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Theatre Australia: Australia's magazine of the performing arts 2(6) November 1977

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SEASON TWO 1977

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Irving Berlin musical

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by Stephen Poliakoff

MACBETH
by William Shakespeare

A HAPPY AND HOLY OCCASION
by John O'Donoghue

ADVENTURE IN THE DEEP
presented by the Magpie
Theatre-In-Education Company
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Behind a jaded, crushed-velvet, burgundy curtain, Gordon Chater sits with only a short robe between him and the opening moments of Benjamin Franklin. Hundreds of telegrams looking like a bad wall-papering job speak litteringly of success while Gordon chain-smokes the programme-advertised Dunhills and beams his news of the London transfer through the fog of the dressing room.

It has been known for some time that the play had been bought — and he, without a trace of pique, wished it well — but now he is to go too; a triumphal return after thirty one years, during which time he has "never thought of myself as anything but Australian".

Other billowing names are still puffed into the air on who’s to play the ageing transvestite in New York — George C Scott, Richard Burton, Orson Welles — but their smoky presence disperses quickly and the air clears again. Clear enough to see Gordon Chater on Broadway? Hal Prince and Stephen Sondheim, no less, will be shocked if he isn’t; Mrs Prince is quoted as saying to Hal "this guy has got to do it in New York — he’s married to his material".

Gordon (self-effacing as always) remarked that Steve J Spears was “putting himself down by saying the play depended, A Chorus Line and The Twenties and All That Jazz. The office is in the Comedy Theatre, where

The Doll, began at what was to become the largest state company — but that was a long time ago.

Increasingly voracious needs for subsidy by companies gobbling up as many of the venues in state capitals as they can seems to bear no relation to acclaim received. At the same time the commercial theatre is selling off its inner city theatres. Stultification is arguably the only thing which bears true relation to company size. Still, the latest addition to the Tote’s “monopoly” -like bids though the property itself has not exactly teemed with popular patronage, has been given into the hands of two of the best young Australian directors around, in their different ways. Jim Sharman and Rex Cramphorn. If anyone can inject vitality and set roaring what was

coming to look increasingly white and elephantine (the Seymour Centre), it is they; and with Hewett, Nowra and White already announced, together with Shepp and Bond, everything augurs well for an exhilarating season.

Back in Melbourne, Hoopla still looks for the money to ensure that the Playbox Theatre can be more than just a venue for other productions. Graeme Blundell and Carillo Gantner get little positive response from the Australia Council — two moderate successes (stunningly good considering they were on the heels of the disastrous MTC flirt with Grant Street) are not sufficient open sesame to government coffers. Yet the smaller breeding grounds at the moment seem to make for the biggest fish.
David Gyger talks to Peter Hemmings, new general manager of the Australian Opera.

Peter Hemmings, the new general manager of the Australian Opera, is strikingly unlike his predecessor, John Winther — a Dane and a pianist, whose wife is an opera singer.

There is none of Winther’s suave Nordic charm about his successor; he ought to be a dour Scot, so brusque and tweedy is his manner, but is in fact an Englishman by birth: his connection with Scotland came later on, when he became the man at the helm of Scottish Opera in a burgeoning 15-year managerial stint from its inception in 1962 until he resigned to come to Australia. One knows from the official biographical data put out by the AO that he has a wife and five children, but they in no way enter the conversation we are having deep in the bowels of the Opera House.

One knows from behind the scenes that he is far from without plans for the future of the Australian Opera even now, and his track record for innovation and box office success in Scotland reinforces the expectation that exciting times lie just over the horizon for his new charge; but Peter Hemmings is playing his cards very close to the chest just now, for we are talking several weeks in advance of his official assumption of power.

Scottish National Opera started in 1962, he recalls, with a one-week season in Glasgow. In its first few years growth was slow: by 1966, it was only playing a fortnight in Glasgow, with shorter seasons in Perth, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Till 1975 it was almost permanently on tour. But now it has its own home — the Theatre Royal in Glasgow where this year it is playing for 20 weeks, doing four or five performances of each of 10 operas on subscription. In addition, it is having a six-week season in Edinburgh, two weeks in Aberdeen and six weeks on tour of other centres in Scotland and northern England. The company now has 180 permanent employees, and will give 135 performances in 1977.

“One of the great differences is that in Scotland we allocate operas to orchestras, and so avoid having to require two different orchestras to learn the same opera,” says Hemmings; then, without saying a word, obviously refocusses his attention on the Australian scene. And a gap suddenly opens in the billowing mists obscuring the future; or maybe it opens.

“I feel the whole orchestral business with the Australian Opera needs a great deal of thought,” he says. “I’d like to get to the stage where re-rehearsal is the exception rather than the rule.”

“With careful planning of repertory, occasional division of orchestral forces ought to be possible — even desirable,” he says. “Unless there was one opera orchestra big enough so it could be split.”

“But what about the old bugbear of excessive travel?”

“My experience is that people in opera enjoy the stimulus of different audiences,” says Hemmings. “But they do not enjoy being away from home a great deal.”

And doesn’t the prospect of more touring for the AO — a more adequate fulfilment of its national role — inevitably raise the counter-prospect of fewer performances, shorter seasons, at the Sydney Opera House? After all, there are only a fixed number of days in the year and the AO is not exactly under-committed even now.

“With a bit of increase in personnel,” says Hemmings thoughtfully, “I think it’s possible for the Australian Opera to serve both functions.” He is picking his words carefully, but clearly he is not caught off balance by the problem. “I would say,” he continues, “that the Sydney Opera House was built as a means of providing opera and ballet most if not all the year in Sydney. In most if not all minds it is synonymous with opera and ballet.

“Already the Australian Opera gives 110 opera performances a year at the Opera House; with careful planning, it will be possible to increase its output — provided we get the resources required to enable the company to fulfil its national function adequately.”

And what about the thorny question of repertory that bedevils every opera company in the world but has been a particular bone of contention for the AO in recent years, with some patrons jumping up and down angrily and/or cancelling their subscriptions because of the inclusion of works like Sculthorpe’s *Rites of Passage* and Janacek’s *The Cunning Little Vixen*, while others complain the AO has its feet stuck too firmly in the mud of the 18th and 19th centuries — Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti and their ilk?

“I agree with John Winther’s policy of repertory development,” says Hemmings; but adds, without a pause: “But you must take the public along with you. The standard modern repertory — Stravinsky, Berg, Janacek — is essential.” But one must always play the diplomat...

“It is a question of encouraging subscriptions and then experimenting without putting them off. My long experience about modern opera is that it is wise to budget for small audiences.” And then he adds, almost to himself, “One of the great tragedies is that so many modern composers lose touch with audiences. But in recent years in Britain some contemporary composers — Britten, Tippett — have been drawing reasonably well; and given time I can’t see why Australian composers shouldn’t gain similar popularity.”

Does this mean that new and Australian works would be put on subscription even at the risk of offending some of the more conservative subscribers?

“I would like to see everything on subscription,” says Hemmings; “only very occasional non-subscription performances. A city like Sydney should be able to find a regular audience for new works... be able to sell out a few performances.”
"I hope everyone connected with the industry — including the viewers — have a good laugh. But I think they might squirm in their seats a little too."

QUEENSLAND BYWAYS

ALAN EDWARDS, Artistic Director, QTC: "Our latest forays into the country have been three fold. We sent a team of four actor/teachers to Charleville for a week to work with the children of the area. They gave many workshops with them and also classes with both primary and secondary school children in the area. It looks likely that this will become a permanent feature of our operation. Why Not Stay For Breakfast, which we are presenting in association with the Queensland Arts Council continues its riotously successful tour. Our Project Spearhead team is working on Andre Obey’s play Noah with local youth groups in the Mackay and Harvey Bay areas. This is an exciting and innovative idea which received the financial support of the Schools Commission. Reports have been stimulating and highly commend the standard of work these young Queenslanders are achieving. We are currently planning our 1978 activities; the State Government grant to the QTC of $357,000, an increase of $29,000 will enable us to realise many of our existing ideas."

COP OUT

CLIFF GREEN: "Cop Out!, opening at the Russell Street in late November, is my first stage play. I enjoyed writing it immensely. Every journalist wants to be a novelist, every stage playwright wants to write for television, so of course every screen writer wants to write for the stage.

"It is set in a television production house making a police show. So I’m paddling about in what are — for me — rather familiar puddles. The play moves in on the television sausage factories rather heavily, but there is nothing personal in it. TV has been very kind to me. By and large I’m let do pretty much what I like. It’s the system I’m attacking, not the individual companies or networks.

HOOPLA’S FIRST HALF YEAR

GRAEME BLUNDELL, Hoopla Productions: "We have now been definitely knocked back by the Australia Council for what is called a ‘continuing’ grant. In spite of the fact that we have State subsidy and a proper venue, not to mention our personal qualifications, they say that if they gave us money they would have to give it to X and X other companies. So we have now applied for a ‘special projects’ grant, and we should know the result of that in December. But even if we don’t get it we’ll still go ahead somehow. The Late Night season is now underway with James’ Dutchman and the Downstairs Supper Show will be running from 3rd to 26th November with Bruce Myles playing Hancock in Hancock’s Last Half Hour.

"The first of our readings, sponsored by The Age started on 16 October with Ted Neilson’s Let Me In and continue on 20 November with The Propitious Kidnapping of the Cultured Daughter by John Lee. In January, instead of the usual tawdry old pantomimes children will be able to see Ross Skivington’s Patrick’s Hat Trick, Richard Bradshaw’s Shadow Puppets and the Muppet Show and Alitji In Wonderland in four performances a day. Then in the Playbox in early February Adam Salzer will be directing Rock ola with John Waters and myself as half the cast.

"So, we’re alive and well and determined to be viable come what may!"

DESIGN EXHIBITION

KIM CARPENTER: “The Designers Association in the Performing Arts has just been reformed after having been in abeyance for some time. Initially the Association aims to promote and protect the role of the designer in theatre, TV and cinema and to heighten both professional and public appreciation of their work. The Association is based in Sydney with a committee of ten headed by Anne Frazer as president and Allan Lees as secretary.

"The current membership comprises fifty designers from around Australia. One of our future projects will be a representative exhibition of designs sponsored by the Sydney Opera House Trust in the Exhibition Hall at the Sydney Opera House during April and May 1978."

BUT NO WILLIAMSON FOR WILLIAMSONS

PAUL RIOMFALVY, J.C. Williamson Productions: “So far our search for new Australian plays and musicals has been very disappointing. We have had quite a few scripts from new and amateur writers who are hopeful, but we have not had anything submitted by established writers, which is what we really want. We are looking for material from the Williamson’s, the Buzos; the good people.

"I have spoken to the Writers’ Guild and the Producers’ and Directors’ Guild for a ‘special projects’ grant, and we should know the result of that in December. But even if we don’t get it we’ll still go ahead somehow. The Late Night season is now underway with James’ Dutchman and the Downstairs Supper Show will be running from 3rd to 26th November with Bruce Myles playing Hancock in Hancock’s Last Half Hour.

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"So, we’re alive and well and determined to be viable come what may!"
and asked them to encourage writers, but nothing has happened; perhaps they still will. I suggested to Bob Ellis that The Time Is Not Yet Ripe is just asking to be given musical treatment, and who better to do it than him — we had tremendous financial and artistic success with the commercial production of The Legend Of King O’Malley — but he is writing a film at the moment and I don’t know whether he has done anything about it.”

Letters

Your correspondent, Jaqueline Kott (“Quotes and Queries” August 1977), shows little gratitude for the grant received by the Peter Summerton Foundation from the New South Wales Premier’s Department through the Cultural Grants Advisory Council for the Alan Schneider Workshop. In actual fact, the Advisory Council in an effort to help what they thought would be a worthwhile project, accepted an application from the Foundation months after the closing date — contrary to their otherwise rigid rule that late entries will not be considered.

The Advisory Council was aware that the Australia Council would offer some financial assistance and of course it was expected that the Summerton Foundation is therefore not only misleading but most unfair.

Out of a total budget for the Workshop of $6,000, the grant awarded by the New South Wales Government was $2,000 — and her comment that “... the Wran Government have supported us minimally” is therefore not only misleading but most unfair.

In this regard it is not so much the staff...
Looks as if next year could be Australian Year in London. It now seems definite Reg Livermore in *The Betty Blunk Bunter Follies* will be there at the beginning of the year, Gordon Chater in *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin* about March and *The Twenties and All That Jazz* presented by Michael Codron at the Mermaid in April. Believe the rights to David Williamson's *Twenties and All That Jazz* The Club have also been sold for London, and didn't Paul Elliott suggest he would be touring an Old Tote company overseas?

