Theatre Australia: Australia's magazine of the performing arts 2(4) August 1977

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Nimrod Theatre
500 Elizabeth St
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Adelaide
Her Majesty’s Theatre

from Thursday 25 August
William Shakespeare’s

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

directed by John Bell
Set design Larry Eastwood
Costume design Kim Carpenter
Robert Alexander, Maggie Blinco, Peter Carroll, Drew Forsythe,
Ivar Kants, Deborah Kennedy, Gordon McDougall, Dennis Scott,
Anna Volska, Stanley Walsh
‘witty, intelligent, exuberant, emotional, sensual and robust’ —
— The Australian

Winner of the 1975 National Critics Award:
John Bell/Best Director

(presented by the Adelaide
Festival Centre Trust)

Melbourne
Playbox Theatre

Gordon Chater as Robert O’Brien

The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin

by Steve J. Spears
directed by Richard Wherrett
designed by Larry Eastwood
‘The talk of Melbourne for months to come’ — The Age
or there again ‘It should run for years’ — The Australian
Winner of Four National Professional Theatre Awards and
Three National Critics’ Awards

(presented by Parachute
Productions Pty Ltd)

Sydney
Nimrod Upstairs

from Saturday 30 July

GOING HOME

by Alma de Groen
directed by Richard Wherrett
designed by Ian Robinson
Gary Day, James Elliott, Nancye Hayes, Chris Haywood,
Catherine Wilkin
‘Ego is not a dirty word’ — Skyhooks

Sydney
Nimrod Downstairs

from Saturday 27 August

FANSHEN

by David Hare
based on the book by William Hinton
directed by Richard Wherrett
Set design Eamon D’Arcy
costumes Marea Fowler
Tim Burns, Margaret Cameron, Nick Lathouris, John Ley, Suzanne
Roylance, George Shevtsov, Stephen Thomas
“A major piece of theatre, a play without precedent in the history
of British theatre, engrossing and unmissable” — The Guardian,
London
Theatre

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This month is a time for double celebrations. Ten candles for Carlton theatre — so central to the new wave of Australian drama and all that has entailed — and one for Theatre Australia.

The two anniversaries are connected. The first production at La Mama, Three Old Friends, was written by Jack Hibberd and performed by Graeme Blundell, David Kendall and Bruce Knappett. Bruce was a founding editor and now Associate Editor of Theatre Australia. Jack and Graeme are on the Advisory Board. But in the wider view it is the major change of the alternative becoming the accepted, of the fringe writers (that is Australian writers) becoming established playwrights and out-of-the-way theatres becoming mainstream that has given sufficient activity for a monthly magazine to record. And a publication which can be national without being merely patriotic, which can have ninety nine percent indigenous content without being parochial.

Like the development of theatre generally in this country, perhaps, the magazine began looking too much to English models. Like the theatre it now has its own unique style, character and format. But like the theatre it took a certain rebelliousness and faith to make it work. Before 1967 actors here were largely dissuaded from speaking their own tongue despite the enormous impact of The Doll. The stage then, as now in many ways, was dominated by the practice of the old country (the National Theatre in Perth has just appointed an Englishman as Artistic Director), and though the MTC did many local plays, a new initiative similar to Lawler's triumph was needed. It came from a group of people working at La Mama — most university contemporaries. Hibberd, Romeril, Buzo, Oakley and later Williamson proved the local idiom again to be as dramatic as the received mode. It took other university wits and a Shakespeare in England, a Goethe in Germany and a Pushkin in Russia to make similar advances. In this issue we publish Marvellous Melbourne, significantly group evolved, though first penned by Hibberd and Romeril. The first publication of the play to celebrate the first APG production, and with a title that rings out the local excited optimism of the time.

It is a socio-political-satirical piece beginning a line which was to remain the foundation, if only meanderingly the observed fact, of APG programming over the subsequent ten years, as Garrie Hutchinson points out in his article. But if political consciousness in playwriting spurred the new wave, it was politics on the federal scale which cemented it. The failed hopes in Don’s Party with the near miss of the ALP in ’69 became the triumph of ’72. Now that all has seemingly settled back into the plum pudding of disorientation (though there are still cherries here and there to be bitten on) the Whitlam era may look like a mere Indian summer for the arts. Yet though some of the energetic optimism has now declined, much was consolidated amidst the heady burgeoning activity of those years. What was rich and strange has become in many respects the norm.

There was non-commercial theatre in Melbourne before La Mama and the APG, but as the introduction to Four Australian Plays points out, the fostering and development of local drama was “most certainly not being fulfilled”. The MTC, one feels and hopes, no longer presents such works like “poor unwanted relations” (Masque 1969), and it has always had a better record here than the Old Tote, but it remains conservative, safe, subscription-oriented — and highly successful financially. With its blue rinse appeal, number of venues and scale of subsidy it dominates the theatrical life of the city. So establishment is it that notwithstanding the new blood of such talents as Mick Rodger it can proudly advertise itself as Melbourne’s 5th channel.

At the moment it seems to be suffering something of a critical onslaught. Yet if the critics are closing ranks against it, such action is not without cause. One sees that the MTC has used its influence to get one Australian critic sacked on the grounds of vested interest, only to find that his replacement is the man who wrote the official history of the company. Stonethrowing from glass houses is really not on. But this magazine can never support criticism based on anything other than honest response. If the critics are responding with prejudice, even if there is cause, professional pride should remind them of the two wrongs adage.

In the 1960’s The Doll train had run out of steam. The APG was created when one line of writing and performance was in the doldrums. Ten years later what was new wave now seems more like a mill pond. Now is the time for another initiative. The MTC is in an unassailably dominant position in non-commercial theatre; the APG is small, radical, and though doing some splendid work, it is standing on the dunes. Ironically, what began as an alternative is now, so rumous has it, siding with the MTC to keep out other alternatives. John Hawkes of the APG goes on record as saying there were more alternatives in 1968 than there are in 1977, so why the opposition to the emergence of Hoopla?

Sydney theatre, not that the two capitals should be viewed competitively, is surely healthier and more productive at the moment precisely because of the greater number of companies operating (and cooperating) there. Isn’t there a need, as Richard Wherrett has argued, for a Nimrod-type theatre somewhere between the two existing groups now operating? As someone put it, Melbourne has splendid buildings but few companies where Sydney has splendid companies but few buildings.

Hoopla must be tried as a significant middle way. With Benjamin Franklin ensconced in its theatre, the Playbox, the help of the bold young entrepreneur Wilton Morley, talk of close collaboration with Nimrod, and the new opportunities for actors, especially if the intention of touring succeeds, the venture looks at its birth sound and strong. The lesson of new developments of 1967 must be remembered a decade later, and the fighting so characteristic of the Melbourne scene (or rather behind it) must not be allowed to prevent further off-spring in 1977.

With the simultaneous opening of Stretch (APG) at Nimrod and Benjamin (Parachute and Nimrod) at the Playbox, a significant step forward has been taken to end Sydney-Melbourne rivalry. Plans for more Nimrod generated shows at the Playbox early next year (Blair’s Christian Brother and Perfect Strangers), and even straws in the wind of Hoopla-Nimrod co-productions, show that this is not just one step, but a route march in an exciting new direction. Marches can’t be made on empty stomachs. The APG has had nearly a decade and the MTC (including UTRC days) more than two, to establish themselves; surely enough for both not to be motivated by jealous paranoia over the emergence of a new company. Hoopla must be given the subsidy to stride out confidently on a basis equal to that of Nimrod. Hatchets must be buried and the realisation reached that diversity is the health and strength for the whole of Melbourne theatre.
TIMOR APOCALYPSE

RICK BILLINGHURST, artistic director, La Boite Theatre: "It's going to be an apocalyptic season. I think we're the only theatre that does Snoo Wilson's plays, and the Peter Gill will be a premiere. But The Timor Show is the major thing. We're trying to turn back the tide of English provincial rep that is so pervasive and if the state theatre companies won't do anything about it then the smaller alternative companies must. We'll be working on The Timor Show for four months until it goes on around November (Happy anniversary, Peter Cheeseman's Stoke-on-Trent work). We're doing it as a game, but the term theatre documentary can be loosely applied to it. Hopefully, others will be interested in it when we've done it.

"I see it as a second stage of the development of Queensland playwrights; they can now handle form but not content, other than kitchen-sink and domestic. A bit like sitting at the centre of the cyclone — it all looks calm in there while storms are going on around. John Bradley, John O'Toole, Hugh Lunn, Lorna Bol and Richard Fotheringham will be working on it, along with real Timor refugees. They may be acting or directing too; the roles are merging at the moment, though they may clarify later. As it's the first one, methods of working are taking longer than they should do. It will be theatre-in-the-round, with such devices as propaganda specifically directed to groups holding particular coloured programmes, representing social groups. People will go out of the theatre to make strategic plans and be fed appropriate food, like rice for the refugees. The Australians will stay in the theatre, get TV dinners and be asked to choose their choices; and we've got real fears that, if the Kerry Packer cricket circus goes abroad, these and others could disappear altogether. Sportsmen are featuring in many TV ads, while 80 per cent of Equity members are unemployed and Equity offices struggle to find the funds to stay open.

"If sport is going to dominate our TV screens in this way, the least we should be doing is signing up professional sportsmen as Equity members. Southern Equity has baulked at the idea, but in Queensland we think it's a matter of life or death for Equity. If they make money out of our industry, they should contribute to funding the association."

LONGER RUNS

RON BLAIR, assistant director, SATC: "In spite of the enthusiastic backing given to the South Australian Theatre Company by the Government and the citizens of Adelaide, the run for each production is still too short: three weeks after a month or two of rehearsals. One of the things I'd like to do in my year with the company is to build audiences to sustain a longer run for each play. This means each play will reach greater audiences while giving the actors a chance to hit their stride. At the moment they've hardly got into the play before it's closing night."

BECKETT WORKSHOPS

JACQUELINE KOTT, Peter Summerton Foundation: "The Peter Summerton Foundation has been going for seven years now; it was formed by a group of Peter's friends when he died. He was a director, and so our primary aim is to help directors, and as many directors as possible. There was a lot of discussion about the best way to do this. We thought of overseas scholarships, but in fact we have a tape of Peter saying that that can only help one person, who might not come back anyway, while bringing someone in can affect far more people. The original plan was to have a directors' workshop once every two years, but it's turned out to be more. William Ball in 1971; Stella Adler in 1973; Bill Gaskell in 1975; and Michael Blakemore in 1976.

"I think this year Alan Schneider has a very special contribution to make because he is a teacher — a lecturer — as well as a director. Michael Blakemore was very reluctant to teach. Alan is doing 10 short Beckett scenes — one entirely mime — and he is a Beckett expert.

"The Tote has very kindly helped us to pay for the workshop by giving us a preview night of Big Toys where the actors and everyone involved have donated their services, for which we sell the tickets. The Australia Council and the Wran Government have supported us minimally."

GROWING PAINS — STILL?

CAROL RAYE: "As an actor I'm obviously enormously involved in wanting work, and I can't work unless management puts on shows. The thing that concerns me about the response to The Pleasure of His Company, is not that the critics didn't like it, or people thought it was a bad play, but the nationalistic bias against shows imported by commercial management. I felt embarrassed as an Australian actor being asked by the management that was giving me work, "What are we doing wrong?" Bernard Jay and Paul Elliott are two young men who adore theatre — and certainly not just for the money; they both started at the bottom and I've seen them myself, during the run, sweeping stages, and fixing dressing-room curtains.

"They were upset, too, at the apparently personal vendetta that seemed to be going on against imported actors: Douglas Fairbanks, Stanley Holloway and David Langton, who couldn't understand why everyone seemed to hate them. There were four local actors and four Australian..."
understudies in the cast, not to mention all the backstage jobs, and though I would love to think it was me, I think it’s debatable whether we would have got the audiences without those names. There is a hard core of theatre-goers who will always go to good theatre, but if you can get those who will only go to see ‘names’ into a theatre at all, it can only be to the good. I’m terribly proud of our own actors, especially some of the younger ones, and I feel embarrassed to have to say to internationals that this nationalistic fervour must be growing pains. Surely we’re past that?

"Paul Elliott said he could have had the Theatre Royal for a year; no one here is putting on plays. It was he who sent Freddie Gibson of the Royal to see Tarantara! at Marian Street, and got him to take it on. Like other Australian actors, I was tetchy about Dead-Eyed Dicks, but Elliott was asked to bring in anything to keep the theatre open. ‘Equity should be stronger in such situations and also in areas like commericals. It’s much worse for Dick Emery, Derek Nimmo and other people to earn vast amounts doing commercials which don’t give other actors work at all. The complaints are aimed at the wrong people.

“There’s a possibility of The Pleasure of His Company coming back to tour at the end of the year, and in the meantime I’m doing a telemovie called Roses Bloom Twice by Tony Morphett, directed by Paul Eddy, and an episode of the four-part serial Age of Innocence. I really want to do more theatre; it’s so very satisfying.”

**OPEN DOOR IN THE WEST?**

from a Perth correspondent

The National Theatre of Western Australia recently announced the appointment of the new Artistic Director who will take over from Aarne Neeme at the end of this year. Perhaps because Perth is so isolated the announcement has passed unnoticed by the rest of Australia.

The new director is to be Stephen Barry, an Englishman who, for the past three years, has been resident director of Harrogate Rep. — before that a stint in TV news, before that work with various reps around England, and before that a considerable period of time with the National Theatre of Great Britain as one of their staff directors.

This is not bad experience, but compared with the experience of some of the Australian applicants one wonders whether the appointment, which is for a term of three years, is altogether justified.

It would appear that a member of the Board of Management of the National Theatre of WA went to England to interview one or two of the English applicants who were being considered for the post. There were three Australian directors also left on the short list. Perhaps the salary advertised was not attractive to a resident of Australia. But if the Board is financially able to move an English applicant and his wife and family to this country (a cost of $4,000 or $5,000, including the fare incurred by bringing him for the interview) they could have increased the advertised salary by $1000 per year and thus make it possible to attract a suitable Australian. Or are we to believe that such a person does not exist? Was the Australian Council — unlike the British Council — unable to recommend a specific person for the job? Or would they perhaps consider it unethical to do so.

Mr Barry’s engagement is now confirmed, he has taken one of the few theatre-director’s jobs in Australia that carries with it a reasonable degree of security. Will he be at all daunted by his inevitable lack of knowledge of the Australian theatre scene and, more particularly, the available talent? It would seem that at the moment it is all too easy to step into the theatre scene of Western Australia — let us hope there are no plans to bring further English artists through the door in our West Wing!
A PACKED WEEK

MARLIS THIERSCH, secretary ITI:
"The 17th Congress of the ITI was held in Stockholm from 30 May to 5 June. On these occasions, the greatest pleasure is meeting international theatre people like the spectacular Ellen Stewart, founder of La Mama, from New York, and Peter Peterson, from Denmark, who is to direct The Flying Dutchman for the Australian Opera later this year. Called 'a packed week' by the Guardian's Michael Billington, the 500 participants from 48 countries in six continents met, talked and argued, ate and drank, and enjoyed performances together. Most memorable were a Monteverdi opera on the famous 18th century stage in the palace of Drottningholm, near Stockholm, and an open-air presentation of a Holberg comedy in the magnificent courtyard of the Vaxholm Fortress on the Stockholm Archipelago.

"Conference discussions proceeded in six committees and a request for a group of authentic Aboriginal dancers to participate in the Fifth Festival of Traditional Arts in March 1978, at Rennes, France, has already resulted from Australia's activity in the ITI's Third World Theatre Committee. Australian delegates have attended most of the ITI's biennial congresses. This year, Hal Lashwood (actor), Keith Bain (dancer), Adam Salzer (director), Roger Pulvers (playwright) and myself were the lucky ones."

NATAL STAGES

JOHN TASKER: "At the end of July I'm off for three months to Port Moresby to be adviser in drama and administration to the Papua New Guinea National Dance and Theatre Company. It's a new company, an offshoot of the National School. I am simply going to be of whatever assistance I can when I get there — it's a very open brief and I'm most excited by it. They wanted me earlier but I was committed to Don't Piddle Against the Wind, Mate, and I have to be back by early November, as I'm directing Gluck's Orfeo and Eurydice for the Canberra Opera.

"It's a hectic six months, but I'm delighted to be able to assist in the natal stages of a new company. I will particularly be encouraging indigenous writers, of whom there is a great shortage in Papua New Guinea.

"I was in Port Moresby six or seven years ago for the Papua New Guinea Drama Festival. I saw four plays by resident writers, and they were much better than those by the white writers. They have a very high standard."

WINTER READINGS

HELEN VAN DER POORTEN, chairman, Playreading Committee, ANPC: "On 27 June the Bondi Pavilion commenced its so-called 'Winter Readings' of new plays — mostly plays derived from the National Playwrights' Conference and supported also by Currency Press.

"Artistic director Victor Emeljanow sees it as a way of exposing new scripts to a more general public than might see the plays at a conference. Additionally, by working the plays up to something of performance-state, there is a chance for managers and agents to have some idea of the potential of a piece.

"With the first play, John Lee's Australo-Chinese Opera The Propitious Kidnapping of the Cultured Daughter, directed by John Wragg, audiences were able for the first time to see the play with musical accompaniment and accent, and over mulled wine they stayed behind after the show to discuss the play's effort to merge Eastern and Western forms.

"The format of each week's readings will remain much the same. For eight weeks, on Mondays and Tuesdays at 8.15 p.m., new plays will be read by actors such as Neil Fitzpatrick, Sandra Lee-Paterson, Max Cullen, Liz Chance, David Waters and Celia de Burgh. The mulled-wine discussions will follow each performance. Playwrights having new plays read are Rivka Hartman, Susan Yorke, John Aitken, Ron Blair, Mike Giles, Ken Methold, Geoff Sykes, and Graeme Turner."

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Louise Paio, Barry Lovett, Trevor Kent, Kerry Walker and Phillip Hinton in Alan Ayckbourn's CONFUSIONS Directed by Ted Craig UNTIL AUGUST 27 Tues. to Sat. at 8.15, SUNDAY 4.30 OPENING SEPTEMBER 1 AWAY MATCH by Peter Yeldham & Martin Worth 2 MARIAN ST., KILLARA THEATRE AND RESTAURANT

488 3166
Louise Paio, Barry Lovett, Trevor Kent, Kerry Walker and Phillip Hinton in Alan Ayckbourn's CONFUSIONS Directed by Ted Craig UNTIL AUGUST 27 Tues. to Sat. at 8.15, SUNDAY 4.30 OPENING SEPTEMBER 1 AWAY MATCH by Peter Yeldham & Martin Worth 2 MARIAN ST., KILLARA THEATRE AUSTRALIA AUGUST 1977 5
It is fair to say that history will judge a culture on the original work it produces, rather than on how well it reproduces other people's cultures. Given this criterion, we feel that the series of articles under the banner "Focus on S.A." completely missed an enormous area of theatre activity in this state which we think should have been included in a comprehensive and accurate study of South Australia.

There are some forty Community, Alternate and Semi-professional theatre companies within the Association of Community Theatres; it is these companies which are taking the responsibility for presenting nearly all the original local and innovative avant-garde work in Adelaide. The Association itself is a liaison/publicity body servicing these companies, coordinating and disseminating information, pooling resources, presenting a regular series of workshopped readings of new local plays, and organising Community Theatre Days and Showcase Seasons to push our writing/acting/directing talents into the public eye. ACT 3, a six-week season of Community Theatre in The Space is at this moment displaying four new works in Drama and Music Theatre, and this will be followed in November by an original season of four new works in the University Little Theatre.

It was an ACT group — Circle — who first took a gamble on Steve Spears' Young Mo; it was an ACT playwright's workshop that first discovered Ken Ross, and the first full production of a Ken Ross play, Don't Piddle Against The Wind, Mate, which was in the ACT 3 Season in July. Another ACT group, Troupe, presented local author David Allen's study of D.H. Lawrence, If I Ever Get Back Here Again, I'll Stay — a brilliant play currently being looked at by Thames Television.

It is worthy of note that three of the plays presented at the recent Playwrights' Conference were by South Australian authors; but this has little to do with any of the institutions written up in your last edition. The task of developing a genuine, home-based culture has been left to ACT and its member groups. As this development should be of prime importance to responsible arts authorities, we were understandably disappointed to read, in Tony Baker's interview with the Premier, that: "We have been endeavouring to help community theatre wherever we can. A great deal has been given in grants towards their operations. But they haven't always reached the standards we would like, either."

We hope we have drawn to your attention what we consider an omission on your part, and feel strongly enough about the matter to hope that you will correct it, either by publishing this letter, or by commissioning a follow-up article presenting the other side of the coin.

Incidentally, we are pleased to see the attention given to South Australia in your pages, and I personally look forward to each new edition; it is with what was NOT said rather than what was said that we take exception.

Yours sincerely,
Frank Ford,
Chairman, Association of Community Theatres inc.
Adelaide

Briefly, if I may, three points concerning your June issue:

1. The most depressing and infuriating bit of theatrical news of 1977 (or any year for that matter) must be that a State Drama Company has staged a production of The Sound of Music.

2. I can only imagine Wilton Morley was misquoted in saying 'Nancye Hayes was last seen in a play 15 years ago'. Nancye's many admirers would agree that her talents have been sadly under used, but she has, of course, over the past 15 years appeared in numerous musicals for commercial management and been guest artist with Melbourne Theatre Company, South Australian Theatre Company, Twelfth Night Theatre, St. Martin's Theatre and the National Theatre Company, Perth.

3. Ken Moffat, a member of our company, is also a member of the AYPAA cast appearing at the International Children's Theatre Festival.

Terry O'Connell,
Director,
Riverina Trucking Company
If some people think A Chorus Line is schmaltzy, what about Broadway's latest smash hit Annie? Based on the comic strip Little Orphan Annie, it has a little girl and a dog in the leads. Writing from New York a friend, whose opinion I respect, refers to the musical as being "appalling, tritely written and full of nauseous kids". Maybe that's one show which shouldn't be imported... Several different managements seem to be interested in staging here the new small-cast Broadway musical I Love My Wife... Understand feelers have been put out to Val Bryner to appear in The King and I in Australia after he finishes the Broadway run and American tour of it.

Despite Paul Elliot telling me, after the Melbourne reviews for Sheila Hancock and John Thaw in The Two of Us, that English actors no longer would want to come here, it seems the boot is now on the other foot. Those who are in the queue to come, but so far haven't found takers, include Jack Smethurst, Hattie Jacques and Eric Sykes... Perhaps they'll be picked up by Gary Van Egmond, currently in London conferring with Paul Dainty on future shows to follow the box office success they've had with Doctor in Love... When the Nedwell-Davies starrer was at Sydney's Theatre Royal, a survey was taken of audiences which resulted in revelation that 50 per cent of them had never before been inside a live theatre. Guess there's a moral somewhere.

See Lewis Fiander has taken over from Alan Howard the principal role in the London production of Wild Oats... Recently received a letter from John Dankworth saying he and Cleo Laine hope to be back at the beginning of next year... Following the tradition set by The Twenties and All That Jazz and Hats, a one-man revue starring Jon Finlayson, entitled Ladies Only, had three "shop-window" performances at the St Martin's in Melbourne (two at midnight), enthusiastically attended by members of the profession. John, who has stolen more shows than it's possible to recall, can now take his place beside Barry Humphries and Reg Livermore. His female impersonations, achieved without falsetto voice or campery, are impressive and lifelike, and his writers — as programmed — included John Michael Howson, Mick Rodger, Gary down, Fred Schepisi, Ron Challinor, Alex Stitt, David Williamson and Ray Lawler.

Understand Tennessee Williams is very eager to come to Australia and appear in one of his plays. Bit of a risk, though, seeing he cancelled his Adelaide Festival trip last year at the eleventh hour... Ruth Conti, who recently retired after 45 years' service with the Italia Conti Stage School in London, is to live in this country. Must be something of a record for a one-man show (certainly here) that Reg Livermore haschalked up with Wonder Woman, playing for 10 months in Sydney. A three-months season is scheduled for Melbourne, three weeks in Canberra, and then Reg should be opening in London sometime around next March... We're back to that "first lady of the Australian stage" controversy. One reader writes me that "if it was Sydney alone, it would have to be Judi Farr"... Must have been garbled, the report I received that Edna Edgley was doing radio commercials for Funny Peculiar saying it's a family show!

There's obviously something wrong somewhere. As the law stands now in Victoria, a live show can operate on a Sunday, and so can a licensed restaurant, but a set-up like The Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant which combines the two can't... Ever since he played in Relatively Speaking, the first Alan Ayckbourn play to be seen in Australia, Peter Adams has been itching to appear in another of the English playwright's vehicles. Now he's getting his wish in what seems to be a tailor-made role in the Old Tote's The Norman Conquests... Melbourne's Palace Theatre has its 50th anniversary on November 11. Understand something special's being cooked up to celebrate it. Apparently, on the same day it opened the then Prince of Wales landed in Melbourne... In England a firm making a herbal cigarette under the brand-name Honeyrose is attempting to introduce its product via non-smoking actors who are called upon to smoke on stage.

For a long time now, everyone has assumed the Melbourne Theatre Company will be occupying the Playhouse of the Victorian Arts Centre when it finally opens, mainly because it's the only major company around. Hypothetically perhaps, but if by 1981, or whenever it is the theatre complex opens, there's another group with higher standards and capabilities, it's possible — !... Over 250 performances is not to be scoffed at, but, in view of its explicit sex content and constant full frontal nudity, one would have expected Let My People Come to have attracted more audiences in Melbourne... Wonder who the person is who took such a fancy to the May edition of Theatre Australia he/she shoppedlifted 10 copies of it one Friday evening from Melbourne's Showbusiness Bookshop.

Am hearing persistent rumours that the director of one of our national companies intends to retire next year. Personally, I can't believe it — And it's not Bill Redmond!... Derek Nimmo making his third trip in Why Not Stay for Breakfast to this part of the world. This time it's New Zealand, where he opens August 11... New York has its own The Club and, although the characters are all male and it's a smash hit, there the resemblance ends to David Williamson's play. Set in a men's club at the turn of the century, with awful unknown supposed authentic songs of the period, and schoolboy type "blue" dialogue, it's performed by seven women in male attire. I read the script and thought it terrible; so did most of the reviewers, but their raves at the acting have turned it into a success. Whether Australia sees a production or not, it could spark a counter-trend to all the female impersonation shows we seem to see.

The recent death of that highly skilled light-comedy actress Sophie Stewart highlights the way the Australian theatre — and in particular the commercial — ignores the talent within its midst. Married to Australian actor Ellis Irving, Sophie, with whom I corresponded over the years, lived on and off in Sydney for several periods in the sixties and seventies. A West End leading lady of some substance, the only roles she played here during that time were a tiny one in Write Me a Murder for a commercial management, Mrs Higgins in J.C.W's revival of My Fair Lady, Madame Rancevsky, Getrude in Hamlet and Lady Bracknell for the Old Tote, and in The First Mrs Fraser at the St Martin's. With just a little encouragement from managements here, Sophie would never have returned to the U.K. and settled back in her native Scotland.

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Appointments

Theatre Director:
Professional Director
For Darwin Theatre Group (Amateur) Six or Twelve Months

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The events... at La Mama and the Pram Factory have changed the face of Australian theatre forever
August 1953 saw the first production of Melbourne's Union Theatre Repertory Company, and the years since, with the consequent repetition of the Sumner formula, have shown that theatre of that kind can survive and even prosper. That any kind of theatre staggered through the fifties and early sixties is a marvel not to be sneered at. That the company produced 26 Australian plays between 1953 and 1967 is a fact worthy of some applause. But, by the time the UTRC changed its name to the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1968, it was clear that times had changed. No longer was everyone relieved that a company, any company, was surviving. Some wanted more. More Australian plays, more relevance to the Australian experience, more understanding of what it means to live here and now, more comprehension of the history of the theatre since Ibsen, more excitement, more of everything.

These people, while not entirely given over to the sex-dope-rock-and-revolution syndrome of the sixties (some were, and are, positively aesthetic), and of another generation. The Australians born (roughly) in the forties just naturally assumed that if you wanted to do something, you went out and did it. Others might get in the way, but sooner or later they'd see reason. Write novels, plays, poems, films. Stop the war. Get rid of the government. Take over universities. If no one would publish or produce your work, do it yourself.

This attitude, looking back on it now, was astonishingly naive. It was founded on a profound ignorance of the way the political, social and cultural processes worked. It declined comprehension of economics and the problems of those struggling souls who appeared natural enemies. These were the chaps running anything at all. But given a whole generation's exuberant self-confidence, somehow or other things did change. The question of which was the cultural chicken, and which the social egg is a question best left to students of the arcane sciences. But what is true is that the position of the theatre now, while not perfect etc. is a few laps ahead of where it was in August 1967. Or August 1953.

August 1967 saw the first production at La Mama. It was, unsurprisingly, Jack Hibberd's *Three Old Friends*. The cast was Graeme Blundell, Bruce Knappett and David Kendall. The decade since then, in and around La Mama, might not constitute the history of the Australian theatre in that time, but it does amount to a good part of it.

La Mama the building is behind an open space used as a car-park in Faraday Street, Carlton, and behind a busy shopping street, Lygon Street. It is in the heart of crypto-bohemian Carlton, traditional home of students, migrants and artists. When Betty Burstall found it and began rounding up people like Hibberd, Blundell; Brian Davies and many others to turn it into something resembling Ellen Stewart's New York La Mama, it was a former shirt-factory. They must have been pretty small shirts, as the factory generally seats only about 50. Tightly.

What was soon discovered was that La Mama was a very congenial spot for the surrounding community, who in small but influential numbers began to come. Hibberd, Kris Hemensley, Barry Oakley, Frank Bren, Michael Thomas and Syd Clayton all had plays performed in 1967 by Knappett, Blundell, Kendall, Lyndell Rowe, Kerry Dwyer, Bill Garner, Peter Carmody, Peggy Cook, Malcolm Robertson, Burt Cooper, Sandra McGregor, Michael Wansborough, Peter Green, John Romeril, Mike Herron, Janet Laurie and others. La Mama soon became a focus, a place in someone's legendary words where things could happen, where there was room to fail. Word got around, and through 1968-9 there were about 50 new plays or performance pieces done. They were of varying quality, but were continually exciting.
Those years also saw the formation of a more or less regular group, the La Mama Company, which, with Tribe, provided the backbone of the work done at La Mama. The La Mama Company grew from the actors, writer and directors of a season of Hibberd’s microplays, called Brainrot, performed at Melbourne University in 1968. Actors’ Workshops occurred, gleaned from the latest seamanl TDR’s, where ensemble acting, physical acting, encounter groups and anything else were tossed about. This aestheticism was given something of a jolt late in 1968 upon the arrival of Lindsay Smith, Jonn Hawkes, and John Romeril from the political capital of Australia, Monash University. The working-out of the relationships between politics and performance, acting and living, organisation and spontaneity, laboratory theatre and middle-class audience, has informed much of the work of The La Mama Company and what it became, The Australian Performing Group.

The style of the group was described in 1969 as “super-naturalism” and was conditioned by the two places where most of it took place. The first was the tiny La Mama space, where the sweat of an actor could be smelt and where any falsity in voice or physical action was (and is) immediately apparent. There had to be genuine truth, if you like, in each moment. Unconvincing language on the part of the writer or half-heartedness from an actor was embarrassing for the audience. This led to a certain bigness in performance, to a simplification of gesture and a complication of subtext. The more that took place in the spaces, the more engrossing the performance.

The other situation where performances took place was the open air. The arrival of the politicals led to a large amount of work on street theatre, and on a sort of pageant theatre for demonstrations, rock festivals and the like. Typical of these plays were Romeril’s Mr Big the Big Big Pig, The Continuing Story of Mr Big, and Dr Karl’s Kure. Here moral tales were told in simple, cartoon form using masks, giant puppets, music, and “the theatre of large gesture”. Perhaps the most effective of these sorts of events was Whatever Happened To Realism? an anti-censorship performance that took place in the La Mama carpark, where six actors were arrested by the local wallopers.

