Theatre Australia: National Performing Arts Magazine 1(7) February-March 1977

Description

Publisher
Theatre Publications Ltd., New Lambton Heights, 62p

This serial is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/theatreaustralia/7
Young Mo
by
Steve J. Spears
starring
Garry McDonald
THE SEYMOUR CENTRE
SYDNEY'S NEWEST ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS CORNER CLEVELAND STREET & CITY ROAD

- three live theatres
- cinema
- gallery
- bars
- restaurant
- rehearsal studios
- multi-level car park

24 hour booking service: 692 3711
all other enquiries: 692 0555
General Manager & Licensee: Christopher Frost

24-hour booking service: 692 3711

- three live theatres
- cinema
- gallery
- bars
- restaurant
- rehearsal studios
- multi-level carpark

Gregory's Map 6 — C10
CONTENTS

EDITORIAL ........................................................................................................ 3
THEATRE GUIDE .............................................................................................. 4
QUOTES AND QUERIES .............................................................................. 6
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ........................................................................... 6
SPOTLIGHT ....................................................................................................... 8
Music Theatre Forum: William Shoubridge ...................................................... 8
Richard Bradshaw, Puppeter: Roger Pulvers .................................................... 10

REVIEWS
Rooz: Roger Pulvers ..................................................................................... 11
The Greatest Circus on Earth: Garrie Hutchinson ........................................... 13
The Game of Love and Chance: Jack Hibberd ................................................. 15
The Twenties and All That Jazz: Raymond Stanley ....................................... 16
The Golden Oldies: Bruce Williams ................................................................. 16
The Sea: Richard Fotheringham ...................................................................... 18
Old King Cole, My Fat Friend: Michael Morley ............................................. 19
Caucasian Chalk Circle: Felix Crampel ................................................................ 20
The Surprising Supranos: David Gyger .......................................................... 21
Treasure Island: Alison Jones .......................................................................... 22
Young Mo: Katherine Brisbane ....................................................................... 22
How Does Your Garden Grow? Collin O’Brien ............................................... 37

PLAYSCRIPT
Introduction: Richard Wherrett ....................................................................... 24
Young Mo: Act 1: Steve J. Spears .................................................................... 25

AUSTRALIAN CURRENTS
Garry McDonald: Interview: Barry Eaton ....................................................... 33
Perth Festival Round-up: Cliff Gillam ............................................................... 34
Arts For Town and Country: Gaenor Thomas ............................................... 44
National Policy: Aarne Neeme ....................................................................... 45

THEATRE ORGANISATIONS
Hole in the Wall: Compromising Upwards: Margot Luke ......................... 38
An Unlikely Birthplace: Alan Cassell ............................................................... 38

THEATRE BUILDINGS
Behind Closed Doors: Collin O’Brien .............................................................. 42

FILM, TELEVISION, RADIO
Sympathy For A Chairman: Stan Marks .......................................................... 47

INTERNATIONAL
Letter from London: Alan Seymour ................................................................. 48

BALLET
A Trying Out Period: William Shoubridge ..................................................... 50

OPERA
Summer Season: David Gyger ........................................................................ 52

L.T.I. NEWS ...................................................................................................... 54

ON TAP
Films: Barry Lowe .......................................................................................... 55
Books: Helen van der Poorten ....................................................................... 56

DANCE COMPANY (N.S.W.) Page 50.

THEATRE—AUSTRALIA is published by Theatre Publications Ltd., 7 President Place, New Lambton Heights, New South Wales 2306 (Tel 049 525976) on the 19th of every month. It is distributed by subscription and through theatre foyers etc., by Theatre Publications and to newsagents throughout Australia by Gordon and Gotch (A'asia) Ltd., MELBOURNE SYDNEY. Printed by Newey & Beath Pty. Ltd., 10 Belford St., Broadmeadow, 2292 Newcastle N.S.W.

Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts and visual material supplied for this magazine, the publishers and their agents accept no liability for loss or damage which may occur. Unsolicited manuscripts and visual material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

Opinions expressed in signed articles are not necessarily those of the Editors,
The publishers accept no responsibility for advertisements placed in this magazine for which finished art-work is not supplied.

© 1977 Theatre Publications Ltd.

*Maximum recommended retail price only. Prices subject to change without notice.
THE OLD TOTE THEATRE COMPANY

SEASON TWO
1977

A SEASON OF 10 PLAYS, RICH IN VARIETY AND DRAMATIC EXCITEMENT —
3 Plays at the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
3 Plays at the Parade Theatre, Kensington
4 Plays at the Seymour Centre, City Road.

THE OLD TOTE THEATRE COMPANY — SEASON TWO 1977

Please send me an obligation-free brochure for the above season. I wish to be included on the Old Tote’s regular mailing list.

NAME: Mr. Mrs. Miss. .................................................................
ADDRESS: ........................................................................... POSTCODE: ..............................................
PHONE: ........................................... BUSINESS: ...........................................................

Mail this form to: The Subscriptions Manager, The Old Tote Theatre Company, P.O. Box 1, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033.
Comment...

As we go to press, the most heavily publicised show business ventures are the Edgley circus and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust sponsored tour of two plays: *The Two of Us* and *Pleasure of His Company*.

Each venture is presented in terms of its international stars—and probably the preliminary campaigns splashed around enough money to make sure of at least break-even box office.

For Edgley's circus this seems fair enough. We don't get enough of them in the flesh—and our own Bullens (who have a slice of the action as well) and Ashtons will probably benefit indirectly anyway. If it is really successful, it should help feed the current swell of popular theatre; after all something does seem to be happening on that front. The top music halls in most states are turning people away; Steve Spears is currently exploiting the sawdust and tears razzamataz of vaudeville with *Young Mo* in Sydney; everyone seems to be doing Hibberd's song and gag *Toast to Melba*; and one of the A.P.G.'s greatest successes, *The Hills Family Show* is now on the road in a three state tour just as their *Soapbox*, acrobatics with music, has. Edgley's circus both relates to our current scene and is a commercial non-competitor with it.

The other—John Thaw and Sheila Hancock in Michael Frayne's *The Two of Us* and Stanley Holloway and Douglas Fairbanks Jnr (Douglas who?) in *Pleasure of His Company* is something very different. We've just seen a big promotional splurge on *Peter O'Toole's Dead-Eyed Dicks* . . . and now this. Why? Surely it would take no casting genius to get two locals for the Frayne two-ender who could, with a similar promotional campaign, turn this rather ordinary actors' vehicle into a success? Why, then, does a body that has done so much for the development both of art forms and artists in this country—The Trust—choose to throw its money into importing?

The Trust is a public body disbursing public funds. This venture is an unequivocally commercial one. If it is viable then it should be to fail; that failure should somehow be identifiable with the national interest. It is hardly the case here.

It all seems like a trip into the past: those tired tours that set the clock back each time they came and went, pandering to a general misgiving that ours could never be as good as theirs.

No one begrudges Sheila Hancock, Stanley Holloway, Douglas Who II their chance to work on our stages. But if there's a lot of promotional money around, it would do our local industry much more good to spend it on our own talent—talent which if properly sold would fill theatres every bit as effectively as imported equivalents.

If, for the ad-man, the more glamorous packageable artist is the one from elsewhere—then why not push interstate tours? The revival of John Bell's *Much Ado* at Nimrod this year is something other states would be clamouring to see if only they knew. And no doubt each state could think of at least one show that would fit that sort of bill.

The problems of the performing arts in the West—and that has our chief focus this issue—are the problems of Australian in microcosm . . . except that so vast a state as W.A. can hardly be called a microcosm. The size and remoteness of the state, the gulf between city and country, present difficulties that are not peculiar to the West. What is interesting—and Collin O'Brien's highly urban reviews over the past six issues have also shown this to be so—is that Perth shows all the signs of a burgeoning local culture that is yet part of the national mainstream. At the moment they too are having a festival, and it's one where East (Popular Theatre Troupe, Old Tote, A.P.G.) is easily mixed with West.

Editors: Robert Page, Lucy Wagner. Assistant Editor: Bruce Knappett

Representatives:
Melbourne - Raymond Stanley (03) 419-1204
Perth - Joan Ambrose (092) 94-3369
Brisbane - Don Batchelor (07) 269-3018
Adelaide - Michael Morley (08) 275-2204

Advisory Board:
John Bell
Graeme Blundell
Ellen Bray
Katharine Brisbane
Vivian Chalwin
Gordon Chater
John Clarke
W.A. Enright
Lynda Gray
Jack Hibberd
Ken Horler
Garrie Hutchinson
Robert Jordan
Philip Mason
Stan Marks
Jake Newby
Phil Noyce
Raymond Omodei
Philip Parsons
Diana Sharpe
Ken Southgate
Raymond Stanley
Elizabeth Sweeting
John Timlin
Tony Trench
Guthrie Worby
Richard Wherrett

Theatre Publications Ltd gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Arts Grants Advisory Committee of South Australia, Queensland Cultural Activities Department, the University of New South Wales Drama Foundation, the Victorian Ministry of the Arts, and the assistance of the University of Newcastle

Advertising Agents: Treweweke Durnford Ass. North Sydney, Telephone: (02) 92-0247
ACT

AUSTRALIAN OPERA
Canberra Theatre (49 1723)
Madam Butterfly (Puccini) in Italian: Mar 3, 8, 11, 15. Producers, John Copley; designers, Michael Stennett (costumes) and Henry Bardon (sets); conductor, Carlo Felice Cillario. Lamberto Furlan or Robin Donald as Pinkerton; Jennifer Bermingham as Suzuki; Ronald Macpahgihe or John Pringle as Sharpless; Miauiggie as Butterfly. Last night in French: Mar 4, 9, 12, 16. Producers, Norman Ayrton; designer, Desmon Dingby; conductor, Peter Robinson. Joan Carden as Lakme; Anson Austin or Henri Wildsen as Geral; Robert Allman as Nilakantha; Rosemary Gun as Malika; Graeme Ewer as Hadji. Lyndon Terracini or Pieter van der Stolk as Frederick. Carmen (Bizet) in French: Mar 5, 10, 14, 17. Producer and designer, Tom Lingwood; conductor, Russell Channell. Margretta Elkins as Carmen; Isobel Buchanan as Micaela; Ron Stevens as Reginald Byers as Don Jose; Raymond Myers as Escamillo.

NEW SOUTH WALES:

ACTORS COMPANY (660 2503)
And Now At Last The Nibble Nobby’s Nuts Show by Ray Biechler and Derry Blazer, directed by Rodney Delaney (to March 5).

Norm and Ahmed and Ray’s Club Shows, by Alex Buzo, directed by Rodney Delaney (from March 17).
The Caretaker, by Harold Pinter, schools production (from Mar 21).

AUSTRALIAN OPERA (26 2976)
Sydney Opera House (2 0588)
Opera Theatre: La Boheme (Puccini) in Italian: Feb 19 (mat) 21, 23, 26. (eve). Producer, David Neal; designer, Tom Lingwood; conductor, Russell Channell. Robert Allman or John Pringle as Marcello; Lamberto Furlan or Anson Austin as Rodolfo; Neil Warren Smith as Colline; Gregory Yursich as Schaunard; Joan Carden as Mimi; Etela Piha or Elizabeth Frewell as Musetta.

Madam Butterfly (Puccini) in Italian: Feb 12 (eve) Producer, John Copley; designers, Michael Stennett (costumes) and Henry Bardon (sets); conductor, Carlo Felice Cillario. Robin Donald as Pinkerton; Jennifer Bermingham as Suzuki; John Pringle as Sharpless; Leona Mitchell as Butterfly.

The Magic Flute (Mozart) in English: Feb 22, 24, 26 (mat) Producer, John Copley; designer, John Stoddart; conductor, Peter Robinson. Robert Gard as Tamino; Ronald Maconaghi as Papageno; Rhonda Bruce as the Queen of the Night; Isobel Buchanan as Pamina; Graeme Ewer as Monostatos; Grant Dickson as the Speaker; Clifford Grant as Sarastro; Cynthia Johnston as Papagena. Carmen (Bizet) in French: Feb 25. Producer and Designer, Tom Lingwood; conductor, Russell Channell. Lone Koppel Winther as Michaela; Ron Stevens as Don Jose; Margretta Elkins as Carmen; Raymond Myers as Escamillo. Albert Herring (Britten) in English: March 13 (in presence of Queen Elizabeth II). Producer, John Cox; rehearsed by David Neal; designer, Roger Butlin; conductor, William Reid.
QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
Noonday Demons and Leonardo’s Last Supper both by Peter Barnes (University Players; to March 5).
Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf by Edward Albee directed by George Roberts (from March 10).
CAMERATA THEATRE (36 6561)
Tom by Alex Buzo directed by Doreen Wilson (Feb 18 to March 13).
HER MAJESTY’S (221 2777)
Same Time Next Year by Benard Slade directed by Gordon Hunt (Feb 26th).
LA BOITE (36 2296)
Bullshit Crummong by Messrs House, Shearan etc; directed by Rod Wissler (Feb 18 to Mar 19).
QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 3861)
For Years I Couldn’t Wear My Black by Anthony Shaffer, directed by Joe MacCollum (Feb 26).
TWELETH NIGHT (52 5889)
The Matting Game by Robin Hawdon, directed by Gilbert Sportsswood (Feb 26).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CONCERT HALL
Jeune Ballet de France, Cote d’Azur (Feb 19).

HOPLA PRODUCTIONS (41 4415)
Grant Street Theatre: The Golden Oldies, directed by Graeme Blindell (Dec 20).
LA MAMA (347 6085)
No Worries by Cliff Ellen, directed by Bruce Kerr, and Norm and Ahmed by Alex Buzo, directed by Mark Callan (to Mar 6).
LAST LAUGH (419 6226)
Crackers at the Savoy with the Busby Berkeleys (to Feb 26).
Sleezeee a cabaret musical by Louis Nowara and Sarah de Jong, directed by Darryl Wilkinson (from Mar 1).

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 1100)
Athenaeum Theatre: The School for Scandal, by Sheridan, directed by Ray Lawler (from Mar 15).
Russell Street: The Doll trilogy by Ray Lawler, directed by John Sumner (in repertory to Feb 19).
The Fall Guy by Linda Aaronson, directed by Mick Rodger (from Mar 29).
St Martins: The Game of Love and Chance by Marivaux directed by Mick Rodger (to Mar 6).
PLAYBOX THEATRE (63 4888)
Hats, by and with Colette Mann and Ron Challenor (from Feb 24).
ST MARTINS THEATRE (654 4000)
(see also M.T.C.).
Leading Lady, with Jill Perryman (from Mar 12).
TOTAL THEATRE (662 4991)
Let My People Come by Earl Wilson Jr. directed by Peter Batey (continuing).
WINDSOR REGIS (51 6979)
The Naked Vicar Show by Tony Sattler and Gary Riley (Feb 26).
Son of Naked Vicar, by Messrs Sattler and Riley (from Mar 1).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Beginner’s Luck by Norman Barasch & Carol Moore directed by Cecil Reed (Feb 26 to Mar 5)
A.M.P. THEATRE (51 0451)
Love’s a Luxury by Paxton & Hoyle (Production by the Nomads from Feb 17-26)
FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: The Hills Family Show (APG Touring production, to Feb 26)
PLAYWRIGHTS' APPEAL

"Since the Australian Council turned down a grant last November for the annual National Playwrights Conference in Canberra next May, things have turned first gloomier then brighter. The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, stunned by their own government cut-backs, retrenched our administrator. Dismayed at the thought of the Conference being abandoned, half a dozen theatre people came forward with guarantees and support; and with new courage we presented a revised budget to the Theatre Board in January. At the time of going to press it appears we have the $8,200 for which we asked, covering salaries for the Artistic Director, Administrator and fourteen actors. Further money has come in from state grants (except N.S.W.); but even on our starvation budget we still need $13,000 in private donations. Business organisations are being lobbied; we need proof that the theatre profession is with us. The conference committee is very grateful to Hilary Linstead of M. & L. for her battle cry on our behalf. M. & L. have already put their own money on the line."

Katherine Brisbane.
(See Letters below—Ed)

PUTTING THE STAMP ON THE ARTS

"Since Melba made her debut in opera at Brussels in 1887, Australian artists have won international acclaim in the Performing Arts. And I am especially delighted with this series of stamps issued on 19th January, 1977, and during the Festival of Sydney, featuring the Performing Arts, in paying tribute to our many fine and talented artists in Drama, Opera, Ballet, Radio Films & Television. Australia has featured famous Australians since Henry Lawson 1949, Melba 1961, Banjo Paterson 1969, Dame Gordon 1970, Dame Mary Gilmore & Marcus Clarke 1973; Australia—Asia motifs with Japanese "Noh" play of the Imperial Court; The Display created by Sir Robert Helpman; a singer of the Classical Chinese Opera. Various postmarkers include Moomba Festival, Melbourne 1989-76. Since the Philatelic Sales Centre opened 1971 the Sydney Opera House was used and is being used for each new issue. Henry Kendall Memorial Park 1973. Then two special postmarkers were issued of The Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian Ballet, when the Opera House opened 1973. As one of my many hobbies, I have managed to collect a large number of Stamps from around the World pertaining to the Performing Arts. My collection is called Philatelic World, Music & Theatre in Miniature. I am endeavouring to annotate it as a history of the Arts with stamps, and give geographical, historical, artistic and personal background of the artists portrayed on these marvellous miniatures that are so taken for granted."

Marguerite G. McNeill.

SYDNEY FESTIVAL THEATRE

"The problems in getting certain theatre companies to participate in the Sydney Festival come about because some funds were unsecured until the beginning of December. We did want the Q.T.C. to go into the Theatre Royal, and the A.T.Y.P. involved, but they wanted a contract before the end of November, which forced us, reluctantly, to let them go. The money did come through and indeed we spent in excess of $80,000 on theatre and dance. Some, like the Nimrod with Young Mo and Treasure Island were backed financially, others such as the one-man shows of Colleen Clifford and Alex Archdale were promoted with advertising. But a whole string of theatre groups were included, from youth groups to puppeteers, and of course we did present the International Music Forum, so theatre wasn’t, in many senses, ignored. And we are negotiating now for the Q.T.C. to visit the next Festival in 1978."

Stephen Hall, Director Sydney Festival

ROYAL WATERWORKS

"The Queen will make a speech and will then switch on the fountains at the southern end of the plaza that will send water flowing down through a series of ponds... towards the Playhouse."

Des Corcoran, occasional acting Premier, S.A. on the March 22nd opening of the Hajek designed plaza, the final stage of the $20m Adelaide Festival Centre.

M.T.C. NOT ALL THAT BAD

"I enjoy working with the Melbourne Theatre Company. Certainly I don’t work for it full time: I don’t want to do that for any organisation... one day I’ll do an article for you, a real cry from the heart on being a free-lance director in this country!" "The complaints that the M.T.C. is huge and monopolistic are in some respects true, but I don’t know that it’s such a bad thing. It is important to have at least two really big companies where you can get all the back-up and expertise you need to do certain shows. And speaking as a director, the kind of technical back-up one gets at the M.T.C. is first rate; it’s not always as good elsewhere. Moreover, I’ve put up ideas to the company—of shows that I’ve wanted to do—and just as many have been accepted as rejected. ‘With a company like the Old Tote... they invite a director to do a production, presumably because he is a recognized director, and then they’re not interested in what that director has to say about choice of play. That seems to me an inconsistency. ‘Then, with theatres like the Pram Factory and Nimrod: they have their own people and that, in the main, is that. Sumner at the M.T.C. has been pretty adventurous about getting new people in.’"

Mick Rodger, free-lance director.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors,

Withdrawal of Australia Council support for our National Playwrights Conference this year is a serious blow when the flegling local industry desperately needs support at a basic level. No one would question its importance in this respect, bringing together with theatre professionals, writers, directors, actors, agents and publishers, for nearly two weeks intensive work-shopping and discussion. M. & L. Casting suggest that all readers of this magazine contribute financially to get the Conference on the road again. Perhaps donations/cheques could be sent care of Theatre Australia Yours sincerely, Hilary Linstead, M. & L. Casting. Kings Cross. Though the Australia Council has given some money [see above] there is still a $13,000 shortfall and we would be happy to pass on donations to the Conference committee. They should be made out to the Australian National Playwrights Conference, who no doubt will issue receipts. Editor.

Dear Editor,

In your Quotes and Queries column in Vol. 1 No. 3 of Theatre Australia, John Smythe, referring to the Statis Group’s projects on Sylvia Plath and Peer Gynt, states quite falsely that "...the A.P.G. collective... is being less than supportive of its self-willed offspring both on financial... and ideological... grounds." We wish to point out firstly that the original Statis project had a deficit of $9,000 which was met from A.P.G. funds. Secondly, touring the Sylvia Plath show was seen as a possible way of offsetting the deficit of the new Peer Gynt project, which will still have a deficit of at least $2,000, and that also will be met from A.P.G. funds. It should be clear from this expenditure of $11,000 that the A.P.G. has given substantial support to the Statis Group, at least equivalent to that given to other A.P.G. activities. Yours sincerely, Margaret Clancy for the A.P.G. Executive

Dear Editors,

In the Christmas issue, Katharine Brisbane states that the Black Theatre in Redfern opened a year ago with The Cakeman. This is incorrect. The Cakeman was produced by Bob Maza in January 1975, it was now by my reckoning, January 1977. It’s a bit hard to see what Katharine Brisbane means by saying the theatre has come a long way. In 1975, the audience was largely black, the play had guts and was involving; in December 1976, according to your reviewer, the audience was all white, the play was rough but involving, the black actors had growing experience, the white actors were gutsy.

Why doesn’t Theatre Australia invite someone involved in the Black Theatre for a comment on the growth of their exciting, raucous brainchild?

Sincerely, Sally Morrison
Kew, Victoria
OGILVIE ON THE LOOSE

"It is a feeling of relief and release: after four years of sixteen hours a day I feel totally and wonderfully in limbo.

"One of the reasons I left Adelaide was to get the chance to move in other directions. Most of my life seems to have been connected with regional companies like the S.A.T.C. and the M.T.C. And the Adelaide company is really another example of what the M.T.C. and the Old Tote have been doing all these years—a more obvious example even. There’s perhaps more variety in Melbourne audiences: at the S.A.T.C. I was really feeling the restriction of having to work hard preparing plays for such a comfortable class. And they really dictate what succeeds in Adelaide. The greatest adventure the audience had over the last couple of years was Equus—which I thought a load of middle class crap.

"Acting again in the children’s show Old King Cole was a real joy. I hadn’t been on stage for two years, and the role suited perfectly—with the training I’d had as a clown. And that experience of being an actor made me think of all the wrong things I’ve done in the rehearsal room as a director—so many things I’ve said to actors that must have meant simply nothing to them!

"I want to use 1977 to do very little work; there’s Lucrezia Borgia for the Australian Opera but I don’t have any other fixed plans. I want time to look both backward and forward, and I want the freedom just to do a lot of thinking.”

