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Theatre

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COMMENT

It has often been noted that the fare here bears a strong resemblance to that of the West End 18 months or two years before. Alongside it last year, there were plenty of our own plays — Hurtleberd's A Toast to Melba, Williamson's The Department and A Handful of Friends, Power's Last of the Knacklemen, Cove's The Gift and others. But the traffic is one way. These Australian plays are unlikely to be in the West End seasons of two years hence. Don's Party and What If You Died Tomorrow did make it — and there was The Doll and now Steve Spears: these successes are few and at best sporadic. We began to ask why.

The Australian Film Commission is doing somewhat better. Let The Balloon Go is on release in the United States, Picnic at Hanging Rock there and in Britain, Dot and the Kangaroo (an animated full-length feature film) has been sold to Germany, and Caddie is soon to be released in Britain. These, along with numerous shorts dubbed in many languages, have been sold abroad: a good record, consistent and developing. The reason seems to be solid marketing; the Film Commission has agents in countries throughout the world — Britain, America and Europe — and at present is particularly interested in breaking into the Latin American market. A delegation is off to Cannes, not for the prizes but for the sales platform it provides for such new films as Raw Deal, The Singer and the Dancer and Fantasia 2. The international market provides the profit where the home market covers basic costs.

The ABC, often conservative, has a similar dynamic approach to overseas sales. Again, it has agents in London for Britain and Europe, and in Canada and the United States. The policy is for all major productions to be sent abroad for potential sale, and a good deal does get sold to the English and European markets. Right now, Power Without Glory and Certain Women are on air in England and A Big Country and Wild Australia have been sold.

What is being done for the sale of the performing arts abroad? The Federal Government makes noises about tight budgets, and for the short time there has been any kind of cultural programme (since the mid-sixties), that programme has been included as part of Foreign Affairs activity. Australia has only two cultural attachés, one in Jakarta and the other in Tokyo — none in English-speaking countries. The policy is that attention be focused on the Asian area. There the record is bad for visits by ballet companies, orchestras, chamber music, visiting and photographic exhibitions. No theatre gets to Asia because it runs against the language barrier. True cultural exchange, not one-way traffic, is needed for Australian culture to be enriched and, as importantly, for our contribution to enrich the whole English-speaking tradition. Other countries obviously feel this need. The British Council has offices all over the world, including Australia, with the task of promoting all aspects of British performing arts through bringing out companies and circulating publication and scripts, and each year pays for someone — a designer, actor or director — to come out and work with an Australian company.

The Australia Council, which could perhaps act as a central body for overseas promotion, as the Film Commission or the British Council does, has little money for overseas fieldwork. And, despite a founding principle "to promote Australian art in other countries", it appears to view this as a low priority. Theatre companies can use the council's grant-funding to tour productions overseas if they wish, and, more directly, the Australia Council does fund individuals to attend international theatre conferences and seminars. The money the council has is restricted, it is true, but then comes the question of priorities.

The Association of Australian Artists was founded in London at the end of 1975 with the intention of presenting new Australian drama, showing Australian talent at its best, and actively promoting the creative theatrical image of Australia abroad. So far, it has managed to get Mates and The Christian Brother on at the Mermaid, and McNeil's The Old Familiar Juice — to excellent reviews — at the Roundhouse. McNeil's play was sponsored by the Jim Hunt, the chairman, personally. At the moment the association is negotiating for a three-month season of lunchtime theatre at the King's Head Theatre Pub. It also puts on rehearsed readings in odd rooms in Australian House (rent-free) in the hope that a full-scale West End production may result.

The Australia Council is to be applauded. It supports a grant from Canberra, but none has been received. Australian-based companies in Britain have donated a total of 15 pounds in contributions!

Perhaps the only short-term hope of becoming a recognised branch of the English-speaking theatre tradition is via the commercial theatre. Rumour has it that Reg Livermore will be appearing in London before long, and even that Gordon Chater might be going with The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin to New York. Entrepreneurs Paul Elliott and Bernard Jay, feeling much maligned about bringing shows in, are also negotiating to take the Australian product to other countries.

Let's hope that by some lucky accident — there's no design — it's not too long before our great successes are playing consistently in the West End and on Broadway. And that eventually the Government will give the need for proper cultural representation to the performing arts in the way the Film Commission and the ABC have for film and TV.

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THE ARTS OF EVERYDAY

DONNA GREAVES, artistic consultant, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology:
“A major problem facing artists today is how to operate as a genuine part of the working environment.

“Of the plays we’re not actually workshopping, we are reading professionally. Bernard Matthew’s exciting prison play Tumbling Dice and John Lee’s modern Chinese opera based on the Patty Hearst story. I’m circulating the most exciting plays (including runners-up) to theatre companies who ask me about them, and feel that the most promising plays are getting an airing this year.”

ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERTISE IN SA

TONY FREWIN, Adelaide Festival Centre: “The reason we’re so busy, and doing so well, is that the Festival Centre Trust is the biggest entrepreneur in South Australia. Since July 1976, it has been treprenurened 333 performances of 35 different attractions, which have played to more than 150,000 people! The performances ranged across all entertainment from film to vaudeville, and have included overseas artists and companies, interstate artists and companies, and several locally initiated shows. The biggest success has been My Fat Friend in the Playhouse, which played to 101 per cent capacity houses every night. Also the Gilbert and Sullivan season in the Playhouse at Christmas played to 50,000 people, and recently the Victorian State Opera’s La Belle Helene did very well in its five-night season. The SATC in 1977 is having the best houses of any season they’ve ever done; School For Scandal was their best.
show ever.

"At the moment, we're preparing for a controversial production of *The Maids*, directed by Alex Hay, which will go on in the Space. Alex Hay first did the play last year in Perth, and we are touring it to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Tasmania. It's the first Festival Centre production that we are touring. Eric Dare will be touring My Fat Friend, possibly with Lynn Redgrave in the lead. The AET always hang over the things they tour to us when they go on in the Festival Centre — they think we do it better — so we will be managing Tarantara! while it's here.

"We also have a very strong commitment to local community theatre, and from June to mid-July are bringing three new Australian productions, with professional directors and using the pool of talent from the amateur scene here, into the Space for a season called A.C.T.3. First will be a double-bill, *Hunting* by Veronica Sweeney and Glitter by Philip Murphy, directed by Martin Christmus; then Don't Piddle Against the Wind, *Mute* by Ken Ross, directed by Patrick Frost; and last a musical called *Food* by Tony Strachan, directed by Malcolm Blaylock. And they're all Adelaide writers."

**MTS TO GET NEW PRODUCTION HQ**

**SIMON SEMPHILL, Melbourne Theatre Company:** "On 4 April, the Vice-Chancellor of the Melbourne University, and chairman of the MTC board of management, Professor David Derham, announced the purchase of the 73,000-square-feet Nathan Blight Building in South Melbourne for the Melbourne Theatre Company's administrative and production headquarters.

"The State Government financed the purchase of the building ($92,000). For the past six years the MTC has been housed in a building owned by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works in Normanby Road, South Melbourne. The company has been renting the building which is in a dilapidated state and will be required for roadworks after the completion of the Westgate Bridge. The MTC will transfer its operations into the new building progressively over the next few months, though things probably won't be finished there for several years.

"The company is obviously delighted with this move to a permanent head-quarters, and is most grateful to the Victorian Premier, Mr Hamer and his Government for their continuing generous support."

**WHY SUBSIDIES FOR AMATEURS?**

**ARNE NEEME, National Theatre Perth:** "As a State drama company we shouldn’t have to be in the situation of subsidising ourselves. But in effect this is what we’re doing. We have to plan for a commercial success, usually with an imported star.

"I am opposed to bringing in overseas stars because this often degrades our own actors and tends to reinforce the general public's parochial opinion that all local swans are geese. I’m certainly not opposed to commercials, but we shouldn’t have to depend on them. We are a subsidised drama company, not a commercial management.

"But if we don’t have a commercial success downstairs, we can't do any productions of experimental theatre in the Greenroom.

"One problem is that our State funding-body is duplicating its spending. In effect, it is subsidising amateur theatre. That money should go to the professional theatre. In that way we could bring the very best to the public and extend the plan more fully our present involvement with workshops, education and amateur groups."

**SHEER ENTERTAINMENT**

**COLETTE MANN, of Hats:** "Hopefully, we’re helping Australian legitimate theatre stay alive. It is up to groups like us and All That Jazz. People these days are seeking out entertainment in the theatre, a real good night out. We are optimistic about the theatre and about shows like ours, and because people are standing up and saying what they think about Australian theatre. I shudder when I think that not very good overseas productions attract audiences when local shows with top local actors don’t pull them in as well, just because overseas people are seen on TV. Hats is a family show and has brought many people back two or three times to see it. We do change, but basically it is the same show. We would like to do a TV comedy series or show. I’m optimistic about our Sydney season; word of mouth has helped a lot up here, especially with the younger audiences."

Eric Dare has booked Hats for an indefinite run, which started in Sydney in April at the Speakeasy.

**MULTI-MEDIA MESS-UP**

**LUCY WAGNER, executive editor, Theatre Australia:** "The Beatles — Away with Words," the biggest multi-media show in the world's, currently touring Australia, has something of the atmosphere of a travelling magic-lantern show. The three huge, slightly ramshackle screens, and strobes installed along the entire front of the auditorium, and on the night I saw it, the failure of the show to start for some 15 minutes, and the sporadic appearances of worried-looking, youthful technicians, gave something of this impression even before the show started. Eventually, the screens lit up and flickering slides and the odd film-clip, mostly superimposed either on each other or on psychedelic patterns, began to appear. The first section is on the birth and early days of rock, but certainly not in chronological order, nor with music synchronised to visuals, even with the film-clips.

The slides and films of the young Beatles — in the Cavern, at the Albert Hall, in the street, in the bath — can hardly fail to evoke some degree of nostalgia, but as the show goes on the slides become less and less chronologically ordered, and they and the music less related to each other. Slides and films of, for example, Nixon, the Ohio student killings, beautiful sunsets and naked black girls (to the music of "Blackbird") begin to predominate over the Beatles themselves.

"By the end one has heard at least a few notes of most Beatles (and post-Beatles) songs, though there are some notable exceptions, and probably seen most of the photos and film shots, including clips of all their films, of the Beatles that exist, but the way they are put together seems totally ad hoc.

"Overall, the show adds up to neither a full and comprehensive biography of the Beatles, showing the development of their music, nor a commentary on what their musical and sociological influences have been on the sixties and early seventies; it isn't even a springboard to indulging in nostalgia — unless the projection and extreme speed remind you of home movies. Often the music is painfully loud, the slides annoyingly flickery and the strobes flashed at the audience at odd and unrelated times make viewing impossible. The saddest thing is it could — should — have been so good; with material like that it must be hard to go wrong."
In Theatre Australia No. 8 (March/April) Marlis Thiersch reported in rather favourable terms on the pilot short course in Theatre Administration conducted by NIDA in February of this year. In contradiction, my own impressions were that the NIDA short course was most unsatisfactory as a course, and for a substantial number of the participants.

My main criticisms of the pilot course relate to:

(i) Undiscriminating selection criteria
(ii) Poor teaching methods
(iii) Insufficient preparation
(iv) Inappropriate staffing.

(i) Selection criteria. Approximately 50 people attended the pilot short course, representing interests as diverse as professional theatre companies, amateur theatre groups, theatre centres, symphony orchestras.

The level of experience of the people attending, and their expectations of the course, varied greatly and thus made the appropriate level of instruction very difficult to establish. I think that short courses in theatre administration can have several different purposes, and therefore separate courses, or at least streaming within the one course, is desirable. For example separate courses could be established for:

(a) Experienced theatre administrators to meet to evaluate their own effectiveness and update their approaches.

(b) Inexperienced theatre administrators (whether artistic or administrative personnel) to be given a basic grounding in theatre administration.

(c) Amateur administrators to study and develop appropriate administrative procedures for their own organisations, drawing on general principles of arts management.

(ii) Teaching method. In the pilot short course the teaching method adopted was the presentation of lectures to the whole group. In the course of the lectures, questions were invited; however, extension into discussion, between lecturers and participants, or between participants themselves, was generally discouraged. On the whole, the lectures were unsuccessful in establishing an understanding of the subject matter as the level was often too advanced for some participants, yet elementary for others. One result of this was that the whole of some lectures was lost to many participants. I believe it may be a common experience that one of the most valuable sessions was the Thursday afternoon when a considerable time was spent examining, in an informal way, the administrative records and procedures of NIDA itself. By contrast, the sessions on Old Tote methods of financial control probably left many participants with little useful information.

I believe that a more appropriate teaching method would be seminars and discussion-groups. Guest lecturers could briefly outline the basics of a particular subject area; the group could then break into smaller groups to pursue lines of interest under guidance of guest lecturers and the course staff.

(iii) Preparation for the course. To me, it was obvious that there was insufficient preparation for the pilot short course, on the part of the course staff and of the guest lecturers. Several of the lecturers simply talked on an anecdotal way "off the cuff". While this approach certainly can be very interesting, it generally cannot replace a careful, concise survey of the subject matter, backed up by written material. For example, when dealing with budgeting, I think it is important for lectures/discussions to be supported by the pro forma that the lecturers themselves use in the preparation of their own organisation's budget. This would give a clear indication of the steps involved.

With regard to the preparation of the course itself, I believe that the failure of the three "practical exercises" to materialise was just one indication that the course was under-prepared, or insufficiently thought out in terms of the time available for instruction.

(iv) Staffing. The staffing approach of the pilot short course was to invite, as guest lecturers, executives of the major performing arts companies, particularly the Old Tote. In many cases, this led to the situation where the lecturer was discussing procedures, not in general terms, but in terms of the operation of his/her own particular company. Often this information was irrelevant to most participants, who face problems entirely different in both scale and nature to those of the major performing arts organisations. (One example of this was the possibility mooted by one lecturer that the administrator/production manager may be faced with the necessity of reducing technical staff from 40 to six while on tour away from the city theatre.)

In the pilot short course the choice of guest lecturers was often appropriate. Michael Crosby to talk about Actors' Equity, Ken Horler to talk about legal structures and fund-raising, the Department of Services representative to talk about theatre licensing. However, in other cases the guest lecturers talked in a prescriptive way about structures or procedures, rather than outlining their own
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"Out of Creative Waters?" (Theatre Australia, April/May, p. 3) had nothing to do with any comment by Mr Timlin, and that it was written by an independent commentator.

I was interested to read in your Comment Section of Theatre Australia the statement that there had been no evidence of lack of training here for the theatre and that you intended to follow this up.

The newly formed 680 Drama School (started by John Howitt of the Killara 680 Theatre, following the failure to purchase the Independent Theatre School of Dramatic Art) is providing very good training for the theatre.

It is an evening school only, at the moment, with three core classes of movement with Keith Bain, speech and acting with additional classes in dialect, make-up, script study, film and TV techniques and practical experience with workshop productions every five weeks and graduation plays.

The acting training covers every aspect of theatre styles and our staff have been trained at RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, the Old Vic School, as well as being working directors from the theatre and the ABC and professional actors. We are having our own premises built at Mosman, with our own theatre and video room.

GILLIAN OWEN
Director, 680 Drama School, Mosman, NSW.

Your editorial (Theatre Australia, March/April) came as a challenge. ("All the eternal truths running around in our little parish... ") so I hope you will consider the parish of Sydney’s suburbs (containing a quarter of the city’s population in the west/south area) and allow me to introduce FRINGE.

Fringe is a committee made up of representatives from more than 20 amateur theatre groups, covering an area that extends from Turramurra in the north to Springwood in the west, and Camden in the south. (Each of these is more than 60km apart.)

The committee began with the Whitlam Government’s attention to the previously neglected western suburbs, and has had expert help from Arthur Pike, then a member of the Theatre Board, as well as founding grants which enabled the committee to employ a professional director to visit each group to instruct and advise.

Each year a festival has been held which attracts entries from 12 or more groups, and this year a combined production was presented.

Membership currently includes one professional theatre, the Q Theatre which has supported Fringe theatres in many ways, and which has moved out from Sydney to Penrith. It also includes the Deaf Theatre of NSW, which has performed in the Seymour Centre, and the Youth Theatre Workshop, which was able to make a real contribution to the Sydney Festival by presenting a home-grown musical of relevance and quality, The Saint Mary’s Kid.

As I see it, these amateur activities are absolutely essential to the sophisticated professional world, as they provide the grass-roots in training the community to regard theatre as at least as valid as football or clubland. I believe the report on the arts supports my belief, and I take your editorials to imply that you also hold no brief for a dead museum culture operating in an elite ghetto.

Yours outside the ghetto, in Fringe.

JEAN BURTON
Camden, NSW.


As an artist and as a dancer, I have been insulted. I feel compelled to speak.

Mr Shoubridge stated, "Practically any fool can walk off the street, put on a costume and act, and people who are willing to go in for the gruelling years of training and daily exercises as well as the stringent self-discipline to keep themselves in shape just to go into an amateur dance company for no financial remuneration, don’t exist."

Shall I take him by the hand and lead him through the streets of New York, London, Paris (yes, and even Melbourne) to show him the spartan conditions in which dancers live and grow? Dancers do not dance for money, but for art itself. They deny all in order to give all. They dance whenever, wherever, they are given the opportunity.

I was appalled by Shoubridge’s lack of sensitivity in understanding and appreciating modern creative dance. Quite by accident I attended the Dance of Life Company’s presentation of The Phoenix. I immediately went back to view the next performance. It was by far the most creative, most inventive, most magical dance company which I have ever witnessed anywhere in Australia. Melbourne appreciated it, as seen by the continuing sold-out houses. Paris would be more than happy to have it. Let the photos featured in the review speak for themselves!

I do wish that Mr Shoubridge would stick to classical ballet criticism and leave modern creative dance alone, for it is quite evident that he lacks the insight to judge anything new of value. Better yet, if Mr Shoubridge would gracefully bail out of an aeroplane and depend on his "intelligent depth" rather than a parachute, then creative dance would rejoice in the outcome, even if he did manage to land on his ass.

RICHARD BOULEZ,
Camberwell, Vic.

• William Shoubridge points to his continuing concern with the Dance Company NSW and the Australian Dance Theatre to show his enthusiasm for Australian ballet/dance. His contention is simply that there are amateur groups "disguise their lack of choreographic ability with costumes, effects, cliches and over-simplifications."
William Shoubridge
previews
"An innovation
of terrific magnitude"

The concept of *A Chorus Line* is deceptively simple. There are 17 dancers auditioning for parts in a Broadway show, but only eight (four male, four female) are needed. The selection, weeding-out and auditioning for those eight constitutes the format and the dramatic tension of the musical (no trouble with plot-turns in this show). But it is this dramatised process, placed on a stage and thus defined, that has had American and British audiences clamouring for seats and which has almost overnight put this show into the annals of the American musical theatre. Never before have critics been so unanimous in their praise and audiences so personally touched.

It is a backstage musical, and Broadway has a heavy history of such shows, but this one, because of the intense personal in-
volevement in its creation, breaks the barriers of the form. *A Chorus Line*, by implication, and by projecting its theme out into the lives of "ordinary" people, has become, for those audiences who have seen it, a palpable symbol of personal exertion, discipline, hope, dignity and the right to start again if one has failed. It is, in effect, the ultimate job-interview: an arena where one's qualities and abilities are put on the line, tested and, if good enough, used.

Bayyork Lee, member of the original cast and Michael Bennet's assistant on such shows as *Follies, Company* and *Promises Promises*, who is here to direct the Sydney cast, says that it is the love and the honesty of the show that makes it effective.

"Also change," she says. "Audiences watch a group of dancers being forced to talk about themselves and why they chose this sort of livelihood. They see the change that comes over those dancers as the show strips away their protective barriers and makes them see themselves anew. But more than that. Hopefully, the audience will change. Instead of sitting at one remove, making their own choices about who should be selected and who shouldn't, they will come to identify with those peo-
ple up on stage — come to realise that the situation applies to them as well, in their own way. The show should give people a sense of the importance of human dignity.

But why has *A Chorus Line* made such an enormous impact? Its music is serviceable but hardly memorable, there are some dreadful cliches in the text and the staging (especially for those used to the usual JCW over-decoration) is extremely austere.

"*A Chorus Line* arrived at just the right moment," says Bayyork Lee. "Broadway — America — was ready for us!"

True enough, the show might have flopped miserably a few years ago. But now it is here at a time when Americans, and because of their pervasive influence, the rest of the Western world, are fed up with faked glamour, with insincerity, when those in authority can no longer be trusted. After Vietnam and Watergate, the American psyche took a severe battering. People lost their faith and their self-assertiveness; there was very little to grab hold of and believe in. What audiences wanted for a change was honesty.

Dancing is probably one of the most honest artistic expressions there is. You
cannot disguise lack of technique or inflexibility. Either you have natural rhythm or you don't. If the body is not fit and disciplined, it just cannot perform, and if your heart isn't in it, it will soon show.

"But," says Miss Lee, "dancers, especially Broadway dancers, have been put down for so long. For a lot of them it's their only livelihood and it is getting harder and harder all the time. Dancers have always been a background for the star, nothing more. This show makes people realise that dancers are human beings too."

The inevitable question arises concerning the abilities of the kids in the Australian cast. "They are young," says Miss Lee, "and therefore there is a hell of a lot of enthusiasm there."

But that is not enough. "These kids have been put through the same sort of trials as we had in the original team," she says. "True, the Australian kids aren't as experienced as we were, but a lot of themselves has come out in the work that we've done together already. Audiences are going to see a lot of love in this show.

"Anyway, this cast is lucky. It's been pampered, just as we in the original were. The other casts, the London, San Fran-
Cisco, Toronto and Los Angeles casts — well, we just churned them out like a factory, at an incredibly quick rate. Things are more relaxed here, and the kids are so dedicated.”

But one still doesn’t know how the Sydney audiences will take to it (although, by the time this article appears, the show will have properly opened after three weeks of previews, and judgment will have been passed).

Miss Lee allays my fears. “I have taken cabs around the city,” she notes, “and I’ve been amazed at the number of people who have already seen the show in the States and loved it and are going to see it here, and who are going to tell their friends to see it. I think it will work wonderfully.”

Whatever the final outcome, at the moment of writing the show has received more than 69,000 advance bookings, so there’s anticipatory interest at least.

“It’s not particularly American,” Miss Lee says energetically, “it is about dancers, and by extension, people in general. Audiences will understand.”

Where to from here? “I really don’t know. I don’t envy the person who comes after us. We have, in a way, broken the mould. The ‘old’ musicals won’t work after this. But we didn’t worry about that when we created the show; we just gathered together with a collective feeling that Broadway was dying and maybe there was something we could do about it. We did it, we were honest about it, there was no beating about the bush and, well, we have changed the face of the industry. Some people disliked the show. Stephen Sondheim, for example, hated it.”

Sour grapes, perhaps, for stealing the thunder of the Tony Awards from his Pacific Overtures? “I don’t know”, she says, “It wasn’t his sort of thing.”

Sondheim and Prince have been for a long time typed as the “innovators” of Broadway. A Chorus Line is an innovation of such terrific magnitude that perhaps there is little left but for the others to pick up the pieces of an expanded form and try again. But A Chorus Line didn’t go out of its way to be innovative, merely for its own sake; the content dictated the form.

“We didn’t realise to start with that it would make such an impact,” says Miss Lee. “But even if it had flopped, all of us in the cast would have gone away so enriched, having learnt so much about stagecraft that we would have gone out to work with new energy and knowledge. We would have been proud to be dancers. Like I said, it’s a show about dignity.”
THRING: "I hate directing . . . I loathe the actors. I think they are the dullest people . . ."
his own request, was released from his contract. He then formed his own company, and for the next two years presented plays at the Arrow Theatre, engaging directors like Irene Mitchell, Robin Lovejoy, Alan Burke and the English Frederick Farley. Here the mould was set for the type of character Thring would play in the future: Herod in Salome, Volpone, Whiteside in The Man Who Came to Dinner, Essendine in Present Laughter, Othello (with Zoe Caldwell as Desdemona), Mr Dulcimer in The Green Bay Tree, and Oedipus Rex. He surrounded himself with some of the best people available at the time and frequently designed the sets and costumes.

Eventually Thring became bored with the Arrow and asked Farley how he thought he would go down in London. “You’re so extraordinary, you’d probably do quite well,” he was told. (Comments Thring: “A cross between Robert Morley and Charles Laughton at the age of 25 — who could ask for anything?”)

So, together with Farley and the costumes, Thring went to London and leased Jack de Leon’s Q Theatre for eight weeks. Here he repeated his roles in Salome and The Green Bay Tree, appeared in Ebb Tide (adapted from R. L. Stevenson by Donald Pleasence) and in between presented new plays with actors like Patrick McGoohan and Patrick Cargill. He intended playing Othello again, but Harold Hobson, critic of the Sunday Times, had so praised his performance in Salome that the play transferred to the St Martin’s and ran for a while.

Having proved he was up to West End standards, Thring became homesick and returned to Australia, where the typical comment was: “Oh, he must have been an appalling disaster. Why would anybody come back to Australia?” Infuriated by this, Thring made certain he obtained front-page coverage when he received a cable from Anthony Quayle inviting him to join Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the cast of Peter Brooks’s Stratford production of Titus Andronicus — to play the evil Emperor Saturninus.

Titus was an enormous success, and Thring stayed on in London; otherwise, Australia would say he had been a flop with the Oliviers! He played Captain Hook in Peter Pan, traditionally doubling the part of Darling. (“The only production of Peter Pan”, says Thring, “where Mr Darling has scared the children more than Captain Hook!”)

Next Thring went into a twice-nightly stage version of Doctor in the House at the Victoria Palace for Jack Hylton. On the point of returning home again, he received a telephone call from Olivier inviting him to play in a revival of Titus to tour the Continent and then a season at London’s Stoll. Here Kirk Douglas saw him perform, which led to film work for Thring, playing more emperors (impressing people back home far more than the fact he had acted with the Oliviers!).

Since then, Thring has been able to play most of the parts he has wanted to, and so the legend has grown. Back in Australia, he played Caligula in Frenzy at the National, the title roles in The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde at the Little, and in 1959 joined the Melbourne Theatre Company (then known as the Union Theatre Repertory Company) and frequently has been one of its main forces since, enjoying a good working relationship with founder-director John Sumner.

In his first season with the UTRC, Thring had a huge personal success playing Ahab in Orson Welles’s Moby Dick — Rehearsed, which he repeated in 1967. Other roles have included a succession of religious dignitaries, including the Archbishop in Romanoff and Juliet (programmed as H.E. Rod), Dracula, Macbeth, repeats of his roles in The Man Who Came to Dinner and Present Laughter, Burgoyne in The Devil’s Discipline, Falstaff, Guev in The Cherry Orchard, Sandor in The Play’s The Thing (at his sparkling best in a typical Thring role) and more recently the Mother Superior in The Nuns.
Perhaps his most surprising role — and one which gave him personal satisfaction in playing — was Max in Pinter’s *The Homecoming*. As he says, “I’m not anybody’s idea of a 70-year-old cockney butcher who fucks his daughter-in-law, am I?” Seeing the play in London, Sumner cabled he had found a marvellous part for him. “John, you must be insane,” said Thring after having read the script. “One’s always covered with red velvet and rubies, walking down flights of stairs being emperors . . . I don’t know that I can do a cockney accent.” But Thring did, won all-round critical acclaim for his performance, and gained Best Actor for 1966 award.

Thring was not present at that awards ceremony. Rumour at the time had it he thought the award should have gone to Raymond Westall for his portrayal of Dylan Thomas. Today Thring implies this was not exactly so.

“I was never happy with those awards,” he says, “because the critics were all such idiots. I’m not sure that they’ve changed. One didn’t pay very much attention to the critics. When they said people were terribly bad, you thought, ‘Oh, screw them’, so why accept their bloody award when they say you’re good? One doesn’t go into a nervous breakdown when they say you’re lousy, so why take . . . I dislike the whole system of awards.”

These days he seldom does stage work away from the MTC. Loathing the upheaval of finding accommodation in another city, the role has to be something extra-special to attract him. He was of course Mr Barrett in the musical *Robert and Elizabeth* (“I’d always wanted to play Edward Moulton-Barrett anyway”), was in JCW’s *Hadrian VII* and went to Adelaide last year when George Ogilvie invited him to play Othello again.

One would expect that, having once been an actor-manager, he would at some time want to form another company, but not at all. He maintains he formed one previously because it was the only way to play the roles he wanted to; now Sumner does it all for him, and much better, he believes, than from Australians, written specially for him. He was surprised to read in an earlier issue of *Theatre Australia* that Steve Spears had written *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin* with him originally in mind. “One hardly fits into what David Williamson writes . . . one hardly fits into *The Summer of the 17th Doll*. One doesn’t fit into the normal Australian scene, or what most Australians seem to write about, anyway.”

Has he ever thought of writing a play himself? “Frequently — but I’ve never had the patience. I’ve got a very good thriller, but I can’t think of any way to end it.”

A one-man show? Yes, he has considered this too, but “one’s first preference is to do Oscar Wilde — and Micheal Mac Liammóir has beaten me to that.”

His interpretation of roles usually is a collaboration between himself and the director, in mutual agreement over the part. (“It’s no good a director saying, ‘I’ve always seen them as being dressed in plastic jock straps.’ You know that you just do not do it with that director!”)

What about his Shylock, a role he never wanted to play as he was put off it at school, but, having seen a few performances recently — including a NIDA one — has he new thoughts on it? How is he going to play that? Is it going to be very Jewish? Thring refuses to provide any hint. One must just await the production.
"How well I remember our first visit to the Theatre Royal, Hobart... I think I shall never forget seeing the Theatre for the first time — in the morning when we went to arrange the Stage for our evening performance — I think we both felt it was an ideal theatre — the right size — not from the financial side, alas — but splendid for performance by actors. At night I was thrilled by its intimacy — the perfect acoustics and the feeling of real Theatre — audience and actors performing a Ritual Act together. Yes, it’s a gem of a Theatre, and an honour to Hobart, and to Tasmania..."

So wrote Dame Sybil Thorndike as the foreword for Michael Coe’s *History of the Theatre Royal* from 1834. One can recreate in one’s mind Dame Sybil’s rich, measured tones, full of enthusiasm and sincerity for a theatre in which she performed with her husband, Lewis Casson, more than 20 years ago.

Hobart’s Theatre Royal is one of the best theatres in Australia for an intimate actor-audience relationship, yet it is basically a Victorian design. As the view of the auditorium shows, the three tiers in the small upper tiers produce for the audience seated in them that feeling of encirclement of, and concentration on, the action which is today usually achieved only by thrust stages with their seating rising up and around in a half-circle.

Because of its relatively small size and narrow galleries, there are no problems with acoustics at the Royal. The acoustics are quite good for generally listening to drama and to small opera or musical comedy orchestras; the hard thick plaster on the ceiling and walls assists in reflecting high frequencies, increasing the articulate qualities of speech and lending a quality of brilliance to music which is attractive.