Plays performed inside La Mama during 1969 included Hibberd’s Dimboola, Who and Romeril’s I Don’t Know Who To Feel Sorry For as well as pieces by Sam Shepard and Megan Terry. The La Mama Company also produced Buzo’s Norm and Ahmed and Barry Oakley’s The English Lesson.

At the same time as all this activity was taking place, another kind of theatre, a more ethereal, communal, inward-looking style, was being developed by Tribe. While this was often very physical, it’s subject-matter was more in the realm of poetic community than on the factory floor or involved in understanding Australian culture. Whatever the long-term influence of Tribe, the events themselves were generally startling and people like Doug Anders, Alan Robertson and Carol Porter, have continued working.

A similar, though more art and musical style of performance, was developed by Syd Clayton, who created a species of performance art that even now surfaces from time to time. And through this time playwrights like Kris Hemensley and Barry McKimm added other wrinkles to retrospectively more famous events.

The aggressive marketing policy of the APG from 1970 has somewhat overshadowed the work of other people at La Mama, especially after the group left during that year to work on the first production at the Pram Factory, Marvelous Melbourne. A certain amount of animosity eventuated. But the next-to-last season of plays by the APG — Hibberd’s White With Wire Wheels,
Romeril's *Man From Chicago*, Buzo's *Front Room Boys* — was an important event. It marked the arrival of the new wave once and for all, and set up the APG for its extraordinary (and timely) success at the Pram Factory over the next five years.

The other major productions, though, in 1970 were pretty interesting in themselves. Kris Hemensley's *Hieronymous Bosch Hour* is an interesting unrecognised work and there were four plays by David Williamson, including *Stork*, as well. Williamson did pretty well with *The Removalists* the next year, as did Syd Clayton with *Hands Down Gourds*, Hemensley with *First Quarter Report*, and Tribe with *The Gooseberry Moth* by Frank Starr and *A Last Look At Sadness* by Alan Robertson.

Since then, though, there has been a diminution of energy, and although there have been some terrific productions done, nothing has happened to replace the excitement and energy of the earlier years. It even shows in the fact that a playwright as good as Max Richards, (who is very good) has had some 10 plays done at La Mama without causing much of a ripple outside Carlton. The decline of La Mama as a place where history is created has meant a return to its original function: a venue where more or less anyone can do more or less anything they want to without being dissected too grossly. And more often than not the actual events are worth a visit.

The APG, on the other hand, from *Marvellous Melbourne* onward, has become a more and more important group: to the extent that a period of loss of focus, as in the past year or so, has meant the same for Melbourne's theatre in general.

The APG has been in the unfortunate position where every aspect of theatre theory and practice that is not undertaken by the MTC or commercial managements (which leaves 95 per cent) has become its responsibility. Coupled with a dedication to collectivisation of decision-making, and even of the theatre process, the pressures inside and outside the group have been intense. One only has to list the sorts of activities attempted to see the scope of the APG's endeavours. What appears to be a random series of attempts at everything, is really a consistent approach to a simple question: what kind of theatre should we do now?

There has always been a strong commitment to Australian writing, of course, mainly in the work of Hibberd, Romeril and Oakley. The APG has done more to establish the fact of the indigenous product than any other single source in Melbourne, ever. Plays like Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination*, Peggy Sue, *A Toast to Melba*, and *The Overcoat*; Romeril's *The Floating World* and *Chicago*; Oakley's *The Feet of Daniel Mannix, Beware of Initiations, Bedfellows* and the first production of Williamson's *Don's Party* have firmly settled the question of Australian writing. It's here to stay.

Then there are the group-created shows like *Marvellous Melbourne*, *The Hills Family Show* and the extraordinary women's show *Betty Can Jump* — all remarkable achievements.

Children's theatre, circus, educational theatre, pantomime, even some foreign contemporary plays, experimentalism, puppetry, street theatre, pensioner shows, propaganda and more have been attempted. Plus at least three versions of an acting style, all co-existing at the moment. Whichever way you look at it, and whatever your opinion of individual shows and current realities, the whole thing is of considerable importance. The APG's eclecticism was, and still could be, the source of its strength.

The events of the past 10 years at La Mama and the Pram Factory have changed the face of the theatre in Australia forever. With the same sort of activities at Jane Street and Nimrod over the same period, 1967-77 has been a most fruitful decade. Happy anniversary!
“I think that Max Gillies is one of the very funny Australian actors. He’s really terrifically good. Absolutely first-rate. I think the Pram Factory phase is over for him.” — Barry Humphries, Farrago, 13 September 1974.

John Larkin

THE MANY MASKS OF MAX GILLIES

You’ll find Max Gillies, someone said, nowhere near as funny as he is on stage. In fact, he can be really a serious sort of bloke. Doesn’t say much. And sensitive.

Whatever you do, they said, talk with him alone. Don’t try to interview him in The Office, the back bar of Stewart’s Hotel in Carlton, with all those other people from The Pram there. Otherwise you’ll end up having to talk to them all, at once.

The impression was the search for the man, Max Gillies, behind his multitude of masks as an actor could require peeling away some personal disguise as well.

For this most public of Carlton players, reputed to be one of the funniest people in Australian live theatre today — he has just won the Best Actor Award for Victoria — also had a reputation for being a private person.

It was backed by his somewhat shy admission, friendly though, that he was a bit
diffident towards the idea of being interviewed, because: “I’m not very good at that sort of thing.”

Finding the person himself was done by following his directions, given over the telephone:

_There is a big house at the front, he said. I live behind it, out the back ... in a tin hut._

The implication of this throwaway line, delivered dead pan, was that The Pram people were indeed, as believed, pretty poor, or that he was, according to Stanislavsky, preparing himself for his Australian tour as Monk O’Neill in _A Stretch of the Imagination_ by living in the same style dwelling as he occupied in the play.

What sacrifice for the sake of art! What dedication to be true to life to have incarcerated himself thus in the freezing backblocks of North Melbourne!

A young lady, also from The Pram, answered the door in a leotard, in the middle of her yoga. You’ll find Max, she said ... yes, I know, down the back.

This meant going through the long hallways of this most splendid Victorian terrace, through a gentle garden of gums and bluestone blocks, down an almost secret path to . . . a tin shack. There it was.

But what a shack! Instead of being the anticipated overgrown kerosene can, it emerged through the trees as one of the finest examples of domestic space-age architecture seen around this city in a long time: a soaring, many-level series of planes and angles, a sculpture of glass and wood and . . . tin. Yes, the architect had used great sheets of gleaming galvanised iron around the exterior, lined, of course, and making all sorts of shapes as it curved up over the tower towards the sun. Some shack!

Who had said that Max, the man, was not funny?

While he made fresh coffee, Gillies explained that he was a longtime member of an economic union, a group of people who shared all their money and supported each other when necessary, especially if somebody wanted to do something non-utilitarian such as acting, and this house had been built by the group. So, it was his house, but it wasn’t.

His presence, though, permeated through the long rows of books on everything from art to screen books to novels to scripts to stories of the great comedians to _The Petrov Conspiracy Unmasked_.

We drank a lot of coffee and smoked a lot of cigarettes as we talked about his life and work while sitting around the potbellied stove. He would change chairs a couple of times, moving around the room, during the long discussion.

This suggested a sign that he might not care to be pinned down personally too much. He was not, for instance, too ready with details of his own history, not unless it seemed relevant to the story of his work, and that of The Pram, for the two are always together.
Any discussion with Gillies soon reveals this attachment to the Australian Performing Group, which is really a Family, of which he is not only a co-founder and chairman, but also, at 35, a proud part-
father.

Gillies used to be a primary school teacher. Then he went to a teachers' college for six years, where he started its drama division, working there from the mid-sixties through to the early seventies. Before that, he had done a lot of student drama, and before that, a lot of amateur plays. He had worked in productions at Melbourne University and learned various techniques from what each director offered each play. "I think that's the best way to learn, related to each particular play."

After teachers' college he went to Monash University, where he directed and acted in a couple of plays. Choosing acting as a career, though, took its time. When he left school in 1958 he thought about trying to make it. Teaching seemed much more worthwhile. "I didn't want to be an actor at all costs. Teaching seemed much more worthwhile."

Apart from the Melbourne Theatre Company, there was little regular television or radio, and he was not interested in either. Ideologically, he knew he could never fit into the MTC. "I didn't want to be an actor at all costs. Teaching seemed much more worthwhile."

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Conscious. I felt confident about what I could do as an actor."

He said a lot of his attitudes to formal theatre changed in the late sixties with the setting up of the college drama course and working with students. The best work they did was improvised ... people not being miserable or uneasy with Shakespeare or modern American. "The ideas out of those workshops were often more stimulating. The therapeutic nature of the activity was quite exciting."

His gradual drift into the APG began when it was still at La Mama, where "people I'd been to university with, Hibberd, Blundell, Brian Davies ... were galvanising quite a bit with Betty Burstall." Gillies started with them part time in mid-1970.

Then the Pram Factory became available. They moved in, renovated it, set up a six-month workshop and in March 1971 staged Marvellous Melbourne, by Hibberd and Romeril, with Gillies and Blundell both as directors and players.

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Melbourne thought it was marvellous, and they were away.

Gillies then gave a long and detailed account of the progression of The Pram over these seven years. It was typical of him that his own successes should be not singled out as separate from the APG, that his account should start with the group.

"I didn't want to be an actor at all costs. Teaching seemed much more worthwhile."

Next, they did Chicago, Chicago, by John Romeril, in a much revised version of the original 1969 presentation. Max Gillies was the producer.

Katharine Brisbane, writing in the Australian, said it was one of the APG's best yet. "There is an underground current of dramatic talent about, which will not for much longer permit itself to go unrecognised."

In November 1971, Gillies directed Barry Oakley's The Feet of Daniel Mannix. He also acted in it.

Margaret Jones, writing in praise in the Sydney Morning Herald, said: "The mad, vaudevillean progression of the play is greatly helped by two remarkable performances: by Bruce Spence, the tallest actor in the business, as Dr Mannix, and by Max Gillies, who plays Mr Greensleevs, architect of The Movement, with every exact gesture and verbal nuance of Mr B.A. Santamaria." She said the audience "fell about in its seats in joyful hysterics every time Max Gillies came on ... Most times they still do."

Talking about the early APG successes, as they moved into 1971, Gillies said: "They made us think morosely about the question of where do we go from here. How were we to respond more responsibly to the public?"

We constituted the APG and we defined membership as anybody who'd been helping to make the theatre operative and we provided for monthly group meetings with the executive to be elected every three years."

He was elected the first APG chairperson, and held the office for three terms.


Leonard Glickfield, writing in the Sunday Telegraph, said: "This play, with its hillibilly music and tambourines, technicolor double-winged aeroplane, shadow puppets, bouncing booms, satirical slides and Max Gillies having a wonderful time leering and declaiming as Alabama's cornpone governor, George Wallace, offers some of the most exciting stage magic we have seen in Melbourne."

Glickfield continued his praise of Gillies when writing about his performance as Sir Wilfred McLuckie the retired Australian Prime Minister, in Barry Oakley's Beware of Imitations! In the Sunday Telegraph in January 1973, he said:

'It is not like the old days. Few Australian performers command a following on the strength of their real talents rather than the lure of their PR or television image.

"An exception is to be found at the Pram Factory. When the posters and publicity blurs announce that Max Gillies is in the new show, the phones generally run hot.

"Gillies is possibly the best character actor at work in Australian theatre today — and definitely the best character actor under the age of 40."

Plump, squat, with a rubber moon-face that suggests a Stan Laurel in his most clownish moments, Gillies is blessed with the physical attributes of an Alec Guinness. He has a quiet dignity, nondescript handsomeness, average height, which enables him to look tall or small on stage, tremendous agility and powers of observation. Most crucial of all for an actor he has the ability to efface himself completely on stage.

"Under the influence of the APG's scathing and obscene satiric style, Gillies' impersonations (he had already also done a megalomaniac, a Vietnam war veteran and Billy McMahon) become uproarious farce turns, but under the influence of his own meticulous facility for observation, they become personalised, universal statements about the Australian character."

"Gillies accomplishes miracles. He transforms eminent politicians into awkward buffoons, and then resurrects them to mirror attitudes typical of the ordinary man in the street."

And so it has gone on. Ian Robinson, writing in the Sunday Press in September 1973, about Harold Pinter's The Dumb Waiter, at The Pram, said: "It is hard to estimate how much of its success is due to a consummate acting performance by Max Gillies as Gus. His control and attention to detail are constantly astounding."

And on: in The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria (February 1974) which showed Gillies' flair, too, for dramatic versatility; as Groucho in On Yer Marx, a month later; in Barry Oakley's Bedfellows (January 1975), described as a triangular comedy, but which left some critics feeling it was half serious, too, and said that the pathetic Ivan Nyukhin in Chekov's Smoking is Bad for You (December 1975); in a multitude of parts in...
A Toast to Melba (March 1976); in The Hills Family Show (1975-7), and now again as Monk O'Neill in A Stretch of the Imagination, for which he was acclaimed by this critic in 1976 as giving the performance of the year.

Some people have thought perhaps Gillies was being locked in too-tight with The Pram people, that maybe the collective was cramping his style, that he could just about work anywhere.

When asked, he said, yes, there had been offers of outside work and they had talked about it amongst themselves at the APG. But he felt there would not be the range of choice elsewhere as he had at The Pram. "It's nice to be offered a part, but what's the point of something not having local immediacy?"

"At the Pram Factory we can create images and celebrations. That's a role theatre can have that's very important... just giving people a feeling of possibilities for themselves... of recognising themselves instead of being given images of the English class-system and American enterprise.

"You're performing experiences common to the community. That's positive for a start, getting images of our lives on stage. You recognise theatre is a neutral territory for acting out possibilities.

"First of all you reflect society, and then you change it, on stage. You act through versions of people's lives in a non-threatening way. You can show what could be done in that way or this way."

There was some concern at times, he said, of The Pram becoming a ghetto. "We worry about the general thing of being isolated. But when it comes to the crunch you have to make a particular decision... the way you see yourself in terms of work activity... you commit yourself to the ongoing activity of the APG as a cultural expression... and that's the first priority. So, if you're working there that usually takes precedence over any outside offers."

At the same time, he said, they did not think they should stay isolated. "I ought to work outside the place a bit more. But it's a matter of time and priorities. Yet you need to come into contact with other ideas."

"If I did more work outside The Pram, I'd like it to be films because they go out to more people."

Gillies has already had a lot of involvement in films, including A Salute to the Great McCarthy, Dalmus, Pure Shit and Applause, Please, quite a lot of fringe films.

As asked about his acting style, he said he had studied the theories of Western theatre styles. "But a lot of that doesn't have a lot of immediacy. It becomes less significant."

"In terms of preference for style, I suppose for me it's some sort of comic." One critic referred to him as a fine comedy actor with a tendency to clown. "That was fairly devastating. I don't know what I thought about that, but at least I remembered it!"

He said he had studied such people as Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis, Woody Allen, George Wallace, the Marx Brothers and W.C. Fields. He preferred the style of broad comedy, himself.

"One of the things about the Pram Factory has always been we have always seen ourselves as a reaction against formal theatre."

"But the point about art is you want to get the thing right. You don't approach it from wanting it to be as artistic a comedy as you can, but you work on the art of comedy." He spoke of "a stylistic preference for comedy over naturalism or tragedy because there's an element of objectivity in it.

"You're not pretending you're suffering on stage. You're saying 'Laugh at this behaviour, or have mixed feelings towards it.' You might say: 'Why am I laughing at this? It's quite shocking.' Somehow, your mind's engaged with it."

He said he enjoyed the intimacy of relationships in working at The Pram.

Asked if he had ever felt trapped by it, he said: "You're there, not because they won't let you out, but because you've something in common with the others. But there's so much of individual expression there that it's a bit of a luxury."

He said there were plenty of chances to be self-critical, although it was more sensitive. Confidence came from the collective criticism. "You're not the hired actor who's got to bear the brunt alone. We come to grips with the fact that some people wear criticism less than others. You evolve a working critique of what you're doing in a natural sort of way. There's more development in our productions than at the actual rehearsals and the cast self-directs more. When it works, it's as much a part of that ensemble process as one person's flair, or somebody's 'artistic vision.'"

He said the committee development style at the APG was a delicate balance between individual creative impulse and a collective statement. Sure, there were problems about stifling some individual initiatives, but any one must not be allowed to dominate so the rest become puppets.

The Hills Family Show, he said, was a microcosm of the APG. "We are saying on stage all the time: 'We are the entertainers and you are the audience.' But we want you to join in a game about theatre. That doesn't happen very much these days. The Hills Family Show is not a piece of theatre that you watch. It's as much a game with the audience about acting and theatre. It's a game you can join in."

"Sure, we were manipulating, but that happens all the time. To pretend suffering is manipulation of the highest order. What we do has brought it more out into the open."

And were they having a good time? "Oh, yes," he said.

Of course they are.

John Larkin is theatre writer for the Sunday Press, Melbourne.
South Australian Theatre Company

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The White Phenomena

It is a delight for anyone who supports the great innovatory voice of Patrick White to be discussing his first four plays at a time when Big Toys, the first new White play for thirteen years, is rehearsing at the Sydney Opera House with Kate Fitzpatrick, Arthur Dignam and Max Cullen. Jim Sharman is directing.

Last year Sharman directed a revival of The Season at Sarsaparilla for the Tote, the first time a White play had reached an Australian audience since Night on Bald Mountain in 1964.

The production was stylish and generally well received, with brilliant performances from Robyn Nevin, Kate Fitzpatrick, Bill Hunter, Max Cullen and Peter Whitford. Unfortunately many critics seemed unable to take into account that the play was practically a piece of theatre history. Nor was it an accident that even in 1976 the Patrick White play chosen for the Tote, was written for the Sydney little theatre, the Playhouse. Both of these productions had been his timing. Is his first play, The Ham Funeral, written in 1947 and not performed for fifteen years, still too innovative for the Australian theatre to tackle? Was it the whole truth that White, wounded by the savage and destructive reception of his plays, could not then exist in the hurly-burly of the theatre, and after a short period of enormous playwriting fertility, withdrew all his plays from production?

The more sympathetic and informed audience reaction to The Season at Sarsaparilla, a dedicated director and the support of the Tote, were obviously key factors in White's return to the theatre with Big Toys. The overall result may be that all the plays will return to our theatrical repertoire, and we will at last be convinced that in the long silencing of Patrick White as a playwright, Australia lost an innovatory genius at a time when our theatre badly needed his mature, moral vision, and multiplicity of styles, to counteract the stranglehold of naturalism.

White's first writing was for the theatre. At twenty he wrote a drawing room comedy and a one-actor, performed at a Sydney little theatre, the Playhouse. Both plays were later suppressed by him as juvenilia. In 1933, after his graduation from Cambridge, and his decision to become a writer, he produced revue sketches and lyrics for sophisticated, intimate London audiences, at the Little Gate theatres, long before he published his first novel, Happy Valley, in 1931.

The influence of his revue writing days, and his delight in knockabout farce, are reflected in his love for interludes and scenes played before drops: e.g. the London street scene interlude in The Ham Funeral with the two old ladies in rusty tiaras, lace and feathers picking over the rubbish, finding fish bones and a foetus and swallowing false pearls; the chorus of four relatives in bowler hats, identical soap-coloured men with drooping straw moustaches, popping their heads simultaneously out of the house windows, as if strayed from Brighton pier; the chorus of old ladies in the Sarsaparilla Sundown Home; the bizarre funeral of Mrs Lililee in A Cheery Soul.

The scene of the scavenging London ladies has given the critics a lot of unnecessary trouble. What is it doing there? Is it necessary? Does it assist the action? They ask peevishly. White, with customary tongue-in-cheek, wrote a note to the programme of The Ham Funeral: "A lapse of time and a change of scene were necessary, so I gave way to my weakness for music hall. In any case many actual interludes are a mixture of the hilarious and the brutal."

Leslie Rees in The Making of Australian Drama believes that this scene, much more than any other factor, made enemies for the play. But the questions asked merely point to the bewilderment of Australian audiences and critics facing The Ham Funeral experience even fifteen years after it was written. They are all the wrong questions. After The Legend of King O'Malley, and the APG Melbourne experiments, such questions were no longer relevant, and White takes his place as the first modern Australian playwright to take advantage of all those theatrical devices that became stock-in-trade for the young Australian playwright after 1967/68.

The Ham Funeral was written in 1947 in the same period as White first found his own original novelist's voice in The Aunt's Story. The play came before Pinter, Ionesco and Beckett's Godot. There was a period after the war when expressionism in England was already considered dated. Brecht was virtually unknown. The Ham Funeral came out of various theatrical and personal experiences. It was originally motivated by the Dobell painting of The Dead Landlord and White's own experience of London bed-sits as a young man (the priggish Young Man of the play maybe).

It's theatrical roots lie in European expressionist and symbolist theatre, perhaps influenced also by Fry and Eliot's verse dramas, White's own revue writing and his passion for music hall (shared incidentally by T.S. Eliot).

If we look at what was happening in Australian theatre in 1947 we can see what light years White was away from his native country. Summer Locke Eliot's Rusty Bugles, a documentary with the accent on character and folklore, was shocking Australian audiences at the Independent for its "swearing", got itself banned, and then broke all box office records on an Australian tour. Dymphna Cusack and Oriel Grey were writing social comment plays. By the end of 1952 Gwen Medefith had written twenty-two episodes of Blue Hills amongst a bonanza of radio soap operas, and Ruth Park and Leslie Rees had turned her naturalistic novel of Surry Hills slum life, Harp in the South, into a play.

"The real world", said The Sun, "Starkly real!", said the Telegraph. Douglas Stewart's verse dramas, creating legendary and historical Australian heroes, had been listened to on radio, and seen, with some misgivings, on the stage. Reedy River, the ethnic "rough" musical would arrive, via Dick Diamond, the Bush Music Club, and New Theatre in 1952; The Doll in '55; The Shifting Heart in '57; and The Ham Funeral would play in Adelaide in 1961. The period was dealt with in a chapter called by Rees, in The Making of Australian Drama, "Realism and Naturalism in the late Fifties".

The only play that could come within cooee of The Ham Funeral in style and imaginative vision was Peter Kenny's Slaughter of St. Teresa's Day in 1959, and the critics said its looseness ruined the
When Patrick White offered his novel The Tree of Man, Voss and Riders in the Chariot to the Adelaide Festival. He had returned to Australia as a prodigal son, already famous for The Tree of Man, Voss and Riders in the Chariot.

A year before Alan Seymour’s One Day of the Year had been rejected by the Festival Fathers through the fierce lobbying of the RSL, White’s fate was no better. If Seymour’s naturalistic play was “too box office potential,” “unappealing fare” as well as Max Harris’ comment: “The Ham Funeral vibrates between poetic fancy and a sharply etched realism.”

The pro-Ham Funeral lobby called it “a modern work of power and imagination, satisfying at a deep level some real and basic audience emotional needs”, but the minority report won the day, and The Ham Funeral was rejected.

The Adelaide University Theatre Guild staged it late in 1961 with John Tasker directing, and it played at the Palace Theatre to standing room only for a two and a half week season. The last night had a standing ovation. Later a provincial repertory company staged it in London, but it has never been seen since.

In 1962 White’s second play, A Season at Sarsaparilla, played at Adelaide University Theatre Guild with John Tasker again directing. Obviously more acceptable then, as now, because of its more naturalistic style it moved to Melbourne Union Theatre and then the Sydney Theatre Royal. A Cheery Soul (1963), for me perhaps White’s most acceptable then, as now, because of its technique. "The Ham Funeral" as well as participating in the action. He has something of "the artist as young prig" about him. He wants to become a writer, like Roy Child in A Season at Sarsaparilla. The Ham Funeral traces the moral education of the Young Man, and at the conclusion, like Lawrence’s Paul Morel in Sons and Lovers he moves out into the world more prepared for its exigencies, wiser and more adult, because of his experiences in the house of the Lustys.

The Ham Funeral has two other archetypal White figures: Mrs Lusty, the landlady, the mother-earth figure with her innocent, sensual, carnal fleshliness is central to novels, short stories and plays. She appears in different guises, but is essentially the same in the novels as Mrs Godbold (Riders in the Chariot), Nance Lightfoot (The Vivesector) and Mrs Whalley in The Tree of Man onwards. The Cheery Soul with its grotesque and terrible heart goddess, Miss Docker, translates from short story to play. The Ham Funeral is the first White work in any genre to emphasize the necessity for simplicity, humility and loving kindness as distinct from desire, a basic moral philosophy in all his work from that time on.

White’s plays demand imagination, intellect, skill, and brilliant courageous leaps from their directors. No wonder few have dared the challenge.

It has been the fashion to see The Ham Funeral as the most playable of the plays. What is not often mentioned is that each play has its strengths, problems and innovations. No play of the four discussed stands still on the ground of the last play, always the mark of a brilliant artist. White dares much in the theatre, sometimes inevitably he falls short, never, I believe, does he actually fail.

Facing his plays even a sympathetic critic like Robert Brissenden writing in Meanjin 3, 1964, maintained that "no single play, with the possible exception of The Ham Funeral, can be judged a complete success, but his body of work is more substantial and promising than any other Australian dramatist".

Brissenden saw the plays as "structural­ly weak", living through "the vitality of the language and the credibility of the characters". He seemed prejudiced against expressionism as a dramatic form... "it can be depressingly sterile and empty beneath the immediate theatrical brilliance of its technique."

The only critics to understand the meaning of White’s impact on Australian theatre, what he attempts and what he achieves, are Harry Kippax in his introduction to the Four Plays by Patrick White, and Katharine Brisbane in her chapter on Australian drama in the Penguin Literary Atlas of Australia: "The controversy about the merits of Patrick White’s plays involved more than their merits" writes Kippax. "It was part of a revolt by individuals, especially artists and intellectuals, against the conservatism, the timidity, the resistance to innovation of the Establishment generally."
The Dead Landlord
by Sir William Dobell.
From the collection of
Mr. Dennis Gowing, used
with kind permission.
He scarcely speaks. His intellect is overthrown, and White's mind, and the Sword house of death. Some hope of redemption from the chill of immature, even anti-life. The artist is "a device and rightly seen as old fashioned with Australian values, but they also men to lead us through this journey of Everyman and Everywoman, for White is dealing thematically with those Australian "forbidden" subjects, old and age.

No, the trouble in young men seems to embody much of White's own impatience, and disillusionment with his acting. "It will only be temporary. Sarsaparilla."

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"All I ask is that everybody acts reasonable," says Miss Quodling, and then, in a final epiphany to the mountain, and to life itself, sews up the land with the words of beginnings: "the bare patches, with the sour grass, the brickash water seeping through... Swords amongst the rocks..."

Two of them in Night on Bald Mountain, Stella Summerhayes and, to a certain extent, the ghost of that girl in the ruined, drunken Mrs Sword in her white wedding dress; dreamy Judy Pogson with her violin practice, in A Season at Sarsaparilla.

A Season at Sarsaparilla the watcher/commentator is Roy Child, the young schoolteacher, who leaves the scene with Australian values, but they also have a self-critical function. Their self-critical weight. They are forgetting the audience and play to the tender por­traits fall gently on the side of the virgins, and priggish, bookish, lavender-coloured young men to lead us through this journey of Everyman and Everywoman, for White is dealing thematically with those Australian "forbidden" subjects, old and age.

No, the trouble in young men seems to embody much of White's own impatience, and disillusionment with his acting. "It will only be temporary. Sarsaparilla."

But the range is much wider and more universal. The virginal and innocent young schoolteacher, who leaves the scene with Australian values, but they also have a self-critical function. Their self-critical weight. They are forgetting the audience and play to the tender por­traits fall gently on the side of the virgins, and priggish, bookish, lavender-coloured young men to lead us through this journey of Everyman and Everywoman, for White is dealing thematically with those Australian "forbidden" subjects, old and age.

Choral voices through... Swords amongst the rocks..."

In the spindly scrub, the prickly flowers... no scent much... but the smell of sun... Whole mornings I'll lie and watch a beetle or ants struggling with rocks of sand... Listen to the sound of pellets scattering as my goats browse off leaves... and sun

Her last words are the antithesis of Waiting for Godot: "There is no such thing as nuthin' (softer). The silence will breed again... in peace... a world of goats... perhaps even men!"

Night on Bald Mountain is White's most dramatically mature state to date. The archetypal characters are more complex, and set in a real/poeticized landscape which recognizes the unities of time and place.

But it is the most "difficult" of all White's plays, A Cheery Soul, which I find the most rewarding theatrically.

At the centre of A Cheery Soul is the terrifyingly ambivalent figure of Miss Docker. Her awful Pollyanna goodness is firstly presented to us as a disease: "She's sick with it. One must try to be kind to her." But at Mrs Lillee's funeral our sense of superiority to Miss Docker begins to be profoundly shaken. As we drive and drive again... in peace... a world of goats... perhaps even men!

The Ham Funeral, with its hilarious and brutal interludes, knockabout farce, choruses and revue-type scenes, played between gauzes or drops, but the risks and stored at A Cheery Soul in A Hard God, but the range is much wider and more universal. The virginal and innocent girls develop from the young girl in The Ham Funeral to Stella Summerhayes in Night on Bald Mountain, a figure con­tinually compared to wildflowers, birds, sunlight, and all the elements of nature.

From the adolescent girl children in A Season at Sarsaparilla to the tender por­traits of the old ladies in the Sundown Home in A Cheery Soul, White's sym­pathies fall gently on the side of the women.

Those of us in the Australian theatre who work in the area of expressionism, surrealism and symbolic language, are perhaps only now beginning to evaluate the debt we owe to Patrick White's earlier work; to realize that our traditional pub theatre of revue and rough knockabout farce, reflected in the plays of Boddy and Ellis, Jack Hibberd, Ron Blair, John Romeril and Barry Oakley, has its most sophisticated expression in The Ham Funeral and A Cheery Soul.
Peter Corrigan graduated in architecture from Melbourne University in 1966 and was registered in 1967. While at the University he designed sets and costumes for fourteen student productions, ranging from *Hamlet* in a tent to *The Birthday Party* and *Faust*.

He subsequently did post-graduate work and taught at Yale University in the Architecture School. While at Yale he was involved next door in the Drama School with the Design Department and the Yale Rep.

For the next five years he worked as both an architect and stage designer in Manhattan. Theatrical experience included designing for a range of Off-Broadway companies - the best known being at La Mama Theatre and the Playhouse of the Ridiculous.

At the end of 1973, the Australian Opera Company flew him back to Sydney to design sets and costumes for John Bell’s production of *Don Giovanni* in the Opera House. Since his return he has designed five productions with the Australian Performing Group, including Brecht’s *The Mother* and Romeril’s *Floating World*.

He is now resident in Melbourne and his time is divided between a private architectural practice and the Australian Performing Group.

CITY SUGAR

One night I went to the local Drive-In to see Brian de Palma’s “Phantom of the Opera”. In this movie, Paul Williams played a demented rock composer who threw extravagant spazzas all over his circular desk. This particular piece of furniture prompted the third and final design I presented to Ian Giles, the director of the show. The acid green colour scheme, the silver posts and the tilted gilt-framed mirror somehow just seemed to follow naturally.

A FLOATING WORLD

The audience were confronted by silver wire fences and directed through silver wire gates. Inside this compound, the vaguely shipboard forms, the claustrophobic green paint job, the dinner suited drummer, the red satin curtains, the deck chairs and dippy birds, all constituted the images of Les Harding’s nightmare world.

The audience watched and waited as Les Harding took the Cherry Blossom cruise to Tokyo and his suppressed memories of Changi surfaced, and ultimately drove him mad.

This was all just hard work.
PECKING ORDERS
This play was located on colonial Victoria's 19th Century prison hulks. They were moored off Williamstown in Port Phillip Bay, and inhabited by Genet-type figures.