George Ogilvie. Former Artistic Director, South Australian Theatre Company.

DEPOLITICISING FILM IN QUEENSLAND

"Queensland plans to set up a Film Board—like South Australia, like New South Wales . . . and it has worried a few of us that it could be political in its operation or effect.

We want to guarantee that excellence is fostered: there’s a lot of gutsy work going on up here, something which might not be recognised.

So we’re setting up a Film Institute: a group other than the Board, a depoliticised group who can speak with an authoritative voice, give awards, conduct seminars . . . a group who can make people aware down-south of the high standards up here—and show for instance there’s no need to import a crew if shooting in Queensland."

Jon Dawson. Assessor Experimental Film Board.

BENJAMIN IS BEST

Stephen Sondheim, Alan J. Lerner and Hal Prince, over for the music theatre forum saw (see p. 8) The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin recently.

"It’s the best play I’ve seen all year—I never thought I would have come 13,000 miles to see such a play."

Stephen Sondheim.

DIANE HERE FOR PREMIERE

Diane Cilento is in her Australian homeland to set up the world premiere of For Years I Couldn’t Wear My Black by Anthony Shaffer. The title was to be Widows Weeds (as announced in last month’s Q & Q) but they have reverted to the original. Theatre-Australia will be featuring an interview with both Diane and Anthony Shaffer in the next issue.

"I came out with a recording of the play by J.C. Williamson Theatres, and all the cuts, for Joe MacColum who will be directing it here.

Diane Cilento will be directing it at Greenwich later in the year."

The Greenwich Theatre actors, and all the cuts, for Joe MacColum who will be directing it here. I will be directing it at Greenwich later in the year and hope for a transfer to the West End.

I’ve seen some of the rehearsals, which looked very encouraging, and Tony is coming out the arrived 31st January—Ed.) to be in on the final stages and for the opening on February 9th.

"My other reason for being here is the school we’re opening from April 24th at the farm I have bought North of Cairns. Our aims can’t be expressed in a sentence, but it’s definitely not some kind of nudist colony as some of the press have implied.

"My long term plans in Australia? You’d better find out about those during the interview.”

Diane Cilento.
Spotlight

PRODUCTIONS
The Golden Oldies seems to have dispelled any Grant Street (Melbourne) gremlins and is playing to good houses. A national tour seems on the cards, Hooray for Hooptie.
Big Toys, so the word goes, is the title of the next Patrick White play for the Tote (Sydney), with Jim Sharman again directing. Seems like a classic author/director relationship in the Dexter/Wesker, Hall/Pinter mode.

Tarantara, the Q & S medley, has had a stunning success in the last seven weeks at Marion Street (Sydney) and four weeks at the Theatre Royal (Sydney). Marion Street’s follow-up is Something’s Afoot: a musical spoof of Agatha Christie’s Ten Little Niggers.

The Australian Performing Group are taking their tour of The Hills Family Show to Sydney’s Bondi Pavilion where the company will follow Marilyn Rutherford’s play The Training Run which has done well.

PLACES
The A.T.Y.P./Old Tote Armidale project will be in situ this month. The University of New England are lending the group a van. Accommodation is a problem because the company mascot, a huge Scottish deerhound belonging to Barbara Dennis, is travelling with them.

A mini Playwright’s Conference? As a Festival preliminary in Perth, “Plots and Plans” is a four day working-and-sharing seminar focussing on writing for children. Amongst those involved is Andrew Ross, recently with M.T.C. now at Perth’s Playhouse.

The West End? After fifteen years in the lunchtime theatre field, and then some touring excursions into Sydney’s vast western suburbs, the Q Theatre is taking up a home base in Penrith and launching into evening presentations of full-length shows. Their first programme of five plays (Engaged, What the Butler Saw, A Hard God, Lock up Your Daughters and The Entertainer) will each play Penrith for two weeks, then a week each in Bankstown and Parramatta.

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company, after the long struggle of their first season in Newcastle, have won the fight for survival. State and federal grants make 1977 look a much (relatively) rosier prospect.

PEOPLE
Carole Raye is still playing to full houses in California Suite at the Ensemble.
Brian Thompson, who worked on Superstar looks likely to be the designer for The Best of Lionel Bart musical in London.
Cameron Allen, who wrote the outstanding score for Summer of Secrets, is doing the music for Nimrod’s Twelfth Night directed by John Bell.
Kim Carpenter is to be the designer.
Martin Phelan, Ann Hady, Betty Lucas, Elizabeth Chance, Martin Vaughan and Brendan Lunney are off to the Perth Festival with the Tote’s production of The Plough and the Stars.

More movement: Ruth Cracknell, Ron Falk, Brian James and Kevin Miles to the South Australian Theatre Company.
Norman Hetherington and his puppets are taking part in ‘77 Leap, a three day performing arts festival “for young people of all ages” at the Seymour Centre in Sydney from February 24th.

There’s been a growing need within our theatrical community for meeting ground for people interested in writing musicals—somewhere to discuss the methods involved; the problems of creation and production; the very future of the medium itself.

Hence the International Music Theatre Forum originated and organised by Ms Amy McGrath and held as part of the Festival of Sydney at the N.S.W. Conservatorium for one week in January.

The Forum invited a number of professionals from England and America. Their brief was to come and tell us of their experiences and to give practical advice on the construction of The Musical.

THE MASTERS
ALAN JAY LERNER, lyricist (Paint Your Waggon, My Fair Lady etc; collaborator with Loewe, Previn, Bernstein, Weill);
HAROLD PRINCE, producer (Broadway—Fiddler on the Roof, West Side Story etc.; and Hollywood—Damn Yankees, Pyjama Game etc.);
STEPHEN SONDHEIM, composer/lyricist (A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Company, A Little Night Music . . .);
IRVING BAUER, playwright, Broadway playwright-
director;
STONE WITNEY, Broadway co-director and stage manager;
AND MORE.

International Musical last month because of a theatre.

WILLIAM SHOUBRI
Forum, and of the need.

THE CLASSES
There were open seminars and there were masterclasses throughout the week. At none were there ever less than a hundred people in attendance—local writers, lyricists, composers, directors, choreographers; people who have been involved with the musical in Australia for a long time.

Afterwards;
“there was a great feeling of frustration and impatience in evidence from the people involved” (Prince).

The Australian Music Centre will act as a repository for librettos, scripts, lyrics, sheet music and tapes; and it will keep a list of names so that people looking for collaborators can locate other interested individuals;

A decision that there will be other Forums—not so large perhaps, but sessions where people can present material, have it performed and criticised.

THE PROBLEMS
Why was this art form in such a depressed state in Australia? Some blamed the lack of subsidy; others prevailing snobbery against such a “bastardised” form as the musical; and others doubted whether Australia could even create a great musical—it was a peculiarly American form.

To this last gripe, both Lerner and Prince countered that Australia had just the same lack of cultural traditions, the same electric and pioneering spirit, the same powerful energy that helped create the hybrid art form of the musical in America. They saw we now had a unique voice and manner in our playwrighting; the days of a distinctive “Australian musical” could not be far off.

Prince; Subsidy is now necessary. Its the only way material can be worked on and developed.

The problem is that there was no Forum at all, and of the need.

A Voice; There’s a terrible them-and-us snobbery in the Australian Arts scene. From the viewpoint of Official Recognition particularly, the musical is looked down on as inferior to drama, ballet and opera.

Bauer (bewildered); In America there’s very little subsidy for any of the dramatic arts. Perhaps that’s to their detriment … but what does exist is the financial backing of big business.

Witney; Its a matter of salesmanship. If the product is good enough, it can be sold.

MUSIC
guls came together in Sydney
world-wide shortage of product in musical

g reports on this unique and pioneering
for Australian musicals.

General Demur: Business houses here aren't
interested in supporting the unknown. Their
money goes to the big establishment—Opera, 
Ballet. ... 
The Panelists (as one): It's still a matter of sales-
manship!
One Bob Ellis: Australia doesn't have the sort
of audiences to sustain a theatre of big musicals. 
Australians aren't interested in theatre. They're
interested in sport. 
(Witney: So are Americans)
Australia's Bruce Barry: Well then, what about
the Leagues Club Circuit ... 

A CHORUS LINE
"A Chorus Line was created by people who
wanted to say something about their personal
experiences. It began with a group of people
talking into a tape ... putting down their life
histories, their fears and frustrations; their
personal hopes. They didn't go into it with the
over-riding intention of making a big musical to
go immediately onto Broadway, with cast
albums and film contracts. It was a powerful
personal involvement that generated it" (Sond-
heim).
"The small musical is viable ... What is needed
is a workshop situation." (Prince)
"One doesn't write a musical about concepts,
one writes about people" (Lerner)
Sondheim's masterclass on lyric writing was
of enormous interest. He stressed that lyrics
were not poetry—they are made to be sung. Be
clear, and banal if necessary; for one should
never make an audience sweat over lyrics. He
talked of songs that speed the story along
and songs that are commentary only. But he
demonstrated there must always be a reason for
the song.

Harold Prince's masterclass on direction
pointed out how the best songs all have the mat-
terial in them to facilitate their staging; they dic-
tate their own manner of presentation.
And so on; into closer and closer detail. The
proportion of dialogue to the whole; whether
and why dialogue, a song, or a dance routine
best suits the content of a particular scene; the
cues for songs; the relationship between song
and character, between lyric and music ... .

AUSTRALIAN DOUBT

A nagging question recurred through the
sessions—the Australian-ness of a musical.

The Doubt: because of the inflow of different
cultures and ethnic groups into America, it had
a wide spectrum of musical styles to work on
and adapt; Australia doesn't.
Lerner A.J. (amazed): We all use the same notes
don't we?
Prince: You don't have to use Australian history
to make an Australian musical. It isn't necessary
to write about The Outback or Ned Kelly. That's
parochial. The fact that it written in Australia
by an Australian and showing signs of a distinct-
ive Australian mode of attack—that makes it
Australian.

(Audible relief. Applause)

Discussion often came back to the Discovery
of the Australian Soul ... or spirit, or psyche ...

A Voice: We must wait for it to be created.
Another Voice: If we do that we'll wait for
bloody ever.
Lerner: Well, write about that.

FINALE

The week was climaxed by a concert in the
Seymour Centre. It was a magical evening, and
standing room only. Sondheim sang songs from
his shows. Local artists sang some from Lerner's
shows and there were two songs from original
Australian musicals. They stood up well; though
it was painful to note how many people never
even knew those musicals existed. The Australian
negativism all over again? The hope is that the
Music Theatre Forum changed a few people's
attitudes and gave others the heart to go on
working. But this event mustn't exist in a vac-
uum. It must be followed up. "A musical depends
on understanding collaborations" (Prince) That's
what we must do now; collaborate.
When I chided him once on being a Kentucky Colonel—which is true, by the way—he said, "Yes, And someday I'll call my show Colonel Bradshaw's Kentucky Frayed Puppets!" This is typical of his sense of humor: in a word, pointed. When he gave his benefit show for the Playwrights Conference a year ago, he announced interval by saying, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'd say 'turn on the lights' but please don't confuse illumination with enlightenment". This was an obvious reference to the Liberal Party's slogan "the light of enlightenment". Now he is back from a month-long tour of Japan. The tour was sponsored by the famous Japanese puppet theatre PUK and included his well known shadow plays and pieces such as Super Kangaroo, Alf, Circus, and others. But while he is most well known as a shadow puppeteer, his latest work is in solid puppetry. As Head of the Marionette Theatre of Australia he is taking our national puppet theatre into all new directions.

"I'm trying to extend gradually the audience upwards," he said, "Roos, for instance, has more appeal for senior primary or secondary too; even for adults. Trying to create a complete fantasy is not, now, I feel, the preserve of puppets. Leave that to cartoons, films, and such. Illusion is what we want to create. If the character is strong enough, it's interesting to see how far you can go to show that it's just a puppet."

In this way he thinks in pure theatrical terms. There is no distinction here between puppet and live actor; for he attempts to create an image, or illusion of reality, all the more stark because the audience knows how it is being created. People are dulled to violence on the screen, for example. But when, at the end of Hands, the pop star is actually pulled apart, we know the teeny-boppers are getting what they really dreamed of!

"To continue along those lines . . . a consistent strong character is what is important—not necessarily a beautiful sculptured puppet. Ideas and characters, the two things a puppet play has to have. Hands starts off with gloved hands and gradually introduces puppets—rod puppets, string puppets, finally a large pop star worked by three puppeteers who sings the song 'Hands Off'. In another piece, one hand is a cow's udders and after it is milked it picks up the pail and after it is milked it picks up the pail and walks off! In a skit about a spider, when the two hands which form the spider are hit with a karate chop, they separate and walk off in opposite directions!"

In his shadow puppetry too, he is so aware of the grotesquerie of puppets, of the potential for black humor in them. Often his humor borders on the cosmological.

"Roos, of course, is different, because we are using hand-held puppets. Now a major problem with this kind of puppet is that they are difficult to walk. With our wallabies, they don't have to walk; they hop. So they are ideal creatures for this kind of puppet."

Another feature of his puppetry: each puppet is perfectly suited to its intrinsic character.

"I thought of TV, too, when I devised the blue costume for the puppeteers and the background. They use chroma-key now and this can eliminate the blue figures altogether against a similar background. Plans for the future? Hmm. Yes, a permanent performing home for the Marionette Theatre in a central city location. In fact, I'd say that the chances are fairly good that we might have this by the middle of this year. That would be our company of four puppeteers plus me and a manager/stage director. This would mean less touring and a repertoire of shows to do. By the middle of this year we will have four shows that can be done by four puppeteers. My aim more than anything is to do shows for adults, but we have to start by extending the range of present shows first. Now I'm so bogged down by administrative problems. I resigned so many times last year!"

There are still obstacles in a country where puppety is not taken seriously by most theatre people. Yet Richard Bradshaw's range of talent—from the high comic to the grotesque through every conceivable type of puppet—is greater than that of almost any other Australian playwright, director, or actor I can think of. In America he may be a Colonel, but for me, here, he is no less than our Shadow Minister for the Arts!

CURRENCY'S CARLTON PLAYWRIGHTS

A tribute to the A.P.G.

Jack Hibberd
A Stretch of the Imagination
Barry Oakley
Bedfellows
Brian Allott
A Lesson in English (Double Bill No. 1)
John Romeril
I Don't Know Who To Feel Sorry For
The Floating World
David Williamson
The Removalists
Don's Party (new film edition)
Three Plays: The Coming of Stork —
Jugglers Three — What If You Died Tomorrow
The Department
A Handful of Friends

Today better than ever

Currency Press Pty. Ltd. Australia's drama publisher
distributed by Cambridge University Press (Aust.) Pty. Ltd.,
Melbourne and Sydney.
It is not often that Asian theatrical inventions are successfully adopted in the west. Now the Marionette Theatre of Australia, in what amounts to a redefinition of the relationship between puppet and operator, have done it. And they've done it naturally, and with a style of their own. They've made it work.

It is a time when many puppet theatres around the world are wrapped in bunraku. In this sense, the use of hooded figures visibly holding puppets in not untried in the west. The Swedes, with their amazing puppet theatre (which is fully state supported) have done it. But the Marionette Theatre of Australia's use of visible operators is more than just a borrowed device. It fits in perfectly with the message of the story that, sadly, the fate of animals is in the hands of man.

The show begins with introductions. First out is Ocker the Quokka, "all the way from W.A." Ocker is wary of the hooded figure behind him. "He keeps followin' me around. Where's his face?" he says. The operators are all dressed in baby blue, before a blue backdrop. Ocker refers to his operator as "a great big blue blob." This immediately calls attention to the presence of the puppeteers. It is a wise thing to do for audiences who are not used to seeing them on stage. It is done very unselfconsciously. But it is also wise that it is not mentioned again. The audience will forget that they are there.

Ocker is followed by Rita and Rat Kangaroo and a snooty Banded Hare Wallaby, the former, with ratted hair a kind of Moonee Ponds marsupial, and the latter a pouched pom and confidante of governors-general!

Then in lumbers Big Red, operated by three puppeteers, one of whom manipulates his scratcher! Red wears a cork-rim hat, carries a swag, and is a kangaroo of very few words. In this character, as in Ocker, Richard Bradshaw's superlative humor strikes. Big Red sings a Lawson ballad, "Freedom on the Wallaby."

After being warned by a paranoiac kakapo about the man from the zoo, Welby meets up with the dama wallabies, actually parma wallabies sent to New Zealand 100 years ago by Gov. Grey. They, along with kookaburras, live on Kawau Island in New Zealand. But in rushes the Hairbreath-Harry villain to snatch Welby and his pouched paramour to the Sydney Zoo. Welby is, in a word, hopping mad. How Welby is reunited with his family and how the evil man from the zoo turns out to be a regular guy after all is the story of Roos.

Australian now has one of the two or three best puppet theatres in the world in the Marionette Theatre of Australia. Their theatre is, perhaps, the most stark, innovative, and impressive dramatic institution we have in this country.
nimrod theatre & eric dare
very proudly present

Gordon Chater
in The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin
by Steve J Spears

directed by Richard Wherrett
designed by Larry Eastwood

ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR
Gordon Chater holds top spot for the best piece of acting I have seen in any play, local or imported
— Taffy Davies, The Sun.
— Theatrical Performance of the Year
— Geraldine Pascall, The Australian.
— Quite Superb... The Hit Australian Play
— London Evening Standard.
— Electrifying
— National Times.

Tuesday to Sunday at 8.30 p.m. Book theatre 660 3922 & agencies
Tickets $6.90 including booking fee where appropriate
For party bookings concessions ring 820 199
Student rush 15 min. before show $4.00

SEVENTH STUNNING MONTH
Strictly limited season, prior to National Tour, New York and London productions, and tour of Hong Kong, Japan and New Zealand!
Watch press for details of touring dates.

The New Arts Theatre, Glebe
166 Glebe Point Road, Glebe from October 21st.
Michael Edgley’s latest ‘attraction’ (that’s what they’re called) is dubbed The Greatest Circus on Earth. Doubtless you will have noticed that the Ringling Brothers’ Barnum & Bailey outfit tried to stop them using this nomenclature, claiming it was too close to the time honoured formula “The Greatest Show On Earth”. If the truth be known, there is only one circus on earth, the artists being peripatetic employees of old established firms. This is as it should be. The world should have the opportunity of seeing people who have spent their lives perfecting some very strange, miniaturist acts. The exceptions to this international wanderlust are the honoured artists of the Soviet Union and China who prefer to travel in national groups. At least their governments prefer it that way.

This collection scores with six acts out of nineteen: not a bad percentage. It makes the night well worth the price—provided you buy a seat where you can see. Some of the other acts are worth seeing for their weirdness if nothing else.

Circus is one of the oldest forms of theatre, and one that has remained more or less the same since the first neanderthal learned how to juggle. There’s no doubt about it. Life itself is, as far as we know, a never ending juggling act. Even bad jugglers wandering around parks and streets are compulsively watchable. Part of the reason I suppose is that it is easy to tell the masterful from the awful, the measure of success not being a subjective feeling of being “affected” but whether the fool falls off the rope. Death in the circus is a present possibility, if overplayed by the actors.

At its best, though, circus does inspire a certain amount of spirituality: like mountain climbing, or Shakespeare. You can have your ordinary actors fooling around with juggling, tumbling, trapezing, wirewalking or balancing; give me The Great Doval walking on stilts on his high wire any day. That’s not to say that circus techniques, like many ideas from the ‘simple theatre’ of commedia, pageant, procession, puppets and so on have not infiltrated the Australian theatre. They have. A current example is the highly popular and reasonably skilful Soapbox Circus from the Australian Performing Group. Here circus techniques plus propaganda and jug music are used to great effect. But however good as jugglers those people are, it isn’t the same as the magic achieved by a master like Rudi Schweitzer. It may only be a level of superlative skill and practice, but his hat tricks give me a sense of the impossible. That for me is the essence of it. The achievement of the impossible, not necessarily, but usually of the death defying kind.

In the last few years, with the fashionability of televised Olympic gymnastics, we have been able to see that tumbling as an artful sport is much further advanced than many of its circus exponents would have us believe. The work of Eastern European gymnasts makes many of the stunts of acrobats pale in comparison. Consequently much in this circus along these lines was second rate—especially the Boichanovi Troupe doing a five person high pyramid off spring boards, and the bizarre Chikkarov Trio doing balance beam tricks. Their folkishness is easily outclassed by the memory of Nadia Comanici, the Rumanian gymnastic heroine of Montreal.

On the same level, other tricks were mere copies of traditional Chinese acrobatics, seen here in the form of the Kwang Chow Acrobats a few years back. Where the Duo Kristoff sent a lady up a thirty foot pole balanced on her partner’s shoulder, the Kwang Chows sent many. Where Les Castors did foot juggling on upholstered leather chairs, the Chinese juggled huge urns on their backs.

The best acts, the traditional circus acts, surpassed these trivial interludes. Not that they were the most trivial—there was Daisy Bentos who poses twenty feet off the ground hanging by her hair, and Lilly Yokoi who did bicycle tricks on a gold plated bike.

There was Rogana, Baroness of Balance, who climbs a wobbly ladder balancing a tray with full wine glasses on the hilt of a sword, whose tip is balanced on the tip of a dagger, and wearing very little. This is death defying to a major degree, I suppose. One slip and the sword would skewer the lady. There were the flying Terrels, a trio of sexy trapeze artists who do some simple tricks to the tune of disco music. Best trick is a triple somersault, but it happens too quickly to cause much excitement.

I’ve mentioned Rudi Schweitzer, a terrific juggler, especially with hats. He almost makes them talk. And then there is the majestic talent of the Great Doval, a high wire walker of genuine genius. He is really the only one who gives a scent of what has been attracting adults to the circus for millennia, what made Blondin an international hero, what makes wire walking magic. He in fact didn’t do his celebrated headstand on the wire, but he did skip, jump, nearly fall, and walk on stilts. They say he can hang by his toes, and I’m happy to believe he can walk on air. He makes it all worthwhile.

There are other acts, and all together they make up a fine circus, one worth going out of your way to see. Happily there are only a few animal acts, including fourteen very friendly lions. The day of the travelling menagerie and freak show has thankfully gone, leaving the circus to the creation of amazement in willing adults. This is the last theatre where the suspension of disbelief is forced by skills you can see and measure.

This circus is on the way to my ideal of an adult circus, where a select group of actors perform the impossible in a tented temple for the benefits of multitudes of us pedestrians. The next thing I wish is that Michael Edgley might realize we aren’t terribly interested in seeing his wedding photos in the program. He ought to be more humble.
DON'T FORGET THE SMALLEST THEATRE IN THE WEST

CURRENTLY AT
HOLE in the WALL THEATRE
8 Southport Street, Leederville, W.A. Phone 81-2403

* FEBRUARY 5 TO MARCH 5 -
The Kurt Weill/Bert Brecht Musical
"HAPPY END"

* FEBRUARY 25 TO MARCH 5 -
A late-night Festival of Perth show Stravinsky's
"THE SOLDIER'S TALE"

UNBELIEVABLE ECLECTICISM!