Most actors who have performed in this theatre have, like Dame Sybil, appreciated it as a good theatre. Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh performed there in 1948 with the Old Vic Company, and Olivier supported the citizens of Hobart at that time when the theatre seemed fated to demolition for the re-routing of road traffic. Nearly 25 years before mainlanders had been redecorated and four boxes had been added to the two upper tiers. Although I personally would prefer the tiers continuing unobstructed to the proscenium wall, the boxes make the auditorium more Victorian in appearance, following the original design by architect William Pitt for the major alterations of 1911.

What one sees in the foyers and auditorium is not the oldest theatre in Australia. These areas, in design, are pure William Pitt. Although of 1911 vintage, they seem late 19th century, as Pitt necessarily included a large number of columns supporting the tiers, and the decoration is of heavy Victorian style. Ballarat’s Memorial Theatre auditorium is older: it is a combination of 1875 and 1898 construction. However, parts of the Royal’s side and foundation walls and basement rooms date back to the original building finished in 1837 and to the first major reconstruction in 1856-7. The lower portion of the street front was also completed in 1857, the upper part in 1911. The original auditorium and its enlarged successor have entirely disappeared, as, too, have the foyers of each, although from viewing the exterior it can be seen that portions of the old walls have never been replaced in the rebuilding processes. Part
Long section after the rebuilding of 1911 but prior to the addition of boxes adjacent to the proscenium in 1952.

Cross section (post 1911) showing a proscenium of rather grand proportions for such a small theatre.

Conjectural restoration of the street front of Degraves' original theatre of 1837.
of the original stage walls adjacent are also visible, but most of the design of the stage otherwise is late 19th century.

THE BUILDING FROM 1834

In 1846, Peter Degraves wrote a letter from his Cascade Brewery to the Colonial Secretary attempting to dissuade the government from issuing a theatre licence other than that for his own Theatre Royal in Campbell Street, Hobart. The letter is interesting for the light it throws on the town of Hobart as well as theatrical conditions of the time. It says in part:

"... First I have to represent for the information of His Excellency, that in 1834 the monotony of this Town was much relieved, by the arrival of Mrs. Cameron, a very talented actress in Tragedy as well as comedy, and the Town at that time affording no better accommodation for Theatrical purposes than the Freemasons lodge, at the bottom of Harrington Street (the dimensions of which were only 44 by 17 feet) it was found impossible to change scenery in such a narrow space with due effect — or for the females of the Dramatis Personae to change their dresses with due regard to decency, the Townspeople then in flourishing times resolved, to build a commodious theatre by subscription, and the list was fitted up with names to the amount of 3,000 and upwards in one evening!! A Theatrical Committee was appointed and I was requested to furnish a plan, elevation, and section: which having been approved of by Mr. John Lee Archer (the Honorary Architect) my plan, and tender was accepted, and the structure being half built only, a disastrous change in the times took place, the subscriptions were not half paid up, I was £2,500 in advance with a mortgage which I was obliged to foreclose, and at the auction sale there was not a single bidder beyond the amount of my claim!

"... Suffice it to say that I finished, and furnished it; and in a style greatly surpassing the first intention, and so greatly to my loss ...

"For the information of His Excellency its dimensions are 100 feet long by 50 feet wide, walls 34 feet high — 3 feet thick from foundation to the upper Boxes and saloon, and 2 feet from thence to the wall plates (supporting the roof), and so well timbered throughout, and braced with iron, as to be beyond all question as to its permanent solidity.

The dressing rooms are commodious, and arranged with a decorous view to the due separation of the sexes, and the interior with a view to the due classifications of the several orders of society, and well ventilated throughout.

"With a Theatre such as I have described equal in every respect to most of the best provincial Theatres in England, ... I respectfully raise the question, whether one patent Theatre is not more than sufficient for our little City of Hobarton..."

The first performance had been held in the then-incomplete theatre on 6 March 1837. By 26 March, it had gained the title of "New Theatre Royal", replacing the former venue for theatricals in Hobart, the "Theatre Royal Argyle Rooms".

What was this original theatre like? Degraves's dimensions provide the shape of the envelope. Various brief contemporary descriptions likened it to a warehouse, store or house with the main entrance having no "attempt at effect". It was claimed that the building "did not announce its purpose in construction". A much later photograph shows the upper portion of the old front wall behind the 1857 extension. It shows tops of wide flat piers between which would have been windows. Thus it can be assumed that the facade was typically simple Colonial Georgian of the day. It must be remembered that Degraves was an engineer and probably not accustomed to building architectural gems, and possibly resorted to pattern books for much of the visual design.

Working backwards from architects' working drawings of alterations of 1856, the dimensions of the foyer-saloon, auditorium and stage can be ascertained.
The auditorium would have been only about 45 feet wide by about 47 feet long to the curtain or act-drop line; the stage would have been the same width by 30 feet depth from the act-drop. There was no fly-tower, only space sufficient to pull cloud borders up out of sight. Scene-changing would have been carried out with flats in grooves after the Georgian/Regency style. The auditorium would have been only slightly lower than the boxes, being entered either through the ground-floor saloon or via subterranean passages in the basement, which also contained a tavern. The first Theatre Royal had a chequered career; it was sold in 1853 after Degraves's death. Richard Lewis bought it and major alterations took place in 1856-7. These affected the auditorium and the front-of-house accommodation from the basement to the roof. The level of the dress (circle) boxes was raised so the pit (stalls) could penetrate beneath, as we are accustomed to seeing in more recent theatres. The new gallery was pushed tightly against the old roof structure, headroom being obtained by putting the ceiling above the roof timbers and tucking an alcove into the roof above the rearmost seats. The 300 patrons in the gallery had only one entrance-exit, a three-feet-wide masonry-enclosed circular stair to the basement! The pit patrons also entered via the basement, up steps at the rear of the auditorium; however, they had a refreshment bar to slake their thirst. One wonders at the magnitude of the interval crush which would have occurred with the only pit access-lobby being five feet wide and space to stand in front of the 10-feet-long bar being only three feet wide! Space and safety standards have certainly changed in the intervening 120 years.

The extended front section of the basement now included three ladies' and two gentlemen's dressing-rooms and one ladies' and one gentlemen's general dressing-rooms, all with small fireplaces and no windows. There was also a closet for each sex. These were airless internal lavatories, measuring five feet by three feet six inches, probably at best, of the earth-closet type; or at worst, of the removable pan type. Of course, washing facilities would be jug and basin. The actors had to walk the length of, and beneath the auditorium to arrive at the stage.

The interior of the auditorium seemed to be quite richly decorated, mostly in white relieved by blue, with mouldings in burnished gold. Fabrics on benches and the vice-regal box were of crimson satin damask, while draperies of the private boxes, dress circle and gallery slips were blue-and-gold damask. A dome was tucked into the existing roof; it was divided into eight panels and decorated with groups illustrative of Shakespeare's "Seven Ages" and Shakespeare himself.

In 1882, the stage was extended rearward by fifteen feet and a more satisfactory system of exits made to the gallery and pit. The theatre was sold in 1889 and the new owners initiated more changes, this time to the stage. In 1890, the stage was further extended rearwards and the original roof of removal was the mansard-style roof in corrugated iron constructed to house a fly-tower. The stage was "framed for traps, viz. 2 quarter traps, grave trap, bridge rise and sinks (3). A part of the stage is screwed with joists to lift for water scenes. There is also a large trap 16 feet by 4 feet for raising scenery... the grid is 40 feet from the stage." (The Mercury, Hobart, 19 September 1890). Thus the stage could house any Victorian melodrama with its associated spectacle and the new-style box sets.

In 1911 the last rebuilding took place; this time it was to be the auditorium and front of the house — as it is today. William Pitt's original design working-drawings, however, show that he envisaged a larger theatre. He had proposed cutting off some of the stage-house at the auditorium and extending it the equivalent amount rearwards. In the newly gained space in the auditorium, he had proposed prosenium boxes at stalls and dress-circle level, but the stage remained unaltered and the auditorium was smaller and without the boxes (until 1952) which provide the delightful intimacy of today.

The theatre is not, however, a museum piece; the evolutionary process of improvement is continuing. Last year, it was re-roofed and new fire-escapes constructed, as, too, were new toilets for the public. The building has been re-wired and a new lighting board installed at the prompt corner. For actors, removal of the old sub-stage dressing-rooms seems in sight; stage one of a three-storey extension at the rear of the theatre is being constructed. This will finally supply space for loading-dock, workshop, paint-frame, new dressing-rooms with showers etc., rehearsal room, administrative offices and, hopefully, a small museum to house relics and ephemera of the Theatre Royal.

The auditorium of today much as it would have appeared in 1911. Off-whites, cream and red plush fabric.

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* See Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1905: from the time of the first settlements to arrival of cinema, by Ross Thorne, 2 vols.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA JUNE 1977
"Experiment usually has been tempered by the need to appeal to mainly conservative audiences . . ."

The Tasmanian Theatre Company is young compared with the Old Tote or the Melbourne Theatre Company; however, it possesses a priceless asset: the tradition of Hobart's Theatre Royal.

When established in 1973, it inherited the Royal, Australia's oldest stage and also a 140-year-old theatrical tradition.

From its beginning in 1837, the Royal's work encompassed the whole spectrum of the theatrical arts, from dance to drama and from opera to opera, with occasional orchestral concerts thrown in.

This versatility was what early Tasmania required. In a stratified society, the Royal had to cater for all tastes; after all, those were the times of unsubsidised theatre and box-office receipts were all important. Productions had to be of good standard or audiences would fall away and they had to be sufficient in number to keep interest in the theatre alive.

Among those who developed theatre in the 1830s in Hobart, and even before the Royal was built, was Samson Cameron who staged Kotzebue's The Stranger, The Married Bachelor, The Rendezvous and other productions. Seasons were long — up to five months.

The Samson Cameron company also gave the opening performance at the newly built Theatre Royal on 6 March 1837. The programme listed Speed the Plough and the farce The Spoiled Child.

Mrs Clark and Mr Capper were among the early entrepreneurs who managed the Royal. They took over in 1840 and in the following five years presented musicals, drama including Charles II, The Merry Monarch, Karl Maria von Weber's Der Freischütz, and Macbeth. Mrs Clark incurred heavy financial loss and in 1845 left.

By this time, the function of the Royal in Hobart's cultural life had been well defined and a tradition established by which it managed to face often-difficult times. In 1839, the Royal nearly came under the auctioneer's hammer, but happily this never came to pass.

In 1869, John Davies, who then was lessee, added a gallery and a classic facade. The Davies family has remained connected with the Royal which owes much to them and to the Hobart Mercury.

In recent times, the Royal was nearly sold to become a warehouse. There was a public outcry. The Royal became the first national theatre in the British Commonwealth incorporated by charter and the National Theatre and Fine Arts Society (NATFAS) was formed in 1949 to administer it. It was largely through the genius and energy of Mr Bruce Piggott that this was achieved.

Since then, the Royal has been renovated and re-decorated and heating installed. Today, the Royal is the perfect small theatre: perfect in design and proportions and also in acoustics, and it takes a high and honourable place in the cultural life of Tasmania.

It must be noted that under NATFAS the old traditions were carefully maintained and in substance the Royal remained what it had been all along: a stage which had to look after the performing arts in total, although the emphasis occasionally shifted. In the post-war years, for instance, opera was given a prominent place, and one of the reasons was the arrival of Walter Stiasny, a musician and conductor who had learned his craft in Vienna.

Two seasons were given each year with the help of singers from the Mainland and the then ABC Orchestra. Many of the productions paid their way, which in things operatic was something unheard of.

Ballet came to the Royal in 1958 with Borovansky, and light opera in the following year. This, in short, was the tradition the Tasmanian Theatre Company acquired when established in 1973. It also took over Fred, the Royal's resident ghost who appears rarely and only when he is happy. He has made two appearances since the company took over.

The Tasmanian Theatre Company emerged from a re-organisation of the per-
forming arts in 1973. Established were the Tasmanian Theatre and Performing Arts Council and the Theatre Royal Board. The Theatre Royal Bill, passed by Parliament in 1973, established the board as trustee and landlord of the Royal, with the job of managing and maintaining the theatre.

John Unicomb, previously manager of the Royal, was appointed executive director of the TTC. He continues to hold the post. Mrs Fay Thompson, previously secretary of NATFAS, was appointed Theatre Royal manager. The TTC, main user of the Royal, became its resident company. From the start, John Unicomb advocated extensions to the old Royal to provide a full wardrobe department, showers and modern dressing rooms, workshop facilities, adequate loading access, rehearsal area and staff offices.

He sees the Theatre Royal, with these additions, as being a first-class theatre centre, a factory providing professionally mounted productions for Hobart and the rest of Tasmania. The first stage of these additions is now being built with a $200,000 grant from the Federal Government and $108,000 from the State Government.

Mr. Unicomb also suggested that the Shades, an area under the stalls which was originally a tavern, be redeveloped as a restaurant.

In its first four years the Tasmanian Theatre Company has succeeded in widening Tasmania’s theatrical horizon. The erstwhile comfortable provincialism is changing into something that resembles Sydney and Melbourne attitudes, and this is being achieved without sacrificing local flavour.

Plays of a more controversial character were introduced into the theatre programme: Sticks and Bones, Savages, Kennedy’s Children, The Removalists, Sizwe Banzie is Dead, and Equus.

It is remarkable that this process of incorporating late 20th century theatre was accomplished without burning bridges. Indeed, what was found to have had value in the past was taken over and shaped to meet contemporary standards. This policy did not remain unrecognised by the theatre-going public, including the young generation.

That such a policy was and is making great demands on the company is self-evident. The company has to be versatile — by necessity must be able to compromise, except in artistic standards — and it must be able to make ends meet with relatively modest means.

Financially, things have become tighter since the “Whitlam Spring”. The company has adjusted. Today the principals are engaged on a season-to-season basis, often for one production. They usually are well-known Sydney or Melbourne actors who welcome the opportunity to appear on Australia’s oldest stage and before audiences who still like to laugh in theatre, but who do not like an over-sweet diet.

The company has not been afraid of experiment. It has left the Theatre Royal on three occasions to present theatre-in-the-round in Hobart as part of a varied programme. But experiment usually has been tempered by the need to appeal to mainly conservative audiences.

An example of this artistic policy is the 1977 season which should get the nod from the middle-class and middle-aged heads; it should please the young generation and also those with cultivated taste.

Sound of Music, which has just finished a three-week season, was a quality production which gave local talent the opportunity to work with Sydney actors. Count Dracula comes next. There will be a school production in July, an intimate revue in September-October, and How the Other Half Loves will be staged in November and December.

All productions, except Sound of Music, will have seasons at the Civic Theatre in Burnie and the Princess Theatre in Launceston.

The company also acts as entrepreneur and plans to bring five productions from the Mainland. The first, The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin, opens at the Royal on 26 May. This will be followed by Tanarata/Taranata! from the Marian Street Theatre, Sydney (28 June - 9 July).

The season is more popularly oriented this year to ensure larger audiences and to present a complete theatre programme.

An important branch of the company is Theatre-in-Education. In 1972, Barbara Manning was appointed, and her brief was to introduce a theatrical programme which would bring young people into the theatre and also to take theatre in schools. Acts not cast in a current production were available for these ventures.

From that modest beginning Tas. TIE has grown to a permanent company of nine, and the team tours Tasmania and sometimes other States.

After five successful, strenuous and exploratory years as an offshoot of the Tasmanian theatre company Tas. TIE is now preparing to become an autonomous group to be known as the Tasmanian Theatre in Education Company Ltd.
Fred Schepisi’s approach to feature film making has been that of the old bull, and nothing has been left on the fence in a rush to either artistic or commercial success. Working as a producer and director in advertising, documentary and public relations films has not blunted his creativity; just taught him a lot about film and the business of film.

He knows how to visualise, use a camera, pace scenes, read a location, light of Cinesound and called it “The Film House”.

Fred and The Film House developed a business catering mainly to advertising agencies and his commissions, awards and experience in the medium grew.

He continued to run The Film House while drawing on his own experience to write, direct, produce and arrange distribution of The Devil’s Playground. He also organised the money which included much of his own. He arranged distribution in the capital cities himself and controlled the promotion, ensuring that it wasn’t buried in an art house, but took its chance on the main street. In Melbourne it ran at the Bryson for eight months.

He took it overseas personally, and after the Cork Festival in June it opens at the Columbia theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Schepisi sees his feature film-making as project based and personal. He plans to

Fred Schepisi is not a commercial film maker turned to features. He is a creative film-maker, an artist, a film nut, with a wealth of commercial experience.

“So many films look as if someone said, let’s make a film and then looked around for a story, actors and crew. You need an idea that has to be made into a film.”

He spent a young year in a Marist training college, joined Carden Advertising in a dogsbody capacity, was assistant film producer at Paton’s to Phillip Adams, and became Melbourne manager of Cinesound.

At Cinesound he wrote and directed documentaries, and after the newsreel business faded from the screens was joined by friends to purchase the Melbourne end.
work on one film at a time and see it through all stages. "One person has the idea of a film, and one person follows it through. If you demand total personal freedom you are then responsible for standing up for that creation and selling it."

His first film was very personal. He wrote it. It was of his experience. His next film is different. *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* is Fred Schepisi's screenplay of Thomas Keneally's novel.

"*Jimmy Blacksmith* is a harder project than *The Devil's Playground*. You have to analyse all the writer's reasons; see the writer's position in the book. You have to find your justification in the book too. It's hard to get a run on as you can when you are writing yourself, when occasionally your thoughts outpace your capacity to write them down. Working from a novel ... it's more like whittling."

If *The Devil's Playground* is "not a novel, always a film, that's its medium", why choose a novel as the base for his film and not just take the outline of the original Jimmy Governor story for his screenplay?

He sees the structure as important, the structure of a novel with a rich tapestry of details building up "not just the man, but the man in his time, the man in his relationship to his environment". And it is a very visual book, Schepisi adds, which does not sit in the necessarily novel milieu of, say, *Voss*.

There will be slight changes of attitude between the novel and the film because each has different tools of communication. Schepisi feels that Keneally would now agree with him that the novel has too little sympathy for the whites. The film will not see them as inhuman, more as products of their time.

A novelist who develops his own work of art must feel some pangs when this offspring is adopted and nurtured by another artist. Tom Keneally, using the cook, in one episode, has obviously grown fond of his character and would like him to have his scene. Schepisi, in writing the screenplay is worried about detailed treatment of this episode interrupting the cinematic flow.

Schepisi outlines the problem with sensitivity, explaining the difference between how novels and films appropriately say what they say and concluded his explanation of this artistic dilemma with, "Anyway, I'm bigger than he is!"

*Jimmy Blacksmith* is a different film in many ways. *The Devil's Playground* had a setting which was largely confined to the college. The action saw the same group of players throughout the film. The crew and cast lived around the college; Fred could "direct at night over a drink" and felt very strongly the common enthusiasm of his team, as it developed through this growing continuous association.

With *Jimmy Blacksmith* there are many locations. The setting is the bush. There are few main characters but many who are only required for shooting for a day or two.

The logistics of the film are different. There is not the same familiar home base. And the creative ideas are based on Keneally's.

The film is being planned very carefully. It has to be. The fifteen weeks of shooting will cost $75,000 a week.

In avoiding time losses it is probably fortunate for Schepisi the producer that Schepisi the director loves filming in rain and fog. Another happy combination in this man of art and reality.
Take: one locally-written play and the brief return here of Kiwi actor-director Jonathan Hardy, on loan from the Melbourne Theatre Company.

Result: revitalisation of New Zealand theatre's longest-running, continuing debate: what emphasis should be placed on indigenous work in the programmes of our professional community theatres?

The play is Roger Hall's Glide Time, an uproarious comedy — with a sting in its tail — about life in the civil service, which showered an unsuspecting Wellington with delight last winter. Such was its appeal in the bureaucratic heartland that it kept returning for the remainder of the year, including two short, house-full seasons in the capital's 1570-seater Opera House.

Significantly, the theatre to discover Glide Time was Wellington's new professional theatre, Circa, established early in 1976 by a group of local freelance actors. It happens to be the only professional theatre in the country not subsidised by the state — at least, for the moment.

The other ingredient, Jonathan Hardy, is a punchy, beetle-browed ball of high-powered, home-brew talent. For the last two months he has been at Auckland's Mercury Theatre, the largest, and probably most "Establishment", of the community theatres.

As well as directing a much-praised production of John Powers's The Last of the Knucklemen, and appearing in his one-man show, Gogol's Diary of a Madman, he has waxed eloquent, and with raunchy aggression, about what he calls "the need to create an energy surge for indigenous theatre".

In a profile in the influential and widely-read New Zealand weekly magazine The Listener, he hit hard, saying New Zealand theatre lacked "a sense of excitement . . . something in the air".

People who hawked "international theatre", he suggested, only made New Zealanders feel more lonely, because they did not understand it.

"If a theatre cannot command an audience, I believe it's the theatre's own fault," he said.

Hardy's balls-and-all attack brought forth some predictably sour comments from some sections of the country's theatrical Establishment.

Mike Nicolaidi
for home-grown talents
the signs are good

Mike Nicolaidi, 38, is a former director of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (1971-3), New Zealand's equivalent of the Australia Council. He is currently theatre critic and parliamentary lobby correspondent for Wellington's Evening Post.

He recently served as cultural adviser to the Task Force on Economic and Social Planning, whose report New Zealand at the Turning Point, has resulted in the Government establishing the New Zealand Planning Council.

Mr Nicolaidi has had a long association with the arts, particularly theatre and film. While London correspondent of the New Zealand Press Association, 1965-8, he freelanced as theatre critic of The Scotsman.
indigenous work, have tended to program conservatively.

Their eyes have seemed fixed to contemporary overseas plays, even though they know that a London success, either commercial or critical (or both), no longer ensures full houses on the other side of the world.

But they are gradually beginning to believe in the obvious growing fascination “new” theatre audiences are developing for home-grown writers.

As well as Circa’s recent success with Glide Time, Downstage had a long run with Jo Musaphia’s Mothers and Fathers early last year. This “sex” comedy is now destined for production by Sydney’s Old Tote.

The fundamental unanswerable, of course, is what comes first, the chicken or the egg — or, in this case, the secure establishment of theatre companies, or a concentration on New Zealand work to produce a truly living, communicable theatre?

The conundrum has endless permutations.

At the recent annual conference of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, held in Wellington, even Marlis Thiersch, who is passionately devoted to the cause of indigenous drama in Australia, was unable to give a clear answer.

While saying that without its own corpus of writers a nation cannot claim to have its own theatre, she stressed the need to build up a viable theatre system before the promotion of new plays was possible.

When, or at what point of establishment, is a theatre system viable? Too much concentration on the “system”, without creating that “something in the air” that Hardy speaks of and that sparks real communication between stage and audience, can spell disaster.

However, the success of Glide Time, and the leadership and programming courage shown by Downstage over the last five years, appear certain to add momentum to the indigenous drama cause.

Playmarket Inc., an organisation established four years ago to encourage the writing and production of New Zealand plays, recently conducted a survey of forthcoming productions. The signs are good.

Apart from eight planned new productions of Glide Time over the next few months, local playwrights Gordon Dryland, Craig Harrison, Robert Lord and, of course, Musaphia, are receiving close scrutiny.

Upcoming at Downstage, for instance, are main-bill seasons of Dryland’s new play Fat Little Indians, and Harrison’s Perfect Strangers. Indians is described as a timely, truthful comedy about a quartet of flat-dwellers attempting to come to terms with the liberated life-styles they’ve adopted, while the Harrison piece looks compassionately at the problems of racial integration and tolerance.

Dead and Never Called Me Mother, by Lord (who is now domiciled in New York and whose Well Hung was given Australian airing by Nimrod Theatre a few years back) will be tackled by Christchurch’s Court Theatre.

These auguries reflect the spirit, if not exactly the frontal impatience, of a Jonathan Hardy. Yet it seems we need our Hardys to bring down to earth much that is both debated and presented in our theatres.

Theatre should be neither precious nor prissy, and the injection of a certain ruggedness, or “balls”, can only encourage and heighten the fundamental connection it must have with its “native”, or “national”, audience.

Significant developments (not previously mentioned) in theatre across the Tasman over the last six months have been:

— the appointment of Anthony Taylor (director of Circa’s Glide Time) as artistic director of Downstage;
— the appointments of Robert Alderton, executive director, and Ian Mullins, artistic director (a British import) at Mercury;
— a $6,000 Arts Council fellowship, and honorary doctorate of literature (University of Wellington) for New Zealand’s “living” and most idiosyncratic, theatrical “institution”, Bruce Mason. Mason, who has achieved fame well beyond his shores, has in the past 12 months added two new solo pieces to his repertoire, Not Christmas but Guy Fawkes and Courting Blackbird. Audiences throughout the country are flocking to him and eating out of his hand.
"I find it difficult to explain that I am trying to write funny tragedies rather than farcical comedies"
William Shoubridge

Ballet

The Australian Ballet
The Dance Company (NSW)

"Modern-dance audiences will never grow out of classical ballet fans..."

The Australian Ballet and its artistic director, Anne Woolliams, have come in for a lot of criticism lately, much of it negative and unsubstantiated.

The furore surrounding Don Asker's Monkeys in a Cage has had some members of the audience ripping up their programmes and demanding their money back at the box-office. There have been outraged letters to the Sydney Morning Herald demanding the return of Sir Robert Helpmann (some of which have gone before the board of directors) and one well-known "personality" of the airwaves has once again shot his mouth off about the calculated insult and "a waste of time" that Monkeys in a Cage seems to be.

It is a known fact that modern-dance audiences will never grow out of classical ballet fans, the two forms are (to them) worlds apart.

If the reactions to the various works shown in the latest season of the company in Sydney are anything to go by, audiences do not want ballet to say anything about the world we live in. They see it as only a social occasion and a pleasant after-dinner diversion.

Of course, anything with so determined an outlook on life as Monkeys, developed in so stringently modern a manner is bound to cause a furore among the reactionaries. Audiences did and said the same things about Nijinsky's Fame and Rite of Spring 65 years ago!

The important thing is that the board, having shown faith in Miss Woolliams in the first place by asking her to become director, do not go back on their decision now. Also that the dancers in the company have sufficient faith in her to peer now and then out of their severely closeted preconceptions and see just what she is trying to do to revitalise an almost moribund performing company.

If the company is content to rehash the Merry Widow again and again, as well as other pleasant but stagnant pieces of frou-frou, they may keep themselves and the audiences happy, and subscriptions renewed, but they will soon lose the right to claim an international reputation of being adventurous and vital. The Australian Ballet and its audiences, along with the rest of the world, have to move with the times.

All of which is not to say that the Australian Ballet should gradually do away with the classics and focus entirely only on "modern" works; there are other companies to do that. The company is a classical ballet company, and it has a duty to present the classics in a professional manner.

But, then, what are classics? Swan Lake was too daringly innovative for the audiences of its time; now it's a classic. The Ballet Russe caused continual uproars with the works it premiered; now some of those are classics. All things change.

Woolliams is a stickler for discipline as well as adventurousness. This may be what some members of the company dislike her. The company has needed a thorough cleaning-up in technique and application for a long time, having been so used to nonchalantly wandering through the fripperies of the Widow. It takes time and application.

The present season, however, has not made the conservatives very happy and conversely others have complained of its lack of interest and innovation.

As far as I'm concerned, such works as Raymonda, Serenade and Giselle have been chosen to highlight that strength in technique and ability, while Monkeys and Billy the Kid are there to show audiences that the company has enough ability to tackle material well off the beaten path of conventional ballet. While others still like Les Patineurs and Sebastian illustrate the differences of the company from what it was when these works were last performed.

Apart from anything else, it has been a careful selection, made so as not to alienate too many people and therefore keep the company on an even financial keel.

In the first programme Les Patineurs was dredged up from the past as an effective curtain-warmer. This aged ballet of Sir Frederick Ashton is looking a little the worse for wear these days. The steps are danced correctly, I suppose, and Kelvin Coe as the Blue Boy has all the speed, assurance and clean line that is so necessary for the "show-off" character of his part. Walter Bourke, in the second cast, wasn't quite so definite and effortless. The ensemble dancers, by and large, were passable overall, but some of the little choreographic jokes fell flat and at no time was I really conscious that the dancers were in fact impersonating ice-skaters. Perhaps they should get John Curry in to...
Eugene Loring’s famous work *Billy the Kid* closed the programme and it illustrated another of the things that we must thank Miss Woolliams for. She gives dancers with specific abilities encouragement and gets them to star in works that suit them. Eugene Loring saw the qualities of a hitherto unnoticed dancer Danilo Radojevic, wanted him to dance the star part in *Billy the Kid* and Miss Woolliams concurred. The same goes for David Burch with the star part in *Monkeys*.

*Billy the Kid* is superficially a strange choice for the company. If it was to give a sop to the American Bicentennial, there are other works that would have said a lot more about the American spirit than this; Martha Graham’s *Appalachian Spring* for example (if she would have given permission for the piece to be danced by a ‘mere’ ballet company).

Anyway, *Billy the Kid* is what we got and it was well enough danced. It is gutsy, colourful and dramatic and these qualities have always been the strong point of the company.

A potted version of the history of this legendary Wild West figure, it has a sustained dramatic thread and plenty of characters, all closely tied to its theme and Aaron Copland’s music. There are hoe-downs, gun-fights (well-translated into the balletic vocabulary) and a real feeling of a frontier community, closely knit, paranoid, hard, yet not without its moments of caring and lyric gentleness.

The main work in this first programme, though, was Don Asker’s *Monkeys in a Cage*.

Melbourne-born Asker has been for the past two or so years the resident choreographer of the Nederlands Dans Theatre, that aggressively modern and pioneering group that was at the top of its form a few years ago and that the Glenn Tellem-Hans van Manen axis, but which now (I saw it last year while on holidays) seems to be resting with that of the creator.

In his rather pretentious programme note, Asker says that *Monkeys in a Cage* is the Human Predicament. One can see parallels, of course: the urge for companionship, the desire to claim one’s personal territory, the realisation of one’s creativity and the natural occurrence of tension when others are introduced into that territory.

Both Asker and his composer, Geoffery Madge, claim the influence of the writings of Samuel Beckett and Pinter, as well as the paintings of Bosch. The mechanism of those writers is clearly unmistakable. The sense of aloneness and desolation, the dramas between individuals and “interlopers”, the hostility when an established community and an order are upset.

David Burch, in the central role, is riveting. Tireless in his performance, he makes the drama work because his understanding of it and identification are at one with that of the creator.

My only real criticism of this work, choreographically speaking, is that too much of the ensemble work is blurred and unfocused, too contrived and messy, unable to convey sufficiently the mechanisms of a community being set up and destroyed. The confusion is intensified by the music which offers no assistance or even sympathetic background to the choreographic argument. The set design is capably, but hardly useful or illuminating to the audience.

Apparently, on the strength of the opening-night performance, the creators were not satisfied with some parts of the work and have subsequently set to work on them, so perhaps some of these faults will be cleaned up.

The work is a long-overdue shot-in-the-arm for the company; it cannot be their staple diet, of course, but it shows that, given the impetus, they can bring concentration and effort to a new work and force audiences to see the other side of dance. Let us hope that the lesson is learned and will not be lost, either to the company or its subscribers.

In the next issue I will go into greater depth about the other works in the first Sydney season for this year. Balanchine’s *Serenade*, Butler’s *Sebastian* and the Petipa/Raymond Act 3, as well as the beautiful revival of the Coralli/Petrol classic *Giselle*.