The set was grafted together by sawing up Carol Porter's "My Foot My Tutor" set, and propping up the resultant lumber on posts.

The flag was the property of a Collective member, while the map, one of the Bay, was painted onto the floor in Imperial Raj Red and Blue.
There was no colour used whatsoever to establish mood with this set. It depended totally on Duchamp, Grotowski's Poor Theatre, and the annual A.P.G. liquidity crisis.

The cast was offered a grab bag of unassuming, everyday wooden objects, e.g. planks, boxes, and steps. The production depended upon them being invested with magic and meaning. In many aspects it was particularly purist Brechtian design.

After two weeks with no ideas, this set was the result of a social visit to the Bushy Berkley's modest timber cottage in Prahran. It proved to be a bower bird's nest full of china ducks, old movie posters, bamboo furniture, wax fruit and flash trash.

John Pinder and I climbed over the back fence of the neighbourhood green grocer and secured 48 timber fruit cases.

Suzanne Spunner, if I remember correctly, adjudged it her best set for the season. Beats me.

The night before, I saw an old Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire movie in which they danced their way through a number of nifty art deco sets. I took the palm trees from one, the pyramid from another, threw in the silhouette and cross referenced, not unreasonably I thought, to P. La Creme's sphinx-like smile.

I really don't know where these nightclub sets come from.
Jerzy Grotowski proposed poverty in the theatre as an alternative to Rich Theatre. The later attempts to compete with films or T.V. by means of borrowed mechanisms, sophisticated technical plant or the dynamics of "total theatre". His Polish Theatre Laboratory happened to be strapped for money at the time, but they viewed their situation as an exciting theatrical opportunity not a crushing burden. In this spirit the A.P.C. presents "The Mother". We are not concerned with the juggling of radical chic ideas, but rather with the assuming of professional responsibilities.

This "poor design" attempts to examine the inherent nature of humble objects and cheap clothing. It is not a destructive Dada gesture. It is not an attempt to purge by anti-design. Objects have an independent life of their own. We seek to coax it out.

Our production invests a room, windows, shirts, some crates, coats, planks, dresses, twelve chairs, socks, etc. with meaning in relationship to a theatrical performance. It invites spectators to fulfil their own needs. We do not view you as instruments.

This design is not an end in itself. It is concerned with the act of making not being. It addresses itself to work.

A map of the City of ............. is enclosed.
Boyle Meets Girl

BARRY EATON


Robert Law, John McTernan; Larry Toms, Bill Charlton; J. Carlyle Benson, Ross Hohnen; Rosetti, Steve Paton; Mr Friday, Gary Baxter; Peggy, Angela Berrell; Miss Crews, Rosane Dunn; Rodney Bevan, Michael Smith; Green, Len Kaserman; Slade, Anthony Auckland; Susie, Linda Blumer; Nurse, Christine Woodland; Doctor, Glenn Mason; Chauffeur, John Hageman; Young Man, Hugh Scales; Studio Officer, Frank Haines; Cutter, Michael Canning; Nurse, Roslyn Forrest; Major Thompson, Roger Eagle; Radio Interviewer, Bob Huber; Radio Announcer, Ed Washer.

A visit to the Hollywood fun-factory at its golden best could hardly have been any zanier than Boyle Meets Girl. Resurrecting it from 1935, director Hayes Gordon sets a cracking pace for his cast at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre.

The story revolves around a typical (?) movie producer's office during the creation of the masterpiece that will save the studio from financial ruin. (Where have I heard that before?) Falling and fighting in a threatened riot of midget extras and a good running gag involving trumpets that is cleverly used to finish the show. I must admit I half-expected the Marx Brothers to appear suddenly and take over the stage. Indeed John McTernan does use some typical Groucho pieces of business.

The dialogue is full of great one-liners, as you would expect. Larry Toms (Bill Charlton), the swaggering cowboy star, is described by his agent as an outdoor man. Robert Law retorts, "Yeah? So's my garbage man!"

Hayes Gordon has chosen his large cast well for the most part. John McTernan excels once again and all but steals the show. Indeed John McTernan does use some typical Groucho pieces of business.

The only typical character missing from the line-up is the sexy-cum-beautiful-cum-bumble-footed young idiot Englishman who lurches into her life. Hollywood's true hero. Gary Baxter, sounding like James Cagney, as the movie producer, and Steve Paton as the oily agent, both give good performances.

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My main beef is with the accents. For some reason many Australian actors have trouble with the grasping and sustaining of an American accent. There are a couple of genuine accents in the cast and some reasonable attempts. But, on the whole, this failure is a jarring note in the production.

Accents aside, Hayes Gordon has let his head go, and it's obvious he and the cast have a ball with this one. I'm sure audiences will react accordingly.

Being an old movie fan helps!

It can be fun . . . watching the desperate lover trying to bring the lady to bed

THE HAPPY HUNTER

NORMAN KESSELL

The Happy Hunter by Georges Feydeau. The Marian St. Theatre Company, Marian St. Theatre, Killara, NSW. Opened 26 May, 1977. Director, Alastair Duncan; designer, Brian Nickless; builder, Richard Haller; Yvonne, Lynn Rainbow; Dr. Roussel, Phillip Hinton; Chandel, Mark Hashfield; Babette, Gaye Poole; Pierre, Damien Parker; Castillo, Al Thomas; Madame La Comtesse de Latour, Marion Johns; Inspector Duval, Kenneth Laird.

Feydeau is Feydeau is Feydeau, a respected colleague commented after having seen the Happy Hunter at Sydney's Marian St. Theatre.

True enough, this less well-known of the prolific George's 60-odd plays follows fully the all-too-familiar formula. Feydeau achieved a profitable popularity by his skill in devising so many permutations from a comparatively small bag of farcical situations, all of them centred on the bedroom.

In this piece, a husband, Chandel, per-
saudes a trusting wife, Yvonne, that on his frequent absences from home he is happily hunting rabbits and hares, and occasionally pheasants, with his Spanish friend Castille.

When she discovers he is, in fact, enjoying daintiness with his mistress and that the "bag" he dutifully brings home is direct from a butcher's shop, she decides to aveng the breach by her own yielding to importuning of a would-be lover, Roussel. It's a Feydeau fad that his heroines remain virtuous, so we know this is a seduction that will not be consummated. It can be fun, however, watching the desperate lover trying to bring the lady to bed.

This is, of course, the spot for the routine trouser-dropping technique, and for once this useful garment has a key role in the plot.

The remarkable coincidence that the would-be seducer's love-nest is in the same building as that of the husband's mistress conveniently brings all the protagonists toing the line for the predictable collision course.

To complicate the line-up, enter a police inspector, Duval, called on by Castille to apprehend his wife's lover, unknowing that said lover is, in fact, his good friend, Chandel. Also Chandel's nephew, Pierre, using a key given him by a former occupant of Roussel's apartment, one Fifi. All very neat, isn't it?

The awaited chase starts when the police inspector, as usual, arrests the wrong man. In the frenetic efforts by all to avoid unwanted confrontation, split-second near-misses keep the pot boiling as they race in and out of innumerable doors, windows, cupboards and closets.

I hardly need add that a blend of blackmail and qualified forgiveness pervades the happy ending.

Barnett Shaw's English adaptation neatly captures the Gallic flavour and naughtiness of Feydeau's inventiveness, to which the required elements of style and charm have been imparted by director Alastair Duncan. That other essential for the success of conjunction, pace, took a while to work up the night I was there, but eventually it was there.

I liked best Phillip Hinton's detailed portrait of the unlucky lover, Roussel, using with great effect every movement, gesture and expression in the farceur's repertoire.

Lynn Rainbow's attractive, smartly dressed wife had just the right blend of outraged virtue and ruthless retaliation. Al Thomas was spot-on as the bemused and befuddled Castille, especially in his exchanges with Mark Hasfield's appropriately blustering Chandel.

Damien Parker was an engaging and resourceful young Pierre; Kenneth Laidre a sly old police inspector who is also, he kept repeating, a man of the world; Marion Johns a painted bag of a concierge and Gaye Poole a saucy, hip-swinging maid.

Period dressing, as always at this theatre, was excellent, and designer Brian Nickless provided a pastel-hued, stylistic and highly ingenious double-purpose set for the construction of which Richard Haller received a well-merited programme credit.

'To speak for an audience, instead of to it, is one of the keys to its capture'

THE REMOVALISTS
THE PEOPLE SHOW NUMBER ONE

MARGUERITE WELLS

The Removalists by David Williamson. Riverina Trucking Company at its theatre, Q Block, Riverina CAE, Wagga, NSW. Opened 9 June 1977. Director, Terry O'Connell; designers, Fred Lyon; Sergeant Simmons; Eric Hillas; Constable Ross, Noel Hodda; Kate Mason, Jenny Leslie; Fiona Carter, Janet Haste; Kenny Carter, Mark Twiglen, Rob, the removalist, Greg McCarthy.

The People Show Number One devised by the cast. Riverina Trucking Company at its theatre, Q Block, Riverina CAE, Wagga, NSW. Original songs by Terry O'Connell.

Lighting; Fred Lynn; costumes, Eleanor McDonald and Peter Caley. Janine Bishop, Beth Collins, Kim Hillas, Barbara Kamlerr, Terry O'Connell, Myles O'Meara, Garry Peterson, Peter Wright.

Part of the very considerable charm of the Riverina Trucking Company's production is the warmth of their relationship with their audience. It is "their" audience from the start, for the army of helpers who hammer and paint, and, in this case, cook and wait at table, continues to grow, and the number of Wagga-ites — and others — who were willing to invest ten dollars and five hours in a night at the theatre is enough to make any other theatre company green with envy. Act 1, as a series of interviews — again performed by the whole company of approximately 30 people — is the performance of the evening of the thoughts, opinions, observations and feelings of Wagga people, then perhaps you are not alone, but you are wrong. From the heart-wringing plaint of the gourmet who found Kraft cheddar featured as Woolies' "Cheese of the Week", to the Catholic surfer, who, to save his soul while maximising his surfing time, would stand in his swimming trunks and clutching his surfboard, in company with a thousand other ajexed heads, outside the church (where the overflow of the surfer congregation was forced to congregate in reverent silence) throughout the Mass, the monologues had a warmth of humour and charm with which only the most morose critic could wish to quarrel. Certainly the audience had no complaints. Every wave of laughter flowed through both cast and audience. The cast had the sheerliness of muffins with maximum in disguise to entertain at night, yet knowing that their audience knows full well who they are in the day, and is glad to see them in both their capacities.

The cast for The Removalists should have been the cast for The Coming of Stork, but when Trucking Company member Ken Moffat was chosen to join the Australian "team" at the International Children's Theatre Festival, the company did another of those cast re-shuffles in which it is beginning to specialise, and Eric Hillas, who was to have been a very short Stork, became a medium-sized, but singularly pedantic, patronising, laboured and authoritarian Sergeant Simmons, whose force carried through to the end of the play. Act 1, a series of interviews — of Constable Ross come on his first posting to a two-man police station, and of the two women, come to lay a complaint against a wife-beating husband — is highly verbal and almost inevitably static. Slightly more energy and less concentration would have lifted the performance, but this very deliberation meant that every joke in the script came through with maximum clarity. Act 2, full of punch-ups and furniture moving, had as much visual life as one could hope for in an Australian lounge-room comedy; the violence was absolutely convincing and the panic of the police at their victim's death had such a sense of urgency that it gave retrospective tension to the rest of the play.

The gleaming white set made a police station which, like its sergeant, had an air or unpleasant wholesomeness. In the second act it acquired an appropriately bare and ultra-boring modern lounge, and then, with sky-blue rostra and chairs, a screen for the slides which were the backdrop and the lighting for The People Show Number One. The set was versatility and financial and artistic economy all in one.

Behind the black comedy of The Removalists is anger. Behind the humorous warmth of The People Show Number One, where each monologue has a telling sting of laughter in the tail, is the anger of powerlessness. It was this niggling undertone of anger expressed through an equal measure of humour and charm with which only the most morose critic could wish to quarrel. Certainly the audience had no complaints. Every wave of laughter flowed through both cast and audience. The cast had the sheerliness of muffins with maximum in disguise to entertain at night, yet knowing that their audience knows full well who they are in the day, and is glad to see them in both their capacities.
one evening of theatre, and won the audience totally. To speak for an audience, instead of to it, is one of the keys to its capture.

'For me . . . this production's main appeal stems from clever use of the York Theatre's thrust stage'

**WILD OATS**

NORMAN KESSELL


John Dory, Garth Meade; Sir George Thunder, Richard Meikle; Ephraim Smooth, Barry Otto; Lasy Amaranth Thunder, Anne Grigg; Harry Thunder, Robin Bowering; Midge, Bill Conn; Rover, Terry Bader; Chambermaid, Lisa Grayson; Farmer Gammon, Raymond Murray; Sim, Mervyn Drake, Jane, Abigail; Banks, Ron Ratcliff; Twitch, Lex Marinos; Mistree Johnstone, Jennifer West; Lamp, Edward Howell, Amelia, Phillipa Baker.

The Old Tote Theatre Company's programmes are always commendably informative and that for John O'Keeffe's *Wild Oats*, playing a short Sydney season in the Seymour Centre's York Theatre, is no exception.

Only notable omission is mention that this 18th-century farce was retrieved from obscurity by the Royal Shakespeare Company and staged at London's Aldwych Theatre last December.

Nor is the *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* credited with the quoted information that O'Keeffe (1747-1833) was an Irish dramatist who wrote his first play at 15. As an actor he was a member of Mossop's stock company in Dublin for 12 years. At 23 his eyesight began to fail and eventually he went blind, but he continued to write, mainly farces and light operas, the latter containing many well-known songs.

Of his more than 70 works, the most popular, especially in America, were *The Poor Soldier* (1783) and *Wild Oats* (1791). The latter was last staged at Drury Lane in 1820.

English critic William Hazlitt called O'Keeffe "the English Molière", but, as the *Oxford Companion* sourly comments, "in view of the total disappearance of all his work from the stage, this comparison can hardly be justified."

While this revival must qualify that appraisal, O'Keeffe is certainly no Molière. Were Hazlitt with us today, he might more accurately describe O'Keeffe as an 18th-century Ben Travers.

Here are the typical multiplicity of oddball characters, the misunderstandings, the mixed identities, the endless comings and goings through innumerable entrances and exits. Also a Gilbertian situation of a misplaced husband and son whose rediscovery restores the latter to his
rightful place among the gentry, thereby entitling him to woo the lovely heiress.

He is Rover, the Strolling Gentleman of the play’s sub-title, most engagingly played by Terry Bader. She is Lady Amaranth, a gentle and generous Quaker somewhat unwillingly repressed by the bigotry of her own servants and, as played by the otherwise very personable Anne Grigg, a bit mature-looking for the boyish Bader’s wooing.

The tangled plot has Richard Meikle, as Captain George Thunder, all nautical talk and naval oaths, planning to marry his son Harry off to Lady Amaranth for the sake of her fortune. Meanwhile, Robin Bowering, as Harry, has decamped from naval college because he wants to become an actor. He and Rover meet on the road and become friends, then go their separate ways.

Next, the captain’s valet de chambre John Dory — with Garth Meade, whom I have seen before only in revue, amusing as a dull-witted seaman — mistakes Rover for the missing Harry. Harry decides to take advantage of this and continue the impersonation to try to impress Lady Amaranth, who is only too ready to respond.

Confusion now piles on confusion, with sub-plots that include Raymond Murray as a grasping farmer seeking to foreclose on an elderly brother and sister (Ron Ratcliff and Phillipa Baker) and eject them from their cottage; the lustful pursuit of Jane, Farmer Gammon’s simple daughter (Abigail) by Lady Amaranth’s Malvolio-like steward, Ephraim Smooth (Barry Otto), and the captain’s pursuit of three naval deserters. Other complications ensue from a challenge to a duel and also — on the authority of the cast — a customary concluding gavotte.

The play opens slowly, but gathers momentum as the plot thickens with lines from Otway, Buckingham, and that’s allowing for his outstretched dialogue is cheekily laced with quotations from Shakespeare singularly appropriate to the moment and also — on the authority of Plays and Players critic David Mayer — with lines from Otway, Buckingham, Fielding, Rowe and other lesser-known writers.

For me, however, this production’s main appeal stems from clever use of the York Theatre’s thrust stage by director Mick Rodger and designer Anne Fraser. Comparison with photographs of the London production indicate this treatment as entirely original.

Rodger has many of the cast sitting or reposing on the straw-littered surround of the stage, rising whenever necessary to respond to a cue and join in the action. I do not know whether it is in the script or not, but having one of the players (Lex Marinos) acting as stage manager and wielding a gavel to signal and announce changes of scene, is another very effective device.

Anne Fraser has provided a sort of bal­relief freeze backing which at first sight looks like a vast junk-shop display of huge antique cupboards, a piano, a coach, a sedan chair, and with ladders on either side to balconies above.

Every one of these items is used for entrances and exits, as is a theatrical costume basket forward on stage and also steps leading below stage down which a couple of characters tumble alarmingly.

Incidental music, played by a trio in one of the balconies, is by actor Mervyn Drake, who also gives an amusing performance as Sim, the farmer’s gormless son.

What I assume is a deliberate piece of audience-teeasing is that Jennifer West as a landlady and Lisa Grayson as a serving wench expose much of their ample charms, but the well-endowed Abigail, who is delightful as the rustic Jane, remains coyly covered.

The Q goes west — and is alive and doing very well

A HARD GOD

FRANK HARRIS


A bitchy, difficult role, but sensitively written by Kenna and beautifully played by Lola Vandere.

The Q Theatre, sadly missed in Sydney for its lunch-hour shows over many years, is alive and doing very well in its western districts pioneering venture.

Penrith, Parramatta and Bankstown are its venues. Many patrons have never seen live theatre before, I was told. Cheers for the Q!

After a knock-out success with Lock Up Your Daughters and Orton’s What the Butler Saw, they look like having another hit with a revival of Peter Kenna’s A Hard God.

Kenna, who first hit the spotlight with his prize-winning Slaughter of St Teresa’s Day, has written his best play so far in A Hard God, and that’s allowing for his latest work, Mates.

I saw A Hard God on opening night at the company’s base theatre in Penrith, one of the most comfortable and spaciously seated in-the-round theatres I have visited.

A Hard God is a wonderfully sympathetic and acutely observed picture of an Irish Catholic family, bush-bred and with fairly rigid religious codes, but lost and baffled in their standards when they come to the city lights in Sydney.

There’s Aggie, the eternal mother figure, husband Dan, who is dying of cancer but who keeps faith his “hard God” despite the troubles which engulf him like the biblical Job.

Martin, the elder brother, is married to a religious bigot, Monica, and writes passionate poetry on the sly.

Paddy, the younger brother, wed to drunken, gambling Sophie, is a desperate little coward, always prating religion, but, like Falstaff, getting out of the tight spots as quickly as he can.

As the group gets together, there are brawls and conciliatory scenes, full of fast comedy as well as touching, wrenching moments. Kevin Jackson, directing, handled these very well.

Doreen Warburton, the driving force behind the Q Theatre’s western districts venture, played Aggie splendidly.

Doreen doesn’t fall into the trap of playing for blatant comedy, although the laughs pop up plenty.

Much to my liking, she’s the natural woman, beset by all the religious traumas of the Cassidy mob around her, but with her mind firmly fixed on the only true way to earthly salvation — survival in tough times.

She’s always questioning where the next slice of bread comes from before she gives thanks.

A novel experimental touch was the split time-level Kenna used. The Cassidy family scenes are interleaved with episodes in which Aggie’s son Joe is involved in a homossexual incident with his friend Jack.

It’s the younger generation still caught in the family background, and worried by Church rules. Jack breaks free, but Joe is abandoned, left only with vague hopes of another happy companionship.

This was the only part of the show which didn’t work, possibly because of first-night nerves and more probably because of the tricky stage bridge on which they had to work.

Still, Joe (Geoff Boon) made good in his last scene.

At the start of Act 2, Martin, who never sits down to rest without a mumbled prayer, is dead. There’s a mystery here. Did he commit suicide when he apparently fell over a cliff on a job or was he pushed by those who hated his ideas on unions?

But there’s no mystery about his widow, Monica. Over-zealous in religion, she’s a frozen bigot, elegantly dressed and finicky in behaviour, lost in a dream of heavenly rewards which is totally divorced from the life around her.

A bitchy, difficult role, but sensitively written by Kenna and beautifully played by Lola Vandere.

Best supports were Leo Taylor as the cowardly Paddy and Ron Hackett as Dan. Richard Brooks (Martin) needed a slightly stronger projection.

But the crowning touch came from Doreen Warburton in the curtain scene, muttering prayers to her half-forgotten dying Dan, and expressing an agony of loneliness in final silence. She was superb.

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'A very theatrical piece of work, and more than usually well directed'

**FUNNY PECULIAR**

**BOB ELLIS**

Funny Peculiar by Mike Stott. Presented by J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd. and Michael Edgley International Pty Ltd. Theatre Royal, Sydney. Opened 18 June 1977. Director, Jeffrey Cambell; designer, Patrick Robertson; lighting/technical director, Sue Nattrass; Irene Tinsley, Kat Wild; Rev. A.J. Thwaite, Brian Harrison; Trevor Tinsley, George Layton; Sgt. Harry Asquith, Gordon Glenwright; Mrs Baldry, Lynne Murphy; Stanley Baldry, Bruce Spence; Shirley Smith, Wendy Gilmore, Eric Smith, John Benton; Desmond Ainsley, Henri Steeps; Shane Pritchard, Brian Harrison.

Any theatre audience, remarked the Julius Caesar of Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March*, feels impelled to respond to any play with the moral attitudes of the last generation but one. The swinging-young-executive audience of Funny Peculiar, accordingly reacted with squeals of delighted shock at the nudity, adultery, bisexuality and on-stage fellatio that they could have had any night at home. But to their credit they reacted as well with sympathy, philosophical absorption and grateful applause to the darker levels of the play, which for me were totally unexpected in such a work and very disruptive of my holiday mood.

In summary, the play seems more predictable than it is. Trevor, an ardent small-town grocer energised by much erotic literature, seeks new sexual frontiers outside of marriage and when subsequently in traction is alarmed to hear how Irene, his normal little wife, is finding them, too, in the large and welcoming bed of the selfsame swinging couple from whom he has learned so much. The *Funny Peculiar* of the title, however, refers not to his wayward provincial urges and their sensuous metropolitan bed-fellowship; it refers as well to the other, more helpless figures in the play — the deviant vicar who after an uproarious village scandal hangs himself from the bellrope of the church steeple (in a black comic curtain-raiser more reminiscent than it should be of Christopher Hampton's *The Philanthropist*); Mrs Baldry, the village busybody, a character more or less left over from Ben Jonson, who spies on her neighbours' infidelities and reports them in lecherous detail to their drowsily smiling spouses; her son Stanley, the village idiot, whose chief permitted sensual pastimes are the fondling of mice and frogs, lucid discussion of their funny little animal ways and wild dreams of unbridled sexual congress with Dora, a female molluskoid acquaintance now, alas, under lock and key; and Stanley's wife Irene, whose very "normalness" in being shocked at her husband's infidelity, sobbing, despairing and wanting a divorce, is in this day and age looked on as highly peculiar. Her despairing soliloquy on the hopelessness of her ordinariness (extraordinarily well performed by Katy Wild) is topped only by Mrs Baldry's parallel soliloquy (almost as well performed by Lynne Murphy) on how the first time she saw her husband fully naked was when he was dying, and his beautiful body withering away.

It's a very theatrical piece of work, and more than usually well directed by Jeffrey Cambell; one that more often than not (though I know it's a dangerous thing to say) in its soliloquies, songs performed in the nude by moonlight, sensual animal images, tasteless cretin buffoonery, wierd encounters by torchlight, pratfalls, pelted cream-puffs, and warm despair at the fleetness of man's existence, reminded me of the darker comedies of Shakespeare. It's neither an idle nor a coat-trailing comparison. Mr Stott has as sure a sense of the contemporary audience (always going three steps further than I'd have thought possible), and as deft a hand for the juxtaposition of rude force and autumn sorrow. He may not yet have achieved the mountainish, but on the foothills of craft and cunning he's looking very good.

As Trevor, George Layton is excellent, a nuggety, dream-tossed archetype for all seasons. Bruce Spence is less than comfortable (and with good reason) in his all-too-familiar typecasting as the gangling cretin,
and John Benton and Wendy Gilmore are suave andgolden as the singers. Gordon Glenwright does a bouncy cameo as the constable ("If every pooper hanged himself from the bellrope we'd all be deaf with the clanging"), and Brian Harrison is good in his dual roles as the sodomite vicar and the concealed and foul-mouthed hospital patient deprived by medical science of one of his balls. During the battle royal of the cream-puffs Henri Szeps as the territorial cakeman displays a rigid, incensed and acrobatic sangfroid as artful as Buster Keaton's. But the honours go narrowly to Katy Wild, whose enormous darkling humanism left me shimmering, like a leaf. In all, an extraordinary, traditional, original, bad, good, excellent, mediocre (in terms of propaganda value), revolutionary night out.

‘...the rare confidence of the production...takes the play by the forelock’

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

KATHARINE BRISBANE


Director, John Bell; designer, Larry Eastwood; costume design, Kim Carpenter; lighting, Grahame Murray; music composed by Sandra McKenzie.

Leonato, Gordon McDougall; Hero, Deborah Kennedy; Beatrice, Anna Volska; Ursula, Maggie Blinco; Don Pedro, Ivar Kant; Don John, Tony Llewellyn-Jones; Benedick, Peter Carroll; Claudio, Tony Sheldon; Conrad, Denis Scott; Borachio, Robert Alexander; Friar, Alan Tobin; Dogberry, Drew Forsythe; Verges, Alan Tobin; A Sexton, Tony Llewellyn-Jones; Antonio. Dennis Scott.

There can be no question, on the evidence of the success of the current Shakespearean season at the Nimrod Theatre. John Bell's productions of Twelfth Night and Much Ado About Nothing make him arguably the best director of Shakespeare we have in the 1970s.

Neither of them are definitive productions and inevitably they have aroused controversy. The casting of a boy in the role of Claudio, for example, disturbed many people's sensibilities. What these offer - and audiences have responded to it - is not correctness but that same audacity, that same confrontation with the flesh and blood of the actor, that first brought John Bell to our attention as a director in 1970 with The Legend of King O'Malley.

The location of Much Ado About Nothing is Messina. In this production, a revision of the successful 1975 one with Anna Volska as Beatrice and Peter Carroll as Benedick, Bell has capitalised upon the Mediterranean setting both in vivid colour and a strong sense of the clan structure which frames that society. Within this structure the blood conspiracies, the protection of women and the preservation of honour, the elaborate rituals of the vendetta - all sit comfortably. The period is vague - Tony Llewellyn-Jones's Don John is a little Napoleon, out of his time; others might be drawn from the present day. As originally conceived, Larry Eastwood's set was a circus tent in which Leonato, Governor of Messina, oddly stowed his family and entertained the Prince of Arragon and his train.

Kim Carpenter's costumes are concerned to expand this sense of a congregation of peasants and clowns. The bustling in the new production is still there is a two-level set made over from Twelfth Night and painted primary colours. The present set adds little to the design of the play's action; rather it adds a new permanence: no longer the circus - Luna Park, perhaps. It matters little to the audience; enveloped in bunting and Sandra McKenzie's circus music they find themselves in jolly, outgoing company at a family party.

The point of controversy, however, in this production is not the vaudeville visual style but the greengrocer accents. "Can one possibly justify", one asks oneself, "a jewel of the English language being played in such an accent"? Unless, of course, they are a company of Italian greengrocers. And again: "Is it distracting? Is the meaning obscured? Is it incongruous? Or does it, in fact, assist the audience's comprehension?" All the evidence, of course - the packed houses, the laughter, the bubbling interval, the hooting enjoyment of the schoolboys who surrounded me in the audience - point to the production being an even more resounding success than its premiere season in 1975.

Perhaps it was the expectation, this time - I admit that first time round I found some of the accents distracting and obscuring and they tended to pale after the first scene or two. In this new production the dialect seems more deliberate, consistent and painted with its care of the text. It reflects a general concentration on detail, particularly of the externals - the timing of business, the pointing of implications - that characterises the present production.

The reason I liked the accent was a simple one: that it provided a communal reality within which the actors could work and a bridge of familiarity over which the audience might approach the play without timidity or reverence. The problems involved in trying to find something in common between Shakespeare and the modern Australian are, of course, legion. Aristocracy, in particular, is something that makes us uneasy. We have no sense of natural hierarchy and the intrigues of the nobility would seem pretty remote to our experience of life. That is why the study of Shakespeare so often becomes a duty, an effort of will, in search of an enlightening experience. John Bell's production of Much Ado About Nothing knocks the stuffing out of such uncomprehending reverence and focuses the audience's attention and affection directly on the people and events on stage.

The chief beneficiaries of the technique are Beatrice and Benedick, Claudio and Hero. Peter Carroll's rough, amiable soldier, part-clown part-hero, engaging with the audience at every opportunity and paired with the swinging peasant liberalism of Anna Volska's Beatrice, makes of their affair a public circus in which their mutual affection, transparent from the first, is blasted in happy salvoes across the arena. This Benedick vies with his role in The Christian Brothers to be his best performance yet. Anna Volska's Beatrice is equally a landmark in her career. In this and her Olivia she has discovered a new warmth and affability behind her elegance which gives a new quality to her acting.

Bell is, of course, right in exploiting the Sicilian blood to explain the vindictive behaviour of the villain, Don John, and the gullibility of Claudio. A man of experience at arms, Claudio is naive in matters of human nature. He falls in love with the first girl he meets on leave, precipitates his affair a public circus in which their marriage, does a quick reverse after falling for a crude trick to dishonour his bride and an about-turn when ordeal by death proves her innocent. He then takes the next partner offered him, does a full circle and ends up with the resurrected Hero as if nothing had happened since the beginning of the dance. Shakespeare makes a point of tripping up his characters - they attempt a too hasty marriage. Claudio's marriage looks doomed to fall flat on its face. The real marriage in the play is that of Beatrice and Benedick, born of long testing, maturation and tolerance.

The one reservation I have in this area is the interpretation of Hero. The young women among Shakespeare's lovers have a way of being more level-headed than their men and more courageous. The direction of Deborah Kennedy's Hero as a half-grown schoolgirl is at odds with the dialogue and Miss Kennedy's potential in the role. As Claudio, Tony Sheldon is splendid when they attempt a too hasty marriage. Claudio's marriage looks doomed to fall flat on its face. The real marriage in the play is that of Beatrice and Benedick, born of long testing, maturation and tolerance.

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take his biggest challenge yet when he undertakes the title role in the trilogy, *The Norman Conquests*.

Ivor Kant's *Don Pedro* is also a remarkable performance, holding the centre of the play with a relaxed authority that brings life to the old hierarchical world from which Shakespeare's characters sprang and the new hospitality John Bell's production offers them.

*Much Ado About Nothing* is not the most difficult of Shakespeare's plays to perform; its principal characters captivate their audiences and the play has a long stage history of popular success. The production of this play is not in new twists to an old theme, though they are there, but in the rare confidence of the production which takes the play by the forelock as though such had never been done before. It is a confidence not of youth and ignorance but of a slowly maturing production which takes the play by the twists to an old theme, though they are one grisly charade — and two fine productions.

### HAMLET
**THE 'NAKED' HAMLET**

**ROSENCRANZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD**

**Rex Cramphorn**

**Hamlet** by William Shakespeare. Independent Theatre, Sydney. Opened 8 June 1977. Director, Graham Dixon; lighting design, Toni Reed; sound design, Glen Kerr.