Q theatre group pty. ltd.
Q theatre at night!
AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL LUNCH HOUR THEATRE, AND THREE YEARS IN THE WESTERN AREA, THE Q THEATRE NOW BRINGS YOU FULL-LENGTH NIGHT-TIME PERFORMANCES OF THE BEST SHOWS IN TOWN.

Penrith Bankstown Parramatta
FOR INFORMATION WRITE TO: THE Q THEATRE, P.O.BOX 10, PENRITH, 2750.

AMER'S THEATRICAL TIMES
* Informative
* Thought Provoking
* Entertaining
* Educational
ENCOMPASSING ALL AREAS OF THE ARTS: SINGING, ACTING AND MUSIC.

Fill in and return to:
Amer's Theatrical Times,
15 Montgomery Avenue, Str. Granville, 2142

I wish to subscribe to Amer's Theatrical Times.
I remit payment of $ ............. being for ............. mths. subs.
11 monthly issues for $10.00 (students: $7.00)
6 monthly issues for $6.00 (students: $4.25)
made payable and crossed to: W. AMER PTY. LTD. (includes postage)
Name: .................................................................
Address: .............................................................
Postcode: ..........................................................
Special Student Concession for High School students and students of private and public music or dramatic classes.
School/Class: .....................................................
I have always detested latecomers in the theatre. So it was with great mortification that I slunk some fifteen minutes late into this production. My guilt, however, soon evaporated.

Firstly, there existed a carnival, indeed a rags-and-muffin and most un-St. Martin’s-like atmosphere in the auditorium. The callow adolescents of Dingley East and Airport North seemed to have turned out in force, creating a milieu not unlike that of an Italian picture show where loud conversation, quips, burps, minor bartering and the mastication of sweets provide a rich social discord. Secondly, the first fifteen minutes had patently been spent in a plot-erecting exposition easily comprehended after a brief span in the seat.

My immediate impulse was to dash out, snap up a few cans at the local, join in the sport. A Philistine was up the back, and furthermore they were enjoying themselves, not bouncing off the theatre—the silences were those of disgruntled ennui, the shouts of good-natured mockery; all in all apt responses to the proceedings.

The Game of Love and Chance is a simple-minded primordial French farce of the eighteenth century adapted and titivated up into the early part of this century by director Mick Rodger. The author, Pierre Carlet de Marivaux, a card and denizen of Parisian literary salons, achieved notoriety in all hands except the rare genius like Shakespeare who at his best bathed the genre in an ironic moral light.

Admittedly the mistaken identities (two servants pretending to be mistress and master respectively) are deliberately set up, displaying a healthy touch of cynicism, instead of it being an accident. Again the play might seem to be exposing the mask-like and mere role-playing tenuousness of social station. An earnest Marxist might even see in it an attempt to satirize and derogate class barriers. Deep down, however, it is just another renovating romantic French tract on the omnipotence of true love—among members of the same social caste. As such it pales beside the work of Beaumarchais who profoundly shocked his audiences with insubordinate servants, a pre-revolutionary spirit that induced da Ponte and Mozart to write their masterpiece The Marriage of Figaro.

As comedy The Game of Love and Chance possesses none of the exponential intricacies and remorseless logic of a Feydeau. The fact that for his time Marivaux daringly wrote in prose and on the omnipotence of true love—among members of the same social caste. As such it pales beside the work of Beaumarchais who profoundly shocked his audiences with insubordinate servants, a pre-revolutionary spirit that induced da Ponte and Mozart to write their masterpiece The Marriage of Figaro.

As comedy The Game of Love and Chance possesses none of the exponential intricacies and remorseless logic of a Feydeau. The fact that for his time Marivaux daringly wrote in prose and not the stale verse of the hacks means little now. Plays are only remembered for the quintessential freshness and elasticity of their dramaturgy, regardless of temporal fashion and non-fashion, for their enduring capacity to stupefy our contemporary imaginations. That is why so few plays survive, and all the others must be thoroughly modernized out of their docile topicality.

The perils of Mick Rodger’s search-and-restore policy are multiple—those attendant upon the esoteric, the quaint and novel. I’m sure there are admirable things in the activity, but he might end up scratching chook-like over well-pecked ground. More importantly, it should be asked: what is the contemporary adaptability of these desperate and even escapist unthings? The Game of Love and Chance, despite its new twentieth-century later French polish, remains a period piece. Because it is so fragile and insubstantial, any recostuming of this Marivaux play will only weigh it down; cosmetics on a corpse. The adaptation needs to produce an utterly new play.

The production is schematically cluttered with a new business-device for nearly every scene, you name we have it: croquet, boating, roller skates, punching bag, mah-jong, motor-cycling, a tandem, battledore and shuttlecock etc. The more gullible members of the audience seemed tickled pink by this parade of antique recreations. For such a plethora of scenic business, moments of genuine comic interest were alarmingly few and far between: the chosen business generally had an awkward and inorganic relationship with the dramatic material at hand, paradoxically diluting the theatricality of the characters. Yet in the end Mick Rodger’s approach is probably the best: plonk these chattering and fatuous skeletons in a picturesque and diverting landscape.

The actors, as you can imagine, had a struggle on their hands. Only Simon Chilvers, that thoroughbred of the M.T.C. stable, managed to trot through the evening with requisite deadpan verve, though even his sensibility seemed taxed by the avalanche of corn. Lex Marinos, at least sporadically broke out of his Chico Marx persona, a role that appears to have haunted him over the years, and looked splendidly at one with the unctuous and facile valet Arlequin. The others, to their credit, gave it all they had. The actresses especially, who displayed unwarranted fidelity to their realizations of the twitty female stereotypes that the play boosts.

In the end, I found it a pretty disappointing night, lacking style, grit and incisiveness, notwithstanding the levity and predictability of the material. I felt quite a lot of sympathy for the galahs up the back: who must have wondered what the hell they were doing there, watching all this feline foppishness in 1977.
THE 20's AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Raymond Stanley

A potted biographical musical, Gershwin, centred around the American composer and his music, opened at South Yarra's Arena Theatre at the end of October 1975. It was the brain-child of John Diedrich and John O'May, who performed in it with Caroline Gilmer and Natalie Mosco, with a small orchestral accompaniment. Presented only at midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, the local critics did not want to know about it. Soon though, by word of mouth, the show became a cult and there were some who in the end could boast of having seen it 18 times!

In February 1976 the mini musical, having undergone certain revisions, was transferred to the Total Theatre where it was grudgingly received. (Current main-line Melbourne reviewers do not appear to be keen on musicals anyway!) There were plans afoot to take the show to Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide later that year. Insurmountable copyright difficulties on the Gershwin music arose, however, and the show can never be revived.

The same team is now at work again, turning their attention to America in the twenties. It is a very different type of entertainment, and it deeds falls into no set category, perhaps branching out on an original line of its own. Intimate revue, maybe, is the nearest description one can give it—but lacking any topicality.

The three performers—Diedrich, O'May and Gilmer (Mosco having returned to America)—have done a great deal of research, devised and scripted the work themselves, as well as self-direction. The result might well have been a confused affair. Miraculously it holds firmly together in most departments.

The black and white setting is an American bar in the 20's, constructed in front of the stage, with staircases on either side. Thus there is a performing area above the bar, on the stairs, and in front—with the audience on three sides. The orchestra is situated at the back of the stage. Stools are propped up at the bar; there is also a table with a couple of chairs to one side. All useful props.

In ninety non-stop minutes the trio presents its version of the 20's. During that time more than 70 tunes are gone through, mostly evergreens but occasionally an unfamiliar one interspersed. Dance rages of the period are presented: the Racecoon, Black Bottom, Varsity Drag and Charleston. As well as comedy the entertainment has moments of pathos. There are cameo scenes which pinpoint what was happening in America at that time; accentuated are such things as prohibition and marathon dancing. One quickfire segment rushes through the decade focusing on newspaper headlines.

Varying the content as much as possible, and highlighting the trio's versatile talents, some impersonations of a black-faced Al Jolson, Chevalier, Fanny Brice, Helen Moran, Noel Coward and Eddie Cantor. One hilarious item features in flickering lights the exaggerated acting of silent films; another focuses on the inadequacy of Mrs Dool's voices at the advent of sound. Each is provided with one stop-the-show moment. For John Diedrich it is a moving monologue as Fatty Arbuckle relating with great sincerity the true facts of the Rappe affaire, which do not always coincide with the generally publicised distorted versions. Caroline Gilmer plays on the heart strings with her rendering of Dorothy Parker's short story One More. And John O'May, who earlier stops the show as bouncing pop-eyed Eddie Cantor singing "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?" gives an excerpt from Scott Fitzgerald's Crazy Sundays, as lightning cold, the show gave no sign of first night nerves; nothing seemed to go wrong. All the right cues were on right time, one could not have hoped for anything smoother. Obviously there will be revisions of the content: for this reviewer at least some of the earlier cameo sketches seemed a little weak and pointless. But this is a minor quibble. The cast work utterly as a team, with no one seeming better than the others. Mention should be made of the highly efficient hard-working four-piece orchestra under the direction of talented young pianist Michael Tyack.

This time around Diedrich, O'May and Gilmer are not worrying about critics. They know they have a ready-made audience from their last show. If anyone likes to review the show, okay—but they are not putting out feelers in this direction. They stress the show is only being performed for 14 performances, and there is no way they will extend the run. No way will they transfer. No way? Well . . . . . . . . .

Footnote: Where but Australia would a group recreate a period away from their own country? But what was happening in Australia at that time? Did it have enough of its own identity worth showing on the stage? The tunes would have to be American anyway. And does the material still exist from which to research?

HOOPLA PRODUCTIONS

THE GOLDEN OLDIES by Dorothy Hewett Grant Street Theatre, Melbourne, Victoria. Opened 18-77. Director, Greeme Blundell; Designer, Peter Corrigan. Robbie, Nora, MARION EDWARD: Esme, Ellie, MAGGIE MILLAR.

The first of the oldies is thoroughly stuffed: an effigy on her deathbed, receiving her daily enema from the ever-so-breezy district nurse ("Do a jobbie for Robby") while Mrs A., the oldie's daughter, whines and remembers and calls to Mr A.. Mr A., another effigy, spends ten years dramatic time reading in the next room, leaving his wife to waste and pine until scene three, when in her turn becomes the oldie. Breezy Robby then turns into the daughter's keeper as well, this time in the guise of a housekeeper who absconds with the linen, but turns up to weep buckets at the graveside. In the last scene we see the inheritor, Mrs A.'s daughter Ellie, licking over the relics of these two generations of repressed, petit-bourgeois femininity.

This is Hewett country, the suffocating interior of an "Australian middle class villa", where the men have lost whatever interest they may have had, while their women struggle with deprivation, trying to find what went wrong amongst the ironing boards, the old photographs, the echoes of Crosby and Como—all that shellac allure for which they’ve traded their lives. The two ladies we see on stage are the bewildered and deprived, whom death is forcing into search. Offstage is Hewett's bitch goddess, the vital, amoral "truthteller" who has lived out her impulses, revelled in children and lovers, and is therefore, to the villa-world, a standing reproach. Her name this time is Rebecca.

They want her back, because her turbulence would rattle loose those venetian blinds that shroud the set. Mrs A., though loathing her absent daughter's wantonness, aches for something other than the remote care provided by her second daughter. For Dr Ellie, sister Rebecca has been the intolerable (yet ridiculous) shadow over her life. But both ladies are disappointed, Rebecca has killed herself. Even unbounded impulse, it seems, can't release this family from the curse of emptiness. At the end of the play, we see Ellie, in spite of her hatred, vainly calling to the dead Rebecca while a stuck record mocks her efforts.

It's a play full of craft and contrivance, using slides, scrims and a complex array of songs to chart the course of memory. Yet in scale, of course, it's far sorer than Hewett's earlier work (The Chapel Perilous, for example) which showed a gargantuan love for the resources of the theatre.
and a positively Dickensian willingness to multiply and divide whole packs of characters. This play has the sparer, formal control of The Tatty Hollow Story, and it takes that play's preoccupation with splintered subjectivities even further.

Clearly, it's going to be hard to do. Having created this closed, self-absorbed world, Hewett also requires a certain amount of direct address from actors to audience. Both Maggie Millar and Marion Edward seemed uncomfortable at these moments. To add to the actor's troubles, the amount of interaction between them is down to a minimum. The play is composed of a series of interrupted monologues, and where dialogue does occur, its subtext is, to say the least, obscure. Then there's the problem of how an actor engages with material so intensely private. Marion Edward, who had much the easier task as the nurse and housekeeper, breezes and flutes away with much panache—and something more, a sense of the stubborn ordinariness for which these desperate old dears are all very well. On Maggie Millar falls the burden of the private memories, and although she was consistently workmanlike, the part demanded (perhaps immoderately) a deeper commitment which she was rarely able to give. I liked the snapping tenacity of her oldie, and in the last scene, where I felt the writing was touch-and-go, she managed very well the rhythm of sudden feeling disputing the surface efficiency of Dr Ellie.

Nonetheless, the last scene did lose momentum. The cries to the absent Rebecca clinched nothing. And of course, they weren't meant to—this isn't a play in which issues are resolved or brought to fruition. Dorothy Hewett has been working in this tract of family land since (at least) her long poem Legend of a Green Country. In these last, increasingly intimate plays, she has turned away from the definable even to the shifting world of memory. She now works inside out, the subjective flow of her characters' feelings strives to take shape in dramatic action. For a playwright, this is a perilous middleground, somewhere between imitation (of whatever kind) and the fullblown symbolism she once used. There are precedents in late Strindberg, a few hints in plays like Landscape and Silence, but for such private undertakings, there are, in the end, only private shapes. Whatever has been exercised for Hewett in The Golden Oldies (and exorcism is what it feels like) the audience is swirled along in the fantasia to be left at the end with no option but to go back up the stream of memory in search of their own order.

Plays can be made out of happenings, or out of things failing to happen (as in Beckett) but it's risky to desert the category altogether. The few happenings in The Golden Oldies merely punctuate the lines of memory, fantasy, complaint, reverie. All the determinants of the characters' lives lie in the past. Their present is occupied by clearing out their psychic lumber rooms, (an image made explicit in the last scene as Ellie picks over the litter). The audience is entitled to ask for something more than the analogy with everyone's experience, since there is an unsatisfying arbitrariness about the pattern that seems to emerge: Ellie and her mother, life-deniers, opposed to the absent Rebecca, who affirms life at the cost of all the decencies. I say this pattern is arbitrary because the life denied and affirmed is somehow never felt to be a difficult or arduous—not even an engrossing process. It's all over, after all. The play's black humour keeps everything at a distance. That opening image, for example, of the dissolution of the oldie; we take it as lightly as a passing cartoon. The constant debunking and undercutting don't have enough to work against, so that at times I felt the spirit of the play to be cold and dismissive: women's life as a spectacle of helpless chaos; all impulses running into a swamp of bad faith.

This is the second play in Hoopla Productions first season. The company is a most welcome addition in a town whose theatrical options have declined in recent years. Golden Oldies was a brave and worthwhile choice. It gives Melbourne audiences only their second chance to see the work of someone who, despite my personal misgivings, is undoubtedly a playwright who demands attention, and whose skill (witness the monologue writing in this play) constantly increases. Let's hope the exorcism has been successful, so that Dorothy Hewett can leave these shrunken devils to cool for a while.
From on the fascist mentality, and Ivan Illich on self-certifying elites would all seem appropriate, for Edward Bond writes using his concepts about violence and the nature of society. It was I think Max Weber who defined the state as being that group which had a monopoly on organized violence in a given territorial area. Mr. Bond creates in each of his plays the violence of men alienated within an oppressive society, and the physical representation of their destructive neurotic fury is coldly shown as the product of the power relationships within that society.

If that reads a little like the absurd pronouncements of the critics in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, I can only plead the play, Bond's own prefaces (particularly that to *Lear*), and the current excellent La Boite production in my defence. It is on the surface a simple enough story; a black comedy of events in an isolated English coastal village in East Anglia in 1907. A young man Willy Carson stuggles out of the sea crying out that his friend is drowning. Two men hear his cries; but one, (the reclusive Evens) is too drunk to help, and the other (the town draper and part-time coastguard Hatch) accuses him of being a spy, a servant of forces not merely from over thechannel but from the village, notably the grandiloquent queen of the town Mrs. Rafi, the dead man's fiancée Rose, and the impressionable young working men who have swallowed Hatch's theories about conspiracy, foreign menaces, and extra-terrestrial influences.

The play progresses from the drowning to the workings of the village society, to the discovery of the body, the scattering of the ashes, and Willy and Rose's eventual departure from the town. The story is given a broad edge of comedy by Mrs. Rafi's theatrical rehearsals, a tragic undercurrent by the representation of Hatch's downward slide to homicidal madness, and an historical dimension by the omnipresent booming of guns from the nearby army reserve as the Edwardian age prepares itself for the retreat from Mons. All the elements are carefully selected and honed, for behind the story lies a rigorous philosophy of society, an appreciation of social violence, and a belief that study of a microcosm from the past can illuminate the workings of the society of today.

Thus in Mrs. Rafi we have both a village tyrant and a picture of fading glory of the British empire in the years before the First World War. She reigns in absurd glory in her little isolated village, indifferent to the march of time yet aware of it, conscious of her age and of concepts like the cash nexus which she refuses to come to terms with. In the draper Hatch and his followers we have a study of the foundations of the fascist mentality. Obsessed with order and precision, with unaided bills and quantities of cloth, Hatch is a product of the industrial revolution, of Samuel Smiles and the gospel of self-help; tortured by his dependence on the whims of Mrs. Rafi and the counter-pressure of the Birmingham manufacturers; unable to cope with change and threatened by the unknown. His conspiracy theories find ready credence amongst Mrs. Rafi's servants, for they are debilitated by the labour which she requires of them. Hatch's mental breakdown in the fifth scene, accomplished while attempting to meticulously cut vast quantities of blue velvet into precise three yard lengths, is a piece of writing and performance I shan't easily forget.

Against these are arrayed the characters of resistance and hope. Evens lives by the beach, seas and is not fooled but is incapable of positive action. He is wise enough to advise the two young people, Willy and Rose, to leave the village ("There's no hope here") and to reject his solution of stoic isolation also. The play concludes with the fascinating Rose agreeing to leave with Willy. Where they go, and what kind of hope there is, Bond does not tell us. But it is a small victory nevertheless; a refusal to be sucked in, a refusal to stand aside. Somewhere, there is hope for drowning men.

The introduction at La Boite is a genuinely outstanding one. Two central performances, those of Bev Langford as Mrs. Rafi and Michael McCaffrey as Hatch, were particularly fine; and Gil Perrin's Evens and Peter Murphy's Willy Carson also caught the essential qualities of their roles. It testifies yet again to the health of the La Boite organisation; to the wisdom of their policies of training young people in every aspect of the presentation of a play and the ensemble commitment this has engendered; and to their ability to stand on their record of good work and to draw to their ranks experienced and talented actors and directors who for one reason or another are earning their salaries outside the profession.

I fear however their decision to take out a quarter of the seats and play on a thrust stage was not totally unconnected to their expectations that *The Sea* would be a commercial success. If I hope they're wrong, but it must be admitted that Bond makes few concessions to popular viewing.

It's a problem that ultimately limits the effectiveness of his art. Bond himself is committed to revolutionary change, though not in the accepted Marxist sense. He has written plays for, and recited his verse at, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Rallies and the Sharpville massacre commemoration. But in a play like *The Sea* he tries to express through a personally known reality (he lived in East Anglia as a child during World War Two) the violence of the species homo sapiens he himself sees as being bent on self-destruction by nuclear holocaust. Ultimately I think the message is too devious, too detached.

I wonder how many of the appreciative audience (who included representatives of a uranium mining company) made any connection between the events in the play and their own lives. For in essence the message the play was offering to them under the cloak of metaphor was the same message that Bond articulated directly at the CND rally:

Madmen, peace!
You who bend iron but are afraid of grass,
Peace!
OLD KING COLE

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE TRUST & SAS CHANNEL 10

MY FAT FRIEND

Michael Morley

OLD KING COLE by Ken Campbell. The Playhouse, Adelaide, South Australia. Opened 28.xii.76. Director, Roger Chapman; Designer, Anna French; Faz, FRANK GALLACHER; Twoo, GEORGE OGLIVIE; Baron Wadd, LESLIE DAYMAN; Sports Commentator, PATRICK FROST; Cyril, ANDREW CLARK; Old King Cole, JOHN DICK; Old Queen Cole, JUDE KURING; Princess Daphne, LYNDEL ROWE.

Twoo and his overcoat stocked with goodies prove irresistible.

In this Harpo Marx role George Ogilvie succeeds in stealing the show: his sense of comic timing was always sure, the business was never overdone, and on this evidence, there are several members of the S.A.T.C. who could learn from his attention to detail. Frank Gallacher was less happy as the supposedly brighter Faz, but apart from some flat moments initially, the two worked well together. Good contributions also from Les Dayman as the Baron and Lyndell Rowe as Daphne and a particularly neat send up of one of those British T.V. sports commentators from Patrick Frost in the Wembley scene. The one criticism of the production as a whole would be that the attempts to involve the audience in the performance seemed on the first night both haphazard and rather unconvincing. But this could well have been rectified as the season progressed. Final verdict from my two younger co-critics? “Better than Mr. Punch, Gilbert and Sullivan and Snow White. The kidnap scene was best and it was funny when Twoo sprayed disinfectant on the lollipop, and it was great to see the real lady from Man About The House (Paula Wilcox happened to be in the first night audience).

That reaction is not, as it might appear, an irrelevant anecdote: for it’s clear from the sell-out season of My Fat Friend that there’s a fair percentage of older Adelaide theatre-goers who think the same way. It showed commendable enterprise on the part of the Trust to think of filling the three theatres in the Festival Centre over the holiday season. Admittedly, the quality of one of the offerings—the unspeakable thing with the soft-drink title (I’m not giving them any more free copy)—was the poorest I’ve seen anywhere; but My Fat Friend goes some way to restoring one’s faith in the ability of the managerial side to select an unashamedly commercial product which is not an insult to the intelligence.
Bill Farley (Henry), John Murphy (James) & Paula Wilcox (Vicky).