After the success of the 1977 International Music Theatre Forum in Sydney understands there'll be a second Forum in 1978 — called Sydney International Theatre Arts Forum, or SITAF for short. Apparently people like Tito Gobbi, Franco Zeffirelli, Jerome Robbins, Bob Hossey, Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein and Gian Carlo Menotti have all been invited ... With the Playwrights' Conference being held annually in Canberra, one wonders when Melbourne will jump on the bandwagon with some cultural do. Yes, I am aware there's always Moomba! ... Anyway the Victoria State Opera Company is staging a masked ball on October 29, and that sounds as if it could be fun ...

Reverting back to the Playwrights' Conference; understand Mick Rodger is to be Artistic Director and our worthy editor, Rob Page, has now been elected vice chairman of the Conference. At this date no one's been named as chairman. In future too, the Conference will have two per cent royalty stake in any plays workshopped there which take off further.

At 73, Anna Neagle opens in the West End in a musical version of James Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, entitled *Maggie* ... Eric Dare tells me he's going to bring Steven Berkoff in his own play *East* to Australia next year ... Max Gillies chalking up his 100th performance in *A Stretch of the Imagination* in Hobart in November ... Believe there's a strong possibility magician Ian Buckland (who's taping 72 episodes of "Ian Buckland's Magic Bag" to be seen on the ABC next year) will be playing Aladdin to Les Girls' star Stan Munro's Widow Twankey.

A very select luncheon party given in Melbourne to celebrate the first anniversary of Nimrod's production of *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin*. The 15 or so people around the table included Gordon Chater, Steve J. Spears, Wilton Morley, Paul Iles, Betty Pounder, all the stage staff connected with the production and a handful of media bods ... Don't think it was generally known, but Paul Iles (who's Nimrod's live wire general manager) confided in me it also was the first anniversary of his arrival in Australia. Paul makes a trip back to England for a month soon ... Michael Bennett, who conceived, choreographed and directed *A Chorus Line*, apparently is getting about US$90,000 per week gross income from the musical. Figure includes seven per cent from the Sydney production.

Hear Helen Morse could be playing the role Susan Hampshire had in the London production of Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* when it tours here next year with Googie Withers and John McCallum. The London production was originally a transfer from the Chichester Festival Theatre, so wonder why the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust are sinking money into its Australian presentation and not the Chichester Festival Theatre proper's tour, which is being sponsored by Robert Sturgess, J.C. Williamson Productions and Michael Edgley International ...

Problems that some of the national companies outside of Melbourne are up against was highlighted to me when someone from Brisbane mentioned as reason for not frequently seeing the Queensland Theatre Company productions the over-exposure of actors, i.e. seeing the same people again and again, often giving similar performances. ... Although it's been rumored for the future too, the Conference will have a two per cent royalty stake in any plays workshopped there which take off further. My mention in the August issue of a rumour that one of our national directors intends retiring next year I am now assured is definitely not so. A long visit overseas probably but certainly nothing more ... Is it the Australian Ballet or the Australian Opera Company I wonder, which is considering doing its own version of *A Picnic at Hanging Rock*?

News of Australians in England: Billie Brown, late of the Q.T.C., at Stratford in the *Henry's* ... Darlene Johnson has joined the company at Stratford East for the season ... Michael Staniforth (English, but he was in the Menzies theatre restaurant potted musicals) is playing the boy who lames himself in *Googie Withers* ... Michael Bennett (who's Nimrod's live wire general manager) is playing Aladdin to Les Girls' star Stan Munro's Widow Twankey.

The first $7,000 Armstrong-Martin Scholarship given to assist in providing advanced overseas musical education for its recipient, will be awarded to one of six finalists on 22 January next in the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House.

Don Battye and Peter Pinne, the Melbourne team responsible for several musicals (particularly children's) over the years, are now transferring their residence to Sydney. Peter tells me their latest musical, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, will be staged at the Alexander Theatre next January there's also the possibility of another being presented in Sydney and quite likely another six of their kiddies' musicals will be planned throughout the country around the same time ... My mention in the August issue of a rumour that one of our national directors intends retiring next year I am now assured is definitely not so. A long visit overseas probably but certainly nothing more ... Is it the Australian Ballet or the Australian Opera Company I wonder, which is considering doing its own version of *A Picnic at Hanging Rock*?
Robin Ramsay in interview with *Theatre Australia* traces the paths which have led him to Broadway fame, TV mass recognition and back to the Australian boards and his farm at Bega.

"I've followed all my tracks and ways, from old bark school to Leicester Square; I've been right back to boyhood days, and found no light or pleasure there." 

So said Henry Lawson, that Australian of all Australian figures, whom Robin Ramsay, one of our best internationally known actors, is portraying each night for the Melbourne Theatre Company. Ramsay has taken a selection of Lawson's songs, poems, letters and narratives and, under the direction of Rodney Fisher, has woven them into an evening that evokes turn-of-the century Australia, England; alcoholism, imprisonment and poverty. They are the lesser known works, a combination of which does not give the more usual, sentimental view of Lawson, and through which Ramsay portrays some of Lawson's characters as well as the man himself.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said in relation to Lawson that there is a fatality "which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghostlike, the spot where some great and marked event has given colour to their lifetime".

Robin Ramsay has known success in America, London and Japan, and yet he has returned to live and work in Australia. Like Lawson, part of the reason for this is a deep love for and affinity with the Australian bush and living close to the land; he has built himself a house at Bega where he retired when not working, and lives on his chickens and vegetables, working on an oyster farm. Recently he worked as a theatre consultant to the South Australian Arts Council in order to be able to spend time in the bush, in a way of life that is almost totally opposite to that of the actor facing the crowds each night.

The life of an actor was suggested to Ramsay by Dr Darling, the headmaster of Geelong Grammar, where his theatrical performances received more acclaim than his academic ones. His parents left for England when he was sixteen; Robin "tagged along, told a bit of a fib about my age, auditioned for RADA and got in".

It was a pretty overwhelming experience with people like Peter O'Toole and Albert Finney in the years ahead of his, but an excellent place to gain experience, which he also did by working at the Chelsea Palace with the lugubrious comedian Max Miller in vaudeville.

His reason for returning to Australia...
after this was simply to avoid being caught up in the Cyprus troubles, but after doing his national service here he joined that pioneer professional theatre company, the Union Repertory Company under John Sumner.

"At that stage it was the only place in Australia where actors could earn any money — apart from what was known as the Melbourne eleven; eleven rather seedy actors who used to do all the radio shows. We were a very young company. Patricia Connelly and I were ASMs, she was twenty five and I was eighteen; there was Zoe Caldwell and George Ogilvie, and Win Roberts was the old man of the company at thirty three!"

In 1962 Robin Ramsay left for America — "I had an American wife at the time, which meant I could work there" — partly because at that point he felt unable to relate to an Australian way of life. "I was a very retiring person in those days, and there were all these huge actors, womanisers and drunkards, and I drank lemonade and couldn't cope. I really felt out of it."

He had also left the Union Rep to work at the first Adelaide Festival, and found on his return that another actor had stepped into the juvenile leads, and he was left doing the walk-ons; "I had a lot of ambition at the time. I couldn't do what I wanted to do here; the AETT had started, but I couldn't even get an interview as there were too many people there like Neil Fitzpatrick, so I decided to go to America."

America did turn out to be something of a land of opportunity, for after landing up in Times Square with a suitcase and no money, and experiencing the delights of the YMCA, Ramsay got a job in a restaurant at night so he could audition during the day — "the great thing about New York was that you could see two hundred people a day about jobs" — and joined the National Repertory Theatre very quickly.

They toured throughout America with productions like Tyrone Guthrie's Mary Stewart and Elizabeth the Queen, and then Robin moved on to the Theatre Company of Boston. "That's where I first did any Lawson, with a whole collage of Australian things, to make money. Universities there will pay for anything a bit different: they'd have Bertrand Russell one night, Pablo Casals the next and me the next!"

When work finished in Boston, Ramsay went back to New York and met up with Barry Humphries whom he'd known in Australia. Humphries was just leaving the part of the undertaker he'd been playing in Oliver!, with that went the understudy to the part of Fagin, and Robin stepped into both.

At that point David Merrick wanted the rights to Marat Sade and Peter Brook wanted Clive Revell, who was playing Fagin, so they did a swap and at the age of twenty four Robin Ramsay started playing Fagin on Broadway. As luck would have it, the casting director was also replaced just then, and the new one didn't realise that his Fagin was not the right age so he was kept on for two years.

It was an extraordinary two years for a young Melbournian actor, and included doing things like singing a couple of numbers from Oliver! on the Ed Sullivan Show when the Beatles were on it, to an audience of 40,000,000 viewers — "The Beatles wanted my autograph" — but towards the end of it he felt the need for further development and returned once again to Australia in the hope of new opportunities.

He went back to home-ground first and did a lot of work with George Ogilvie in what had become in his absence the Melbourne Theatre Company. Other professional companies had also come into being, and the production of How Could You Believe Me ... ?, John Bell's adaptation of the Goldoni Servant of Two Masters was quite a new direction for the Old Tote. "Drew Forsythe, John Gaden and Robyn Nevin were in the cast; something wonderful was happening then..."
It’s a shame the Tote didn’t let it go further — in fact I was disappointed last year when I did The Wolf, and at the gala opening they didn’t even list the play with everything else the Tote had done. As if they were ashamed of it.”

With that particular new direction failing to take root — at least at the Tote — Ramsay launched himself into television acting as Charlie Cousens in Bellbird, and became a household name. He feels that an actor should always be expanding in his own vision of creativity and that learning to work in a new medium is one way of doing that.

Playing Pontius Pilate in the rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar gave him another chance to do this by working with people who were not primarily actors. The experience of vital young talents — which in this case included Jim Sharman — has also proved immensely stimulating. “Jim was very different with JCS than when I played Macheath in his Threepenny Opera, which was a stunning thing to do. That too was a company that you wished could have gone on and done other things.”

A company that did go on and do other things was Nimrod, and Robin was impressed by the way everyone in the production was involved in every part of Martello Towers, even re-designing the set with Larry Eastwood and Richard Wherrett. He would very much like to work with Max Gillies and other APG actors whom he much admires, but ruefully explains “I wouldn’t want to clean dummies for six months to see if they’d use me as an actor. When one’s done one’s apprenticeship there are other things.”

Ramsay has “this holy thing about acting”, (although he thinks “the rough and the holy often go together” as in Jesus Christ Superstar) and feels that for him personally doing commercials is somehow sacriligious to talent. But he admits it is only good fortune that has allowed him not to be prostituted in that way.

When work is scarce he retreats to Bega because “there doesn’t seem any point in doing something as an actor that you’re not yet ready for or that you’ve gone beyond. That doesn’t necessarily mean that you must only do the great writers, not at all. I’m doing Rock’ola for Nimrod because it has a special quality.”

The special quality of Australian theatre is something Robin Ramsay strongly believes in, a quality that he feels is instanced by David Williamson’s recent direction of All My Sons at the SATC. “It had a much more lively, taught astirnency” than English Rep style which is being perpetuated by “directors of second rate English provincial theatres being appointed to run our companies”. It is not the directors personally that Ramsay has any grudge against, but the situation that is allowed to exist whereby English directors are being currently appointed to state theatre companies.

“In Perth the director of the Harrogate Rep has taken over; now we have a clean sweep of English directors all over Australia. I don’t think we should fire Sumner and Alan Edwards, but it’s a shame that in Adelaide we should just have brought in an English director who stars his English wife, has an English designer and an Englishman running the youth theatre”. The idea of exchanging artists between countries is more than acceptable, but straight imports to Australia is just no longer on.

The much and varied work he has done in other countries would seem to have taken its due place in extending the versatility and polishing the talent of Robin Ramsay, in a balanced way that has allowed him to make use of it without being seduced by it. His tracks have led him back to Australia, the bush and the theatrical medium, between which latter two he leads a life balanced on extremes, the one regenerating a capacity for the other.

“But every dream and every track — and there were many that I knew —

“They all lead on, or they lead back, to Bourke in Ninety one and two.”
By the time that Louis Esson's play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* had been performed for the first time on 23 July 1912, the thirty-three year old author had made a name for himself as an Australian playwright. Later he was to be the main person concerned in the formation of the Pioneer Players, the first group of Australians to write and act only plays ... three act plays. Yet none of the four plays which Esson wrote for the Pioneers was to receive the acclaim which was given to *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* when it was produced by Gregan McMahon of the Melbourne Repertory Company at the Athenaeum theatre in 1912. It played to a packed house which included the Prime Minister of the time, Andrew Fisher.