Hamlet, Tony Hayes; Claudius, Charles Woody; Polonius, Raymond O'Reilly; Horatio, Peter Withall; Laertes, Robert Kinanne; Rosencrantz, Peter Bonney; Guildenstern, Barry Bennett; Ophelia, Garry Skinner; Marcellus, Gordon Ellice-Flinch; Bernardo, Arthur Fawkes; Player King, Arthur Fawkes; Player Queen, Catherine Priory; Lucianas, Garry Skinner; 1st Grave Digger, Dennis Glenn; 2nd Grave Digger, Barry Bennett; Priest, Roy Wilkinson; Reynaldo, Christopher Boddam Wetham; Gertrude, Lucy Clifford; Ophelia, Carole Cramwell; Ghost, Roy Wilkinson; Messenger, Hugh Weav­ing; Attendants, Toni Reed, Patrick Casey; Fron­tinras, Chris Bell; Francesco, Michael Dengler; Volkman, Glenn Buttress-Grove.


Rosenzweig, Les Amsussen; Guildenstern, Scott Lambert; The Player, Alan Faulkner; Alfred, Stuart Chalmers; Tragedians, James McLachlan, David Wheeler; Hamlet, Peter de Salis; Ophelia, Kate Ferguson; Claudius, Michael Rolfe; Gertrude, Maree D'Arcy; Polonius, Bob Baines; Horatio, Don Swonnell.

I had intended to draw a veil over my experience of the Independent's *Hamlet* — better let it pass in decent obscurity, aver the gaze of those who, but then, in one of the daily papers, I read a review of it which, to my amazement, complimented it in all departments and congratulated it on keeping a school audience quiet. Now some years of experience with daily-paper reviews have prepared me for generalised pro and con noises and an absence of any detailed account of even the superficial appearance of the production, let alone any exposition of its meaning or intention. However, in this particular case, the grotesque accord, (a kind of conspiracy of mediocrity), between the aged, school-hall fustian of the production and the aged, clappedr of the review, about general clarity and how well the children put it up with it, together with the immeasurable gulf between all that production and exhibition and any sort of real experience in a theatre — well, all that has roused me to a sort of missionary zeal (readily discernible in the overstrained syntax).

So, instead of drawing a veil, I'm going to describe exactly what I saw at the Independent. A flying glimpse of the foyer took in a minimum of wattage failing to conceal peeling paint, a sense of damp and decay. With something like superstitious awe, the glimpse also took in Miss Doris Fitton, CBE, still in attendance, along with her portrait in oils. The passage down the aisle revealed an auditorium two-thirds full of schoolchildren, the few adults being banded together in the front rows. A glance at the programme informed us that "director, cast and production staff" were "giving their services to the Theatre for the duration of the season of this production".

Looking up to the stage, the eye was rewarded by the spectacle of a wrinkled cyclorama — the sheet pinned-up-at-the-back-of-the-hall effect — with a row of rostrums in front of it and a few sets of steps. The structural columns, which form such a prominent feature of the stage space at the Independent, had come into their own and were, for once, cheerfully revealed. The lights having gone down and come up again apparently unchanged, and some wind noises having got up steam, a performance of *Hamlet* which exceeded any expectation aroused by the foregoing, exploded into view.

"Creaked" is not perhaps the right word for the group who first assembled on the "battlements": their average age seemed to be about seventeen and I took them (perhaps wrongly) to be the progeny of the Independent Theatre School of Dramatic Art, advertised on the back of the programme. The Hamlet who eventually joined them (Tony Hayes) was of a somewhat more mature age, dressed in a décolleté white shirt, black velvet "doublet" and black tights — a costume, in fact, that looked like a fancy-dress party with a reasonable expectation of being recognised. What he said was clearly audible and no doubt made good enough sense to those who'd done their homework. His indications of anger, grief, madness were as sensibly decorous as his well-lacquered page-bob. Gradually it became clear that anything else would have been out of place. What was unfolding was an attempt at school play, with all-purpose, costume-hire "mediaeval" garments, the black drapes, the wrinkled cyce, the rigid young actors. What held the audience pinned to their chairs was surely the grishly predictability, the utter conventionality of everything worn and done and said in this time-honoured charade. If Hamlet, or anyone else, had for a moment let slip the slightest hint of genuine feeling or attempted to smuggle across the merest suspicion of communicated meaning, the whole thing would have been endangered, might even have collapsed like a house of cards allowing us to laugh properly at the ridiculous component elements: Claudius (Charles Moody) looking and behaving like a cross between the pantomime-dame Gertrude of *Hamlet On Ice* and the King in the *Wizard of Id* — hilariously dressed in purple robes and a cardboard crown; Gertrude (Lucy Clifford) straight from a touring company's *Snow White* — the wicked queen in one of those twin-horned "wimples" (draped with a bit of organza) and a great big red necklace; the thought of such quaint furry-duddies getting knotted up in the sheets together; the Ghost (Roy Wilkinson) whose melodrama quaver on "Rememmmmber meeee" as he exited was capped by his "Swear" from the wings which sounded as if he'd been kicked in the stomach rather suddenly; the juvenile-player king in his outrageous grey wig . . .

I had some difficulty holding my compa­nions in her seat, at every black-out she'd be on the edge of it, saying "Now remember!" could hold her no longer, we were sprung, bolting up the aisle, by the lights for inter­val.

I left, as I say, convinced that it would be tasteless to draw attention to the extraordinarily prolonged death-throes of the Independent and to the remarkable survival of all that is worst in my memories of amateur Shakespeare for schools in the fif­ties. The only chance is that the audiences I went to school with would have hooted merrily and made free with Jaffas, causing an impassioned "Shut up" speech by Hamlet and acrimony in assembly next morning. I guess it just shows that people expect less and less of theatre with every passing decade, a process resonantly main­tained by showing the worst things to the most impressionable.

By contrast the Actors' Company "Naked* Hamlet* looks like the last word in novelty. Actually, the version dates..."
from 1968, the passage of time being perhaps most clearly discernible in the occasional Hair-type excursions into song-and-dance music (audience on the stage in the middle of this case instead of at the end like Hair). But the greatest, the significant contrast to the Independent’s Hamlet was in the audience and its reaction: not school-children compelled to the theatre and pinned in their seats in well-drilled catatonia, not even a chic or coterie audience, but normal-looking, everyday young people and adults handed together for no other purpose, as far as I could see, than the enjoyment of the play.

I suppose it could be said that the “Naked” Hamlet (it’s something of a misnomer — they wear underclothes, Hamlet and Ophelia that is, for a couple of appearances) does little to extend or clarify one’s ideas of the play. It reposes entirely on the principle of administering high-speed, irreverent shocks to one’s preconceptions about the play. But the result is that one is thinking about Hamlet (even if thinking, for example, I’m sure there’s more to the death of Ophelia than burying a peanut under a garbage-tin lid) not just having a predictable and unthought, unfeeled stream of knotted old words launched at one from behind the arch. Of course, such sections of the text as remain can still seem fairly knotted, all the more so, in fact, in their odd new surroundings. And sometimes the surroundings seem only to complicate the meaning — as in the case of the soliloquy delivered by Hamlet in his Italian janitor character and voice (shades of Nimrod’s Much Ado) where what is added is a tone of cheeky eccentricity in keeping with Hamlet’s joke-playing character but at the expense of the intellectual content of the lines. Audience-participation (at its best at the end where Hamlet is the only one left alive and has to ask an audience-member to shoot him — a really very resonant moment), showgirl numbers, non-stop gags, and a general sense of knock-em-down-and-drag-em-out attack make this a vividly American Hamlet — show-biz know-how puts some punch in the Bard.

But tempting and easy as it is to apply prescriptive, classical criteria to this play, on the premise that any production of Hamlet must be aiming to give the final authentic insight into the play, as if it were to be the last performance ever, it must be admitted that the premise is probably false. There is no reason why witty/slapstick games should not be played with the familiar old war-horse — even to at least partly serious purpose for the “Naked” Hamlet is not really a send-up (like Hamlet On Ice), rather a series of reflections on it in 1968-American-contemporary idiom.

Peter de Salis gives a sweatingly, pantingly energetic commitment to the “star” role and thoroughly deserves the approval he wins from the audience. The production (Rodney Delaney) moves, as I have indicated, at a smart pace and makes what must be more than 90 minutes without an interval seem like just the right shape. The company’s alternating Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is a respectable treatment of the play and putting it back-to-back with Hamlet is a good idea. Unfortunately, although consistency of roles is maintained (Peter de Salis etc. playing Hamlet etc. in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern — and Les Asmussen and Scott Lambert playing Rosencraft and Guilderstone in the Hamlet) the Hamlet from which the characters stray into Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is manifestly not the “Naked” Hamlet. So, as in the Old Tote’s production of some years ago, the Hamlet, Gertrude etc. who appear in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are played as gross exaggeration in rather ridiculous costumes. I remember that I wished, in reviewing the Old Tote production, that one could have a sense of an honest performance of Hamlet actually taking place just outside the off-stage limbo in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exists.

I was pleased to find that the play still seems to me, as it did then, one of the finest in the modern repertoire. Its Beckett-like vision of disorientation in a moral, spiritual and even physical wasteland, couched in the altogether original terms of a metaphor of moribund theatrical tradition, of gags and word-games spending themselves in grim silence, is unparalleled in new English playwrighting. I still long to see a production that plays the sub-text more and doesn’t over-sell the superficial comedy, but it is good to see it revived and good to see an audience thoroughly enjoying it.
THE OLD TOTE
at the SEYMOUR CENTRE

"Alan Ayckbourn is Britain's best comic playwright since Noel Coward"
HERBERT KREITZER, LONDON DAILY EXPRESS

"Very funny, fascinating, hilarious. The Norman Conquests will become a cult here as it has in London"
CLIVE BARNES, NEW YORK TIMES

The NORMAN CONQUESTS
by ALAN AYCKBOURN
with TONY LLEWELLYN-JONES as Norman, PETER ADAMS, JUDI FARR, JENNIFER HAGAN, VERONICA LANG, ALAN TOBIN
Directed by ROBERT QUENTIN. Designed by LARRY EASTWOOD.

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A Trilogy: PLAY A - "TABLE MANNERS", PLAY B - "LIVING TOGETHER", PLAY C - "ROUND AND ROUND THE GARDEN". PLAYS A, B, and C will be played in repertoire from AUG. 3 TO OCT. 25 (see attached schedule)

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HOW MARVELLOUS MELBOURNE CAME TO LIFE

‘In all, we churned out the equivalent of four full-length plays’

As early as the winter of 1970, only two years after its beginnings, the Australian Performing Group, in Melbourne, exhibited its egalitarian impulses by deciding to make a play co-operatively. Until then the company, a loose but frenetic organisation dominated by individuals like Graeme Blundell and Brian Davies, had been a crucible for the Australian playwright, a pot pourri of improvisational experiment, actor assertion, political indignation and ecletic assimilation — Off-Off-Broadway, Brecht and Grotowski all intermingling with the works of local writers, vaudeville and Vietnam.

The period from 1967 to 1970 at La Mama, where a plethora of groups and individuals worked, was indeed remarkably steamy, and not merely by contrast with the rechauffe theatre of the earlier sixties — the Melbourne Theatre Company and Emerald Hill Theatre, for all their virtues, did not think or work out of an Australian context of experiment and aspiration. The milieu at La Mama was nakedly, importunately Australian, though paradoxically coloured by a modernist curiosity. In that sense it was never quite parochial. One style that did emerge, partly dictated by the small size of the space, was physical, direct, unadorned, tough, comic, yet strangely realist — no tricks of the trade, but rather an instinctive talent, partly dictated by the physical environment. In the context of experiment and aspiration, the theatre is not parochial; it is part of a unique working theatrical structure that the best and the worst of the world of theatre. This is in stark contrast to the Melbourne Theatre Company, where no tricks of the trade and no philosophy, in a word.

The APG has always been graced with, to the contrary, a surefire of philosophies, to the extent that political and theatrical theory has occasionally cluttered creative processes. Nevertheless, a theatre devoid of ideas is a barren and fatuous one. The APG, for all its reluctance to notch up successes consistently, has at least been more than dimly aware of issues crucial to the practice of theatre. This is in stark relief to a heap of the country’s theatrical institutions which tend to work empirically and derivatively, to whose practitioners ‘theory is a dirty word and whose ideas you could jot down on half a Tally-ho cigarette paper.

Early on, then, a lot of matters were not automatically accepted by members of the APG. For example: that the actor is naturally recessive and stupid (something told me by a few of our senior actors over the years); that the director is invariably and indubitably right; that the text is sacrosanct; that theatre operates best within a hierarchical structure; that we are an English colony; that professionalism ineluctably means excellence; that formal training enables you to work flexibly and feelingly; that Theatre is part of a Universal Concatenation of which we are but a minor and snivelling link.

It is out of this sceptical and heuristic background that the best and the worst of the APG has evolved. The APG has not yet achieved its highest potential. Externally, the mandarins of taste, the guar­di­ans of the status quo, have seen to that. Internally, it is a risk-taking, self-evolving organization whose morale is extremely tenuous. Its failures relate to the inanities of ideological decorum, to a naive and manipulative use of democratic procedure, to a kind of insular moral wankery. Its successes, and they are high in my now disaffiliated opinion, derive from the earned, felt, fought-for discoveries of its concerned and thinking artists, and are inseparable from a unique working theatrical structure.

The APG is still a major intellectual and artistic reference point in Australian theatre, it’s an innovative resource centre, some kind of weird laboratory of ideas and practice, from whose contorted tubes issue both elixirs and steam.

So, in 1970, while John Bell was working at Jane Street on a text by Bob Ellis and Michael Boddy (The Legend of King O’Malley), a two-year-old group of actors, directors and writers started open workshops with a view to developing a show based on shared concerns. As the workshops continued, new people were attracted: of special importance was Margaret Williams, who alerted us to the 1880s in Melbourne, to the Australian melodramas of the time and the work of Bland Holt, Darrell and Alfred Dampier. Idealistic theatrical parallels were imme­diately discovered in terms of our own time. Research into the political and social history of that period revealed delicious analogies with contemporary Victoria.

In the autumn of 1970, the APG acquired the Pram Factory — signific­antly, around the corner from its breeding-ground, La Mama. Workshops and rehearsals soon proceeded in what is now known as the Front Theatre. New blood appeared in the form of Max Gillies, Evelyn Krape, Claire Dobbin and Tony Taylor from the Bouverie Street studios of the Education Department. Bouverie Street, incidentally, was the beat of Carlton’s famous larrikin push, The Bourgeois; they later featured, given the circles of history, in Marvellous Melbourne.

Marvellous Melbourne . . . The title was affectionately, ironically, taken from one of the most popular melodramas of the late 19th century; we included in the production the Opium Den Scene from that excellent oddity.

Once the period, themes and basic style had been adumbrated, the writers, John Romeril and I, dispatched ourselves to Melbourne. Workshops continued, new people were attracted, given the circles of history, in Marvellous Melbourne.

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Scene were then presented to the ensemble, read or worked, and discussed. Some were rejected out of hand; others revised or accepted as written. It was a laborious and illuminating process of trial and error. Generally, things advanced in a harmonious fashion. The nose-
to-nose nature of the work did, however, at times lead to unseemly confrontations and personality clashes. Though prickly for the minority concerned, they were assimilated in the overall forward impetus to get the work at hand completed.

During rehearsals proper, especially before the second season, the twin issues of actor independence and feminism emerged. This ideological effervescence became a little awkward for the writers to handle dramaturgically, as the material, which had been previously chosen by mutual consent and enthusiasm, was not particularly amendable to forceful development in these areas. It was difficult to come up with enough female roles and scenes for women; the villains of the time were all men; the traduced women of the time could largely only be deployed to shed an indirect ethical light on the behaviour of the male power-mongers. Certainly, the gross carnal and scatological flavour of some of my writing then offended a reconstructed sensibility or two.

On 11 December, the Pram Factory opened its doors to the public with the first season of Marvellous Melbourne. The show boasted a cast of 15 and four musicians led by the composer Lorraine Milne. The performing area, roughly cruciform with raised auxiliary areas, seemed populated by a menagerie of grotesques and buffoons, seedy varlets and middle-class innocents, political thugs and puritanical hypocrites. The exhilarating group-gargoyle style of performance owed an enormous amount to the early improvisational and non-verbal workshops. Miraculously, it seemed to sit easily with the volatility of the text; perhaps the physical excesses linked hands lovingly with the verbal excesses.

After a projected eight performances, the group settled back to re-work the material, correlate and gel disparate themes, to elaborate new scenes, to refine performances, and tighten the whole sprawl dramaturgically. This it did over the summer. The final version of Marvellous Melbourne appeared in March 1971 and played to houses of a size equalled at the Pram Factory only a few times since. So large were attendances that the Health Department eventually felt compelled to close the place down.

Marvellous Melbourne, a local Melbourne phenomenon, did not receive the continental acclaim of The Legend of King O'Malley. As has been pointed out by Katharine Brisbane, it is of comparable historical significance. Resonances of Marvellous Melbourne still ring strongly through the APG, manifested in the free-thinking flexibility and physicality of many of its best actors, and the durable tradition of group-created plays. A wriggly thread can also be traced through The Sonia Knee and Thigh Show, The Feet of Daniel Mannix, Waltzing Matilda, Mary Shelley and The Monsters, The Les Darcy Show, The Floating World, and A Toast to Melba.

This text (of the final version) is presented as a historical document; no attempt at revision or emendation has been made. Assuredly, there are some things all of us concerned would like to change, but that would be a literary ruse, the wisdom of hindsight. The text of Marvellous Melbourne is difficult to detach from the performances it helped engender, from the actors and directors who worked for its fruition; it is little like a disembodied voice. Full appreciation of Marvellous Melbourne belongs in the memory of those who saw and relished its bumptious vulgarity, simian tribal energy, and Karl-Kraus-like political satire.
York, who have generously braved the tempestuous oceans of half the world to attend our exhibition beneath strange southern skies. Give them a cordial colonial welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Spare not your hands nor throat. In attendance with them will be the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Loch, the Mayor and Mayoress of Melbourne... and other political dignitaries. Here they are, ladies and gentlemen, show your appreciation, show the spirit of the times, the wealth and progress, the generosity of magnificent, marvellous Melbourne!

Arrival of Duke of York et al.

MC: His Lordship, the Mayor of Melbourne.

Mayor: Ladies and gentlemen...

Noise and dissent.

MC: Silence please!

Mayor: Ladies and gentlemen. I think I can say with the probity of an honest man that tonight is a landmark in the history of Melbourne; it is the summit of our endeavour, our very Kosciusko. To stand on that summit, with his wife, we have here tonight, as personal representative of her Majesty, the Queen, His Most Egregious Grace, the Duke of York.

Never has Melbourne known such industry, wealth and expansion. Our Stock Exchange bursts at the mullions with business and profit. Grand new edifices sprout each day. Pageants and illuminations excite our streets. Ours is a wealthy, healthy, just and powerful city. Its citizens are content, even sated. In a word, Melbourne is on the map. To share in this glory, indeed to augment it, we have here tonight the Duke and Duchess of York.

It is my most onerous and honourable task, then, to introduce to you our galant and graceful, er, couple, and welcome them, as democratically elected representative of the people, to our great Centennial International Exhibition. (Applause)
DUKE: Thank you. Thank you. Lord Mayor, Governors, eminent politicians and civic luminaries, ladies and gentlemen.
My wife and I are quite exasperated by this splendid welcome. We hardly feel equal to the occasion, such is its plenitude and, er, froth.
To travel such vast and barbaric distances, to desert our dear England, the cradle of civilisation, for some nine months in the colonies was not a minor undertaking. We felt, however, that it was our Duty to God, Queen and Country.
On behalf of her Majesty, who this very month is taking the waters at Baden-Baden, we duly thank the Lord Mayor for his eloquent and well-bred sentiments. We are prepared to meet some of the, er, people similarly determined to explore ceaselessly are quite determined to enjoy ourselves, to take. We felt, however, that it was our cradle of civilisation, for some nine months taking. We hardly feel this splendid welcome. We hardly feel this splendid welcome. We hardly feel this splendid welcome. We hardly feel this splendid welcome. We hardly feel this splendid welcome. We hardly feel this splendid welcome.

"MAXIM" Chaffcutter.

SANDRIDGE

Snowy: They've got Melbourne on a string all right, only the string's a bloody rope and it's strangling the lot of us.
Stump: The Frogs had the right idea . . . guillotine the turgs.
Jock: I wouldn't mind one of their heads up on me mantel.
Dingo: Beside the bust of the Queen.
Stump: The royal udders.
Snowy: Listen to this, while on the subject of booms and busts. (He produces a piece of paper.) I was mug enough to invest a few quid in Munro's Real Estate Bank in 1887 . . . found the prospectus in the duny last night. Cop this: "This bank is founded for the purpose of enabling the industrial and thrifty classes to participate in the distribution of real estate, or secure a portion of the large profits which are made by purchasing land in large quantities and selling the same in moderate-sized farms or allotments."
Stump (assuming an upper-class speech; the others follow): How's the country estate, old chap?
Snowy: Thrifty.
Jock: Poor seasons of late, eh?
Snowy: A mere ten to the acre.
Dingo: The sheep?
Snowy: A little better, Dingwell. Had a spot of trouble with the shearers. Sacked the bastards and employed non-unionists.
The countryside is alive with them. Hardly a crisis. The unions have retreated clutching their socialist cods. They'll not have the audacity to try that again.
Stump: Well done, Snowdon.
Jock: It's a pity that most of your harvest oughta be, poor fodder, the vitriol of cheap beer, in-
Snowy: Not true, I export the best and leave the shit here.
Stump: Well done, Snowdon!
Dingo: I believe that the working classes grow more stunted every year.

SONG OF EIGHTEEN- NINETY

Conditions in the city aren't what they oughta be, The sharks and bloody Boomers control economy,
They milk money from the wealthy and squeeze the poor as well,
It is Heaven for the leeches, but for us its nearly Hell.
In August eighteen-ninety we joined the scamen's strike,
And bludgeoned all employers, the big and small alike,
But the unemployment beat us, non-unionists and scabs,
Like poor mugs they saved the bosses in carts and hansom-cabs.
Conditions, friends I tell you, aren't what they used to be,
We're back inside the sweating of nineteen-seventy,
With low wages and the price of essentials at a peak,
It is rash to have a be-er; the rent men ex-
tort each week.

Lily: It looks like a baling-hook to me.
Reggie: Does it? That chap said 'e used it to open 'is lunch.
Nigel: A colonial fork?
Lily: Let's go, Nigel. I want to show you the city and my father's theatre, where I do a spot of acting myself.
Nigel: What?
Lily: I was mug enough to invest a few quid in Munro's Real Estate Bank in 1887 . . . found the prospectus in the duny last night. Cop this: "This bank is founded for the purpose of enabling the industrial and thrifty classes to participate in the distribution of real estate, or secure a portion of the large profits which are made by purchasing land in large quantities and selling the same in moderate-sized farms or allotments."

SONG OF THE NEW CHUM TAKEN FOR A RIDE

Reggie sings. Music continues through the prose speeches as well. He acts out scenes, does voices etc.
Left at a loose end waiting on Station Pier For a rough, tough warfie missing his hook
Sings.
Have you been holding this piece of string like I have?
Have you been standing there not doing a thing like I have?

Jesus, we're sods! What a pair of clods
For wasting half the day — eh?
That bastard's done it to win a bet or else
impress his lady — eh?

That's me — victimised, everywhere I go.

What about the time this bloke asked me
To pose for a photo with his girlfriend? All
new-chum all at sea.

"This Pommy bastard wants to know what
It wasn't of course and
We're up against. Say something, you.
Reggie: Ooh, ooh! (Struggling to get away.) Help! Help!
Coop: Hear it? Pommy. Plain as day.

Reggie: You clapped 'em on the King?
Rats: Na, ain't winked 'im for a stretch.
Silk: Eh, youse got mud on yer clinh.
Rats (wiping his shoes): Strike me fat,
Silk, the Flemmo mud sticks loik shit.
Silk: Watcha back?

Lights up. Reggie is at wool-bale. Coop and Co. returning. Music stops
Reggie: Oh, there's my friend now. Yoo-
hooh! Ha! I began to think you weren't
coming back, Heh?
Coop: There y'are. Take a look.
Reggie: I imagined you'd forgotten me, thought you were going to take me for a ride, as they say, Heh?
Coop: Hook in hand, just waiting for the start-work signal. (Grabs Reggie) Non-
union, aren't you eh? Scabbing, about to
load this black-banned bale, eh? I get your
game, don't you worry. (Lets Reggie go, who tries to make a break for it. The hook
gets caught in bale and pulls him back. He
doesn't think to let go.) Take note of this, men: take good bloody note. This is what
we're up against. Say something, you.

Sings:
Left to my own devices on Station Pier,
Waiting for a wharfie missing a hook to
reappear.
I've begun to think it all a trick;
That's usually what happens to me.
I'm weak and obliging, a silly nitwit, a
new-chum all at sea.

LARRIKINS AND SADDLING-PADDOCK SCENE
Flemington Racecourse, Cup Day, On the
flat.
Silk: Eh, Ratsie, you clapped 'em on the
King?
Rats: Na, ain't winked 'im for a stretch.
Silk: Eh, youse got mud on yer clinh.
Rats: Strike me fat, Silk, the Flemmo mud sticks loik shit.
Silk: Watcha back?

Rats: Carbine, o'course. Half-a-yid.
Silk (big-time): I went the quid for five.
Rats: Wot a spiller!
King (entering): 'Ere, you cobbers seen me
donah!
Rats: The traps 'ave jugged 'er, King.
King: 'Don't yer poke borak at me.
Silk: Watcha back, King?
Carbine: A flag for ten.
Silk: Cor me blue, a brick!
King: I 'it the bagswinger square in the
quoit with it.
Rats: Youse is all cuss, King.
King: Nark it, Rats, or I'll knuckle yer
quilt.
Rats (shaping up): Corn, Ize as game as a
miss-ant.
Silk: Eh, 'ere comes yer little piece o'muslin, King.
Rats: The bushfire blonde.
Silk: Princess of the pavement.
Ginger enters.
King (annoyed): Where's yer been, Ginger?
Ginger: Ganderin the prads.
King: 'Owse 'e on the clinals?
Ginger: Oh?
King: "Oo," she says. Wot a tug!
Dontcha call me a tug.
King: Why not?
Ginger: I'm yer yoke.
Rats: Pass 'er the jolt, King.
King punches Ginger.
Silk: Wot a finger!

King (sings).
They call me King Flash,
The Bushfire blondie.
"Make way for the Bouveroos!", "Don't
'the way, Toffie", "Scuse me, Silvertail",
"Make way for the Bouversoos",
"Don't cut the flash with me, jam-face".
They reach the rails.
Ginger: Th'ys, th'ys is in the straight!
Rats: Carbine in the lead!
Tits: Corn, Carbine!
All: Corn, Carbine! Etc.
Sunset (to King, dumb): I spread a whole
carpet on the filly from Echuca with the
lusty colours —
King (pushing Sunset aside): Corn, yer
larks, to the rails!
They force their way to the rails through a
dense crowd with comments like: "Out
the way, Toffie", "Scuse me, Silvertail",
"Make way for the Bouveroos!", "Don't
cut the flash with me, jam-face". They
reach the rails.
Ginger: Th'ys, th'ys is in the straight!
Rats: Carbine in the lead!
Tits: Corn, Carbine!
All: Corn, Carbine! Etc.
Sunset: 'Ere, where's that prad from
Echuca!
All: Carbine wins!
Cheers, yells etc.
Wot a moke!
King: I knew it.
Silk: All that scrum. Wot a push of tin-
hawks. A new set o'cobber for Silk
morra.
Tits: Wot about me?
Rats: Shoulda put a blueback on 'im.
Sunset (glumly): She just crossed the line.
Megaphone Voice: "Ladies and
snowy: coop
quanga: silk
nigel and lily enter tentatively.

ing about? you've gotta job haven't you?
while we're battling for a crust.
jock:

ginger: betcha 'er didgeridoo ain't never

ginger:

king:

sunset: (gloomy) i did me carpert. no chuck for a week.

king:

eh, yer larks, i'm dead for a gulp o' the turps.

ginger: ooo, i'd love a squirt.

rats: where to, flash?

king: the old saddling paddock! all: yeh!

king: let's nit it, bouvoorees. see youse at the royal, sunset.

sunset: yeh.

they arrive at the saddling paddock.
collect by a bar. barman.

barman: what'll it be, gentlemen?

ginger: a cocky's joy.
quanga: i'll 'ave a lady's waist.
tits: lola montez, me.

king: three stringybarks, montague.

barman: right with you, king.

king: shout yerself one, mont.

barman: never touch it, squire.

king: yer tug.

nigel and lily enter tentatively.
silk: cor, a couple of frills.
rats: gets 'ow they cuts the posh.

ginger: betcha 'er didgeridoo ain't never been played.
rats: i'd give her a long tune.
quanga: yoo keep 'off' er!
silk: 'ows yer tuning fork, ratsie?

stump: jesus, i could slide one down right now, only the old woman would squeeze it out of me with her mangle.
jock: how's your wife, dingo?

dingo: she died.
jock: sorry to hear that, mate.

snowy: what from, dingo?

dingo: malnutrition according to sawbones. she gave all the tucker to the kids. i didn't know.
jock: it's getting worse every day.

snowy: and what's the government doing?

dingo: nothing.
jock: not a damn thing.

dingo: they sit up there on their fat arses while we're battling for a crust.

coop (entering): what are you all whingeing about? you've gotta job haven't you?

snowy: yeh, but what for?

all: for a shillin' in pay!

song of the wharfies

we lift, heave and pull the whole bloody day.
for a miserable rotten shillin' in pay!

the sweat runs down our necks in rivers,
the heat and sunburn give you the shits and shivers.
our muscles ache, backs are permanently bent,
our guts are full of maggots, our heads of cement,
our wives and children eat bread-and-water for dogs.
there's bugger-all in the corner shops,
there's nothing but work, work, work, work,
and big, big money for the boss, the big fat turk.
we lift and heave the whole bloody day,
for a miserable rotten shillin' in pay.
we lift, heave and pull the whole bloody day,
for a miserable rotten shillin' in pay.
we're sick to death of work and sweating,
we'd much rather be in a tea-shop betting,
or sitting on the yarra with a hook and line,
guzzling flagons of the best bordeaux wine.
our wives and children should be dressed in the best,
where's my bowler hat and white silk vest?
not here but on our boss or some swank new chum.
we are the mugs, the rotten bloody scum!
we lift, heave and pull the whole bloody day,
for a miserable rotten shillin' in pays!

snowy: what can we do for you, coop?
coop: union fees, gentlemen, are due.
jock: we can't afford it.
coop: there's no such thing as "can't afford".

stump: you've got a bit to learn.

dingo: i can afford it.

coop: that's more like it, lads.

dingo: my wife just died. one less mouth to feed.

coop: my condolences.

snowy: you have to understand our position, coop.

coop: mmmm. you have to understand ours too. we must present a consolidated front to the employers who bleed us day by day.

pork (entering with others): gentlemen! gentlemen of sandridge! may i present to you, mr nigel new-chump, director of the newly arrived drury lane shakespearean company, here to entertain and edify us, to add to the greater glory of melbourne!

stump: there's not too much glory in melbourne at the moment, mate!

pork: at my personal bequest, i mean request, nigel has graciously agreed to entertain and distract you with a modest portion of the bard.

snowy: who?

jock: it's a hand-out.

nigel: lovers of the theatre, patrons of the gods, colonial waterfolk! our expedition across prodigious and parlous oceans to your colony can, it appears to me, be likened to that of the ancient greeks some millenia ago.

stump: what's 'e talking about?
A falsehood! A foul lie! Right before you, men, stands a true scab, the type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. type who would work for less when you strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo. Furthermore, fellow-workers, this particular scab has a yellow crust, a certain strike and starve, a non-unionist dingo.
Dampier: That’s a very feminine five o’clock. Nigel and Lily have been struck dumb by one another.