NEW THEATRE

CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

Rex Cramporne

There was a time when, in relation to Old Tote productions of Brecht, I was troubled by the inappropriateness of the plays’ intentions in a snug commercial/subsidised context. I later thought that this was, perhaps, a little naive when I read of the Berliner Ensemble’s presentation of The Caucasian Chalk Circle in Paris in 1956: ‘My first impression was of petrified amazement at the amount of money involved. From East Berlin Brecht has transported dozens of impressionistic settings, hundreds of costumes, a new revolving stage for the Sarah-Bernhardt, a new curtain, and seventy-six artists—scarcely more than half of his permanent company.’ (Kenneth Tynan, Curtains, Longmans, 1961, p.389.) I am even more convinced of this now that I have seen Brecht performed in the perfectly suitable context of New Theatre, by a cast of twenty-six mostly amateur actors, in minimal settings. The ‘alienation’ that results from paucity of performance and design skills does not contrive to Brecht’s cherished Verfremdungseffekt—only to a kind of numbing of the viewer’s sensibilities which does, finally, begin to affect his perception of the play’s intentions.

I think that the production at New Theatre (director David Cisek, designer David Hull and Linda McLaughlin) is mounted with the best intentions—care has been taken to present the sorts of production values, the sorts of settings, the sorts of technical devices—like the use of masks for the subordinate characters—that one understands to have been used by Brecht, but the result is not epic simplicity or Brueghelian fidelity of detail or Boschian nightmare clarity—but smallness, dullness, woodiness. I am reluctant to write so harshly of what is, I recognize, a humble and well-meaned production in a largely amateur theatre, but I wish to make the point that, somewhat to my own surprise, means are probably even more important than intentions, even in the performance of Brecht.

It would not be possible to write even summarily of a performance of The Caucasian Chalk Circle without mentioning the two great roles that Brecht has created: Grusha and Azdak. I thought Jane Ahlquist’s Grusha was good in the area of quiet stoicism but rather soft and sentimentalised, that Rob Steel’s Azdak was commendably vivid and real, and that neither of them should have been called upon to sing, of impressionist settings, hundreds of costumes, a new revolving stage for the Sarah-Bernhardt, a new curtain, and seventy-six artists—scarcely more than half of his permanent company.’ (Kenneth Tynan, Curtains, Longmans, 1961, p.389.) I am even more convinced of this now that I have seen Brecht performed in the perfectly suitable context of New Theatre, by a cast of twenty-six mostly amateur actors, in minimal settings. The ‘alienation’ that results from paucity of performance and design skills does not contrive to Brecht’s cherished Verfremdungseffekt—only to a kind of numbing of the viewer’s sensibilities which does, finally, begin to affect his perception of the play’s intentions.

I think that the production at New Theatre (director David Cisek, designer David Hull and Linda McLaughlin) is mounted with the best intentions—care has been taken to present the sorts of production values, the sorts of settings, the sorts of technical devices—like the use of masks for the subordinate characters—that one understands to have been used by Brecht, but the result is not epic simplicity or Brueghelian fidelity of detail or Boschian nightmare clarity—but smallness, dullness, woodiness. I am reluctant to write so harshly of what is, I recognize, a humble and well-meaned production in a largely amateur theatre, but I wish to make the point that, somewhat to my own surprise, means are probably even more important than intentions, even in the performance of Brecht.

It would not be possible to write even summarily of a performance of The Caucasian Chalk Circle without mentioning the two great roles that Brecht has created: Grusha and Azdak. I thought Jane Ahlquist’s Grusha was good in the area of quiet stoicism but rather soft and sentimentalised, that Rob Steel’s Azdak was commendably vivid and real, and that neither of them should have been called upon to sing.
GEORGEY S. BELL (in conjunction with THE FESTIVAL OF SYDNEY)

THE SURPRISING SOPRANO

David Gyger

The Surprising Soprano, he calls himself; and describes his more-or-less one-man—or woman, if you prefer—show as “an unexpected recital of arias from opera, operetta and oratorio.” He is vaguely comparable to the indescribable Anna Russell, though the sweep of his satires is a good deal wider and his approach to his material more obviously scholarly.

Michael Aspinall is his name, and he is a debonair, knowledgeable young Englishman off stage; a student of vocal techniques and styles who has published articles on Pattie and Melba and vocal ornamentation in Rossini’s music, and written cadenzas for such noted singers as Montserrat Caballe. His show, which had a three-week run Sydney’s Seymour Centre in January, has the skeletal shape of a serious Victorian soirée; but it is fleshed out by a staggeringly versatile array of devices to send up himself and the genre—sometimes subtly, sometimes coarsely. Between numbers, he explains what he is about in a cultured baritone speaking voice which is a good deal more evocative of a university lecturer than a professional entertainer.

The biggest problem he seemed to have in establishing a thorough-going rapport with Sydney audiences was that most of them weren’t familiar enough with what he was sending up to appreciate fully the subtleties of his musicianship and comic flair.

Wisely, Aspinall presented three different programs in his Seymour Centre season for it was pretty clear, on return visits after the well-attended premiere, that his committed Sydney public was small (though it was also thoroughly enthusiastic). The basic format of all three programs was identical: a little opera and an occasional safari into the hallowed precincts of Schubert lieder and the French art song; a lot of songs of monumental triviality seemingly chosen, as often as not, for the absurdity of their lyrics.

Aspinall has to be able to sing, of course, to bring off his wickedly accurate satire of the pretensions of singers and songs at all; and his performance is always close enough to the real, serious thing so the send-up achieves maximum impact. He glares at the accompanist during an excessively showy introduction or interlude; hurries him along when he’s running out of breath on an extended note; warbles a little too smugly; changes vocal register just a trifle too obviously, swooping into the depths of a chest tone with the kind of semi-astonished facial expression that is seen all too often in serious recitals by artists who are just a little too pleased with themselves or take themselves too seriously.

The fascination of Aspinall’s recitals arises from his acute perception of the trivia which surround the actual singing: his ability to exaggerate flaws in vocal technique, platform imperiousness, artistic self-indulgence just enough so they are funny without being offensive or recognisable. The viewer must be thoroughly attentive to the periphery of the performance if he is to get the most out of it; even the not overly spacious Theatre at the Seymour Centre is almost too large to afford Aspinall the intimacy his act demands.

But there is a good deal of pleasure to be derived from his performances even if one does not appreciate all the most subtle innuendoes: indeed, possibly the greatest strength of his art is that it operates on several levels at once. One may require an intimate knowledge of the foibles of pretentious lieder singers to appreciate fully the humor in a particular twitch of an eyebrow or crook of the finger or of subtle change of vocal timbre, but the absurd triviality of some of the Victorian song lyrics he has unearthed speaks for itself, his melodramatic version of Schubert’s “Erl King” is a splendid tour de force that requires of an audience no special knowledge of the lieder syndrome. Occasionally, particularly in his send-up of the self-indulgence of operatic sopranos mangling well-known big moments in the standard repertory, Aspinall becomes predictable and a little trite, just now and then he slips just enough out of character so one remembers he’s a man in drag and an element of high camp creeps into the performance; but such lapses are rare.

Both the performers who assisted Aspinall in his Sydney season deserve favorable, if brief, mention—the veteran pianist David Andrews of the Sydney Conservatorium, and the young tenor Paul Ferris, who has just returned to Australia after a study sojourn in London. Andrews, well known to Sydney aria competition addicts as a rather stern, sometimes even forbidding accompanist, displayed a real flair for good humor and self send-up in his appearance with Aspinall: his transcription of the Gavotte from Mignon, in the first and third programs, was a particular little gem of its own. Ferris’s voice has matured immensely in the past few years; he has developed a pleasingly lyrical light tenor that should stand him in good stead when he joins the Opera in the near future. And he was a thoroughly adept straight man for Aspinall’s antics in duets from Saint-Saëns’ Samson and Delilah, and the finale from Ponchielli’s La Gioconda.

Despite their efforts, though, Aspinall’s showingers in the mind for his personal versatility and charm, his hilariously accurate if slightly overstated multitude of costumes and his obvious enthusiasm for the music he performs; in the very best sense this is a one-man show. Unfortunately, theatregoers in other States were deprived of the opportunity to see Aspinall this time round; it is to be hoped he will return soon and receive wider exposure.
Treasure Island was staged late in January by a happy inspiration on a genuine island: Rodd Island, in one of the western reaches of Sydney Harbour and reached only by a specially chartered ferry. A most agreeable setting, though unfortunately, since nothing is perfect, on one of the flight paths to Mascot.

It was billed by the Nimrod Theatre as "a rattling great adventure story for all the family"; and such, on the whole, it was, though I was struck, as often at children's theatrical productions, by the high proportion of pre-schoolers and the taping off in the older age groups. This is always a pity, since so much of children's theatre has a degree of sophistication which can only be appreciated by those over five.

It is difficult to cover "all the family", but Treasure Island went as near as possible to doing so. There was some restiveness among the very small fry, but even they found something to enjoy in the more obvious blood and thundery bits and the occasional comic touches, while enjoying in the more obvious blood and thundery atmosphere and the air of brooding and foreboding were played down—they would, in any case, have been almost impossible to represent on such a bright sunny out-of-doors location. And (no doubt to avoid offending the most puritanical) mod cons were left out. But the large-scale mayhem built into the story was not allowed too much prominence. The crucial side of Silver's character was played down, and the geniality, refl ective nature and plausibility played up (though it is doubtful if any captain with eyes in his head would really have been taken in by him) and all very well portrayed by Hugh Keays-Byrne, who handled the perilously uneven ground and changes of location with admirable skill, wooden leg, beautifully home-made crutch and all.

Stevenson himself complained when writing the story that he found it difficult to present pirates without bad language. In presenting them on stage Ken Horler found no such difficulties. I didn't detect anything stronger than a "grog" or groggin' reference and was able to play up for this by blustering and shouting and looking generally villainous and by inoffensive but picturesque phrases like "as strong as the guts in his head would really have been taken in by him" and "I'll stow in your blockhouse like a paper bag."

In the interests of understating the sinister qualities of the adventure, the eeriness of atmosphere and the air of brooding and foreboding were played down—they would, in any case, have been almost impossible to represent on such a bright sunny out-of-doors location. And (no doubt to avoid offending the most delicate sensibilities), I was diverted to hear that whoo gog was ordered for all bands when the island was sighted, a special order was given for "lima juice for Mr Hawkins!"

My favourite character of all, even above Long John Silver, was "poor Ben Gunn" (beautifully realized by Bruce Spence) marooned on the island, main represented by the stockade. All, of course, were visible at once, and the actors were allowed to range outside these specific areas—notably up and down a very handy rocky slope (just the thing for desperate hand-to-hand fighting) and even among the groundlings, whose ears seemed slightly imperilled by the cutlass-waving of Long John and his rebellious pirates.

The basic story was adhered to most faithfully, and the additional material generally in keeping. (There were some odd exceptions: when Silver offers Jim Hawkins, the boy hero, a bit of a raw fish and Jim declines on the grounds that he is not allowed to eat between meals, it but this was a minor lapse.)

The best use of added material was on board ship, where sea-shanties, led by a pleasant faced sailor, who later disappointingly turned out to be a baddy, and a storm at sea, got through an otherwise difficult voyage in the most agreeable way. There was much raising and lowering of the yard arm, a practice I suspect not particularly nautical; but in the absence of sails, it provided action and added some excitement by swinging around nastily in the storm.

There was plenty of action in the cutlass, pistol and cannon department, every opportunity being seized to have hand-to-hand action. Particularly applauded was the fall of the treacherous Israel Hands from the rigging into the sea. But the large-scale mayhem built into the story was not allowed too much prominence. The crucial side of Silver's character was played down, and the geniality, reflective nature and plausibility played up (though it is doubtful if any captain with eyes in his head would really have been taken in by him) and all very well portrayed by Hugh Keays-Byrne, who handled the perilously uneven ground and changes of location with admirable skill, wooden leg, beautifully home-made crutch and all.

Stevenson himself complained when writing the story that he found it difficult to present pirates without bad language. In presenting them on stage Ken Horler found no such difficulties. I didn't detect anything stronger than a "grog" or groggin' reference and was able to play up for this by blustering and shouting and looking generally villainous and by inoffensive but picturesque phrases like "as strong as the guts in his head would really have been taken in by him" and "I'll stow in your blockhouse like a paper bag."

In the interests of understating the sinister qualities of the adventure, the eeriness of atmosphere and the air of brooding and foreboding were played down—they would, in any case, have been almost impossible to represent on such a bright sunny out-of-doors location. And (no doubt to avoid offending the most delicate sensibilities), I was diverted to hear that whoo gog was ordered for all bands when the island was sighted, a special order was given for "lima juice for Mr Hawkins!"

My favourite character of all, even above Long John Silver, was "poor Ben Gunn" (beautifully realized by Bruce Spence) marooned on the island for three years, capering up and down the island where the most exciting things had happened, and eating and uttering maniacal cackles. It was Ben Gunn who foilied the pirates, having dug up the treasure in his spare time while waiting to be rescued. My one major quibble with the adaptation was the revealing of this point so early, thereby making the final digging up a bit of an anti-climax.
again into another famous figure of vaudeville Queenie Paul.

It is not a towering performance but it is one in her warm, relaxed, familiar style and one surrounded by the trappings of vaudeville theatre which has been home most of her life.

The fact that she is there at all makes Gloria Dawn’s performance great. Equally fortuitous is that of Garry McDonald. A fine, febrile comic actor has developed through his alter ego Norman Gunston, his individual brand of insanity. He returns to the theatre with a new assurance, the now-famous face of Norman happily hidden behind Mo’s still more famous chalk mask; and with a new liquid ease of movement and a warm, conspiratorial friendship with his audience. His reincarnation of Mo—the walk, the sibilant Jewish accent, the compulsive, aggressive practical joking—is uncanny.

But the sober reason why Young Mo has reached Nimrod’s stage at all is, of course, because its author is, in the words of the programme, “Australia’s current big hit” after the success of The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin.

Steve J. Spears is an eccentric and highly talented young writer who has happened into Sydney at the right time: a time when theatricality had fallen into disuse in the wake of almost universal domestic comedy; and was being returned to favour by Eric Dare’s new kind of sensation like the Lindsay Kemp company and Reg Livermore’s shows.

Benjamin Franklin combines outrageous theatricality with a new substance—elusive and confused perhaps but demonstrably flesh and blood. Young Mo is an earlier piece which played successfully in Adelaide in 1975 and later had a brief season in Sydney. Regrettably I cannot compare the performances: there are some who say they preferred the first and regret the passing of sections of the script in the second half. Certainly I found the second half unsatisfactory. The reservations I had were much the same as those I expressed about Jack Hibberd’s A Toast to Melba—that I wanted more about the metabolism of the artist.

Young Mo begins well with the resurrection of Roy Rene from his coffin, followed by anecdotes in revue style about his early life, his stage debut and his partnership with Nat Phillips (Stiffy). By interval the show is fairly bouncing. But in the second half the bottom falls out of the trampoline. Roy is lectured about, joked about, immortalised on a pedestal. But the man himself is left with maddeningly little to do. In the Hibberd piece Melba was at least the centre of the action and her life was absorbing. Of Mo’s life and character we see very little demonstrated; of the art that made all Australia love him—almost nothing at all.

There were, as we known, copyright problems about Mo’s material; and it was this comedy material so many members of the audience were expecting to hear, that would unlock for them the secret of Mo’s particular genius. Without it the show rings hollow—and Garry McDonald’s splendid performance.

The most peculiar aspect of the script, particularly in the second half, is the lack of dramatic action. It sparks into life occasionally, for example in a reconciliation in doggerel between Stiffy and Mo. But most of the action seems to have taken place elsewhere and we are left with the post mortem. Roy Rene was, according to legend, exasperating to his colleagues, delighting in practical jokes, shocking behaviour, prejudice and, according to his biographer Fred Parsons, a total lack of sense of humour. There was in him that magical mixture of the childlike and the single-minded egotist which is as much endemic to the great artist as his talent.

Young Mo is a pleasant and ingenious entertainment with a delightful cast including the formidably talented Sue Walker, John Gaden as Stiffy, Willie Fennell and John McTernan. But it is also deeply unsatisfactory at the more important level. The play is a nostalgia trip for those in the know, those without experience of the famous clown learn very little. For me the great disappointment lay in the fact that Mo embodies a kind of humour that is deeply Australian and owed nothing to the foreign influences common place today in our television humour. The Resuscitation of Roy Rene might have done something to redress the balance and remind us of a time when we were more unselfconsciously ourselves, at least among the Australians Mo knew, than for the most part we have been since.
The resuscitation of The Little Prince Who Couldn’t Laugh
as performed by
YOUNG MO
at the height of the Great Depression of 1929

introduced by Richard Wherrett

and know nothing of why its life in Sydney was so brief. But I do know, since having read their version, it was a very different play—roughly fifty percent was quite new material. The version I had responded to, and which is published here, is the original version, with changes made during the course of our rehearsals. The author in his opening notes, admits it is a skeleton and invites “fleshing out”, but in fact the changes we made were not radical. The original three act form became two acts, and songs and dances were added, some to reflect Mo’s added, some to reflect Mo’s early career in Vaudeville, and others purely to heighten narrative moment, such as the rehearsal tensions prior to the first Stiffy and Mo opening, and the death of Nat Phillips.

I was thirteen when Roy Rene died, and can just remember hearing him on radio. In that his death occurred two years before television came to Australia, there exists little record of him on film, so that many people have no visual memory of Mo, while a young generation are likely not to know of him at all.

Our special problem therefore was how to realise his stage-craft—his timing, his mugging, his delivery, his extraordinary voice and walk. Strike Me Lucky, the one feature film he made, is the major exception, and was invaluable to us and Garry McDonald in particular in recreating that technique. In the course of that research I have come to understand why his fame and success spanned forty years.

Young Mo traces the first fifteen of those years. In 1929 Mo was at the height of his stage career, and that date roughly marks a turning point in his life, his marriage to Sadie Gale and the death of Stiffy, Nat Phillips. For the play is also very much about Nat and his relationship with Roy, with an attempt to analyse why Mo’s fame lives on and not Stiffy’s. Was Nat Phillips the means by which Roy Rene’s special talents were realised. What makes a star? What makes fame endure? In life we do not know what is going to happen next; in a play we must not know. One of the particular strengths of Young Mo is its ability to surprise, its constant changes of direction and viewpoint and mood, not the least of which is the extraordinarily non-theatrical (although theatrical because extraordinary) last section in which the above questions are raised.

For the rest, the surprises are achieved via the exploitation of a gamut of theatrical tricks in a play about the theatre. Its form is “rough”. Its content is a man whose unexceptional off-stage life was matched by an exceptional onstage achievement. This is worth remembering and re-experiencing.

I first read The Resuscitation of ... and The Eloction of ... simultaneously, just over a year ago. At that time I was more keen to produce Mo than Benjamin, partly because I was already currently rehearsing a one man play (Ron Blair’s Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know) and felt disinclined to follow it with another, but also because I responded very much just to the fun of it, having most recently been involved with a couple of wonderful heavies, Richard III and A Streetcar Named Desire. For that is very much just what Mo is—fun, an entertainment.

As it turned out, the Circle Company had the rights, and indeed proceeded to mount their very successful Adelaide production in Sydney. We went ahead with Benjamin. They are as extraordinarily different from each other as they are in turn from others of Steve Spears’ works, such as the yet unperformed King Richard and Wouldn’t It Just Make You Weep. Though it would be true to say that Mo has origins in an established genre of documentary narrative (Legend of King O’Malley and Flash Jim Vaux), the author’s distinctive originality lies in this ability to write so differently from play to play.

I didn’t see the Circle’s production of Mo,

Richard Wherrett

(Photographer: Gregory Weight)

STEVE J. SPEARS

STEVE J. SPEARS is Australia’s current big hit as a playwright. His ‘The Eloction of Benjamin Franklin’, premiered by Nimrod and starring Gordon Chater with Richard Wherrett directing, is now in its sixth month of performances, quite some feat for a straight one-man play here. 1977 will see a nationwide tour of the play as well as productions in New York and London by impresario James Hammerstein, and a further Nimrod tour to New Zealand, Hong Kong and Japan.

Twenty-four year old Steve has been a professional writer for three years. Stud, a horny, nude historical rock show was produced in Adelaide in 1973 and was followed a year later by the original racist vaudeville hit Africa at the Pram Factory. Young Mo was premiered in its first version at the Adelaide Festival Centre in 1975. Radio 2JJ broadcast his Eliza Q and he is currently working on a screenplay for the South Australian Film Corporation. Steve will shortly be writing for seven episodes of a new Garry McDonald show for TV’s Channel 2.
Everyone loves getting their Theatre Australia

c/o Theatre Publications
7 President Place
New Lambton Heights
N.S.W. AUSTRALIA. 2305
DON'T GET IT OFF SOMEONE ELSE

get your own subscription to

Theatre - Australia

AND what about a gift subscription for someone else?

Name: ..............................................................
Address: ............................................................
............................................................... Post Code: ..............
Gift from (if applicable): ............................................
I enclose cheque/P.O. for $15.00 for one year's subscription
starting with ..................... (month) issue sent to (over)
ACT 1

Scene 1: The Forest

[Characters enter: Tree, Bird, Deer, Fox]

Tree: Greetings, dear bird, deer, and fox. What brings you to this forest today?

Bird: We have heard of the magical forest where the trees and animals live in harmony. We have come to learn more about this place.

Deer: Indeed, we are curious about the stories we have heard. Perhaps we can learn something from the wise old tree.

Fox: I agree, we are always seeking knowledge and wisdom.

[Tree speaks, imparting knowledge and stories to the other characters]

Deer: This forest is truly enchanting. Perhaps we should return and explore more.

Bird: Agreed. Let us continue our journey through the forest.

[Characters exit, continuing their exploration]

---

Scene 2: The Village

[Characters enter: Village Elder, Young Girl, Young Boy]

Village Elder: Welcome, young ones. What brings you to our village?

Young Girl: We have heard of the wisdom and beauty of the village. We wish to learn more about your culture and way of life.

Young Boy: Indeed, we are eager to experience the traditions and stories of this place.

Village Elder: Welcome. Let us share our knowledge and stories with you.

[Characters engage in conversation, learning about village life and traditions]

Young Girl: This is truly a fascinating place. I wish I could stay longer.

Young Boy: I agree. We should return and visit more.

[Characters exit, continuing their exploration of the village]

---

Scene 3: The Castle

[Characters enter: Castle Guard, Young Prince, Young Princess]

Castle Guard: Welcome, young ones. What brings you to our castle?

Young Prince: We are honored to be here. We have heard of the grandeur and beauty of the castle and wish to learn more.

Young Princess: Indeed, we are eager to experience the history and traditions of this place.

Castle Guard: Welcome. Let us share our knowledge and stories with you.

[Characters engage in conversation, learning about castle life and history]

Young Prince: This is truly a magnificent place. I wish I could stay longer.

Young Princess: Me too. We should return and visit more.

[Characters exit, continuing their exploration of the castle]

---

Scene 4: The Rainforest

[Characters enter: Rainforest Guide, Young Explorer, Young Adventurer]

Rainforest Guide: Welcome, young ones. What brings you to this rainforest?

Young Explorer: We have heard of the wonders of the rainforest and wish to learn more about the plants and wildlife.

Young Adventurer: Indeed, we are eager to experience the beauty of this place.