In searching for the broad line and thematic focus it is easy to overlook the subtleties of the brushstroke. This thought occurred to me recently when watching a performance of Leigh Warren’s *Mirage*, one of the new works in the Dance Company (NSW) season in the Opera House.

To those attuned to dance always concerning itself with a clear theme or message, it becomes difficult to get the sightlines of modern dance right. “What is it about?” people always ask. Sometimes emotional situations, relationships or delicately stated concepts. Quite often it is concerned with shape, line, form, development and the presence of well-tuned bodies performing in a clear, uncluttered space.

The dance critic has one of the hardest jobs in writing his appraisals. It’s one thing to tie oneself into intellectual knots to review a play, it is another to communicate a purely physical, kinaesthetic experience in words. So often one is left with either a dreary catalogue of what happened (“She stuck her leg in the air; he grabbed it and stuck her leg in the air; he grabbed it again”) or else a series of very coloured, emotive and purely subjective adjectives, for example, “the still, dark menace of the bottom of a stagnant pool”. And then again, what happens when one is confronted with pieces like Balanchine’s *Agon* or *Episodes* where the work is concerned only with shape and form in space and time, totally stripped of emotional connotations? Critiques of these start to read like an essay in advanced physics with talk of “linear flow” and “mathematical precision”.

The best one can do is, I suppose, to give a subjective appraisal of what one saw and attempt to leave graphic detail to the imagination of the reader. But this of course can misrepresent the choreographer, his dance piece and the whole feel of his work.

Leigh Warren’s *Mirage* (music, Tangerine Dream’s “Rubicon”) strikes me as being about the mirages of sight, form and emotional relationships. If this concept is fair, as I think it is, I fear that Warren had lost sight of his theme halfway through the work, and padded it out with some extraneous gymnastics. The male solo in the middle, full of shoulder-stands and jetes into arabesque, while being extremely well executed by Andris Toppe, is inconsequential because it seemingly had nothing to do with what had gone before.

*Mirage* starts well with three girls slowly promenading towards the front of the stage as if walking on foam-rubber. It is dream-like and exploratory. This gluey wading is then interrupted by the arrival of the boys, who stand, bend and support the girls in long, languorous falls to the floor. They seem to act as a catalyst, as the pace soon builds; the girls race off in quick, angular turns, and the road is left open for the afore-mentioned solo, a quick, soaring segment from the girls, which I found rather pointless, choreographically unsubstantiated and irritating because of constant repetition.

Towards the end the whole team re-enters; there is a slow, sad solo for Stephanie St Claire who seems to have realised that whatever she wanted has turned out to be only a mirage.

I don’t think *Mirage* will go down in the annals of Australian dance as a great breakthrough. It is fairly well put together, but still shows the strain of construction. Contractions and expansions and other modern techniques seem to be merely pasted on top of a rather insecure classicism, a serious flaw that does nothing to improve the form and image of the work. Warren has also allowed himself to be too strongly dictated to by the music. But still there are moments in this work when one is gripped by tiny flashes of intense moments of expressive beauty that are all too soon swallowed by a lot of busy, rumbustious to-ing and fro-ing. These moments are the subtle brushstrokes that I mentioned earlier.

This performance was part of the Dance Company’s season in the Sydney Opera House, which is intent on extending the audiences and building up new audiences. As Jonathan Taylor told me earlier in the week, if the audience for modern dance will not come from the ranks of the aged dowagers that comprise a lot of the Australian Ballet’s audiences; it will come from a younger generation that has not been preconditioned as to what dance is all about. This audience is also one that will not stand for empty whimsicality or pomposity, misthought sermonising. It wants something that is strong, vibrant, has wit and intelligence and, moreover, something to say. Modern dance with a “social conscience”?

Anne Sokoloff certainly has a social conscience and her dance work *Deserts poses*
the proposition that life is futile, joy ephemeral and personal contact only fleeting. Deserts certainly has impact when first seen, but continual viewings of it leave me indifferent, irritated and highly critical. I distrust anyone who is extreme in any direction, and Sokolov as personified in Deserts is too unrelentingly pessimistic to ring true. She, like Samuel Beckett, has wrung her works out of a literary and philosophical concept with little bearing on life as it is lived. Mr Beckett and Ms Sokolov tell us, “Why bother? It’s all a cruel, unmerciful joke, anyway.”

Sokolov has a right to hold her vision; I just question the mastery of her staging of it. Deserts looks sparse and arid, and Sokolov is telling us that there are deserts of the mind, the soul and the imagination as well as those of the earth and the cosmos. Phew! It is a work that could once have been called “la nouvelle vague”, but which now looks a little “ancienne”. Fists clenched, arms raised to the sky in supplication, frenzied bouts of action contrasted with long stretches of stasis build up the image that we are all islands cast adrift from each other.

It was a lot more concise and persuasive when performed last year at the Seymour Centre after Sokolov herself had come to mount it on the company. But now, with an almost completely new cast and on a larger stage, it has lost its impact. Most of the dancers are young and classically trained, so it would not be totally unfair to say that perhaps they have not yet got the personal experience and spiritual armoury to relay convincingly Sokolov’s message to the world.

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Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education this year received the highest grant for TIE from the Australia Council and the 1976 Critics’ Award for Tasmania

THEY TELL IT LIKE IT WAS

"It was so bloody good it brought tears to my bloody eyes"

At a football club in Whyalla, one of the men thought the back-cloth was for a strip show. What he saw was a theatre-in-education programme that works as popular theatre. He said he stayed to the end because it was so bloody good it brought bloody tears to his eyes. At the Hobart Matriculation College, students saw the show that worked for the men in the club in South Australia, with Renaissance art as the back-cloth for songs and jokes about sex roles in society.

Performances such as these make Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education an exemplary company, a major resource centre for ideas, standards, and scripts for Australian theatre-in-education. The company is the result of the work of Barbara Manning since her appointment in 1972 as youth activities officer to the Tasmanian Theatre Company. After five years, Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education is an independent company of eight with a special position in Australian theatre-in-education which earns it a high income from subsidies, including $70,000 for 1977 from the Australia Council, the highest subsidy paid by the Australia Council for theatre-in-education. This year, over the head of the Tasmanian Theatre Company, the company was given the National Critics Circle Award for Tasmania for “services to theatre”.

Before her appointment in 1972, Barbara Manning worked as a drama specialist in education, as an actress and director, and for some years as a current affairs and art interviewer with ABC radio and television. The company’s four main programmes in 1976-7 reflect her view that theatre-in-education is the use of theatre within the whole range of education, and that education is concerned with the development of individuals in social groups, with choices and social expectations as much as facts and academic skills.

Anne Harvey’s I’ll Be In On That for upper secondary and tertiary students is the most widely successful of the four 1976-7 programmes. Anne Harvey works out of Sydney and until the last few years most of her work was as a theatre and tele-
vision actress in Sydney and Melbourne. She wrote I'll Be In On That and I Must Have One Of My Own with the help of a director's development grant from the Australia Council. After seeing I'll Be In On That in Tasmania, John Clark asked her to use it as the basis for the first theatre-in-education course at NIDA, in 1976. A third production by John O'May for the Theatre Royal in Hobart involved Victorian schools for six months last year and was seen by more than 30,000 students. This year a national company of actors provided by the main state theatre-in-education groups, directed by Anne Harvey, and under the organisation of AYPA in New South Wales, will take I'll Be In On That to an international festival in Wales in July.
Wilton Morley is an Englishman. And the son of a very famous Englishman, Robert Morley: one indeed renowned for portraying the epitome of the British upper-class gent, if rather loveable and bumbling at the same time. Brother Sheridan edits books on the British theatre, exercises his dryly urbane style as the theatre critic of Punch, and appears in numerous television arts programmes.

All members of the Morley family are intelligent and, of course, theatrically minded. Yet Robert did not approve of schooling in conventional Eton-Oxford sense. Sheridan did manage to reach the cloisters of that august university, but only by his own efforts and with the background of the rather bohemian education imposed on both boys by their parents.

Wilton, with one show under his belt and Benjamin Franklin now under his company's management, is shaping up to become one of the most significant forces in commercial management here. His ideas are fresh and challenging, his approach to keep an ear firmly to the ground and get there first.

It was father's touring activities which first brought him to these shores four years ago "to see how the other half lives". This came after a two-year stint at the Wyman Theatre, Swindon, as a manager: a position he didn't like because of the red tape. It was good training, though, and having liked what he saw in the Antipodes, he went around to Miller, Edgley and Williamson's looking for a job.

Williamson's took him on and set him on the road to his own entrepreneurial activities by appointing him tour manager, which over two years took him to most places in Australia. And being the open, hearty and loquacious chap he is, he made many friends and contacts.

His feelings about JCW's are mixed: on the one hand he is grateful for the excellent grounding he received in an organisation, as it was, unique in the world, but on the other hand he is appalled by the mismanagement which he considers was responsible for the firm's downfall. "They had it coming to them for a long time because it was such an absurdly badly run organisation — to the point of financial suicide. At the top were accountants who, to my mind, had little idea about the theatre: the sort of people who saw nothing else and never went near the MTC or the Old Tote. They could have made Don's Party a tremendous success by putting the money into the production that I think it needed; another example is Dimboola. With all this kind of thing they could have had first choice if they'd had their feelers out. The good people, like Betty Pounder and John Robertson, who did know what was going on, were never really listened to because of the structure of the organisation."

Wilton Morley knew that the end was in sight for Williamson's when he went to New York and was offered the rights for Same Time Next Year. After taking up the offer, he went back to his firm with the proposal. "I fished around and got some money, and said to them, 'Look I've got this play, would you like to do it?' They seemed agreeable, so I asked if they would take a share, but then they said 'Oh no, we can't have that because we don't allow employees to invest in our productions.' So I said, 'OK, I'll take it to Kenn Brodziak if that's how you feel.' So they said, 'Perhaps we can bend the rules.' That's how it all started."

Parachute Productions, his company, managed the play in Sydney, with Louis Fander and Nanice Hayes. When Louis went back to England, Wilton bought out the Williamson share and put Graeme Blundell in the role. Graeme has become a great friend and important influence on Wilton's thinking. They admire one another and constantly spark ideas off each other.

Having made money with the play, Morley is convinced that audience attitudes to overseas stars are changing rapidly in Australia. "I think that's the way things are going. I'm not crusading: it's as much self-interest as anything. If I promote Australian talent and give Australian actors a chance before overseas people, there's more chance of people coming to me — they'll send me plays and so on. Managements using imported actors will find themselves progressively more and more cut off from the actors and the audiences. Part of the thing that went wrong with JCW's was that the actors were always just instruments to be moved around to Miller, Edgley and Williamson's looking for a job."

Williamson's has its own share of problems. Morley says he has first choice if they had their feelers out. Some have said her name doesn't sell tickets, but this tour has proved them wrong. Graeme says he doesn't want to be a star, but there must be stars here if theatre is to be Australian. I believe people go to see more stars than plays. People go to Benjamin Franklin because they know Gordon Chater and go to see Same Time Next Year because of Graeme and Nanice."

Morley is quick to stress that his company (he owns it 100 per cent) spends its money in Australia, with very little going out. Not only does he see imported actors as a threat to the talent here, in that audiences have been trained to think that only overseas TV stars are worthy of taking lead roles, but also that the country is being used as a money-making machine for outside managements with inevitable damage to commercial organisations here. "What they do is make sure that, if a play they've got the rights for is to be staged here, then they mount it and put the money in. Which also means they take the profit out. It's exactly the same as English actors coming. Pretty unfair."

The peculiarly weak Equity set-up is largely responsible.

Nor is Morley convinced by the argument that at least imported shows provide work here and keep theatres open which
would otherwise be dark. "They say that unless you bring in people like Paul Elliott to mount long seasons at the Theatre Royal, you wouldn't have anything in the theatre. That's not true, or shouldn't be. A product properly promoted creates need for more. The time has come for us to be fiercely Australian. In fact, I think the best thing that could happen would be a ban on overseas actors so that people could discover that they like to see their countrymen just as much. It's a fallacy to say that we learn anything from the people who come in. We don't. Most of the stuff is dreadful anyway — those awful English comedies!"

Apart from Benjamin Franklin, though, Morley has no short-term plans for promoting local plays. He says rather defensively that, though he thinks Same Time Next Year is a super and universal play, if he had had an Australian play he would have preferred to do that. He adds that no one has sent him anything as yet. Nonetheless, despite having seen some of the better home-grown fare, nothing else has so far managed to capture his enthusiasm. At present, he is captivated by a four-hander for women, Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi, which had a season before Christmas at the Hampstead Theatre Club. Again it's a comedy, though on the dark side: at the moment he thinks people are more easily pleased by comedy than drama. The play is written by women and will be cast from local actresses (Helen Morse is reading the script) and directed by a woman. "I'm thinking of approaching Graeme's wife, Kerry — there aren't many women directors here."

Morley's use of an American director for Same Time Next Year brought him into conflict with Ken Horler of the Nimrod. Here he is unrepentant because of the very American character of the play. ("You have to compromise when it's necessary.")

Another play on the stocks, again from England, is Willy Russell's John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert, which, if it comes off, is likely to have Graeme playing Ringo, and Shirley from the Skyhooks in somewhere. Using rock personalities, with their enormous drawing-power, appeals as a way of bringing younger people into the theatre. The best ones, he argues, have stage presence and thus the potential for straight acting, "and the people who manage Shirley seem keen on putting some money into theatre, which shows I'm not the only one who thinks the barriers can be crossed." John, Paul, George appeals to a whole generation in a way Sergeant Pepper couldn't. That was a balletic show based on the music from the album. The Willy Russell play works on the (oft-mooted) idea of the Beatles getting back together and necessitates that the actors look like them sufficiently to convince the audience at first sight. Morley wants to make use, in part, of the publicity gimmicks which surrounded the group, and recreate the press conferences which brought forth a zany competence from the Liverpool four.
Entrepreneur
WILTON MORLEY
talks to
ROBERT PAGE

Again, though, it is likely an outside director would be brought in, though Graeme would have been used — "he understands that classless thing" — if he weren't already the first choice for Ringo. "I'd like someone who knows the north of England. Perhaps Alan Desser, who directed the original production, but he'd probably come out for only four weeks, where I'd like someone who would be around for the whole run of the production. It's got to be someone I can work closely with, for I'd like to be very involved, though I don't think I'm ready to plunge in and direct it myself."

At the moment, Parachute can only handle one show at a time. Partly it is a question of management capability and partly because of the finances. Duda, Fish, Stas and Vi will probably be mounted in September, with the Beatles show to go on after that (February?) if the backing is there. "If I needed some quick money, I would try to find a nice, funny, fast Australian play, perhaps for someone like John Waters to do, and push that, or get Jack Thompson back on to the stage. Why bring out O'Sullivan, who has nothing to do with Australia? The thinking behind it seems to be a bit dated. Still, I wouldn't like to say too much about Brodziak: he's too powerful! I hope he makes something of the way it has turned out, though in that case without preplanning, with Benjamin Franklin. The big stumbling-block is working out the finances, but if that could be overcome, there seems little reason why a subsidised theatre should not try out a worthwhile new play with a commercial management waiting in the wings to tour it if the response were sufficient. The use of the resources and of the expertise of each in this way could provide a new possibility for promoting the local product. "I'm already interested in doing things with Graeme's company, Hoopla — and hope to take up Bobo."

Parachute may operate softly, softly to catch the audience monkey at the moment, but the family is still there to help Wilton move quickly. Sheridan keeps him posted with reviews and advice from London. "Then I react instinctively — often without having read the play — and place an international call and offer say 500 pounds with 10 per cent royalties. They give a year's option; then if you do the play, the initial money comes off the royalties — if not, you haven't lost too much." Interestingly, it was his father who suggested the name Parachute ("one leap — and it may not open!") and in one sense Robert is always in reserve to break any fall. "If I needed some quick money, I could always bring Dad out with his one-man show — but I don't want to have to."

At present Wilton's floating quite happily on his own.

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WRITE TO US FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF DANCE BOOKS
Playscript

THE FALL GUY

Linda Aronson
Linda Aronson was born in London in 1950. Educated at state school, she studied English Literature at the New University of Ulster and St. Hilda's College, Oxford. She is currently working on a Ph.D. at Sydney university. She began writing as a child but has concentrated on playwriting only since arriving in Australia in 1973. The Fall Guy is the first of her plays to be produced professionally. Her first Australian play, Closing Down — about a family that runs a seedy, penny-in-the-slot amusement hall — was to have been produced at both the Bondi Pavilion and The Stables, Sydney. Her Australian play, Lonely for my Garden, had an amateur season at the Australian Theatre last year. Linda Aronson has also published poetry and written revue material for ABC radio and Sydney's New Theatre.

The idea of writing The Fall Guy came to me when I first saw the Seymour Centre's York theatre. The stage area suggested vaudeville: in particular, a comedy duo. I finished the first draft in November 1975 and the second draft eight months later. That version, bar a major overhaul on the gay dance section and the odd line here and there, represented the finished script. The plot remained virtually unchanged, although its presentation was different. Gordon, for example, neither met the boys nor witnessed the dance. The first draft was really two plays: Jack and Gordon and Hughie and Sean. The problem lay in combining the two; also in improving structure, pace and characterisation.

The redrafting period was a crucial one. With hindsight, the problem was to choose between the complex plotting and characterisation of full naturalism and something more symbolic — based in naturalism but employing archetypes to portray the comedy duo as a caricature of partnership. It was at this time that I first encountered The Entertainer. Until then I hadn't known the play at all.

It was worrying, partly because I'd thought Fall Guy was original (and it was depressing, if salutary, to see what could be done with the idea); but largely because I was frightened of being influenced. The fears were well-founded. I began to write a complicated naturalistic play, then, realising something was wrong, ground to a halt in total confusion. Months later, and still no further, I concluded that what must be interesting me was not so much the story or characters, but rather the nature of partnership. Since a comedy duo derives its humour largely from the joke of two bickering but inseparable friends, why not expose the truth behind that joke through the joke itself? That is, create some bickering couples and point the resemblance to vaudeville comedy. And that — although with no such clear idea of it — I tried to do.

The gay dance section was the play's problem-area. It went through five versions. In the first draft, the scene was simply taped and heard during the blackout. Mark II resembled the final version but with no scrim, more dialogue, and Hughie and Gordon brawling while Jack performed his act facing the theatre audience. The fight occurred later, outside the dance-hall. The final version is the fourth draft minus about half the dialogue, including a part where Hughie breaks down.

The problems were considerable because a great deal regarding plot and characterisation had to be explained credibly without loss of pace — in fact, in something like three minutes. My main worry was that the dance episode might duplicate the last scene: hence the attempts with tape-recordings and "backstage" effects.

The turning-point came when the cast and director suggested that the gay dance audience — which, until the fourth draft, cackled Jack off the stage — should respond favourably towards him. After six hours of debate and several stiff drinks, I concluded they were right. It was more credible, and made Jack's humiliation more powerful, since triumph preceded. The use of a scrim was also suggested that afternoon — tossed in casually, almost despairingly, at the eleventh hour. I'd never heard of a scrim. I seized the idea because, as well as making possible the "backstage" effect I'd wanted but hadn't known how to stage, it added a strong visual element and the opportunity for visual symbolism.

Needless to say, I was more than pleased with the production. My thanks to all concerned.

Next issue: Act 2 of The Fall Guy and The Fall Guy Casebook, by Mick Rodger
The Fall Guy was first performed by the Melbourne Theatre Company at the Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne, on 29 March 1977.

The original cast was:

**JACK**, Norman Kaye  
**GORDON**, Terence Donovan  
**HUGHIE**, Mervyn Drake  
**SEAN**, Stephen Oldfield.

The play was directed and designed by Mick Rodger and choreographed by Jon Finlayson.

**CHARACTERS**

**JACK:** Mid-fifties. His left arm is paralysed and hangs useless at his side.

**GORDON:** About fifty.

**HUGHIE:** Early twenties.

**SEAN:** Early twenties.

**SYNOPSIS**

The play concerns the disintegrating relationships of two male couples: Jack and Gordon, a vaudeville comedy team; and Hughie and Sean, two young homosexuals; all of whom, in some respect, are the “fall guy” of the title.

On the 28th anniversary of Jack and Gordon’s partnership, Gordon tells Jack that their feeble and violently anti-homosexual act must be changed. Jack, self-willed, bigoted and an alcoholic, refuses, and the pair split up. Unable to find work but determined to keep face, Jack suggests to Hughie — whom he has met, with Sean, in a pub — that they two form a variety act, Hughie, who has been sending up Jack without Jack realising it, agrees — partly as a joke and partly to annoy Sean.

Ultimately, without Sean or Gordon’s knowledge, Hughie cons Jack into performing his act at a gay dance. Gordon beats up Hughie and goes off with Jack. Whether Sean and Hughie remain together is left unclear. The play concludes as it opens — with Jack and Gordon’s act. But Jack, unable to forgive Gordon — and perhaps the world — humiliates Gordon on stage, thus destroying the act, Gordon and himself.

**THE SET**

An empty stage (preferably a thrust) with an entrance set centre-back.

On one side of the doorway is a flimsy metal table with four metal chairs. These are required for all scenes except I,ii and II,ii and may remain on stage throughout the play, if so desired.

For Jack’s flat, two old armchairs and a small movable cabinet (holding a telephone, an old portable record-player and LPs, bottles of spirits and glasses) are placed on stage. Alternatively, the contents of the cabinet may be concealed in built-in cupboards or placed on drop-down flaps screwed on to the flat. On one side of the doorway is hung a large disintegrating photograph of Jack and Gordon, in fifties-style evening dress, performing their act.

For the scene inside the pub (I,iii), two large block-mounted ads for beer are hung on either side of the doorway, one of them concealing the photograph. A pay-phone is placed on some sort of stand near to the doorway.

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**JACK’S GAG FOR LATECOMERS**

(This may be inserted anywhere in Act I except during the songs.)

Jack: Wait! Stop! Stop everything! Hold it! (To latecomers.) Did you find it all right? Second door to your left through the foyer. (Or whatever is appropriate.) Anyone else wanna go? It’s your last chance. (To, if possible, a cross-legged member of the audience.) What about you, mate? (or dear?) You can’t sit cross-legged the whole night. No? Na, but ... (Continues where he left off.)

**SCENE 1**

The RSL Club.

Man’s Voice (through a loudspeaker): And now, ladies and gentlemen, Jack Harvey and Gordon!

Lights: Jack and Gordon run on stage and sing “When you’re smiling”, accompanying the song with an energetic dance routine in which much comic play is made.
They give him an IQ test, reckoned he'd been dead for four years. Na, it's embarrassing. Lives in a world of his own; they all do. Take the other day, Y'know what he does for a living? Tell 'em what y'do for a living.

Gordon: Gents' hairdresser.

Jack: Right. Now what you and me know is that barbers don't only sell haircuts. (Taps his nose significantly.) Oo, she knows — look at her — you know what I'm talking about don't y'? Yes! I mean when I was sixteen I had the shortest haircut in Sydney. I did! Think about it! Think about it! But he doesn't understand that, see. What happens? There is, floundering round with his hair-creams and hair-sprays — no, you tell 'em.

Gordon: Well, a man came in and asked me if I kept Gossamer.

Jack: And what did you say?

Gordon: Supersoft or hard-to-hold?

Jack: Na, don't laugh, it's pathetic. Na, when you think about it . . . Married once, would y'believe! Weren't y'? Great, big girl . . . Still, she had her good points. (Gesticulates to indicate giant breasts.) — two of 'em! Na, but you shouldn't laugh. You shouldn't. (Indicating a woman in the audience.) Ah, she's off! Look at her. She's off! No shame, some of 'em . . . Na, seriously, this is a sad story. Tragic story. He bumped her off. Didn't y'? Yes. Suffocated her — stuck a pillow down her throat while she was asleep. Aa, nasty! He denies it, but, don't y' ? He reckons she was dreaming about eating marshmallows. It's true! My oath! But stupid! He's so stupid . . . ! Tell 'em what you did.

Gordon: I buried her in the back yard.

Jack: Too right you buried her! (To audience) Aw, he buried her, all right. Buried her with her bum sticking right up outa the patio!

Gordon: Well, I had to have somewhere to park my bike!

Introductory bars to "Side by Side". Gordon drops his effeminacy, and both go into a song-and-dance routine, singing Side by Side.

(Bowing) Thank you! Thank you! They run out through the doorway, possibly lifting off the flag and the RSL emblem as they go. Blackout.

### SCENE 2

**Jack's flat.**

Darkness. While the set is being changed, Gordon and Jack are heard offstage. Milk bottles toppling, jingling of keys, muttered curses, interspersed with Jack's tipsy version of "Side by Side". Lights. Jack and Gordon enter, still in evening suits but — as long as the two latter keep their faces hidden.

**Gordon:** Gents' hairdresser.

**Jack:** Right. Now what you and me know is that barbers don't only sell haircuts. (Taps his nose significantly.) Oo, she knows — look at her — you know what I'm talking about don't y'? Yes! I mean when I was sixteen I had the shortest haircut in Sydney. I did! Think about it! Think about it! But he doesn't understand that, see. What happens? There is, floundering round with his hair-creams and hair-sprays — no, you tell 'em.

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(Bowing) Thank you! Thank you! They run out through the doorway, possibly lifting off the flag and the RSL emblem as they go. Blackout.
Gordon: It's been good working with you, Jack.

Jack: Instead of the anticipated comic routine, there is silence. Jack is hurt. He stares at Gordon for a moment.

Jack: Go home, Gordon.

Gordon: I'm sorry, mate. I...

Jack: Go on, go home.

Gordon: Jack...

Jack: Just let me know about that club date will you. (Pause.)

Gordon: That's what I wanted to talk to you about. It's off.

Jack: Aw. Barney got anything else lined up?

Gordon: Nothing.

Jack: Nothing! Whadya mean "nothing"? That club was the only thing between now and January! What's the stupid bastard doing with himself?

Gordon: Jack, I got him to cancel the lot. Pause. Jack is thunderstruck.

Jack (briskly, with controlled fury): All right, come on, what's the game? Well come on!

Gordon (with difficulty): It's about the act.

I'm not happy with it, Jack. It's just... It's cheap smut. I mean, all this business about me being a poof. I feel like a ventriloquist's dummy up there. I'm a comic, same as you. Well, I don't feel like it's a double act any more. Either we change it or...

Pause. Jack nods his head in disgust.

Jack: So we're on to that again, are we? We're on to that. What 'y'got lined up for yourself this time? More cats'-meat commercials?

Gordon (attempting to remain calm): I haven't fixed anything up. That's what we're here to talk about.

Jack: Oh, is it? Bit late in the piece for talking.

Gordon: I kept trying; you wouldn't listen.

Jack: So you rig this up! I s'pose Barney's in it as well, is he? Is he? (Gordon turns away.) Aw that's beaut. That's beaut. Twenty-eight years! You really choose your moment, don't you.

Gordon: Jack...

Jack: Don't you bloody Jack me. (Pause.)

Gordon: It was the only way. I kept tryna suggest changes, you wouldn't have it. (Pause.)

Jack: S'pose little Myra's got her finger in the pie. Aw yeah. Doesn't like her big bruiser acting like a poof, eh.

Gordon: It's got nothing to do with Myra. I made the decision.

Jack: You wanna crucify a perfectly good act, and it's nothing to do with Myra?

Gordon: It's a lousy act. Our time-spots are getting shorter and shorter — Barney spends more time on us than on the rest of them put together.

Jack: Ah yeah, good old Barney! Where was bloody Barney ten years ago when we coulda got that TV contract, eh? Eh? Didn't see him flogging his guts out then, did we?

Gordon: We'd nevera got that job. Don't blame Barney. (Pause.) What are we gonna do?

Jack: Don't ask me. You made the decision. We're finished. (Pause.)

Gordon: All I want to do is change it a bit. Jack: Aw, grow up! You can't change an act like that! We go out on the stage, they expect you to act the poofler. That's how they know us! That's our image! You change that, boy, an' you're done.

Gordon: But I wasn't always the poofler! Not at the beginning...

Jack: The beginning was twenty-eight years ago! They don't remember that! Jesus Christ...!

Gordon (aggressively): Well, I'm sorry, mate, but it isn't changed I go.

Jack: Well, go — and good bloody ridance. (Pause.) You know, I can't understand you. I work for years to build up an act, years, and all the time you're pick, pick, pick underneath, picking away, destroying everything...

Gordon: That's the point, Jack. It is your act.

Jack (vehemently): Yeah; well, if that's so, I'm not the one to blame, mate. I'm not the one who walks out every time the going gets rough.

Gordon: Twice I've done that...!...

Jack: My oath. (Sarcastically.) Gordon, my mate, my partner. Well, I s'pose I should thank you for giving me a bitter warning, shouldn't I? Makes a change from last time.

Gordon: Look, after what you did...

Jack: What did I do, eh? Eh? Told Myra a few home truths you shoulda told her yourself years ago, the bitch.

Gordon: All right, cut it out...

Jack: She couldn't take it, could she? First her husband spending all his time with her — in front of all her nice friends. Oh no, wouldn't do would it!

Gordon: Jack, the kids asked her to tell you. They were growing up. They wanted their own sorta parties. They loved you there when they were littlies, doing all the conjuring tricks, but...

Jack: Danny was twelve years old! Twelve years of age!

Gordon: Kids are funny at that age. They wanna be grown up. They don't want their parents' friends hanging around. They want their own friends.

Jack: Look, if he'd felt like that he woulda told me himself! Danny and me were mates, always were. That kid worshipped me...!

Gordon: He didn't wanna hurt your feelings.

Jack (contemptuously): Hurt my feelings...

Gordon (angrily): Well, what did you expect him to say? "Don't come to my party, Uncle Jack, cos all the kids at school laugh at me when you come in drunk and try to puggle and can't, and besides the way you swing your bad arm about makes me feel sick." (Jack is hurt. Pause.) Anyhow, that's all in the past.

Jack: Except for one small thing. You walked out on me then, and you're gonna walk out on me now.

Gordon: I'm not walking out on you.

Jack: What are you doing then?
Jack: My arse! You couldn't write a joke to save your life.
Gordon: I've been writing for Curly Mason for the last six months. (Pause.)
Jack: Well! Little Ripper aren't you? When d'you do that? Between ironing Myra's smalls?
Gordon: No. While you were getting yourself drunk with your alco friends.
(Pause.)
Jack (quietly): Anything else you'd like to add?
Gordon: Yes. I hoped it wouldn't turn out like this, but that's the way you want it. You're a parasite, Jack. For years I tried — made excuses for you, watched you cut me out of the act, saw you insult my wife, try to take over my kids. And all the time I thought, "He can't know, he can't realise . . ." But you realised all right. Well I'm sick of it. I've had it up to here. Now if you wanna turn into a drunk, you do it. I can do very nicely on my own. Barney thinks he can get us work if we change the act — tone down the gags, cut out the poofter, he can get us work if we change the act —
Jack (contemptuously): You're giving me one more chance are you? You! Well. You can stick your bloody chance, mate. I don't need you, I never did — or your bloody mate Barney. And I'm warning you. Don't you come back here with your tail between your legs and expect me to take you buck, mate. 'Cos you'll wanna come back; you know that, don't you? You bastard. (Pause. Furiously.) I won't forget this, mate, don't you worry. I'm gonna get you. I'm gonna bloody well get you! They confront each other for a moment. Gordon exits; Jack stares after him.