Strangely enough, the play was not performed again until 1972 when it was staged at the Melbourne Union Theatre by students of Trinity College and Janet Clarke Hall. Louis Esson's granddaughter, Kathy Esson, played the leading role of Doris.

A newspaper review published in the *Australian* of 24 June 1972 by Katherine Brisbane commented on "the astonishing quality of the play and the absolutely up-to-date perspicacious wit of the writing". She quoted as an example the representative of a Chicago syndicate, Mr Hill, who wants to buy up the Northern Territory and "develop the country, bring it up to time, Americanize it" but who needs "certain concessions" (Act I, p9).

There are other aspects of the play which suggest that people in Australia are still concerned with many of the same ideas as in Esson's day. Lady Pillsbury declares when Doris is asked to stand for parliament:

> We (women) have been kept down for centuries by man made law. All we need is more opportunity to display our ability. That is why I never allow my husband to make up his mind on any public question before he has consulted me. (Act I, p14.)

This also reminds us that Esson was writing at a time when Australia led the world in giving women the vote and introducing compulsory adult franchise. The Prime Minister's very English butter declares, "Australia is the only country where the peasantry make the laws" (Act IV, p54), and the sombre socialist, Hopkins, complains, "This is the country of the satisfied working man" (Act II, p19).

Although Esson balances the scales equally between the left and the right in politics by satirising both in his play and his conclusion seems to be that "the time is not yet ripe" for socialism, it was at this time that he was contributing articles to the Melbourne *Socialist*. Among these were verses lampooning capitalism personified as "The Sick King" (the title) which was published on 4 March 1910 and an article, "Eight Hour Day", printed on 28 April 1911. Esson's wife wrote of this period:

> We were all rebels and it was at this time that Louis was gaily writing in the old *Socialist* edited by R.S. Ross, articles that Bernard O'Dowd told him, with a twinkle in his eyes, could bring him five years for sedition. Although he was not a disciplined revolutionary, Louis never accepted the present social order, nor the conventional standards in political or literary questions.

As a perusal of Esson's article "Our Institutions", republished in the Currency Press 1973 edition of his play, clearly shows, most of Barrett's views are also those of the playwright.

On the night of the 1912 performance, however, that audience was not conscious that the playwright held any strong socialist opinions. The *Argus* of 24 July 1912 reported:

> Impartially he distributes satire and only a parblind politician could accuse him of "leanings". Very often in a keenly humorous way, he touches with red hot needle the follies, extravagances, foibles and absurdities
of those engaged in the government of the country and those who in turn are engaged in governing them. ("Reperitory Theatre," P.6.) It could be argued, indeed, that Barrett is not really a socialist but that he was more concerned with improving the quality of life of his countrymen. In his pre-election speech, he chose his audience.

I believe in compulsory Greek in schools and universities ... open air cafes where one could drink wine and meet one's friends ... picnics and festivals, a two hours' working day ... no daily newspaper, picture shows, pony racing. (Act III, p51.)

Possibly Esson became more serious about his politics and had second thoughts about the ideological content of his plays between Doris and Barrett that leads to the breaking of their engagement with "ideological argument". Furthermore:

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Philip Parsons in the introduction to the Currency Press edition of the play relates that there exists an annotated copy of the 1912 edition in which Esson "seems to intend" to replace the dialogue between Doris and Barrett that leads to the breaking of their engagement with "ideological argument". Furthermore:

These revisions probably belong to the period when Esson had become a serious disciple of naturalism and hence wished to make his play more realistic. It would, however, have been unfortunate if he had made his play more serious in tone.

Katherine Brisbane calls The Time is Not Yet Ripe "a highly Shavian comedy," yet Esson's only reference to G.B. Shaw is not complimentary. "As a realist ... he is a brilliant failure and he has no feeling for life," wrote Esson in the Socialist on 11 July, 1913. Even so, the character of Doris, Esson's attractive heroine, is not unlike the "new women" of the plays of Shaw and Ibsen — Major Barbara, Candida and Nora. Again, Barrett's efforts to shock his audience into an awareness of the social system in which they live, have overtones of Shaw's tactics.

If Esson did not acknowledge any admiration for Shaw, he was prepared to sit at the feet of another mentor. This was the Irish playwright W.B. Yeats whom he first met with J.M. Synge while on a journey to Europe in 1904 and again in London in 1920.

In 1904 and 1905, Esson and his friend and fellow journalist, Leon Brodzky, saw Yeats' plays, The King's Threshold and On Baillie's Strand and Synge's plays, In The Shadow of the Glen, The Well of the Saints and Riders to the Sea at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

Esson came back to Australia to write three short plays which were published in 1911. These were The Woman Tamer, a comedy based on his knowledge of slum characters in "Little Lon" (Lonsdale Street), Melbourne, Dead Timber, a tragedy of a bush farmer and A Silent Place dealing with Mahommadian Indian hawkers whose religion interested Esson.

Gregar McMahon produced Dead Timber on 13 and 14 December 1911 while William Moore staged The Woman Tamer at his first Drama Night on 5 October 1910 and The Sacred Place on his fourth Drama Night on 15 May 1912, two months before the performance of The Time is Not Yet Ripe.

William and T. Inglis Moore dedicated their anthology Best Australian Plays, published in 1937, to Louis Esson:

whose group of one-act plays, produced in Melbourne about 1911, was the first original and distinctive contribution to our drama.

This was at a time when the emerging middle-class forms who made the main audience for drama, looked mainly to productions which had already succeeded overseas, for their entertainment. Australian drama hardly existed.

It was during this period that Esson published two slim volumes of verse, Bells and Bees in 1910 and Red Gums and Other Verses in 1911, as well as various articles and short stories in the Lone Hand.

A second meeting with Yeats in London in 1920 led to Esson becoming involved in the formation of the Pioneer Players, modelled on Yeats' players, in London.

The Time is Not Yet Ripe

The Time is Not Yet Ripe

Esson's character, Barrett, that people do not desire "freedom, joy and splendour".6

Esson's gift for humour and dialogue is rarely present in his Pioneer plays. He seems to regard it as no longer suitable for drama. His later introduction to The Southern Cross and Other Plays Hilda Esson wrote of the meetings of literary men in Melbourne:

I wish some of the stories of those days could be told, when Louis' devastating and impassioned wit was the delight of his friends and the discomfiture of his foes. His interpretation of "debellare superbos" may well have been to 'deflate the pompous' and it was a sport he never ceased to enjoy. (ppxiv-xv)

In The Time is Not Yet Ripe Esson's audience certainly enjoys his sport in 'deflating the pompous' — both Doris' father and her fiancé. Although the same theme, the need for freedom and aesthetic pleasure in life, runs through some of his serious Pioneer plays, notably Mother and Son and even The Bride of Gospel Place, Esson was never to write again with the same lightness of touch that he displays in his political comedy. Australians have forgotten that "man in his ridiculous aspects has a long and honourable tradition in Drama" and that comedy may be a vehicle for serious ideas.

After the Pioneer Players ceased their activities in 1926, Esson continued to write plays but these were never acted. Ill health restricted his activities until his death in 1944. Nevertheless, his strong championing of Australian drama made him a legend in his own lifetime.

It is to Esson and the Pioneer Players that we owe the tradition that Australians could write plays about their own people and that companies would be formed to produce such plays.

To them, moreover, we can probably attribute the strong belief in naturalism (which they equated with realism) which for so long pervaded Australian plays, as well as their traditional structure. It was not until the production of Patrick White's Ham Funeral (1962) and Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis' The Legend of King O'Malley (1967) that these traditions began to be broken.

The involvement in the bush ethos which so many Pioneer plays displayed has continued as a strong element of our drama. Such plays as Ray Lawler's The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll (1957) and Jack Hibberd's A Stretch of the Imagination (1972) show this.

Esson's use of the Australian vernacular in his "slum" plays, moreover, set a style which can still be heard in so many plays today, from The One Day of the Year (1957) to The Removalists (1971).

While it is to be regretted that Esson abandoned the writing of satirical, witty comedy about the kind of life with which he was directly involved, after the performance of The Time is Not Yet Ripe, yet, perhaps, his concern for the quality of Australian life continues in many contemporary playwrights. The one that comes to mind is the author of that other "election" play, Don's Party (1971) in which Williamson's more savage satire conveys a somewhat similar regret to that of Esson's character, Barrett, that people do not desire "freedom, joy and splendour".

REFERENCES

1. Introduction, L. Esson, The Southern Cross and Other Plays, Melbourne, 1944, pxi.
3. Three Short Plays, Melbourne, 1911.
6. Act IV, p.44.
The Armidale Project 1977, outlined in Theatre Australia October 1976, is over. After eight weeks rehearsals and four and a half months in the Northwest, the company pulled out on 16 July, returning to Sydney to show the Othello which had been developed up there, to city audiences at the NIDA Theatre. It played to seven packed houses and could have ... in Boggabilla, Guyra, Kootingal, Neminga and Moonbi. Plans are already under way for an expanded programming in 1978.

We were worried about The Advance by John Mulligan, from the outset — however, the idea and some of the writing had potential. The aim was to workshop and develop the text. The final product however, proved unsuitable for the intermediate students. A preview in Sydney attended by officers of both companies brought praise for the acting and directing but alarm was expressed at the play itself.

The company rehearsed fully in the theatre after the opening night, adjusted to the peculiar acoustics and refined the performance which had been somewhat coarsened after playing in a series of venues ranging from intimate barns to the yawning caverns of civic centres. Subsequent performances were received with tremendous enthusiasm by large audiences.

For schools, Doolan by Richard Tulloch and I Suppose I'd Better... by Michael Cove, were effective products of commission. The readings and rehearsals supported their choice and with minor changes in rehearsal they proved eminently successful with students and teachers.

We were concerned enough about the leading players had been rehearsing both The Advance and preparing The Mime Show to within a couple of hours of opening. Unknown to us, the theatre is equipped with an air conditioning system which is both erratic and has a fearful effect on the acoustics for the spoken voice.

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The tour had a triumphant opening in Taree, in an abominable school hall, to a capacity audience and progressed for a... delight of seeing the entire wardrobe draped in the sun for hours, on ladders, fences and accommodating hedges.

Yoshi Tosa's splendid set and the costumes from the Old Tote production drew gasps of delight, especially in the towns where "big" shows don't usually play and where people rarely see professionally designed products of such excellence. Local opinion was that the word of mouth on Melba was so enthusiastic that if we had back-tracked on the tour, we would have had packed houses.

Much loved by the country audiences, Melba had a mixed reception on its first night in Armidale. The performance was below par, the result of exhaustion from a strenuous tour and the fact that the leading players had been rehearsing both The Advance and preparing The Mime Show to within a couple of hours of opening. Unknown to us, the theatre is equipped with an air conditioning system which is both erratic and has a fearful effect on the acoustics for the spoken voice.
to jettison a product we regarded as unsuitable despite weeks of work and expense. They were also favourably impressed by the company’s ability to provide an effective alternative. Both companies travelled together in two vehicles and were programmed, in most cases, into the same school. The concept of running two simultaneous performances in schools is clearly a good one and much appreciated by teachers as it causes minimum disruption to the working day. However, it is only in primary schools that this can be done (they often have several double classrooms) as we usually used the hall/gymnasium in high schools and had to play one after the other.

We have been most fortunate this year that the Intermediate play, being a mime show, was readily adjustable for the wide age range it was to cover. In that it is unlikely we shall be able to find as flexible a play again in 1978, both companies should have two plays in their repertoire: i.e. four plays for schools altogether: Junior Primary; Senior Primary; Junior Secondary; Senior Secondary.

The May season of Othello captivated the public and in particular the staff of the English department — many of whom came more than once. Their letters of praise for the company’s work delighted us.

Ray Omodei worked on the text and found that it could be performed, almost uncut, with seven actors, two doubling (Brabantio/Cassio), (Emilia/Bianca) and one multi-role playing Roderigo/Duke/Clown/Lodovico. Design of set and costumes was simple and stark. The audience response was overwhelming. We played two extra performances and turned away nearly 100 people at one of these. One extra performance sold out in twenty-two hours because of an excellent PR campaign.

Our relationship with the University of New England was cordial, productive and rewarding and the co-operation from the Arts Theatre staff — Bob Herbert and Vic Ashelford — beyond praise. We were enormously assisted also by various service departments and of course, by the enthusiasm of Department Heads and the Pro Vice Chancellor. Apart from the performances of Othello and Melba the company provided the University with many other activities such as seminars, radio broadcasts, even sessions from Malcolm Keith (an accomplished fencer) with the Fencing Club.

For the College of Advanced Education we offered performances of the three schools plays; directorial (R.O.) assistance with four plays being produced there; and an extensive series of workshops conducted by Ray Omodei, with voice and movement classes conducted by Barbara Dennis. We would have liked to have involved the company more with the CAE but it was impossible successfully to marry the College’s timetable with our touring itinerary.