Rainforest Guide: Welcome. Let me share my knowledge and stories with you.

[Characters engage in conversation, learning about the rainforest and its inhabitants]

Young Explorer: This is truly a remarkable place. I wish I could stay longer.

Young Adventurer: Me too. We should return and visit more.

[Characters exit, continuing their exploration of the rainforest]
Relate to him somehow. I can make him work in spite of himself. I can get a good company going and pack them in. Anyway, what can you lose? If he's no good I can always get my old partner back.

Hands aren't sure.

Stiffy: Come on Mr. Fuller, what do you say? Look don't worry about Roy. He's a bum but I'll see he shapes up.

Stiffy pinches Mo's cheek.

Stiffy: He'll do us proud, so?

Hands agree.

Stiffy: That's great Mr. Fuller. You won't regret it, I promise you.

Hands shake with Stiffy, then feebly with Mo.

Mo: Thanks Ben. Say, you ever worked as a barman? Your face looks familiar.

Hands get agitated. Stiffy hastily drags Mo out.

Stiffy: What are you trying to do? You nearly ruined everything.

Mo: Sorry Nat, but I was feeling embarrassed by all the compliments.

Mo pinches Stiffy's cheek.

Mo: Don't worry pal, I'll do you proud.

Stiffy: Well all right. Just remember, Roy, I'm doing you a big favour. I could have chosen any one of you.

Mo: Sorry Nat, don't think I'm not grateful. I must have sounded ungrateful and God knows I didn't mean to.

Mo takes photos out of pocket.

Mo: Say Nat, are you married?

Stiffy: No, why?

Mo puts photos back.

Mo: It doesn't matter.

Stiffy: Tell you what, I'll get the company together tonight, get hold of a few shells and we'll celebrate the beginning of Phillips and Rene at my place. What do you say?

Mo: Good pal.

Stiffy: Right. See you tonight.


Mo: Course, to be self-centred and self-opinionated and selfish and a bit shifty. Mr. Fuller, sir. But he'd do us proud, Mr Fuller, sir. Ahhh! Where was it? Ah yes...

"The Little Prince Who Couldn't Laugh" Stanza 2.

"Now the just and wise old King, And his lovely noble Queen Were tired in their souls and sick at heart And cast their eyes to heaven And prayed to..."

During this, party noises have been getting louder and louder. Doorbell rings.

Stiffy: I'll get it. Roy! Come in, come in.

Stiffy drags irate Mo into party. Introduces...
DON'T GET IT OFF
SOMEONE ELSE

get your own subscription to

'Theatre - Australia'

AND what about a gift subscription for someone else?

Name: ............................................................................................................
Address: ..........................................................................................................
Post Code: ......................................................................................................
Gift from (if applicable): .............................................................................
I enclose cheque/P.O. for $15.00 for one year's subscription
starting with ....................... (month) issue sent to (over)
Everyone loves getting their Theatre: Australia

c/o Theatre Publications
7 President Place
New Lambton Heights
N.S.W. AUSTRALIA. 2305
The resuscitation of
The Comic Mo Who Made Everyone Laugh
as performed by
GARRY MCDONALD
at the height of the great recession of 1977

by Barry Eaton

Despite this Garry feels that seeing the film and listening to Mo’s records have only been minimally helpful to his preparation.

Overall has it been a hard grind? “Yes—particularly in the first week of rehearsals, which I resented. It was Christmas and I really would have preferred having the time with my kids instead of working my ring off. After that it got better.”

How did you get into the role in the early stages? “All through rehearsals I was listening to tapes of Mo, mimicking his voice. I had been trying to get a copy of Fred Parson’s book, A Man Called Mo, and finally got one halfway through rehearsals.”

Was this a help? “Yes, because in a way I just hadn’t cottoned on to the character. I’d heard all these stories about him. I knew what an ego he had and I couldn’t shine to him. When I read the book I saw Mo in a new light. It was really written with great love. Then we saw the film again last week when things were bogged down a bit and it helped a lot.”

In what way? “I didn’t realize how broad Mo’s walk was. My movements have been restricted by TV and film where things have to be played down. I realized I wasn’t being big enough and after spending a sleepless night things worked out well at rehearsals next day. It made me realize how far I could go.”

How far does Garry get into Mo’s character? “Well, it’s really only in the first half of the play that it’s a Mo impersonation. I’ve really only done Mo in a few scenes and then after that it’s a sort of blend of what he must have been like in real life and what we know of him.”

Having Gloria Dawn and Willie Fennell in the cast has been a great help to Garry. They both worked with Mo and of course have many stories to tell about him.

“Every story you hear about Mo, his ego comes through. The other characters were only there to feed him lines so that he could get the laughs. In my characterisation of Mo offstage all I have tried to do is highlight his arrogance and cock-sureness.”

What about your appearance? “I have dyed my hair in a semi permanent rinse and I’m thinking of filling in the hairline with black make up. I’ll see about that anyway.”

The make up itself? “Oh very simple. Will Andrade sent me a sample of Mo’s make up. A stick of Leichner black and a stick of white.”

Garry freely admits to ‘pinching’ some of his business from other great comics. “I went to see The Great Dictator last night to pinch a few things from that,” Garry admitted.

“Of course this is what Mo used to do. He’d pinch from every comic. Then when somebody pinched that bit from him he’d say—the dirty mug!”

Garry thinks all this very amusing and not at all unprofessional. “Why not, I do it,” he laughs. “I mean even Mo’s name was pinched from a French clown apparently and his make up from an American comic.”

There are some things that Garry can’t master. “I can’t do all those falls and things Mo did, because he was trained in vaudeville. Those fellows used to be able to do terrific things with their bodies. Mind you we don’t have the calling for it nowadays.”

For the past few weeks Garry McDonald has been living with ghost of one of Australia’s best loved performers, Roy Rene—Mo.

The memories of Mo are many and varied to those who saw or heard him work. When Steve J. Spears’ play Young Mo opened at the Nimrod Theatre in late January, it was after much rewriting of the original script. Plus a lot of hard work from a talented cast, Garry, Gloria Dawn, Willie Fennell, Sue Walker, just to mention a few.

I talked to Garry in the final week of rehearsals about the difficult task of playing the great comic. When originally approached, Garry was very keen to do the part to get away from his great fan of Mo’s at the time.

“John Bell loaned me a Mo record when we were doing Measure for Measure, but he didn’t impress me very much,” says Garry. That was several years ago.

Having decided to accept the role Garry’s preparation began with a look at the only film Mo ever made Strike me Lucky. Garry came to my home to see the film with the director, Richard Wherrett. I remember none of us raved about it at the time.

“I was a bit astounded at the film,” recalls Garry. “I thought, oh God! But it was a shame that our choreographer, Pamela Gibbons, didn’t see it that day. It just rushed over me—it was too much in one hit. Then we couldn’t get the film again until last week. It was a lot more helpful the second time around.”
The 1976 Perth Festival was remarkable for the number of overseas companies which added their talents to those of local and eastern states performers during Perth's annual cultural orgy. We had the Negro Ensemble Company and the Little Theatre of the Deaf, as well as a brilliant double bill of South African plays—Sizwe Banzi is Dead and The Island. By contrast, dramatic fare offered for the 1977 Festival, the Silver Jubilee year, will be by companies totally Australian. The new Festival Director, David Blenkinsop, has come up with a programme for the drama which could be termed 'the Australian way with the European classic'. Plays by Shakespeare, Moliere, T. S. Eliot, Sean O'Casey and Brecht will be performed, while parochial enthusiasm will be catered for by the A.P.G. with a play about Phar Lap, and by Leonard Teale's one-man show While the Billy Boils.

The obligatory Festival Shakespeare will again be provided by W. A. T. C. directed by David Addenbrooke, who gave us last year's 'galactic' Tempest. This year the company will present A Midsummer Night's Dream, but with the addition of an original rock music score by Perth musician Tim Hood. In some ways the Dream seems an odd choice, given that the '76 Festival featured John Milson's production of The Faery Queen which, as everyone knows, is Shakespeare's Dream fleshed out with supererogatory masque scenes and music by Purcell. In fact, Addenbrooke has been planning to produce the Dream for some years, and only held back in '76 because The Faery Queen was scheduled. The 1977 Festival has given him his opportunity, and it is unlikely that complaints about duplication will arise, given the radically different approach which Addenbrooke plans.

The play will be performed in an environment suggesting the traditional three-ring circus with Puck, to be played by Edgar Metcalfe, as ringmaster. A five piece rock band, situated in full view of the audience in a band box over the main rear entrance to the ring, will accompany the performers at various points in the play.

Addenbrooke is an admirer of the Polish critic Jan Kott, and finds himself very much in accord with Kott's view of the Dream as one of the most darkly erotic of Shakespeare's plays. He hopes, in the context of the tinsel glamour of his circus setting (designed by theatre architect Peter Parkinson, who also created the superb 'space-age' setting of last year's Tempest), to bring out elements of the play frequently avoided by the 'gossamer and gentle lyricism' school.

Of lesser renown, but still classic of the twentieth century, is T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, directed by John Milson. This play has been chosen in order to combine both the choral and the dramatic societies of the University in one production; for we occur in last year's The Faery Queen, performed in the New Fortune. It is regrettable that the open-air New Fortune will not be used during this Festival, but Milson has sound reasons for staging his production in the prosenium arched new Dolphin. Like the New Fortune, the Dolphin possesses an exceptionally broad and deep stage of variable levels which the director will employ to heighten dramatic mood and to present the tableau effect of this very ritualized play. But the Dolphin also permits an intimacy between the audience and Becket which is rarely possible in an outdoor or cathedral production, where the intricate poeticism of this religious drama is often either lost in acoustic oddities, or needs to be so punctuated that the narrative lacks vitality. Starring Peter Carroll, whom most of us saw with delight in The Christian Brothers, the presentation promises to be a powerful success.

Music plays a more prominent part in another production by John Milson—a seldom performed work of Brecht, Happy End. The score by Kurt Weill is sparkling, but the play is not simply a musical. Written in 1929, the action takes place in a Chicago of 1911: Brecht saw in that period the height of a conflict between the human individual and the overwhelming, amorphous forces of city organization. By 1929 Brecht and Weill were well aware that the struggle was over, and the title of their play should not be taken too literally. To emphasize such loss of identity the actors' 'facades' will be masked by white make-up; it is secondarily a convenient method of doubling up with a cast of ten when the script has some twenty parts.

The Old Tote Theatre Company brings us Sean O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars, which thematically has much in common with Brecht, as we realize when Corporal Stoddart asks us, "... a man's a man, an 'e 'as to fight for 'is country, 'asn't 'e?". Directed by the distinguished Hugh Hunt, and featuring the various
talents of Ron Haddrick, Martin Phelan and Martin Vaughan, this production at the Playhouse Theatre will certainly be as popular as the Melbourne Theatre Company's 1976 offering, Kid Stakes. And the set, so important in much of O'Casey, will be designed by the illustrious Anne Fraser, who was responsible for both set and costume in last year's Ray Lawler drama.

At the Playhouse, The National Theatre Company will contribute Molière's The Miser to the armoury of classic plays. However, director Aarne Neeme will not produce the play in the classic French style of the Comedie Française, that Australian actors are not generally comfortable with such a style, and will therefore bring out those elements in the play more congenial to the emerging Australian acting style, nourished by the conventions of 'rough theatre'. These elements are, of course, the traces of the Commedia dell'Arte which linger in both character and action in Moliere's play, for all its verve and sophistication.

The Playhouse has followed its usual practice of importing a name English actor for its Festival production, and this year John Le Mesurier will play the lead role of Harpagon. Designer Anne French, formerly with the South Australian Theatre Company, has opted for a costume which will bring out the Pantalone origins of Harpagon and there will be a hint of Harlequin in Maitre Jacques, to be played by Dennis Miller. The set will consist of a central box reminiscent of a Punch and Judy stall. Apart from Le Mesurier, the small permanent company at the Playhouse will be supplemented by guests from the local theatre scene, including Eileen Colocott as Frosine, a character whom Aarne envisages as 'very much a Hello Dolly type'.

Ebullience, too, can be expected from the A.P.G.'s contribution, a new play by a new writer, Steve Mastare. Based on one of the more curious of the mythic creatures lodged in Australian race memory, the racehorse Phar Lap, and titled It's Cinghalese for Light 'ning, Y'Know, the play will be produced on the thrust stage of the University's Octagon Theatre.

The A.P.G. have probably been the most significant initiators of a specifically Australian style of acting, drawing heavily on music hall and 'rough theatre' traditions. The Group's commitment to "the development of a truly indigenous theatre, strongly rooted in the realities of life in Australia", while laudable in itself, has too often led in the past to the devising of fairly lightweight entertainments, for which exaggerated claims of 'significance' have been made. It is to be hoped that their Festival contribution will be sufficiently potent to balance the heavy dose of European culture otherwise offered, although the publicity blurb's promise of "a crazy mixture of social realism and spectacular fantasy" contains a hint of the company's frequent tendency to self-indulgence. We must hope for a success because otherwise the flag-carrying will be left entirely to Leonard Teale.

Teale will be presenting a one-man show in the new drama centre of Mount Lawley Teacher's College. Called While the Billy Boils and based on the later years of Henry Lawson's life, the show will be largely a series of readings from some of Lawson's better known bush stories, strung together by Teale's impersonation of the aging Lawson, dipsomaniac and self-pitying. Leonard Teale's vast experience and special knowledge of Australian character and folklore should ensure an enjoyable evening's entertainment.

In sum then, the '77 Festival, although lacking the stimulating effect of overseas companies, offers the prospect of a varied and generally wholesome theatrical diet. At least there are no outright dogs among the proposed plays (and even the most charitable of critics must have felt last year's Pinero farce, The Magistrate, and the 'musical' The Currency Lass belonged in this category). As to horses, we must wait and see. It seems theatregoers can look forward, on the basis of information already available, to some lively debate on the relative success of the treatments planned for A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Miser. Finally, it is interesting to note that comedy, spectacle and song seem to outweigh the more serious fare, and for a Festival, perhaps, this is as it should be.
"An overwhelming sight...

this, without question, must be the most innovative, the most daring, the most dramatic and in many ways, the most beautiful home constructed for the lyric and related muses in modern times”. MARTIN BERNHEIMER — Los Angeles Times.

Julie Anthony
Winifred Atwell
Claudio Arrau
The Australian Opera
The Australian Ballet
Leonard Bernstein
and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra
Kerry Biddell
Dave Brubeck and the Darius Brubeck Ensemble
June Bronhill
Carol Burnett
The Bee Gees
Claudio Arrau
Winifred Atwell
Julie Anthony

Don Burrows and George Golla
Stephen Bishop
Pat Boone & Family
Diahann Carroll
Richard Bonyng
Tim Conway
Barry Crocker
Carlo Felice Cillario
Concentus Musicus Vienna
Jette Davis
Edward Downes
Dean Dixon
Enignt Farnham and
The Fires of London
David Frost
Dance Company (N.S.W.)
Daly Wilson Big Band
Jon English
Arthur Fiedler

Johnny Farnham
German Bach Soloists
Rolf Harris
Colleen Hewitt
Hirokazu Iwaki and the NHK Symphony Orchestra
Paul Hogan
Sir Robert Helpmann
Kiri Te Kanawa
Kamahl
Danny Kaye
Graham Kennedy
Gina Lollobrigida
James Last
Toni Lamond
Radu Lupu
Don Lane
Rod McKuen

Merce Cunningham and Dance Company
Lorin Maazel and the Cleveland Orchestra
Musica Viva Australia
Moscow Chamber Orchestra
Anna Moffo
Don McLean
Herbie Mann Sextet
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Melbourne Theatre Company
Neville Marriner and The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields

Willem van Otterloo
Roy Orbison
Des O’Connor
Ray Price
Pacific Brass Quintet
of Los Angeles
Cliff Richard
Helen Reddy
Joan Sutherland
Sherbert
Silver Studs
Donald Smith

Judy Stone
Guiseppe di Stefano
The Sydney Symphony Orchestra
Smetana Quartet
Harry Sconce
The Stuttgart Ballet
The Shanghai Philharmonic Society
Maxim Shostakovitch
Reg Varney
Digby Wolfe
Roger Woodward
Zurich Chamber Orchestra

Listed above are some of the greats who have already appeared at the Sydney Opera House.

We hope to see you here soon.

All the best, Frank Barnes, General Manager, Sydney Opera House.
HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Collin O'Brien


Director, Aarne Neeme; Designer, Graham Maclean.

Sam: ALAN CASSELL; First Officer: ROBERT van MACKALENBERG; Second Officer: BOB FAGGETTER; Senior Officer Ivan KING; Mick, ROD WILLIAMS; Brenda, MARTIN JONES; Sweeper, IVAN KING; Levick, MACKALENBERG; Second Officer, BOB FAGGETTER; Woman, HELEN NGHOUG.

To arrive at some sort of assessment of Jim McNeil’s How Does Your Garden Grow? it is worth comparing it to two other examples of prison plays: the Ronnie Barker television series Porridge and Genet’s The Maids in the Alexander Hay version reviewed in these columns two issues ago. Indeed when one comes to think of prison drama, there seems to be a good deal of it about, somewhat claustrophobic as shades of the prison house begin to close upon the fumbling scribe.

As with the McNeil play, Porridge is grounded in realism. However it is sometimes in danger of suffering from the inherent weaknesses of short television series: giving way to the glib laugh and the easy paradox (‘there are undesirable types in this prison’) and the impossibility within the timespan and genre of developing very much compassion.

One other aspect of Porridge makes me uneasy. There appears to be, just beneath the surface, a rather unpleasant acceptance of immutable class difference—the idea prevalent in Victoria’s England that there is such a thing as the criminal classes, consisting entirely of recidivist working class people. These are born to the recurrent prison sentence as a way of life and are therefore not objects of pity or compassion, unlike the higher class victims of misfortune like John Stonehouse who were never born to go to prison, and so are objects of our pity. Even the making of folk heroes out of Ronald Biggs and Ned Kelly has its reactionary undertones, as such an attitude seems to accept that there is an inescapable them-and-us about who should ‘do time’, or at any rate about whom we should feel sorry for when incarcerated.

At the other end of the prison play scale in terms of genre is the Genet, a poetic play which finds its expression in symbol and imagery, a species of surreal vision. McNeil’s play claims no such pretension, yet within its realistic genre it manages a vision and clarity based on compassion and the deft pointing and exposition of the realities of prison life. McNeil abjures sentimentality, preaching or any attempt to explain away or apologise for what he so clearly sees and reveals to us. It is realism doing what it does best.

The overriding emotion connected with any institutional existence is unutterable boredom, the same as that of the men who have involuntarily been in the army will tell you (and may Her Majesty forgive me, for I was once reluctantly one of Her gentlemen by act of parliament). Art differs from life in this important respect: life may be boring, but it is the function of art to convey to us the sense of boredom without actually boring us, a difficult feat which Waiting for Godot so brilliantly achieves.

McNeil also manages to convey the sense of ennervating boredom without himself being boring, but his play also triumphs in another major respect. With great tact he manages to anthropomorphize man’s nesting instinct, his need to set up a satisfying domestic context, and he does so within the specific world of prison homosexuality. I describe his treatment as taciturn because it avoids any easy judgement, explanation or special pleading, and is revealing in a most economical way.

The play centres on the handing over, by a prisoner about to be paroled, of his cellmate ‘Brenda’ (ne(e) George) to a nice but rather scruffy older lags. We sense—indeed we see—that Brenda’s influence on the older fellow will be to spruce him up as he did the parollee. It is the equivalent of what we see in ordinary life when a rather down-at-heel bachelor slipping into slovenly middle age marries the right sort of wife—and it would be unfair not to note that it also happens the other way around.

Whereas Brenda is a homosexual, the parolee Mick and the other prisoner Sam are what might be called situational homosexuals. A closer reading of the text supports this. Mick has a wife to whom he is returning, and Sam accepts a relationship somewhat shyly, but with no overt camp behaviour. The strength of the play stems in part from the fact that neither Mick nor Sam show the least guilt or repulsion about coming to terms with the realities of prison life, they accept the status quo without agonising. And the whole situation is given added point by the very real affection between Mick and Brenda, born of their association. The final moment of the play has Brenda affectionately hugged simultaneously by both Mick and Sam and carries the stage direction ‘Brenda smiles perhaps cries, it’s hard to say’. It is a triumphant and just conclusion to the exploration and subtle revelation of the relationships which has been the stuff of the play. Only very occasionally do we feel that the situations are at all contrived for the odd laugh. In the main the action is credible and rivetting, especially considering the length and easy pace of the play.

The direction reveals Aarne Neeme at his best, his tact and deft handling a mirror of the text. Rod Williams plays Mick, the anchor of the action, with his customary intensity of focus, clarity and precision. Alan Cassell deploys his gift of being able to comically undercut a powerful presence; he never succumbs to—though he sometimes approaches—getting the easy laugh, a weakness he has indulged sometimes elsewhere. Martin Jones’ Brenda is the best performance I have seen from him; he does however occasionally fail to match the strength and certainty of Williams and Cassell. In the roles of prison warders et al. Ivan King, Robert van Mackelenberg and Robert Faggetter show expertise and versatility.

It was good to see Aarne Neeme in midseason form, especially as this was something of a farewell for a number of us: Faggetter and Williams are off ‘back East’, Ivan King returns after this season to the music hall and I am reviewing Perth theatre for The Australian for the last time for a year, as I will be in England on study leave by the time this issue hits the streets. I do hope that those sighs I hear are of at least mild disappointment, not relief.

Rod Williams and Alan Cassell.

Photo: Hole in the Wall.
In December 1974, at the end of his first year as director of the Hole in the Wall Theatre, John Milson issued a questionnaire to patrons, asking among other things: Do you think the Hole, as a subsidized theatre, should present only experimental or Australian or classics or popular commercial plays or a combination of these?

The answers were fairly predictable and as a result Milson continued the kind of tightrope act faced by the minor subsidized theatres everywhere, of balancing Australian with classics and launching into the occasional daring experimental offering which at least part of the audience might swallow reluctantly as a dose of cultural medicine.

The peculiar situation of the Hole in the total Perth Theatre scene demands a flexible approach to programming that might, in lesser hands, lead to spineless, haphazard improvisation. In fact, over the three years since Milson took over, the theatre has managed to acquire a distinct character, the main elements of which might be defined as a sure sense of style and enterprise.

Where Milson sees a need to compromise, he compromises upwards rather than down: instead of putting on a sure-fire commercial success to balance the books after a bad season, he will.

Director, John Milson as Joseph K in The Trial.
Photo: Sally McConnell.

Frank Baden-Powell was a co-owner of this members-only key club where you took your own grog. They uncorked it, poured it into a glass and sold it back to you, this anyway was what was supposed to happen in order to get round the crazy licensing laws of 1966. Along with the small room for the club was a rather nasty adjoining hall which came on the same lease: Frank had to put it to work. He had a very wide and varied theatrical background—Stage Manager at the Playhouse, actor, director and sometimes successful entrepreneur of theatrical ventures in pubs, halls or anywhere that he could get people to sit down and watch a play.

