True they have seen a bit of "modern gymnastic stuff" buried between classical divertissements in programmes of the Australian Ballet and occasional overseas groups and true they have seen and been intrigued by the Nederlands Dans Theatre and Merce Cunningham's Company, but the experience is spasmodic and the event isn't sufficiently followed through.

Or rather wouldn't be if it weren't for the Dance Company (NSW). This company is the only one totally devoted to the exploration and presentation of modern dance. It doesn't sandwich it between pieces of classical frou-frou and semi-modern masterpieces (like Petrushka) as does the Ballet Victoria. It doesn't throw them almost apologetically onto the stage as does the Australian Ballet. It presents them continually, it redefines the axis of "modern dance ballet" and "dance theatre", and it specialises in discovering and encouraging choreographic talents from within its own ranks.

The Company was first formed on a trial basis in 1965 under the administration of Suzzanne Musitz, a former soloist with the Australian Ballet and Bejart's Ballet of the 20th Century among others. She gathered together a small band of dancers and musicians, and under the auspices of the then State Opera Company of NSW, the company took its first tour of NSW country centres.

Aided by Dame Peggy van Praagh and Margret Scott the group increased in scope, adding secondary, tertiary and finally adult performances to its programmes.

The great bug bear was of course that there was not enough money. The group had no state or federal financial assistance and as such could not keep its performers on a contractual basis.

So the company, if it wanted to survive and grow had to base itself as a legitimate company with a board of directors.

Miss Musitz was fortunate enough to obtain a board with enough contacts, interest in the modern dance and most importantly business acumen to get the company rehearsal studios, equipment and financial backing against loss.

By 1971 the company had a grant of $5000 from the Australia Council, were presenting over 285 performances a year and were more or less together as a permanent company.

In 1972 the Dance Company became the resident contemporary dance company in the Sydney Opera House and in 1973 their first
programme in the concert hall which included Frans Vervennes' Australia, Australia and Christine Koltai's Narnia was an overwhelming success.

Since then the Dance Company has gone from strength to strength, obtaining the services of Jaap Flier one time artistic director of the Nederlands Dans theatre as its guiding light.

The Company is at the level now where it can perform Glen Tetley's Pierrot Lunaire and Circles and have choreographers of the calibre of John Butler, Remy Charlip and Anna Sokolov to mount works for them and to consistently give performances of works by at least one of its dancers, Graham Watson.

It is at the stage where it will suffer either artistically or financially by the departure of Jaap Flier. The standard is high and the dancers eager for more chances to perform.

It can go further in its exploration of the range of modern dance.

In the early days and in that first Concert Hall programme the company's works were orientated more towards the dance theatre ideal. Meaning that, that it used dance as a form of language with which to tell a story. But since then it has branched out into what for want of a better word could be called pure dance.

Dance of this form does not depend on an argument, the form of such a work is its argument. As Balanchine said of his great modern ballet piece Agon, "... there is theatre and there is theatre, Agon is a theatre of a different mind... it does not invoke the didactic sense, but it challenges the eye, the ear, the sense of form and the sensibility towards logic and inevitability."

Some call such modern ballet pieces soulless, mechanized. True they present a physical mathematics, but one that thinks and smiles and acts according to its own rules as does "legitimate theatre".

One wishes that some theatre people would realize that dance was a verb before it was an adjective and that the theatre as we name it now came into being when physical movement was added to the recitation of the written word. When one takes into consideration that Meyerhold's ideas of mass theatre were crystalized by his witnessing a performance of Fokine's Petrushka, or that some of Grotowski's latest work is totally wordless, or that A Chorus Line has a basis of dance and is about dancers, one should come to a realization that the time is finished when we categorized what was "strict theatre" and what was not.

We will never (I think) achieve a totally integrated art form, a gestmankunstwerk, but there is so much overlap and borrowing from one art form to another that the development of each is dependent on the other and that there is so much that can enrich each present aspect of theatre.

The new artistic director of the Dance Company (NSW) will be a young Australian born choreographer who has made a name for himself within a very short time.

If the Company can get more opportunities to dance interstate, more often and with increasingly challenging works, I think it will probably become the well spring for indigenous choreographic talent in Australia as well as becoming the first dance company that toured overseas and gave the Australian Ballet a run for its money and international reputation.