Blackout.

SCENE 3

Inside the pub. Hughie and Sean sit at the table. Two half-empty glasses of beer in front of them. Sean is studying a university prospectus and taking notes on a pad of paper. Hughie, bored, amuses himself for a while by throwing peanuts into the air and catching them in his mouth. Stops, regards Sean.

Hughie: You know something? You're a compulsive note-taker. (Pause.)
Sean: Mmm? What? Hughie: I said, you're a compulsive note-taker. My God, taking notes from a university prospectus!
Sean (with a touch of pride): Ah well, sign of a true academic. Hughie snorts contemptuously. Silts looking round idly, then gets out his wallet and counts his money. Sighs.
Hughie: D'you think they'd give me back my job at Cezanne's?
Sean: Doubt it.
arm. He comes out to the phone, dials a number and hangs up.

Sean: Hughie, if you wouldn’t keep interrupting me I’d be finished much sooner. Hughie grimaces. Pause.

Hughie: “Come down to the pub,” he says. “Celebrate the end of my exams,” he says . . .

Sean: Look, you suggested coming here, not me. You knew I had to map this out . . .

Hughie: Map what out? You’re applying to do an MA, not scaling Mount Everest! For God’s sake, just fill out the form and get it over with.

Sean: That’s exactly what I’m trying to do! (Pause.) I’m sorry, Hughie . . . Look, it’s such a late application . . . They’ve gone to a lot of trouble — I can’t afford to antagonise them by not knowing what courses . . .

Hughie: Yes, yes, yes, yes. All right, go on, “map it out” — map out the rest of your life. (Sean sighs.) I haven’t said a word. If you want to rot away in that neo-Gothic mausoleum, you do it. (Sean sighs, continues writing.) Nothing to do with me, after all. (Pause.) Ah yes, I can see it now. “Newcastle Mick makes good: Sean O’Sullivan, BA, MA, scholar and sodomist.” (With an Irish accent) “Sure and away, we’re proud of ye, Sean — but couldn’t ye give up that doirty business with the lads, now?”

Sean: Hughie, I’m not going overseas with you, now I know what you think about the MA, but I’m going to do it, and if you had any sense you’d do the same yourself. So please stop trying to distract me. Now, let’s leave it at that, shall we?

Hughie: Oh sure, just leave it at that. (Sean sighs.) No I will not be quiet. You really expect me not to put up a fight? For Christ’s sake, half an hour of your time. You couldn’t care less, could you?

Sean: Nothing to do with me, Hughie — there’s no reason why you shouldn’t still apply . . .

Hughie: Prove it.

Sean shrugs angrily at Hughie.

Sean: I can’t take much more of this. Honestly, sometimes I wonder what makes you tick . . .

Hughie: Yes, I don’t know what you see in me. Why don’t you go and consult Sam? More cosy little fireside chats about my psychology.

Sean: I’m not going through all that again. (Teresa.) Why are you like this, Hughie? You know, sometimes I think you hate me, you want to punish me.

Hughie leans earnestly forward.

Hughie: I thought you’d never notice. (Sean turns away impatiently.) Well, it’s bloody obvious, isn’t it? You prefer your MA to me, that’s all.

Sean (warily): I could say exactly the same thing about you. You’re going overseas and leaving me . . .

Hughie: That’s different.

Sean: Oh, that’s different, is it?

Hughie: It is! Christ! You’re like an old man! You know that! Risk something, Sean! Take a risk for once in your life!

Sean: What’s that got to do with it?

Hughie: Everything. You’re not prepared to risk anything — for me or anything else.

Sean: I’m certainly not prepared to risk my whole career for the sake of a six-month jaunt across Europe . . .!

Hughie (melodramatically): “My whole career! In ruins!”

Sean: Well I’m not!

Hughie: Nobody’s asking you to!

Sean (furiously): Look, Hughie, you’ve been trying to sabotage this MA for the last three months!

Hughie: I have not!

Sean: I sent for two application forms by post and you tore them up. Thought I didn’t notice, didn’t you? Well, you should get rid of the evidence next time. You left the bits in the waste-paper basket . . .

Hughie: Do you often go grubbing through waste-paper baskets?

Sean: Only when I’m looking for my mail. A tense moment. Hughie suddenly bursts into laughter.

Hughie: It’s not funny!

Hughie: Oh God! Your face when you found them! If only I’d had my camera! Innocence outraged!

Sean: Hughie, I thought you left them there on purpose . . .

Hughie: Well, you might have thought they got lost in the post . . .

Sean (amused, despite himself): Aw . . .

Hughie: Well anything could’ve happened! Come on! Look, what am I asking? Six months of your time. We could even go to Tasmania again. You can do the MA next year.

Sean: Things might be different in the department next year. I’m not in a position to bargain . . .

Hughie: Oh God! The inferiority complex rears its ugly head.

Sean: That’s right, sneer. It’s all right for you . . .

Hughie: Aw yeah, the great white hope of the decade queuing up for . . .

Sean: That’s what sickens me. You could do so much, Hughie — there’s no reason why you shouldn’t still apply . . .

Hughie: Terrific! I can just see it! — the oldest ingénue in the business!

Sean: Rubbish!

Hughie: I wouldn’t waste my time . . .

Sean: Oh, and I’ve posed hanging round pubs all day isn’t a waste of time . . .

Hughie: Of course it is! If it wasn’t a waste of time I wouldn’t waste my time on it. (Pause.) Oh, go on, finish your notes.

Sean (grudgingly): I’ll manage with what I’ve done.

Hughie: Oh well, all we need do now is sit back and enjoy ourselves. (Pause.)

Sean: And why you want to come here — of all places! (Pause. Softening.) It’s only two years.

Hughie: Two years! What am I supposed to do for two years? Sit and watch you sort your card-index?

Sean: There’s the movement . . .

Hughie: The movement! Christ! Even the name’s absurd! (High-pitched voice.) “And have we had our movement today?” (Gruff, Australian accent). “No, nurse, musta been those hard-boiled eggs we had last night.”

Sean: Look, you could do a lot for it, really you could. Okay, you don’t like the way it’s run at the moment. Get on the committee, help Ken organise the dances, do photos for Breakout — your work’s a hundred times better than Steve’s. You’re not even working on your photography any more . . . Why don’t you talk to Sam . . .

Hughie: Nobody talks to Sam, they ooz into his presence.

Sean: Well, at least he’s doing something.

Hughie: Aw come on! He couldn’t give a stuff — it’s one long ego-trip, that’s all. Pamphlets, letters, talk-back shows with guilty straightens. “Sam Rogers, the poof with the human face.” (With heavy Australian accent). “Ay Bluey, it’s that poof bloke on the TV again.” “Yeah, never credit it, would y’? They reckon he plays Aussie rules.” “Aw well, in there with all the fellas I s’pose.” Want me to turn out like that — like good old Sammy? Maybe you do.

Sean: And what’s that supposed to mean? A long pause. Hughie is beside himself with impatience.

Hughie: Well, say something! Punch me in the eye! Knock me down! Do something, Sean! God, you’re so civilised, so . . . bloody . . . (Pause.)

Sean (quietly): So bloody what? (Pause Hughie looks away.) All right. I’ll tell you. That Saturday . . .

Sean: Hughie, I am tired of hearing about your dreary infidelities.

Sean: That evening . . .

Hughie: Dear Dorothy Dix . . .

Sean: . . . After you’d had that fight with the man in the milk-bar, Hughie, I felt . . .

Hughie: “Randy” the word you’re looking for!

Sean (angrily): I felt if I heard your voice again, if you nagged me any more . . . I wanted to be with someone reasonable, I wanted a bit of peace . . .

Hughie roars with laughter.

Hughie: Tell that to the judge! (With an
Irish accent.) “Sure ’twas just for a bitta peace, Your Honour.”

Sean: I’m sick of that trick. (Sean hesitates.) What’s the matter? Go on — if I make your life such a misery. Although, as I recall, I was supposed to be quoted the most valuable person in the world unquote. (Pause. Sean sighs, slumps into his seat, eyes downcast. Hughie scowls at him for a moment, then softens. With a mixture of impatience and affection.) Come on. (No response.) Think of it — we’ll go all through Asia, Europe. We’ll get to London, get you into an MA course. You haven’t got any faith in yourself. You’d have dropped out at the end of third year if you hadn’t bullied you through! Wouldn’t you? (No response.) Look, I tell you what. You apply for the MA here. Get the application in, get it off your mind. If you haven’t got any faith in yourself. You’d laughed so much in all my life, those days! (Desperately maintaining his joviality.) New York! How many phones you got, then! Course I remember the time when you . . . Ah, well, no worries, I’ll leave you to it. . . . No — no — trouble, mate . . . Aw, just ringing for a bit of a chin-wag, you know, about the old days . . . Yeah, well, same to you Johnny. Be seeing you. (Hangs up. Stands pondering for a moment then looks over his shoulder and nods. Hughie brightens.) Aw, come on! Can’t do much better than that, can I? You’ll have three clear months to think it over.

Hughie: Well think it over again! (Pause.)

Sean: If I promise to think it over, will you promise not to heavy me?

Hughie: Grins mischievously.

Hughie: Look at it this way: I’ll be twice as old if you don’t. (Sean sighs, capitulating. Hughie becomes businesslike.) Okay, come on, where’s the form? Have you got the form?

Sean: I can’t fill it in here!

Hughie: Why not?

Sean: Well, look, it’s filthy!

Hughie: A few Nobby’s nuts won’t hurt it!

Sean: Aw but . . . !

Hughie: All right, I’ll do it if you want it.

Sean: No, no, it’s okay.

Hughie: Sighs, begins filling in the form. Throws back his head — always drank rum . . . Yeah! . . . Yeah! . . . Aw, we have some laughs, never laughed so much in all my life, those days! (Determinedly maintaining his joviality.) New York! How many phones you got, then! Course I remember the time when you . . . Aw well, no worries, I’ll leave you to it. . . . No — no — trouble, mate . . . Aw, just ringing for a bit of a chin-wag, you know, about the old days . . . Yeah, well, same to you Johnny. Be seeing you. (Hangs up. Stands pondering for a moment then looks over his shoulder and nods. Hughie brightens.) Aw, come on! Can’t do much better than that, can I? You’ll have three clear months to think it over.

Hughie: Pretty hot, isn’t it? ’bout time we had some good weather.

Sean: Looks up.

Jack: I reckon.

Hughie: Clouding over a bit now, though. Jack: Yeah, probably see rain before we’re much older.

Hughie: (to Jack): You’re er . . . Jack Harvey, aren’t you?

Jack: (brightening): That’s right. ’Ow d’you know that?

Hughie: Oh, my mother’s a great fan of yours. She used to have a photo of you.

Jack: Aw yeah!

Hughie: Yeah. She and my Dad used to go to all your shows. There was one, I remember, ages ago . . . somewhere in the Haymarket, I think. You and Gordon Dobbs were doing a show with Johnny Dyer. She never stopped talking about it. Now where was it . . . ?

Jack: Musta been at the old Tiv!

Hughie: That’s right! That was it!

Jack: Yeah, that was a show, all right! Remember one night, some fella laughed too much he had a heart attack! Had to carry him out on a stretcher! Shouldn’t laugh, I s’pose . . . Ay, you’ll never credit me? “Harvey”, he said, “Harvey, you’re the best-adjusted man we’ve had in here.” Gets ’em every time. Ah dear. See, lot of ’em can’t get used to it, can’t adapt, reckon their lives are over, y’know. Now me, I accepted it. An’ I didn’t only accept it, I used it. Said to myself: “No bloody paralysed arm’s gonna get the better of Jack Harvey, no way.” So y’know what I did? You know what I did?

Jack: No.

Hughie: (To Jack.) Turned it into my living. I had a comedy act going, so I made it parta the act, made it into a big joke. (Proudly, excited, amused.) See, I’m standing there, giving ’em a fags an’ I start talking about my arm, real sad, y’know. Then, when their chins are scraping the ground, I say with this real straight face I say: “Yeah, I’d give my right arm to have it back.” ’Gits ’em every time. Ah dear, See, in audience admires that. Takes a big man to do that.

Hughie: (To Jack.) Yeah. Well. You seem to manage all right.

Jack: Ah, all parta the business. You gotta be professional. See, y’can’t take your self on to a stage, know what I mean? However you feel, whatever your problems, you gotta get out there an’ make ’em laugh.

Hughie: The show must go on.

Jack (missing the sarcasm): My oath!
You're there to entertain and God help you if you don't. Because an audience is a thing without mercy. They know no mercy. . .

Hughie (singing to the tune of "If You Knew Suzie"): If you knew mercy like I knew mercy.

Sean (hurriedly): Hughie, don't you think Jack (delighted, with a great guffaw): Ha! Y'bastard! You're pulling m'leg!

Hughie and Jack (singing): If you knew mercy Like I know mercy, Oo, ow, ow — what a girl!

Hughie and Jack break off into laughter.

Jack: That's like the third time — hear the one about the vicar with three daughters, Faith, Hope and Charity? He ended up on an incest charge, 'cos Charity began at home!

Sean: Hughie, I think we'd better be going.

Jack: Ah, you're not going, are you? Have a beer before you go, my shout.

Hughie: Ah thanks Jack.

Sean: Sorry, but Jack: Beauty! Won't be a minute. I'll get old Jock out here. You'll like old Jock.

Jack exits. Hughie watches him go then shakes his head in a mixture of amazement and contempt.

Hughie: Where do they come from?

Sean: If you let this turn into another fight . . . Why did you have to give him all that crap about your mother?

Hughie (getting out the autograph): Oh yes, I see, what did he write? (Reads.) "To Gladys. Keep your sunny side up."

God, that'd go down well with the old girl.

(With a high-pitched upper-class accent.) "Hughie darling, just what is a sunny side?"

Sean: Hughie, he's pathetic. Why don't you leave him alone?

Hughie: Him alone? What have I done to him? Pretended my mother was his greatest fan? So what? Where's the harm? Just boosted his ego, that's all. He's hardly likely to meet her, and if he did, she's so vague she'd probably think she was his greatest fan.

Sean: Let's go before he comes back, shall we?

Hughie: Why?

Sean: Why . . . ! Give me one good reason for staying?

Hughie: (a) He's buying us a drink; (b) he interests me.

Sean: And (c) because you want to annoy me.

Hughie (singing to the tune of "Cecilia"): Paranoia, you're breaking my heart, you're shaking my confidence, baby . . .

Sean: What have I done, Hughie? Why are you acting like this? Just tell me what I've done, will you? (Hughie groans.) I've got a right to know!

Hughie: Shut up, Sean, please.

Sean: Well, what's the matter with you!

Hughie (exasperated): Aw, Hong Kong dong! (Pause.) Spare me the undergraduate psychology, will you? Just leave me alone — stop nagging me.

Sean: One minute I'm not paying any attention to you, the next I'm supposed to be nagging you. I don't know what to do. If you explained, if we talked it out . . .

Hughie: If we talked it out. Yes. Well, I'm afraid this isn't one of Sam's select little soirées — all sitting around dribbling over our boring neurones.

Sean: I didn't think there was anything boring about Rex threatening to kill himself.

Hughie: Well, I did. Anyone who's failed as many times as he has ought to have the common decency to keep it to themselves.

(Pause.)

Sean: Oh God, you're sick!

Hughie (suddenly wavy): No Sean, you are, you and all the rest of them. Rex's life is a total misery to him. He is old, boring, ugly, unattracted and poor. He has nothing and he knows it and he wants out. Now, that being the case, I don't see how your attempts at preventing him, all the mock-heroics — midnight vigils, frisking him for Valium, dragging him out of the gas-oven when he's weeping to be left there — I can't see anything more than a morbid sort of ego-trip, and if anyone derives any comfort from it, it's certainly not Rex.

Sean: And how long have you been polishing up that little speech?

Pause. They stare at each other. Jack is watching them. 

Hughie: Ah, come on! Well all right, when it's finished then! Ah, y'don't wanna watch that, do y'?

Getting into your second childhood mate, that's what's wrong with you. (Applies at the doorway carrying a jug of beer.) Silly old bugger wants to watch Sesame Street. (Over his shoulder.)

Forget it. Change your mind and come in here! All right, please yourself. (Going to the table, shaking his head.) That's old Jock for you. You know, you'd never credit it, looking at him now, but he used to be one of the best singers in the business. Here.

Jack puts the jug on the table, sits down. Hughie and Sean each take a glass.

Hughie: Ah, thanks.

Jack: Yeah. Gone to bloody pieces. Used to sing all the old stuff, y'know — with that wobbly sorta voice they all used to have. He'd sing you opera, the lot. Course, all that went out fashion. Old Jock went out with it. Mind you, his voice was going a bit even then. Still, he was all right — wife had a bitta money. Knocked the stuffing out of him, but. Yeah. Get enough beer into him and he'll still sing for you — "Banks an' Braes an' Bonnie Doon", that sorta stuff — in a cracked old voice, Adam's apple shaking away like a scraggy old chook, for all the world like a scraggy old chook. Poor old bastard. Y'dunno whether to laugh or cry.

Sean: And he just sits in there all day, does he?

Jack: Yeah. But there again, it's like I was telling . . .

Hughie: Hughie. Hughie and Sean.

Jack: Yeah, it's like I was telling Hughie a while back: he couldn't adapt. He should changed with the times, changed his songs, but he couldn't. Now me, I'm thinking all the time about my work — polishing it up here, rounding it off there. That's professionalism. You see, when you're a comedian, it's not a job, it's your life. Never let up. Never let anything past you. (Drinks.) What's you line a business?

Sean: Me? I'm a student.

Jack: Ah yeah. What you studying?

Sean: Psychology mostly.

Jack: Always wanted to be a vet myself. Lotta money in that. Course you need strong nerves. Takes a lotta nerve to stick you hand up a cow's bum, I reckon!

Jack starts drinking.

Hughie: Takes even more to stick it up a bull's bum.

Jack, caught mid-swallow, laughs, coughing. Sean rescues and wipes his nose.

Hughie: Stupid bugger! Ah, sorry mate!

Sean (stiffly): It's all right. No harm done.

Jack: Na, I'm serious. Make a fortune if you're a vet. Course, in my day it was leave school at fourteen, out to work and like it. The university of hard knocks. Uni was the place for bludgers and poofs. Different these days. I mean, every Tom, Dick and Harry's a uni student these days. No offence a course.

Hughie: Oo, I dunno that's it's any different these days. I'd say there were still bludgers and poofs, myself. Specially poofs.

Jack (warming to the subject): Well, it's what you'd expect! I mean, to look at some of 'em . . . ! (Conspiratorially.) Y'know, I was in here last week, one of 'em walks in the fucking bar! Camp as a row of tents, mind you! Straight up to the bar, bold as brass, buys a bottle of wine!

Hughie: Go on!

Jack: My fucking oath! If that'd happened ten years ago there'd a bin a riot.

Hughie: What did happen?

Jack: Nothing! Fucking barmaid's all over him like a fucking rash! Na, ten years ago you knew where you were. Kept themselves to themselves then. Now y'can't move for 'em. Even on the TV. Ever seen that fella — what'sisname?
Hughie: Turns your stomach.

Jack: My oath! Playing Aussie rules — and they wonder why we lose the Olympic games! Here, know what Jock calls him?

Hughie: I dunno.

Jack: Have a guess, go on, have a guess.

Hughie: I give up.

Jack: Poof in boots!

Hughie: No! (To Sean.) Sit down — you haven't even finished your drink!

Jack: Yeah, old Jock might be long in the tooth, but he's not past it yet. (Getting up.) Tell y'what, I'll try and get him out here. (Goes to the doorways.) Ay Jock! Jock mate! (Pauses as if listening.) Come out here, will y'! (Pauses again. then exits with a gesture of impatience. Offstage.) You don't wanna watch that!

Hughie bursts into laughter.

Hughie: Poof in boots! Oh God, I can't wait to see Sam's face. (Pompously.) A series of programmes designed to increase public awareness of the movement for homosexual rights, 'Poof in Boots!' Superb!

Sean: That's not funny, it's bloody tragic.

Hughie (amused): Oh stop being so self-righteous. What d'you expect? Sam goes on TV and the next day blokes like Jack are losing their heads — inner peace and strange beatific grins. Christ, what else have we got to do for a living?

Hughie: Well, let's hope that won't be for a long time yet. Cheers.

Jack: Yeah. I'll drink to that. (Drinks. To Hughie.) What do you do for a living?

Hughie: I don't. I'm redundant. Unemployed and unemployable.

Jack: What's your trade?

Hughie: Well, I'm a whiz in Roman history, but there's not much call for us these days.

Jack: Well, you can't stay on the dole all your life.

Hughie: Oh, I'll get a job. I'll get something. (Flamboyantly.) I'll go on the stage, become a film-star! Australia's answer to King Kong. (Hughie impersonates an angry King Kong. As Jack delivers the next lines, Hughie as King Kong, suspiciously snatches up Sean's prospectus, sniffs it to see if it is edible, impatiently tosses it over his shoulder. Sean picks it up.)


Sean (rising): Yes. Well, I think we'd better be making a move.


Hughie: Who? Me?

Sid: You encouraged him!

Hughie: Innocently: Who? Me?

Sean: Very droll.

Hughie: Temper, temper!

Sean: If this turns into another fight...

Hughie (passifyingly): Relax! Look, he interests me, that's all.

Hughie: Oh, really? Why don't you take his photo? A choice specimen of local colour? He's no fool, Hughie. He's going to realise you're not after sending him up.

Hughie: Oh stop chucking. What harm am I doing? I'm just passing the time of day with him. Anyhow, you must admit, he's quite a character.

Sean: If you like that sort of thing.

Hughie: Well, at least he's got a bit of life. Come on, what else have we got to do?

Jack: For a start, you're supposed to be helping Ken with those posters.

Hughie: What posters?

Sean (impatiently): Extra posters for the disco. The gay dance on Saturday. You promised.

Hughie: Ah, you're kidding. When?

Hughie: At that party last week. You offered to exchange for half a bottle of red.

Hughie: Christ, what else did I offer? Oh look, he can't possibly keep me to that.

Jack: You insisted you were sober.

Hughie: Well, I'm not going. Ken's off his head — inner peace and strange beatific grins. Christ, you promised, Hughie.

Hughie: Stiff.

Jack reappears at the doorway, moves over to the table.

Jack: Na, he won't budge.

Hughie: Still watching Sesame Street?

Jack: Yeah, silly old bugger. Getting senile. My oath, I hope I go before I get like that.

Hughie: Well, let's hope that won't be for a long time yet. Cheers.

Jack: Yeah. I'll drink to that. (Drinks. To Hughie.) What do you do for a living?

Hughie: I don't. I'm redundant. Unemployed and unemployable.

Jack: What's your trade?

Hughie: Well, I'm a whiz in Roman history, but there's not much call for us these days.

Jack: Well, you can't stay on the dole all your life.

Hughie: Oh, I'll get a job. I'll get something. (Fianbly.) I'll go on the stage, become a film-star! Australia's answer to King Kong.

Hughie: King Kong.

Jack: You're kidding. When?

Hughie: Ah, you're kidding. When?

Jack: If you wanna talk, you talk here.

Sean: Jack.

Jack: Stay where you are, son. If he's got anything to say, he can say it here. He's a bit too fond a talking behind people's backs.

Pause. Gordon and Jack sit down.

Gordon: It's about work.

Jack (unhelpfully): Ah yeah.

Gordon: Can't we talk in the bar? (Jack smiles grimly at Gordon, enjoying his discomfort. Gordon suppresses his irritation.) All right. I've been thinking over what happened last month and I reckon — well, I reckon I might have been a bit unfair on you. (Jack maintains a contemptuous smile.) I said some things — well I reckon we both said things... and after all these years, if we can't... After twenty-eight years, well...

Pause. Jack's smile broadens.

Jack (sweeely): How's Myra, Gordon?

Gordon: All right, you've had your fun.

Jack: Ah no, I haven't started yet. I haven't even started. How is Myra — and how's good old Barney, and the brother-in-law and you mate Curly Mason — all the pals who were gonna help you out? How they going?

Pause.

Gordon (quietly): Listen, Jack. Curly might be giving me a spot on the show.

Nothing fixed, nothing settled, but he's been dropping a few hints and I reckon it's odds-on I'll get a chance. Now that happens and they like me, it could mean a TV contract with Curly next summer. If he offers me something, if it comes off, I want you to be in on it. It's up to you, but you'll have to make up your mind 'cause I've got to be ready to negotiate.

Jack: I thought I'd had my last chance.

Gordon: I've said I'm sorry, Jack.

Jack: And you think that makes it quits, do you?

Gordon: I'm offering you a job!

Jack: Well, I don't need your bloody job!

Gordon: Ah, come off it!... (Pause.) Word gets round, Jack. I'm sorry.

Pause.


Hughie (deadpan): Pleased to meet you.

Pause. Gordon is unconvinced.

Gordon (to Jack): Listen... Look, I know how you feel.

Jack: Well, all I know is you can keep your job, and don't only keep it, stick it.

Gordon: You're cutting off your nose to spit your face, you know that. (Pause. Gordon rises.) If you change your mind you know where to reach me.

Jack: I won't change my mind.

Gordon stares suspiciously from Jack to Hughie, exits left. Sean sighs.

Hughie (anxiously): Well, thanks for the job. Jack (embarrassed, with forced heartiness): Sorry about that. Couldn't let that bugger get away with... you know.
Hughie: That's all right. Pleased to assist.
Jack: He walked out on me, see. After twenty-eight years. Just like that. Course.
I'd been carrying the act for years, but . . .
He was tryna take over, y'know. Turned 'em all against me — all the agents, all the clubs. Him and his mate Curly Mason. Frightened of the competition, see. Na, they got it all sewn up — got a protection racket going. Curly's in it to up here. That's how he made his money. Talent . . .
Remember all those clubs that burnt down? Bloody Curly Mason. Common knowledge.
Hughie: I thought they'd caught the people who did that.
Jack: Ah yeah! Said it was a pack of Eyeties! Can you imagine it, pack of Eyeties organising that . . .? Na, Na, the big boys are all right. (Rubs his finger and thumb together) No worries. Curly bloody Mason's all right.
Pause.
Sean (attempting to conclude the proceedings): Oh well, sounds as if you're better off out of it.
Jack: Out of it! Who's out of it! No one's gonna push out Jack Harvey, mate. They won't get me out.
Hughie: Can't keep an old dog down, eh?
Jack: Too right. (Pause. Jack looks at Hughie.) I'm . . . er . . . I'm serious, you know, about the job.
Hughie: What?
Jack: The partnership, you and me.
Hughie: What!
Jack (with a touch of desperation): Why not? You've got the talent! You're a natural! First thing I noticed about you! I'd show you the ropes!
Pause. Hughie stares at Jack with a mixture of amusement and surprise. His smile broadens.
Hughie: You've got yourself a deal.
Jack gives a crow of laughter and slaps Hughie on the back. Sean watches in consternation. Blackout.