He needed a partner he decided, someone who could share the financial risk. The new theatre was to be semi-professional—who could contribute artistically? John Gill was perfect—a successful advertising man with a love of theatre, especially innovative theatre, and a growing reputation as a director.

From the original conference, which went something like this—
F.B.P. What do you reckon we put on theatre in the hall?
J.G. Ripper, lets get started—everything happened as in those unlikely scenes.
look for an unfamiliar quality piece instead. In a 1974 interview he expressed this as a defensive measure against carping critics, whose influence he tends to overrate, but it has proved a more positive approach all round.

At the beginning of 1974 the map of Perth Theatre had suddenly taken on new outlines, and, with the exception of new life stirring on the campuses, the situation has remained unaltered. The major subsidised professional theatre is the National Theatre Company at the Playhouse. In 1974 it added a small (50 seat) theatre in what had been its Greenroom, which allowed for experimental theatre presentations, leaving the main theatre free for "safe" plays—classics, the less difficult Australian plays and the occasional pure commercial product.

This pulled out the rug from under the Hole, which had seen itself as the natural venue for alternative theatre, though in the years immediately prior to John Milson's arrival it had gradually relinquished its reputation as the place that had put on the once daring Americal! American! Student theatre was languishing at the W.A. University, though the W.A. Institute of Technology with its Theatreground (associated with its theatre arts course) was beginning to fill the gap, and their rather nebulous W.A. Theatre Company (originally named the National) was weighing in with occasional rather grandiose productions of the classics.

Originally John Milson's aim had been to "balance the diet" offered by the Playhouse. In the course of time, as the picture grew more complex, the kind of balance achieved was more in the context as a casual survey of the outstanding productions during the past three years (both successes and disasters) shows the sort of nimble footwork engaged in to keep up the challenge to audiences without either driving them away or letting them stagnate in cosiness.

The two major successes of 1974 were Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest and Kenneally's An Awful Rose. The first, an obvious audience pleaser, received an additional boost from the charming design. The Hole had generally tended to rely on makeshift or token scenery, in keeping with its "experimental" character, and apparently argued that the audience three feet away could not be fooled with illusion anyway. The introduction of Victoriana decorative charm was put in itself a dramatic coup.

The Kenneally play, on the other hand, caught everyone by surprise. It was felt to be a popular success. Kenneally was not exactly a household name, in fact when he offered to give an informal press conference at the theatre pre-cisely prior to John Milson's arrival it had graduated from a Hole in the Wall Club, "perfect", thought Frank Kenneally, that recipes can be misleading. It ought to have been a runaway success, with its lively Oz folklore quality, but the variety-sketch format was still new to audiences, who responded better two years later to A Toast to Melba. Also the size of the theatre worked against the element of showbusiness razz-ma-tazz the play needed.

The hole had taken its name from The Hole and they decided to buy the building. Would we like to take on. The Committee did their sums, looked completely at home, with Terence Clarke and the committee of nine was elected, most of whom still serve. A newly built Warehouse in Southport Street looked like it would be perfect. The Committee did their sums, crossed their fingers and rented it. Within eight weeks it had been turned into a theatre, and opened in August 1963 with the play A Day in the Death of Joe Egg which got great reviews but not great audiences. They had to find us again, but a bigger problem loomed.

The company we rented our new theatre from, the Hole, have some financial problems and wanted to sell the building. Would we like to buy it? Sure, but how? Another Committee was formed, again made up of good friends of the Hole and they decided to buy the building on a mortgage. The theatre world rent it from them and hopefully pay for it completely—one day. With that payment secured, it was taken over seriously, but now with far bigger financial responsibilities, actors were paid more, a permanent director was appointed and staff had to be taken on.

Our reputation by now warranted a small grant from the W.A. Government, but nevertheless 1969 found us gently slipping into solvency when our guardian angel dropped a plan into...
Theatre Company was adequately covering such material.

The emphasis during this year was on international theatre with a strong element of challenge. Starting innocuously enough with the Australian musical The Currency Last and Anouilh’s stylish The Rehearsal, and finishing with a bright December holiday entertainment of Mixed Doubles (short plays by contemporary British writers) everything else was either tough, provocative or innovative. People are still arguing about Arrabal’s The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria, which, to soften the shock, was tactfully played behind transparent curtaining to distance the audience from Arrabal’s more offensive fantasies. Guest directors provided a variety of styles, from Omodei’s spectacular Hamlet to Alexander Hay’s flamboyant The Maids. There was also a chance for local actor Malcolm Keith to try out his mime and words adaptations of Animal Farm and Kafka’s The Trial. The only purely Australian contemporary play was A Toast to Melba, and audience response showed that the Hibberd style was beginning to find acceptance.

The three main problems facing a theatre like the Hole seems to be a) audience loyalty, b) working with a changing and semi-professional cast, c) adapting productions to the severe physical limitations of the theatre.

The first problem seems to have been solved with a reasonable measure of success. The nature of the continuing battle between the committed theatre director who wishes to be innovative, and the bulk of the audience who wishes to be stimulated, but mildly so, means that there is a constant state of tension, which the director must keep just short of breaking point.

The work with part-time or inexperienced actors has resulted in occasional examples of unfortunate casting, but no more so than at the Playhouse where the problem is caused by a small permanent ensemble demanding some unhappy bits of casting. At the same time, there has been a constant renewal, talent discovered and moving on, creating a sense of expectations and discovery.

The physical limitations of the theatre are, of course, formidable. Mistakenly called “in the round” it is, more correctly, a square horsehoe, with the audience sitting around three sides of the acting area, close enough to touch the actors and to have them tripping over the occasional front-row foot. This is fine for plays demanding audience discomfort or participation, but places considerable strain on the imagination when illusions of space are essential or a play relies on the visual appeal of a realistic set. Probably the lapidary productions, such as Importance, Rehearsal, Shaw’s Battle of the Sexes and Beckett’s Happy Days were most successful in their seemingly effortless ease of fitting into the theatre.

The most amazing optical illusion was however Ray Omodei’s Hamlet, which seemed to double the stage area and had a spectacular duel (staged by Malcolm Keith) proceeding within inches of the audience.

The changing fortunes of the Hole in the Wall may perhaps be seen as a fairly representative reflection of the state of the theatre and the temperament of audiences as a whole. Its modest subsidy keeps the wolves from breaking the door down, but at the same time does not allow for too much directorial self-indulgence. It might be seen as a paradigm of the compromise between ideal and reality that has probably always been one of the facts of life in the theatre.

**HOLE IN THE WALL (Cont’d)**

John Gills lap: Girl in My Soup with Abigail playing her first part in Australia.

Its success was incredible. It ran for something like three months and when we finally took it off we moved it into the Dolphin Theatre at the University because we couldn’t stop bookings. However the smug smiles were soon wiped off our faces because after that we suffered a reaction that kept people away in their thousands, but Girl had at least put us firmly in the black.

One of the Hole’s proudest boasts in the early ’70’s was its courage in putting on Australian plays. In those days when you did an Australian play you hoped people would come out of loyalty or curiosity. How nice to report that the most successful play of 1975 was Bedfellows, and no one bothered to advertise that it was Australian.

Apart from doing very ‘different’ plays The Hole occasionally goes very conventional; Director John Nilson’s first season at the Hole was a beautifully produced version of The Importance of Being Ernest. There was also Edgar Metcalfe’s Christmas review with dinner suits, evening gowns and songs by Noel Coward. Nevertheless the Hole’s purpose is to be young, viruous and a little radical, not so easy when you enjoy grants from both Federal and W.A. Governments. Not that there are any strings attached to the grants but a theatre, like an actor, must watch for middle aged spread.

And what does one do about it anyway? Well how does this sound: invite Alexander Hay to do The Maids, invite Aarne Neeme to produce How Does Your Garden Grow and ask the prisoners of Fremantle prison to do a public performance of The Chocolate Frog. All that has happened in the space of three months. I think we are doing alright.
2 STAR STUDDED ATTRACTIONS

Theatre Royal
MLC Centre, King Street

Comedy Theatre
Exhibition Street

JOHN THAW
Star of TV’s “The Sweeney”

SHEILA HANCOCK
Star of TV’s “The Rag Trade”

IN
THE TWO OF US
with DAVID NETTHEIM and VALMA PRATT
By Michael Frayn
Directed by Patrick Lau
Designed by Terry Parsons

SYD: Tue. 15 Feb. to Sat. 12 March
MELB: Wed. 16 March to Sat. 9 April

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS JR.
DAVID LANGTON
CAROL RAYE
AND
STANLEY HOLLOWAY
PLEASURE of HIS COMPANY

By Samuel Taylor with Cornelia Otis Skinner
Designed by Terry Parsons
Original London production directed by Peter Dews

SYD: Tue. 15 March to Sat. 9 April
MELB: Wed. 13 April to Sat. 9 May

COUNTER BOOKINGS
SYDNEY-NOW OPEN

Save up to $8 when you purchase two tickets to each play.
Collin O'Brien on the scandalous misuse of theatre facilities at the University of Western Australia.

The University of Western Australia is better equipped with theatres than any other university in Australia. Since its range of theatres includes the unique New Fortune it is arguably one of the best equipped in the world. The persistent failure of the University to make anything approaching adequate use of its theatres is little short of scandalous.

In a local ABC programme Monday Critics I described the University's apparent attitude to their theatres as a Taj Mahal complex: the desire to create buildings which are a dream by moonlight but which are kept unsullied by vulgar use. I honestly think that the ordinary citizen has a right to demand of the University why it fails to use the theatres it has been given. After all it is all our taxes which are used both to pay for university facilities and to maintain them, they are not a free gift to the university to use or not use as they see fit.

Let me briefly summarise for those unfamiliar with the University's complement of theatres. In the first place there is the Octagon, a 700-seat thrust stage theatre in the Guthrie mould, designed by Peter Parkinson with some advice by the late master. Then there's the new Dolphin, a 200-seater designed by the same architect, which has among other facilities a flytower, although not as yet all its flying equipment. This theatre replaces the old Dolphin (now used for rehearsals), a fine little theatre fashioned from an engineering workshop by the blood sweat and tears of Jeana Bradley, David Bradley and Philip Parsons among others. Next there is the Sunken Gardens, an open-air theatre not much used nowadays but once the venue of a number of fine productions. Lastly—and this is where I grip the arms of the chair such that the knuckles show white beneath the skin, I grit my teeth and the veins stand out in purple knots on the fevered brow—there is the New Fortune, the only theatre in the world built to the known dimensions of an Elizabethan playhouse, the Fortune of 1600 for which the builder's contract still exists.

Why are these theatres not adequately used, either for teaching or general community cultural needs? Well, it would be nice to finger a specific individual or organisation for this neglect, to say that so-and-so's spite keeps other users out, but I suspect it is more complex than that. What is perhaps more important is the fact that the University bureaucracy and commercial approach to theatre hire are one or other to blame. It would be nice, but not entirely true. So before homing on to what I see as the prime cause for the neglect of these theatres I'd like to comment (within the laws of libel) on these possible causes.

In the first place, let us consider the malice of individuals. It is true that when a university refuses to take the study of drama and the performance of it seriously in that they will fund neither; university drama other than that done by students can easily become indistinguishable from other amateur drama. A university may do The Miser rather than The Monkey's Paw, but the underlying approach of the participants can remain amateur in the pejorative sense, and the attitude 'I may not be doing anything myself, but I'll make damn sure you don't either, you bastard' easily prevails.

The University possesses a Performing Arts Committee appointed by the Vice-Chancellor. That they are well-meaning is beyond doubt, but the credentials of some have been at least questionable. To be negative, I could name you at least three people in the University whose contribution to drama over the years and professional expertise would seem to make them obvious members, but none of whom have been invited by Mr. Big to serve on the committee. On the other hand I wonder how some of the people who have been on the committee whose first-hand acquaintance with the performing arts is minimal would feel if one or other of their scientific committee were in the hands of, say, Neville Teede. I surmise—and it is only a surmise—that the respective Vice-Chancellors or their Deputies in choosing the committee have failed for that ghastly Australian notion that committees of the arts are only workable if they consist of people neither active nor knowledgeable in the performing arts, thus excluding the bias of interest. I call it the Myth of Disinterested Parties, presumably an antidote to the spectre of a Swarm of Screaming Queens.

But neither of these factors is insurmountable by someone really wanting to get something done, especially as the Performing Arts Committee genuinely want to see things happen, to save themselves embarrassment if nothing else. My third factor—the attitude to theatre costs—is crippling, but it is a symptom rather than a cause.

What I see as the root cause of the University's failure to adequately exploit its theatrical resources is a failure of will by the academic community as a whole, reinforced by the fact that history has overtaken them. Let me be explicit.

Any University which takes drama at all seriously will be concerned to do two things: to treat the study of drama in a performance context as opposed to treating it as a purely literary genre, and also to recognise the per-
formance of drama on its campus as a cultural duty to itself as a body and to the community at large.

Such attitudes are shown in two ways. In the first place drama will be allowed to be studied by students within a drama department as well as within the literature departments, and such study will count as part of a student's progress. Secondly there will be a recognition of the value of professionalism both in the work of the staff who are professionally trained, and in the payment or other recognition of professional theatrical work within the University. Where student drama is seen as not contributing to a student's studies for even, as is often the case, hindering them), or the study of drama is seen as beneath the dignity of a university except as a pleasant and marginally useful adjunct to the study of drama as literature, or where any theatrical work by staff members even with students is not recognised as work but as spare-time playacting: where such attitudes prevail, drama will be in the moribund condition it is in the University of W.A.

There is no point in the University as a body claiming it is serious about drama when, with all that built-in capital in the way of theatres, it gives Drama a priority below Religious Studies, Prehistory, Ethnomusicology and, I would guess, Home Economics! I am not knocking the odd visiting commercial company or prestigious film or even that universities put their scarce resources into training the people who direct the plays and deliver the music to the community as a whole. In those days the University provided a very real service in the provision of music to the community at large. It all goes back to the time when the University went professional at running the theatres, but not as far as what went on there. We have paid managers, box office staff, ushers, fireguard, carpark attendant, etc., but no one wants to pay the people who direct the plays and deliver the music. Oh, and don't take those figures for theatre here quoted above as gospel. I have it on the best of authority that there are strong moves in the University of W.A. to restore Drama a priority below Religious Studies and to put it back to the University by way of charges. How can a student body contemplate doing something worth the effort but not box-office when a ten night season starts with $1,000 at least for the theatre?

There was no professional theatre except the odd visiting commercial company or prestigious Old Vic royal visit. There was a lot of serious and fine amateur and unpaid professional work, but no local professional theatre in the full sense. In those days the University provided a remarkable range and quality of serious drama, emanating largely from the Department of English. But this august pile on the banks of the Swan seems not to have noticed things which have happened since. Professional theatre has hit Perth, and there has emerged not only in North America but even in England, departments of drama. Not perhaps at Oxford and Cambridge old boy, but at least at some universities of some standing, such as such as Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham.

Putting on my sociological philosopher's hat for a moment let me put forward the idea that colonial and neo-colonial societies do tend to be a generation behind the old country: we were still standing for the Queen at the pictures when the English would have fallen about at the idea. Similarly the concept that drama in the context of performance is not a fit study for university still prevails here. Behind closed doors (jarrah, not mahogany) it is hinted that what will be taught is 'putting on makeup and painting flats'.

More seriously it is claimed that the university is no place to train actors, there are other places such as N.I.D.A. and the Theatre Arts Course at the West Australian Institute of Technology. Such notions completely fail to recognise the role of drama departments in universities. Their role is similar to that of a music department, to study the art form in a disciplined way in the context for which it was created: performance. As the music department is to a conservatorium, so a drama department to a school of dramatic art.

I keep holding up as the example of what is possible the success of the University's Department of Music under Professor Calloway; scholastic in getting excellent artists in residence and in providing a very real service in the provision of music to the community as a whole. But no, I'm afraid it's a case of 'Calloway went thataway'.

The refusal to take drama seriously as a discipline is reinforced by the refusal to fund it in any real sense as something which is of value to both the University and the community at large. It costs University users $100 a night for the Dolphin and $150 for the Octagon. They can have budgets agreed to by the Performing Arts Committee, but the bulk of the money goes back to the University by way of charges. How can a student body contemplate doing something worth the effort but not box-office when a ten night season starts with $1,000 at least for the theatre?

Directed by John Bell
Starring
Robert Alexander, Bill Conn, Bob Faggetter, Jane Harders, Tony Sheldon and Greg Zuckerman.

PREMIERE SEASON
of LOUIS NOWRA'S
INNER VOICES

Preseason of Louis Nowra's INNER VOICES

Directed by John Bell
Starring Robert Alexander, Bill Conn, Bob Faggetter, Jane Harders, Tony Sheldon and Greg Zuckerman.

Designed by Brian Hocking

Group Travel savings have theatre-goers applauding

Pop festivals, music concerts, opera, ballet or theatre parties, trade shows, incentive groups, jaunts to the "big game", or whatever. If you belong to an eligible common-interest group, TAA offers a fat 10% Discount off regular Economy fares when 10 or more of you fly together.

TAA can arrange your accommodation, tours or rent-a-cars, too. Plus special baggage allowances. And people who fly TAA together, save together. Call your Travel Agent or TAA to see if your group is eligible. Ask about Off-Peak fares too – they can save you even more!
The Western Australian Arts Council has the job of culturally enriching the lives of people spread far and wide. GAENOR THOMAS explains the policies, problems, hopes and achievements of a task which ranges from funding the National Theatre to providing the sole violin for a small mining town.

"The Western Australian Arts Council is a statutory body, answerable to the (State) Minister for Cultural Affairs." (Western Australian Year Book, 1977 entry.)

This is the state of dichotomy; of city and country—a small city, big country—needs and attitudes with no more in common than caviar and cucumber, all swept together under the supportive umbrella of the Arts Council, charged to foster and encourage "the arts" throughout Western Australia.

Reduce the problem to a million. You have almost a million square miles, on which to spread the basic butter of just over a million dollars for just over a million people.

Given some kind of bank-card benevolence, a fleet of performer-carrying jumbo jets, and an understanding with the Almighty that he would abandon the "wet season" in the Kimberleys, it would be possible to erase the jam of professional performances more democratically throughout the State.

Meantime, inevitably, the bulk of financial assistance goes to the bulk of the population: in Perth. The Arts Council has a firm policy to support the major metropolitan performing companies—the National Theatre, the W.A. Ballet Company, W.A. Opera Company, and the W.A. Arts Foundation Orchestra. This support accounts for half the Council's annual state budget, with a further $178,300, this year towards semi-professional companies; to date, The Hole in the Wall Theatre, Fremantle Arts Centre, Children's Activities Time Society, Perth Institute of Film and Television, Craft Association of Western Australia, Gilbert and Sullivan Society, Perth City Ballet, and the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association.

Clearly, with that slice cut from the cake, only crumbs remain for the country. However, apart from State Government funding, there is a financial allocation from the Arts Council of Australia.

And while major grants are issued annually, with bursaries to travel and further study issued bidentally, the council coffers allow a small manoeuvrability for year-round "special project" grants, guarantees against loss on performance, interest-free loans on equipment, and help with freight charges in country areas.

These are not so much policies as accepted funding procedures for a State Council only three years old. That this is the baby of Australian Arts Council is possibly its saving grace. Unprotected by bureaucratic buffers, its twelve-member council and small staff must say: "The buck stops here!"

Performing arts are expensive. Everyone needs more money. Everyone's need is greatest. In the absence of elasticated purse-strings, a Dumas-type 'one for all' pattern of mutual assistance has gradually evolved into policy.

Written into the state orchestra's grant is the proviso of some free service to the ballet, National Theatre, Opera, and the Gilbert and Sullivan Society.

Perth City Ballet Company is funded, specifically, for school and country performances. And, in theatre, director/producer expertise spreads beyond the professional stage. Last year, Aarne Neeme, (National Theatre) gave free time travelling Perth to adjudicate 34 amateur productions for the Robert Finlay Award. Neeme's workshops and encouragement are factors in the standing and confidence of amateur groups.

In November, 1976, the Arts Council brought Alexander Hay to the Hole in the Wall Theatre, for Genet's The Maids, with a following Genet workshop giving rare opportunity for amateur, student and teacher groups to learn of Genet's philosophy and raison d'etre. David Addenbrooke produced John Bowen's After the Rain, for the Esperance Repertory Group, 720 kms from Perth. It was, recipients claim, an educational experience, beyond production and workshop requirements.

Enabling country people to enjoy city performances has proved more difficult. Bus (to assist country groups with travel) and seat subsidies have only been truly effective for towns situated up to 300 kms from Perth. The major companies, with touring commitments built into their grants, have toured the state extensively, but, again, large sections of the North West have been neglected, and even in accessible, artistically-established areas, the reaction has, to say the least, been erratic.

However, two near-parallel developments in 1976 have seen a positive practical policy for country arts, both visual and performing. In March, the Council appointed two specialist officers, Keith Sinclair, (art/craft), and Margaret Gill, (performing arts). Their main role has been to travel the country, listening, talking, looking, advising, assessing: listening to ideas, advising on specific problems, telling of Arts Council benefits, looking at existing amenities, assessing their adaptability to changing demands.

Margaret Gill has been compiling, on route, a country/city register of scripts, so that particular play requests can be passed on to groups owning typed copies.

Following her December visit to Albany, its arts council president donated an authentic collection of Hong Kong prison uniforms to the Western Australian Arts Access, a two-year pilot scheme also established in 1976 have seen a positive practical policy for country arts, both visual and performing. In March, the Council appointed two specialist officers, Keith Sinclair, (art/craft), and Margaret Gill, (performing arts). Their main role has been to travel the country, listening, telling, looking, advising, assessing: listening to ideas, advising on specific problems, telling of Arts Council benefits, looking at existing amenities, assessing their adaptability to changing demands.

Margaret Gill has been compiling, on route, a country/city register of scripts, so that particular play requests can be passed on to groups owning typed copies.

Following her December visit to Albany, its arts council president donated an authentic collection of Hong Kong prison uniforms to the Western Australian Arts Access, a two-year pilot scheme also established in 1976 have seen a positive practical policy for country arts, both visual and performing. In March, the Council appointed two specialist officers, Keith Sinclair, (art/craft), and Margaret Gill, (performing arts). Their main role has been to travel the country, listening, telling, looking, advising, assessing: listening to ideas, advising on specific problems, telling of Arts Council benefits, looking at existing amenities, assessing their adaptability to changing demands.

Margaret Gill has been compiling, on route, a country/city register of scripts, so that particular play requests can be passed on to groups owning typed copies.