Because the company is small it is flexible and can develop and explore whatever fields it wants to. Dance is probably the only art form today that has so many different companies and choreographers and dancers altering, developing, restructuring and expanding its terminology and vocab. The Dance Company (NSW) is no slouch in this respect, it continually analyses the language it uses and as such is one of the freshest and most forward looking performing groups in this country.
Kiri Te Kanawa and Lamberto Furlan in La Boheme.

was out from London to re-produce revivals of during the period, Tom Lingwood’s realisation Australian Opera of Kir Te Kanawa, were less with spectacular results. The other two performing forces, just about never less of the sudden unveiling of any spectacular new season of the Australian Opera was much performances to mark the debut with the of Bizet’s additions to the repertory in the second half of successful; but the two Copley triumphs, particularly auspicious debut; but John Copley ended up being a good deal more satisfying after the first few weeks. But to match voices and temperaments perfectly is a perennial impossibility in opera, and hers was a thoroughly professional Marschallin which entwined with the voices of Miss Elkins and Miss Hannan to produce an ecstatic reading of the ethereal trio in Act III. Neither Nance Grant nor Lone Koppel Winther, seen late in the season as the Marschallin and Octavian respectively, added anything to the dimensions of the Marschallin and Octavian respectively, added anything to the dimensions of the Marschallin which entwined with the voices of Miss Elkins and Miss Hannan to produce an ecstatic reading of the ethereal trio in Act III. Neither Nance Grant nor Lone Koppel Winther, seen late in the season as the Marschallin and Octavian respectively, added anything to the dimensions of the Marschallin which entwined with the voices of Miss Elkins and Miss Hannan to produce an ecstatic reading of the ethereal trio in Act III. Neither Nance Grant nor Lone Koppel Winther, seen late in the season as the Marschallin and Octavian respectively, added anything to the dimensions of the Marschallin which entwined with the voices of Miss Elkins and Miss Hannan to produce an ecstatic reading of the ethereal trio in Act III. 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And Richard Bonyonge’s tempos seemed erratic, at times, on opening night: they were a major cause, along with inadequate planning of the detail of the stage action, for a very dull Act 1 which was to improve immensely over the succeeding weeks.

Isobel Buchanan’s charming Micaela, as sweet and glossed both of appearance and voice as the pure country lass she is supposed to be, but never soppy or cloying, was a predictable hit with audiences; but by far the greater achievement was Stevens’ Don Jose. What he undeniably lacks in pure beauty of tone—his “Flower Song” is almost devoid of the lyrical radiance it ought by rights to contain—he more than atones for in sheer dramatic power. Right from the moment in Act I when he is first exposed to the animal magnetism of Carmen, his is a convincing portrayal of the development of passion to the point of obsession where it logically leads to murder. The cumulative effect of his last two acts is enhanced in this production by the decision to play them without an interval, is stunning: he is wholly credible as a crazed, unshaven madman, a truly tragic figure demanding the...
sympathy of the audience at the final curtain.

Miss Tourangeau’s Carmen was tentative both vocally and dramatically on opening night; though she did improve considerably in subsequent performances, she never quite achieved the heights her previous Sydney appearances with Joan Sutherland in The Tales of Hoffmann, combined with her European TV Carmen screened by the ABC recently, had led me to expect.

In a very real sense, the two Copley productions which were revived under his supervision this year were the artistic highlights of the season. The casts were little different than they were originally: a new Countess (Isobel Buchanan) in Figaro; a new Kostelnicka (Elizabeth Fretwell) and a new Steva (Robin Donald) in Jenufa. As Copley himself put it, not unkindly, the big difference was that the originals can do it so much better this time round: in five years (Figaro) and two years (Jenufa) they have matured immensely as performers.

And both productions have tightened up under Copley’s renewed presence: the sense of ensemble has increased in Figaro, and little new comic touches have been added; a stronger sense of dramatic cohesion has been added to the tense fabric of Jenufa. And the E.S.O. is now able to produce consistently better, more subtly sophisticated, sounds for Figaro; more frenzied, passionate outbursts during the climaxes of Jenufa.

Miss Buchanan is still not quite up to the immense demands of Mozart’s Countess, nor is Graeme Ewer quite comic enough as Don Basilio, though he captures the dirty old man part of the role perfectly. But it is hard to imagine a better Count than John Pringle’s has become, or a better Figaro than Ronald Maconaghy’s or a better Marcellina than Rosina Raisebeck’s. Neil Warren-Smith makes a fine Bartolo and Cynthia Johnston’s Susannah, never less than excellent rose at the end of this year’s season to a superb last act aria which was the best piece of singing I have ever heard from her. Jennifer Bergham’s Cherubino is still occasionally prone to excesses of clowning which flirt dangerously close to sheer silliness; but it is no doubt better to err on that end of the spectrum than to allow the part to be merely insipid.