SCENE 4

Hughie (dropping into an armchair): Well, I don't think I've missed my vocation.
Jack (gigling): Ay, that cop's face . . .
(Hughie and Jack roar with laughter.)
Reckon he thought he was seeing things . . . (More laughter.) Aw dear . . . Whadya having, beer or Scotch?
Hughie (high-pitched, Scottish accent): A wee scotch and water please, Dr Cameron. (Gruff Scottish voice) Aye, Janet, coming up. (High Scottish voice.) You'll watch your manners Dr Cameron.
Hughie dissolves into drunken giggles, muttering. Sean looks on in disgust.
Jack (to Sean): Whisky?
Sean: No thanks. I've had enough for tonight.
Jack: Ah come on! We haven't started yet!
Sean: No, honestly.
Jack (offended): All right, please yourself. (Pouring out two whiskies.) Sortin' out the men from the boys now, eh! Hughie!
Hughie: My word!
Jack: Terrible thing not to be able to hold your liquor — for a man, that is. (Moving to doorway, holding a glass.) Course, it's an advantage in a woman, eh! Knew a girl once — two glasses a sherry . . .! Had a queue a mile long waiting to buy her a drink. Ah dear!
Jack goes out through the doorway.
Sean (in a hoarse whisper): All right. How much longer are you going to let this go on?
Hughie (sleepily drunk): What?
Sean: You know perfectly well. It's not funny.
Hughie: Don't you think so? I think it's superb. I think we make a lovely couple.
Sean: Do you honestly think he's not going to realise?
Sean: Yes, you could. It doesn't occur to you to think of his feelings.
Hughie: Aahh . . . Mr Nice Guy. Mr Nice Guy Sean Smug O'Sullivan. Grow up. If he was fifteen years younger he'd beat you up without a second thought.
Sean: Yes, but he's not, is he?
Hughie: Give him a good night's sleep and he won't even remember we existed.
Sean: You saw his face — of course he will. Hughie, he's pitiful.
Hughie: Save your pity for those who deserve it.
Sean: The people who really need pity never deserve it.
Hughie: The people who really need pity never deserve it.
Sean: You can take any liberties you want! Liberty Hall, here — you can take any liberties you want!
Jack collects his own whisky.
Sean: It's all right. I'd rather stand.
Jack (dropping into an armchair): Well, I'm glad someone around here can still stand, eh!
Hughie: Sit down, Sean; you've made your point.
Sean grudgingly moves to the table.
Jack: What point? What's the matter with him?
Sean sits.
Hughie: Well. You see, Sean doesn't approve of me becoming your partner.
Jack (annoyed): Aw yeah, what's wrong with me?
Sean: It's not you; it's him. He's just . . .
Jack: He can't sing and dance. He'll ruin your act.
Sean: Yeah, Well, I'll be the judge of that.
Jack: Sean, I'm not suggesting you don't know your own business . . .
Jack: What are you suggesting?
Hughie laughs.
Hughie: Poor old Sean! Look, Sean, take some advice from an old friend. Just be quiet. Come on, Jack, down to business; ignore him. What do I have to do?
Jack: Well, all depends on what sorta audience we're aiming for. See y'can't treat a bunch of teenagers like you would a bunch a fellas. Stands to reason — different sense a humour. You gotta be adaptable. That's professionalism. Now. We can do any one of a numbera things Song-and-dance, character parts, impersonations. All depends what sorta audience we're after. An' that depends on what you can do.
Hughie: Me?
Jack: All right, y'can't dance. When we getta bitta money, we'll get you lessons. What we gotta do is find out your real talent. Find that out and base everything round it. Now. Ever done any acting? Can you act? Do different accents, that sorta thing?
Hughie: Ah well, now you're talking. Acting's one thing I really can do.
Jack: Right. We're in business. We'll invent a character for you and build on that.
Hughie: What sort of character?
Jack: Anything you like. Vicar's a good one, so's a pool — or a drunk. You can do a lot with a drunk.
Hughie: I bet. What'll you do? Will you take a character?
Jack: Could do. Depends what we can think up.
Hughie (assuming a thoughtful frown): Well now, let's see. How about . . . I'm a pool and you're a drunk?
Jack (enthusiastically): Well . . .
Hughie: Well, how about two poofs? Lot of easy jokes there.
Jack: Now you're talking! I've got material for that.
Sean gets up.
Sean (tersely): I'm going.
Hughie (innocently): Sean! Whatever's the matter?
Sean looks angrily at Hughie for a moment, then goes out through the doorway. Hughie stands at the door. Jack is in the room talking to himself.
Jack (conversationally): Well . . . He's got a flea in his ear! Moody bastard. Still (Giggling), when a man's gotta go, a man's gotta go, eh? (Getting up.) Come on, drink up, we got a long way to go yet!'nother one?
Hughie (grimly, holding out his glass): Why not?
Jack collects the whisky bottle from the table.
Jack: See, the trouble about character acts is that they've all been done before. You gotta bring in a new gimmick, give 'em something new to laugh at — or they'll crucify y'. (Turns his left arm and winks.) This fella. (Pause. Chuckles.) Ay, ay, gonna tell y'something. Tell y'a secret, tell y' a secret.
Hughie: What?
Jack: (indicating his left arm, giggling): He's got a name. Guess what his name is, go on.
Hughie: Dunno.
Jack: Jack! His name's Jack! Every morning I say to him — he's lying there — I say: "Get up Jack, you old bastard" (Giggles). "Get up, you bastard; I know you're faking." (Giggles.) Ah dear. Yeah, old Jack knew how to deal with the women, my oath. Old Jack knew how to turn 'em off, didn't y'mate? He gave 'em the cold shoulder all right! He gave 'em the cold shoulder.
Hughie: (morosely): [Thinks for a moment.]
Jack continues giggling. Hughie, who has been staring seriously at Jack, is suddenly struck by the black comedy of the situation. Begins to laugh.
Jack (delighted): You reckon I'm mad, don't you? You reckon I gotta screw loose, y'bugger!
Hughie: Eyes closed, shaking with laughter, waves his hand in denial. Jack regards Hughie with drunken affection.
Jack: You're a good bloke — you know that? Wouldn't give me Aunt Fanny's cat for most of them these days, but . . . you're a good fella. Good sense a humour. That's what I like in a fella. Most a them, they got these . . . rattty faces. You noticed that? Ever since the war. Wouldn't trust 'em as far I could throw 'em. That's why, when I saw you . . . I thought, "Now there's a good bloke. There's a genuine fella." You got a good face. A good, open face, good smile. An Aussie face. None a this greasy, Eyetie look. A beaut, young Aussie bloke. Pause. Hughie gets up.
Hughie: I've gotta go. I've gotta get out of this place.
Jack (still laughing): Come over tomorrow night. (Rising.) I'll have something ready by tomorrow night.
Hughie staggerers out, motioning Jack to stay where he is. Jack drops laughing into his chair. Sighs, giggles, looks at the photograph of Gordon, gigs.
Jack: Well up you, Gordon! Up you, Gordon bloody henpecked bloody Dobbs! (Sits grinning drunkenly.) Na. No way. (Sits grinning.) When I decide to do something, I do it. Look, when you're bin in the business as long as I have . . . (Pause.) His tone and manner gradually change as he begins to fantasise a conversation, focusing on an imaginary listener. When I first started in this game, I was a mug. Thought everyone was m'mate. Everyone was fair dinkum. Everyone was as honest as . . . honest as the day was long. But y'can't live like that — y'gotta survive, y'gotta fight — or else you're finished. Through. Kaput. (Pause.) Now I'll help a mate out. Do m'darndest for a mate. Like when young Hughie turned up. Young fella, decent bloke, just startin' in the business. What harm's it do me giving him a start? Na, if y'can't help your mates . . . if an old-timer can't show the newies the ropes. (Pause.) Course, in my time . . . ! No one ever helped this fella. No one ever gave Jack Harvey something for nothing. (Pause. Bitterly.) All right after the war. Aw, yeah, marvellous. You were a hero then, defended your country. People'd come up to y' in the street, all the girls, pat you on the back. "How d'it happen, tell us how it happened?" "Aw, took some odds and ends in m'shoulder and chest." (Pause. Meditatively.) Twenty-three years old. They nearly amputated. (Pause.) Not so obvious like that. Don't notice it so much like this. (Pause.) Na, nobody helped Jack Harvey. (Pause.) What happens? He walks out. After twenty-eight years. Twenty-eight years. (Pause.) Ah, good bloody riddance. Good bloody riddance. (To the photograph.) You don't get me down, mate. (Brightening.) Push me down and I b'oh right up again. (Grins.) Got myself a new act, new partner, Yeah — you know what you can do with your bloody charity, mate! Grins, his mind racing. Rushes crowing to the telephone and dials a number, assuming a tragic tone when the call is answered. Hallo? Myra? This is Jack. Can I have a word with Gordon please? . . . Yes, I know what the time is. It's . . . it's very important . . . Could you get him out of bed? I wouldn't do this normally, Myra, but . . . (Covers the mouthpiece and cackles silently.) Yes. Thanks, Myra. (He waits, his eyes flashing around with delight and anticipation. His tone to Gordon is as tragic as before.) Gordon! Look mate, I'm . . . I'm sorry to get you up at this time. It's just . . . Jees you're a pal, mate. (Cackles silently.) . . . Yeah, well, I just . . . (Humbly.) All I wanted to say was . . . He blows a loud raspberry into the receiver, hang ups and cackles into laughter. Blackout.

INTERVAL
"If this Merchant did not reap big dividends in excitement, it was for want of risk and enterprise"  

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE  

DON BATCHELOR


Antonio, David Clendinning; Salerio, Bruce Parr; Solano, Tom Burlinson; Bassanio, Tim Hughes; Lorenzo, Ron Layne; Gratiano, Douglas Hedge; Portia, Robyn Gurney; Nerissa, Kate Wilson; Stephano, Old Gobbo, Warren Meacham; Shylock, Don Crosby; Prince of Morocco, Tubal, Russell Newman; Lancelot Gobbo, Phil Moe; Leonardo, Prince of Aragon, Peter Kowitz; Jessica, Louise Rush; Portia's Messenger, Bradley Campbell; Antonio's Messenger, Johnny Johnstone; Balthazar, Bernie Lewis; Duke of Venice, Reg Cameron; Attendants, Gavin Fraser and Rory Vanery.

I came away from the QTC production of The Merchant of Venice as 'were "with one auspicious and one dropping eye", or perhaps the auspicious part of my anatomy was an ear. For I would rate highly, with one or two exceptions, the general fluency and clear sense of the speech on this occasion. It is no mean compliment to say that at the level of craft, the vocal work was a pleasure to hear.

Some days before, the Camerata Theatre's version of The Winter's Tale had been poor in this department. David Gittins, the director had managed to iron out excesses of poeticising, but for all the coaching, sense phrases were mangled, and one or two people (notably Wendy Nugent as Hermione) were largely incomprehensible. This was the more astounding since the staging was delightfully intimate.

By contrast, the QTC Merchant was highly intelligible even in its detail. The reason for my one dropping eye was that it remained largely unafflicting. Only occasionally did Alan Edwards's direction strike that spark which ignites the creative energies of a cast and transforms the ordinary into the exceptional.

Such was the case in the Bassanio casket scene. Here, sensing that Portia’s racing emotions could not be contained in the established, and by now habitual ceremony, Edwards allowed free rein to the actress, Robyn Gurney, and she responded with what was for me the best scene of the play, culminating in the tenderly generous speech: "You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand." The response from Tim Hughes as Bassanio was eager and sensitive. Indeed, in company, these two generated an excitement absent elsewhere. Tim Hughes gave the best performance of the evening — nicely ardent. It was interesting to see that, beguiled by the SGIO Theatre, he employed a dynamic range that meant we lost significant words too often.

Don Crosby simply did not command the part of Shylock. At first appearance the portrayal suggested a man world-weary in his bitterness, his hatred for Antonio being coldly malevolent rather than scourging. It flared promisingly after Jessica stole off with Lorenzo (and the loot), but then it fizzed. Hampered by a sort of incantatory delivery, the performance approached neither the heights of understandable rage nor the depths of reprehensible malice.

Counterpointed against this low-key adversity, David Clendinning's Antonio came across as melodramatic. A further imbalance of interpretation in this role was caused by the director's allowing Antonio to become peripheral to the closing action. He is after all the core of the play. He is the Merchant of Venice. He is the one who actually does "give and hazard all he hath"; and though he has only seven lines in the final Belmont scene, five of them represent his ultimate giving of himself for his beloved friend Bassanio — "I dare be bound again, my soul upon the forfeit." In this play about self-giving, is there a character more central?

The Merchant presents some stimulating problems to a designer. The action switches back and forth between Venice and Belmont, and in this structure a sort of spiritual counterpoint is intended. The design challenge is to capture the starkly contrasting worldliness, turmoil, and decay of Venice and the idyllic, serene, timeless of Belmont, but to do so without cumbersome set changes. Basically, James Ridewood's idea of some noble yet elegant archways cross-slatted with timber which could be front-lit to suggest solidity in Venice, and back-lit for a more ethereal Belmont was good. In practice, the atmospheric difference between the two situations was insufficient, and Venice in particular suffered from being altogether too clean-cut a place.

The production was set in the Regency period, and if there is any dramatic or social significance in this, it escapes the flimsy net of my historical knowledge. It certainly provides stylish costumes, and Ridewood made the most of it in some really excellent work. In this he was well served by the wardrobe department, whose cutting and making caught the line and spirit of the period admirably.

In the end, then, the achievement was one of craft not art. A lot of care, effort and money were invested in this Merchant. If it did not reap the big dividends in terms of excitement, it was for want of risk and enterprise.

"Keep it moving, play it broad and belt it is the required style... That's what this cast did"

SOMETHING'S AFOOT

DON BATCHELOR

Something's Afoot, based on Agatha Christie's Ten Little Niggers, devised by James McDonald, David Voss, Robert Gerlach and Ed Linderman. Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 14 April 1977. Director, Joan Whalley; designer, Jennifer Carseidine; musical director, Kingsley Boucher; Clove, Joe James, Lettie, Rosalind Muir-Smith; Flint, Wilson Irving; Hope Langdon, Liz Burch, Dr Grayburn, Joe Sorbo; Nigel Rancour, Paul Charlton, Lady Manley-Prowe, Liz Harris; Col. Gillweather, Jeremy Muir-Smith; Miss Tweed, Sandra-Lee Patterson; Geoffrey, Andrew Gibson.

The Fortunes of theatre companies are cyclic. The best of them get in a bind from time to time. Often all that's needed to get things moving again is an effective theatrical laxative, so to speak, and that's exactly what Joan Whalley administered in Twelfth Night's production of Something's Afoot. Whatever it achieves for the theatre, it did me a power of good.

Laxatives are less than inspiring things
to analyse, and the ingredients of this one do not represent a break-through in theatrical science. Take one of those preposterous Agatha Christie situations where a bunch of upper-class (English) misfits, mysteriously gathered at some rural baronial retreat, are suddenly and conveniently cut off from the outside world by the elements and one by one murdered by an unknown murderer. Scatter their brains a little more than usual, spoon if all up a lot, add a few bouncy patter songs, and stir. One of Granny’s recipes that can’t fail. The effect is immediate, not lasting, though this one is likely to persist in the amateur repertoire for some time.

Keep it moving, play it broad, and belt it is the required acting style. Certainly that’s what this cast did, with the additional occasional bit of inventiveness, especially during the feature number which nearly everyone gets. The backbone of the piece is Miss Tweed (played by Sandra-Lee Patterson). Like a sort of musical Miss Marples, Ms Patterson possessed the role with dotty enthusiasm. She grabbed every song with relish and gave it crisp, clear, comic treatment. The other outstanding performance, and conveniently cut off from the evening, was Ross Muir-Smith as the demented maid Letitia. When the characters were falling like flies, I kept praying she would be spared a little longer so as not to be robbed of a superbly timed, beautifully controlled performance. She played it on a knife-edge between peasant hysteria and lower-class aggressiveness born of the will to survive. The effect was hilarious.

Musically the show is bright and substantial as a bubble, but quite cunningly devised for all that, so that no strenuous vocal demands are made on the average actor/singer. This team sounded pretty good. They were well supported by piano and drums. The musical director (Kingsley Booher) concentrated on accompanying the performers rather than indulging in scene-stealing bravura. The result was a bit tame, but always secure. Perhaps both director and musicians might have contrived an overture with fire, but this would probably have required a piano with more tonal brilliance.

Jennifer Carseldine’s design succeeded to a degree as a dusty shambler box-set, but for a musical those vast expanses of unmitigated brown walls and black floor were somewhat oppressive. There needed to be more humour in the design, more of the spirit of a send-up.

Props had a field day, and Jennifer Muir-Smith deserves an accolade. The devilish ingenuity of the killer in the play is such that the props become a feature. While at the preview the timing of one or two effects was astray, the mechanics were always efficient and the results amusing.

There is no denying that towards the end my enthusiasm was waning fast, partly because the show winds down rather badly with a cumbersome device involving a gramophone. Whatever the reason, it was a timely reminder that an overdose of laxatives can have an effect beyond the bounds of desirability.

“La Boite’s season produced one of the best studies of Australian women I’ve seen — a major play, in fact”

3 QUEENSLAND PLAYS

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

In Beauty it is Finished by George Lauden Dann, Brisbane Repertory Theatre at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 25 March 1977. Director, Rick Billinghurst; stage manager, Peter Baillie; lighting, Kristin Reuter, sound, Ian Thompson.

David Edmonds, Gill Perrin, Mary Edmonds, June Lynch, Joyce, Shirley Lambert, Marion, Di Eden, Tom Steppele, Joe Woodward, Annie, Ollie Murphy.

The Kite by Jennifer Blocksidge. Presented by La Boite, Brisbane Repertory Theatre at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 30 March, 1977. Director, Fred Wessely; assistant director, David Jessop; stage manager, Jacki Teuma; lighting, Gordon Saunders; The Kite Girl, Evelyn Ferguson, Man, Peter Murphy, The Boat, Sei, Les Evans; Mary, Beverley Wood; Brian, Peter Murphy; Jane, Evelyn Ferguson, Nocturne; Cellist, Godfrey Wagner; Woman, Beverley Wood. Written and directed by Jennifer Blocksidge. Presented by La Boite, Brisbane Repertory Theatre at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 1 April 1977. Director, Jennifer Blocksidge; assistant director, Bronwen Doherty; stage manager, Chris Stevenson; lighting, Ian Baker, sound, Bill Vlutz. Ruby, Nicole Lecompte, Ma, Kaye Stevenson, Dot, Alison Fraser.

La Boite’s season of three Queensland plays produced one historical curiosity, a bracket of interesting short works and one play which I’ll venture to describe as one of the best studies of Australian women I’ve seen on our stages — a major play, in fact. George Dann’s In Beauty it is Finished (written in 1931) seemed to me stilted and awkward, no doubt reflecting the fact that the subject matter — the sexual involvement of an ex-prostitute with a part-aboriginal man — was an awkward one to touch on. The Boat Girl presented in 1931, but the furrow surrounding the first production should not blind us to the fact that Dann wrote only six years before Xavier Herbert’s Capricornia, which is a world away in attitude and in the scope of its treatment of similar themes. What society allows as public utterance has lagged far behind what it accepts on paper or celluloid (which doesn’t absolve the theatre from chicken-heartedness in this regard); and nearly half a century of social change has turned controversy into an occasional curiosity.

Jill Shearer’s three short plays were the closest to contemporary comment. Two (The Boat and The Kite) recently won the Utah-Cairns Centenary Competition. In each of the plays an absurdist visual construction is married to the drama of personal psychology. In The Boat a man sits in a fishing dinghy in his living-room; in Nocturne an elderly woman monologues to a man playing a ‘cello on a mountainside; in The Kite a traditional clown flying a kite encounters a girl contemplating suicide.

The Boat has been widely admired, but to me its various elements failed to mesh. The fisherman is the father of the family, driven by dismissal from his job into his own private fantasy world. His wife and son indulge him out of love, but into the house barges the boy’s girlfriend: an abrasive student unconvincing in her sudden domination of the scene and her determination to make the father face reality. (“I’ve studied psychology,” he says, “and I’m not sure if the script’s a great one, but the combination of script, careful workshopping, and a beautiful production by Jennifer Blocksidge made for a memorable performance indeed. Re-writing cut out an unnecessary male policeman and left five women (writer, director, and the three players) presenting a simple story of a girl’s life in a small coastal town in northern New South Wales with such veracity and care for detail that the character of the girl became one of the most detailed and complete stories I have seen. One can recall of what it was like to be a woman in Australia in the years before prosperity and the pill.

The story is of a mother and her daughter, with the daughter’s friend acting as messenger and confidante. Economic survival has turned the mother into an obsessive automaton — sweeping floors, collecting eggs, looking after the flats she lets to tourists in the holidays. Even when the death of her son is reported to her at the end of the first scene, she doesn’t crack, it’s no more than she expects from life.

It’s the daughter’s fight against this drudgery and dulling of the emotions that
Holds our interest throughout. What's particularly impressive is that this is achieved without the sentimental involvement ("We're all the same underneath") of, say, the film Caddie. Treadmill is coldly objective, and the girl Ruby uses every weapon she has to keep herself from being badgered by her mother to assist in the chores and is two months pregnant by a young married man who hurriedly leaves town. Her brother gets into a fight over the rumours and later dies. Weeks later, Ruby makes her first move: a registry office wedding to a rather simple-minded admirer. It's a calculated step which solves the waistline problem and gets her out of her mother's house.

A year later, she's back in the house with a baby daughter and the widow's pension. She's sorry for her husband's death (in a tractor accident), but that doesn't stop her enjoying to the full the advantages which her mother can't take. The mother starves and, suddenly Ruby's left with the baby, the flats to look after, the chores to feed, the eggs to collect, and the chances of escape considerably diminished.

Intensive discussion, improvisation, and rehearsal have honed the first two scenes to a very high standard of craftsmanship. It's a perfect example of why it's essential to a very high standard of craftsmanship. Intensive discussion, improvisation, and rehearsal have honed the first two scenes to a very high standard of craftsmanship. Intensive discussion, improvisation, and rehearsal have honed the first two scenes to a very high standard of craftsmanship. It's a perfect example of why it's essential to a very high standard of craftsmanship. Intensive discussion, improvisation, and rehearsal have honed the first two scenes to a very high standard of craftsmanship. It's a perfect example of why it's essential to a very high standard of craftsmanship.
CHIDLEY

by Alma de Groen. Canberra Repertory Society, Theatre Three, Canberra. Opened March 31. Director, Joyce MacFarlane; set designer, Ross McGregor; lighting designer, Sandie Wright; costumes, John Stead; stage manager, Pat Davis. William James Chidley, Hugh Buckham; Ada Turnbull, Bernadette Vincent; Walt Turnbull, Bernard McLindon; The Judge, John Bartholomaeus; Inspector Branston, Ian Hunter; Dr Wilson, Colin Gilbert; Maiden and Rutherford, Ian Telford.

Alma de Groen's work — caustic, witty, poetically fanciful, cutting — has had two currents rushing inside it: the social message, the idea in the play, overriding a basically naturalistic sub-plot. The only play that didn't follow this pattern was The After-Life of Arthur Cravan, up to Going Home, her most profound but misunderstood drama.

Her plays share this with Dorothy Hewett's, although Dorothy Hewett's poetic line is hardly matched by anybody. Both playwrights, too, shared the neglect of the early seventies of our theatre where blood-sweat-tears realism was demanded by most managements and characters had to be of the warts-and-all variety to be considered producable. Any poetic content or true beauty only squeezed through while the Board of Governors wasn't looking.

The love triangle sub-plot has been with Alma's plays since The Sweatproof Boy (called, by the way, by a certain Dutch dramaturge The Sweater-proof Boy!). It surfaces again in Chidley, but this time merely as banal contrast to Chidley-the-man's flights of prophecy. It makes a great deal of sense dramatically and highlights a wonderful bitter pettiness from which Chidley-the-man must escape.

Unfortunately, Joyce MacFarlane's production of the play for Rep never did escape from the domestic sub-plot. The result of the production is melodrama of the home spun, home-cooked, and awfully homely variety. The character of Walt, for instance, was a problem here. Bernard McLindon played the part, perhaps because he wasn't stopped by the director, in the style of a Woolloomooloo High School production of Pinter's The Caretaker. This added frightfully to a cliche.

In Chidley, a play partly about habits of dress, the costumes are very important. Chidley's belief was that oppressive English-style clothing was not fit for our climate. This production didn't spend enough thought on costuming. The inspector wore a suit that didn't fit the style of the rest. And Chidley himself looked hideous in the robes and nightshirts they gave him rather than looking liberated and comfortable as he must have.

Bernadette Vincent's performance as Ada was the best thing about the production. She was the "good sort" that the play calls for, spunky, compassionate of Chidley's philosophy if ignorant of its challenge, a woman caught between two husbands, one of the mind and one of the body. She herself, however, was not free enough with her body. Too many times on the mattress she pulled her dress down self-consciously. Chidley's discovery of the automatic Hoover method of penetration demands a scene on the bed at the end of Act One where both actors use their bodies very skilfully. Chidley's message is one of expansive mind over expanding matter. It is serious — that men go around with erections in their pants and that this constitutes the threat of violence. By refusing to have an erection, Chidley was denouncing violence against women and in this he was no less profound or earnest than Gandhi. But the scene in bed managed to de-emphasise Chidley's revelation and show it up as a crazy comic interlude in a kind of bedroom soap-opera.

Chidley was written specifically for the small space of the old Nimrod. It didn't fare well on Rep's wide stage for the same reasons that intimate plays don't work in the Drama Theatre of the Opera House. This play required a focused centre where all or most of the drama should take place. By spreading it out to fill a long stage it loses some of its power. The last scene, in particular, was done to one side, in the back, behind glass. This muffled Chidley's beautiful final monologue and subtracted something from the play's message.

Before she re-wrote it, Alma de Groen had Chidley immolating himself in the centre as the climax. The new ending, written for the Hoopla production, is better. But in the Rep production it was sidetracked and barely came off.

Alma de Groen's plays combine several theatrical elements and they combine them with skill, thought, and dramatic integration. But they are not easy to produce, especially if the domestic-character structure overpowers the truth in them. This production was a case of not being able to see the church for all the scaffolding that hid it.
"There are... valuable insights into the play... and yet it is not satisfying"

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

PETER WARD

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov, South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Festival Centre, Adelaide. Opened 7 April 1977. Director, Colin George; designer, Rodney Ford; dances by Michael Fuller; assistant director, Brian Dobman; lighting, Nigel Levinghs; stage manager, Gabrielle Bridges.

Mrs Ranevsky, Ruth Cracknell; Anya, Anne Pendlebury; Varya, Dorothy Vernon; Gayeff, Brian James; Lopakhin, Dennis Olsen; Trofimoff, Ronald Falk, Pleshchekin, Kevin Miles; Charlotte, Daphne Grey; Epiphodoff, Leslie Dayman; Duniasha, Michele Stayer; Fiers, Edwin Hodgeman; Yasha, Patrick Frost; Stranger, Craig Ashley; Post Office Clerk, Alan Andrews; Servants, Michael Fuller, Colin Friels, Doug Gautier, Michael Siberry, Rebel Russell.

It is mid-summer in Old Russia, the revolution is only a decade or so ahead, the emancipation of the serfs is still a novelty, the bourgeoisie is rising and the old families falling, and property — above all, property — is changing hands, dividing families, obscuring the past and distorting history important, valuable, and worth paying for. The house and orchard should have had a physical presence as actual as the abstracted shapes of the grave stones pointed the moral of change and decay and dying fall. In short, the fin de siecle balletic confection. It is after all a pros ценим-арх play — there has to be a framework of tension and tenderness, valuable insights into the play if not into the characters, and yet it is not satisfying. Like the song, you want to keep asking: "Is that all there is? Is that all there is to...?"

One of the main problems that Colin George's production had to deal with was Rodney Ford's design. It set a tone inconsistent with the play's drive. Brightly patterned and decorative, it lacked the substance needed to make property and history important, valuable, and worth paying for. The house and orchard should have had a physical presence as actual as Fiers is himself, while in Act 2 we should have been able to see something of the orchard in the twilit distance, as the abstracted shapes of the grave stones pointed the moral of change and decay and dying fall. In short, the fin de siecle balletic confection. It is after all a pros ценим-арх play — there has to be a frame of some kind to provide a credible context in which the characters can develop and work.

And work, of course, is the word. In another sense, some of the characters in this production didn't entirely, especially Patrick Frost's Yasha, the callow young valet, and Brian James's Gayeff, Madame Ranevsky's foot of a brother. Patrick Frost tried for a kind of nonchalant stylish callowness, but did not reach it — for an

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actor such nonchalance should be made of
tenser stuff. Brian James, on the other
hand, worked hard and almost made it, but
unfortunately was all too rushed and flat­
flappable, the latter an unfortunate quality
since it is Lopakhin who is required to of­
fend by his lack of control and tendency to
flap his arms about.

Denis Olsen played Lopakhin with his
usual style and vigour; but his reading of
the character was not ideal. He was a kind
hand, worked hard and almost made it, but
actor such nonchalance should be made of
something of these qualities in Lopakhin,
satisfied with life. And while there is
of country doctor, clean, well-groomed,
pable, the latter an unfortunate quality
plenty of it . . ."

I have occasionally toyed with an idea
which would no doubt be considered
heretical by our high priests of drama. It
would involve organising an equivalent of
one of those tours on which the par­
ticipants, suffering from gout, over-eating
or cirrhosis of the liver, used to take the
waters at various centres. In my — oh yes,
utterly utopian — theatrical equivalent of
this mineral cure, critics and public alike
would be able to dispel the indigestion and
flatulence which are all too often
nowadays the reward (?) for an evening in
the theatre. For once, not only the au­
dorable, middle-aged foolishness, inaction and
regret. But it was still not quite there, the
heart was still missing, and it was as if she
was watching herself, rather than feeling
herself, act.

But not so with Teddy Hodgeman's Fiers
and Ruth Cracknell's Madame Ranevsky.
On opening night, Ruth Cracknell's per­
formance was uncertain, almost tentative,
and clearly she was not relaxing in the role.
A week later, she was far more in control,
far closer to the right pitch of bitter-sweet
middle-aged foolishness, inaction and
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heart was still missing, and it was as if she
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herself, act.
...the cast bounced through two hours of sendup and slapstick that sent the audience away singing.

DIAMOND STUDS

MARGUERITE WELLS

Diamond Studs by Jim Wann and Bland Simpson. Riverina Trucking Company Theatre, Riverina CAE Wagga, NSW. Opened 14 April 1977. Director, Terry O'Connell; designer, Fred Lynn; musical director, John Rosengren; Belle Starr, Street Singer, Federale; Janine Bishop, Pinkerton, Yankee, Ruffian, Preacher; Tim Bottoms; Zee James, Street Singer, Federale; Beth Collins; Greencheese, Street Singer, Federale; Janet Hastie; Bob Ford; Cashier, Gonzales, Pappy, Old Maid, Noel Hudda; Porkbarrel; Zerelda Samantha, Federale; Jenny Leslie; Bob Younger, Whicher, Murphy, Brakeman; Ken Moffat; Newshawk, Yankee, Ruffian, Conductor; Myles O'Meara; Cole Younger, Puncho Villa, Toby Prentice; Quantrill, Henry Clay Dean, Warden, John Treloar; Frank James, Governor Crittendon, Mark Twigden; Jesse James, Les Winspear; Jack Younger, Engineer, Tourist, Peter Wright.

It is in some ways a sad comment on Australian society that the Riverina Trucking Company performs this life-and-death story of Jesse James the American outlaw complete with American accents, both Southern and Yankee, sleepy Mexican guerillas, hillbilly pappies, Southern belles and shady ladies, to the manner born. Their cow-cow-yippy nasal Western songs and magnolia-scented lullabies had the audience, admittedly an audience of partisans, clapping and stamping and singing along with utter good humour. “Watch out, Wagga,” the director warned in the programme notes. “The Trucking Company’s out to get you.” And get them it did, with a reshuffled and recycled cast, who had originally been chosen for a production of Equus and who just happened to have the oomph and the singing voices plus the finesse needed for this delightful and unpretentious musical comedy. True, a certain glaze in the eyes of some of the cast in the first half hinted at the need for more than four weeks’ rehearsal, but some fine acting (particularly from Jenny Leslie and fine singing from all the cast (but especially Janine Bishop with “I Don’t Need a Man to Know I’m Good”) carried them through high and dry. By the gutsy, pulse-thumping finale of Act I (“Cakewalk into Kansas City, Wearing Diamond Studs Tonight”), it was obvious that Wagga had a smash-hit on its hands.

This is more than partly due to the work of designer Fred Lynn, whose splendid set was composed of three pianos forming the wings, with concealed ramps, so that people appeared suddenly on top of pianos. After the first half-hour this stopped being stunningly effective and became merely highly effective. The pianos were then put to other uses. They became the counter of a bank, the podium of the local hall, a locomotive, a bank safe, and produced money and cash-bags and notices from under their lids. One of the pianos, of course, was the orchestra, and, played by John Rosengren, the musical director, it very nearly was an orchestra on its own. With three guitars, a harmonica and a washboard (played by Les Winspear as the great Jesse James himself), with a clarity of diction that is a great luxury in these times, and with harmonies that were always pleasant even when not accurate, the cast bounced through two hours of sendup and slapstick and sent their audience away singing.

Despite the superb score, in which the lyrics are as hard-hitting, and sometimes as beautiful, as the music is infectious, the play had never been performed outside the United States, and with some reason. The script assumes familiarity with American folklore, history and geography. For Australians who have heard of Jesse James and the American Civil War and who have a little of solid fact about them, the exposition was really not adequate. Reedy River might have the same effect on an American audience. The MC’s historical and geographical comments, though delivered in a faultless accent, meant little to an audience who could not tell the Missouri from the Mississippi, and the historical name-dropping throughout the play (what on earth were Quantrill’s guerrillas or the Federales, for instance?) likewise fell on deaf ears.

But what do history and geography matter in the theatre? This play is theatre for the sake of theatre. It sets out to prove absolutely nothing, and the director, Terry O’Connell, whose inspired choice it was, wisely took advantage of the fact. Believing that musicals, and particularly Australian musicals, are often too earnest for their own good, he gave his production the air of a Southern country concert (an air most appropriate to Wagga!), and aimed to “bring back memories of Saturday afternoons at the local Hoyt’s, when the world was maybe a little simpler”.

The world is not really very simple for a professionally oriented and innovative theatre company in a big country town in southern New South Wales. The Riverina Trucking Company was named at a barbecue in 1976 and two days later had the rights to Hamlet on Ice and a budget of $500. — $50 from each of the 10 original members. Their lights were made from jam tins and their dimmer-board with
dimmers from Coles, and despite dire predictions about the tastes of Wagga audiences, the play was a success. They turned people away from full houses in their production of *Kennedy's Children*, but their next production, *Soozua*, a play devised by the company, being street theatre for children, brought in no money. Sixteen column-inches of credits in the programme show where the shoestring funds come from and the extent to which the company’s work has community support, but the names of almost all the actors also figure in the list of donors.