The Project has been eminently successful. As a professional theatre company housed in the area it has, in five months, made itself felt and known and needed. The collective and individual contributions made by the company were enormous. People were quick to voice their praise for the range and quality of the work and the pleasant willingness of the company to accommodate the expressed needs in the area where humanly possible. Expressions of hope that the company would return and stay in the area were universal.

It was impossible to accommodate all the requests from amateur groups for workshops and assistance. The itinerary was too dense to allow this. Ray Omodei, Jake Newby and a visiting actress from Sydney (Silvia Martin, now a student in the University of NSW’s School of Drama) gave a day assisting the Glenn Innes group with its production of The Odd Couple and the company held informal seminars in several towns after Melba performances.

We are proud of the company’s work done for the Armidale Project under the banners of the Old Tote and ATYP and grateful for the constant support of all those concerned to see it succeed. In future, and in the light of our experience, we will make even more productive use of the enormous energy and effort expended in the sheer operation of the touring.

The Project has been a student in the University of New South Wales’ School of Drama) gave a day assisting the Glenn Innes group with its production of The Odd Couple and the company held informal seminars in several towns after Melba performances.

We hope to see the programme repeated, expanded and entrenched. The work was relentless but productive and profoundly rewarding on every possible level. This concept is an effective alternative to and an improvement on the old “touring from Sydney” mode. Those outside the metropolis are entitled to their share of the entertainment/arts tax dollar and the type of theatre, theatre-in-education programme and service the Project provided for the people in the area was a positive, visible and identifiably relevant one.

The Company
Ray Omodei — Project Director
Jake Newby — Company Manager
Intermediate Schools Company
Ray Anderson
Malcolm Keith
Barbara Dennis
Junior/Senior Schools Company
Jeni Caffin
Dallas Lewis
Chris Orchard
All cast in Othello and Melba

Timetable
29 Dec. 76 to 18 Feb. 77: Rehearsals
22 Feb. to 21 March: Melba tour
23 March to 16 July: Schools tours including
23 March to 4 June: Rehearsal & Othello

Number of Performances
A Toast to Melba 22
Doolan (Junior play) 83
Mime Show (Intermediate play) 92
I Suppose . . . (Senior play) 34

Audiences 24,662

Workshops
11 schools
1 for local amateur theatre group

Vehicle Miles Travelled: 28,000

THEATRE AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER 1977 13
A critic’s view: Frances Kelly

The Role of Sydney Morning Herald

Unloved, unwanted, misunderstood, underpaid — oh yes, it’s a sad profession; see us weep into our free gin and tonics any night in any foyer. You wonder why we bother.

Since the Dead-Eyed Dicks affair, the recent Playwrights’ Conference, during which Australian theatre critics came in for some solid hammering; and following Helen Dawson’s remark published in the Sydney Morning Herald that critics these days perform largely a social function (“really just letting people know what’s on”); not forgetting Theatre Australia’s own effort in embarrassing a critic, I have been wondering just why we do bother.

Assuming that a critic surrenders night after night to the magic of the stage, the stories, the setting, the craft of it all, out of love and fascination, why offer one’s opinion for publication? Is it a case of ego in extremis?

Probably the answer is that a critic is as much a show person as an actor, with the same need to exhibit and entertain as a playwright — and be praised for doing it. The critic’s stage is the journal, the audience the readers, with much the same responsibilities of an actor or writer — to engross and enlighten with enjoyment.

While Charles Marowitz won’t go down as one of the major critics of this age, he had some interesting points to make about criticism. He said in his book, Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic, he believed with Oscar Wilde that “the creation of a fine piece of criticism stands shoulder to shoulder with the creation of a fine piece of art, and today, when the theatre is so assailed by fraud parading as novelty or routine disguised as ‘technical polish’, the critic’s responsibility is even greater than the artist’s.”

I wouldn’t go as far as saying the responsibility is “even greater” than the artist’s, but it certainly is important in the light of fraud and novelty.

Marowitz further says “remove the critic and you remove the artist’s recognition of what he has accomplished. You remove the frame of reference by which the artist can measure his result. The critic should not be thought of as a tolerated adjunct of the theatre, but as its scout and front runner”.

This, you may say, is all very well if you respect the critics involved, and plainly only very few Australian critics are respected by the profession currently.

We are not writing for the theatrical profession however, but for the readers of our various journals. Members of the profession fall into this category, but they are in the minority. (Using “ball park” figures to give you an idea, it is estimated that Sydney and Melbourne each have 750,000 people who regularly read arts notices).

Criticism of critics usually goes on the lines of “who do they think they are — God”, and “what are their qualifications”. Lately the questioning has been more specific (as suspicion of the media in general) with the profession suggesting that the grass is greener elsewhere and that Australia is particularly ill-served. Why don’t we have a Sidney Edwards, a Hobson, a Tynan or a Shaw?

Critics might also ask why Australia doesn’t have a Peter Brook, or an Olivier, or Bernhardt. The profession should be glad we don’t have a Barnes, a Levin, or a Tynan. They eat actors and directors for breakfast — especially self-important colonial ones.

It’s a cliché, but you might say that like politicians, a country gets the theatre it deserves, and the critics it deserves. Similarly, since art reflects life, great art usually springs from extreme circumstances in the emotional and political climate of a country. A minor example of this recently was the rise of Australian writing during the so-called Whitlam years. No really great writing emerged and no great critic sprang to meet it, but since more Australian work was being performed criticism gradually became more analytic to look at it.

This was also bound to happen as the role of newspapers had changed. From chasing fire engines even the tabloids, in their own style, turned to backgrounding and analysis.

An odd, later sidelight however is that theatre criticism has become almost exclusively the preserve of the daily press since the weeklies, such as the Bulletin, National Times and Nation Review, have cut it back.

The electronic media have not employed critics to any extent. ABC radio does a little; the nearest television comes to it is Bill Collins’ film commentaries, and Stuart Wagstaff’s introductions to World Playhouse.

Most newspapers get the critics they deserve. While Australian critics are not bound by policy in any way, most are aware of the audiences they write for, and cut their cloth accordingly. An exception to illustrate the point is Hans Forst, the Sunday Telegraph’s new music critic, who is said to be too ‘intellectual’ for his readers.

There are many occupational hazards — time, space, and unsympathetic editors. Two hundred words, which is some critics’ limit, just about takes care of the name of the show, where it’s on, who’s in. Requests for more room usually fall on deaf ears — what’s a play to a full page political story? But everybody has occupational and personal hazards. A critic may not be able to rise above dislike of certain playwrights, may neglect the cast for concentrating on the writing (as I did to my regret recently). A performer may be distracted, a director capricious. Everybody has blind spots.

But do Australian critics have more than others? Are they “the worst in the world” (Paul Elliot, entrepreneur); “illiterate” (Ross McGregor who apparently willingly had accepted a national critics award); “behind the times” (actor Robin Ramsay); “uneducated . . . and blind to visuals” (Helen van der Poorten); “poor . . . and arrogant” (Dorothy Hewett); “subjective and uninformed” (Richard Wherrett).

Of course not. This sort of nonsense is typical (if immature and disappointing) of people whose feelings have been hurt. Nobody likes to be criticised, least of all people who are putting more than just learned skills into their profession, but body and soul as well.

You hear that sort of thing in every country from anybody who seeks praise and finds he or she has to cop displeasure as well.

The point is however, that Australian critics are different from those elsewhere in the world — because they tell theatre just as they see it, without writing up a storm, without dishonest intellectual frills. The sort of criticism the Australian profession seems to want is the florid intellectualisation of plays and players in which all sorts of motives are “discovered” where motives did not exist. All that sort of writing achieves is a self-important critic.

Australians are writing for people who want to know what the play is like before paying out the large sums now being exacted for tickets; and those who can’t go but enjoy a surrogate opinion. That is their brief. Australian newspapers just aren’t

“Has anybody ever seen a dramatic critic in the daytime? Of course not. They come out after dark, up to no good.” P.G. Wodehouse
interested in anything "heavier".

But there are many shades of critics and criticism, from light to the more serious, and readers become used to the likes and dislikes of their paper's reviewer.

For instance in the Sydney Opera House one night I heard a woman tell her companion "well, Kevon Kemp didn't like this, so we should".

There are critics who specialise in script analysis, others who write merely foyster gossip, those who understand directors better than they do writers, but few who write well about acting.

Since the decline of the actor's theatre (when people would see any rubbish if Wolfit was playing) and the rise of the playwright's importance, creative writing about acting for general readership is uncommon. In a monthly journal like *Theatre Australia* a writer may explore acting on a technical level, but for daily or weekly consumption you find critics falling back on tired expressions like "convincing", "credible", "in her element", "well-rounded performance" (what ever that means).

Some comfort may be gained from Shaw (I think) who wrote that describing the actor's art was the most difficult art of all.

The most frequent complaint about critics is that they think they are "God". Because a notice might appear next to a report of a disaster or political coup, it tends to take on the status of fact instead of opinion.

A review after all is only one person's opinion, based on a come-as-you-are (sad, happy, tired, ill) sitting on one performance - the same as any paying customer.

A critic is a professional theatre-goer, whose credentials include attending more nights at different performances than any actor or director; considerable reading around the subject; and, often, practical experience with a company.

Aloofness from the profession is essential - there is nothing harder than reviewing a friend's work.

There were attempts, stemming from Nimrod, to bring the profession and critics closer together. One or two people thought that critics should sit in on rehearsals to see how directors and actors worked together, developed a show. Others were nervous of the idea.

It was an interesting thought, but more useful for arts journalists than critics. Our business is with the finished product, nor the script read before a performance in order to be as closely just another member of the audience as possible.

Preparation itself is anything other than an excuse for genuine lack of time or laziness. If in general the critic cannot help being more informed than the audience then he should develop his knowledge and discernment; he may then be in a position to point out the worth of a production beyond that of the way it is received by the public. Otherwise why should his views be publicised?

Why not any other member of the audience? Or better why not poll those who have seen the play? As Shaw said rather blisteringly of the critic in relation to his audience "it is his business to educate these people not to judge their plays". Respect for a critic is respect for his knowledge and developed powers of discrimination, not for his self-opinionation or naivety.

Knowledge and experience allow the critic to recognise that which is the contribution of the writer, that of director, actors, designer and so on; the difference between or concurrence of intention and realisation, and even something of previous productions, other work of the actors and director, and the rest of the playwright's canon.

Too many reviews rely too heavily on a dogged reiteration of the story where clearly this is only one (and usually a minor) element. The theatre is a collaborative art form; to appraise it is to appraise the work of a number of artists — actors, playwrights, directors and designers and sometimes choreographers and musicians.

It should be approached as a nexus of various talents; the difficulty is to find the signpost which leads one from the complex organism which constitutes a piece of theatre to the assessment of it in words.

The way may be via a central theme, a metaphor or a major piece of business - though with a sense of the creative work as a whole being preserved.

The cry is often of not enough space but, within obvious limits, restriction of the number of words can be seen as a virtue, not a factor allowing only superficial comment but (like hanging!) one that "concentrates the mind wonderfully". The allowing of prolixity has its own dangers.

A critic's job is not to destroy the illusion but to announce it. Where one feels the illusion is elusive, the task is to explain why.

That's fine in theory. It doesn't always work out that way. Writing a fine review is as rare as seeing a brilliant performance — whether you're in Australia, London, New York, Paris or just Poughkeepsie, USA.
When commercial theatre is mentioned, one instinctively thinks of J.C. William­son, Kenn Brodziak, Harry M. Miller (has he retired from the scene?) — and the Edgleys.

Although the Williamson name has been the front for various theatrical companies for a number of years, the original Mr Williamson died in 1913. Brodziak has been a power on the commercial theatre scene since the forties, Miller only a familiar name in the field in the sixties, whilst the seventies have introduced Eric Dare. The Edgley name, though, has been known to audiences for more than 50 years, with ever-increasing importance.

The company, known for many years as Edgley and Dawe, and today as Michael Edgley International, started as an English comic duo — Eric Edgley and Clem Dawe — making its debut in Australia in a Melbourne pantomime, *Sinbad the Sailor*, for JCW’s in 1920. The two were actually brothers, born in Birmingham, whose real surname was White. Their mother, as Elizabeth Wharton, had as a child been in the ballet at Covent Garden, and was principal dancer in a pantomime when she met her future husband, who was a member of the orchestra. He was Richard White, a professional accountant who also happened to be a talented cellist and sometimes played in theatre orchestras.