Mrs D: Are you going to grace us with your presence at tea tonight?

Dampier: What’s on the menu?

Mrs D: Steamed flathead.

Dampier: I’ll give it some thought.

Nigel: Sounds awful.

Dampier: I’ll see.

Mrs D (noticing Lily): Lily!

Dampier: It’s her one aberration. She’s a crack cook.

Mrs D: Lily Dampier, answer your mother. (Pause. To Dampier.) Who is that gentleman, that moon-struck consumptive?

Dampier: Permit me to introduce Mr Nigel New-Chump of the Drury Lane Shakespearian Company. Lily swoons to the deck.

Mrs D (rushing across to Lily): Control yourself, Lily. You’re a disgrace to womanhood. After everything I’ve told you . . . you silly child. (Pats her on the face, sal volatile etc. Talks on. Helps Lily up eventually.)

Dampier (to Nigel, during Mrs D’s speech and action): Hey, Nigel, now that she’s out of earshot, how about we slink away and pick up a young juice at the Saddling Pad-o’-earshot, how about we slink away and pick up a young juce at the Saddling Pad-dock? I can recommend the colonial muf-fin. Strong in the pod. I tell you, son, Melbourne’s wide open. The hottest spot south of Cairo. We’ve managed, so far, to keep the Presbyterians well at bay. How about a few pints of bitter on the way? It’ll take the ladies hours to powder their loins and lace up their jowls.

Nigel is oblivious to all this.

Mrs D (approaches, having heard the last part of D’s speech): That’s quite enough.

Dampier: It’s a gay town, Nigel.

Mrs D: Alfred?

Dampier: What?

Mrs D: Let’s go.


Mrs D: They are both beyond hope. Come along. The little man with the flathead will have gone home. I thought a man of your amatory experience would be able to spot the symptoms of the disease.

Dampier: What disease?

Mrs D: The one I contracted. Decades ago. You were handsome then . . .

They leave.

Nigel: I love you, Lily.

Lily: I love you, Nigel.

Reggie enters with baling-hook. Nigel and Lily kiss.

Reggie: Excuse me.

Nigel: Reggie. What’s that horrible thing? Reggie: O this, um, it . . . it belongs to a friend of mine. Yes, I’m just waiting for ‘im to return and claim it, you see. Yes.

Nigel: Making friends with the natives already, Reginald?

Reggie: I’m not the only one am I?

Rats: Vibratin’!

They laugh

Lily: I thought I’d sneak you in here for a quick peep before the curtain goes up.

Rats: I’d lift ‘er curtain with the old crow-bar.

Ginger: I’d lower ‘is with a kiss or two.


Lily: All types mingle here — the upper and middle classes, bucolics from the North, larrikins, drunks, thieves, and even, ladies of low repute.

Nigel (mock incredulous): No.

Lily: Yes.

Nigel: Hardly the spot for you, Lily.

Lily: Why not?

Nigel: You’re a maiden, so you — Lily: Shh!

Olga enters, Walks into a “spot”.

OLGA’S SONG

Green gravel, green gravel, Your true love is dead; I send you this message To turn round your head. Green gravel, green gravel, Your true love is dead; The moon is not yellow And cold is your bed.

Applause

Ginger (now beside Nigel): I’m dead for a smoke, curls.

Nigel: Oh, a cigarette. He reaches for one. Gives it to her.

Ginger (sexily): Ta.

Nigel lights it for her. Nigel is seduced.

Lily (peevled): Come on, Nigel, we’ll miss the start of the show.

Ginger (to Nigel): Watcha name?

Nigel: Neville, and yours?

Ginger: Madeleine.

Nigel: How cute.

She giggles. The larrikins watch amused and pass quiet comments.

Lily: Nigel, please come along, the play will have commenced.

Nigel takes hold of his hand to lead him away.

Nigel (trying to release his hand): Leave go my hand.

Lily: No.

Ginger: Leave go ‘is softies, Miss Jam, ’e’s comin with me.

Lily: You mind your own business.

Nigel: That’s is no way to address a lady.

Gaffaws from the larrikins.

Lily: That, a lady, she’s a — Nigel: Lily!

Lily: What?

Nigel: Run along. (Pause.) Go away. I’ve finished with you.

Ginger: Nit it, lady.

King (coming up): ’Ere wot’s you up to with me bart?

Nigel: Attend to your own affairs, sir.

Ginger: Piss off, King.

King: Cor, I’ll slice you up good and neat, Mr Toff. (To Ginger) You too, toffie-hole.

He produces a knife and threatens with it. Shrieks etc.

Dampier (entering): Lily, what are you doing here? Hey! (To King) You there, sir. Put that away and get out or I’ll call the constabulary!

King: Nit it! The larrikins flee.

Nigel and Ginger also exit, together.

Lily: Nigel?

Dampier: Get a grip on yourself, Lily. (Pause.) Aren’t you going to watch Marvellous Melbourne? It’s started.

Lily: Damned you and Marvellous Melbourne!

Dampier (annoyed): Come with me.

Lily (slowly): I want to be left alone.

Dampier: Lily — (She leaves.) He’ll come back. It’s only a flash in the pan. A trifle. All men are the same. Pah! Women will never learn. Best seats in the house, too. Shit (Looking at his fob-watch), it’s nearly time for the Opium Den scene. My favourite.

He hops into Sunset as he leaves.

Sunset (still gloomily): ‘Ere, ’ave you seen King Flash?

Dampier: Who?

Sunset: King of the Bouveroos.

Dampier: Can’t help you, sport.

Sunset (profoundly gloomy): Looks like they’re scat.

Pause.

Dampier: Listen, Captain, would you like a free ticket for the show tonight?

Sunset (dumb-struck): Eh?

Dampier (offering it to him): Best in the house.

Sunset (elated): Honest?

Dampier: No strings attached. My daughter couldn’t come. She’s, er, not at all well.

Sunset: Sorry to ’ear that, sir.

Dampier: Follow me.

Sunset stands for a moment staring at the ticket in disbelief.

Sunset: Cor me blue, wot a dash of luck! A ticket to the theatre! Wot a tin-back! He dashes after Dampier.

OPIUM DEN SCENE

Robert and Jack enter with Charles.

Charles: What a howid smell of howid fat?

Robert: Come and try your luck.

Charles: Twy my luck — what’s that?

Jack: You mark a ticket, I’ll shout one for you.

Hing-Hi: You buy a ticket, slick-penny — one-shillingee ticket.
Charles: Is the game anything like loo or poker — because I don't play loo or poker.
Robert: No, no the squarest thing in the world. Explain it to him, Hang-Hi.
Hang-Hi: You alleel same make ten mark, you sabee?
Charles: You sabee? — what's "you sabbe"?
Robert: "You understand."
Charles: I don't sabee.
Hang-Hi: You make plenteel mark alleel same alle finger (Shows fingers.) You sabbee. Yut yee sarm see oom look tit pat que shup. Banker makee mark alleel same. You makee plenteel money mark alleel same. Four mark (Shows four fingers.) No good. Five mark (Shows five.) Lily good. Seven mark (Shows seven.) Better good. Eight mark (Shows eight.) Plenteel good. Nine mark, muchee better alleel same muchee plenteel money, you sabee? Charles marks ticket.
Jack: What do you think of it, Charles?
Charles: I can't think at all. He's made my head ache. The howid smell seems to get thicker and thicker, doncher know.
Robert: Nonsense. You'll soon get used to it.
Charles: Does all Melbourne smell like this?
Robert: Sometimes.
Charles: Perhaps that's why Sala called it Marvellous Melbourne.
Robert: You shall have a treat tomorrow. We will take you down to the bone-boiling works on the lovely Yarra.
Charles: If I stay here much longer I shan't live till tomorrow, doncher know. (Marks tickets.)
Robert: You certainly will not if you go out in the streets at this time of night.
Jack: He's quite right; it's dangerous. There are some very rough customers about.
Hang-Hi marks duplicate ticket etc.

Hang-Hi motions Charles to lie down on mattress. Hang-Hi prepares opium with lamp between them, puts opium in pipe. Charles draws and becomes stupefied.
Hang-Hi: You lie down ah coy. Me lie down ah coy. (Lies down alongside Charles.)
Charles: I feel as if I were drunk.
Jack: You're as sober as a member of parliament.
Charles: That bwandy must be vewy stwong.
Robert: Three-star, my boy.
Charles: Somebody's put me to bed with my boots on. Good night, kiss me, Mother. (To Hang-Hi.) If you're waking, call me early, call me early, Mother dear, for I'm to be Queen of the May, Mother, I'm to be Queen of the May.
Charles falls back asleep.
Jack (who, with Robert, is leaning against the counter): We've got him! Robert: Now for his letter of credit. (Kneeling down by Charles.) He's one of the easiest cases we've had.
Jack: By all the saints of Collingwood, he is a soft one.
Robert rifles his pockets, throws card-case to Jack and goes on as Jack reads.)
Jack: Charles Harold Vane Somers Cholmondley Vivian Golightly, the Duke of York.
Jack and Robert double-take. Together: The Duke of York!  Curtain

Hang-Hi: Charles makee ticket.

Robert: Nonsense! What! You, an Englishman who has been under fire in the Sudan?
Hang-Hi: You makee tickets.

Hang-Hi: We've got him!

Robert: Now for his letter of credit. (Kneeling down by Charles.) He's one of the easiest cases we've had.
Jack: By all the saints of Collingwood, he is a soft one.
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The QTC achieves a significant break-through

GENESIS

DON BATCHelor


Genasis is perhaps the most significant single project yet undertaken by the Queensland Theatre Company. One could identify self-indulgence in the text, flabbiness in the production, coarse features in the design and many inadequacies of performance which would obscure the tremendous sweep and imagination of the concept. But the largeness of the attempt is of such importance that I am not going to risk losing it in a detailed catalogue of failure of execution.

At one time, the project represents the QTC's most complete attempt to meet and work with the community, and is the most important break-through yet in finding a way to serve the country areas of Queensland — so far, a naggingly unresolved requirement of the company's charter.

Four professional theatre people, Robert Kingham (director), Lloyd Nickson (designer), Jim Cotter (musical director), and Rick Thompson (ad­ministrator) were set up, for a period of four months, in a rambling house in Toowoomba, 100 miles west of Brisbane. The house was the only focus for activities, and finally performances which ranged over the Darling Downs, an agricultural region of quite specific geographic and demographic identity, "half the size of Tasmania". More than 40 participants were recruited from 15 high schools in the region and proceeded to meet in groups for acting, writing, design, music, directing, and technical matters, sometimes separately, sometimes together, sometimes in Toowoomba, sometimes in other centres, after school, at night, and at weekends. Several camps were held as part of the process of growing together. This co-operative effort with people from the same district whom you might otherwise meet only in competitive situations like sport or debates, strikes me as one of the healthier aspects of the project. For working purposes, the group took on the name Darling Downs Youth Theatre, and it will be interesting to see whether the ad­monitions of the professional team of initiators (not to let the idea die when they leave) are heeded by the community. An apparent weakness, now, in the set-up, was the failure to include any local adults in the team who might carry on the work.

I spent a weekend in Toowoomba early in the project and saw the way in which various groups would come and go at the house, working in intense sessions with one or other of their mentors — an improvisa­tion going on in one room, a stage-fight being worked out on the lawn, a group "writing" text on the back steps, and others from the design team experimenting with corn-cobs in ways William Faulkner never thought of. Dove-tailing this and maintaining a sense of responsibility between groups, so that both project and team grew organically, were interesting features of the exercise.

The Downs community was generous in its involvement. Shops donated food, the media gave time and space, a local bus company provided transport, all of which is significant only because it was part of a deliberate policy to include local people as much as possible. In the same spirit, lots of local produce and materials were used in the show itself — acorns, corn leaves and bunya nuts were incorporated in the costume, and some plough-shares were transformed into musical instruments.

The show itself was a group creation based on the Book of Genesis and the Babylonian myth of Gilgamesh, Enkidu and "Noah", which pre-dates Genesis by 1000 years. These superbly elemental stories still carried power, in this simple, direct, episodic portrayal, to convey the mystical sense of life, and the ritual shape of birth, life, death and re-generation which are the well-springs of drama. In our con­temporary theatre, so preoccupied with the social adjustment of men, it is deeply refreshing to meet total man, in life, in love, in death. If the QTC wanted to introduce young people to theatre, I can think of no better material with which to do it.

The highlight of the evening was the section devoted to the epic of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. This Australi­ansed and modernised version had the two mythical characters portrayed as a pair of knock-about comic mates, biking it across the country through a series of very amusing adventures. The performances by Mark Little and Shane Calcutt had that youthful charm only possible where natural theatrical instinct has not yet turned into technique.

What also impressed me about the whole piece was the very strong injection of humour which is a necessary antidote to the rather serious idealism common to people of this age. Even so, the latter part of the show took on a somewhat too con­sequential air.

It did not, however, spoil some quite moving personal dedications played on tape as each of the performers was called off stage by name at the end of the evening. This was one of those stage ceremonies which can so easily be maudlin, but handled carefully might almost be called holy. In terms of the intention of the project it was a singularly appropriate ending — and hopefully a new beginning.

'An idle backwater in the theatrical stream . . .

THE SHIFTING HEART

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon. Brisbane Arts Theatre, Brisbane. Opened 30 June 1977, Director/designer, Jennifer Radbourne (lighting), Spencer McPherson and Simon Brown; Poppa Bianchi, William Davies, Leila Pratt, Beverley Wood, Gina Bianchi, Mark Barten, Donna Bianchi, Dorothy Schwarz; Charmayne Taylor, Gillian Fowler, John Grey, Maria Fowler, Liliana Paggiaro; Donny Pratt, Neil Howatson, Detective-Sergeant Lizzie, Dave Robinson. The Arts is a theatre I infrequently frequent. Subsidy has upgraded its status to professional administration, and its cramped but workable little theatre is part of a complex which includes a top-class restaurant. But, even when an interesting play finds me in the audience, I usually emerge unmoved.

The place has an unfortunate house style; an approach to plays and to their production which time has passed by. To it
gravitate many of Brisbane's speech and drama teachers, ABC radio actors and producers, and cultured dilettante. They've created an idle backwater in the theatrical stream, giving pleasure to their own kind and little else. Individually, I've seen most of them do good work on other stages, but the Arts brings out their worst tendencies.

The Shifting Heart tried to be more than this, but wasn't. A story of Italian migrants in Collingwood in the 1950s, its tale of prejudice reconciled has substance. My memories of this production, however, were of theatrical artifice. The acting was mannered and external and kin to the pizza ads. It was played in the stand-centre-look-at-the-audience - and - no-upstage - turns style. The set made a stab at realism, but lapsed oddly when you looked at the details. The audience were mostly high school students presumably studying the text; they made jokes about Wogs and rolled Jaffas down under the seats and were generally inattentive. The programme offered know-us-and-love-us actors' notes from which we gleaned that one enjoyed the chance to play a character role, another was an expert on accents, a third was making his Brisbane debut, and a fourth wanted to become a professional actor. Heady stuff.

I'm being partly unfair to Jennifer Radbourne's direction, which was a clear exercise. It was played in the stand-centre-look-at-the-audience - and - no-upstage - turns style. The set made a stab at realism, but lapsed oddly when you looked at the details. The audience were mostly high school students presumably studying the text; they made jokes about Wogs and rolled Jaffas down under the seats and were generally inattentive. The programme offered know-us-and-love-us actors' notes from which we gleaned that one enjoyed the chance to play a character role, another was an expert on accents, a third was making his Brisbane debut, and a fourth wanted to become a professional actor. Heady stuff.

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Theatre/Victoria

... quite the most satisfying Ibsen production seen in Australia

THE WILD DUCK

RAYMOND STANLEY


Pettersen, Roy Baldwin; Jensen, Gary Down; Maid, Natalie Bate; Old Ekdal, Edward Hepple; Mrs. Sorby, Marie Redshaw; First Guest, Peter Curtin; Second Guest, David Downer; Third Guest, Peter Dunn; Old Werle, David Ravenswood; Gregers Werle, Bruce Myles; Hjalmar Ekdal, Simon Chilvers; Gina Ekdal, Julie Hamilton; Hedvig Ekdal, Sally Cahill; Relling, Barry Hill; Molvik, Robert Hewett.

"Great disappointment — Ibsen's new play is not by any means up to the mark," wrote the Norwegian's greatest champion, William Archer, to a friend on 11 November 1884, immediately after reading The Wild Duck. Since Archer had been married less than three weeks, possibly he did not give it his usual methodical attention. Be that as it may, for the next decade Archer tended to underrate the play and, learning how highly it was regarded after a production in Copenhagen, was "inclined to give more credit to the excellence of the acting than to the scenic qualities of the play". In fact, partly due to pressure of other work, it was not Archer but his wife, Frances, who translated it into English.

When in May 1894 The Wild Duck finally was staged in London, Archer, certain it could not succeed, actually advised against its production. He went to the first performance "if not precisely prejudiced against the undertaking, at least with the gravest mis-givings as to the probable result". Although the acting evidently left much to be desired, he left the theatre after seeing Ibsen's play "never more deeply thrilled by a sense of his genius". Some 18 months before Archer's death, to Harley Granville Barker he was referring to it as "Ibsen's greatest play".

To-day Ibsen is frequently considered dull, a bore and dated. Hopefully, many holding those views will have seen John Sumner's production of The Wild Duck, staged by the Melbourne Theatre Company, and share my opinion that it was quite the most satisfying Ibsen production seen in Australia. For me it was also the best-mounted classical by the MTC for a long time and — with the exception of The Club — provided the strongest all-round acting seen from the company for many months.

In fact, almost everything about the production was outstanding. For once the designer did not appear to have tried to compete with the performers, being content to provide a serviceable set and allow the acting to speak for itself. Almost every role seemed perfectly acted.

Chilvers assuredly lived up to Ibsen's envisaged character and, although later in the play, on opening night at least, there was a slight tendency to trip over into melodrama, it really was a very fine performance.

No less admirable was Bruce Myles as Gregers, fulfilling the difficult feat of making him believable. There was the very finely spoken Dr Relling of Barry Hill, another outstanding characterisation by
Edward Hepple as Old Ekdal and Robert Hewett — by looking so grotesque — actually making something of the thankless role of Molvik.

I was less happy about the Gina of Julie Hamilton. Bogged down by an accent which seemed to fluctuate slightly between Australian and Cockney, her performance would have been more acceptable coming from a gifted amateur rather than a professional. Presumably her accent was meant to indicate her servant beginnings; yet Marie Redshaw as Mrs Sorby, who apparently replaced Gina in the Werle household, spoke in neutral tones.

Although Sally Cahill was all right, I have seen Hedvigs whose performances have moved me far more. And surely Hedvig, whose eyesight is failing, should be professional. Presumably her accent was wearing spectacles — at least to read with?

This production was successful in extracting every ounce of the play's humour, stressed by Archer as being so essential; there were probably some touches not even visualised by Ibsen, but which in no way jarred. Perhaps more could have been done with the lighting. Ibsen attached much importance to this and wanted it to correspond to the basic mood prevailing in each of the five scenes.

Over the years people have argued about the symbolism in The Wild Duck, and probably will continue to for as long as it is performed. Wisely Sumner played this down. When the play opens, with the almost Pirnier-like revelations of plot and who's who by the servants, it flashes through one's mind that perhaps Ibsen is outwitted. However, soon one is gripped in the complexities and ultimately lost in admiration — as always with Ibsen — at how each speech contributed not only to plot, but is character-revealing of the person making it and to whom it is addressed.

Ray Lawler has presented an excellent unobtrusive adaptation of the play, mainly aimed at making the original Archer translation (by Frances and touched up by William) more speakable and plausible for the present day. It was far better than the heavy-handed humourless German film version that opened the Melbourne Film Festival, which whistled down Gina's role but pleased those apparently unacquainted with Ibsen's original.

One hopes the MTC and the Lawler-Sumner team will follow The Wild Duck with other Ibsen adaptations. Maybe John Gabriel Borkman or Little Eyolf?

A circus that is 'just about a dream come true . . .'

WAITER, THERE'S A CIRCUS IN MY SOUP

GARRIE HUTCHINSON

This prison play deserves to be given a chance outside

CONSPIRACY

GARRIE HUTCHINSON

Conspiracy by Peter Brennan. Pentridge Jail, Coburg, Victoria. Director, Peter Brennan; Fred, David Ewer, Darcy, Stan Taylor; Major, Douglas Russell; Maureen, Gail Raymond; Reuben, John Roberts; Jean, Linda Fletcher; Moose, Chris Richardson; Crow, Ross Burleigh; Peterman, John Jamieson; Frank, Kevin Rordan; Drunks, Rod Patterson, Laurie Howell, Two-up Players, Les Maynard, Michael Carey, Keith Ryrie, Rino Iuliano.

It seems remarkable that Australia's prison system has turned out as many competent playwrights as it has. Some more than competent, which makes their achievement, given that it has taken place away from the conventional theatre, even more remarkable. Without speculating too much on the socio-psycho-aesthetic dimensions of the subject (one eminently suited to a multi-disciplined Ph.D. student, by the way), it seems to be an important facet of Australian theatre. It isn't the theatre that is working in prisons, like some children's theatre groups play at kids, but prisoners doing it themselves. This is interesting.

I had the opportunity recently to see a new play by a new writer, Peter Brennan, who happens to be in jail. It was performed inside Pentridge by other men who happen to be prisoners too. Plus a couple of actresses from outside. It's called Conspiracy, and it has the potential, with a little work, to be quite a play for one of those non-existent smaller-scale commercial producers.

It deals with the situations of a couple of seemingly homely men who happen to drink a bit. They are persecuted under the Vagrancy Act, swindled by their erstwhile friends, patronised by the Salvation Army, but through it all keep a fairly ribald and cheerful attitude to their situation. One wonders why they simply aren't left alone to live their lives as they choose.

The major character is Darcy, played for all its worth (and quite nicely too) by a natural performer, Stan Taylor. He's grubby, funny, resilient, conniving, a bit of a Monk O'Neill. His accidental partner, Fred, played by David Ewer, is a more philosophical and educated, but again a humorous character.

The play itself, which has the first half set in an alley, and the second in the watchhouse, is really a sequence of problems that Darcy encounters, with a fair amount of propaganda about the real situation of men like him thrown in. It would be a lot tighter without the propagandising, as the other material makes the same point. Poor old Darcy never gets a go, never has the opportunity of getting out under, even if he wanted to.
Conspiracy is the sort of play that is ill-served by the theatre structure as it exists at present. It attracted a big and enthusiastic audience in its season at Pentridge, and deserves to be given a chance outside. But because the fortunes of companies are so dependent on the success of each individual play, something like this won't get a chance. Except at La Mama, perhaps.

The cast were basically inside a classic and duelling against stale tradition

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

JACK HIBBERT

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov, presented by The Alexander Theatre Company in association with Hoopla, Alexander Theatre, Monash University, Melbourne. Director, Peter Oyston; design, John Beckett and Geraldine Nixon. Yefkhodov, Christopher Crooks; Yasha, Ross Skiffington; Poshchok, Carillo Gantner; Tramp, station master, Lloyd Cunnington; Trofimov, William Gluth; Gayev, Malcolm Robertson; Lopakhin, John Wood; Feers, Reg Evans; Ranvyrnkaia, Julia Blake; Varya, Judith Crooks; Ania, Jackie Kerin; Doonishaha, Wendy Robertson; Chattotta, Judith McGrath.

The narrative bare bones of a Chekhov play frequently have the set of melodrama. It would not be too evil to suggest that this is the reason for their insufferable popularity in the theatre. People enjoy a cheap weep. They draw sustenance from the miseries of others, especially when these lamentations are cloaked in the caul of tragedy. School curricula invariably contain a Chekhov, along with that other maestro of comic social comment, Peter Oyston’s production, to its credit, attempts to force some opposites, but sidesteps an ironic sociological overview and seems to positively tremble at the thought of political colouration. In the programme notes Oyston plants in the student minds of the audience a few possible political parallels which aren’t at all discernable on stage (Trofimov’s speeches in the second act, incidentally, are cut) yet at the same time he disavows wishing to be seen as ‘political’ — a feeble each-way bet. An ideological slant on The Cherry Orchard, if that is the director and cast’s bag, could incorporate a number of insinuations, stretching from sardonic hints of modern Russia to the banality of a corner shop being swallowed up by a monopsony.

To return to the central business of the play, any production needs carefully to attend to texture, to redress possible melodramatic imbalance. The Cherry Orchard presents at core the challenge of multiple layers and interlocking ironies, the comedy of terrible choices, a defunct status quo or a horrible future, civilized patrons or barbaric opportunists, elites or mediocrities.

When I saw this production, the evening had a good ensemble feel but was rather slow to animate itself. The first act lacked volatility and life, the characters were too bland, the initial tensions loose. As the play progressed characters gradually gathered individuality and distinct shape, and dry-eyed wit at least started to tug it out with emotional frankness. While it is a marvellous thing to catch actors exhibiting genuine feeling, particularly when a lot of our theatre is distinguished by ersatz sleight-of-hand, I felt this production at times left actors emotionally marooned, naked — the tears and gloom did not seem to authentically arise out of tear-producing, gloom-engendering dramatic situations on the night. I gained the impression that committed and gifted actors had been a little ill-served by the director.

Oyston, who is Dean of the School of Drama at the Victorian College of the Arts, is still to produce the goods, cut the mustard, as a force in our theatre. It is naturally much too early to pass judgement on his institution, yet distressing rumour circulate that the central full-time staff is mainly English in cultural orientation, that the Australian content is token and off-putting (e.g. first year students last year having to dramatize the literary avoirdupois of Poor Fellow, My Country), that part of the second year course coincides with productions at Monash this year by the Dean which coincide with some HSC English Literature recommendations — all reinforcing a traditional conservative mentality.

As a director away from St. Kilda Rd Oyston meanwhile manages to elicit performances ranging from the ordinary to the excellent. The delights of the evening were for me the Firs of Reg Evans, Wendy Robertson’s Dunyasha, and the Yasha of Ross Skiffington, the last two bringing off beautifully their scenelet in the last act where like many Chekhovian lovers they clumsily, or through mischance, fail to emotionally connect. Malcolm Robertson skilfully played Gayev as a lovable and idle fatso, an emotional wreck much given to tears and nostalgic peripatysis. This proved a fine and bizarre foil to Julia Blake’s dignified and buttoned-up Ranevsky.

John Wood, who I have hounded critically in the past, gives his best performance for a while even though I found the actual interpretation of Lopakhin a puzzling one — he seemed more a member of the family than some sweaty nouveau riche threat. Others in the cast moped around dispiritfully on the edge of platitude, except William Gluth and Judith McGrath who occasionally overstepped the mark and were guilty of deadpan wit. Jackie Kerin, whose realization of Anya thankfully cut against the last act’s potential mawkishness, marred her performance with a surfeit of computerized hand gestures. Christopher Crooks as Yefkhodov, like Judith Crooks as Varya, was perfectly adequate but gave little indication that he is likely to set antipodean students of drama aflame with his English professional experience. Carillo Gantner, on loan from the teeming ranks of Melbourne’s new alternative commercial theatre company, Hoopla Productions, grooped and gawked early on as Poshchik then came home with great style in the last act.

All in all, not an utterly stunning night at the theatre, though refreshing in that the cast were basically inside a classic and duelling against stale tradition. They were assisted by an imaginatively centripetal stage design (the width of the Alexander Theatre is vast and dissipating). They were not that much assisted by a production which in the end lacked chiaroscuro, tough comic guts and a coherent interpretative framework. The programme notes, with their emanations from cast and director, are likely to become a collector’s item.
Catering for the audience or for Canberra's Thespians?

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW

MARGUERITE WELLS


Brenda (George), Andrew Stobart; Sam, Denis Mackay; Mick, Peter Callam; Sweeper, Colin Vaskess; The Woman, Julie Bail; First Officer, Graham Pike; Second Officer, John Loy; Levick, Michael Crawford; Senior Officer, Alan Mawer.

A bold and dominating performance by the set meant, as it so often does in Rep productions, that what might have been a performance of considerable flair and subtlety on the part of the actors, became an attempt to keep up with a set design which, instead of accommodating the production, determined its course. It would be hard to think of a Rep production where stress on the visual, highly laudable in itself, did not produce a set which, though striking and visually pleasing, failed to marry with the play or the production. The acting space of Theatre Three, larger than the seating area, does not lend itself to intimate production, and Ross McGregor, both as director and as designer (in the recent production of Chidley), has consistently laid stress on breaking up the acting area to stop it from swamping the actors. This tends to go a little far, though, and the actors are often swamped by the set instead of by the space it fills.

It is Rep's proud boast that in its last season, it found work for three hundred and sixty cast and backstage crew. Casts of thousands are Rep's specialty and in employing them, it is no doubt admirably fulfilling the function for which it is subsidised by the Australia Council and the ACT Committee on Cultural Development.

Female Transport had a speaking cast of ten and a supporting cast of twenty-seven convicts and guards, who draped the stage and carried on with concerns of their own which were no part of the action of the play. Multiple attention focus productions have their validity, but they are written, not adapted. Twenty-seven writhing human beings, however artistically they writhe, command attention in a rather unsubtle way which needs to be allowed for in the play's structure. It is hard to add them, however thoughtfully, without making them a distraction, rather than a complemenation to the action of the play. But twenty-seven extra cast members had graced the stage of Theatre Three, and Canberra's surging hordes of aspiring actors and particularly actresses, were appeased.

Ross McGregor's set for Chidley was once again striking — a semi-circle of windows at different heights, with concealed acting areas in front and behind. This meant, however, that actors not on the main stage were forced to move in a plane on their narrow platforms. In conversation they had to stand facing each other and therefore much of the dialogue, particularly when it took place behind a window, was muffled. Another dominating performance by the set.

The set for How Does Your Garden Grow broke up the breadth of the acting area with three rostra, each with its own door and a ramp leading to it from the rear wall which circled the stage. One of the two small rostra was Sam's cell and was never used again after the first scene. It remained, a threatening presence. Most of the action took place in Mick and Brenda's cell, the other small rostrum, so the audience spent most of the evening staring at a downstage corner. The large central rostrum was the exercise yard. The set was all grey, with blue dripping stripes — meant to convey the dankness of a prison. I am sure, but instead it left an impression that was rather gay and sad, like a tawdry fairyland, as though someone had left the cake out in the rain.

The use of three acting areas instead of set changes, meant that we were spared the music of hammers in blackouts, the heretofore inevitable sound effect of a Rep production, but it also meant that a play whose unity of theme needs to be carefully stressed from scene to scene, became fragmented. The audience saw the main plot stage left, Sam stage right and assorted unclassifiable scenes centre stage.

Rep has strong convictions about its artistic integrity and would be indignant at being judged on any but professional grounds — its ticket prices show that! Yet when it comes to choosing between the demands of the flamboyant thespians of Canberra and the fairly discriminating audience, the audience has tended to go away, feeling just a little bit cheated. How Does Your Garden Grow was no exception. It was a good Rep production, with a strong and more than usually evenly matched cast. Yet the audience went away feeling that they had seen a scrappy play — which is not fair to the playwright — and I went away, asking myself as I always do, 'Does Rep set out to entertain me, or itself?'
A very acceptable but quite innocuous blend

MY FAT FRIEND

BILL DUNSTONE

My Fat Friend by Charles Laurence. Regal Theatre, Subiaco, Perth. Opened 30 June 1977. Director, Edgar Metcalfe; Designer, Richard Harley; Costume Designer, Vicky, Judy Nunn; Assistant Director, Robert van Mackelenberg; Tom, Roland Paver.

Charles Laurence’s My Fat Friend is a light-weight British commercial comedy, and quite good of its kind. Judging by the response of a large second-night house, when I saw the play, the author seems to have concocted a very acceptable but quite innocuous blend of sentimental comedy and mild irony.