Fred Lynn, working full-time for no pay, not only did the set and lighting design, but with an army of hammerers, painters and cleaners, has converted an abandoned hall at the Riverina CAE into a flexible and functional space. Though the lights are not just tints this time, they do have to be back in the school hall as soon as the season ends, and the real owners have to have their seating back for just one night in the middle of the run. It is not call­ed the Riverina Trucking Company for nothing!

Terry O’Connell, the director, originally came to Wagga to direct the Wagga School of Arts production of Cabaret as his graduation exercise for NIDA. Since then he has directed the Wagga productions of Coralie Landowne says No and *The Les Darcy Show*, as well as the Trucking Company’s productions. At the moment, he has an Australia Council director’s development grant (but only until June), and the rights to Byeplane in Concert, The Coming of Stork and Jesus Christ Superstar! for one, will be making the trip to Wagga again. Wagga has good theatre.

“... a stream of surprise twists, most of them eminently plausible”

**DOBLE EDGE**

NORMAN KESSELL


Helen Galt, Anne Haddy; Tony Price, Peter Adams; Henry Monk, Max Meldrum.

Monsignor Robert Knox’s 10 rules to be followed by writers of detective fiction are meticulously observed in *Double Edge*, a new thriller at Sydney’s Marian Street Theatre.

With a sort of smug superiority, these rules are conveniently set out in the programme and will, I think, bear repetition as a reminder to any budding playwright contemplating this field of endeavour. They are:

1. The Criminal must be mentioned early on, not just brought in at the end.
2. The puzzle must be solved rationally, not by “supernatural” powers.
3. No more than one secret room or passage to be used.
4. No “undiscovered” or “undetectable” poisons.
5. No sinister foreigners, particularly Chinamen.
6. The puzzle must not be solved by a lucky accident.
7. The detective must not have committed the crime himself.
8. Nor must he conceal clues or reasons for his deductions.
9. A “Watson”, if such a character be used, must not conceal his opinions.
10. There is a special veto against using identical twins or “doubles”.

*Double Edge*, which comes almost direct from a run of nearly 12 months in London last year, is by British authors Leslie Darbon and Peter Whelan. They have contrived an unusual and ingenious who-dun­it—which in the absence of a butler—provides a teasing challenge to discover (a) what was done and (b) who did it.

Obviously, consideration for future audiences inhibits too much elaboration, but the plot examines an attempted assassination of the British Prime Minister which resulted in Avril Monk, wife of the Home Secretary, being shot dead.

All this happens before curtain rise and we find Professor Helen Galt, in pursuit of her self-appointed task of solving the puzzle, recalling the incident by means of projected slides—made, we are told, from a television film—and a recorded description of the events as they occurred.

We are quickly settled into the feel of things. This is Richard’s first professional engagement and he made a good impression on the tough press crew that were in the audience. His facial expressions are incredible and his comedy timing superb. All the more brilliant, as he directs as well as stars in the show.

Peter Parkinson once again excels. I particularly liked his drunk-at-the-airport sketch. Cherie Popp makes the third member of the experienced 680 trio and she is always a hysterically welcome sight on stage. His delivery of lines is perfect.

Whether it is as Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth II, a dustman, a wardrobe mistress, a drunken wine-taster or a dirty old madeira-swalling seducer of young virgins, John’s six-feet-four-inch frame is always a hysterically welcome sight on stage. His comic timing is impeccable. All of this sounds like a bit of a rave. But when you have such a marvellous night’s entertainment, why not enthuse, says I!

This could well be the last show in the present location, as John Howitt has a lease on new premises in Mosman. John looks forward to bigger and brighter things in the future. His new school of Dramatic Art is prospering.

“John Howitt... is always a hysterically welcome sight on stage”

**HELLO LONDON**

BARRY EATON


There are some things in life that I look forward to with great relish. The list is varied and I won’t attempt to reproduce it here. But right at the top is my regular visit to the Killara 680 Coffee Theatre.

Perhaps one of these visits will result in my being disappointed with the show. Fortunately that hasn’t happened yet. I am very glad to report that John is back to full-time star status in the shows. I am thinking of easing more into directing, as I mentioned in that previous Theatre Australia review; I urged John to reconsider and fortunately for us all he has.

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“All of the attention to staging and presentation that helped to make Marian St. one of our most successful regional theatres.”
"Shaw and Jonson both thrived on controversies and rivalries ..."

The Alchemist

THE ALCHEMIST

CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA

Rex Cramphorn

The Alchemist by Ben Jonson. Old Tote Theatre Company at the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, Sydney. Opened 20 April, 1977. Director, William Redmond; designer, Shaun Garton; costumes, Mike Gorman; music, Nigel Butterfly. Caesar and Cleopatra by George Bernard Shaw. Old Tote Theatre Company at the Parade Theatre, Sydney. Sydney. Opened 20 April, 1977. Director, John Clark; designer, Alan Lee; lighting, Jerry Luke; stage management, John Frost, Geoff Gougeon; Subtle, Colin Croft; Face, Bruce Spence; Doll Common, Sandra McGregor; Sir Epicure Mammon, John Krummell; Dapper, Peter Rowley; Pertinax Sury, Peter Wharford; Dragger, Alan Tobin; Lovewit, Peter Collingwood; Tribulation Wholesome, Redmond Philip; Master Thaddeus Walsh; Dame Plant, Kerry Walker; Kastril, Brandan Barke; Neighbour, Dio O'Connor; Officer, Michael Ferguson; Colin, Geoffrey Southby; Neighbour, Margot Gibbin; Officer, Grant Dowdell.

Caesar and Cleopatra...
him “part brute, part woman, and part god — nothing of man in me at all”. That doesn't leave Cleopatra much to be — a primitive, a spoilt child, a woman impressed by Caesar's qualities, aping him but condemned to failure by her own savagery and femininity. All through the play, that debunks love and sainted beauty, "improving on Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra" by giving us a "puritan" view of history, Cleopatra is a cross between a savage and a shop-girl and, in playing, the battle can turn out to be hers. She is changing; the play draws our attention to her attempts to change, to her failure to do it, to her fatal weakness for "round, strong arms". Caesar, on the other hand, witty, astute and we must be grateful for it. I also liked Nigel Butterley's music — the right blend of mystery, grandeur and Shavian originality of what I was undergoing.

"I felt myself being lifted out of the seat by the sheer originality of what I was undergoing"

MEDAL OF HONOR RAG

ALISON MARY FAGAN

BOB ELLIS


Alison Fiske, Margie Brown.

There is a good deal of compelling evidence that live theatre is at an end. When the economics of it, as now is the case, force more and more managements into putting on plays with casts of three, or two, or one, the burden on the playwright, to grip or delight an audience becomes too great. The burden on the performer, too, and only a few theatrical geniuses (Reg Livermore is one) can handle it. The natural minimum cast number for an absorbing night in the theatre is 10: a play like The Cherry Orchard or Twelfth Night could not be written with a cast of three, or two, or one, and it's plain to see why: it depends on an abundance ofoverlap ininteractions and malicious counter-stratagems that is not available in a cast of three, or two, or one. Imagine a Hamlet with only Hamlet and Claudius in it, or a Death of a Salesman with only Willy and Biff. Yet these are the kinds of choices that managements tell writers make economic sense.

Audiences, moreover, are not all that interested in driving through the cold across a city in order to see three people grumbling in an ante-room about their lot when Roots is available in lush and sweaty colour free of charge at home. They need more people on stage to drag them out at night. The most commercially successful Australian dramas also support this view — Don's Party, Melba, King O'Malley, Marcello Towers, A Hard God, Dimboola and Season at Saraparilla all had casts of seven or more and so did Hair and Superstar. Frasian austerity in the theatre, like Frasian austerity in the country at large, is bad economics, and till it stops, the audiences will shrink to one of those black holes in space, of infinite weight and dimension.

Two small-cast one-act plays at the Ensemble in April, however, wrestled practically with the same question. The first was a Vietnam war drama — for the television play, in short, that it might have been. Hayes Gordon's direction, however, has momentum and restraint, and the impact of the confrontation is considerable. That being said, it must be added that Fred Steele, a black American of noble bearing and some grace, has a large future as an actor, so impressive are his natural attributes, and so has Tom Cole as a writer, if he wishes to seek it out.

The second play, Alison Mary Fagan by David Selbourne, with Margie Brown as the one character in it, was an astonishing experience, superficially comparable, I suppose, to Wonderwoman, but not much like it really, though every bit as impactful. I felt myself being lifted out of the seat by the sheer symphonic originality of what I was undergoing.

In a sort of limbo, inhabited only by a star-shaped glory-box in which are inset several mirrors, a woman with a square jaw, stocky figure and full bosom arrives dressed up as a marching-girl, introduces herself as Alison Mary Fagan, nee Fiske, enumerates in lurid detail her bodily measurements, first stripping down to black tights to emphasise them, and in a sort of litany repeats the phrases, “This is the body. This is how I am. I was born to the world to be happy, and I shall be happy, whatever it costs me. I shall be pure as a poppy.” She prowls about the stage, with movements like a ballet dancer’s exercises, and recites a litany of bourgeois hopes
Malvolio translated into the ultimate burlesque, the silent-movie ghost of Buster Keaton . . .

TWELFTH NIGHT

DOROTHY HEWETT

Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare. Nimrod Theatre, Uptairs, Sydney. Opened 23 April, 1977. Director, John Bell; designer, Kim Carpenter; music, composed by Cameron Allen; lighting design, Grahame Murray; stage manager, John Pfeffer. Orsino, Barry Otto; Valentina, Dennis Scott; Curio, Graham Thorburn; Viola, Russel Kiefel; Sebastian, Tony Sheldon; Captain, Robert Alexander; Antonio, Dennis Scott; Olivia, Anna Volska; Maria, Berns Marsh; Sir Toby Belch, Gordon McDougall; Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Drew Forsyth; Malvolio, Neil Fitzpatrick; Feste, Peter Carroll; A Priest, Robert Alexander; First Officer, Graham Thorburn; Second Officer, Robert Alexander.

After the Nimrod and John Bell’s inspired Much Ado, audiences were entitled perhaps to expect a corresponding delight in Twelfth Night.

But this is another country, and besides the wench is dead. The two comedies are very different kettles of fishes. The surface glitter of the court and the marvellous wit and style of Bar Machin and Benedick made Much Ado the perfect vehicle for the Bell pyrotechnics.

Illyria is a magical place with a dark side to its moon. Viola has a mortal sadness at her wity heart, and the Duke is never half good enough for her.

Feste sings constantly of death. The Duke and Olivia personify the folly of love, and the twins mock love’s constancy. The ambivalence and duality at the heart of the play are both highly sophisticated and incredibly tender.

Kim Carpenter’s stage design was a brilliant conception, but was it the right one: slatted wood, jetties, platforms stained with bird-shit, striped awnings, lapping light and water, the sound of gulls . . . Typically Sydney to translate one of Shakespeare’s marvellous transvestite heroines into Elizabethan reality! Viola is played by a boy (but not Olivia.) The translation is interesting. Viola and Rosalind have always had a tomboyish swagger. It is part of their charm. But, except for the first scene, when, draped and cowed in rough linen, he has a passing resemblance to the young, gawky Hepburn, Russel Kiefel’s Viola, sailor-suited, with blonde fringe and knowing, slanted eyes, has a distinct resemblance to the Death in Venice boy. The Death in Venice boy is a watcher, depending upon a silent, mysterious, physical beauty. He is not an innovator, a brave wit, a carrier-off of disguises, an adventurer, a coward, a tender lover or a sender-up-of-herself, as Viola is. Therefore many of the great speeches tend to sound, not charmingly bisexual, but flat and underplayed. The personality blurs, and the play’s centre swings dangerously towards Peter Carroll’s Feste. An odd Feste too! John Bell’s Illyria has a savage stylised centre. Therefore a savage Feste makes sense in such a world, and unifies the “Malvolio-in-the-dark-house” enigma.

Chillingly, on the opening night the “sophisticated” Nimrod audience laughed quite loudly at Malvolio trussed in a straitjacket writhing centre-stage under the brutal ministrations of Father Topaz.

I think that says something terrifying about our Clockwork-Orange-Taxi-Driver world, and the blood spilling on to thousands of lounge-room carpets from the colour TV sets.

Which brings me to Malvolio, and a brilliant performance from Neil Fitzpatrick, one of our greatest actors. Here is a Malvolio translated into ultimate burlesque, the silent-movie ghost of Buster Keaton, complete with masked face, frockcoat, spats, squashed hat, white gloves and running-on-the-spot exit. He plays burlesque with a beach umbrella, farce with the dropped love-letters, Mack Sennett chase-scenes and black, black comedy in the dark house, like some strange visitation from the old movie-houses somehow strayed into a world of Sir Toby in plus-fours, Sir Andrew in kilts, and Feste in trad motley with a gashed face.

Here too is Barry Otto as a melancholic, handsome Duke in a dressing-gown “changeable as taffeta”, and Anna Volska looking unbelievably beautiful in great hats and trailing gowns, giving the ambivalent comic lines the Volska touch, a great comedy cast containing such inimitables as Drew Forsyth and Gordon McDougall.

Why then am I uneasy about the Nimrod’s Twelfth Night? The pace of the play will quicken and the fragmentariness dissolve as the season continues. Viola looks beautiful, but cannot compete with Neil Fitzpatrick or Peter Carroll; therefore the balance of the play is lopsided.

It is a production which seems a kind of danse macabre of blonde mirror-imaged boys with high cheekbones and oblique eyes, a heavy brutal Feste without grace in command of all, and a brilliant surrogate Buster Keaton doing Mack Sennett comedy routines by a Venetian pier.

John Bell, as always, has mounted a super-stylish, highly intelligent Twelfth Night, but where is enchanted Illyria and the enchantress Viola?

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\textbf{"... a mixture of poetry and profoundly teasing insight"}

\textbf{CROSSING NIAGARA}

\textbf{MARGOT LUKE}


Crossing Niagara is about so many things—ambition, fear, obsession, the give-and-take of partnership, the clash and complementing of contrasting temperaments. It's also a demonstration piece about that old preoccupation with the relationship of earthbound body and soaring spirit. Best of all, it's a play based on optimism. How amazing, in the context of contemporary theatre, to find a tightrope walker who doesn't end up falling to his death to illustrate the playwright's tough attitude to life!

The real Blondin, as shown in the smudged 19th-century reproduction in the programme, had a solid, no-nonsense look about him. Robert van Mackelenberg, being wiry rather than bulky, has to suggest the neatness of an acrobat's rompers, contrasts arrestingly with the reined-in, seemingly professional, a little vain. The costume—the neatly bearded face of the acrobat's rompers, contrasts arrestingly with the reined-in, seemingly professional, a little vain. The costume—acrobat's rompers, contrasts arrestingly with the neatly bearded face of the charlatan, creating a sort of Tudor look—an Elizabethan adventurer in a circus tent, with a clothesline background and underpants hung up to air. At the time of the play, Blondin is 45 and a celebrity, having walked tightropes ever since he was an exploited boy-wonder of five. He achieves breath-taking things suspended 160 feet above the chasm, now with a wheelbarrow, now with an omelet pan. But he cheats over the number of eggs he uses, and this is the point of contact with young Carlo, a determined lad with a telescope, who has been watching Blondin for 14 years—ever since at the age of four he conceived the ambition to ride on the great man's shoulders and share his unique experience of walking in the great void.

Carlo is an idealist with an obsession—a hothead with a plan of campaign. He wants to purge Blondin of the cheap commercialism his stunts involve. He also wants him to achieve the impossible: walking on air without the limitations of the wire. He bullies and pays homage in equal measure, and once Blondin has become convinced that the lad is more than a hanger-on or an opportunist, he becomes intrigued. Their dreams merge—they share the vision of space-walking, and the idea of crossing Niagara together seems to occur in a spontaneously shared moment.

The preparation and actual walk are a continuous exploration of their relationship: mutual dependence of contrasting qualities creating a third person, Icaron, a new creature, formed by the two of them and greater than either of them separately. Also, stronger than Icarus, because, as Carlo says, any fool knows wax melts in the sun. Alan Fletcher, as Carlo, has just a touch too much of the boyish energy that drives them on, but he contrasts well with the reined-in, seemingly imperturbable Blondin, eagerness versus experience, wild enthusiasm versus caution.

Their confessions of dreams and fears and motivations take the play beyond the immediate concerns of a two-man team attempting a daring feat and become a psychological blueprint, archetypes in action. When we finally see Carlo perched on Blondin's shoulders, we do witness the birth of Icaron, the creature that can both walk sure-footed and soar in flights of fancy.

The dramatic tension (even though history records that Blondin didn't crash at 45) is sustained throughout the walk. During their final preparations Carlo has last-minute stage fright. Emergency measures are rehearsed at fever-pitch. And our concern works two ways: Carlo is unstable, he can either lose his nerve and bring them both down, or he can give way to his free-wheeling imagination and force them both off the wire in sheer exultation. Either way, he makes a dangerous backseat driver. But it is Blondin, strained to the point of exhaustion, who causes our moment of panic. At the halfway mark he freezes, and it is the visionary, Carlo, who talks them across the rest of the way, pleading, swearing, joking, cajoling. It is a mighty scene. Throughout, they manage to sustain the illusion of the tightrope with the faint suggestion of vertical swaying, whilst a swirl of mist and distant thunder supports the illusion.

The play is a mixture of poetry and profound and yet often teasing insight. The images of unfettered sky-walking and the whole complex web of dreams and fears take the play as far in one direction as the realistic and often funny verbal battles of the two men take it in the other. Visually the production attempts to mirror these aspects. The tatty circus tent gives way to swirling mist, the dapper Blondin reads books while suspended upside-down from a trapeze, the playful maiming of the boy with a wheelbarrow is supereceded by more subtle miming of the final scene that draws the audience into the game of total illusion just long enough to become aware that they have, in fact, become involved in the game.

\textbf{"The first two acts are intense and moving... But with the third Rudkin leaps off the deep end"}

\textbf{ASHES}

\textbf{CLIFF GILLAM}

Ashes by David Rudkin. National Theatre Company, Greenroom, the Playhouse, Perth. Opened 22 April 1977. Director, Andrew Ross; designer, Jas Cartwright; stage manager, Tony Reagan. Colin Harding, Dennis Miller; Anne Harding, Pippa Williamson; Jennifer, Receptionist, Valerie, Nurse, Assistant, Adoptions Officer, Adele Lewin; Doctor, Seminologist, Gynaecological Surgeon, Area Adoptions Officer, Ian Scott.

Going along to the Greenroom on an unseasonably hot April night, I found myself hoping with even more than the usual fervency that the real magic would be worked. Without airconditioning, the Greenroom, a tiny little box of a theatre, makes a fair try at an accurate 20th-century reconstruction of the Black Hole of Calcutta and one needs the real theatrical magic to transport one from the gross and fleshly earth where sweat trickles irritatingly down the face and neck and the breath comes short and gaspingly in a fetid atmosphere of hot, thick and still air liberally suffused with the garlic odours supplied by the lucky gentleman in the seat behind, who obviously enjoyed a pre-theatre Italian meal. Without the magic, one comes away remembering little of the play and altogether too much of the discomfort of the place.
Unfortunately, the current production of David Rudkin's *Ashes* does not deliver the goods. It comes annoyingly close, but ultimately fails. I think there are two reasons for this failure: the first is intrinsic to the play, the second to the direction.

To begin with the play, *Ashes* is Rudkin's first success after the powerful *Afore Night Come*. It depicts, in harrowing detail, the attempt of two sensitive and intelligent people to become parents, in the face of a seemingly inability to conceive. The extended agonies of sperm tests, ovulation charts, and intercourse by calendar are borne with by Colin and Anne Harding with the help of a wry and self-deprecating humour and by dint of a tender caring for one another. Finally conception is achieved, but cruelly, the pregnancy fails, Anne miscarries and in consequence has a hysterectomy. Sterility is now a fact and Colin and Anne's last hope, to become parents by adoption, founders on the rock of a ruthless policy of the medical profession and county nurses, adoption officers and friends required by the script. One scene calls for a particularly insensitive female called Valerie to chat with a bed-bound Anne about babies, pregnancy and related matters. Miss Lewin played Valerie in a broad comic style, and within the parameters of that style played her well, but the style was badly against the grain of the rest of the production, and the director should not have allowed the interpretation to stand.

Pippa Williamson seemed better able than the other performers to maintain her characteristic, active, clean and consistent, and finely controlled performance, distinguished by a fine judgment of the character-audience balance mentioned before. Ian Scott, playing sundry members of the medical profession and county bureaucracy, did well with relatively undemanding material.

The inconsistencies and confusions of this production are summed up in the very real merits, which remain the honesty and compassion with which the predicament of Colin and Anne is treated, an occasional marvellous use of language and, in the first two acts, a sure sense of the wife was played by a young actress, Valerie to chat with a bed-bound Anne about babies, pregnancy and related matters. Miss Lewin played Valerie in a broad comic style, and within the parameters of that style played her well, but the style was badly against the grain of the rest of the production, and the director should not have allowed the interpretation to stand.

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The next play will be the all-female *Rites*, and one hopes the high standard already achieved in the first two plays will be maintained. The existence of a pool of developing talent in the high order evident in UDS productions so far this year augurs well for the future of theatre in Perth.

“The relentless pace of the production... allowed no time for the emotional patterns to develop”

**ABSSENT FRIENDS**

BILL DUNSTONE


The Playhouse production of *Absent Friends* suffers from too keen a devotion to broad farce where more subtle direction and playing would have been in order. Aarne Neeme’s direction concentrates almost solely on getting a quick response from the rather slender farcical situation in the play, at the expense of the sustained comedy of characters which holds the play together and provides the basis for Ayckbourn’s sobering reflections on suburban marriage. It could be that the director deliberately stepped up the pace and laid on the emphasis in order to get the play across the dead spaces which divide the stage from the audience at the Playhouse, but even so, the tone and pace of the production lacked variety, and the stridently mannered acting was no substitute for the understated playing of the sub-text called for by the play.

As Ayckbourn has said in an interview, *Absent Friends* is far removed from the contrived patterns of action of the “well-made” play. The main emphasis in the play is on character, and its action is deliberately scaled down to a series of conversations at a suburban tea-party.

There is an element of farcical absurd contrivance in the action, in that Colin, whose fiancée has recently drowned, has been invited to a tea by Diana to receive the condolences of three of his old friends, who, inexplicably, have not seen him for three years.

The other contrivance is that one of the guests, Evelyn, has recently had a “once-off” affair with Diana’s husband. Diana knows, and Evelyn’s husband, also at the party, condones the affair because of his business interests with Diana’s husband. But this contrivance is only the basis for a more extended look at emotional patterns in marriage, which focuses the comedy on another kind of absurdity altogether.

The play quietly reveals the pathos of several marriages and relationships which are in the process of failing because, in each case, one partner’s genuine feelings and constructive efforts are rebuffed by the opposite number’s habitual insensitivity, selfishness, passivity or implacable hostility. The irony is that only the bereaved Colin is happy, indeed, distressingly happy, with his sentimental memories. He, too, is one of the ironclad survivors in the game of love.

The pattern of stresses which develops between the characters reaches a climax when Diana has a nervous breakdown at the tea, a crisis which is jointly precipitated by the discovery of her husband’s infidelity and by her inability to penetrate Colin’s remorseless genius. Ayckbourn develops this emotional pattern through skilful understatement and comic deflection of the crises which lead up to the breakdown in Act 2. Characters like Marge, who humours her grotesquely hypochondriacal husband over the telephone, and Diana, who cracks after years of marriage to the hideous Paul, are sympathetically depicted by Ayckbourn as victims made vulnerable by their own honesty and generosity.

Carole Skinner, as Diana, and Leith Taylor, as Marge, seemed to understand this grim comic irony, but they pitched their performances to the relentless pace of the production, which allowed no time for the emotional patterns to “gel” or develop. They were also hampered by a lack of support from the male roles. Alan Cassell seemed to be a stray in his interpretation of Colin as a gormless, grinning inept. The whole of the second act, and Diana’s break-down in particular, depend on the portrayal of Colin as a man with a rather ugly instinct for emotional self-preservation disguised as geniality. That is what finally disgusts Diana.

As might be expected, the production came to grief most seriously at those moments when emotions, which had been repressed out of deference to the social occasion, came to the surface. Such moments are characteristically accompanied by a touch of grimly funny bathos in *Absent Friends*, requiring a very tactful balance. Diana’s collapse, for instance, begins with the pouring of a jug of cream over her husband’s head. Happily, the pace of the second act, in which these crises occur, was pulled back a little, presumably in preparation for the emotional high points. For that reason the second act seemed more promising, but any moderation of pace came too late to base the crises firmly on the play.

Another weak point in the production was its failure to get the social backgrounds of the sets of characters into sharp focus. Perhaps the force of class-distinctions in British society is difficult for us to grasp. The problem may be generic. So, too, may be our apparently habitual inability to appreciate the extent to which character is determined by class in a society based upon fine gradations of class-distinction. Class-distinction is built with *Absent Friends* as a factor contributing to the conflicts and attitudes of the characters, and thus as a determinant of the ills which befall marriage. The knack of portraying the subtle but telling differences between the behaviour of a couple who have “made it” into the executive class and that of a couple who are still “on the make” seems to have been beyond the stylistic resources of the present company. But then, there was no place for such nuances in a version of the play which substituted mannerism for accurately observed manner.

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“On opening night the actors were far from working as an ensemble”

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
RAYMOND STANLEY

Juno and the Paycock by Sean O’Casey, Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne. Opened ‘5 May. Director, Ray Lawler; designer, Tony Tripp.

Mary Boyle, Natalie Bate; Juno Boyle, Pat Evison; Johnny Boyle, Gary Down; Jerry Devine, Peter Curtin; Captain Jack Boyle, Frederick Parslow; Joxer Daly, Edward Hepple; Sewing-Machine Man, Roy Baldwin; Coal Vendors, Peter Dunn; Charlie Bentham, David Downer; Mrs Maisie Madigan, Sandy Gore; Neighbour, Sally Cahill; Mrs Tancred, Jacqueline Kelleher; Needle Nugent, Robert Hewett; The Mobiliser, Barry Hill; First Furniture Man, Roy Baldwin; Second Furniture Man, Robert Hewett; Irregular, Peter Dunn.

In the television ads Ivan Hutchinson tells us that we won’t see Juno and the Paycock on that station, we won’t see it on any other station, in the cinemas or the drive-ins, but we can see it that night and every other night live at the Athenaeum Theatre: on “Channel 5”. Perhaps it would have been better had Hutchinson arranged for us to see, among his Movie Milestones presentations on TV, Alfred Hitchcock’s 1930 film version.

According to director Hitchcock, it was “just a photograph of a stage play”. But it did contain three of the 1925 London production’s original cast: Sara Allgood as Juno, Sydney Morgan as Joxer and Maire O’Neill as Mrs Madigan. The Irish sisters Sara and Maire, together with the latter’s husband, Arthur Sinclair, in fact acted in several productions of the play, with Miss O’Neill playing Juno when her sister was unavailable. Juno was said to be Miss Allgood’s favourite role, and she was still performing it on Broadway in 1940.

Lacking the film version, we have Ray Lawler’s production at the Athenaeum, which, hopefully, will be in better shape when the company has given more performances. On opening night, after two dress rehearsals officially known as Young Parents’ Previews, the actors were far from working as an ensemble.

When the lights went down, one was hit by a barrage of Irish accents of varying dialects, which made the first quarter of an hour hard to follow. Now, there is nothing better than a rich Irish brogue, and it can be quite hypnotising as Micheál Mac Liammóir has frequently demonstrated. It can also camouflage an indifferent performance. Most of the members of the cast appeared so engrossed with retaining their accents it quite obviously affected their acting; occasionally Juno’s Celtic had a Scottish ring to it.

On opening night several people with whom I spoke, not acquainted with the play, considered the production had gone somewhat haywire and believed there was too much comedy creeping in. Yet that shrewd critic James Agate, reviewing the first London production in 1925, wrote: “Juno and the Paycock is as much a tragedy as Macbeth, but it is a tragedy taking place in the porter’s family. Mr O’Casey’s extraordinary knowledge of English taste — that he wrote his play for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, is not going to be allowed to disturb my argument — is shown by the fact that the tragic element in it occupies at the most some 20 minutes, and that for the remaining two hours and a half the piece is given up to gorgeous and incredible fooling.”

The background to the play is the Civil War in Ireland, but the production manages to make this appear merely incidental, one never gets a feeling of fear behind everything. Maybe this is what people meant by the stress on comedy.

The Juno of Pat Evison seemed to be played throughout in a minor key. She appears such a nice, timid, subdued introvert that one cannot see for one moment why her husband should be so scared of her as to hide his friend Joxer at her approach. It was altogether a lightweight performance, which, in my view, unbalanced the play; a prime case of mis-casting.

In contrast, Frederick Parslow’s Captain Boyle ranted — much too loudly — and gave little indication of the “peacock” image O’Casey intended. One has seen Parslow play Irishmen to much more effect than this.

The stand-out role in the play is the short cameo provided by Mrs Tancred.
McKenzie; Judas, Terry Dansie; Duke, Phil Gardiner; Secretary, Geoff Street; La Belle Jehanne, Rosemary Springe; Lady-in-Waiting, Karen Judd; Physician; Priest, Ian Matheson; Adrian Ryan, Priest, Bishop, Peter McMullen; Count, Peter Freeman; Duchess, Helen Brieder. Peter Pan, with Aleyt, as Peter, a gay skinny male as Tinkerbell, a John-Cleese-like Mr Darling/Captain Hook, and blonde ingenue as Wendy and gives plenty of room for interpretation of what really went on between parents and children, Wendy and Hook, and everyone with the pirates, mermaids and Indians.

The main axis of the production is the dichotomy between the real, mundane, boring, exploitative world of parents and work, and the free, dreamlike, imaginative world of children. But these children, or Wendy at least, are growing up, becoming aware of their sexuality. It is still Peter Pan, but a knowing Peter Pan.

This style, of jumps in time and place, of bizarre apparitions, of nightmares and magic has been achieved in very simple ways. The setting is just a blue floor with three white cubes on it. The ocean is a parallel series of ropes a few feet from the floor. Mr Darling becomes Captain Hook with the addition of a twisted coathanger on one hand. Troops of Indians and Pirates and Lost Boys yell and shout and yell from time to time. The whole thing, however, achieve some sort of coherence. It could have done with half an hour chopped out, some of the grosser physical and vocal excesses pruned, and some of the parts better cast, but it was still an enjoyable evening. The use of rhetorical speech and some very formal, almost mechanical blocking worked quite well.

The Painted Devil, is concerned with just as weighty issues — life, death, religion, in this case. It is not so much a performance piece as a kind of ceremonial procession by one Rost, a painter, accompanied by Aleyt, a whore, through various bizarre, Bosch-like experiences with madmen and priests, actors and death. This Rost is some combination of Candide and Quixote and Everyman, much concerned with observing and trying, ruefully, to figure out what this medieval Ship of Fools is all about.

There’s a crazy Duke with an immense growth on his stomach. There’s a troop of strolling players doing Judas, or perhaps it is Judas. There’s God and the Devil, with works by the latter. There’s cannibalism, the plague and other assorted joys. There’s a lot of Latin.