At her husband’s wish, Ma White (as Elizabeth was affectionately called) retired from the stage upon marriage, but later was able to offer practical advice to her children. In addition to Eric and Clem, there were also Leslie, Dick and Dorothy who took to the stage, but who retained the name of White. The five in fact joined a well-known troupe, The Lancashire Lads, who could boast of having provided training ground for Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel.

During the First World War Eric and Clem gained experience with English revue and pantomime companies. While appearing as broker’s men in *Cinderella*, they were spotted by a JCW agent and contracted to appear in Australia. The brothers were popular with audiences, liked the country and decided to stay.

Before leaving England, Clem and Eric had worked in a topical revue company known as *The Rockets*, and they decided to form a similar company in Australia, calling it *The Midnight Frolics*. It was launched in Perth in 1923, and Dick, Leslie and Dorothy White also joined them. In the cast, as well, were the wives of Eric and Leslie: dancer Phyllis Amery, and Nell McGuire.

Apparently the brothers had hit upon a magic formula and *The Midnight Frolics*, in various editions, toured Australia for more than 10 years.

In early 1930 Phyllis Edgley died when her son, Phillip, was born. Edna Luscombe, a young dancer with the company, took charge of the baby.

With *The Midnight Frolics* so successful in this country, the brothers decided to take an all-Australian revue company to England, the first time such a thing had occurred. Unfortunately, its London opening coincided with the death of George V; it was not well received, and turned out to be a financial failure. Despite this, the brothers remained in London, and in 1939 participated in the first television broadcast from the stage of the London Coliseum.

Ten years after the death of his wife, Eric re-married. This time it was to Edna Luscombe. At the time of their marriage they were appearing together in variety at the Empire Theatre, Hackney.

By now the Second World War had started, and the brothers decided it was time for them to return to Australia. After appearing in pantomime, they were seen at Sydney’s Theatre Royal in *Funny Side Up* in 1949, followed by *Thumbs Up* in 1942. In December 1943, Eric’s second son, Michael, was born, and a few years later, Christine.

The late forties saw the brothers reviving *The Midnight Frolics* type of show, initially in Hobart. Again the format proved successful and once more they toured Australia with it.
They were back in Perth, at His Majesty's Theatre, by the early 1950's, and decided to take a lease on the theatre. Young Phillip was now appearing on stage alongside his father and uncle.

From 1950 to 1956 Edgley and Dawe Attractions operated in Perth at His Majesty's, presenting locally produced shows, as well as attractions from the eastern states. Then in 1955 Clem died suddenly. Eric (or Mick as he was usually called by friends) Edgley carried on, aided by Edna and Phillip.

Soon Eric observed that the trend now was for entrepreneurs in the eastern states to import companies from overseas, which were usually successful. With the thought in his head that he, too, could import attractions, Eric made an overseas trip in 1960. It was when in Russia he hit upon an idea — strangely not thought of by other management — which ultimately would advance the fortunes of the family firm. He would import Russian companies.

The first company, in 1962, was billed as the Moscow State Variety Theatre Company and featured soloists from the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera, puppeteers, acrobats, jugglers, magicians, musicians, folk dancers and speciality acts from the Moscow State Circus. Aware of the risks involved, Edgley was thankful when JWCs and Aztec Services agreed to share some of the tour's financial burdens. The same year he brought out a second company, this time consisting of 24 star performers from the Bolshoi Ballet. Both attractions were big box-office hits.

Over the next few years the Edgley family introduced to Australians — who never seemed to tire of them — Russian companies who were to return again and again, their success always reflected in the healthy box-office returns. Thus there was the Georgian State Dance Company, the Omak Siberian Company, the Beriska Dance Company of Moscow, the Osipov Balalaika Orchestra, the Mazowsze Polish Song and Dance Company, the Moiseyev Dance Ensemble of the USSR and perhaps the biggest of them all, the Great Moscow Circus.

In February 1967, after a short illness, Eric Edgley died. Now more than ever, Edgley and Dawe Attractions was a family concern. Phillip, Edna and Michael were fellow-directors, but it was young Michael who apparently was at the head. Phillip, though, as artistic director, set off to Moscow to negotiate new attractions, and met the Press. One recalls him in an interview saying one saw Michael himself running around, giving rapid instructions, and even personally helping to tighten ropes.

Sadly, on the face of it, the Edgley organisation does not seem very interested in presenting Australian-originated shows (although they are co-presenting, with JWC's, The Twenties and All That Jazz). However, in 1972 Michael did originate an annual prize of $5,000 for the performing arts in Western Australia, likely to become a national operation next year.

Today Michael is mounting more and more shows in association with Kenn Brodziak, managing director of J.C. Williamson Productions (of which Michael is also a director). The smash hit A Chorus Line, is a joint production, so too are the plays Boeing-Boeing. The Edgley organisation is also presenting attractions in collaboration with other management. Last year was the company's best ever, grossing around $5 million at the box office; this year the figure is expected to be something like $10 million.

When in 1973 Michael was made a MBE for his contribution to the performing arts in Australia (the youngest Australian ever to receive an honour for theatre), he had really earned it. In 1975 he was named "Citizen of the Year" in Western Australia.

Make no mistake about it. The Edgleys do not just book a show and wait for the returns to flow in. For them it is sheer hard work.
Unlike Giuseppe Verdi's last two operas, Otello and Falstaff, which are also based on Shakespeare plays, his Macbeth — which is now playing at the Sydney Opera House — is decidedly not a masterpiece. But for that very reason, perhaps, it is a fascinating object lesson in the complex exercise of transferring great drama to the operatic stage.

For despite its flaws — and there are many, both musical and dramatic — Verdi's Macbeth is a major milestone in the history of opera, and in its better passages a marvellous re-creation of Shakespeare in a new medium. The sleep-walking scene, Act IV Scene 2 of the opera, is an almost exact translation into Italian of Act V Scene 1 of the play; the banquet scene of the opera is very close to the banquet scene of the play down to the appearance of the murderers and the twin appearances of Banquo's ghost. Yet Act I Scene 2 of the opera is a clever amalgamation of no less than six scenes of the play (those between Shakespeare's Act I Scene 5 and Act II Scene 3), incorporating all the important action between Lady Macbeth's receipt of Macbeth's letter describing his first encounter with the witches and the discovery of Duncan's murder in one continuous chunk of stage action. No sooner has Lady Macbeth read the letter, and mulled it over in an aria, than Macbeth arrives and almost on his heels the King, who crosses the stage without uttering a word (in the opera his is a non-singing part). Everyone follows him off stage but almost immediately Macbeth returns to sing his noted soliloquy, "Mi si affaccia un pugnal? l'elsa a me volta?" ("Is this a dagger ... " ) No sooner has he exited on his famous rhyming couplet, "Non udirlo, Duncan! E squillo eterno/ che nel cielo ti chiama o nell'inferno" (Hear it not, Duncan ... " ), than Lady Macbeth comes in to muse a few lines and prepare to receive him back to report "Tutto e finito!" ("I have done the deed."")

Then follows a marvellous duet between the Macbeths, a clever if spuriously un-Shakespearean amalgamation of several bits and pieces from the play, chopped and changed about so as to satisfy the opera-goer's craving for vocal confrontations — not to mention the opera composer's craving to have an opportunity to display his skill at creating complex concerted ensemble passages where vocal lines can intertwine in a fascinating cobweb of oppositions and confluences and brief solo passages. Before the curtain falls on this extraordinary scene, the murder has been discovered (but without the time-killing disruption of the drunken porter's scene) and everyone in sight has engaged in a long-winded and repetitious series of stock lamentations and petitions to the Almighty to bring the perpetrator of the vile deed to justice.

Shakespearean purists by now, no doubt, will be tearing out their hair at the description of such sacrilege to great drama; the Bard himself, totally unfamiliar as he inevitably was with the conventions of
19th-century opera, is no doubt turning over in his grave. It may be some consolation to them to learn that Verdi, who, far from being an ignorant masterpiece-wrecker, was an avid Shakespearean student; he was very concerned indeed to do justice to the original drama when he first tackled Macbeth at the age of 34, doing most of the libretto himself in prose and then handing it on to others for versification. Yes, first; for Macbeth is one of those problematical operas which exist in two versions separated by a time gap of 18 years — the first the product of Verdi's young manhood, the second of his full maturity. The revision was prompted by plans to stage the work in Paris in 1865, where a ballet is de rigueur: much against his wishes, at least to start with, Verdi bowed to the custom and infiltrated one act into Act III, the opera's second witches scene which is an extended version of Shakespeare's Act IV Scene I with the addition of a most un-Shakespearean question-and-answer session between the Macbeths, Lady Macbeth having inexplicably tracked down her husband in the witches' cavern in her presumably implacable perversity to find out what the hags have been predicting next. Verdi also deleted a dying aria for Macbeth in the last scene.

Yet of course one can dwell too much on such flaws in an opera which after all no one claims to be a masterpiece; and seen in the context of your average run-of-the-mill 19th-century opera, is no doubt turning over in his grave. It may be some consolation to them to learn that Verdi, who, far from being an ignorant masterpiece-wrecker, was an avid Shakespearean student; he was very concerned indeed to do justice to the original drama when he first tackled Macbeth at the age of 34, doing most of the libretto himself in prose and then handing it on to others for versification. Yes, first; for Macbeth is one of those problematical operas which exist in two versions separated by a time gap of 18 years — the first the product of Verdi's young manhood, the second of his full maturity. The revision was prompted by plans to stage the work in Paris in 1865, where a ballet is de rigueur: much against his wishes, at least to start with, Verdi bowed to the custom and infiltrated one act into Act III, the opera's second witches scene which is an extended version of Shakespeare's Act IV Scene I with the addition of a most un-Shakespearean question-and-answer session between the Macbeths, Lady Macbeth having inexplicably tracked down her husband in the witches' cavern in her presumably implacable perversity to find out what the hags have been predicting next. Verdi also deleted a dying aria for Macbeth in the last scene.

Yet of course one can dwell too much on such flaws in an opera which after all no one claims to be a masterpiece; and seen in the context of your average run-of-the-mill 19th-century operatic melodrama, even its imperfect libretto is at least fair average quality and maybe a little better than that; and the problems of condensation involved in getting any spoken play down to the dimensions of an opera libretto are monumental. Admittedly, Macbeth is a short play by Shakespeare's standards; but the only means that, say, one must cut two-thirds rather than four-fifths of the original.

In fact, Verdi's opera gains a good deal of dramatic unity by eliminating a number of scenes and telescoping others in the manner detailed above with respect to the arrival and murder of Duncan: the five acts and 28 scenes of the original play are pruned to an economic four acts and 10 scenes in the opera.

One would think it impossible for opera to deal satisfactorily with complex subtleties of characterisation simply because it cannot get enough words across to an audience effectively enough, but sometimes opera does indeed succeed — even with startling effectiveness — in doing just that. The reason for this is the communicative power of the music itself . . . not to mention its uncanny ability to mesmerise us into the sort of semi-willing suspension of disbelief that makes us forget, in Act I Scene 2 of Verdi's Macbeth, that 12 hours or more simply must have elapsed during the course of a single scene of continuous stage action which takes little more than half an hour to perform. And music can also, of course, contradict or reinforce a singer's words almost subliminally, establish in a few bars of orchestral introduction an overpowering mood that might require pages of spoken dialogue.

Verdi's Macbeth stimulates us to think in such terms because of its very patchiness; the fact that it is such an astonishing mixture of marvellous opera and musical and dramatic triviality verging on the absurd. Having shorn Shakespeare's play to its very bones — by and large a study of the ruination of the two Macbeths through an all-consuming obsession to achieve and defend absolute power — it then proceeds to embellish and externalise Lady Macbeth's character in showy vocal terms while internalising and pruning Macbeth's character down to a bare minimum. His great monologue, "Mi si affaccia un pugnal!" ("Is this a dagger ..."), never gets off the ground as a piece of vocal display; his proper aria is in the next-last scene of the opera, just before the death of Lady Macbeth. Yet he spends an enormous amount of time on stage, and there is a brooding power in his music which gives him the opportunity to be every inch his wife's equal in dramatic terms. It is just as tough and demanding a role as Lady Macbeth, if in quite a different way.

But faults and all, Verdi's Macbeth is a milestone in operatic literature for the new emphasis it places on dramatic aspects of the art form as opposed to vocal display. In Macbeth, Verdi did not succeed nearly so well as he was to succeed much later in his career; but there is a good deal of evidence, some from his own lips, that he had a clear vision of what he was after. Furthermore, as a celebrated young composer (only 34 years old) he was pretty clearly feeling his oats on the production side. Indeed, he had detailed the main points of divergence of Verdi and Shakespeare in purely dramatic, textual terms, it is necessary to hasten to point out that this is merely a specific, though quite useful, exercise illustrating the difference between spoken drama and opera. Few if any opera librettos can stand on their own two feet as spoken play texts: opera that is any good is a partnership of text and music, each of which complements — indeed, is vital to thorough understanding of — the other.