As might be expected of a play tailored to please all and tax none, My Fat Friend is not the least bit artistically adventurous. The author keeps to paths that have been well-trodden by generations of writers for Shaftesbury Avenue and popular British television. Even so, Laurence’s characters and dialogue have an atmosphere and an appeal of their own, and his play undoubtedly makes a comic point within its limits. The characters, of which there are four, do not cover a wide range and they are slightly drawn. But each is sufficiently off-beat to be sympathetic and to sustain the plot. And of course, all of the entrances and exits are carefully built towards, as the main interest of the play is a triangular relationship involving Vicky, the overweight proprietress of a bookshop, Henry, a camp civil servant, and James, the failed author and excellent cook. Interestingly enough, though much mention is made of the bookshop, and some of the civil service, James is the only character whose work impinges much on his life. But the fact that James is an odd outsider (a Scot!) perhaps explains that.

Laurence sketches within this triangular relationship a pattern of mutual dependency, vulnerability and role-playing. Each character has a weakness and relies on the others for moral support. So far, so good. But Tome, handsome geologist, arrives fortuitously to win Vicky’s heart in a one-night stand, and the second half of the show concerns the effects which Tom, now absent in Persia, has on Vicky. I myself thought that the plot would have been much more lively if Tom had fallen for Henry, but my sense of humour is perhaps more when she is thin. Laurence tries to make psychological capital out of this — the once plump and insecure Vicky takes to match her thinner self, and the band of on the tentative side but adequate

TREATS

MARGOT LUKE

Treats by Christopher Hampton. The National Theatre Company at the Playhouse, Perth. Opened 30 June, 1977. Director, Aarne Neeme; Designer, Sue Russell; Assistant Director, Patrick, Peter Rowley; Ann, Leith Taylor; Dave, Dennis Miller.

It seems to be shaking down into a pattern: the commercial theatres are doing the funny comedies, the prestige places do the sour ones. As long as our laughter is tinged with unease and we wince instead of smiling, there is some guarantee that we are not yielding to superficial entertainment.
Discomfort and boredom offer a poor substitute for intellectual challenge, but at least there is the irritant, an ingredient added to emptyheaded frivolity, and therefore the product must be superior.

Evidently the Royal Court Theatre thought so when they accepted Christopher Hampton's Treats, or were they merely dazzled by his past achievements in The Philanthropist and Savages? And did the Playhouse fall into the same trap? Certainly the audience was bewildered, murmuring words of encouragement like "It's a bit slow but quite the same trap? Certainly the audience was they merely dazzled by his past achievements in Theatre thought so when they accepted

The fact that they do not leave their cardboard backing is not the fault of the local production. Goodness knows, Aarne Neeme has his three actors in a frenzy of activity: Dennis Miller is energetically loufsh, Leith Taylor feverishly seductive and emphatic, Peter Rowley dithers extravagantly.

But there is neither action nor dialogue to suggest an existence for these people outside their bickering triangular domesticity. Who would have guessed Dennis Miller was playing a journalist, or Leith Taylor an interloper, unless there had been a couple of marginal references? Even the bickering is confined to the immediate situation, and concentrates on possessions — which person is to have sole right to the other, Dave the original possessor of Ann, or Patrick, the interloper. There is also some serious discussion about furniture and the fate of a rug "good for making love on — a mat finish". Memorable joke.

One wonders where in the present spectrum of drama this particular effort belongs. Entertainment, the category it was optimistically entered for? Only marginally. Social comment? Closer. It does examine, fitfully, the contemporary ambience of unloving intercourse, both social and sexual. Of course, Noel Coward, living in a more elegant age did it more stylishly, but might not a playwright observing the present scene pick a wittier set of characters, more inventive both in their insults and their insights?

In an effort to add a missing dimension there are mimed interludes — brief dance-sketches showing the characters in postures symbolising their current states of mind. These sit a little oddly on the body of the play — dimly and fitfully lit by what appeared to be strobes with the hiccups.

One did spend an inordinate amount of time wondering why the enterprise was called Treats, which seemed to have little application on either side of the footlights. Toward the threequarter mark all is revealed. The relationship between Dave and Ann takes on firmer outlines — Ann is punished for regarding her favours as Treats for her men. What is required is that she becomes the submissive female. In a wordless scene, during which Ann wrestles with her liberated nature and the telephone, the point of the play finally emerges: Ann gives in. It is left to us to decide whether we regard this as inevitable and sad, or the natural order of things, is left to us. As the play is unusually brief (ending at 10 p.m.) there is ample time to debate the point.

Talking about voices

THE HUMAN VOICE
INNER VOICES
GOING HOME

CLIFF GILLAM

The Human Voice by Jean Cocteau. Hole in The Wall Theatre, Perth, WA National Theatre Company. Opened 1 June 1977. Director, Andrew John Milson; stage manager, John Wilson; lighting designer, Peter Rowley; scenery and costumes, Carole Skinner; original music, Helen Hough; designer, Louis Nowra; production manager, Judy Nunn; copies, John Milson; stage manager, Stephen Edwards; producers, Andrew Markos, Judy Nunn.


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The Hole-in-the-Wall Theatre has recently been the venue for some quite remarkable talking in theatrical tongues. Concurrently with her appearance in the Hole's major production for June, Stoppard's Travesties (reviewed in the last issue) Judy Nunn appeared in a late-night weekends-only production of Jean Cocteau's The Human Voice, and this has been followed up with Louis Nowra's amazing new play Inner Voices.

Cocteau's play is really a vehicle for a solo female performer — all the interest lies in the capacity of the actress to hold the audience's attention for some thirty minutes — all of which time the woman of the play spends speaking on the telephone to her recently departed lover. The playwright has allowed himself some room to move by having the conversation (of which we hear only the woman's side) take place over a party-line connected phone, so that the linearity of the play can be occasionally varied through interruptions from other voices; although once again, these voices are manifested to us only in terms of the woman's anguished pleading and rage when she is cut off by them from her lover. A solo role using the telephone convention demands much of an actress — a good sense of pace and timing, excellent concentration, an ability to evoke the other person with a mere tilt of the head, the play of responsive thought across her features. Judy Nunn possesses all these attributes, and her performance was utterly convincing. One soon forgot the obviousness of some of the writing — the convention of the party line, some heavy-handed interpolation of expository material made implausibly part of a final conversation between erstwhile lovers — and was content merely to see Miss Nunn fulfill the promise of the programme note, and tear a passion to tatters. She was ably directed by John Milson.

If, as a play, Cocteau's The Human Voice is quite forgettable, such is not the case with the Hole's July offering, Louis Nowra's Inner Voices. When I first heard that it was an Australian play, and knew nothing else about it, I must confess that I grinned inwardly at the thought of yet another three-acter about self consciously Australian academics/artists/business executives busily engaged in failing in
marriage, failing in friendships, failing in scholarship/art/business, and being alternately maudlin and nasty about their failures. I cheered myself with the thought that it might be yet another stab at national self-definition via local legend; an entry in the Nellie Melba, King O'Malley, Monk O'Neill, Sally Bannister, and Lorne help us Hughie Telfer school of Ockeriana. At least such things are generally lively. All of which illustrates merely the tyranny and the folly of pre-conceptions, for I was both surprised and gratified to discover that Inner Voices boasts neither gum trees nor North Shore units with shag pile carpets, but instead takes the stuff of elemental Russian history and weaves it into a magical vision of the complementarity of communication and suffering. Inner Voices is not just a good Australian play, it is that infinitely better thing, a good play. And it has earned, from its director at the Hole, Mike Morris, the proper respect, and been given a stunning production.

Inner Voices is a good play is not, obviously, to say that it is a great play. Mr Nowra has taken the historical fact of the incarcerated Ivan, the putative sixth of Russia, who was shoved off the stage of history by Catherine the Second, and, denied, from infancy to manhood, any human sound but that of his own name, and has embroidered this fact with a fictional coup d'etat, organized by one Mirovich, an erstwhile guard over the prince. In one respect then, the play is another kind of Polonian hybrid, the historico-fantastico pageant. But the play moves well, action is taut and economic, as presented, the pace beautifully controlled (after, that is, a nervously fast first few minutes on the opening night). Morris has also studied the production with some elegant grotesqueries. The decadent Mirovich's gourmet meal, eaten, quite literally, off the bare torso of a reclining dwarf, was one memorable moment among many. These comic grotesqueries are however beautifully balanced with some deeply moving scenes conveying the pathos of Ivan's predicament. Most importantly, Morris has elicited some excellent performances from his actors.

As Ivan, Geoff Kelso gives his all. He is physically convincing, combining a stiff-gaited sense of the newness to Ivan of physical freedom, with an expressiveness of facial feature, a kind of fine-boned fragility apt both for Ivan's "nobility" and his pathetic innocence. Kelso also employed a trick of a catch in the throat, a hesitation of utterance, to quite devastating effect. Ivan is a fine role, and this young actor played it up to the hilt.

As Mirovich, the man who is both Ivan's liberator and his captor, his mentor and his exploiter, Geoff Gibbs was superb. Murderer, glutton, inept Machiavel, Mirovich seems all uncompromising villain. Yet, as Geoff Gibbs played him, he has an almost Falstaffian vitality, complicated by a pitiable sense of his own inadequacy in filling the "historical" role he finds himself in. His bullying, his physical grossness and compulsive desire to ingest seem less the excesses of a simply vicious nature, and more compensations for his sense, at bottom, of his own littleness.

In the script, which I've had an opportunity to read since the play opened, the relationship between Ivan and Mirovich is one of exploited and exploiter, and this is manifested by Ivan's outburst of hysterical rage when Mirovich dies, a victim of poison and court intrigue. Ivan kicks the corpse savagely and utters, as he kicks, a stream of curses and his first comprehensible speech which ends with a bitterly ironic "I'm talking, I'm listening." Morris, however, has opted for a deeper sense of a love-hate relationship between Mirovich and Ivan. Mirovich's rages at Ivan's incapacity to learn set speeches for the French Ambassador are tempered by a curiously paternal concern, beautifully manifested in a way which both made more terrible by the intolerable tyranny and the folly of pre-conceptions, and which is both too simple and too complex.

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First impressions — in spite of Oscar Wilde's contrary opinion — can often be deceptive. And in the case of Food, disconcertingly so. Even at the best of times, joss-sticks are not to my taste; and when the audience was greeted at the door by two members of the cast waving burning wands and ushering the faithful into a room thick with smoke, my hopes for the evening began drying as rapidly as my throat — by now coping unsuccessfully with the swirling clouds of incense. The atmosphere was murkier than in Minsky's on a good night, and the sight of an androgynous Figure seated at the top of the steps, clad in obligatory Hare Krishna gear, was just about enough to send me scuttling back to the less demanding rigours of television. But duty prevailed, I stayed, endured the first 10 minutes and found the rest exuberant, funny, patchy yet still marvellously invigorating.

Centred on the conflict between two restaurants — the one offering the charms of greasy Harry and his hamburgers, cokes and coffee, the other the delights of vegetarian victuals and beneficial beverages — the work combines revue elements with a light-hearted look at the proposition that "man is what he eats". Lentil and Calcutta have acquired their health-food haven through the generosity of Bob, the good fairy disguised as old tramp with a heart and pockets of gold, and a fondness for collecting empties in a dilapidated pram. Allied with Harry are the Gunkies, a bikie gang who set out to make things difficult for the freaks next door. No prizes for guessing the outcome.

The weaknesses of Tony Strachan's script are obvious: an unhappy opening and a rather confused ending, and in between, a plot which seems none too certain of whose turn it is to be on stage and why at any particular moment. And some of the writing does not always avoid the dangers of a limp sentimentality or clumsy comedy. On the other hand, there are moments — as in Bob's description of his (now dead) wife indulging in an improbable tree-rescue — when the lines combine melancholy with a wry awareness of just how long one can trust an audience's response to this sort of heart-baring. The action is dotted with musical numbers, mixing hard, rhythmic rock for the Gunkies and Harry with quieter, sitar music for Calcutta and Lentil. The band copes well with the contrasting styles, and the ensemble work is tight and professional. Three numbers in particular stood out: a show-stopping one for the Gunkies in which they demonstrate the confrontation "eye-ball technique", and two marvellous solos for Calcutta. It's a little unfortunate that the music, for all its rhythmic vitality, lacks a distinctive style, and a few more numbers with a stronger melodic line would have been an advantage. Most of the dance routines went with zest and energy: and the performers' enthusiasm had clearly been tempered with discipline and some hard work on set-pieces which looked none too easy. It's a change to see an ad hoc group like this breaking into dance routines where one doesn't squirm with embarrassment at the obvious lack of rhythm and the awkwardness.

And one could hardly talk of lack of rhythm in the case of Trisha Elix, who virtually stole the show. On this evidence, she's a real find: a five foot-and-a-bit dynamo. Not the brash, out-front larger-than-life variety, but the sort that doesn't need to worry about making sure that everybody, but everybody, can see it, because in her case, you can sense it immediately. She has a real quality which comes over strongest in her singing and dancing and, with some coaching, could also be brought out more in her acting. Her singing was at times stunning: a flexible voice that hit the notes dead centre and was equally at home with the rock numbers as with the ballads. And the power: not, in this case, simply the
amplifier variety, but strong, well-focused and exciting. There aren't too many singers round this city who could make of her songs what she did.

However, the most memorable character in the show is Alan Lovett's Harry, a genuinely funny creation along Alf Garnett lines. Bigoted and truculent, treating his wife the way he treats both his customers and his hamburgers, he is a splendidly conceived part and gets a fine performance from Alan Lovett. Even if there were nothing else to commend in the production, it would be worth seeing for him alone: for, though cast in the Garnett mould, he's a distinctive figure, mean-minded, money-grubbing and instantly recognisable. I was almost sorry to see him get his just deserts — and rather pleased (in spite of higher feelings) by his final resurrection. The scenes between him and the Gunkies were hilarious: broad, coarse and vigorous, they hit precisely that note of knockabout yet slightly menacing farce that one finds in the circus and the music-hall. For this, full marks also to director Malcolm Blaylock and to Tony Strachan, who, together with Kevin Kennedy and David Torr, made up as convincing and ugly a trio of bikies as you're likely to see.

Food deserves a wider audience. There have been other South Australian plays that have been taken up by other companies which have had far greater weaknesses and fewer positive qualities. Author Strachan deserves encouragement: he has a fine ear for dialogue, a keen sense of theatre and he can catch an audience's attention and hold it. What's more, he seems relatively unaffected by the creeping neo-naturalism which infects so much contemporary Australian drama. There's more conviction and accuracy about a character like Harry than there is in all the disaffected middle-class or lower middle-class poseurs and penseurs that seem to people the stage at present.

Work in progress

TOO EARLY TO SAY

WAL CHERRY


Three one act plays of patchy quality could make an interesting evening of work in progress. These plays are ready to be worked on as part of the process by which a company develops its skill and creative capacity. But if we are to be charged $5.00 a seat for a look at a stage-subsidised theatre's work-in-progress, we should demand a more imaginative and enterprising selection of unfinished work than this.

The major asset of the productions is the acting of Patricia Kennedy and Ted Hodgeman. They are technically competent performers who know how to hide a bad line and exploit a good, how to use behaviour as an indicator of inner activity, how to say what they mean, how to evoke passion and to control it, how to keep still, how to listen, how to be a part of an imaginative world.

But these and other fine actors working with this company must not be tempted into believing that teamwork and being part of a company effort is a substitute for the actor's private and personal passion for finding the right action to play and demonstrating the ability to play it. Learning about playwriting is learning about what can be acted. Writers for the stage must write to be performed and they must write knowing that an actor has got to be able to find a reason for grasping the nettle of a script. Good actors must not ever be placed in the position of weeding some writer's garden unless the flowers are worth it.

These three plays are not imaginatively barren. Blair's play has some interesting devices. Unfortunately these are developed toward the cliche. An escapist gets himself locked in a railway cupboard in order to help prove a point and swallows the key to his padlock and chains. A headmistress is confronted by a dead-beat alcoholic former husband. He has been asked to meet the train by their daughter who arrives complete with a combination bikie/sociology student lover. She met her old Dad by accident as part of a casework project while doing some kind of sociology study at University. The point of it all is to get Mum and Dad to hold hands on the railway platform to show that they still have some contact before they part forever. They do. Randy daughter then heads off for the hols, to do something communal with those of her own ilk. After the characters have departed, Colin George throws melodramatic comedy to the winds and has the poor chained-up chap wheeled off on a porter's trolley by some crooks in the stage management, as though regretting a lost director's opportunity for farce. There is a real relationship built up between the old alcoholic and the school headmistress. Because of it the script is given some sense of reality. But I simply cannot shake off my recollection of disbelief as the co- incidental elements of the plot unfolded in a way which indicated that the audience was certainly meant to laugh from time to time, but only at the characters, never at the unlikely circumstances of their basic situations. Sometimes this script drags a little at the heart, rarely at the head and never at the belly.

Fields of Offerings by Michael Cove is clearly meant for the heart. An old Russian lady arrives in an Australian hotel, where the radio spouts Russian, so that, by a simple inversion, she can speak English and tells the audience about her life as a Russian Jew. Included is an account of a multiple rape inflicted upon her in a concentration camp. Patricia Kennedy's technical mastery of her craft rescues the script from the deadening memory of all those writers who have handled this so much better. Why does this lady speak thus to the fourth wall of an Australian hotel?

Family Lore. Cove's second offering suffers from the same problem. The characters address the audience about themselves with no particular reason for unburdening their privacy. It's a Jewish joke, this play. I don't think that Mother actually says to daughter "Why don't you marry a nice doctor. A nice girl like you etc.", but she might well.

Ron Blair and Michael Cove are obviously talented writers and they have some fine work to their credit. In these plays, there is observation, imagination, considered opinion, some well turned phrases and speeches and some skilful variations of rhythm and pace. I would have no inclination to write about the plays so decidedly if they were not offered as full blown productions in a major house. They are work in progress.

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Adrian Slack, director of productions of the State Opera of South Australia, tells of the company's painstaking approach to production of a rarely performed Monteverdi work

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA

The aspirations of any performing arts company are best revealed by analysis of the aims of a single production in that these aims indicate the general attitude more precisely than a mere listing of future repertoire and discussion of what we would like to do in an ideal world. Financial, musical and technical problems force us to be practical in approach, to face restrictions and to try to re-create works of art with more imagination than physical resource. In our case, a present example serves to illustrate. We are currently planning a production of The Coronation of Poppea. Why Poppea? What do we want to achieve?

The music of Monteverdi, though not unknown in Adelaide, is rarely given major exposure. People tend to assume that opera started in the 18th century with Mozart and finished at the beginning of the 20th with Puccini. Works written either before or after that period are regarded as oddities. We intend to show that there is nothing odd or rarefied about Poppea. It is a powerful music-drama, constructed along Shakespearian lines, about lust in all its aspects.

The main plot is paralleled by sub-plots, as in Shakespeare, to indicate the degrading effects of lust, not only upon the individual, but also upon society as a whole. Lust causes a royal divorce — the top of society cracking up. It causes the final decay of Seneca, the man of principle on whose dicta a stable society had been based. Injured parties, otherwise honourable people, are driven to acts of murder.

The story of Nero and Poppea is not literally true; it is based upon various unconnected events during the reign of Nero, which Monteverdi and his librettist, Busanello, put together to illustrate microcosmically the main theme about decaying values.

On this main idea musical director Myer Fredman has based his conception of the work. Monteverdi wrote only a bass line and a voice part, leaving other parts to be filled in by any instruments to hand. He also left a great deal up to the performer, who improvised around the basic musical structure (perhaps one of the reasons for the present resurgence of this sort of music
In an unkind world, the only way to achieve success is to remain strongly committed to the work in hand, stretch the imagination to the limit

is that it is closely allied in principle to the modern forms of aleatoric music and to jazz). After some thought, Myer decided to use Raymond Leppard's realisation of the Monteverdi score which, in contrast to many others, is luxuriant in orchestral colour and size. Leppard has taken Monteverdi's original and moulded it dramatically and orchestrated it in a nicely decadent manner. This, therefore, was the ideal sound through which our conception of the piece was to be projected.

The problem then was how to reflect this not only in the action — a fairly straightforward matter — but also in the visual effect of the design. Together with the designer, John Cervenka, we developed a Renaissance view of Rome — grand, but slightly sugary and self-indulgent. Constantly shifting patterns of pillars were intended to covey the instability of the world in which the characters lived.

So far so good; now for the practicalities. Having expressed our desire to approach the work in the way indicated, we were faced with financial and technical problems. As we wanted to gain maximum contact with the audience and a degree of intimacy which would make the general effect more powerful, it was decided to use the Playhouse in Adelaide's Festival Centre complex. The construction of that theatre immediately presents a problem regarding the size of the orchestra, as there is no proper orchestra pit and the space available is very limited. Instead of asking for a different venue for the performance, Myer Fredman decided to use a small orchestra and make his effects through clarity of detail and precision of sound. Two harpsichords will be placed at either side of the pit, giving a stereophonic effect, which composers of that time frequently employed. In addition, there will be a small string-orchestra and an organ. At significant moments of the drama, there will be odd splashes of orchestral colour, such as the addition of trumpets — so that the audience is constantly kept on its toes as far as the aural effect is concerned.

Piquancy rather than lushness is now the musical language which we will use to express the drama.

The stage designs, when presented, were found to be simply too expensive and could not be reduced effectively without destroying the overall lush impression they were intended to convey. Back at the drawing board, Cervenka started again. The second version was very different. There were still the columns, but much starker. The self-indulgence was removed from the concept and the lines of the designs became much harder. What the audience will see is a much more solid impression of Rome than was intended at first. The changes in visual presentation in no way affect what we want to convey — they just mean that the selfish Poppea and her lover Nero have more to destroy. Rome and its society look solid and stable in the present design, and thus the ideas of decay and degradation will come to the audience as more of a shock.

These technical and financial pressures have forced us to re-think the way of presenting Poppea. It requires discipline not to lose sight of the initial goal — namely the moulding of the music and the drama into a unified conception, which will communicate itself to an audience — and it requires imagination to find alternative methods of conveying that same conception from the stage and orchestra pit into the stalls and circle. To achieve this goal we need time for meditation, discussion and experiment.

Time is our most valued asset. In this company, we try to maximise its use both before and during rehearsals. Our duty is to present work of the highest possible quality and to encourage in all the people who work with us their obligation as artists to delve deeper and deeper into the opera in question so that their performance becomes richer and fuller, ultimately more truthful and more genuinely uplifting. Our aim is to entertain, to raise people's spirits and to make them aware of what human values mean and how they affect us. In an unkind world, the only way to achieve success in our aims is to remain strongly committed to the work in hand, stretch imagination to the limit, and never say, "It'll be all right on the night." In short, we must never be satisfied with ourselves.
'I am not complaining about the trendy subscribers . . . They buy the expensive seats and support the addicts'

In Film Festival memories everybody has their good-old-days and mine are the Queen's Birthday long weekends of cultural excitement and discomfort, when we ran from one rigorously cold lecture-room to another, as film followed film with barely enough time to take gin, sandwiches, rum balls and coffee from a thermos on the closely-mown and freezing greensward. We wore greasy-wool sweaters and duffle coats and caps from which our ears stuck out, rose-red with the cold and enthusiasm.

But that was long ago and far away, and it is now the in thing to subscribe to the film festivals in Sydney and Melbourne and Adelaide. Many of the subscribers never see a film except at the festival, and then they see only the big films, whereas your real addict sits through every short subject, some of which reach heights, or depths, of mind-boggling boredom.

I am not complaining about the trendy subscribers. But for them, the high cost of everything would probably mean no festivals at all. They buy the expensive seats and support the addicts.

Here I have to confess that I did not subscribe this year, and am able to write this article only because of the charity of the festival administration and a few subscribing friends.

Well, no good crying over past winters. The greasy-wool-sweater days were over when the Sydney Festival moved out to the Wintergarden Theatre in the suburb of Rose Bay, and even more over when it moved into the city's State Cinema. I have nothing against the State; it has the authentic facade and interior, the true architectural expression of an industry that is paradoxically concerned with money and dreams. But because the State is stuck in the middle of a city, some feeling of festival "separateness" is lost, with some sense of commitment.

I am sure all these factors have been weighed by the director, Mr David Stratton, and his friends and helpers, and a decision made on the most practical grounds. I just think it's a pity.

So what was on view at the festival this year? As usual, a few complete works of art among the merely interesting or informative or irrational or self-indulgent exercises. It may have been meant to have a Canadian theme, but you cannot make a theme out of half a dozen commendable but not actually outstanding features, and in fact it had no theme at all. The films I will remember from this Festival are Edward Munch, by Peter Watkins; Raise Ravens by Carlos Saura; Chinese Roulette by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; The Man on the Roof by Bo Widerberg and a documentary, Harlan County, USA by Barbara Kopple.

One I most wanted to see, and missed, will never see because it will not get a commercial showing here (though it did get a commercial showing in London) was In the Realm of the Senses. This film a Japanese/French co-production directed by Nagisa Oshima from his own screenplay, purports to tell the true story of Sada, a servant girl and part-time prostitute who in 1936 strangled and castrated her lover, for love, and with his consent.

I asked some people who did see it what they thought. "Boring," they said. "All that screwing." Whether or not In the Realm of the Senses is porn, the attitude elicited here is often used by people who are excited or moved by porn. They say, "Boring", but they don't mean it.

One night I sat next to a man who has been attending the Sydney festival for 24 years. I asked him what he thought of it.

"Beautiful," he said. "Intelligent and beautiful. And interesting."

"Not boring?"

"Not at all."

"All that screwing not boring?"

"What can you mean?" he asked, offended. So I shut up.

Edward Munch is a film by Peter Watkins (Culloden, The War Game, Privilege, Punishment Park) about the Norwegian painter (1864-1944) and his work. The script is based on Munch's journals but strongly affected by Watkins's own recollections of his childish and youthful sexual longings, emotions and work. Munch referred to himself in his journals in the third person and to the woman he loved by a pseudonym. In many of his portraits the heads are turned aside as if the sitters did not wish to be recognised. The actors in Edward Munch — really not actors at all, but people that Watkins found when he was working on the film in Oslo — have the same closed faces as the people in Munch's portraits. And coming out of the film I met an acquaintance who had been recently in Oslo, and he said that the faces of the people in the Oslo streets have that same closed look.

The theme of the film is reclusiveness, frustration, fear of any expression of emotion; the impression the characters give is
of being strangers even in their own kitchens and bedrooms. One is aware of Munch as being extraordinarily brave, of being capable of facing anything in his own life, even madness.

Watkins is a most accomplished filmmaker. He has matched his own innovation to Munch's innovation, expressionism in painting.

*Raise Ravens* (in Spanish *Cria Cuervos*) is by Carlos Saura, and takes its title from the proverb, "Raise ravens and they'll peck out your eyes." It is about a little girl who sees clearly, as a child does, but partially, as a child also does. The child is named Ana, and is played by Ana Torrent. Her mother (Geraldine Chaplin, fulfilling all the hope and trust many have had in her) is cast as the mother who dies of cancer. There is a father, a soldier and womaniser, who also dies suddenly. Ana and her sisters are left with a speechless grandmother in a wheelchair, an aunt and a maid. It is 1975, and the film moves forward to 1995, when Ana is an adult (Geraldine Chaplin again) looking back on childhood, and understanding why others did as they did, and why it seems so strange to her. *Raise Ravens* is a claustrophobic film, memorable, and well worth a second look when it comes on commercial television.

*Chinese Roulette* was my first Fassbinder film. There has to be a first Fassbinder film. There has to be a first look when it comes on commercial television, and if I say it is very German I can expect a shower of rude letters. All the same, it is.

I take it that Bo Widerberg's *Man on the Roof* was in this Festival to represent Swedish cinema, which was otherwise missing. The film is based on the Martin Beck character in the roman policiers of Maj Sjowall-Per Wahllo, which have become a cult with whodunit fanciers, and it employs none of the tricks we have grown accustomed to when film tells this kind of story. There is a reason behind every action by the man on the roof — the sniper — and the men who have to get him off it — his colleagues, policemen. The film deals with issues in society that are known to everyone, including us — police brutality, political insensitivity, popular apathy — in a remarkably perceptive way.

Widerberg may be remembered for *Elvira Madigan*, but *Man on the Roof* has the tough political attitudes of his later film, *Adalen 31*.

Everybody will be able to make up their own minds about the star turn of the festival, Altman's *Three Women*, when it reaches the cinemas, as well as about *Mado*, Claude Sautet's film about French contemporary middle-class upwardly-mobile people, which has the talented Michel Piccoli to see it through.

I mentioned *Harlan County*, USA. This is the first film by an American woman, Barbara Kopple, who began working on it in 1972 during the miners' strike in Kentucky and kept on working on it, with contributions of money from all over America, until 1976, when she finished it and won Best Feature Documentary at the New York Film Festival. *Harlan County* is real documentary film-making, in which the director imposes nothing but the discipline of the craft on her subject.

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EVERY LITTLE MOVEMENT, CODE OF TERPSICHERE, BORZOI BOOK OF MODERN DANCE, PRE-CLASSIC DANCE FORMS, DANCE: A SHORT HISTORY.
The Australian Dance Theatre, like the Australian Ballet Company (NSW), can no longer hide under guise of being a "promising group". It has arrived and must now consolidate its position. Both these companies have (by and large) a well-trained team of dancers, artistic directors of proven ability and a repertoire of divergent yet consistently interesting dance pieces. Yet the troubles of the Australian Dance Theatre, having seen them in their debut Adelaide season, seem to me to be threefold.

Firstly, they are going to have to work long and hard to erase in people's minds the unnerving memories of earlier days. The thing to do now is to reassure people that the new ADT is not semi-amateur in its philosophy, potential or performance standard.

Secondly, the audience will be a young one, that being the only one that apparently is amenable to the art form. Being young, it will last a lot longer and it will be loyal; the company will be forgiven the occasional choreographic bummer.

The ADT is twice blessed in that it will have the capacity to attract audiences in both South Australia and Victoria. And the audiences are steadily growing.

At the opening night of the company in Adelaide, there was the usual depressing collection of doting ballet mothers and their recalcitrant husbands, and fatuous socialites in fur wraps.

By the end of the second programme, there was much denum in evidence, the age-group was between 20 and 35, they had paid for their seats, and the conversation at interval was marked by intelligent appraisal of what had just been seen. This is the audience modern dance attracts and desperately needs. The ADT is attracting it, and the process is on-going. Their idea of open rehearsals at theatres on university campuses is a good one.

The second trouble facing the company is in not only obtaining good dancers, but keeping them. Adelaide is not exactly the shimmering heart of cultural endeavour, despite the Tourist Bureau, and dancers, being the peripatetic creatures they are, always yearn to go overseas, looking for new horizons, new techniques, innovative choreography and "self-realisation". They have every right to do so; it's also healthy, as long as they come back and do something towards enriching this poverty-stricken land of ours.

ADT needs more male dancers and female dancers with greater performance impact. Jonathon Taylor himself is dancing and this should not be so. He'd be the first to tell you that he's beyond it and he doesn't want to dance. He shouldn't have to. Group-relations are all very well, but an artistic director's job is to forge the company into shape, to choreograph works for it and generally run things.

Apart from this, there is at the moment far too much importance (and strain) put on the two Rambert imports, Julia Blake and Joe Scoglio, which is not to downgrade their self-evident talents but merely to highlight the disparity of talents within the company.

Other dancers need to undertake the load; otherwise, if some of them are not given lead parts, a demoralisation will set in, those dancers will look elsewhere and the problems will multiply.

The third trouble at the moment, as I see it, and one that can only be corrected by time and constant performing, is the discovery or foraging of a distinct company style, a way of going about things, of attack and execution that mark the differences between this company and the modern pieces of the Australian Ballet (such as they are) and the Dance Company (NSW). It's a matter of training and choreography.

Now, I know, gentle reader, that these are teething-troubles and any new company is bound to have them, and I know that Jonathon Taylor is aware of them, but someone has to point them out.