It all adds up to quite an experience, extremely well performed, especially by Peter Finlay as Rost and Bernadette Brouwers as Aleyt. It’s also a bit mysterious and religious for my liking, coming across as a sort of cross between The Seventh Seal and A Stretch of the Imagination, but there’s no denying the integrity of Edwin Batt’s production.

Peter Pan, instead of being treated as a diversion for small, dreamy children has been turned into a dream-like adult entertainment. It casts a fat, balding Australian as Peter, a gay skinny male as Tinkerbell, a John-Cleese-like Mr Darling/Captain Hook, and blonde ingenue as Wendy and gives plenty of room for interpretation of what really went on between parents and children, Wendy and Hook, and everyone with the pirates, mermaids and Indians.

Melbourne University has been one of the unsung heroes of the Australian theatre, mainly, I suppose, because those people who have gone through the place would rather forget the institution that caused all that pain and aggravation. Also because, unlike American factories, “creativity” occurs in spite of the courses rather than because of them. Melbourne University has existed as a sometimes benevolent, sometimes nasty milieu where a great many people have done a great deal in the theatre.

One performance which seemed exactly right was Edward Hepple’s Joxer, every minute inch of him looking and acting like a good student production gives a mediocro production by anyone else a run for its money."

THE PAINTED DEVIL

PETER PAN

GARRIE HUTCHINSON

The Painted Devil by Colin Ryan. Melbourne University Theatre Experiments for the Melbourne University Union, Guild Theatre, Melbourne. Director, Edwin Batt; designer, Barbara Ciszewska; lighting, Robert Hall; stage manager, John McLoughlin; music, Caz Masel. Child Death, Barbara Ciszewska; Nicholas Rost, Peter Finlay; Aleyt, Bernadette Brouwers; Despair, Greg Mylan; Melancholia, Margaret

"A good student production gives a mediocro production by anyone else a run for its money"
Barry Lowe

Films

"Although the subject of the film did not affront me, audience reaction did"

I'm a pretty passive sort of person and I believe in the rights of the individual to indulge in anything he wants to provided it does not interfere with the rights of others. So I have no objections to people who wish to take drugs, to have an abortion, or commit suicide. So the subject of Pure Shit, directed by Bert Deling, about 48 hours in the life of heroin-users did not affront me. I did not, like one Melbourne critic, find it "the most evil film ever made", nor did I find it one of the best new local films, as Bob Ellis did. Though if not one of the best, it is certainly one of the better films from our current upsurge in cinematic creativity.

Although the subject of the film did not affront me, audience reaction did. In a scene in which Gary Waddell and friend hold up a chemist shop in their search for drugs, they use violence, which I abhor. Even though a monkey-wrench and a knife are used in the robbery, the audience were all onside with the thieves and hissed loudly when a customer in the shop wrestled the knife from one of the thieves and cut him on the head. When it comes to prejudice and cliche, the Wasp (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society does not have a monopoly.

Much space was devoted in the press to the portrayal of authority/establishment figures in the film as antagonistic, brutal and/or stupid. But in the context of the film the depictions are understandable.

Psychiatrists have never been a strong love of mine since I worked at Sydney's Gladesville Hospital, and the smug complacency of Max Gillies as a television hip mental medicus who extols the merits of methadone treatment rings true. His condescension to drug-users is appalling and harmful, and his treatments are no more than experiments with human guinea-pigs. The police are presented as their derogatory nom de plume, "pigs", would suggest, but though they have had, experiences with paying off police (no dear, commissioner I have no proof) and being hassled by them for no reason, their portrayal as power-crazed bionic morons is spot on. The film, and I concur with the view, does not suggest that all police are corrupt. But to paraphrase a particularly apt line from Boys in the Band, "Show me a good cop and I'll show you a dead one."

At last to the film itself. Pure Shit, or Pure S, as it was euphemistically called on posters and in newspaper ads, follows two girls and two boys in their search for a hit. It shows that the addicts are the other side of the consumer coin to the capitalists and their obsession with materialism. Both get their kicks from consuming: one from the "high" that his drug gives him, the other works/steals for the power and prestige he craves.

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The drug world is more openly hedonistic, but it, like Big Brother's world outside, has its own mores and moral code. It has its own strata in which one class looks down on another: in the film divided into heroin and non-heroin users, the pimps, the cheats, the egotists, and the on-offbeat. There is as much madness there as there is in the mainstream.

The milieu of Pure Shit is alien to the great "silent majority", who are "educated" by newspaper and television current affairs programmes which are out to uphold the status quo. After all, the thinking goes, if everyone was out enjoying themselves, who would run and work the factories? The film will probably find its audience among the converted, the university and alternative-culture cinemas. It's a pity, for the lifestyle portrayed, albeit romanticised, is as restrictive and unsatisfying as the alternative. Where does this leave the people like me who find little difference between what each culture offers?

Top of the repulsive stakes, however, must be the people who turn up at Don's Party on the eve of the 1969 Federal election. David Williamson's stage satire of ageing radicals comfortably secure in their well-paying jobs and their suburban homes has misfired somewhere in its transfer to the screen.

Don's Party is a play I love, but the film seems to have foreshadowed much of its scatological humour to concentrate on those tiresome yokbo Ockers. I have very little patience with the film, directed by Bruce Beresford, which I find tiresome and plodding. The acting is adequate, but many of the cast were unable to bring much to life. Graham Kennedy is good as the poor sap who likes to photograph his mates making love to his wife, and Ray Barrett is good as the loud-mouth friend of Don, but Harold Hopkins is too hip and good-looking as the womanising Cooley. I longed for the cheeky exuberance of John Ewart and, in the role of the Liberal lady, the scatter-brained qualities of Wendy Blacklock.

The film offers a chance at self-flagellation, to exorcise the Ockerness we all have within us. We all know people who behave like the guests at Don's Party. In fact, in one way or another, we all behave like them. The Ocker tradition lies dormant in all of us.

I'm not convinced yet that Williamson can write for the screen. His stage plays do not transfer from one medium to the other. His larger-than-life stage creations become monsters on film. In Don's Party, Bruce Beresford has opened up the script and had added nothing, and the film has lost all the satirical bite of its stage model. The words are the same, but Beresford has created, not a maliciously witty film, but a boring booze-up.

The critics, falling over one another to show how sophisticated and anti-Ocker they are, laughed on the outside while crying on the inside, no doubt complimenting themselves on their lack of similarity to the characters. As for me, I found it a bloody bore, and could hardly wait for it to be over.
Lingwood's crisis of identity

"I like to convey the gut feeling at the essential level where the audience is compelled to react..."

"If you are, like me," says Tom Lingwood, "more than just a designer, you can't tolerate the situation of being flung in with others in a production team. It's very hard to find a director one can make a happy marriage with; in opera, it's harder yet than in straight theatre because there are three people involved: director, conductor and designer."

Lingwood, who has been resident designer for the Australian Opera since 1972, and has recently become a member of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, is talking about his most recent crisis of identity. His last previous one, he says, was largely responsible for his coming to Australia in the first place.

Then, in the late 1960s, he was disillusioned with the commercial theatre world of London and not aesthetically attracted to the money-dominated precincts of the television world. He was at something of a loose end professionally, but even so he first came to this country more or less by accident. He was bemused by his first negotiations with the then Elizabethan Trust Opera Company, precursor of the Australian Opera. First he was asked to design Verdi's Otello, and then Fidelio, and each time he said yes; but the company changed its mind a second time and finally asked him to design La Bohème, which was to be directed by Renzo Frusca and conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario, both of whom were in Europe at the time. Cillario was conducting in London, and Lingwood recalls having gone round to see him to ask whether he should have anything to do with this antiquated company that seemed unable to make up its mind about what it wanted him to do.

"You go to Australia," said Cillario, and Lingwood, impressed by the man with whom he had struck up a friendship that has lasted to the present, obeyed.

"I arrived to do Bohème," he recalls, "expecting nothing very pleasant, but I fell in love with the company. " And what had begun as a tentative filling-in of a gap in Lingwood's career developed quite rapidly into a long-term association, if not always an untroubled love affair, with the company which has dominated his professional life ever since.

In addition to Bohème in 1970, he designed Verdi's Force of Destiny almost as an afterthought; in 1971 he did Nabucco and was expecting to do Trovatore, although that fell through. Then he was offered Richard Strauss's Der Rosenkavalier for 1972, on very short notice — so short, he recalls, that he couldn't do it by post and told the company so. Whereupon he was offered a permanent job, and left London to settle in Australia, where he has been ever since.

"I can't say I've not been pleased with the strengths and successes that have come my way during that period," says Lingwood; but increasingly he has ended up in conflict with directors he has found himself working with almost by accident. Thus arose his current crisis of identity, which he now thinks may result in his embracing a whole new career as a designer-director. It all started off, as so many things do in a creative life, virtually by accident.

"I seemed to be faced with a clear-cut choice," says Lingwood. "Either I could stay at the Australian Opera in some purely administrative capacity and give up designing altogether — which I didn't want to do — or I could get out of the AO and be a free-lance guest designer. I was thinking about these alternatives when the Perth Carmen came up in 1975 — a combined designer-directing stint — and I tried it.

"It was a whole new thing," which had its problems, Lingwood says in detached recognition of the schizophrenic role any designer-director must play. "It takes time to adjust — to achieve the dual viewpoint required in this situation. You must be able to let the design side ride, once you have done your best in that department, and look at the work solely from a director's viewpoint. In this situation you have an enormous responsibility to the performing artists — even more than as a designer pure and simple. It's enough to keep you lying awake at night."

Following the Perth Carmen, which was acclaimed as a success, Lingwood was unexpectedly asked to be producer-designer of the AO's 1976 Carmen at extremely short notice. The problems were immense and Lingwood, anyhow, is out of sympathy with the view of Carmen held by Richard Bonynge, who conducted the opening performances of the production starring Hugette Tournaneau in the title role.

Bonynge, he says, views Carmen as the end of a French opera tradition, whereas he thinks Bizet consciously set out in this work to create something radically different. "I was faced with the problem of either going along with Carmen as a beautiful French opera of the Massenet/Gounod sort or trying to bend the concept to the demands of the drama — it was like working within an enormous straightjacket," says Lingwood.

He sees the production, as it finally emerged, as "a little conservative". It was, of course, planned with Donald Smith as its initial Don Jose, though Smith left the AO just before it opened and has never appeared in it; by the end of its first year, four Carmens and three Don Joses will have sung the leading roles.

Carmen is the third AO production in which Lingwood has had a directing hand: he co-directed the 1975 Aida with Stephen Hall, and his first design-directing stint for the company was the 1976 concert-hall version of Richard Strauss' Salome. He agrees that Carmen, at opening, was not dramatically as good as he would have liked.

"But we have been working at it very hard since," he says, "and we are winning. The company has come around behind me in the past year; we have gone a long way ahead and I've gained the courage and confidence to believe I am able to operate successfully on the level of a designer-director.

"I know I'm still a beginner as a director, but I'm much more confident now that I won't let them all down. It's a grim time when you're in the middle of a host of problems, but if you can fight them through they can turn out to be the best things you ever do. There's a tendency in Australia to give up at just the moment..."
when a little more effort would do the trick. Nothing worth while or memorable is ever achieved except by that extra effort.

Right at the moment, Lingwood is in the middle of one of those "grim times", beset by the problems involved in designing a new production of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake for the Australian Ballet; they were premiered in Melbourne later in the year. Apart from a couple of productions for Sydney's Music Hall Theatre Restaurant, it is his only non-operatic work since he joined the AO. But he laughs when asked if this will be his first venture into the field of designing for ballet. It's only since he came to Australia, he says, that he's become so closely associated with opera. "I've always believed in a mixed-media career," he says. In fact, it was through a ballet he designed in 1951 that Lingwood first broke into the big-time theatre world of London.

Lingwood had a mad three-year career in the British Army — worthy grist for a Sellers or a Guinness comedy — during World War II. Assigned to a map-drawing unit in the North African desert, he attached himself unofficially to a British drama company, and subsequently spent most of his tour of duty in the Middle East building theatres and designing shows to entertain the troops from Malta to Nairobi to Haifa and Tel Aviv. When he was due to be demobbed, he was branded as a deserter and had some anxious moments before the army finally let him go.

When he left the service, he spent some time in the English provinces and had enough success to convince him to try his hand in London. He had a rough time of it at first, but eventually met a friend on a bus who suggested he should try the Ballet Rambert, which ran workshop sessions on Sunday evenings at the historic Mercury Theatre. Lingwood designed an abstract one-act ballet there in 1951, which went well; and after he had done a couple more, he was noticed by the London Festival Ballet, where he created a jazz ballet in 1952 called Symphony for Fun — which was so successful it toured the world for 11 years, and even reached Australia.

Then Lingwood was on the way, and had considerable success not only in ballet, but in drama and musicals. At one stage, in 1954, he had six plays running at once in the West End for a fortnight. Then he was lured into commercial TV, when it started in London, by the big money involved, and from that he moved into film. But Lingwood had set his sights on the classical theatre — Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov — and was thoroughly dissatisfied with the nature of much of the work he was doing. During his career, he has had lots of success overseas with Shaw ("The Shaw plays are very operatic," he drops into the conversation as a casual aside). He has been asked by the Old Tote to do Major Barbara and Caesar and Cleopatra in Sydney, but has not been able to accept. But Lingwood adds ruefully: "To this day, in 30 years, I've not been asked to do a Shakespeare play."

The trouble with working in Australia, he says, is that you are so cut off from the world and so are your audiences. "Some people say everything's marvellous; others say nothing is any good; and both extremes are, of course, wrong. The way of life here is very much more American than British. I like the enthusiasm and energy, the slight roughness around the edges, the tendency for things to be blocked in rather than finely finished." And he sees in the performing arts the reflection, perhaps, of these national characteristics.

"What still exists here," Lingwood says, suddenly focusing very specifically on the Australian Opera, "is that it's a company. There's a genuine enthusiasm and belief in what they're doing. In Europe you often get polish and style and detail at the expense of the heart of the matter — that's not even there, sometimes. I like to convey the gut feeling — drama, horror, etc. — at the essential level where the audience is compelled to react. You can lure an audience in with carrots, but unless you can get through to them they won't come back. The basic thing is to grip them before you go for the deeper, more intellectual levels ...

Yet Lingwood does not feel the Australian Opera has succeeded as well as it could have — particularly over the past year or so, in the inevitable let-down in the aftermath of the opening of the Sydney Opera House. "It had to make a huge leap in 1973," he says, "and then, having done that, the problem was to maintain the emotional charge necessary to keep on giving top-rate performances."

Everyone knows by now about the backstage difficulties of the Opera House: "As long as that building stands, it will always be a battle — like working with one arm tied behind your back," says Lingwood. "The company has given much to the Sydney Opera House: but the building gives a lot in return. It helped to put Australia on the world cultural map; the whole madness of ever having built it is an inspiration of a sort. Without it, would we have had all those other new arts complexes: the Adelaide Festival Centre, Melbourne, Brisbane, etc. ?"

But after such a great leap as the one required by Sydney's $100 million sculpture of an arts complex, how does one forestall a sliding backwards? "You must have inspiration in the moment of decline," says Lingwood, "a cause to help you build up enough inner charge to give of your best in every performance. Otherwise the artists rely purely on technical skill; they cannot achieve competence, but their work will lack excitement."

In this area, he says, good administration is vital; and he is not uncritical of some aspects of the administration of the AO in recent years. "Management must be businesslike and capable, but it must also be part of the performance. However well it handles administrative matters, it will not be totally effective unless it helps to produce and maintain the necessary emotional charge within the company. We are selling humanity; human beings in dramatic situations are our stock in trade; and management must never forget this."

"Everybody involved in the company must be part of it: the performers, the backstage staff, and so on right down to the last secretary. There's no room for tokenism in a performing-arts company."

As a captive company in a small world, says Lingwood, the AO has its own peculiar problems; but everyone knows they will be together next week, and a sense of camaraderie can arise from that very fact. Such a sense helped the AO to cope with last year's financial crisis and the emotional let-down in the aftermath of the opening of the Sydney Opera House. "The company said to itself: it simply wasn't going to put up with going along the bottom of a trough; it must rise above it — and it did."

Lingwood sees a danger, though, that the AO may fall into a real artistic rut if it doesn't watch out. "Sydney is beginning to take its massive twin opera seasons each year for granted; Melbourne people feel they're in a trough because of the Sydney Opera House; they are waiting for their own Renaissance."

And suddenly we're talking politics, almost without knowing. The politics of the performing arts in post-Whitlam Australia, in particular. Logically, Lingwood agrees, the AO should be able to reside in Sydney permanently, but then he goes on without even pausing for breath to point out why this will not come to pass in the foreseeable future. Touring, he agrees, is a big problem for any such company not only because it costs money in fares and accommodation allowances, but because it
The American Ballet Theatre is not necessarily subsidized by the Federal Government, in the same way as the Australian Opera and Ballet. The Australian Opera and Ballet receive massive funding from the Federal Government, but only as a demonstration to the national government, diplomats, etc., that we take our national franchise seriously. Melbourne may complain that it's hardly done by, but it's still on the touring agenda every year; Adelaide misses out this year, but Brisbane may still get an opera season late in 1977. "You can't gainsay that we ought to travel," says Lingwood. "Only when — if — Australians acquire an emotional feeling of Sydney as the nation's cultural capital would it be possible for the AO to sit there all year round. If it sat there now, under present circumstances, it would gradually lose its national status." Along, of course, with its claim to such massive subsidies from the Federal Government. And the AO is not necessarily subsstandard, as has sometimes been claimed, when it is out of Sydney. "We can be as good when we're on tour," says Lingwood, "but it's a lot harder. Different orchestras, different stages, the flu epidemic that hits us every year in Melbourne."

What, then, is the answer to the opera problem? If the AO, with the best will in the world, can maintain only a token presence outside of Sydney (and perhaps Melbourne), might it perhaps not have been better to split available Federal subsidies six ways right from the start, and let each State develop its own opera company, even as each now has its own ABC orchestra and its own drama company? The answer is a simple No: "If the opera subsidy had been split six ways, you wouldn't have had any of the companies reaching international standard within 10 years." But eventually, of course, you might have five or six Australian opera companies reaching international level.

But then, there's often more than one way of dealing with a problem; maybe, says Lingwood, there's another way of looking at the opera dilemma which seems to be confronting Australia at the moment. "I'm very cautious and conservative by nature," he says, "but every now and then I get myself geared up to take a great leap into the dark. "We should be looking much more at what can be done to improve the situation in the cities other than Sydney: how we can present more repertory in a more economical way. Aida could be mounted in a semi-staged version in stadiums, perhaps. We should be touring popular things to Brisbane — good entertainment — and possibly flying people to Sydney for the Wozzecks and the Albert Herrings. A small-scale season at the Seymour Centre, including Wozzeck and Bluebeard's Castle, maybe. The answers needn't always necessarily be the expensive, elaborate ones; if we don't become more adventurous in our thinking next year, the artists will start feeling bored — as if they're in a pensionable job.

"In 10 or 15 years, when all the new cultural centres in the various States are open, we may need two or three more major companies to encompass the full range of music theatre works; but I'm against a three-headed AO in the long run. It's much better to have several totally separate companies, each with an identifiable identity."

Adventurousness, perhaps, is the key word: "I still believe we should be constantly aware of the necessity to be adventurous and at the same time get as much back for each cent spent as possible. This inevitably involves taking calculated risks. It's a continual problem, too: one can be too gimmicky, but it's even worse not to be gimmicky enough."

Finally, though, everything comes down to money; while we can support an Old Tote and an MTC and a QTC and equivalent drama companies in the other States with an annual average subsidy of about $600,000, Australia simply can't afford the millions that would be required to support a similar amount of opera activity. "At the Australia Council," Lingwood says ruefully, "we have endless arguments about money, but money always has to be tied to something happening. Dreaming about ideals and talking about money . . ."

Too much of the time, that's what administration of the performing arts seems to boil down to these days.
YOUTH THEATRE TO TOUR

The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association has been invited to take part at an International Children's Theatre Festival in Wales in July. The invitation was extended by the British/Welsh Centre of ASSITEJ — the International Association of Theatres for Young People — of which Australia is a member.

The production, which will be toured around Wales and England, is Anne Harvey's light-hearted look at the trade union movement in Australia, I'll be in on That. This play was commissioned and performed by the Tasmanian Theatre-in-Education Company in 1975. Anne Harvey will direct the production with Don Bridges (Tasmanian TIE team), Michael Siberry (South Australian Theatre Company), Nano Nagle (Magic Mushroom Mime Troupe, Melbourne) and Kate Wilson (Queensland Theatre Company) as members of the group.

The Australia Council will help the project and support is being sought from other sources. The company will leave Australia on 30 June.

Companies from Canada, Poland, Iran, the U.S., England, France and other countries will be at the three-week festival, based in Cardiff. It is the first time an Australian theatre company performing for young audiences has travelled overseas.

Further information from AYPAA, 21/6 Farrell Avenue, Darlinghurst, Sydney, 1970. Phone: 358 1939.

THEATRE OF THE NATIONS

The third world season of the Theatre of the Nations is being held in Paris from May to July.

Theatre companies from Belgium, Colombia, Japan, Poland, Rumania, the U.S., Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Spain have arranged programmes, and more countries are expected to take part.

Two workshops are planned, one organised by the New Theatre Committee, another on the situation of emigrated theatrical companies who are temporarily settled in France.

The New Theatre Committee is still interested to hear from experimental companies wanting to take part in presentation of work and discussions. Groups interested should write to the secretary of the New Theatre, Jean-Michel Ribes, Centre Français du Théatre, 7 rue du Helder, 75009, Paris, France.

MUSIC THEATRE TRAINING

The International Dance Section of the ITI has organised a 10-day seminar on music-theatre training at the Roy Hart Theatre, Anduze, France, from 12 August to 22 August.

Practical work will consist of group exercises in movement and voice-training, as well as individual help in singing, acting and dancing. Instruction will mostly be given by members of the Roy Hart Theatre, although participants may join in instruction also.

The dedication of the Roy Hart Theatre, members to involvement in interdisciplinary training and life-style will be the basic structure which all participants will be obliged to respect.

No fees will be required. However, there will be a modest charge for accommodation. People interested in attending the seminar should contact the Australian Centre, ITI. Applications close at the end of May.

30TH HOLLAND FESTIVAL

"A Festival of Fools", a festival of young performers for young audiences, is one of the exciting events planned for the 30th Holland Festival, being held from 1 June to 23 June this year.

Mozart and Puccini works will be performed by the famous Komische Opera from Berlin and the Netherlands Opera Company; contemporary dance performances will be given by Carolyn Carlson and Le Groupe de Recherches, from Paris; the Joyce Trisler Dans Company and Jennifer Muller; The Works from New York, and the Netherlands Dance Theatre. The Dutch National Ballet will present Giselle.

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre will present Measure for Measure, by William Shakespeare, and The Devil is an Ass, by Ben Jonson, in contrast to the New York Shakespeare Festival's performance For Coloured Girls who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf, dramatised poetry on the subject of young black womanhood.

Music-lovers will attend a wide variety of orchestral, chamber music, choral concerts and workshops.

Although Amsterdam will be the major centre, events have been planned in other parts of Holland.

People interested in obtaining tickets or programmes should contact the KLM Airlines office in Sydney.

ADDITIONS TO ITI LIBRARY

A Guide to the Australian Theatre. Edited last year by June Collis for the ITI and dealing mostly with professional theatre, its policies, subsidies and management, this informative booklet also contains a section on TIE teams, youth theatre and puppets, as well as listing some contemporary Australian playwrights, universities, and a dozen Australian drama and theatre books.

Directory of Canadian Plays and Playwrights, 1977. This informative directory contains synopses of more than 300 plays (including children's plays), biographies of 100 playwrights and an outline of the work of the Playwrights' Co-operative, Canada's "largest fulfilment centre for contemporary Canadian drama".

The Playwrights' Co-operative "publishes and distributes contemporary stage plays, provides a reading and consultative service for new and developing Canadian playwrights, and acts as an agency and service bureau".

Scripts can be ordered from the co-op as long as they are prepaid, and discounts are available.

Copies of the directory are available for $1 (Canadian) each to cover postage and handling from: The Playwrights Co-op, 8 York Street, 6th Floor, Toronto, MSJ 1R2, Ontario, Canada.

HUNGARIAN PUBLICATIONS

Dance Information No. 1

The International Dance Section of ITI has decided to publish information on the art of dance all over the world. The Hungarian ITI Centre is collecting, publishing and distributing information on professional dance companies' residence and staff, first nights and revivals, guest performances abroad and participation in competitions in the current year and in the coming season. The first bulletin contains information from professional dance companies in Finland, Hungary, Iran and USSR.

RePERTORY OF NEW PLAYS, 1976. This bulletin contains information and synopses of new plays presented in 1976 in German Democratic Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel and Yugoslavia.

PLAYSCRIPT. We have received an English translation of the play Matthew by Iceland playwright Guomundur Steinsson, published by the Hungarian ITI Centre.
Audiences are burgeoning, but . . .

"Has the AO done as much as it could . . . to fulfil its national brief?"

Sydney's dead, or at least low-key, musical theatre period between the end of the national company's summer opera season and the opening of its major subscription season early in June, has not been without interest — even stimulation and excitement — this year.

Even the Australian Opera itself has not subsided wholly into the touring woodwork of Canberra and Melbourne where most of its performing activities have been taking place: it has teamed up with the ABC to present a concert performance of Wagner's Parsifal at the Opera House, and it has evoked a positive barrage of big headlines in the daily and weekly press through the resignation of one general manager, John Winther, and the appointment of another, Peter Hemmings. Of the Parsifal, more anon; first, I would like to say a little about the change of helmsmen at the AO.

Under Winther, who took over the Australian Opera in 1973, the company has made giant strides forward in the artistic area. Its general level of performing standards has risen dramatically — to the point, indeed, where the name of the AO is increasingly known and respected in world opera circles. Audiences and box-office takings have continued to burgeon, particularly in Sydney, where interest in opera was already rapidly escalating — in anticipation, at least partly, of the imminent opening season at the Opera House — before Winther arrived on the local scene. And despite tightening economic conditions in the past year or so, Sydney seems to be maintaining the ability to fill rather long opera seasons to a phenomenal 90 to 95 per cent of audience capacity.

But the AO's success has not been nearly so great in other cities, most notably Melbourne, where much shorter seasons have not been able to achieve anything like the same audience response. Reputedly, artistic levels have not always been as high in Melbourne as in Sydney, and certainly there are no longer any premiers of new AO productions out of Sydney. And there is no doubt that Melbourne feels keenly its isolation from the biggest things the AO is doing these days, just as Sydney opera-lovers were miffed, a few years ago, when Melbourne and Adelaide saw Tito Gobbi and Marie Collier in Tosca and they didn't. Edward Downes, Richard Bonynge and Joan Sutherland have not performed staged opera in Melbourne in recent years, though they have been regular visitors to Sydney.

In view of the national brief of the AO, have the admittedly thorny problems of touring its biggest performing names been faced squarely and dealt with as well as possible during the Winther years? Admitting the immense costs of touring a full-scale opera company, has the AO done as much as it could to cater for opera-lovers in Adelaide, Brisbane and Canberra? There are people who love both art forms who insist that the Australian Ballet — despite a good deal more overseas touring — is fulfilling its national brief a good deal more effectively than the Australian Opera: showing its flag in more Australian cities, and more regularly. There are differences, yes; but there are a good many more similarities in the two art forms and the two companies.

In the repertory area, equally disturbing problems arise with the Winther years; for the only truly innovative period during those years came so close to their beginning as to cast doubt on the share of responsibility — or blame — Winther himself could properly assume after the event. The only native-born operas the AO has ever staged were presented in 1974 — first, a number of subscription performances of Peter Sculthorpe's Rites of Passage, which was also aired later in Adelaide and Melbourne; then the double bill of FelixWerder'sThe Affair and Larry Sitsky's superb one-act Lenz, which received a paltry two performances early in 1974 and have not been seen since. The only other AO venture into the realms of home-grown musical theatre was the disastrous Craig McGregor rock opera Hero, which had a brief, costly and wholly uninspiring run at Sydney's Seymour Centre in 1976.

There were other ventures off the beaten track, of course: the spectacularly successful production of Leos Janacek's Jenufa in 1974, the disastrous dance/commedia dell'arte programme early in 1976; the excellent presentation of Benjamin Britten's Albert Herring in the same season; the good attempt at the Brecht/Weill horror musical, Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny early in 1975; the innovative staging triumph of the concert hall Aida in 1975. But the 1976 winter season was without noticeable innovation and no 20th-century work, or a single note of Australian music, is to be performed by the national company in 1977. Four of the five new productions for this year come from the pens of some of the best-known composers of the 19th-century, though not all the works are well-known: Puccini (Madama Butterfly), Donizetti (Lucrezia Borgia), Verdi (Macbeth) and Wagner (The Flying Dutchman); the fifth, Daniel Francois Aubet's Fra Diavolo, was premiered in 1830 and is merely a lesser-known work in a thoroughly familiar idiom. We do not know, of course, how the blame for this retreat into the standard repertory ought to be apportioned as between Winther and his board; nor does it really matter. The fact of the contraction itself does.

The economic crisis the AO has had to face in the past few months has had a parallel crisis in the equally — perhaps even more — important area of creative direction. For better or worse, subsidy money is the lifeblood of any professional opera company; but a sense of artistic direction, and continuing proof that a heavily subsidised company like the AO is conscious of its duty to reach as many, and as widely spaced, Australians as possible — and to present home-grown works — is essential. Otherwise, why should the community at large bother to sustain a very large and expensive performing institution dedicated to perpetuation of an art form many people regard as anachronistic, even irrelevant, in the 1970s? Of course, opera isn't irrelevant to these or any other days; but it must be able and willing to articulate its own idea of its function in modern Australian society, to argue intelligently with critics, to tailor its hopes and aspirations to accord with realities; to contract its operations when the economic climate is bleak and to expand them when things are on the affluent upswing. It must continually be innovative in a way the AO has not been toward the end of the Winther years, regardless of who has been responsible.

Like Stephen Hall and Donald B. McDonald, who preceded him at the helm of the national company, John Winther has fulfilled a vital role in the development of the Australian Opera; but his departure is not necessarily the omen of evil things ahead for the company that some people have been claiming in recent weeks. His successor, Peter Hemmings, has an excellent reputation both as an efficient administrator and for his adventurous approach to repertory planning with Scottish
Opera, where he has been administrator since it was founded in 1962. We all regret the end of the long and mostly fruitful association between John Winther and the AO; but I for one am very enthusiastic that he is to have such a promising successor as Peter Hemmings.

Both the AO-ABC copresent version of Wagner's Parsifal and the recent University of New South Wales Opera's staged version of Alessandro Scarlatti's Eraclea were ambitious undertakings which didn't come off quite as well as they might have.