Following her December visit to Albany, its arts council president donated an authentic collection of Hong Kong prison uniforms to the Western Australian Arts Access, a two-year pilot scheme also established in 1976 have seen a positive practical policy for country arts, both visual and performing. In March, the Council appointed two specialist officers, Keith Sinclair, (art/craft), and Margaret Gill, (performing arts). Their main role has been to travel the country, listening, telling, looking, advising, assessing: listening to ideas, advising on specific problems, telling of Arts Council benefits, looking at existing amenities, assessing their adaptability to changing demands.

Margaret Gill has been compiling, on route, a country/city register of scripts, so that particular play requests can be passed on to groups owning typed copies.

Following her December visit to Albany, its arts council president donated an authentic collection of Hong Kong prison uniforms to the Western Australian Arts Access, a two-year pilot scheme also established in 1976 have seen a positive practical policy for country arts, both visual and performing. In March, the Council appointed two specialist officers, Keith Sinclair, (art/craft), and Margaret Gill, (performing arts). Their main role has been to travel the country, listening, telling, looking, advising, assessing: listening to ideas, advising on specific problems, telling of Arts Council benefits, looking at existing amenities, assessing their adaptability to changing demands.

Margaret Gill has been compiling, on route, a country/city register of scripts, so that particular play requests can be passed on to groups owning typed copies.
teacher wrote, begging for musical appreciation: "I doubt if there is one child learning music here, who has, for instance, seen a violin, other than in a picture or on television."

One hundred and fifty children enjoyed the resulting four-day workshop. Four hundred saw the Arts Access children's entertainments, Magical Marquis, and Pied Piper.

The Jerdacuttup Players, a group coming together from remote stations to perform plays, sought professional help. There was a drama request from Carnarvon School of the Air, for children with no cultural experience. From Tardun, a mission father asked advice on lighting and equipment. And from Paraburdoo, came the exultant response that, being 1,000 miles from Perth no longer mattered! Arts Access, with a small performing unit, and single experts, has reached untapped, deprived areas. The benefit has been enormous; the expense, of course, astronomical.

Meanwhile, the Council's country benefits continue, with financial assistance for ballet tutors and music examiners, music camps, music and arts festivals; direct grants to country arts councils. But the financial demand is minimal, compared to the city's. The repeated call is for professional service, not professional performances. Country towns are independently insular, less involved in the remote city sophistication, more concerned to "do their own thing."

The first meeting, (November, 1976), of a new development committee, consisting of country delegates and council staff, considered major company touring, and voted for only one annual tour, with two "mini tours", which might deliberately involve the local population.

A second Arts Council "State-Wide Symposium", in March, will gather country representatives in Perth. Meeting and hearing professional entertainers, they will discuss future developments. Thus, needs and expertise begin to overlap.

But one often-insurmountable problem is time. It is the nature of any council beast, that applications go carefully through committee machinery, while all involved know the help is often needed today, or yesterday—but not tomorrow.

It is a compliment to communication and delegation, that, having experienced the climatic conditions of the area, Margaret Gill was able to act speedily, with the Kimberleys Arts Council, to send a puppeteer and textile worker the three thousand kms to Wyndham and Kununurra in the December holidays. Eighty children, who would otherwise have "stagnated" in the intense heat and humidity of the "wet season", enjoyed a ten-day workshop/entertainment.

So while the major portion of Council money goes to the city, the major portion of Council time goes to the country. In effect, there are two broad policies; one financial, one practical; equal, but different. And, in between, are the myriad supported amateur groups, city and country: opera, drama, music; and the myriad bursary applicants, city and country, for opera-study, drama-training, ballet.

Will Kathy Edgar, whom we've sent to Sydney Opera Company, over-shadow Sutherland? Will Kim Wright, now reporting enthusiastically from the Bristol Old Vic. Theatre School, become a new Olivier?

What of Kathy Jarvis, first with the Australian Ballet School, now with the Company; the actresses and musicians studying in the U.K.? What will become of satisfaction, or national acclaim.

In the last resort, it is the council's role not only to select the stars, but, as often as possible, in as many ways as possible, to enrich the lives of as many people as possible.

National Policy

Aarne Neeme, Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Perth, talks about the future of the company.

"As the State Company we are responsible for the general health of all theatre in the state. So our primary aim is to create a representative audience and so become a vital part of our community.

I see a particular need then to wean our audience from the largely entertainment-orientated theatre of the West End, of old English Rep, to the more provocative main stream of Australian and World theatre in the 70's.

We've all sorts of aims subsiduary to the main one. It will sound something like promo list, but I do think all the following are being implemented to the best of our present resources.

Firstly, as far as the community is concerned-

Presenting a variety of first class professional theatre at a reasonable price. We have a dual (Mainhouse/Greenroom) programming policy so we can both consolidate old audiences and develop new ones, so we can cater both for the G.P. and a more adventurous alternative. Now, our repertoire is seriously hampered by the smallness of our company: not many classics can be done with a basic company of seven actors—which is the result of the small size of our subsidy. So we lean towards modern dress, small cast, one set plays.

Providing professional services, artistic and technical, to other groups, professional and amateur. To ensure future grass roots development we must break down barriers between professional and amateur—consolidate links between them.

Then there are our educational activities—we run workshops and have T.I.E. programmes, and aim to incorporate all our youth activity into a youth company; our touring the state responsibilities; our Friends of the Playhouse—a liaison organisation between company and audience.

Secondly, as far as the company itself is concerned-

Building a quality company with a distinct identity. Perth's isolation and our limited resources make for problems in attracting top actors from elsewhere—and that's essential for the optimum development of local talent.

Developing new plays—we collaborate fully with Kuljak, the W.A. playwright group.

In-service training schemes and the exchange of personnel and equipment with other professional organisations.

And finally, lobbying for a new home to house the company for both our Main House and Greenroom productions.

The present Playhouse is inadequate in terms of the more intimate and accessible needs of modern drama, and the greater demands for comfort (seating and air conditioning) made by today's audiences. And we wish to continue to make use of other unique local venues."
WHAT 4.5 MILLION PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS MOOMBA

...a good deal of variety, plenty of surprises and lots of excitement.

ABBA at the Sydney Myer Music Bowl; Dizzy Gillespie at the Dallas Brooks Hall; La Belle Helene at the Princess Theatre...

On the Yarra; the Bathtub Derby; the Birdman Rally; the Water Ski Revue by night...

In the Gardens; the Ride for Lite; the Fun Run; the Hot Air Balloon; the Magic Garden; the Craft Happening; the Outdoor Art Show...

On the Streets; the Mardi Gras; the Moomba Buskers; the Street Parade...

AND on stage, the MOOMBA FESTIVAL OF THEATRE: ten days, ten plays

MARCH 4 - 14
A B.C. staffers are hopeful that the new chairman, John Norgard, will be able to achieve some of his aims, especially for a three-year funding period. Producers insist that such a time would enable them to plan and arrange for future productions, without fear of sudden cuts or, even more hazardous, having to curtail productions after shooting has begun. Currently, productions are uncertain and pilots and planned productions are being postponed. The Truckie series is just one that is in limbo.

Of course, this has reacted on actors and actresses, including many who have been cast in planned productions. This means that if and when the pilots and other features go ahead, recasting will have to take place in some cases, as the actors will have taken other openings. Opportunities can’t be let go in the present economic climate.

In another area, there is hope that more attention will be given to planning of news and current affairs programmes, including bringing the two closer. This would eliminate much of the duplication which often occurs between news and current affairs programmes or the battle to get in first which sometimes becomes farcical to outsiders. But, above all, there is renewed hope, however guarded it may or may not be, that the commission will eventually obtain a completely independent charter.

It is also interesting to note that among many wise A.B.C. staffers, supporters and viewers, is a strong view acknowledging the need for trimming some of the waste and unbelievably bad programming from the commission. This goes for actual productions and to times programmes are slated. There also is need for a thorough look at programming for children and young people in general. This could almost be a new position for a Director of Young Peoples and Children’s TV planning — this could be distinct from the regular school’s programmes coming under the A.B.C.’s Education section. (Indeed, the commercial channels might look at this area themselves — how many, if any, have an executive solely in charge of TV for young people from toddlers to teens?)

Another area for A.B.C. consideration is in just how far it should compete with the commercial stations, remembering its charter calls for it to educate, entertain and cater for minority groups in providing programmes others fail to do. In its music presentations, more use could be made (within contractual arrangements) for international artists brought here by the A.B.C. concert department. There could be more regular programming, which would be allied to its subscription and other concerts, using A.B.C. state symphony orchestras. This is quite a neglected area at the moment. The mind boggles at how programming could be enhanced by the A.B.C.’s resources in this area — after all, it is tagged as the world’s largest concert promotion body. And what a way this could be to promote its wares, including to the very young and older youngsters, the audiences of today as well as tomorrow.

Promoting its wares is another area for discussion. In our electronic age, there appear many areas it could utilise which are currently being ignored. One hopes that these and other A.B.C. aspects will be looked at, discussed and threshed around in a willing-to-get-somewhere atmosphere, not merely with some outsiders and some in the commission trying to push their own barrows and artistic wishes at any cost to the A.B.C.

The A.B.C. is a worthy organisation, with some of Australia’s best talents in a diversity of fields. Those inside the organisation and outside (including our various political parties) should ensure all talents are utilised in the best possible way so that the viewers as well as those involved in programming receive the greatest satisfaction. In catering for so many tastes, opinions and age groupings, the A.B.C.’s tasks are not easy. Let us hope, and ensure, they are not made harder, but that they continue to measure up to the world-wide (at times, enviable) standards the commission has enjoyed.

Let us also be alert for any inside and outside the commission who are willing to almost destroy (or hinder) this worthy organisation in achieving their ends.

There is no doubt that Australia and, especially, the acting profession would be much worse off without the A.B.C. All concerned with the state of the Australian theatre and acting profession in general, and this includes radio and television, must be vitally interested in what happens to the A.B.C. which for many years has been a vital area for all our arts, but especially acting. It has assisted the legitimate theatre directly and indirectly in many different ways and been part of one’s theatrical training in this country. Many are the top theatre people who gained confidence and other attributes through work with the A.B.C. and people connected with it. And, we need it now — just as it needs us. This includes objective, as well as passionate, listeners and viewers.

Good luck Mr. Norgard. There are a lot of people who would like to help you feel it isn’t so lonely at the top after all.
I'd like to mix my comments on the English theatre scene with random reactions to *Theatre Australia* as my feelings about each of these institutions sometimes seem to echo and sometimes not. The London theatre in '76 only too accurately reflected the state of the nation. The subsidised theatre's great Gargantua, the National Theatre, slumped like a huge white elephant on the south bank of the Thames, represented "public spending" and the vast sums eaten up by the nation's public services in security, welfare, and so on. Regional theatres and Alternative-Theatre touring groups seemed like those regional authorities which squealed that any further cuts would inhibit or almost destroy their effective functioning, and resented the large amounts of subsidy creamed off by the great wen—though London's public authorities continued to make the case that if anything the metropolis was under-assisted given its special, continuing and worsening problems. And the "independent" purveyors of commodities, cultural and commercial, did what they always do when times are hard: gave us muck and circuses. The muck may be said to be, with honourable exceptions, British goods, as truculently styleless, shoddily, late-delivered and lacking in after-sales care as ever; and the circuses were the toneless rubbish of commercial television and the increasingly vapid totterings of the commercial West End theatre.

Indeed, we become more like the Roman mob each year. I have dismissed the idea of Roman decadence exemplified by the bloody excesses of the Colosseum as a Victorian piety carried over into our own age and gradually presented, unexamined, as a fact instead of a possible interpretation of one aspect of history. But I wonder if the old-time moralists were not, after all, right. There are signs. The cinema, especially, if an accurate index of our current state of mind, suggests that we are a populace hungry for blood, preferably mixed with loveless and often brutal sex, and that a clean straight economy, the caution, the timidity, the fear of cutting would inhibit or almost destroy their effect­

For pop culture likes to include sex as one of its elements and rock concerts are strong on sexuality, what is the ultimate aim assumed to be, and if it is not to be a kind of strip-show, all tease and no result, is not the public orgy an inevitable and, indeed, honest develop­

ment? Well, not to it, but, what's taken you so long? Some open-air festivals of the late '60s and early '70s did have some casual public forn­

icating in the audience, as did some all-right rock and cinema shows in the fleapits of London a few years ago. But sex on stage has been, mostly, stimulation by simulation. When, years back, the Door of No Return offered a touch of flashing and fellatio (real) they were promptly arrested, to encourage the others, who took the hint and made sure their acts were "only pretend". Rock continues to fascinate because of its popularity and influence and if overt sexuality is not going (you should pardon the expression) to come, what will? The unexpected and delightful answer seems to be: Must I? Do I imagine or are today's rock groups, lead singers and back-up instrumentalists alike, showing more musicality, greater variety and inventiveness in their sounds, less wah-wah bang-slam and those endless same three chords in the bass? Certainly some of the best groups are going for greater visual ingenuity and flexibility in their arrangements. If only one could transfer some of the vitality, vigour, however crude, sexual potency, musical and visual power into the straight theatre. Increasingly, and against all our expectations of a few years ago, the legit theatre goes ever more legit. It must be, as I began by saying, the doleful economy, the caution, the timidity, the fear of experiment, or, interestingly, the rationalisation that these sober times are not the moment to experiment but to go quietly on doing what we have been doing. So what have we been doing, or what have they been doing to us?

*Equus*. Revived, if that is the word, modish and banal as ever. *Happy as a Sandbag*, rumoured to be a mushy nostalgia trip catering to the endless English appetite for memories of the Second World War. *Anastasia*. Ana-who? Oh! Calcutta and now *Carte Blanche*. Michael Crawford to keep the crowds coming. *Same Time Next Year* and *Teeth 'n' Smiles*. My People Come, all is simulated, nothing is erect, and the effect is about as impressive as a banana skin without a banana inside. Let them either do it properly, openly, once and for all and let us all admit that it is what it is about, or stop the pretence and get back to real plays really and honestly written so that at least we get something for our money. What else? *Murder at the Vicarage* only twenty-three years behind the other Agatha Christie, *The Mousetrap*. The *Circle*, with La WITHERS, a MAUGHAM revival which, according to one critic, "sailed in majestically" from its production at Chichester. *Ipi-Tombi*, energetic and colourful but about as authentically African as *The Mikado* was Japa­nese. Two *Ben Travers* farces, *The Bed Before Yesterday* and *Banana Ridge*, for which latter see Jim SHARMAN in *Christmas Theatre Australia*. Jim's own *Rip-Off* Show still snags on in the King's Road; it must be more than three years since I saw it but according to *Time Out*, it is "prolonging itself reasonably well". J. S. is also collecting royalties (still!) from *Jesus Christ Superstar* which is doing a Mouse­trap in the Palace. *Same Time Next Year* has new Michael CRAWFORD to keep the crowds coming. Otherwise exchanged transferred to another theatre and Alec Gunning* picked up, improbably, in the West End, with a Swift compilation *Yahoo*. *No Sex Please, We're British*, bafflingly, still at the STRAND. Warren Mitchell did a Bar­

humpies with his one-man *Thoughts of Chair­man Alf*, Australian author Peter YEALDTH must be enjoying his share of *Fringe Benefits*, a White­hall farce with Brian RIX which keeps the coach parties happy. *Side by Side by Sondheim* warbles on in its warm, witty, wayward fashion. And, despite all of the above, the profession must be in good shape. A *Chorus Line* did not after all collapse after the inner circle of show-biz camp followers had seen it through its first few weeks and has played on to good business, the English cast taking over in mid January.

Although central London, Piccadilly and Soho especially, are looking tamer than ever, we have not quite (yet!) the 42nd St atmosphere described by Weiner in *Theatre Australia* Christmas '76. And although we complain about it, that West End line-up is looked upon with some approval and enthusiasm by many visiting foreigners, including New Yorkers, who find, despite all, that there is a wider range of plays on offer here than in most cities. The above list also omitted the subsidised theatre (the Nation­al's two houses, the R.S.C. at the Aldwych, the Mermaid, the I.C.A. and the Royal Court). As well as their offerings the commercial theatre this last year has offered Tom STOPPARD'S *Dirty Linen*, an achingly beautiful Jonathan Miller production of *Three Sisters* and Mike STOTT'S refreshing farce *Funny Peculiar*. Add to these about thirty fringe theatres and half as many again lunchtime venues and it can be as bad as we seem to insist it is. The feel­

ing remains that it is difficult for a serious play­wright who wishes to reach a large number of the unconverted, rather than fifty like-minded ones already converted before arrival, to get a new play done by a commercial management.
Economics and the state of the nation dictate much of the caution, and if we are seeing still—and again and again—that Fifties formula delineated by Sharman in *Theatre Australia*: "the careers and sex lives of the middle classes endlessly discussed in rooms", it is partly because such plays are cheap to do. Of *Otherwise Engaged* one of your commentators said: "Best play of the year? Is this the best the British can do?" Before its low-voltage discussion even began, I was depressed by the set itself: that same old "tasteful" living room. This year's "Best" play, *Dear Daddy* (by Dennis Canaan) has the same set and the same structure. But Jim has hit it. The 60's experiments had a certain bloodless, cosmic callousness about them, were more interested as he now suggests, in concepts than in people. The people were caricatured to make political points. Nowadays we seem to be setting up individuals and searching their faces and their words, quite anxiously, for signs that we are going to survive or, perhaps, in our grimmer moods, for signs that corroborate our conviction that we are not.

*Theatre Australia* teaches me much about the state of not only the Australian theatre but the national sensibility. I note sometimes, with alarm, that my forebodings at the first National Playwrights' Conference were not unfounded: that many articulate people have difficulty in articulating a clear, comprehensible argument or even a graphic description. The verbal inaptitude of people on that conference's podium was staggering. People whose tools were words, whose profession or art, whose very life depended upon the use of words, stumbled along with "er—well—sort of—ah—you know" as their principal verbal building blocks. My favourite was the quite seasoned writer and Influential Person who mentioned an A.B.C. production "that had something quite intrinsic about it."

The magazine also excites me because of the range of theatre activity it uncovers and the multi-dimensional impression one thus forms. Garrie Hutchinson on the A.P.G.'s breakaway group in *The Young Peer Gynt*. Kate Brisbane on the Black Theatre. Earlier, the casebook on Stephen Spears, the delight of Wherrett's discovery of Gordon Chater's talent and presence and his revaluation, by implication, of a generation almost forgotten and, when remembered, dismissed. The awesome task of writing and staging the Lawler trilogy. (But it has been done before; one cast playing three plays in one day; apart from the R.S.C. *Wars of the Roses*: the Ayckbourne trilogy *Norman Conquests* done one imperishable Saturday at the Greenwich Theatre before the company moved into town; and what an ovation at the end of it, comedy being exhausting to keep light and alive. With Ayckbourne, by the way, one doesn't mind the one interior set, the middle class milieu, because one knows that he is going to send it up rotten.)

What most depresses in *T.A.* is the sense of old arguments, old problems, endlessly rehearsed. The Tom Markus case against subsidy in which, though I question his thesis, he made some telling criticisms of some old Australian weaknesses. The wearisome business of having to defend the concept of subsidy at all. The shock at Sharman's statement-in-passing that few Australian theatres would allow him the freedom to experiment uncommercially that the Court has taken for granted, month by month, show by show, for years. Surely all those excitements I've been reading about in *T.A.* are testament to a similar spirit in Australian theatre? In fact, for some time now I have envied the ease with which playwrights can get new plays on, and the growing sense that a play such as *Elocution of Benjamin Franklin* can be a small but genuine commercial success, in Sydney.
As was mentioned a couple of issues back, the Australian dance scene is undergoing a tremendous shake up: changes of staff administration, artistic directorship—and a very grim situation in terms of money and box office income.

The trouble is not limited to the dance scene of course, it's happening all over the country to practically every institution of artistic endeavour, but dance always feels it more acutely.

More acutely because dance in Australia, being the real Cinderella of the arts has always teetered on the brink of financial disaster. It still isn't understood completely enough in this country (one that is becoming increasingly mistrustful of physical exertion and effort); it is therefore a comparatively minor interest and audiences have to be strenuously wooed.

All of this excepting the Australian Ballet of course. That institution has always managed to survive and has been the only continuously performing artistic ambassador of Australia overseas. (You really can't tell me that the cost of transporting The Merry Widow holus-bolus to America and England is appreciably less expensive than transporting say the Australian Opera's Figaro).

The comparatively new Dance Company (N.S.W.) has always amazed me in that it, dealing solely in the less understood "modern" idiom has consistently managed to keep its head above water.

With the Ballet Victoria having recently crashed around our ears and the once disbanded Australian Dance Theatre just now beginning to struggle towards the light, the Dance Company is the only professional hope of modern dance in Australia. And even here things were rather touchy, a few months ago. Their last season at the Seymour Centre with the Anna Sokalov works wasn't the smash hit they (or at least some of the dancers) had expected.

Added to that was the nagging fear that with the departure of Jaap Flier as Artistic Director, the Australia Council funding that fell their way when he arrived might be taken back. Happily that hasn't been the case, and the Company, with Graeme Murphy as their new Artistic Director, has embarked upon an ambitious project of giving free performances as part of the Festival of Sydney as well as preparing for their forthcoming season at the Opera House in March.

Graeme Murphy was for a long time a dancer with the Australian Ballet and occasionally left it to go freelancing as a choreographer. His choreography shows promise, with a decidedly refreshing sense of wit and intelligent design, but still he is an unknown commodity as an Artistic Director. Whether he and General Manager Michael Goodwin will be able to steer the Company through the treacherous financial rapids this year (let alone generate new audience interest) has yet to be seen.

The endeavour deserves success, not merely because Murphy is Australian, but because both he and the Company itself is dynamic, young and urgently involved in getting modern dance and its techniques firmly imbedded in the Australian audience's appreciation. A lot of this of course will depend both on the technical quality of the dancers and the sort of personality they project out from the stage.

When Flier left, a lot of the former dancers left with him, some went to Ballet Victoria and other have since gone overseas. The present company has a couple of old stalwarts in its ranks, a few dancers from Ballet Victoria, some from other state ballet companies and others as yet untired on the professional stage. What needs to happen now is for the dancers to learn to work cohesively together as one group on
stage and build up a feeling of familiarity in the audiences that watch them.

For this reason, the performances in the Sydney Town Hall as part of the Festival were a good trying out period, one which will act as a constructive jumping off point for the upcoming March season in the Opera House. Graeme Murphy’s *Sequenza VII* (to the Berio music of the same name) is one work that will be performed in that period. It’s a completely thought out and well constructed work, showing some traces of Glen Tetley in its overall design. A sparse, insectual work with a strange, lapidary form about it, the moves are out of the basic “classical” vocabulary yet there are small disruptions, pulls to the side and inflections that aren’t part of the ballet lexicon. The three dancers move in sequence (naturally) and the movement of each dancer affects the quality and style of the others. Each enchainment controls the other, fold upon fold, and dictates the form of the movement that follows. The piece has the look and feel of a classical pas de trois seen in a fractured mirror or through a distorting lense.