It would seem that the amalgamation of two States is the most reasonable solution for the Victorian Government to take to have an alternative dance company to the Australian Ballet performing in Victoria, it being apparently impossible to relook Ballet Victoria (and there are more skeletons in the cupboard about the demise of that company than either former members of it or the Hamer Government are willing to acknowledge publicly.) I suppose it is better to have fewer companies of higher quality than to have a larger number full of half-talents without the financial resources to realise completely their ideas and projects. Provided, that is, that those larger companies don't get hide-bound by hierarchies and box-office demands to the degree that they lose all impetus to adventure and innovation.

The ADT is determined to be a flexible group, building on its own resources and able to adapt to changing situations. If Jonathon Taylor has anything to do with it, such ossification will never set in.

Professionalism is one of the most obvious qualities of the company. With one or two exceptions, technique is under full control. The dancers know the heart and matter of the works they perform, and are thus able to give them to the audience with greater conviction.

With a debut season of nine works, all of them either world or Australian premieres, there are naturally some that are better than others and some that should be dropped immediately. What is really encouraging, though, is the relaxed, effortless cohesion of the ADT dancers—a cohesion born of an ensemble of individual strengths, a group feeling that this is their company and that they are there to win over an audience gently, not to impress and overwhelm them.

The repertoire is broad—a intense piece there, a funny one here and a social-comment work elsewhere.

As I noted in an earlier article on the company, because of Taylor's background with Ballet Rambert and his present connections with it, a sizeable slice of the works are those lifted from the Rambert repertoire. There's nothing wrong in that; Christopher Bruce's Wings and Weekend are marvellous works in anyone's book and the stable of works that will undoubtedly grow has, in these two works, a high standard of invention and structure to build itself on and measure itself by.

The two works by onetime artistic director of Rambert-Norman Morrice I'm not too sure about. His Seven Songs, set to Joseph Canteloupe's orchestration of songs of the Auvergne, looks, on first viewing, like one of those "chandelier" ballets without the chandelier. Girls in long, floaty dresses of pure silk, shimmer across the stage, passing here and there for a delicately unfolding arabesque and gliding off in gentle jetes; the men run, leap and support their women, or lift them high into the air as they gradually curl themselves around the men's arms and bodies.

William Shoubridge

Australian Dance Theatre

‘What is really encouraging . . . is the relaxed, effortless cohesion of the dancers—a cohesion born of an ensemble of individual strengths . . .’

The repertoire is broad—an intense piece there, a funny one here and a social-comment work elsewhere.
A lot of it you've seen a dozen times before. It's pleasant and amiable, but leaves neither a tantalizing taste for more or a memorable after-image — at first glance, that is.

But the work grows on you. A sweet adolescent tramp through the summer countryside in those Auvergne mountains (or, indeed, the beautiful Adelaide Hills), Seven Songs is shot through with flickering impressions, swift excursions and mutable episodes, subtly developed but never completely finished, which is probably its intention. It leaves one with a feeling of ineffable calm, like a fading reminiscence of a very happy event.

A far cry from Morrice's Solo, a self-stated "Woman's Lib" ballet. One woman, a trio of trestle tables and a shop dummy is all there is. The sole woman feels herself all over, explores her space and her limitations; she lounges, climbs and undulates over those tables, stressing her superb fluidity in contrast to the immobile, plastic "perfection" of the shop dummy. But this exercise is interrupted by a man who ambles on and is struck by the "perfect female form" of the dummy. He lifts it, holds it, studies and adores it while ignoring the living creature next to him. She forces herself into his sight, but might as well be a piece of furniture. The tension rises. The woman tries out a few mindless social dance-steps, primes herself for the images the man wants, but backs off; those images have nothing to do with what a woman really is. But she still needs companionship, needs to be noticed. So what a woman really is. But she still needs recognition, that is.

There are other works that I couldn't get to see, like Julia Blakie's Night of the Four Moons or Taylor's Listen to the Music, and, of course, later in the year there will be other works by other choreographers like America's Cliff Keuter and Sarah Sughara as well as the company's dancers themselves. When the company gets to Melbourne (performing in Her Majesty's) I'm going to have a second look and I'm sure this marvellous company will have grown in stature and confidence even in a few short months.

Solo carries conviction merely because of Julia Blakie's finely realised performance. From start to finish one is captured by even her smallest gesture, delineating those subtle but enormous differences between image and actuality. Apart from that, Solo is dated and outmoded. While choreographically it has impact, ideologically the work no longer has relevance. Women, at least women who know what they are rather than what they are made, won't stand for that "making-do" stuff any more. Solo ends in defeat, which is no longer the case.

The title is misleading. When the two couples enter the stage, separately, from the darkness, one thinks of a foursome gathering somewhere for a pleasant "dirty" weekend.

True, there is a lot of writhing and copulating, but points are constantly scored within it. The two men flex their prowess towards each other, the women (there are three, and one of them is always left out of this very serious game) huddle together for "warmth" and security. The men just have to break up this knot of self-sufficiency; their territory is threatened. When the women fight back (or rather dance back), the men are static, nonplussed; they can't handle the situation. Only when the women allow the role-playing to go on can they function. There is one memorable moment when the women use the prone bodies of the men for support en attitude — two of them, anyway; the third woman manages it alone.

Doubtless there are hundreds of levels within this succinct and powerful work, but they can only be reached by the viewer. Weekend has to be seen to be grasped. It is a perfect example of dance using its unique language to pierce right to the heart of the matter, going underneath the defences of intellect to reach the unblinded recognition below.

Needless to say, the dancers, Scoglio, Blakie, Alan Isreal and the others, even in the cold, friendless atmosphere of Adelaide's Her Majesty's Theatre make it work with searing conviction.

The same goes for Christopher Bruce's Wings. Wings, once again, is finely and acutely observed. The only note to the ballet is that it "evokes images of flight".

And so it does. The men in white tights (effectively ripped and torn in certain places) personify the large birds — the albatross, eagles, falcons, hawks. The gestures here are wide and expansive, the energy spreading from the torso and the shoulder. The girls are smaller birds — swallows, sparrows and starlings. Their movements are quick, agile and tense. They swoop and career across the stage in a perfect spearhead formation. When they "alight", they group together and hop about nervously; when the men re-enter, the women scatter.

There are marvellously sensual movements for the men as they strut about, gently fondling their arms behind their heads as if folding their feathers. It is a pure work, with no obvious emotional overtones. Even when the male birds fight for supremacy, there isn't a touch of neurotic human violence anywhere; it is all primeval and natural, just the way things are constructed.

Wings, again, is a perfect example of what dance does best. It doesn't copy from nature; it takes an image and invests it with beauty and power that have hitherto rarely been noticed.

Not all of the works in the season are of such a high amperage, thank the Lord.

There's Taylor's own 'Tis Goody Sport — a romp, a rota, full of pratfalls and debonair chivalry, but no less worthy than any of the others. Or his new Flibbertygibbet, populated by latterday Pierrouchkas and Pierrots dressed in painted boilersuits: a whimsical, well-maneuvered work, plotless and entertaining.

There are other works that I couldn't get to see, like Julia Blakie's Night of the Four Moons or Taylor's Listen to the Music, and, of course, later in the year there will be other works by other choreographers like America's Cliff Keuter and Sarah Sughara as well as the company's dancers themselves. When the company gets to Melbourne (performing in Her Majesty's) I'm going to have a second look and I'm sure this marvellous company will have grown in stature and confidence even in a few short months.

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The Queensland Modern and Contemporary Dance Company

Ballet

The performing arts in Australia owe a tremendous debt to the old church hall. Within its worthy walls the arts have for many years found a ready home, and many now-flourishing careers were nurtured in the fellowship of Sunday-school saints under swathes of fading crepe-paper.

It was in such meek-and-mild surroundings that I first saw the QM (as it is affectionately known). This was in 1972, and they were holding what I now realise was their inaugural season in the Park Presbyterian Church Hall. Even in those early days, they were looking to a larger future, and effected a temporary renaming of their modest home to The Park Playhouse. There was something generated in the air by the company that drew one to the place, and that energy has characterised all on its own initiative — at the International Festival of Youth Orchestras and National Festival of Youth Orchestras and Orchestras has been so lively and carefree. It does not blight the fervour which so far, consider them worthy partners to a professional company. I only hope that, to the full professional stage is reached, dedication and harmony seem to characterise QM and these are qualities which should soon carry the members to the professional status they seek. Already, three-and-a-half hours before an opening, this is increased one and a half hours and are followed by a two-and-a-half-hour rehearsal. Two months before an opening, this is increased until finally the dancers attend every week-day — a demanding regimen for amateurs.

The prime mover in all this is Ken McCaffrey. He got his start, as so many do, with Phyllis Danaher in the Ballet Theatre; but it was late, and there was no chance of his becoming a dancer. Instead, he set up a series of musical revues in the late sixties “to give the dancers something to do in the lulls”. It was while preparing one such programme in 1969 that he met Brian Coughran. The combination of McCaffrey’s organising ability and energy, and Coughran’s imagination and serious choreographic intentions were formative influences. At first, the group presented single items like MacArthur Park at the 1970 Innisfail Festival of the Arts, or Love in-A-Gadda-Da-Vida at the SGO Theatre in 1971. By 1972, they were ready to establish the company and present a full programme.

To do this, Coughran invited Jacqui Carroll and Chrissie Koltai as guest choreographers. Since then, QM has commissioned 40 new works from such people as Graeme Watson, Graeme Murphy, Geoffrey Chicker, Norman Hall, Inara Svalbe and Margo Murray. It is a measure of his early influence in the QM and these are qualities which should soon carry the members to the professional status they seek. Already, in 1977, they are providing two seasons as professional company. I only hope that, when the full professional stage is reached, it does not blight the fervour which so far, has been so lively and carefree.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA AUGUST 1977 63
For an industry which limps so often that it sometimes seems to need a surgical boot, entertainment in Australia is fitted with a surprisingly healthy diversity of auxiliary services. The impression which the range and number of these services suggests is that the central activity must be blooming. Images, images!

Actors' agents, for example, abound. The phone-books' Yellow Pages list dozens of them. A quick guess at the cumulative ten-per-cents produces a sum which is no more real than the innocent belief that more than 25 per cent of Australian actors are in work at any one time.

John Gielgud once said that actors should select their agents with the same care as all of us, if we had the chance, should select our parents. It is a neat theory, but in Australia an actor could abort in the attempt to be so selective. The industry isn’t sufficiently dynamic to have enabled more than a few agents to offer desirably distinctive services. Those that do are themselves discriminating among the prospective clientele.

Many of the agents seem to function as little more than token intermediaries, with more clients on their books than is good for the individual client, although rarely enough for the agent’s reasonable profit.

Sydney’s telephone book alone lists more than 70 theatrical agents and, while many of these deal almost exclusively with variety entertainers, the total is disproportionately to the on-stage activity.

Sydney also offers a selection of theatrical managers and/or producers, a handful of theatrical make-up suppliers, and a phantasmagoria of general theatrical suppliers ranging from the Abba Dabba Costume Studio and Carnival Zoo through to something called Zapco Lightshows and Lighting.

Among these support troops, though, are one or two which indicate a sense of developing maturity and professionalism in the whole theatrical conglomerate. Among them: specialist casting consultants.

In Australia, advertising agencies were the first to give casting a bit of caste, employing executives to specialise in the job. Theatre managements and film producers, on the other hand, were slower to catch up, preferring to do their casting by a variety of ad hoc methods according to whim, prejudice or budget. Many still do.

It is difficult to say whether productions have suffered through a lack of care in casting because, given the versatility of Australian actors, there is little within reason beyond them. The old J.C. Williamson management produced several cases of grotesque miscasting largely because it insisted on filling principal roles in its musicals by a sort of executive consensus from lists of No. 2s and 3s around Broadway.

Film producers have sometimes used a single actors' agent to handle casting for them on a production-by-production basis, but it is only in the last few years that the function has been developed in Australia as an independent professional speciality.

Pioneers in the field are Liz Mullinar and Hilary Linstead, who operate M and L Casting Consultants Pty. Ltd. from a warren of first-floor offices in King’s Cross. They seem pretty much unique in the business because they don’t operate concurrently as actors’ agents. They run a company which represents writers, directors, designers, composers, choreographers, directors of photography and dialogue directors, but made what they describe as an ethical decision not to represent actors.

"It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be unbiased if we were operating in both areas of the business," says Liz Mullinar. "I’m sure we could make a lot more money than we do, but we couldn’t live with ourselves."

Liz Mullinar is a former actress. She comes from England. After arriving in Australia she was ritualy doing the rounds of the advertising agencies when she met Hilary Linstead, who was working as a casting director for Lintas. They developed a friendship. On Hilary’s advice, Liz gave up acting to cast for advertising; Hilary went to work for International Casting in Sydney, and then, six years ago, they decided to strike out on their own with their joint venture, M and L.

They say it hasn’t been easy; still isn’t. What profit there is from the business comes from casting for advertising. The bulk of the satisfaction, though, springs from the work they do for films and, to a lesser extent, the theatre.

Says Mullinar: "At the moment there is no real money in casting for films and even less, if that’s possible, in casting for theatre."

Says Linstead: "I sometimes feel that all we’re doing is pushing uphill. But then along comes an assignment like casting for The F.J. Holden and suddenly it’s all worth while again. But it’s only now that producers and directors here are coming to..."
believe that a casting director is a specialist with something creative to offer. Previously, a casting director has been regarded as little more than a highly paid secretary.

The McElroys, Brothers, Hal and Jim, were among the first Australian film producers to use the services of M and L. They chose them to cast Picnic at Hanging Rock.

Jim says: "They filled all the principal roles for us and went to enormous trouble to find the right children, and they were very important to the film.

They interviewed or auditioned hundreds of schoolkids in South Australia to give us the ones who were just right. We would never have had the time to see as many people as they did."

The McElroys most recently have also used M and L to cast for their production of The Last Wave — "not all the roles, but enough to make a significant contribution". They believe that to cast a film without such a specialised service is to look at the range of talent available "through blinkered eyes."

"Some producers or directors might have the time to get out and scout all over the place to get the sort of people they want, but we don't," says Jim. "If you build a professional relationship with a casting consultant on trust — which is what we have for Liz and Hilary — then you get what we get: objectivity in a very critical area. Obviously there are times when you want or need to cast some roles according to your own judgment or for other reasons, but it's our experience that in all other circumstances it's best to leave the casting to an independent consultant. Anyway, it's the international practice."

Mullinar and Linstead charge a film producer a fee for their service based on a variety of factors including the film's budget and, naturally, the number of roles they're required to fill. They operate with a staff of seven, including two senior members who are on a profit-sharing deal.

Considering the constantly uncertain state of their industry, their overheads are formidable, but, judged by the exhaustive nature of the casting service they supply, they aren't a waste of money.

They operate to a maxim of keeping up to date. "The only reason we're employed is because we're totally up to date." They see every show, every rehearsal. They look at every actor, go to all the auditions.

"We've got files on everybody — 12,000 of them," says Mullinar. "We've got one girl who just takes press clippings: seeing where people are . . . reading the newspapers . . . discovering that some new actor has arrived. It goes on all the time."

Last year they were able to measure the level of their performance by overseas standards. Most Australians talk about overseas with a certain amount of awe, as if it's spelt with a capital O and as if it's every foreign country rolled into one. Mullinar and Linstead, instead are cosmopolitan in outlook, but nevertheless are especially impressed when they satisfy a foreign client.

They did the casting for the episode of Universal's TV series McCloud filmed in Sydney.

"We were probably a bit too- anxious to do well," says Linstead, "but they were extraordinarily specific when they were ready, shooting very fast. The script came in at four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. By the following Saturday the entire thing was cast in two States. Liz and I were determined to prove we can compete anywhere in the world. In the end, this guy kept saying to us, 'Stop showing me actors; we've cast it five times already.' They were really very good clients and seemed to think everything was perfect.

For them both, one of the most fulfilling assignments so far was the casting of Michael Thornhill's F.J. Holden.

"It broke so much new territory for us. We had to find so many new people, kids in the western suburbs. But we found them, we found them all. We searched them out everywhere. And for the first time we used the media to help us."

Hilary Linstead: "I don't think I've ever previously had the courage to use the media in the way we did for F.J. Holden. We've always hidden behind our own judgment, played it carefully and done it bit by bit. But this was a special case, so we asked the press and radio for help. We were inundated. It was exhausting. Hundreds came in to try for the part of the lead boy alone. He was hard to find, but I think it worked."

It did work. The film was picked apart by the critics, but there was almost unanimous praise for the casting. It wasn't attributed to M and L, but they long ago came to accept their satisfactions vicariously. It is as much, after all, the intermediary can hope for. That, and money; although in the Australian performing arts there's never much money.

The representational side of the M and L business is important for creative people because they function like radar for a group which, probably more than actors, needs a seeing-eye into the market place.

The list of clients is impressive. Their stable of writers includes Ron Blair, Tim Gouw, Peter Kenna, Michael Laurence, Jim McNeil, Louis Nowra, Mick Rodger, David Sall, Steve Spears and Peter Yeldham. They represent such directors as Gill Armstrong, John Bell, Michael Caulfield, Rodney Fisher, Colin George, Ken Hannam, George Ogilvie, Jim Sharman, John Tasker and Richard Wherrett. They look after such designers and art directors as Wendy Dickson, Kristian Frederickson and Brian Thomson, and the composers/musical directors on their books include Michael Carlos, Patrick Flynn and Frank Ester Smith.

At the last count, M and L were looking after the professional affairs of almost 50 clients who are totally managed and represented. It's a full service, for which M and L charge a 15 per cent fee.

Harry M. Miller used Mullinar and Linstead to cast Jesus Christ Superstar and The Rocky Horror Show; Paradise-Paterson used them for Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat and Sergeant Pepper.

The present structure of theatre in Australia doesn't offer great opportunities for the casting consultant. However, Mullinar and Linstead have had one exploratory outing in packaging a production for the stage. They put together Ron Blair's Mad, Bad and Dangerous To Know, which was presented in Adelaide and then shown in Sydney and Brisbane. Given their other responsibilities it was an exhausting experience, but one that has encouraged them to think of developing the broader potentialities. With a good track-record in finding talented people together with talented people, and a sensitive feel for the creative elements available in Australia, they believe that in time they would like to set up a production unit.

They say it would have to be a unit which would give them the freedom to use anyone's clients, not just their own. At the moment, though, the thought of the capital costs involved — not to mention the extra overheads — keeps the ambition on a disciplined path.

Meanwhile, they've just completed casting for Anthony Buckley's production of The Irishman, now being filmed in Queensland, and are working as consultants on the Film Australia telemovies Separation and Taps. Their other credits include Sunday Too Far Away, Caddie, The Fourth Wish, Break of Day and Storm Boy.

From their position in the industry, they look at the condition and future of filming in Australia: "It had so far to go when it started that each improvement was a huge improvement. Now, there are good things being produced, but the next things have got to be even better and hit international class. That's a really hard jump."

"At the moment, Australians are enjoying the experience of going to see an Australian film. It's almost like a first flush. But it's going to die unless the next films are quite considerably better."

"This is where the star system comes in. We still need one here. A number of things are preventing it at the moment. One of them is a lack of continuity of work. And then there's a lack of belief that an Australian star will bring people into the cinema. People are not sufficiently convinced of the power of an Australian star system, which means that they're not prepared to pay actors enough to make it possible for them to do a few quality projects instead of having to do a lot of rubbish."

"But the development of a star system starts really with the people who represent the artist, because they're the people who have to manage the client, to be discriminating about the jobs they take."

"However, it's difficult to be a star with all the trappings here. For instance, you can't lead a wonderful jet-setting life acting within the bounds of Australia. You can't jump into your private jet and zoom to Monte Carlo for the weekend. So there's this sense of hesitation within our own country."
TRADER FAULKNER’S theatrical career started when Peter Finch advised him to take up speech training with Bryson Taylor. He then trained with Ardini, the acrobat, and began to take parts in radio plays. His stage debut was at the Volksbühne Sydney, in 1948, and this led on to many roles in Australia and London and on Broadway. Films and TV series followed, and a passion for flamenco dancing, which he continues to do. He is based at present in London.

The Gargantuans archetypes, evocative of Goya at his most “capricious”, in Valle Inclán’s Divinas Palabras (Divine Words) are a challenge that can make a director and cast either look like the most atrocious amateurs attempting Grand Guignol farce, or, if able to take the play boldly and wring the truth out of it as Valle Inclán intended, can leave an audience with a very clear observation, and three-dimensional: Galician, Hispanic, and Universal.

He was totally misunderstood by the Spanish public for whom and against which he was writing, who supported puppets jerked into anguish life by a demonic and capricious power that exploits them and offers no light of redemption.

At a much deeper and subtler level, it is a satire on the dogma of Christian belief as blindly accepted and totally misunderstood, and on the entire hypocrisy and warped sense of “honour”, now termed “self-respect”, of modern society. Valle’s purpose in writing Divinas Palabras was to rouse a society in crisis out of its apathetic indifference to the appalling conditions under which so many Spaniards were living.

Avarice is synthesised, with touches of brilliant comedy and farce, through the vicious wrangling by the next-of-kin over a pitiful heritage of fortune, an abnormal, inarticulate dwarf who is dragged on a cart through the lanes and highways of Galicia to be exploited as a money-spinner at fairs and pilgrimages. It is finally agreed, after much argument, with a great deal of hypocrisy and false piety exhibited on both sides, that Mari Gaila, the beautiful, passionate, frustrated wife of Pedro Gailo, the sexton, will avail herself of the profit earned through Laureano the dwarf for the first half of the week, so that Marica del Reino, the sexton’s sister, and also sister of Juana la Reina, the dwarf’s mother, who dies of syphilis begging by the roadside at the beginning of the play, shall have him for the remainder of the week, Sundays to be divided alternately.

Lust is characterised through the violent physical relationship between Mari Gaila, seeking freedom through true love and adventure, and Lucero, called Septimo Miau, an astute, saturnine, picaresque fairground rogue sporting a green taffeta eye-patch, who with his homosexuality, hangs on, Miguelin el Padrones, frequents pilgrimages and fairs. She finds only a treacherous, forbidden love with Septimo, who, superior in intelligence to the other caricatures of humanity, lusts after Mari Gaila, not only for carnal satisfaction, but because he can see the financial gain which might be his through their joint exploitation of the dwarf. Of course, Mari Gaila does not return the dwarf at the appointed time, and her sister-in-law Marica del Reino, apprehensive, and with good reason, about losing her share of the profit, incites her religiously fanatical brother, the sexton Pedro Gailo, to be revenged on his adulterous wife. But Pedro, weak, and vitiated by jealousy and too much religion, seeks the alternative of relieving his solitude and pent-up lust with the desire he feels for his daughter Simontana. It is all handled with a
demonic intensity and grotesque humour (rarely seen in the theatre) by the Spanish cast under Victor Garcia.

Death strikes unexpectedly through the unrequited love of Miguelin el Padrones for Septimo Miau, who, realising that the dwarf will strengthen the bond between Mari Gaila and Septimo, gives him an overdose of brandy in a wild scene of revelry in Ludovina's tavern. Here, with amazing impact Valle Inclán, equates the grotesquely comic and the tragic, in a matter of seconds, with the spine-chilling dexterity of a master-puppeteer. The dwarf, incited to perform his tricks, has his audience convulsed with laughter, but, suddenly over-excited, he has an epileptic fit and dies. Mari Gaila is then forced to return to her husband with the body of the dwarf to face the consequences and renounce her brief moment of liberty and furtively enjoyed love.

Now a bitter controversy rages between the two factions about who will pay for the dwarf's burial. Septimo Miau, through the offices of an old beggar woman, Rosa la Tatula, tries to lure Mari Gaila back, even though she no longer has the dwarf. He contrives a meeting where they can again make love (in a cane-field). But the vengeance of the malevolent Miguelin el Padrones is implacable; he betrays them, and rouses the villagers, who, with shouts of insane joy, hunt them down like foxes. Septimo escapes, but Mari Gaila is caught and left to the mercy of a mob who wish to be revenged at all costs on the woman who has had the audacity to try to find love and freedom. They taunt her to dance for them in her shift, and, like an animal at bay, she rips off her clothes and dares anyone to lay a hand on her. She is hoisted up and carried naked to her deceived husband, before the very church where they were married. When Pedro Gailo sees his wife in all her naked beauty, in a crowd of incensed peasants, lust dominates rage and humiliation, and he tries to control them with the evangelical words, "Let those among you who have never sinned cast the first stone." But he manages only to infuriate them more. They hurl abuse at him. In a sudden moment of inspiration, he shouts words of "sorcery" whose exact sense they do not understand, but whose tones have led them all their lives through the narrow paths of renunciation and repression. With desperate rage, he shouts the "divine words" which had a moment before proved useless: "Qui sine peccato est vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat." The crowd is suddenly silent and its fury abates, subdued by the millenarian echoes, and it submissively accepts a truth which it does not comprehend, that perhaps it has never understood, and that it probably never will. The adulteress is forgiven and exalted. Now, forever she will remain a prisoner, bound, submissive for the rest of her days in a dark, rarefied world, guarded by a thousand superstitions, overwhelmed by a tradition which no one understands and all obey in an aura of Divinas Palabras.

The production now playing at the Lope de Vega Theatre in Seville, where I have just seen it, and soon due into the Lyttelton Theatre on its European tour, has been designed by Victor García and Nuria Espert to capture the essence of a play which to mount literally as Valle Inclán has written it, and as Jean Louis Barrault attempted to do at the Odeon in Paris in 1963, would take the cinematic collaboration of Luis Buñuel.

The Spanish production moves at a tremendous pace, a pace of thinking as opposed to purely speaking, and a great number of subtleties are likely to be missed, even with the earphone commentary provided in the non-Spanish-speaking countries, as so much is suggested, and actually takes place, in the imagination of the audience.

The scenery is simply six trucks. The mobile truck is a traditional stage device which was used in the two great "Corrals" of the Golden Age, the Corral de la Cruz, and the Corral del Principe, in Madrid in the 17th century, where Calderon, Lope de Vega, and Tirso de Molina were first staged. In Divinas Palabras, each truck has 10 organ-pipes of varying length, all vertical, from which five trumpets extend outwards horizontally between each organ pipe; they are on an axis, and so can swivel exactly as a pier-glass frame can swing. The trucks become the huge facade of a gothic church, as in the finale; a cane-field; the eaves and facades of houses in a village street; a rectangular enclosure; (again a church); a tavern. The whole thing, geared to a simple economy, is functional; the cast moves it, and that enables everyone to maintain the pace of the play with its Beckett-like dialogue that is succinct and yet dimensional.
Victor García rings the changes from the wild extrovert humour you see among the Spanish Gypsies, to the deep-black feeling of the tragic sense of life seen in Goya.

Read on the printed page, the play could seem to bog down into turgid and ludicrous melodrama, but this is a case of inspired direction. The scene in which Mari Gaila, dragging the dead dwarf home in his cart in the moonlight, meets “the Goblin Goat”, the satanic aspect of her lover, Septimo, which she only recognises as black, horned Satan who wants to take her for a “ride” through the arches of the moon, and the dance, or rather “jig” with her, is done in an abstract fashion, unmistakably phallic, but the writing and direction marry admirably. When Septimo and Mari Gaila meet in the cane-field to consummate their love a second time, the cast, in shadow, rocks the organ-pipes up and down, suggesting wind blowing across the cane-stalks, and voices of lecherous vengeful villagers echo everywhere in pursuit of the adulterous lovers. Everything moves and everything is fluid, until the organ-pipes suddenly form an enclosed stockade inside which the mob hurls abuse at Pedro Gailo and calls him a cuckold and a gelding.

I told her the critics and public abroad must have already made the obvious comparisons between Brecht and his predecessor, Valle Inclán.

The similarity between playing Brecht and Valle Inclán is more human than theatrical. Both writers have an acute critical sense which completely conditions their work, but the method used to present the work in dramatic form is quite different.
Opera performances on four vastly different levels

‘... the most exciting production could almost be deemed to be the virtually miniaturised Traviata, which used a stage of postage-stamp dimensions ...'
superb reading of his big aria in the preceding scene that rightfully brought the house down. Margreta Elkins cut a credibly dashing figure as the youth Maffio Orsini, and sang magnificently; her drinking song in the last scene was every bit as much of a vocal highlight of the evening as it ought to be. Ron Stevens acted superbly, as usual, and coped a good deal better with the bel canto vocal line than the inherent limitations of his voice would have led one to expect. Graeme Ewer's Rustighello was a little too much general all-purpose henchman/assassin for comfort, though he sang and acted well. John Pringle, Lyndon Terracini, Gregory Yurisich, and Lambert-to Furlan were a fine quartet of young noblemen to support Elkins and Stevens; and John Germain and Pieter van der Stolk more than adequate as the secret agents of Lucrezia.

The second opening of the AO's four-and-a-half-month winter season at the Sydney Opera House was a revival of John Cox's 1970 production of Rossini's Barber of Seville featuring a new conductor, three new faces among the major principals and a somewhat inexplicable reversion to the original Italian text. In advance, indeed, I would have been tempted to put it a good deal more strongly than that: foolish, retrograde, counterproductive are the sort of epithets that spring to mind when one visualises, in the abstract, any production of a comic masterpiece which interposes a lot of aural comprehensibility. Michael Beauchamp, who rehearsed the revival, had refined Cox's original at many points; the newcomers to the cast were, overall, at least as good in their roles as those they replaced, the old hands had refined their interpretations; and above all Richard Bonynge proved himself to be as comfortable in dealing with this comic gem as he is when conducting in the more remote and esoteric backwaters of the French and Italian repertory.

Aided by Italian words that are far easier to spit out at the speed of light than any English substitutes, and an Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra that is increasing in its overall proficiency year by year, he was able to whip the marvellously frothy Rossini ensembles into a positive frenzy of champagne effervescence that is exactly what has endeared the Barber to generations of opera-goers. Occasionally the recitative dragged a little; but surprisingly often Beauchamp was able to get his principals to mime their meaning sufficiently well to get across the point even there. (Maybe, heresy though it be to suggest it, the ideal solution could be to do the recitative in English and the arias and ensembles in Italian: the Vienna Boys' Choir, a few years ago, did just such a German/English rendition of Weber's little comic gem, Abu Hassan, in the Sydney Town Hall with remarkable effect.)

As Rosina, Huguette Tourangeau was an interesting successor to Elizabeth Connell, who premiered the role in this production; and she was in immensely better vocal form than for her Carmen in last year's winter season. Her interpretation of the role is quite different from Connell's, but quite as valid; though her singing voice has an odd dead spot between silvery stratosphere and those gorgeously fruity subterranean depths, it is a glorious instrument and by and large she knows how to use it well.

Paul Ferris, making a welcome return to the AO after several years' study overseas, seemed very nervous to start with; his rendition of Almaviva's dangerously exposed opening aria and serenade were not as good on opening night as one might have wished, and he did himself out of applause after a rather pedestrian headlong into the recitative which follows. But he seemed to relax almost immediately after that, when John Pringle strode on to the stage to sing his famous "Figaro, Figaro" aria with immense assurance and good humour. Indeed, the interplay between Almaviva and Figaro throughout this opera was admirably handled by Ferris and Pringle; and Ferris had proved quite conclusively, before the evening was over, that he is a thoroughly capable comic actor whose pleasing lyrical tenor is ideally suited to the bel canto repertory.

Alan Light displayed more of the vocal agility required of a Bartolo than he had originally in this production, and was a fine blusteringly comic foil both to Tourangeau's Rosina and Ferris's Almaviva. Clifford Grant was a very good Basilio, and Mary Hayman once again made the most of her brief moment of glory as Berta the sneezing housekeeper.