In terms of its long-term significance for the future of blockbuster opera in Australia, the Parsifal was far and away the more significant. I thoroughly disagree with those of my colleagues who have objected to the whole undertaking on the ground that it was a concert version of what ought to be a fully staged work. The biggest obstacles to the live presentation of all the late Wagner works are orchestral; modern stagecraft can cope with, or sidestep if need be, the more fanciful demands of Wagner's incredibly detailed stage directions, but nothing can get round the gruelling, insistently demanding of the orchestra, quite a different sort. Listening to Roger Grant Dickson, who sang Sarastro, it was all but swallowed alive by the other major principals did not: they played magnificently from the 4 p.m. start to the end at 10.30 p.m. or so.

And Cillario lasted it out too, of course — with missing a beat or flagging in his absolute control of the unfold ing performance. He was the unequivocal mastermind of a musical experience that thoroughly convinced many of the sceptics, who had come prepared to endure one act of make-do Wagner, to tarry on to the very end and go home thoroughly satisfied — even exalted — by the experience.

Of the soloists, only Reid Bunger as Klingssor was able to beat the orchestra without fail; but then he has only to last out half an act, vocally, whereas Kundry and Gurnemanz have two big acts and Parsifal himself a harrowing three. Ronald Dowd made a valiant attempt at the title role, but could not quite match its demands; Donald Shanks's first act portrayal of Gurnemanz was superb, but he was measurably less effective in Act III. Lone Koppel-Winther, inspired perhaps to some extent by Bunger's stiff competition in Act II, gave the performance of her life as Kundry; and the audience rightly ignored the "kind request" in the programme not to applaud until the end of the performance, giving its warmest ovation at the end of Act II. John Shaw (Amfortas) and Alan Light (Titurel) were both excellent.

Finally, one missed the additional bonus of a fully-staged Parsifal much as one might miss the frosting on a very rich and exotic gourmet cake; there was more than enough musical sustenance to satisfy the most demanding Wagnerian appetite, but it would have been even nicer to have gone that last inch after having trod so many miles. Perhaps next year — and the year after that, maybe — a start on the very Ring itself . . .

The other major operatic event of the month, Eraclea, was an achievement of quite a different sort. Listening to Roger Covell's musically excellent Scarlatti, at the University of New South Wales' science theatre, was an almost unequivocal joy; watching the unfolding of Bernd Benthaak's precocious production on Fiona Reilly's stark scaffolding of a set more often evoked the heart-in-the-mouth feeling one gets while watching the death-defying high trapeze act at the circus — especially when one was forever being visually reminded that one of the principals, Grant Dickson, had been injured in rehearsal by the twin facts that he carried one arm in a sling and a not-quite-unobstrusive fieldman was always lurking below him just off stage, forever vigilant lest he should lose his footing. (Carolyn Vaughan, also injured in a theatrical accident, was unable to appear in this Eraclea at all.)

There were too many female voices (some of the relevant parts, of course, originally sung by male castrati when Eraclea was first presented in 1700), though it was hard to fault the singing of Beverly Bergen in the title role; or Judy Glen as Livio or Robyn Castle as Decio or Grant Dickson as Alfeo. These singers were outstanding in a remarkably even cast where there were few musical lapses and no painfully weak links; Dickson, in particular, is singing much better this year than I have ever heard him before. (In the March-April issue of Theatre Australia, I inadvertently accused him of vocal shortcomings in the AO's summer Magic Flute, when I meant to refer instead to Clifford Grant, who sang Sarastro.)

And despite the visual precariously of the production, it was by and large successful in avoiding the kind of mesmerising staticness that is all but endemic to modern-day productions of baroque opera, with its interminably long arias and its general lack of meaningful dramatic action built into the text and the score.

The Gilbert and Sullivan Society, whose Mikado was all but swallowed alive by the opera theatre at the Sydney Opera House a year ago, coped a good deal more successfully with the venue when it presented The Gondoliers for a brief season toward the end of March; though for all that, something of the sparkle and spontaneity of the earlier production was missing. Doug Kingsman's sets were perhaps a trifle too picturesque, but not obtrusively so; Brian Phillips's direction and costume designs were thoroughly in tune with the piece and the capabilities of the company. Bransby Byrne kept firm control of the judiciously augmented forces in the pit and produced an overall pleasing musical result.

William Murray was an outstanding Grand Inquisitor; and Doreen Morrow and Petah Burns were excellent as the true loves of the gondoliers of the title, Gianetta and Tessa. Robert Hatherly, Mary Blake, John Wirth-Linquist and Roslyn Dansie were their usually effective selves as the Duke and Duchess of Plaza-Toro, Marco and Casilda respectively; Patrick Donnelly (as Giuseppe Palmieri, the baritone gondolier) was superb, setting a new personal performance standard both vocally and dramatically. The Australian Opera is to tackle The Gondoliers for a three-week season starting on 28 September in the same venue; it will be most interesting to see how it copes with the demands and pitfalls of this piece, which is one of the more difficult G. and S. operas to bring off successfully.
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The real Rachmaninov?

"The Bells . . . is a splendid piece which gives us a new understanding of what Rachmaninov's career might have been . . ."}

Rachmaninov is often spoken of as a composer of second-rate music with first-rate ambitions. Justly so, in my opinion, if we confine ourselves to the orchestral works by which he is mainly represented in our concert halls: the richly melodious but disjointed piano concertos, the alternately torpid and gushing symphonies. On the evidence of his choral symphony, The Bells, we should probably view Rachmaninov as a composer destined to reach very high rank indeed with the setting of words in a vocal/orchestral texture but whose natural abilities in this field were stifled through the circumstances of his life and career. As an exile from Russia after the Bolshevist revolution Rachmaninov was cut off from the singers who should have performed his music in the language in which he set it and from the choral organisations which would have looked to him for new works. In the West he had to make his way as a composer of symphonies and concertos, genres in which barriers of alien cultural tradition (in terms of social organisation and language) did not apply. The pity of this is that Rachmaninov apparently needed the extra musical stimulus and continuities provided by words to create truly convincing and consistently interesting and varied large-scale structures. The Bells, based on the poem of the same name by Edgar Allan Poe, is superior in cohesion, variety, impetus and rhythmic interest to all of his purely instrumental compositions involving orchestra. It is, in fact, a splendid piece which gives us a new understanding of what Rachmaninov's career might have been if political events had not caused him to be one of the culturally homeless outcasts of the 20th century.

Rachmaninov did not set Poe's words in their original form; he worked with a free translation made by the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balмонт, the same poet, incidentally, whose words Stravinsky set in his early and hugely difficult choral piece The Kingdom of the Stars. It is essential, therefore, to record the work with the Russian text that Rachmaninov actually set. This is a daunting occupation for the English-speaking soloists and chorus assembled for the new recording of The Bells made under Andre Previn's direction in London (HMV ASD 3284 stereo/quad compatible). I am not competent to say how successfully they surmount this challenge. Certainly, Robert Tear, the tenor soloist, has a great deal of experience in singing Russian and has recorded for Argo a complete disc of Rachmaninov songs (Argo ZRG 730). If we compare the new recording with the version issued a few years ago on Melodiya/HMV (ASD 2539), we certainly notice a different flavour in the sound of the chorus and in some of the passages for soloists. That recording was made by Russian soloists and chorus with the Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kiril Kondrashin. Some of the differences, no doubt, can be accounted for by different methods of vocal production as well as by small differences in enunciation. If that were the only point in favour of the older recording, it would not deter most people, I imagine, from getting hold of the new version. In fact, however, the older recording is a particularly splendid performance and still sounds extremely vivid, immediate and generous in sound as well as in interpretation. The soloists in the Russian recording are notably convincing. Mikhail Dovenman strikes the greatest contrast; with his steady, clear and supple voice he immediately sets the tone of this symphony's silver-tongued and cheerfully tingling opening movement. Robert Tear in the new version employs that avuncular manner into which he seems to be increasingly settling and which makes him sound as though he is preparing to take over the oratorio style of Richard Lewis. In addition to that, his voice has developed a very wide vibrato indeed. The combination of these factors means that he cannot easily persuade us that he is singing about the bells of youth, sparkling enchantment and sighs in the snow. The other Russian soloist who is far from being matched by his English counterpart is Aleksandr Bolshakov. His rock-like strength and generosity in sound as well as in interpretation make him an altogether more awesome and fatalistic effect in comparison with the singing of John Shirley-Quirk. Shirley-Quirk is an extraordinarily intelligent bass baritone with a fine voice; but his style and timbre give the impression that he is trying too hard to underline the points of meaning in the text and create an impression of restlessness and anxiety to please.

Unfortunately, the older recording is apparently not now available except as part of a big box containing most of Rachmaninov's major orchestral works. This means that the new recording is the only one that most listeners will be able to afford to acquire, especially if they already have satisfactory versions of other Rachmaninov works in which they may be interested. With this in mind, we can take a more encouraging attitude to the new version and recommend it as certainly likely to win friends for the The Bells. The recording is well proportioned and lively, even if some of its incidents are — and one is surprising from a conductor like Previn — executed with less rhythmic precision than in the older recording. Previn's main limitation as an interpreter of the work seems to be that he wants to make it sound more ingratiating than his Russian counterpart. I do not think it needs to sound ingratiating, especially in the wild clamour of the third movement, which matches the nightmarish tone of Poe's words, and in the iron fatalism of the last movement. That suggestion of a softening of fibre or a small addition of sugar or fairy-floss to the essence of the music also makes itself felt in the short piece that fills out side two, the famous Vocalise in Rachmaninov's own orchestral transcription. The Vocalise is a lovely work and seems all the lovelier when its wordless appeal is treated in an objective manner. Certainly, Robert Tear, the tenor soloist, has a great deal of experience in singing Russian and has recorded for Argo a complete disc of songs by Rachmaninov and Glinka (DGG 2550 725). Although Vishnevskaya is far from having an ideal voice for the performance of this piece, she manages to keep the vibrato increasingly evident in her singing under control and she treats it as a song of some substance instead of merely as gilded decoration. This disc of songs, in which the great cellist's piano-playing is particularly sympathetic, is eloquent in its treatment of Rachmaninov but rather more interesting for its eight Glinka songs, which retain the shapeliness and modesty of the earlier Russian song tradition and seem to work better in repeated listening than the Rachmaninov songs, fine though these are.
Ray Stanley’s 

WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS

Lots of eyebrows were raised when Graeme Blundell replaced Lewis Fiander for the tour of Same Time Next Year; yet in the London production same role, played by Michael Crawford, has been taken over for eight weeks by Derek Nimmo . . . Looks as if the smash hit The Twenties And All That Jazz, with its cast, could be exported. Two London producers and two from New York are all displaying interest . . . Don’t be surprised if Yootha Joyce and Brian Murphy come out in a comedy later in the year. Title? . . .

Joyce and Brian Murphy come out in a . . . Two London producers . . .

Same Time Next Year, . . .

Stewart and Mona Washbourne. And . . .

Bill Armstrong probably believes in the Australian recording industry more than any other individual in or out of the business. Throughout his long career as a recording engineer, producer, and now emperor of a minor recording empire, Bill has employed a quirky mixture of philanthropy and business acumen to launch names, labels and albums into the Oz marketplace. . . .

Last month he was at it again, or still at it, when he released the first album on his new 'Jazz & Jazz' label: Tom Baker's San Francisco Jazz Band. Bill celebrated the occasion by bringing the Sydney-based band to Melbourne for the launch, where they performed, among other things, a free concert in the park and a Sunday night special at Smacka's Place, the trad jazz Mecca of Melbourne.

In the flesh, Tom and his mates are an enthusiastic lot who perform engagingly and tirelessly, and their high spirits and accomplished musicianship are well represented in this, their recording debut. The album provides a good cross-section of the band's extensive repertoire in twelve tunes from the twenties — by Scott Joplin, Lu Watters and King Oliver, among others.

Tom, a native of the West Coast of the U.S. who came to Australia as a teenager, did not play jazz until 1972, after studying music at high school and university. Sydney jazz people will be aware of this tall 24 year old from his regular appearances with several bands and from the 30th Australian Jazz Convention in 1975, when he formed the San Francisco Jazz Band.

Bill Armstrong was at the Convention. He says, "I decided to record the band two minutes after I heard them. We got round to doing it last October. The recording session started informally, without much fuss. A few guests including Eric Child crammed into the control room at AMI Sydney. By lunch time we had 15 takes and 10 good tunes. After lunch the band seemed more relaxed. Another 12 takes, 7 more good tunes and the session was over."
“A triumphant tribute to the pluralistic society in which conventional sexuality is not the only way...”

Drag Show


Recommended Retail Price: $6.95.

At last, the Ultimate Theatre Book!” boast the publishers of Currency's Drag Show, and indeed the lavender-and-pink paged book which marks their entry into the coffee-table market does provide an assault on the mind and senses in a refreshingly theatrical way. Twice articles are written up in dramatic dialogue, and with female impersonator Holly Brown the emotive stage directions (“Holly re-enters, sweeping expansively”; “Holly: at a loss with the change of subject” etc.) actually illuminate the person. This is not only entertaining and readable, but it helps the interviewer get over some difficult moments, such as where Holly evades his questions about when in a sexual encounter he considers Spears' elocution teacher a "pseudo-transvestite" effeminate homosexual, while he considers Spears' elocution teacher a plain effeminate homosexual with his offstage friend Bruce a standard “heterosexual transvestite”. I am dubious about the value of these distinctions in such a short article, but at least I inspired me to reconsider the speech of the characters to see whether I found his categories useful. His inclusion of Dick Emery and Danny LaRue would bear further examination, as would his brief reference to transvestite disguise in Shakespeare's comedies.

But perhaps I should not object to brevity in the article, as it leaves room for the far more valuable interviews with and statements by the men/women with whom Drag Show is concerned. Even so, with the tantalising inclusion of Aunty Jack (where was Edna Everstage while this book was being designed?), Wonder Woman and Cinderella at the beginning, one cannot help musing on the popularity of drag in Australian theatres. If it is so, as Alex Hay suggested in a paper at the 1976 Playwrights' Conference, that the actor is essentially an androgynous being, then drag is much more basic to all drama and theatre than some of Currency's writers would have.

Reminding us that most people are only prepared to tolerate "legitimate departures" from the "mythical norm" when they appear in art, New South Wales Civil Liberties Council Secretary Zdenkowski sees some possible cathartic effect as the best result this book can hope for. But surely, if all drama is of all sexes, then there is reason to think people could be confronted by the transvestism they so love on the stage.

Certainly the book is cathartic. Not quite my choice as a birthday present for my maiden aunt, it must nevertheless appeal to many people who want to look at the pictures and consider the different kinds of drag about which they may never have thought. While I was arranging the book around to review, numerous people, no doubt arrested by the gross picture of Livermore on the cover, stopped me to ask about it, and most of them had some kind of story or question about transvestism. I have to say that most of those questions are answered within this book. All power to Currency and to their courageously outspoken subject, who have put Drag Show so reasonably within reach of the coffee-tables. On second thoughts about it, I might just send a copy to my maiden aunt.
AUSTRALIAN THEATRE, Newtown (51 3841)
The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein (Offenbach) in English: 9, 10, 11 June. A Proszenia Theatre production directed by William Abernethy, musical director, Greg Hooking.

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (699 3922)
I Suppose I'll Have To Lie by Michael Cove; directed by Raymond Omondi; The Advance, by John Mulligan; and Doolan, by Richard Tulloch, both directed by John Wegg; all designed by Yoshi Tosa (continuing on schools tour of north-west New South Wales).

BALMAIN BIJOU (827 3652)
Wanderwoman, by Reg Livermore; directed by Peter Batey (continuing).

BONAPARTE'S THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 2555 or 357 2596)
The Cake Man, by William Shakespeare; designed by Doug Anderson, directed by Michael O'Kane; set designer, Michael O'Kane.

CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC (27 4206 or 27 9271)
The Bartered Bride (Smetana) in English: 24, 26, 28, 30 June. Director, Ronal Jackson; musical director, Eric Clapham; set designer, Michael O'Kane.

ENSEMBLE (929 8877)
Medal of Honor Rug, by Tom Cole; designed by Doug Anderson, directed by Hayes Gordon, with Arnie Goldman and Fred Steele.

GENESIAN (827 3023)
The Glass Butterfly, by William Golden; directed and designed by Margaret Remeck; with Dennis Allen and Pauline Furlong (to 11 June).

HER MAJESTY'S (212 3411)
A Chorus Line, original production conceived, choreographed and directed by Michael Bennett; co-choreographer, Bob Avian; book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante; music by Marvin Hamlisch; lyrics by Edward Kleban; choreography and direction recreated for Australia by Bayork Lee and Jeff Hamlin. Cast of 30 (from 21 May).

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY, NEWCASTLE (26 2526)
Hunter Theatre (61 3519).

Hamlet by William Shakespeare; directed by Terence Clarke with Alan Becher and Pat Bishan (to 15 June).
The Breakwater by John O'Donoghue; directed by Terence Clarke. (24 June-16 July).

INDEPENDENT (929 7377)
Our Town, by Thornton Wilder; directed by Doris Fitton, costume designs by Barbara J. Mason, lighting by Mick Schlieper. (to 4 June).

Hamlet, by William Shakespeare; directed by Colin Kenny, (from 6 June).

A Good Man, Charlie Brown, by Clark Gesner; directed by Hugh Munro, designed by Hugh Munro. With Hugh Munro, Cecily Slade and Robert Wells, (continuing; Saturday matinees only).

KILLARA 680 COFFEE THEATRE (498 7552)

MARIAN STREET (498 3166)
The Barber of Seville (Rossini) in Italian: 10, 16 June, 18 June (mat), 24, 29 June. Conductor, Richard Bonygne; producer, George Ogilvie; designer, Kristian Fredrikson; resident producer, Michael Beauchamp. Joan Sutherland as Lucrezia Borgia.

The Happy Hunter by Georges Feydeau, directed by Alastair Duncan, designed by Brian Nickless. With Anne Haddy and Max Meldrum, (to 21 May).

The Breakwater by John O'Donoghue; directed by Terence Clarke. (24 June-16 July).

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (909 8222)
Last For Power: or Perils at Parramatta, written and directed by Michael Boddy,
with Alton Harvey, John Allen and Anne Semler (continuing).

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE
RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY, WAGGA (064 21 2134)

Once More With Feeling, by Peggy Mortimer and Enzo Toppiano; directed by Peggy Mortimer, with the Toppiano Family and Lee Young (continuing).

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare; directed and designed by David M. Martin, (to 4 June).

Enter A Free Man by Tom Stoppard; directed by Paul Quinn, designed by Andrew Blaxland (from 18 June).

THEATRE AUSTRALIA JUNE 1977 77

Queensland: 1-8 June; 1-18 June.

Q THEATRE, Penrith (047 21 5735)
What The Butler Saw by Joe Orton; directed by Adam Salzer, designed by Arthur Dicks, (at Railway Institute, Penrith, 19-22 May and 8-12 June; Civic Centre, Bankstown, 25-29 May; Marsden Rehabilitation Centre, Parramatta, 1-5 June).

A Hard God by Peter Kenna; directed by Kevin Jackson, designed by Arthur Dicks. (Railway Institute, Penrith, from 22 June.)

The Coming of Stork by David Williams; directed by Terry O'Connell, (9-12 June and 16-19 June). Bye Plane, one performance (11 June).

ST JAMES LUNCHTIME PLAYHOUSE (232 8570)
Before Dawn by Terence Rattigan; directed by Peter Williams (to 10 June).

Something Unspoken by Tennessee Williams; directed by Peter Williams (from 13 June).

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
Downstairs: Crow based on the poetry of Ted Hughes; co-directed by Geoff Doyle and David May. A Theatre Workshop presentation (to 28 May).

Kinetic Energy Dance Company: schools programme and new adult programme (6-18 June). Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare; directed by Neil Armfield, presented by the English Department drama studies unit (from 27 June).

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (2 0588)
Exhibition Hall: The Theatres of Sydney (to 5 June).

THEATRE COSMOPOLITAN (300 0157)
Plaza Theatre, Bondi Junction La Traviata (Verdi) in English: 27, 28 May; 1, 3, 4 June; school matinees, 6, 7, 8, 9 June. Producer, Gary Stonehouse; musical director, David Andrews; costume designs, Myriam van Sint Jan. With Margaret Andrews as Violetta, Roy Ramsden as Alfredo, Vadim Laptev as Germont.

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6577)
Doctor in Love produced by Gary Van Egmond and Paul Dainty, with Robin Nedwell, Geoffrey Davis (to 11 June). Funny Peculiar by Mike Stott; directed by Jeff Cantwell. With George Layton and Bruce Spence (from 18 June).

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES OPERA (662 3412)
Science Theatre: Joan of Arc (Verdi) in English: 28, 31 May; 3 June. Directed by Bernd Benthaak; musical director, Roger Covell. With Beverley Bergen (Joan of Arc), John Main (King Charles VII), Neil Easton (Giacomino).

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
Arielde and Heloise by Ronald Millar; director, Ian Thomson (continuing to 18 June, Wed.-Sat. 8.15 p.m.). With Ian Grealy and Toni Pankhurst.

The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon, director Jennifer Raddourne (opens June 30).

LA BOITE (36 1932)
Oedipus by Seneca; director, Rick Billingham (10 June-2 July, Thurs-Sat 8 p.m., Sun 26 June, 5.30 p.m.).

CAMERATA (36 6561) at the Avalon Theatre.

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov; director, Anne Monser (continuing to 18 June, Thurs-Sun, 8 p.m.).

COMMUNITY (356 9311 A/H 356 9936) at the Theatre of Sydney.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 5177)
The Australian Ballet. One Day (1-8 June); Merry Widow (10-18 June).

LIVING ROOM THEATRE RESTAURANT (221 2805)
Jam on Your Spanish Fly, director and designer, Frank Mesh; musical director, Norman Smyth. With Brian Tait and Sheila Bradley.

POPULAR THEATRE TRouPE (36 1745) Millionaire's Handicap, Fall-Out and Follow Me Stumped are in repertoire.

Townsville Pacific Festival (1-11 June), Tully (14 June), Cairns (16, 17 June), Innisfail (18 June).

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 5177)
The Last of the Knucklemen by John Powers; director, Joe MacCollum; designer, Peter Cooke. (On tour to 17 June. Opens Brisbane 22 June, Tues-Sat., 8 p.m. Mats Wed. and Sat.) With Phil Myoe, David Cleland, Peter Kowitz, Bruce Parr and Douglas Hedge.

QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY Not playing in June.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space: Association of Community Theatre. Hunting by Veronica Sweeney and Glitter by Philip Murphy; directed by Martin Christmas (2-11 June).

Don't Piddle Against the Wind, Mate by Ken Ross; directed by Patrick Frost (16-25 June). Food, a musical by Tony Strachan; directed by Malcolm Blaylock (30 June-9 July).

For Playhouse see SATC...

Queensland: 10-27 June; 1-18 June.

OLD TOTE (663 6122)
Drama Theatre, Opera House: Caesar and Cleopatra by George Bernard Shaw; directed by William Redmond, designed by Shaun Gurton and Mike Bridges, with Robyn Nevin and Richard Meikle, (to 7 June).

Parade Theatre: The Alchemist by Ben Jonson; directed by John Clark, designed by Allan Lees, with Bruce Spence, John Krummel, and Colin Croft, (to 24 May).

Unspoken Acts by Colin Free, directed by Peter Collingwood, designed by Yoshi Tosa. With Ron Haddrick, Shane Porteous and Reg Gillam (from 1 June).

York Theatre, Seymour Centre: Wild Oats by John O'Keeffe; directed by Mick Rodger, designed by Anne Frazier (from 22 June).

Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare; directed by John Bell, designed by Larry Eastwood (sets) and Kim Carpenter (costumes). With Robert Alexander, Maggie Blinco, Peter Carroll, Ralph Cotterill, Robert Davis, Judi Farr, Drew Forsythe, Ivar Kants, Deborah Kennedy, Tony Llewellyn-Jones, Berys Marsh, Gordon McDougall, Stephen Thomas, Alan Tobin, Anna Volska (from 18 June).

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IMI R O D (69 5003)
Timber and Enzo Toppano; directed by Peter Williams (to 18 June).

WALES OPERA (662 3412)
The Coroner's Report by John Arden; directed by Denis Pimlott, designed by John Bradbury (to 5 June).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEATRE VICTIM (660 7158)
by Philip Gidley; directed by Guy C. McInnes.

YORK THEATRE, Seymour Centre: English: 28, 31 May; 3 June. Directed by Bernd Benthaak; musical director, Roger Covell. With Beverley Bergen (Joan of Arc), John Main (King Charles VII), Neil Easton (Giacomino).

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For Playhouse see SATC...
ROYALTY THEATRE
The Physicists by Friedrich Durrenmatt; directed by Alan Lovett (to 4 June).

SHERIDAN THEATRE (267 3751)
I Sat With My Love by Barbara Eite; directed by Helen Cunningham (to 4 June).

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)
All My Sons by Arthur Miller; directed by David Williamson, designed by John Cervenka (to 18 June).

COMPANY (51 5151)
Too Early to Say by Michael Cove and Ron Blair; directed by Colin George, designed by Rodney Ford (23 June-9 July).

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
Same Time Next Year by Bernard Slade; directed by Gordon Hunt, with Graeme Blundell and Nancye Hayes (to 4 June).

MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN OPERA
Princess Theatre (662 1355)
The Marriage of Figaro (Mozart) in English: 19 May. Producer, John Copley; designers, Michael Stennett (costumes) and Henry Bardon (sets); conductor, Peter Robinson. With Cynthia Johnston, Nance Grant, Jennifer Bermingham, Rosina Raisbeck, Ronald Maconaghie, John Pringle, Robert Gard and Neil Warren-Smith.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Pram Factory: Front Theatre
The Hills Family Show (to 5 June).
The Uranium Show by John Romeril; directed by Carol Parker (from 30 June).

Pram Factory: Back Theatre.
The Death Show; performed by The Stasis Group (from 16 June).

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 3211)
The Twenties and All That Jazz; a musical recollection with John Diedrich, Caroline Gillmer and John O'May; musical director, Michael Tyack; choreography, Jillian Fitzgerald; design, Trina Parker; presented by J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd. and Michael Edgley International Pty. Ltd.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
The Great Elocution of sex by Earl Wilson Jnr; directed by Wherrett, designed by Larry Eastwood.

ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIAN THEATRES
The Rocky Horror Show; presented by Harry M. Miller (to 25 May).

VICTORIA STATE OPERA (41 5061)
Geoffrey Goodsoand Me Or Wrongnote and The Horrible Honky Tonks, by Peter Narroway (on schools tour, Term 1).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
CIVIC THEATRE RESTAURANT (72 1595)
The Five Past Nine Show, with Joan Sydney and John Rennie.

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)
Travesties by Tom Stoppard; director, John Milson (25 May-18 June). With Edgar Metcalfe as Henry Carr. The Human Voice by Jean Cocteau; director, John Milson, performed by Judy Nunn. A late night show opening 3 June.

WA BALLET
No public performances until September.

WA OPERA COMPANY
In recess.

WESTMINISTER THEATRE COMPANY
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LECTURER IN SPEECH AND VOICE

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To teach voice and speech to students of the acting course; to work with the directors of play productions; and to take other voice and speech classes as required.

Qualifications:
Experience of teaching voice and speech as they relate to the actor; experience of work in the professional theatre and an appropriate teaching qualification are desirable, but not essential.

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The National Institute of Dramatic Art is the first full-time tertiary school for the professional theatre in Australia offering courses in acting, technical production, design and direction.

Applications giving all relevant details and names of two referees to: The Director, The National Institute of Dramatic Art, P.O. Box 1, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033 Australia. Phone: 663 3815.

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The Theatre Board of the University of Melbourne calls for applications for two (2) positions as actors in residence and one (1) position as an actor/director in residence. Applications will be accepted from either individuals or a group of three (3) actors (one of whom must be able to undertake a directorial role.)

The positions shall be for 8 weeks commencing June 20th, at a salary (inclusive of allowances) in the region of $150/week.

The Board envisages that the successful applicants will work together to:
(a) encourage the development of student writing for the theatre by workshop and production of student texts;
(b) help to develop the quality of student acting;
(c) undertake exploratory work in theatre of their own choice with a view to the presentation of work in progress;
(d) provide a resource for the use of drama in the teaching life of the University.

Applicants should have professional experience in the theatre. Written applications giving an outline of experience and some indication of how the applicant might approach the project should be directed to:

The Secretary, Theatre Board,
University of Melbourne,
PARKVILLE 3052


A.T.J. BELL
Registrar

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VICTORIA

CLAYTON THEATRE GROUP, The Legend of King O'Malley by Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis directed by Dean Nottle. From Friday 19 June to 27 June. Clayton Auditorium, Cooke St. Clayton. Bookings 232 2535

NEW THEATRE, Waiting for Lefty by Clifford Odets directed by Don Munro. Every Friday, Saturday, Sunday from 15 July to 14 August. The Organ Factory, Page Street, Clifton Hill. Bookings 317 7923

TRINITY COLLEGE, This Old Man Comes Rolling Home by Dorothy Hewett directed by Ian Robinson. From 21 June to 25 June. Union Theatre, Melbourne University. Bookings 347 4186

NEW SOUTH WALES

GENESIAN THEATRE, A Man for All Seasons, directed by Colleen Clifford. Fridays and Saturdays 8.15; Sundays 7.30 from 2 July. 420 Kent St. Sydney. Bookings 827 3023

BLACK STUMP PLAYERS present Lunchtime Theatre at 12.50 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays, State Office Block, Philip and Bent Streets, Sydney. Next production from 12 July for two weeks. Contact Tony Ralph for details 20 586.

THE ROCKS PLAYERS will be presenting in July, Impromptus for Leisure, French playlets in English, at the Orient Hotel in The Rocks. Can we offer to play in your Tavern or Coffee Bar or anywhere ...? Contact Bill Pepper 231 2155 or Slater Smith 221 2144

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Late Letters

I have been made aware of your insulting and pointed remarks about Douglas Fairbanks Jnr. You have every right to say anything you desire about my activities as a senior producer of this season, but no right to insult a leading member of, not only the theatrical profession, but a distinguished military, business and a public service figure.

I can think of no further words to say on this subject but to take the opportunity to enclose a detailed biography of Mr Fairbanks so that you will not make the same ignorant mistake again.

PAUL ELLIOTT, Sydney.

As a devoted admirer of Jack Hibberd's plays, I felt mentally like a squashed fly after reading his review of The Game of Love and Chance in the Feb/March issue.

Although the lines have not the wit that makes A Flea In Her Ear delectable, surely the gay, nonsensical, inconsequential romp with its ironical slant has its place.

It was deliciously staged at the South Yarra production and admirably acted and a most welcome antidote in this world with its accumulation of man's inhumanity to man.

Also, please allow me to resuscitate the subject of Petrouchka. I did not see any mention of the fabulous production of this ballet by the Colonel de Basil Company at Sydney's Theatre Royal (the old one), in 1939. I have the programme still. It was unforgettable.

BETTY HOWARD, Richmond, Vic.

Coming up in JULY

David Marr on the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust; Peter Kenna on Vaudeville Follies; Puppets and the Theatre Awards.

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Credits

Photos: Peter Holderness 8-12; David Parker 13-15, 36; Dave Excell 18-19; Michael Tubberty 24; Bill Beavis 25; David Burch 27; Mum Flynn 53; and the theatre companies.

Information services: M & L Casting Pty. Ltd.