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totally out of character, for an instant, in her sympathy for her stage husband. Before adding, with a trace of the steel will one feels will increasingly dominate their stage relationship as it matures: "I prop you up all the time, don't I?"

And Shaw, of course, must agree.

"I'm looking forward to doing it," confides Connell.

"Grossly under-rated," reiterates Shaw.

"Of course we're not talking about a masterpiece," says John Copley over a plate of cold seafood and a glass of white wine; leaning back to contemplate.

"I'm looking forward to doing it," con­fides Connell.

Verdi's Macbeth has its problems, he admits; but really, he adds, it's a very straight-forward piece. "What it needs is a lot of expertise. It's not one for amateurs, but it's no nightmare," says Copley.

The traps? "The banquet scene is one. By now, the Macbeths are very nervous. Nobody is at ease; nobody wanted to come to this banquet, but they were forced to. I hate productions which make it too jolly."

And the inherent jolliness of Lady Macbeth's drinking song can be a prob­lem: a director must make quite clear the dramatic irony of her trying to maintain the good humor of her guests in the face of the virtual disintegration of their host before their very eyes.

Not to mention the scene involving the murder of Banquo. "That's the most dif­ficult," says Copley. "What do you do with Fleance?"

But Copley, who first did the piece in an open-air production for the Athens Festival of 1969, is more concerned about budget problems than problems of direc­tion this time round. "We wanted to have a massive, strong, spare set . . . no black and gold, no glitter; just a massive, atmos­pheric, masonry location. Nothing to clap; no spectaculars.

"I feel sometimes," he adds paren­thetically, "that Australian audiences want glitter — something they can clap. But there's nothing light in the piece; it wouldn't fit."

He is having trouble getting the sort of atmosphere he wants with Macbeth; budget problems are to blame. "If things don't perk up in the budget department . . . he interrupts himself. "You can do Macbeth on a bare stage, you know, if you have marvellous actors . . ."

Meanwhile, back at the headquarters of the Australian Opera a couple of miles inland from the Opera House, the designer of the new AO Macbeth, Stefan Laz­zaridis, is supervising a mass fitting of choristers costumes. Just about everything is black: just the odd button or trim stands out to catch the eye, even that relief is.

"The murder splits Macbeth and Lady Macbeth — this is the end of their relationship. They wouldn't have had sex after that. They're hopelessly split, each going toward personal destruction."

Before designing this Macbeth, Lazzaridis studied the Shakespeare original. "There are a lot of changes of balance in the opera," he says; "places where the emphasis has been shifted. It would have been a much greater opera if it had been written later in Verdi's career. It was too intense and savage a subject for what he was doing then . . . but even so, it was much better than most of the operas he was writing at that stage of his career. What carries it is the intensity, the sure feeling . . ."

"Of course there are difficulties with a work like Macbeth, and you can't ignore the fact of their existence. But the music does work — it's very exciting, athletic. Often patriotic."

"You have to see it from Verdi's point of view, not Shakespeare's," he says, giving the impression he's doing just that right now.

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Over the past 140 years Sydney has seen some two dozen commercial theatre sites in the Central Business District. Disregarding the Regent, which was originally built as a cinema for Hoyts Theatres Ltd., on a site owned by J.C. Williamson Theatres the only remaining two live theatres have had histories of theatres on their sites for over fifty years in one case and 120 years in the other. The last twenty or so theatres of Sydney will be featured in a future issue of Theatre Australia; here we shall delve into the past of the present Theatre Royal and in the December issue that of Her Majesty’s, both of which have been rebuilt recently.

Ross Thorne

Sydney’s Theatres

Part 1

The second Prince of Wales was built to a “prize design” by J.H. Hilly for a Mr Fitzgerald. Seeming, from contemporary descriptions, to have the same accommodation it opened its doors to the public on 25 May 1863. It was this theatre which commenced the link to King Street by constructing the stalls entrance between two shops. This allowed the pit patrons, according to social custom of the time, to be segregated from the dress and upper circle patrons. The gallery patrons were similarly isolated from the time they stepped off Castlereagh Street.

Theatre Royal, Sydney. Entrance from King Street to Stalls only, dating from 1863.

Only a small part of the new Theatre Royal in the MLC Centre complex (King and Castlereagh Streets and Martin Plaza) falls on the original site of the first theatre and its subsequent replacements until 1972. The original site fronted Castlereagh Street with an east-west axis; it later acquired a side entrance through a building in King Street. The latter mid nineteenth-century colonial style building is frequently, but erroneously, published as the front of the Theatre Royal.

The first Theatre Royal commenced the dynasty under the name of Prince of Wales in 1855, being designed for Joseph Wyatt by Henry Robertson, who had nineteen years previously designed Wyatt’s Royal Victoria Theatre (opened 1838) in Pitt Street. The capacity of the Royal was 3250 persons in a house divided into four tiers: pit (stalls), two circles of large boxes and a gallery. However we must not be deceived into thinking that it was a large theatre by today’s standards. Its stage was commodious being 60 feet wide behind the proscenium and 87 feet deep from the footlights but the pit was only 60 feet wide by 70 feet deep, thus allowing only 2.8 square feet of floor area per person. Compared to today’s 5 to 5.5 square feet per person this accommodation was cramped, but certainly not unusually so for the times.

Melbourne’s Argus announced the cost of this “splendid building” as 30,000 pounds, but in 1860 it was reduced to ashes insured for only 8,000 pounds. A year before its conflagration there occurred an event quite unusual in the annals of theatre history — a strike by the actors. This industrial dispute of November 1859 concerned the allegedly devious methods by which an entrepreneur, Charles Poole, was attempting to gain a monopoly of Sydney’s theatres. It was claimed he was using unpaid salaries, rightfully due to stage and orchestra performers, for the purposes of obtaining the leases of Sydney’s other two theatres.

The final straw was broken by his demand that all the company take a reduction in salary of 25% for the following five weeks. The dispute dragged well into 1860, the year that saw the disappearance of the first theatre on this site. Four fire engines and heavy rain could not avert complete destruction on the 3rd October of that year.

Lyster’s Royal Italian and English Opera Company performed in this theatre and stage realism was beginning to be an attraction in itself. In 1863, in Life in Louisiana, there was, according to the Sydney Morning Herald, a “correct model of a genuine Mississippi Steamboat over sixty feet long with all its machinery in perfect working order”. Early one Saturday morning in January 1872 the Prince of Wales Opera House and adjacent buildings were one “immense incandescent mass ... lighting up the city all around”. The theatre was almost entirely consumed.

The next theatre, The Royal, opened in December 1875. It was also designed by J.H. Hilly, being again of similar dimensions to the other two buildings, except there were now only three levels, providing more headroom for patrons. Some of the walls and structure existed for the next 97 years although the interior design changed.

Principal frontage to Castlereagh Street, photographed in 1882 possibly the original front of 1855 which according to contemporary descriptions was not destroyed in the various fires.

After fire of 1892. Decoration was frequently paper maske and plaster on canvas, glued to wooden backing.
George Rignold in Henry V, a play in which he appeared frequently in the last two decades of the 19th century.

Fortunately we can obtain some good idea of the interior of this theatre because after a comparatively small fire of 1892 in the auditorium it was restored closely to the design of 1875. Photographs by Perier in the Mitchell Library show the result of the fire and the rebuilt interior with its decorative cast-iron columns supporting the dress circle and gallery each with their filigree cast-iron.

The theatre until 1892 had held the position of first playhouse and home of opera bouffe in Sydney. J.C. Williamson and wife Maggie Moore had here introduced the works of Gilbert and Sullivan; and as well as George Reginald, Dion Boucicault, Nellie Stewart and others performing here, a Mrs Armstrong sang in a series of concerts in 1886. Later she became better known as Nellie Melba.

With the addition of a fly-tower over the stage after the 1892 fire the theatre remained much the same until Henry White redesigned the interior in 1921 and replaced the front to Castlereagh Street. This is the intimate theatre with its decorative cast-iron columns supporting the dress circle and gallery each with their filigree cast-iron.

The musical theatre left, for the most part, the Royal in the mid-fifties but it continued very much as a drama and intimate theatre until the final performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company on 29th April 1972. Then there occurred a rather remarkable series of events.

The committee established was joined by Jack Mundey of the Builders Labourers Federation. The community response was encouraging and the Sydney Morning Herald (1.5.72) summed up its feelings: To the imaginative, its (the Royal's) stones exude the enthusiasm of crowds, the glitter of extraordinary personalities, the magic which transcends tinsel and greasepaint. These are not irrelevant considerations in a city centre increasingly being delivered over to commerce at daytime and emptiness at night.

Within a week of closure of the old theatre a new theatre on the site was announced. On 17th May Lend-Lease Corporation Ltd wrote to the Lord Mayor stating that it would erect a new theatre to be known as the Theatre Royal to be used only as a live professional theatre “in which performances using local talent will be given preference”.

Architect, Harry Seidler designed the new theatre in association with theatre consultant Tom Brown. The only part of the site available fronted King Street and ran north-south, backing onto old Rowe Street. The design had to hide one of the four huge columns which support the office block above, and avoid the Eastern Suburbs railway tunnels below.

The resultant design is a modern adaptation of a typical old style proscenium theatre. It is well planned on a difficult site, and at stage level there is good delivery access and space, particularly beneath Rowe Street, for storing the scenery of incoming or outgoing productions. The stage has a high fly tower and the design of the stage lighting galleries across the ceiling of the auditorium are excellent. It seats comfortably within a red and gold environment, 1,100 persons and cost approximately $4,000,000. (At our inflated monetary values it is 66 times the cost of the first theatre!)
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Celebrating Marlowe

KING EDWARD THE SECOND

CLIFF GILLIAM

King Edward The Second by Christopher Marlowe. The Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth, West Australia. Director, John Milson; designer, Graham Maclean. Piers Gaveston, Sir John of Hainault, Earl of Leicester, Lightborn, Richard Williams; three poor men, Ivan King, Mary Haire, David Holmes; King Edward the Second, Robert Van Mackelenberg; Lord Mortimer, Bishop of Coventry, Edgar Metcalfe; Earl of Lancaster, herald, an abbot, Gurney, Bill Mason; Earl of Pembroke, Spenser, Mattevis, Alan Fletcher; Edmund, Earl of Kent, Phil Wilbraham; Archbishop of Canterbury, Baldock, Earl of Arundel, Ivan King; Queen Isabella, Joan Sydney; Lady Margaret De Clare, Mary Haire; Prince Edward, a mower, David Holmes.

Perth theatre audiences have been extremely well served by the Hole-in-the-Wall during 1977. Under director John Milson, the policy of the last couple of years has been continued which has meant that, along with the odd sure-fire money spinner, productions have been given of many plays whose box-office potential has been uncertain, to say the least, but which have had the merit of keeping us constantly alert both to the potential and the value of the live theatre as a medium. This policy has meant that we have seen new plays by new writers, both Australian and foreign (one thinks particularly of Inner Voices and Crossing Niagara) and also the less-commercial masterworks by established writers, but we have always seen plays which offer more than West End humdrum, and productions which re-vivify ones interest in and commitment to live theatre.

As it has begun, so it goes on. After a five week season of O'Neill's massive masterpiece, Long Day's Journey into Night, in a production brilliantly directed by Raymond Omodei, (and featuring a level of performance from Messrs Teede, Mackelenberg, Hitchcock, and Mesdames Anketell and Moody, consistently higher than anything I've ever seen in years here in Perth), John Milson has followed up with the strangely neglected Marlovian chronicle-tragedy Edward II.

I have never really understood why Edward II is so infrequently performed, since it seems to me the Marlowe play best suited to modern taste. It belongs of course to the tradition of the chronicle play, and in fact details "the troublesome reign and lamentable death" of its eponymous protagonist over some twenty years.

Yet it does so with amazing speed and economy, without ever relapsing into documentary tedium, and it accomplishes this largely by its cunning dual focus — a focus both on the king himself and the conflict between his nature and the demands of his position, and on the forces ranged against that nature as collected and expressed in the redoubtable Mortimer.

The glorious hyperbole characteristic of Marlowe in plays like Tamburlaine and Dr Faustus is lacking in Edward II, having been replaced by a rhetoric better suited to the pace of the action, lower-keyed and economically effective in its delineation of the cut and thrust of the conflict between the king and his barons.