It was interesting to have this piece on the same programme as Norman Moriss’ *Pas de Deux*. The same small but effective twists to a classical style are present here too, but whereas *Sequenza VII* is stark and nervous, *Pas de Deux* is languorous, bittersweet and full of regret. Perhaps the music (the last of Mahler’s Ruckert songs) is a good indicator, as at one stage in those heartfelt songs there is a mention of “the two children, with their tottering little games, on the sand”. The children were of course Mahler’s, and he had a morbid dread of them dying (in fact one did), and one can see the exact mirror of those lines in this meandering duet, its curling lines and slow spins reminding me, in its “drooping dying fall”, of John Cranko’s *Brouillards*. And it was expressively and touchingly performed.

As for Daniel Maloney’s *A Clear Place*, danced by Jaqui Carroll and accompanied by a grandiose orchestral synthesis of Moussorgsky’s *Boris Goudanov*—it was anguished without apparent reason. I’m always suspicious of dance pieces where the dancers flail their arms, look wretched and run round the stage in aimless circles; the works nearly always are just that: aimless.

*A Clear Place* was no exception.

The last work on the programme, Murphy’s *Volumina* was ideally suited to the main auditorium of the Sydney Town Hall. It gave this far-flung, idiosyncratic work plenty of room to breathe and the sight and sound of the enormous Town Hall organ playing the titanic chords of Legetti’s piece (*Volumina*), gave the performance an enthralling sense of drama and mystery. Let’s hope that when the Opera House Concert Hall’s organ is finally completed, they get to perform the work there.*

*Volumina* starts off with a variation on the Cosmic Big Bang theory, one tightly huddled group breaking up into solos and duets that work in areas of their own. Things sail energetically along for a while but about half way through it, Murphy seems to have lost his thread or inspiration and the ballet just walks through to the end. Perhaps this an intentional symbol about the Universe running down; I don’t know. It is also weakened (for me) by a familiar habit of Murphy’s in the works of his that I have seen, of using his dancers as mobile sculptures, expressionless and vacant. I know it’s a favorite fashion of choreographers to do this these days, but the greatest creators in the medium, Balanchine, Tetley, Van Manen etc. have always placed their work on a recognisable human form, with all its descriptive strengths and limitations and their work has increased in power and memorability because of it.

Anyway, *Volumina* shows plenty of promise, and hopefully can be reworked and made to cohere a little more. It has, at the moment a raw energy and crystalline logic that will make the reworking easier and leave its power undiminished. When one watches the team of dancers hopping towards the stairs at the back of the hall, one is left with the eerie image of a plague of locusts leaping off after having just demolished a whole world. Not very pleasant, but it may give you some idea of the potential of this extremely interesting piece of work by a very intelligent and well tuned choreographic mind.
In order to make the best possible use of the high-rent concert hall of the Sydney Opera House, the Australian Opera has multiple cast the major roles of its blockbuster showpiece, Verdi's Aida, right from the start of its rather phenomenal summer season run that began in January 1975. And unlike most opera productions, where the opening cast is given several performances over a period of days—or even weeks—to settle in before new faces are introduced, Aida has been played by the A.O. using a kind of platoon system, with at least the four most important roles being filled by an alternative “team” right from opening night.

Such tactics are inevitable if one is to present a number of performances of works like Aida in a limited period of time—singers just cannot do justice to such demanding roles as Aida, Amneris, Radames or Amonasro on consecutive nights; and of course they tend to add spice to the opera-going of those in the fortunate position of being able to see and compare more than one performance of a particular work in the same season. They also resulted, in mid-January this year, in one of the most phenomenally instructive lessons in comparative stagecraft one is ever likely to witness. Much of the time, on opening night, the singing was thrilling in itself; but at no stage did the performance even look like catching fire dramatically. A mere four days later, at the second performance of the alternative cast, the drama was there in abundance though some of the singing was decidedly less impressive. Stated more cruelly, the opening performance was long on the big noises and the grandiose gestures, and short on the dramatic conviction; the other came out miles ahead in terms of dramatic impact, though it would have lost a good many technical points had one been evaluating its excellence in a vacuum.

In their own way, these two Aidas were a perfect demonstration lecture in the perennial problem of all opera: which ought to come first, the music or the drama? And it might be something of a consolation to the readers of a drama-oriented magazine such as this to have me admit that there was no doubt whatever in my mind but that the second performance was far and away the better of the two, despite the fact that it was far more flawed musically. Yet of course it was far from as simple as that; for even on the limited test of the four major principals such a statement is not wholly true.

Over the two realisations of the title role there will be the most disagreement, I fancy; for there are those who find convincing what I considered to be overblown, stylised posturing in the opening night performance of Orianna Santunione, and her singing was at times most impressive—capable of cutting through the loudest torrents of orchestral and vocal sound in the great ensembles without ever going harsh and unpleasant to the ear. But at no stage did she convince me that she was really a woman torn between love and patriotism: she was too haughty in her scenes with Amneris to be a credible handmaiden, too cool in her scenes with Radames to be a sympathetic love-object, too off-hand in her attitude to Amonasro to be a credibly affec-
tionate daughter. Of course, part of the blame has to besheeted home to the other principals, but Aida, as the pivotal character in the unfold- ing drama, simply must relate to her fellow actors much more strongly than this if a performance is to come anywhere near realising the inherent potential of this magnificent opera.

Reginald Byers continues to sing more beauti- fully year by year but his Radames, on this occasion, was all but devoid of passion and in- volvement. Lauris Elms' Amneris was not always expect of her over the years, nor was she as much more strongly than this if a performance in the action as she ought to have been. John Shaw's Amonasro was near his best, and could have rounded out an otherwise strong complement of principals marvellously; but unfortunately Amonasro is a good deal less cen­ tral to the success of a performance of Aida than were largely in vain.

At least in the performance I saw this summer, I would have to say that Marilyn Richardson's Aida was marginally below her best vocally; it lacked power, here and there, compared with Santunione's, and the odd top note faded away disturbingly. But her flaws in the vocal depart­ ment were far more than offset by her thoroughly convincing dramatic performance: whenever she is on stage, she commands attention—though without ever tempting one to forget she is involved in a drama, not merely giving an individual virtuoso display. And her support in the alternative cast was solidly excellent.

Ronald Dowd, making his debut as Radames at an age when most tenors would be giving it up, was remarkably credible: his make-up made him visually convincing as a man of 30 or so, and he acted with ardency and commitment that even temperamental. Once again one could not avoid the feeling that he was about to prove himself unable to cope vocally; but, clever per­ former that he is, he gave his all where it mattered most and the overall result was most impressive. Margreta Elkins was a very fine Amneris, ston- ing for what she lacks in pure deep color of tone by a magnificent dramatic realisation of the role. Robert Allman's Amonasro could hardly be faulted: it is a continuing marvel that he seems to become the thoroughly desirable, yet heart­ breaking Amonasro of as fine a performance as Steven's and opposite one of his best performances as Gerald, singing very well and acting adequately, though still a trifle too stiff upper lip for comfort; Robert Allman was a reliable new Niilakantha, and Margreta Elkins a very fine Malika.

The first two performances of Carmen I saw during the current season could hardly have been temperamentally less alike in some respects: on opening night, Richard Bonynge's tempos, particularly in the first act, seemed perversely funeral; at the matinee a fortnight later, Russell Channell seemed half-bent on setting a world speed record in the prelude and the smugglers' quintet of Act II, as well as depriving soloists of their applause at several points early in the piece by pressing on regardless of the fact that the singers and orchestra were inaudible to the audience. But he settled down as the afternoon progressed, and it ended up being a very good performance in most respects.

On opening night, Heather Begg showed promise of being a very good Carmen; by the matinee, she had refined and perfected her per­ formance to the brink of excellence and beyond. Her Seguidilla, in the first act, was absolutely marvellous by the matinee, as was her closing scene on both occasions; and where she had seemed a trifle anxious to restrain her animal sexuality on opening night, she allowed herself to become the thoroughly desirable, yet heart­ lessly independent creature she ought to be by the matinee. Her matured Carmen is an absolute­ ly marvellous piece of work that would stand up on any stage in the world.

At the premiere, Ron Stevens excelled his own electrifying Don Joses (with Huguette Tourangeau) of the 1976 winter season, and added a new measure of vocal smoothness; but the big surprise of the first three weeks of the summer season was provided at the matinee when Geoffrey Harris of the opera studio, re­ cently transferred from the Queensland Opera Company, stepped in for an ailing Stevens at the last moment. Understandably, Harris seemed extremely nervous to start off with: Don Jose is a more than somewhat daunting role to make one's big-time debut in, particularly in the shadow of as fine a performance as Steven's and opposite as strong a Carmen as Begg.

But once he got going, his reading of the role was thoroughly convincing, though markedly different from Stevens'. Vocally, it was not always quite there; some notes were superb, others not very impressive. But it was well thought out dramatically, progressing logically and with subtlety from the nonchalance of the opening scene to the murderous frustration of the last. Begg and he had the audience sitting on the edge of their seats during the final scene: it was a thoroughly gripping, dramatically effective, denouement.
The conference was officially opened by Greek President Constantine Tsatsos, at the ancient Theatre of Dionysos under the Acropolis, where the dramatic festivals of Athens were held from 470 BC onwards. The ceremony was followed by a reception in the Stoa of Eumachia nearby. These two occasions set the tone of the meeting; lavish hospitality, in settings which were useful for the delegates to visit and examine at close quarters.

At the start of the discussions, Takis Musenidis and Anna Synodiou were anxious to point out that the conference aimed at a sharing of experience and ideas, and that no specific resolutions on any aspect of ancient drama in contemporary theatre could be expected. In general, the papers presented and the ensuing discussions reflected personal experiences of actors, directors and designers, solving the problems raised by particular productions and ancient plays.

More general views were expressed by two Greek directors, Charles Coon and Spyros Evangelatos.

Coon, founder (in 1942) and director of the Art Theatre, gave the opening report on ‘the director and ancient drama today’. His company has toured productions of ancient tragedy and comedy over most of Europe during the past 15 years, with great success.

His approach, he said, to ancient drama, is atmospheric and emotive and aims at arousing an emotional response in the audience, through the use of movement and rhythm in speech and action, particularly in chorus work. Much of the atmosphere is created with the help of ritual and costume from modern Greek folk festivals, which, he says, are the closest we can come to the dramatic traditions of ancient Greek theatre.

Coon stressed the importance of providing visual and vocal interest and variety in productions of ancient drama, and avoiding the emphasis on special effects. He said, “It is not what is done in a given scene that matters but how it is done, and how the audience takes it in.”

Coon concluded by pointing out that the chorus is the leading actor in ancient drama. “It is through the chorus that the poet makes contact with his audience and expresses his meaning, and the director must always remember this,” he said.

The delegate saw Coon’s ideas at work later in the week, both in performance and at rehearsal, with a production of Aristophanes’ Archanians in the ancient theatre of Eretria on the island of Euboea, and an evening of open rehearsal at his small basement theatre in Athens.

Yannis Xenakis, the best-known modern Greek composer, presented tape-recordings of his scores for productions of Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes and The Persians illustrated Coon’s approach to ancient tragedy, using voice movement and simple props of masks and drapery to create a background against which his hero could project the action and argument. Coon’s actors were physically very active, and it became clear that his chorus work requires a good deal of stamina and resilience.

Spyros Evangelatos, a young Greek director whose Amphitheater company played for the first time this year, with a stage adaption of a 16th century Cretan epic poem, The Eratokritos, presented the second report on the director’s approach to ancient drama.

He emphasised that contemporary productivities of ancient plays have to be closely tailored to the audience and expectations of the particular countries where they are performed. “There is a broad gap between a Mediterranean or Greek production, where emotion and spontaneity of feeling is of paramount importance, sometimes at the expense of theatrical technique, and the other countries,” he said. “Each director has to bridge the gap between the Mediterranean and the outlook of his own community, and must present an ancient play in a way which can have meaning in terms of his own country’s experience.”

A visit by delegates to Evangelatos’ production of Aristophanes’ Lysistrata in an open-air cinema, the summer home of the company, illustrated this approach. His production, in the style of a 19th-century Athens street theatre, with actors wearing “classical” drapery over their 19th century street clothes, linked the music-hall tradition of modern Athenian theatre, adding to the humour, and awakening the interest of a much wider Greek audience than could otherwise be expected.

A discussion on translations of ancient drama, which followed a highly technical paper by the chief Romanian delegate on preserving the metric quantities of ancient drama in modern translations, raised the problems of versification in translations and the use of archaic language. The problems of making acting editions from a non-dramatic translation, and the actor’s insistence on a playable script also came up.

Minister of Culture, Prof. Constantine Trypanis, a former Oxford University lecturer in classical literature, contributed a classical scholar’s view of ancient tragedy with undergraduate actors, using and experimenting with some of the costume styles, masks and properties mentioned by the ancient scholars or commentators on classical drama.

Yannis Xenakis, the best-known modern Greek composer, presented tape-recordings of his scores for productions of Aeschylus’ Oresteia and Euripides’ Medea.

He also proposed that some form of competition for productions of ancient plays should be instituted in Greece, where young directors and actors from different countries could present experimental versions of ancient plays in classical theatres like those at Epidaurus or Dodoni. “These would open up windows on a broader artistic interpretation of ancient tragedy, rather than performances in a mandarin or intellectual spirit,” he said.

An excursion to Delphi included a memorable interpretation by Anna Synodiou—who is noted for her portrayals of Sophocles’ heroines—of speeches from the Electra at the small ancient theatre in the sanctuary of Apollo. It was an overwhelming and moving experience that came when Ms Synodiou called on the god Apollo, and received an answering rumble of thunder which echoed around the mountaintop.

The conference produced no final conclusions or recommendations, but as it ended, Professor Trypanis announced that the Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Service would begin work at the Theatre of Dionysos, to restore much of the seating and study the scene building remains so that it could be used once again for performances of ancient plays. He also has submitted to the government a plan to build another, permanent open-air theatre in this area, to be used specifically for productions of ancient plays by Greek and foreign companies.

GREEK FESTIVAL

This International Theatre Conference held in Athens from the 3rd to the 11th of July 1976 was organised by the Hellenic Centre of the ITI.

More than 130 delegates from 32 countries attended the meetings, among them 84 representatives from outside Greece. Sessions were held in air-conditioned comfort at the Pantones School of Graduate Studies, with simultaneous translation into French, English or Greek. The texts of the reports and summaries of the discussions will be published in a special number of the Hellenic Theatre Centre bulletin Thesis.

Among delegates were Martha Coigney from the U.S. Centre of the I.T.I., Paul Louis Mignon from France, Suzanne Gal from Hungary, Jessa Weinberg from Israel, Peter Schreiber from the Netherlands, Walter Kohls from the Democratic Republic of Germany, Ival Nagel from the Federal Republic of Germany, Rudu Belligon from Roumania, Ingrid Lutterkort from Sweden and others from 23 I.T.I. Centres around the world.

During the Conference, excursions and guided tours in archeological sites as well as receptions also took place.

The above is reprinted from the report of Ms Kerrin Hope of the United Press International office in Athens. She participated as an observer and representative of the Australian Centre.

ITI EDITOR FOUND

June Collis will be replaced by Sue Paterson as editor of the ITI Newsletter for six months from 1 February 1977.

Sue is a New Zealander with a diploma in Journalism from Wellington. She has worked for several years with most of the newspapers before working in London for the Macmillan Publishing Company in 1974/75. Since then she has been at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Sydney in charge of theatrical promotions. As a sideline she dances with the Krishnan Nairs Indian Dance Troupe, having so far appeared in five concerts, and has also stage-managed a production of the N.S.W. Theatre of the Deaf. We welcome her collaboration.
Barry Lowe

For every Caddie or Picnic at Hanging Rock that the local film industry produces there are three or four Plugg, Inn of the Damned, Oz and Summer of Secrets. The success rate in Australia averages about one in four, more than double that of the U.S. But what makes for a success? Well in Australia at least, over the past five years or so, there seem to have been similarities in those films which were successful at the box office (the only criterion that backers go by.)

If you want to succeed the best bet is to put your money into sex (Alvin Purples, Bazza McKenzies, Number 96) or nostalgia. The success rate for films on contemporary subjects (excluding sex) is rather low while re-tellings of our greatest recent successes, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Caddie, and The Devil's Playground have all been set in the past. The same is true of Sunday Too Far Away which, if not quite the financial success of Picnic, was a critical one, and Break of Day which opened to indifference in Melbourne but is picking up its audience through word of mouth.

Petersen made its investment back but seemed to please neither the public nor the critics although Stanley Kubrick took a print of the film back to the States clutching that it was brilliant. The Man From Hong Kong cashed in on the kung fu craze and did well here but better overseas. Neither film set the world on fire however.

Plugg from the Terry Bourke stable (the man who brought us the disaster-prone period horror Inn of the Damned) was little seen and in Sydney was the support to an Yvonne De Carlo sex film. Endplay was more like a double episode of Homicide, and The Cars That Ate Paris, for all its extra-gant praise from overseas critics, was a nice idea than ran off the road, Or, a rock musical was a retelling in local terms of The Wizard of Oz with somnambulent performances from the leads and a remarkably offensive performance from Robin Ramsay as the good fairy. This film has now been sold overseas for a ludicrously small amount and is to undergo the supreme insult of being dubbed into American.

The Great MacArthy based on Barry Oakley's rather funny book was most notable for the performances of John Jarratt and Barry Humphries and its almost complete lack of laughs. The Fourth Wish had some people reaching for their tissues but most seemed to remember its origins as a four-part television serial and stayed away. Casey Robinson's sole Australian scripting effort to date since leaving Hollywood and Bette Davis vehicles was Scobbie Malone, a story of corruption and murder in high places which sat ill at ease in local surroundings. There is something slightly ludicrous in minor league Australia muscling its way in the espionage and corruption stakes of the world.

In later flashback Vietnam war scenes. It's a little difficult but John Hargreaves and Grant Page play their roles with just the right amount of tongue in cheek and it appears Australia has found an exploitable niche in the world of boys own adventure stories.

One of the greatest disappointments on the film scene is Jim Sharman. A great stage director he has yet to find his feet in the film medium. His first tentative effort, a pointer to the direction in which his interests lay, was Shirley Thompson Versus The Aliens, about a widgee who makes contact, or so she thinks, with aliens in the river caves at Luna Park. The film promised much and delivered little and was eclipsed by Peter Weir's superior Hamesdale.

Sharman's interest in the B movie, the low budget quickie, was ideally expressed in the stage version of The Rocky Horror Show which included a tribute to the B genre stars and starlets in its opening song "Science Fiction". But what worked well on stage became a shambles on film. Although the film version affectionately spoofed Hollywood and had scenes that were genuinely appealing it did not come together as a coherent whole and had no feeling. It was cold, lacking the warmth of a good director.

In a supposed effort to get away from the Rocky Horror image Sharman next chose to film a script by West Australian playwright John Aitken, Aitken, it seems, has an enviable reputation in the west but in the east his Sydney production, some years ago, of The Burning of Joan hardly set the world on fire. Sharman miscalculated in his choice of script, the name of which was changed from The Secret of Paradise Beach to Summer of Secrets and which was a mishmash of different ideas.

But it's basically Brad and Janet territory again, this time transferred to a deserted beach where a mad scientist has snap frozen his wife and is attempting to thaw her out like a packet of fish fingers. He even has his faithful offsider Rufus Collins who, during a trip to the local town, is confronted by the Australian equivalent of the U.S. B movie middle-west yokel, in the form of Barry Lovett. The cast work well in their roles, Andrew Sharp and Nell Campbell as the new Brad and Janet, Bob and Kym, Arthur Dignam as the grey haired doctor and Kate Fitzpatrick as his cold, cold wife.

But somewhere along the way the script got jumbled and new ideas were added, ideas that did not sit easily in the film already created. Suddenly we are confronted with the psychological triteness of memory not being all it's cracked up to be. It takes poor Arthur Dignam about ninety minutes and countless thousands of feet of film to find out what the audience has anticipated ages before.

Although photographed beautifully by Russell Boyd it would have been better, but commercially unviable at this stage, had it been shot in black and white! Summer of Secrets lacks the vital ingredient of atmosphere. Nothing is built up. There is no suspense and no foreboding. It is a source of irritation that I find myself defending Jim Sharman's film output, not for what he has done already, but for what, hopefully, he will do in the future.
BOOKS

Helen van der Poorten


Having been criticized by the press and the Canberra Times last year for saying at the Playwrights' Conference that I thought we needed more "vulgar theatre" (words I shall be extremely wary of in future), I was delighted to see that Jack Hibberd has done justice to this very form by publishing three of his "popular" plays—One of Nature's Gentlemen, A Toast to Melba, and The Les Darcy Show. Hibberd has, moreover, spent some time in his introduction explaining what he means by popular theatre in a way I'm sure I could never have done, so I am presently committing to memory some of his comments for my later use.

Of the three plays, A Toast to Melba is the best known by now, and its attractive mixture of witty comments for my later use. Interchange and Australian invective timing and expertise of the professional—perhaps even the institutional—changes of tone all call for the professional—perhaps even the institute-trained actors schooled in the "spurious and ornate style" to which Hibberd refers in the general introduction. If this is so, then we could say that one, the amateur, venue for popular theatre might have to be bypassed, and we are back into the subsidized situation which has led to the tame middle-class fare that popular theatre surely seeks to challenge.

Even judged as middle-class, however, this kind of theatre must be considered the greatest single influence on the "renaissance" in Australian dramatic writing. The recognition that lurks somewhere in the upwardly-mobile consciousness of the Australian middle class is a taste for genuinely popular (vulgar?) entertainment in the theatre can account for the success of the A.P.G. and its interstate followers. Hibberd I think correctly sees the loss of vaudeville and burlesque as having robbed our audiences of direct theatrical, communicative, and clearly the theatre can account for the success of such a formidable Australian playwright, reminds us of the theatre's obligation to reach its audiences.

Three Popular Plays

JACK HIBBERD

chief of Nature's Gentlemen, A Toast to Melba, and The Les Darcy Show. Hibberd has shown himself more than the post-O'Malley 1960's Nimrod playwrights and less raffled than Steve J. Spears.

For most prospective directors and readers I should think One of Nature's Gentlemen will prove the most striking of the three. Described as "a vaudeville farce", it consists of a series of exaggerated bar-room games which combine theatrical with intellectual impact. For this reason no doubt, the play has been successfully used in community theatre tours of factories, once into which we would expect popular theatre to plunge. But Hibberd, in a note prefaces this play, points out one pitfall with "popular" plays for the amateur and/or inexperience role-reversal in recent performances. Commenting that these renditions have not been "crass drag acts" but genuine impersonations, he makes the point that such reversal might not be appropriately for first or inexpert casts. Now it seems to me that the same might be said of casting all of these popular plays—the impersonation of characters such as Wilde and Wedekind, the singing, and the abrupt