In Jenufa, Elizabeth Fretwell’s Kostelnicka is the best all-round performance we have had from her in some time: not so vocally stunning as was Elizabeth Connell’s original, but every bit as dramatically effective in a more restrained way; and the overall cohesiveness of the production benefits. Lone Koppel-Winther’s Jenufa is still dramatically strong though marred at times by excessive vibrato; Robin Donald is a marvellously dissolute Steva, quite different from Robert Gard’s original but just as plausible. Ron Stevens’ Laca is marginally better than before ... no mean accomplishment in view of its considerable power in the first place. Georg Tintner conducted these few Jenufas with marvellous effect.

The two productions which featured Kiri Te Kanawa were both less than wholly satisfying — Simon Boccanegra primarily for deficiencies in the supporting cast, La Bohème for deficiencies in the performance of Miss Te Kanawa herself.

Boccanegra is not among the first rank of Verdi’s operas, suffering from dramatic weaknesses even in its reworked version; but above all it cannot succeed on stage without towering performances in the two main male roles. It was not a good choice, then, for Miss Te Kanawa’s debut with the AO. for the action centres not around the heroine but the relationship between her father (Boccanegra) and her grandfather (Fiesco).

Miss Te Kanawa’s contribution was superb, and Reginald Byers was excellent as Adorno, showing marked improvement since last year. But John Shaw was not nearly as powerful a Boccanegra as Robert Allman was last year, nor was Neil Warren-Smith’s Fiesco quite so impressive as Donald Shanks’.

In Bohème, just about everything was right ... except Miss Te Kanawa, who seemed never really to warm to her Rodolfo or interact with the other Bohemians. She sang well but coldly from start to finish; almost as if she were in a different world from everyone else on stage. Finally she was not a credible love object, as Mimi must be; so there was little sense of tragedy when the time came for her to die.

William Reid, who stepped in at the last moment, conducted magnificently. John Pringle, Donald Shanks and Robert Eddie were thoroughly congenial Bohemians, clowning with an infectious sense of spontaneity that set a perfect backdrop for the tragic ending. Etefa Piha was a fine Musetta, though a trifle thin of voice; Alan Light a suitably scandalised Alcindoro. Lamberto Furlan was a promising Alcindoro, though he is not yet quite there vocally and his acting is still unconvinced, but the voice is blossoming, and he will be a marvel to listen to before many more seasons are out. And David Neal’s reworking of Renzo Frusca’s original 1970 production completed the job started in 1974 by Warner Whiteford; now that just about all the original nuttinesses have been eliminated, it is quite an outstanding Bohème both visually and dramatically.
PLAYS OF HEWETT AND SHERMAN

Melba, by Paul Sherman, University of Queensland Press,
July 1976, edited Alrene Sykes.
Recommended Retail Price: $4.00 cloth; $2.50 paperback.
This Old Man Came Rolling Home, by Dorothy Hewett, Currency-Methuen Drama Ltd., with notes on Redfern by Jack Beaasley
and Merv Lilley 1976. Recommended Retail Price: Paperback, $3.00
Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly and The Tatty Hollow Story, by Dorothy Hewett, Currency-Methuen Drama Ltd., 1976. Recommended Retail Price: Paperback, $4.00

Some recently published plays deal with the reality, often unpleasant, that lies behind some of our favourable female myths and dreams.
Paul Sherman's Melba, for instance, first produced at the Brisbane Arts Theatre in 1974, does not really celebrate the myth of our most illustrious diva as Hibberd has done in A Toast to Melba. Sherman is rather concerned to expose some vanities of the woman underneath the Melba legend, and, significantly, rejects the use of live, dramatically performed aria in favour of recorded music. As in his recent bushranger play The Hero of Too, Paul Sherman deals with the ambivalence of myth, and he has seized on a fascinating aspect of Melba's later life — her relationship with her ghost-writer, the young Beverley Nichols, whose cynical observations give the playwright a way of seeing through Dame Nellie. Nichols was later to write a fascinating aspect of Melba's later life — her relationship with her ghost-writer, the young Beverley Nichols, whose cynical observations give the playwright a way of seeing through Dame Nellie. Nichols was later to write a

Dorothy Hewett again uses a dazzling range of theatrical devices in this play, and there is an extra level of mystery in the "son" P. Laureate, Arthur Ballett's introduction to these two plays is stimulating if contentious.

Tatty Hollow is less satisfactory although, because of the subject matter, it is hilariously funny most of the time. The mythical 40's girl, Tatty, is seen by each individual in a different way, and the incongruity of these views provide many laughs, as do the parodies on film scenarios. But the gap between the mythical Tatty and the painfully vulnerable one begging to be loved is in some ways too great, so that the real Tatty is too far from the reported one to be convincing in ordinary dramatic terms. But Dorothy Hewett again uses a dazzling range of theatrical devices in this play, and there is an extra level of mystery in the "son" P. Laureate, Arthur Ballett's introduction to these two plays is stimulating if contentious.