Milson's production takes advantage of the quality which gives the play its pace, the montage of brief scenes swelling toward major crises such as the execution of Gaveston, and the abdication of the king. Another fruitful collaboration with designer Graham Maclean has allowed him to set the action in a space suggestive of a medieval throne room, but with different levels to the floor which allow for transitions to battlefields or the coast of France with remarkable ease. Shifts in lighting turn the pillars of chain and the panels of iron with filigree cut-outs from throne room to dungeon and torture chamber in less than a moment.

The play exhibits a symmetry in structure, Mortimer rising as Edward falls, which is echoed throughout this production, from the severe lines of the set, to the careful orchestration of scenes of confrontation between Edward and his barons (which would easily have become messy in the small area of the Hole's playing space), down to the masterstroke of having Richard William's double the parts of Gaveston and Lightborn, the king's lover and murderer respectively.

Milson made extremely effective use of only 11 players to fill the twenty five speaking parts of the play. Performances were generally strong, but much of the force and power of this production came from the assured playing of Robert Van Mackelenberg as the king and Edgar Metcalfe as Mortimer. Van Mackelenberg brought a peculiar vulnerability to the role of Edward II. 'O'er governed' by his passion for Gaveston, and later wilfully provocative in his choice of Spenser as a new paramour.

Inept in politics and pathetic in his attempt at bravado, Edward II, is a character difficult to sympathise with until he is forced to suffer a grotesquely cruel imprisonment and death. Yet Mackelenber managed to gain the audience's sympathy from the beginning, being absolutely convincing about the forces of the king's passion for Gaveston.

His appearance in a simple white robe of mourning after Gaveston is exiled again was finely handled. He appeared as a medieval icon, a frail figure in white with a beard of "formal cut", and the entire performance was marked by this sense of stylization, his movement particularly be-

Edgar Metcalfe and Joan Sydney in Edward the Second.
ing a matter of a graceful flow from iconic pose to iconic pose.

The contrast between this king and the tortured creature writing in the cesspool of his imprisonment, curled like a child in the arms of his executioner, spreadeagled under a table, waiting to receive a macabre death, brought an added dimension of horror to what is itself one of the most harrowing scenes in English dramatic literature. In this scene and in the abduction scene, Van Mackelenberg proved once and for all that he possesses the technique, the control and the skills of a master of his profession.

Balancing him was another master, Edgar Metcalfe. Physically compact, tensely determined in both his hatred and his ambition, Metcalfe's Mortimer was entirely convincing, both proud and unrelenting. This was no clichéd Machiavellian, but a blunt and forceful man of many parts, the love scenes with Isabella revealing tenderness too as part of his range of passions.

Joan Sydney played Isabella, the queen caught between the contempt of her beloved king and the ambition of "proud Mortimer." This is a difficult role, since the change in the queen's attitude to Edward after her return with Mortimer from France seems too rapidly accomplished in terms of the action of the play. The memory of her desolation and frustration, her sorrowful fidelity in the first two acts clashes violently with her callousness in the last. If the play has a weakness it is this role, yet Joan Sydney made of it also something memorable.

Richard Williams took the part of Gaveston, as well as doubling as the odd French or English lord, and returning at the end of the play as Lightborn, the ironically aptly named murderer. As Piers Gaveston, Williams was excellent — lithe, strong, fearless, determinedly amoral, his presence gave substance to the conflict between King and Barons over the proper government of the realm.

Of Mice and Men

MARGOT LUKE

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill. Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth, WA. Opened 22 September 1977. Director and designer, Raymond Omodei. James Tyrone, Neville Teede; Mary Cavan Tyroné, Margaret Anketell; Jamie, Robert van Mackelenberg; Edmund, Gerald Hitchcock; Cathleen, Julia Moody.

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck. Playhouse, Perth, WA. Opened 22 September 1977. Director, Aarne Neeme; designer, Sue Russell. George, Trevor Hart; Lennie, Robert Faggetter; Candy, Colin Borgonon; The Boss, Geoff Gibbs; Curley, Martin Jones; Curley's wife, Leith Taylor; Slim, Leslie Wright; Carlson, Alan Cassell; Whit, Ian David; Crooks, Peter Rowley.

Looking back, one can only describe it as a forgotten Golden Age in the history of American Drama. More recently the plays had been ousted by later, more self-conscious, more cerebral writers. Now both O'Neill's family drama and Steinbeck's genre painting are rediscovered and prove to be relevant experiences, cherished the more for their 'otherness'. They are unashamed of full-bodied emotion. They take their time to establish their theme without anxiously peering over their shoulder to see if the audience is getting restless. They achieve a solidity and weight that goes beyond the subject of the plays — the personal crisis at such close quarters.

There is, despite thematic echoes, no comparison in the size or scope of the two plays. Of Mice and Men is a giant of the drama — Of Mice and Men is a literary curiosity: a novelist's venture into the realm of theatre. The one is panoramic, creating an involved net of family relations, exploring the accumulated tragedies of a lifetime, while the other sketches, in bold outlines, the limited relationship between two people whose limitations are in themselves the theme of the play. They may not have totally different demands on both the actors and the audience, and yet, the end result is surprisingly similar — an admiration of the sheer force and vitality created, a satisfaction of both the emotions and the intellect. Because, whatever the post-Brechtian playgoer might have been taught: it is not absolutely necessary for an audience to be alienated in order to start thinking.

In producing Long Day's Journey at the Hole-in-the-Wall, Ray Omodei turned what could easily have been a handicap into an asset. O'Neill's people could be an embarrassment in a very small theatre. Old James Tyrone has a fiery temper and also indulges in hammy reminiscences and recriminations. Mary Tyrone is a drug addict who becomes steadily bizarre as the play progresses. Their two sons have their share of posturings and tantrums.

Everyone quarrelles at the top of their voices. Very dangerous ground this. And yet — it worked. In the first place, by treating the auditorium as an extension of the Tyrone's living room, there was a feeling of being present as part of a happening, rather than a sense of detachment and incongruity. One was, in fact, rather awed at being permitted to witness this intensely personal crisis at such close quarters.

The casting was extraordinarily successful, made the more striking by the fact that there was no type-casting (often inevitable with the comparatively limited reserve of talent in an isolated community). Neville Teede, primarily associated with witty or flamboyant roles (although one does recall a memorable static Pinter), is very impressive as the complex James Tyrone. Family tyrant and resigned ageing man, irascible Irishman and man for all seasons, it all oddds with his sons one minute, drinking companion the next, living past glories and regretting failtures.

He arouses compassion but not facile pity; he handles the transitional areas most delicately, be it pomposity being blown up and then deflated, self-delusion fighting with self-awareness, or cliched protestations of love being displaced by genuinely-felt emotion. The length of the play — all three-and-a-half hours of it — is a measure of the ebb and flow of emotion. Particularly the quarrel scenes between father and sons are choreographed with a collection of tortured wrecks in the O'Neill play would be impossible to present straight by a post-Orton and post-Albee writer. They would need to be seen as examples of American Gothick.
sure feeling for the credible breaking-point after almost unbearable emotional tension.

Margaret Anketell, whom one has grown to associate with elegant, frail and occasionally batty ladies, turned Mary Tyrone into a study of velvet and steel. In her performance the play's deliberate device of deception was developed most intelli-
gently. Early in the piece there is a pervading air of awkwardness and falseness. Families don't talk or act like that alone at home. This quality of unease at first appears as gaucheness on the part of playwright or producer.

Only gradually does it become clear that the entire family is playing a grim charade, with Mary Tyrone acting the part of the pampered convalescent secure in the bosom of her family, and everyone else in the role of supporting cast. The jarring note of falseness, half perceived, gradually gives way to deliberate and blatant deception, guilt and ruthless despair as the family gradually acknowledges the unbearable truths so far kept suppressed. As Mary becomes more brazen about her addiction, the honey-sweet lady of the first scene gradually turns into a tigress, before switching off into total madness. A stunning performance all round.

Gerald Hitchcock, whom one had not previously seen in a major role, plays the part of Edmund, the younger son (whom we ill-at-ease youngster to his final speech there is a steady discernible growth in the character towards maturity. It is a perfect example of writer, director and actor achieving so subtle an integration that one cannot separate their individual contributions. Although Hitchcock's fresh-faced looks do not fit in with one's ideas of the youthful O'Neill, the effect is particularly powerful when, towards the end of the play, he has to plunge from the heights of poetic exalta-
tion (youthful frenzy) to the bitter dis-
envision with both brother and mother — we suddenly see him grow into a tragic man ageing before his time.

The elder brother, played by Robert van Mackelenberg is an ungrateful part — fill-
ing in the dark corners of unhappiness — sketching in the alternative fate to Edmund's poetic resilience.

Julia Moody made welcome brief appearances as an Irish maid — funny, without being intrusively comical.

In both plays the American dream is represented by the theme of land purchase and settling down. In both of them there is the theme of life-partnership and incom-
patibility being the basis of tragedy.

Long Day's Journey is daunting in the way it assembles a mass of detail into a dramatic pattern. The Steinbeck play works the opposite way. All the elements of human relationship are simplified and focussed into the ill-matched pair of mates, Lennie and George.

apes, their dreams being the basis of tragedy.

as the family slightly more in tune with their dreams. The scene in which she and Lennie elaborate their dreams of the future, each totally unaware of what the other is saying is played with wonderfully naive humour, blending most skilfully into the tragedy of the unintended murder.

It is a tribute to the direction of Aarne Neeme that the outrageously theatrical end (George persuades Lennie to "see" their dream-place in the distance while he shoots him) is genuinely moving.

Neville Teede and Gerald Hitchcock in Long Days Journey into Night.
A worthwhile innovation and an engaging enough evening

**ANNIE GET YOUR GUN**

**TONY BAKER**


Director, Colin George; designer, Rodney Ford; musical director, Joannes Roose; movement, Michael Fuller. Charlie Davenport, Edwin Hodgeman; Dolly Tate, Daphne Grey; Winnie Tate, Rebel Russell; Tommy, Colin Fries; Mac, Craig Ashley; Foster Wilson, Leslie Dayman; Frank Butler, Bruce Barry; Buffalo Bill, Kevin Miles; Annie Oakley, Dorothy Vernon; Little Jake, Doug Gautier; Jessie, Michele Stayner; Nellie, Minnie, Juliet Taylor; Caroline George; Allegra Halliday, Lucy George; Pamela Barnette; a sassy girl, Sue Wylie; her mum, Doris Dodd; Mrs Little Horse, Sylvia Ann Pearson; Mrs Black Tooth, Carole-Anne Croker; conductor, Michael Siberry; porter, Rick Pfeiffer; trainman, Stephen Baker; old prospector, Kevin Kennedy; Chief Sitting Bull, Hedley Cullen; “Deer” dancer, Michael Fuller; Medicine Man, Marguerite Pepper; Pawnee’s messenger, Michael Siberry; waiter, John Francis; chorus, Michael Freundt, Michael Lynch, Chris Mahoney.

No-one can fault Colin George, now very much the dominant spirit at the South Australian Theatre Company, for innovation.

Since his takeover as artistic director this year the company has presented two classics (*School for Scandal* and *The Cherry Orchard*) a revue around Ruth Cracknell (*Just Ruth*), a retreat Arthur Miller (*All My Sons*), a new Australian play (Ron Blair’s *Too Early To Say*), a season of play readings and now a middlebrow musical in *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Not to mention sundry changes of personnel, the emergence of a distinctive design style and a very active theatre in education programme.

Mr George’s intentions in staging *Annie Get Your Gun* are apparent, it’s that eternal directorial ambition of attracting a new audience. A very commendable ambition, too, from the man in charge of a unisex world of liberation movements, it is simply that *Hair*, *JC Superstar* and *A Little Night Music*, to name but three, have heightened audience expectations from musicals. To call a spade a spade, in 1977 *Annie* creaks.

Secondly and most unfortunately the SATC have run foul of that old problem that singers have trouble acting and actors have trouble singing. Most of them, indeed, had considerable trouble.

Those problems were exacerbated by the casting of Dorothy Vernon as Annie Oakley. She proved to be one of the better singers; she is a most able actress; she is an attractive woman with a smile that forces one to reach for that regal cliche radiant. But she is a mature and, frankly, a substantial one, while the costumes she wore did nothing to lessen her physical impact.

Opposite her Bruce Barry made a much more convincing Frank Butler. His “My Defences Are Down” with the male company was something of a show stopper in the grand old tradition. But elsewhere he too had difficulty getting the most from some of the songs.

Of the others, Edwin Hodgeman’s Charlie Davenport was typically professional; Kevin Miles’ Buffalo Bill repeated in western garb many of his mannerisms as Pistchik in *The Cherry Orchard*; Daphne Grey’s Dolly Tate was over-enthusiastic and Hedley Cullen’s Sitting Bull splendidly lugubrious.