The production of Verdi's La Traviata which was the newly formed Theatre Cosmopolitan's first venture into fully staged opera was a remarkable success on a miniature scale. Staged in the tiny, but brand-new, Coleman Hall at the Bondi Junction Plaza, it made a real virtue out of necessity — most of the time, at least. None of the principals was unknown to regular patrons of the Sydney suburban opera circuit: Margaret Andrews (Violetta), Roy Ramsden (Alfredo), Vadim Laptev (Germont), Roger Howell (Douphol) and Penelope Bruce (Flora).

I had not previously encountered David Andrews in the role of conductor, however, and found him more than competent to cope with the demands of the piece. And the small hall allowed the mostly small-scale voices to be heard to their best advantage, and reduced the proportions of Traviata to an intimate scale which one does not usually associate with grand opera. This treatment would not work, clearly, with every opera, but it suits Traviata well — for two of the acts involve only a handful of principals; and the other two can be quite logically played, as they were in this production, as if in ante-rooms adjacent to the main thrust of the evening's festivities.

Roger Covell's University of New South Wales Opera presented the first Australian performance of Robert Beaudon's Joan of Arc, 132 years after its premiere at La Scala, Milan; musically it was an almost unmitigated joy, though the staging and production left a good deal to be desired. It is no insult to the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, which mans the Opera House pit, to say that this Joan or Arc boasted an even better instrumental ensemble, for most of Covell's band had been recruited from the ranks of the Sydney Symphony, and undeniably the best of the ABC orchestras.

And the three principals were all excellent. Beverley Bergen, who had been unable to appear on opening night because of a viral infection, was still displaying the occasional trace of vocal worry at the second performance, but even so made a thoroughly pleasing Joan. John Main was very impressive as King Charles VII of France, and Neil Easton gave a very good performance as Giacomo the shepherd, Joan's highly fictionalised father.

Musically, indeed, this Joan of Arc could quite happily have transferred to the Opera House: the three principals and the orchestra would have no difficulty in filling such a venue, though the chorus would have to be augmented and improved. But the production itself would have to be rethought completely. John Roberts's set design, basically a tubular-steel scaffolding that made a valiant but largely unsuccessful attempt to cope with the awkwardly wide and shallow science theatre stage, provided performing areas that made the singers visible but failed to evoke the feeling of the piece. Bernd Benthack's production was too static — largely, no doubt, because of the physical constrictions imposed by the set.

On quite a different level, the Prosencia Theatre's stab at Offenbach's The Grand Duchess of Gérolstein, at the barn-like Australian Theatre, Newtown, had musical merit, though William Abernethy's production is better passed over without comment. Conductor Greg Hocking inspired a surprisingly accurate and stylish performance from his tiny orchestral forces, and Janet Walker had a good few moments, both musical and dramatically, as the Grand Duchess. Ian Delaney, playing the part of the handsome and desirable young recruit, Private Fritz, was visually ideal, sang competently and acted adequately.

But beyond those two, the cast deteriorated alarmingly into not-too-high campery and pure, unvarnished amateurishness. Firm direction might have made all the difference to this effort; as it was, about all one could do in self-defence was sit back and listen to the occasional aural flashes of Offenbachian wit that came through even the oddly bowdlerised version of the piece through the good offices of Hocking and his valiant small band of musicians.

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"Australian theatre is not in a healthy condition."

To highlight ways of improving this situation a study of Sydney theatre has been made by a group of Management Certificate people from the North Sydney Technical College.

Thousands of man-hours have gone into the study, which is aimed at finding solutions using modern management techniques.

The research ranged from the man in the street to the theatre owner/operator, from the theatre-goer to the top 100 public companies in Australia.

The results of this research will be released at a function, to which the public is invited, on the 20th September.

A function which all thinking and concerned people should attend.

The function:—
* will be held at Chalwin Castle, 27 Shellbank Road, Cremorne — ample parking.
* will be held on Tuesday, 20th September, at 7 p.m. for drinks and light meal and at 8 p.m. for the presentation.
* will cost $12.50 a single (or $18 a double) and includes one fully bound copy of the report.
* R.S.V.P. with cheque by 13th September to the Secretary, North Sydney 77 Management Group, Box 435, P.O., Chatswood. N.S.W. 2067.

Additional copies of the report "(Enter) Attainment at $10 each are available postage paid, from the Secretary, North Sydney 77 Management Group, P.O. Box 435, Chatswood. 2067.
Six studies in drama for schools

'I despair ... at the patronisingly clean-living tone in which these writers ... speak to their readers'


(Ten per cent discount to schools on all prices.)

From the number of educational drama books arriving at the offices of Theatre Australia these days it is obvious that this is where the big financial turnover lies in theatre publishing. In this and the next issue I shall look at some such books. Six of them, published in the U.S. by Scott, Foreman Company are designed so specifically for the school situation that the inside front covers have a printed "This book is the property of ..." tabulation ready for school borrowing. These books also have the strangest possible neo-Freudian artwork on their covers, suggesting that the publishers have made the traditional connection between drama and forbidden impulses.

Of least interest to the enterprising Australian teacher would be the collections of "modem" plays for students.

Upstairs/Downstage anthologises plays ranging from The Winslow Boy to the screenplay of The OxBow Incident, and Marquee anthologises 10 plays by British and American writers. Chayefsky's Marty appears alongside The Importance of Being Earnest, and Peckinpah's Noon Wine alongside The Admirable Crichton. Assuming that the editors are not being humorously in this selection, it is clear that they intend a mixture of writers from the media and the theatre. This remains the strongest feature of these collections, which are marred by the banal "Author Biographies" and "Discussion Questions" which enshrine an antiquated approach to senior drama teaching. One dreads to think of successive generations considering the extent to which scene 5 of The Hairy Ape is expressionistic, and so on.

Written for a more specific purpose and therefore perhaps less suspect are two books which provide short scenes from plays as acting exercises. The choice of plays is fairly tame — The Little Foxes and All My Sons, for instance — but in both 28 Scenes and 30 Scenes for Acting Practice there is a useful breakdown of roles and a good range of parts to ensure that each student gets the chance to develop his/her acting skills. The two books, both edited by Samuel Elkind of San Francisco State University, direct their attention to specific and, one might say, subtextual questions. In the fairly wide margins of the text there are questions asked, sometimes about the tone of voice the actor would use for a particular line and more often about motivation. I take it that these points would not require academic written answers, but would rather give the pupils a series of issues on which to base the study of their roles. Thus, a question, say, about Elena's tone of voice in rebuffing Uncle Vanya could have, we take it, an infinite variety of correct answers in performance. Throughout the books, however, there are so many questions about tone of voice that I suspect the editor of a rigidly prescriptive attitude to interpretation. A knowledgeable teacher would have to modify these questions.

In a sense, as with the collections of full plays, these books of scenes could be superfluous to a local drama teacher, who might want more Australian material, and more comedy. There is something strangely alien about the high seriousness of the scenes and plays chosen.

Of more specific use to both student and teacher are Improvisation Handbook and Speaking of Theater. The first book, another of Professor Elkind's, introduces the reader to problem-solving improvisation through the theory and practice of games, dividing them into physical, mental, trust, support and awareness games. He then moves on to the elaborate business of improvising around a classic text — especially The Miser. Here Elkind concentrates on improvisation as exploration of a text, and his study is no doubt useful for students of acting. But for the more general students who regard improvisation as an end in itself, there is the implication here that games improvisation is a first step in the development towards performance, surely not an end-result that all drama teachers would consider desirable. It is clear, too, that the student following through the Improvisation Handbook will then go on to use his "knowledge" in working on the companion "acting practice" books. I would say that the games sections are by far the most useful in this book, although the "Simon says" and group mirror exercises seem altogether too elementary for a "senior" book.

Speaking of ... Theater, by Bud Beyer and Charlotte Lee, seems to be an immensely useful introduction to the theatre arts, for the complete novice. In eight short chapters it covers theatre history, acting, movement, rehearsals, technical personnel, costume and makeup, scenery and props, and stage lighting. In some ways it is a "Bluff-Your-Way-in-Theatre-Practice" book brightened up with moralistic comments on the virtues of theatre, but it will act as a useful textbook. I despair, all the same, at the patronisingly clean-living tone in which these writers of educational drama books speak to their readers. Here this tone is matched by healthy sporting-type pictures of active young people in white (yes) tights. A picture supposedly illustrating the stage-manager on the prompt-book in fact focuses on two people playing ball. With the exception of the very American parts on makeup and stage lighting, however, this book is a remarkably concise source of information on the theatre.

But this book and indeed the others mentioned all left me with a feeling of despair at their sheer thinness. Mostly designed for the teacher untrained in theatre, I would guess, these books limit the possibilities of the drama (especially the creative drama) class. It would be refreshing to read something not prescriptive but specific — an account of work a specific teacher has done with an identifiable group.
Six times the seventh

Including van Otterloo’s version with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra

The issue of a version of Beethoven’s seventh symphony recorded by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Willem van Otterloo (RCA VRL1-0130) compels me to ask why we cannot have first-class recordings of our principal musical ensembles representing them at their best. The performance is not a bad one; it would be quite acceptable in the concert hall. The conductor, a musician of tremendous authority and experience, is sometimes open to the charge that he keeps too tight a rein on the orchestra and that his readings are sometimes a little on the stodgy or laboured side. That is not an important factor in deciding whether or not you want a copy of this disc. It is true that Otterloo’s steady tempo in the finale has something willful and rigid to it; but its very insistence does generate a certain grandeur and monumentality of purpose.

If we are talking about matters of interpretation alone, this recent disc is as eligible for consideration as almost any other recording of the symphony on the market. There is also no doubt in my mind that Otterloo could have secured a far more exact and finely textured performance if he had been given time to do so or that the actual representation of the orchestra in terms of recorded sound quality is far below what it could have been.

The record was made in the Sydney music studios of the ABC with the experienced conductor Eric Clapham as technical operator. I think it would be generally agreed that Eric Clapham is one of the most knowledgeable and experienced of our recording producers of concert-hall music. I know nothing about his relationship during the recording sessions with the conductor or to what extent, if any, he felt constrained by the fact that the recording was being made by the ABC, the organisation which also employs Otterloo and the orchestra. My guess — and it is, of course, open to an indignant denial from Mr Clapham — is that neither producer nor conductor had time to go back and re-record passages of the symphony where the ensemble is not completely exact or where the contrasts of dynamics do not really fulfil the prescriptions of the score. If we place the slow introduction of the first movement beside the same passage in another recent recording of the symphony, the version played by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Carlos Kleiber (DG 2530 706), I can make this point in a little more detail. Comparing the two versions we find immediately that the big tutti chords in the Kleiber version are finely focused and as near to unanimous as the human imagination or ear can go; the same chords in the SSO version are not truly together and have a relatively spread and lazy sound. In the Kleiber version the bars between the opening tutti chords (bar four, for example) move with a sense of anticipation and excitement towards the next big gesture; the Sydney version is accurate but lacking in intensity. The repeated notes and rising scale passages for the strings in bar 10 are marked in my score as pianissimo. The Sydney recording presents them at a level approximately that of mezzopiano or, in other words, about two degrees too loud; the Kleiber version is truly hushed and delicate.

I must say at this point that there are listeners who have complained about the Kleiber disc precisely because its range of dynamics is so great: that its softs are so soft, its highs so relatively loud; and it is true that dynamic contrasts of this order are not particularly suited to medium-range hi-fi equipment, which is the kind most generally in use. However, that is a criticism of the equipment, not of the recording. The RCA disc has been clearly aimed at the market defined by middle-of-the-road equipment; and its shortcomings may not seem so evident on equipment of this kind. Nevertheless, the tendency in recordings in general to flatten out dynamic extremes to a comfortable $m-p-mf$ level is one of the distorting functions that records often perform when they are relied on as a sole source of familiarity with particular works.

When we come to the $sforzando$ notes, strong and emphatic, with which first and second violins answer each other from bar 15 onwards, we again find the Sydney strings providing a rough average of intonation rather than true agreement on the pitch of the higher notes. I am in no way attacking the musicianship of the leading SSO string players: in my opinion the best of them are equal to the best in any other orchestras; and my point is rather that they could play far more exactly in tune if they were asked to do so. The ABC, in making its own studio recordings and then supplying them to a commercial recording company such as RCA, is in a very different position from that of a recording company which makes an independent studio recording and which, as in the case of the leading European and American orchestras, holds an exclusive recording contract with that orchestra. The recording company is then able to insist on the very highest standards of execution because its recording contract, which is usually essential to the orchestra’s economy, will not be renewed unless the orchestra supplies the quality it demands.

Continuing our comparison of the introduction to the first movement of the seventh: at bar 23 the oboist (presumably that excellent player Guy Henderson) sounds suddenly too far forward in relation to his woodwind colleagues and has to be hastily recessed back into the ensemble. Even then the coordination of the woodwind and, in the following bar, of the violas, is not really exact. Listen to the same passage on the DGG recording and on several other versions I shall mention, and you will hear what I mean. The echoing passages for first and second violins which I referred to earlier reach something of a climax at bar 21, when the first violins play a chord in which the highest note is $D$ above the stave. In the Kleiber version the strings take the climax with little acuteness; the Sydney version of the same passage is a total disappointment: instead of the forceful upward lunge that we are expecting, the strength of the accent actually declines.

It would be tedious as well as much too wasteful of space to carry on this sort of bar-by-bar comparison. Perhaps the examples already quoted will be enough to indicate that we are not discussing vague differences of taste and preference about tempo or expression but matters of technique and accuracy. I do not think that the acoustic used for the recording is very helpful in making the symphony as vivid as it can be. The big tutti sound like blobs, without letting us hear their constituent timbres. Instrumental colour in general seems to be swallowed up in a general greyness. Occasionally the trumpets stand out from the rest of the ensemble in a way that makes all the more striking the absence of a good balance of timbre in the recording as a whole. The surface of my review copy was not particularly quiet and the pressing as a whole certainly cannot be considered outstanding. I have no wish at all to do down the local product, but the fact is that we are not presenting the SSO on this disc to ourselves or to the rest of the
THEATRE AUSTRALIA AUGUST 1977 75

David Marr

Annual reports?

Now is the time for the scanning of the annual reports: traditional late winter reading.

It's one of the uncelebrated anomalies that most Australian subsidised theatre-companies are not compelled to issue annual returns to the public, even though it is large dollops of public money that let them survive. All must account to the Australian Council, but those accounts are not available to the public. And it isn't the same thing: public scrutiny can't be delegated.

Take the 1976 MTC report. It's a model of its kind.

The MTC is not compelled by law to make an annual report, to make its accounts public. The company has no separate legal existence; it's just a division of Melbourne University. John Sumner, the MTC's director, says the university prepares the accounts, and he suggests that shortcomings in their presentation are not the fault of the MTC.

If Melbourne University and the MTC are interested in seeing how they might improve their reports, they should look around the arts world. The Australian Elizabethan Trust's annual reports have been models of detail and intelligibility; and the Australian Ballet has just brought out a fine annual report for 1976. It's insanely pretty, with a gauzy picture of Sir Robert Helpmann as the Fool on the Hill together with a fine annual report for 1976. It's in the popular theatre.

The figures were not computed on the same basis for the two years.

Some time before 1975, the MTC set up a fund to accumulate cash for new premises — for the Athenaeum Theatre

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world with the advantages of competitive versions commemorating performances by other orchestras.

In order to see whether I was being altogether too finicky, I turned back to a mono reissue of the famous version of the seventh symphony recorded by Toscanini with the New York Philharmonia in 1936 (RCA Victor 21502). Although the sound, even in reprocessed form, falls considerably short of the latest standards of fidelity, I found that the purely musical questions of exact intonation, genuine agreement in tutti chords were as much in evidence as in the superb new Kleiber version. In fact, if I have to name the two versions of the symphony I find most congenial they would be the 1936 Toscanini performance and the recent Kleiber recording on DG. The performance by Solti with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, issued as part of Solti's complete Beethoven symphony series (Decca SAXO.6564), is impressive, but has less tautness and a less scrupulous observance of dynamics than the Kleiber version. Solti occasionally sounds uncharacteristically relaxed, as if trying to live down something of his reputation for unremitting drive and hair-trigger precision. The Chicago orchestra is recorded rather heavily, with what I feel is excessive prominence given to the bass.

The most questionable factor of Kleiber's interpretation of the symphony is the breathtaking speed with which he takes the finale. When I heard it first I thought that the orchestra could not possibly maintain it or that the conductor would certainly fail to regain it when he returned to passages similar to the opening bars. In fact, the orchestra played it without the least evidence of desperation and the conductor proves that it is a genuine tempo and not a spur-of-the-moment accident. The Otterloo tempo, much steadier and almost relentlessly unchanged, is a completely acceptable alternative. It is only the Klepperer version with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Columbia SAXO.2415) which sounds grotesquely laboured by comparison in this movement: this is not so much the apotheosis of the dance, in Wagner's over-familiar phrase, as the apotheosis of the stagger. By comparison, the version directed by Pablo Casals of the seventh on a CBS recording made from a live performance at the Marlboro music festival in the United States is relatively free from the quirks of tempo and interpretation I would have expected from this marvellous but often wayward and willful musician. I am not sure that the issue of this disc here has a great deal of point, as in quality of sound and the fine detail of the performance it does not really measure up to the best of the studio recordings. But, as always with a vigorous live performance, there is a spirit in it which you may find outweighs the defects of circumstance. My own preferences should be clear: I find the recent Kleiber seventh on DG, despite its contentious points, one of the most astounding and electrifying interpretations ever put on disc.
and new workshop headquarters. This fund stood at $10,000 at the beginning of 1975 and that year a further $42,901.78 was added. (There’s no explanation why this precise sum was set aside.) The money was taken out as expenditure (“a charge against revenue”), with the result that the MTC was seen to make a deficit of $14,000 that year — which the Melbourne University made up with a special grant, squaring the books.

But in the latest annual report, they worked out the surplus and then took their new premises (and some other) money out of that. In this way the special fund got its money and the MTC was publicly seen to make that healthy surplus.

So there are two ways of looking at the MTC’s record over the last couple of years. First on the 1975 basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount (appropriated)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Or on the 1976 basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$77,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$28,901.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On either basis, the MTC improved its performance, (by this measure) from 1975 to 1976. Three muffled cheers.

But what became of the 1976 surplus? There’s no statement of intention in the accounts. Surplus is all taken into the appropriation account and that’s the last we hear of it. The MTC accountant told Theatre Australia that the primary purpose of that account was to pay for new premises — but it doesn’t say so in the books. And that’s a serious omission of detail.

**Income**

“Audiences,” says Sumner in the report, “did not pay much more to attend MTC productions...” But they did pay more, and if the report had set out the details, it would be easier for readers to make sense of the rise in main season box-office receipts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$94,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$83,944.18</td>
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And the improved box office needs to be explained because there was a slump in audiences at the same time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>252,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>234,270</td>
</tr>
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Seat prices (for adults on week nights) rose from $4.80 at the beginning of 1975, to $6 at the end of 1976. That’s a rise of 20 per cent.

Adult subscription prices (for six shows on week-nights) rose from $21 to $26.30. This is a jump of just under 20 per cent.

Inflation is the only revenue problem Sumner mentions in the report: but had the price-rise figures been in the report as well, the public could see that MTC tickets, if not matching inflation, were hanging on in there.

A little under half the MTC main-season income comes from subsidy. For some reason, in the 1976 report these subsidies were not detailed, but lumped in as “Grants applied”. Sumner says this will be rectified in the next report. It should have read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$14,000</td>
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</table>

**Subsidies**

rose more than 20 per cent. It’s clear from the 1976 breakup that someone needs to put the boot into Melbourne City Council and Melbourne University.

**Expenditure**

Here the report is particularly difficult to follow.

In 1975, the report was drawn up showing expenditure for Russell Street and St Martin’s seasons, broken down into 26 items grouped under six subheading. From that it was possible to see in some detail how the MTC as a production and administration body worked. The figures were helpful.

In the latest report, expenditure is listed in only 13 items, grouped under two subheadings (salaries and costs). The figures tell very little, and comparisons between the two years are difficult. What’s more, the 13 items bear titles that make it hard to understand what they mean. How is the public to distinguish between show Production Costs ($74,235) and Production Costs ($130,708)?

The report should include notes to explain what these categories refer to. The MTC accountant explained that the first accounted for the cost of specific productions; and the second the annual cost of production facilities. He cleared up further difficulties.


Total expenditure (all activities) rose very sharply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$1,167,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$2,058,623</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broken down on the rough 1976 basis (unfortunately the only one possible), the figures show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$620,183.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$890,909</td>
</tr>
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</table>

For all Sumner’s talk of a labour-intensive industry beset by inflation with “considerable wage rises”, it’s clear that, in actual fact, it was his costs that ran away with him in 1976 (up by a third) rather than his wages (up by about a sixth).

**Salaries**

Getting a small surplus from the MTC budget last year was only possible by holding down wages. A commendable effort, it seems, but a closer examination of the salary figures shows how John Sumner achieved this — he cut the artistic salaries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$77,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$28,901.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In inflation-riddled times he actually managed to get the artistic salaries of the MTC down. And the acting profession bore the brunt of it: payments to actors fell about $43,540. When Sumner says in his report that the programme for 1976 “consisted of mainly small-scale plays primarily through lack of money to pay large casts”, this is what he means. From his point of view, it was a highly successful budgetary exercise.

Other MTC wages rose: publicity staff by about $17,500; theatre staff by about $11,500, and management fairly steady with what appears a rise of about $3,000.

**Grant Street**

This is not the time to argue the pros and cons of the Grant Street venture. In the annual report it is listed as contributing a loss of $34,601 to the MTC’s results.

This considerably understates the true loss incurred by Grant Street. None of the costs of promotion or administration of the little experimental theatre were put down to its account; nor did it have to bear any part of “creative” or “manufacturing” salaries.

The accountant at the MTC said: “It might be reasonable to add something to the $34,601 to get the true loss; but I think you’ll agree it looks bad enough as it is.” Who could disagree?

**General Position**

By slashing creative salaries, and with ticket prices, subscriptions and subsidies all rising by roughly 20 per cent, the MTC was able to hold its own against inflation. Non-salary costs appear to have got out of hand. Had audiences been up to 1975 levels, this strategy would have provided Sumner with a far larger surplus to pursue his long-range plans of getting the Athenaeum and new workshop facilities. He is now going to have to get a large amount of cash from the current budget: 1976 left him with this handicap for 1977.

The MTC report gives only an income-and-expenditure statement. It’s not a full balance sheet of the sort that public companies are supposed to publish: it doesn’t have details of the MTC’s assets and liabilities. These are not available from the MTC’s accounts. But in the report given (if at all) the company is indebted, nor does the report give a clue about what assets the MTC has and what it’s doing with them. These figures are available only to the Australia Council.

**AUSTRIAN OPERA (26 2976)**


**BONDI PAVILION THEATRE** (30 7211 or 29 8335)


**ENSEMBLE (929 8877)**

*Boy Meets Girl*, by Bella and Samuel Spewuck, directed by Hayes Gordon, designed by Doug Anderson. Continuing.

**GENESIAN (827 3023)**

*A Man For All Seasons*, by Robert Bolt, directed and designed by Colleen Clifford, with Michael Bowie, Elizabeth Sarks, Laurie Butler, Dennis Allen. To 6 Aug. The Unexpected Guest, by Agatha Christie, directed and designed by Ray Ainsworth. From 13 Aug.

**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 Hamlish; lyrics by Edward Kleban; choreography and direction recreated for Australia by Baayork Lee and Jeff Hamlin. Cast of 30. Continuing.

**JANE STREET (663 3815)**

Don't Piddle Against The Wind, Mate, by Kenneth G. Ross, directed by John Tasker, designed by Bill Pritchard. With Ron Graham, Noni Hazelhurst, Maggie Kirkpatrick, John Paramor. To 6 Aug.

**KILLARA 680 COFFEE THEATRE** (498 7552)


**MARIAN STREET (498 3166)**


**MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (357 1638)**

*Roo*, written and directed by Richard Bradshaw; and *Hands*, devised by the company and directed by Richard Bradshaw. Schools tour, Sydney area, to 26 Aug.; outer suburban schools holiday season, 29 Aug. to 9 Sept.
RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY, Wagga (064 21 2134)
Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare, directed by Terry O'Connell.
4-7 and 10-13 Aug. There will also be one Byeplane in Concert performance during this season.

ST JAMES LUNCHEON PLAYHOUSE (232 8570)
Don't Go Near The Fridge, Miss Jenkins, by David Bateson, directed by Peter Williams, with Kay Eklund and Trevor Prior. To 5 Aug.
Sarah and the Sax, by John Lewis Carlino, directed by Peter Williams, starring Valerie Newsstead. 8 Aug. to 9 Sept.

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)
Downstairs: Toys in the Attic, by Lillian Hellman. Presented by the Lane Cove Players, directed by Jennifer Wilson, sets by Graeme Webb, costumes by Marilyn Banbury, lighting by Lionel Willison. With Alan Frew, Margaret Thomson, Wal Moore, Sue Paardekooper, Anne Evers, Norman Turkington. 2 to 6 Aug.
Kinetic Energy Youth Dance Group. 8 to 13 Aug.
City Road Youth Theatre. 29 Aug. to 3 Sept.
Sydney University Drama Society. From 5 Sept.

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT, Kensington (663 7442)

THEATRE ROYAL, (231 6577 or 231 6111)
Boeing, Boeing, by Marc Camoletti, adapted from the French by Beverley Cross, directed by Doug Fisher, designed by Bill Dowd, starring Richard O'Sullivan; with Doug Fisher, Shirley Cameron, Kate Sheil, Judith Woodroffe. Continuing.

WHITE HORSE HOTEL, Newtown (51 1302)
The Billie Collie Follies, by Rick Maier, Malcolm Frawley and Foveaux Kirby; with Jennifer McGregor, Doug Scrupp, Lyn Porteous, Grant Dodwell, Peter Fisher. Continuing.

QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
The Golden Legion of Cleaning Women by Alan Hopgood. Director, Jay McKeen; designer, Jason Savage. With Gwen Smith, Joan Tanner, Peter Pearce, Audrey Thompson. Opens 4 Aug. (Wed-Sats).
Children's Matinees: Dick Whittington and His Cat written and directed by Gordon Shaw. Sats to 16 Aug. All Baba by Jason Savage Productions, 15-27 Aug.

LA BOITE (36 1932)
The Unseen Hand by Sam Shepard. Director, Su Parker. 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31 Aug.

CAMERATA (36 6561) Avalon Theatre.
Little Eyolf by Henrik Ibsen. Director, Shirley Lambert. To 20 Aug. (Thurs-Sats).

COMMUNITY (356 9311 A/H 356 9936)
The Fantastiks by Tom Jones and Harvey Ackmidth. Director, Greg Kathanas; Musical Director, Greg Moser. With Paul Paye. To 6 Aug.

FESTIVAL HALL (229 4442)

HER MAJESTY'S (221 2777)
Julie Anthony in Concert, Gunlan Productions. 3-5 Aug.
Marcel Marceau, Michael Edgley International. 8-13 Aug.
The Grand Adventure (puppets), Theatre Strings. 15-25 Aug.
Split Enz in Concert, Evans/Gudinski Productions. 28 Aug.

LIVING ROOM THEATRE RESTAURANT (221 2805)

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 5177)
St Joan by George Bernard Shaw. Director, Joe MacCollum; designer, Peter Cooke. With Kate Wilson. To Aug. 6.
The Brass Hat by Thomas Muschamp.
AUSTRALIAN DANCE COMPANY
Country tour till 13 Aug.

BOX FACTORY
Women's Art Movement theatre weekend.
Aug. 6, 7. (Theatre workshops, adult puppet theatre, new plays by women.)

FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Festival Theatre:

Q THEATRE (223 5651)
The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde. 5-20 Aug.

STATE OPERA (352 3738 or 352 3366)
Festival Theatre (51 2291)
HMS Pinafore (Gilbert and Sullivan): from 10 Sept. Conductor, Myer Fredman; director, Adrian Slack; designer, Jim Hempton. 20 Aug.
The Stretch directed by Peter Oyston for the Alexander Theatre Company, in association with Hoopla Productions. To 20 Aug.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7153)
Pram Factory, Front Theatre:
Pram Factory, Back Theatre:
At 11 p.m.: Evening of Theatre Songs, with Evelyn Krape, Tony Taylor and Claire Dobbin.

COMEDY THEATRE (663 3211)
Funny Peculiar by Mike Stott; directed by Peter Oyston. From 3 Aug.

THE HOOPLA THEATRE FOUNDATION
Playbox Theatre (63 4888)
The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin by Steve J. Spears; directed by Richard Wheetrett, designed by Larry Eastwood, with Gordon Chater. Presented by Parachute Productions.

LA MAMA (347 6085)
Tenth Anniversary Festival
LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6226)
Waiter, There's a Circus in My Soup, directed by Gary Patterson.

MELOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 1100)
Athenaeum:
The Merchant of Venice, directed by John Sumner. Designed by Kristian Fredriksen. Russell Street:
The Club by David Williamson. Directed by Rodney Fisher; designed by Shaun Gurton. Throughout August.
St Martins:
Ashes by David Rudkin. From 4 Aug. Theatre in Education:

PRINCESS THEATRE
Wonderwoman, by Reg Livermore; directed by Peter Batey. Presented by Eric Dare. From 16 Aug.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 3211)
Marcel Marceau, presented by Michael Edgley International Pty. Ltd. in association with Derek Glynne. To 6 Aug. (Details not available of further August bookings for Her Maj.)

VICTORIA STATE OPERA (41 5061)

WINDSORS REGIS (51 6979)
Son of Naked Vicar by Tony Sattler and Gary Riley.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)

PLAYHOUSE (25 3500)
Martello Towers — see Hole in the Wall. Gilbert and Sullivan Society double bill. RSVP by Offenbach and HMS Pinafore. 28 July-6 Aug.
Double Edge by Leslie Darbon and Peter Whelan. 25 Aug.-17 Sept.

REGAL THEATRE (81 1557)

TASMANIA
THEATRE ROYAL, Hobart (34 6266)
Tasmanian Opera Company: Godspell, 2 one-act operas. 1-14 Aug.
Tasmanian Puppet Theatre (23 7996):
Little Tiger Peter written and directed by John Blundell. 15-20 Aug.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA looks at Musicals in Australia from the turn of the century to today; discusses regional theatre; gives a blow by blow account of Macbeth: Verdi v. Shakespeare; considers the passing of "The Independent"; surveys Opera and Dance as usual; contains insightful reviews on productions throughout the country and much, much, more...

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at
The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
Applications are invited for
LECTURER IN TECHNICAL PRODUCTION
(2 positions)

Duties:
To lecture in stage management, sound or lighting; to supervise the first or second year of the Technical Production Course under the direction of the Head of the Department; and to share responsibility for all NIDA productions.

Qualifications:
At least five years professional experience in stage-management or lighting or sound is essential. A broad knowledge of all areas of technical production is desirable, as well as some teaching experience.

Salary:
Negotiable, but envisaged in the range $11,581 — $13,667 per annum.


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The Director,
The National Institute of Dramatic Art,
PO Box 1,
Kensington, N.S.W. 2023
AUSTRALIA.
Telephone: (02) 663 3815

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Theatre Board Project Grants:
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The Theatre Board has limited funds available for development and training projects in dance, drama, mime and puppetry for 1978.

Professional and amateur organisations and individuals are invited to apply for assistance for special projects, including those of an experimental or community-orientated kind.

Professional companies are invited to apply for assistance in the implementation of basic and advanced training programs within Australia.

Application forms and information booklet obtainable from:
The Secretary
Theatre Board
Australia Council
P.O. Box 302
NORTH SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2060

Telephone enquiries to: The Theatre Board, Sydney 922 2122.


Overseas subscription rates

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<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Surface mail</td>
<td>All other countries</td>
<td>Information services: M &amp; L Casting Pty. Ltd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>By air</td>
<td>Bank drafts in Australian currency should be forwarded to Playhouse Press Pty. Ltd.: 114</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand, New Guinea</td>
<td>Cremorne St., Richmond, Victoria 3121, Australia.</td>
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