Rodney Ford’s design was again both practical and flamboyant with ingenious and unashamedly stagey toys such as a train and mock horses. Mr Ford has now returned to England but while here he was a major acquisition for the SATC opening up and brightening the Playhouse. Hopefully his influence will linger long.

Similar talent was evident from Michael Fuller, the company’s new dancing and movement master. His Indian ceremonial dance sequence was as effective and attractive as his previous ball scene in *The Cherry Orchard*.

The orchestra directed by Joannes Roose was good and nobly resisted the temptation to dominate the cast.

In sum then, a worthwhile innovation and an engaging enough evening but one had to make too many allowances for real enjoyment.

South Australia runs to two heavily subsidised State companies, the SATC and State Opera. Perhaps for the next musical, and there is no reason why it should not be an annual event, they should get together.
Never mind the why and wherefore

H.M.S. PINAFORE

MICHAEL MORLEY


Conductor, Myer Fredman; director, Adrian Slack; set design, Jim Coogan; costumes, Quentin Hole; lighting, Alan Knox; stage manager, Lyn Fenny.

Mrs Cripps, Norma Knight; Dick Deadeye, David Brennan; Bill Bobstay, Keith Hempton; Ralph Rackstraw, Thomas Edmonds; Captain Corcoran, John Wood; Josephine, Patsy Hemingway; Sir Joseph Porter, Edward Woodward; Hebe, Angela Denning; Bob Becket, Maurice Howie.

In the face of the enormous popular success of State Opera’s current production of _H.M.S. Pinafore_ (sell out houses virtually every night) it may appear perverse or, as W.C. Fields would have it, picayune to criticise what the public wants and presumably likes. But while this _Pinafore_ does contain individual performances of much merit and isolated moments when it starts to look like something other than a carbon or Xerox copy of any of the Savoy operas, the evening is on the whole something of a disappointment.

Although _Pinafore_ has never been my personal favourite among Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas — _The Gondoliers_ is musically more inventive, _The Mikado_ theatrically more effective — it was the first I saw in a professional production.

Interestingly enough (well at least to this reviewer) two clearly remembered features of that production, seen 20 years ago, are complemented and confirmed by this one. I have no recollection whatever of the earlier Sir Joseph Porter and a very vivid one of a Captain Corcoran, who physically and vocally was impressive and forceful. And the one number which really stood out for its sparkling music and splendid staging — “Never Mind the Why and Wherefore” — received a similarly entertaining and neatly choreographed performance in this production.

As for the imbalance noted above between Sir Joseph and Captain Corcoran — well nothing could be less like the earlier Captain than John Wood’s bouncing, rotund yet acrobatic characterisation. The common denominator is the fact that he steals the show and makes Edward Woodward’s Sir Joseph appear pallid and underplayed.

No doubt Mr Woodward’s presence in the cast has served to swell audiences: yet it is not simply because of the (inevitable) comparisons with the superlative Dennis Olsen that his performance suffers. The first entry — climbing clumsily up the ship’s rigging — looks all too convincing: whereas surely the essential requirement for any performers of these central Gilbertian comic roles is the ability to make a balletic skill of such clumsiness. (Vide Olsen’s infallible capabilities in this area.)

But one could accept this lack of physical ability if it were replaced by something analogous in terms of gesture, characterisation, vocal skills. Alas, there is little in Mr Woodward’s performance which strikes the right note (no pun intended, as his singing was by no means insecure or inaudible). It may be that a little guidance from the director — in such areas as rope climbing — might have helped. For one suspects that not only Mr Woodward but the cast as a whole have not received much assistance in acquiring either a traditional Gilbertian or appropriately anti-Gilbertian style.

It may seem ungracious to criticise an actor for whose television work I have great admiration: but Mr Woodward’s reading of the role lacks projection, size and an awareness of how to play off his fellow performers. One can make allowance for the difficulties involved in tackling such a role for the first time: but for the viewer it is still rather like watching a trained sprinter stumble around the 400 metres hurdles.

No such reservations about the performances of John Wood and Patsy Hemingway. The first was easily the best thing in the production: in my experience a most untraditional view of the part, yet one that worked splendidly. Looking rather like a British naval equivalent of Hasek’s _Good Soldier Schweyk_ and full of the same ebullience and energy, his Captain Corcoran was witty, light-footed and vocally sound.
He may not have the martinet quality usually associated with the role but this was more than compensated by a consummate and sparkling direction and some wonderfully deft physical business. An always reliable performer, John Wood showed in this role what a considerable asset he is (was?) to the Company.

Although there is less scope for individual characterisation in the role of Josephine, Patsy Hemingway made her much more than the faceless songbird she usually becomes. Her voice seemed a trifle unfocussed in "Sorry her lot" with one or two pitch problems in the upper register, but she soon made up for these initial blemishes. Her The Hours Creep on Apace" in the second act, was sensitively phrased and sung with fine tonal colouring; and she was deliciously pert and appealing in the ensembles.

Thomas Edmonds was in good voice as Ralph and displayed rather more presence than usual and David Brennan made a suitably sinister Dick Deadeye — complete with cat o' nine tails, eye patch, limp and blackened teeth, while sensibly refraining from the temptation to play the part like some Portsmouth twin brother of Quasimodo.

Although the evening was not an unqualified success. The chorus were well-drilled, the ensembles precise, the sound pleasant — and for the most part singularly lacking in wit, bounce and sheer energy. The evening may have been attributable in some measure to the placing of the singers and the dry acoustic but the weaknesses were not only in these areas.

One can admire Myer Fredman's attention to detail and his moulding of the chorus. But this group of sailors sounded dull and drilled, the ensemble precise, the sound pleasant — and for the most part singularly lacking in wit, bounce and sheer energy. The evening may have been attributable in some measure to the placing of the singers and the dry acoustic but the weaknesses were not only in these areas.

Why did they do it?

**CITY SUGAR**

**PETER WARD**

City Sugar by Stephen Poliakoff. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Adelaide. Opened 6 October, 1977. Director, Brian Debnam; design, John Cervenka. Leonard Brazil, Gary Files; Rex, Jim Holt; Big John, David Hursthouse; Nicola Davies, Michele Stayner, Susan, Lainie Grugan; Jane, Rebel Russell.

About the South Australian Theatre Company's production of City Sugar enough really has been said by now. It was a terrible mistake. The play simply should not have been produced by a theatre company in search of a reputation for competence.

The cast tried, and perhaps so did the director, but the material was unyielding and raw. The awful banality, cupidity and cynicism of commercial radio, and how its relationship with consumerism causes it to be a somewhat barren voice of the market place masquerading as wholesome entertainment, is a theme worth pursuing, but not in City Sugar's simple-minded way.

The play was presented as the South Australian Theatre Company's part of an Adelaide commercial radio station's 'Life Festival', an event that in itself was a mixed bag of common and garden popular cultural events. And some marks therefore have to be awarded to the SATC for at least producing a play that tried to advance a critical point of view, but not many.

A large transistor radio ingeniously turned itself into, first, a radio sound studio, then a supermarket area, and then a teenager's bedroom. In those three areas we watched how a Disc Jockey by the name of Leonard Brazil conducted a radio competition assisted by Rex his technician and Big John, the station's news reader. Nicola Davies is the supermarket girl who enters the competition but does not win it, and she discusses that with her friend Susan. Jane wins the prize. And that is it. I have rarely seen an audience so intrinsically bored.

So the question is worth asking: why did the South Australian Theatre Company produce such a dismal confection?

Was it simply a lapse in taste, or does it indicate a more fundamental and structural disability?

Since Mr Colin George took over as Artistic Director early this year, Adelaide theatre audiences and SATC subscribers have been treated to School for Scandal, All My Sons, The Cherry Orchard; two short new plays, one by Ron Blair and the other by Michael Cove; Ruth Cracknell in Just Ruth; Annie Get Your Gun, and City Sugar.

Yet to come are Macbeth and John O'Donoghue's A Happy and Holy Occasion, while on the side-lines and yet in its own lime-light is the company's theatre-in-education activity under the direction of Roger Chapman.

On paper it's not a bad line-up of potentially significant events, but it can hardly be called gripping. Indeed, the most significant and important theatre event in Adelaide so far this year was Nimrod Theatre's Much Ado About Nothing, which really showed its audience and I hope the SATC directorate how to produce with inventiveness, style and relevance.

Colin George's direction of School for Scandal was excellent. The production worked, the play had great charm and dash. There was a sense of theatrical maturity and intelligence about the whole production. The design by Rodney Ford was excellent. But then followed a blossom-less Cherry Orchard, a dull and heavy-handed All My Sons, Annie Get Your Gun which was a sell-out in both senses of the term, and now City Sugar. Only Just Ruth and Ron Blair and Michael Cove's pieces are remembered as having a nice sense of creative tension about them.

Annie Get Your Gun can only be justified on the grounds that it brought into the playhouse theatre a great many people who would otherwise never have set foot in the place, which is something like an excuse. But not a good one. The fact that the Company decided to play it straight is the most central, and I believe damning, criticism to make about the production. And it stands as a symbol of the 1977 season up to City Sugar at least — that is to say, a season and a reorganised company that is vigorously moving it knows not where, because too often it is simply running on the spot.
Terence's mother would be proud

MISS LITCHFIELD'S RIVERINA FOLLIES

MARGUERITE WELLS

Miss Litchfield's Riverina Follies, devised by the Company, Riverina Trucking Company at Riverina CAF, Wagga. Opened 22 September, 1977.

With: Kim Hardwicke, Sharon Hillis, Jenny Leslie, Ken Moffat, Terry O'Connell, Toby Prentice; Miss Rose Litchfield, Julie Winspear; Roy Rafferty's Rhythm Boys, Jeff Browne, (fiddle/mouth harp), Alan Cutting, (keyboards), Myles O'Meara, (guitar/mandolin), Gary Peterson, (guitar).

Miss Rose Litchfield is a lady of a gentility almost divine. You can see it in the way she twists a nattily permed curl further into place or pats a diamante ear ring. Not preening, dear me, no, just a little reassurance that the exquisite picture of ladylike perfection that she presented five minutes ago has not been marred in the passing of time.

So, while directing the performance imperiously from the sidelines and filling in with a torch for a spot when the lighting fails, she still finds time to keep up with world events through the pages of the Woman's Weekly, and to ensure that young Terence O'Connell has written his weekly letter to his mother who worries about him so.

Young Terence's mother would be proud of him, though, if she could see him treading the boards, a seasoned trouper, on the Wagga leg of the Adelong — Wagga — Zanzibar tour.

One of his songs, Home made sweets (which he wrote with young Kenneth Moffat, another of the six Follies troupers), would have brought tears of pride to her eyes, as it brought tears of laughter to the audience's. It was all good clean fun for the soldiers and their girls at the swinging centre of Riverina nightlife, the Coconut Grove. (We were in 1944 at the time).

Home made sweets was the floor show, a pleasant tune, sung with firm assurance, and words that went straight to the heart — or the stomach — it was a recipe for marshmallow and chocolate roughs!

The inventiveness of the Riverina Trucking Company, in putting together this brilliant and beautiful show in four weeks, and in writing the twenty-one songs that studded it, is simply staggering. The wealth of material that they found about them, in the history, real or imaginary, of the Riverina, warms the cockles of a nationalistic heart. Though the music was generally in the American idiom, it was about Australians, for Australians and without a trace of coyness.

They seemed to feel no need to prove the legitimacy of Australian tradition, however short, as a worthy subject for theatre. They assumed it and went from there. And there was nothing tentative about the way they went, as their audacious treatment of the intrepid John Sturt shows:

'Captain Sturt had a stutter,
So he named the towns all wrong,
He named Wagga 'Wagga Wagga',
He named Grong 'Grong Grong'
And these were not the only names
That Captain Sturt mistook,
He called Gumly 'Gumly Gumly',
He called Book 'Book Book'.

No doubt that song meant slightly more to the member of the audience who assured us at interval that his address was 'Book Book, via Gumly Gumly, Wagga Wagga', but as a four part round, it beat kookaburras on old gum trees by a long way. It had the Trucking Company theatre quivering with the hilarious enthusiasm that the audience put into it, and made such a roaring finale for Act I that it inevitably upstaged Act II.

If one had to find a general fault with Trucking Company productions, and one has to look hard to find it, it would be that the execution does not always match the rigour and panache of the theatrical conception.

A fluffed line here, a glazed eye there, a cast member whose performance is, to use an O'Connell phrase, 'possibly less than excellent'. It can be explained away by the limited population resources of a big country town: when you have cast all the very good, you may sometimes have to start on the quite good, but the quality of the artistic core of the Trucking Company needs no explaining away.

In The People Show Number One and now Miss Litchfield's Riverina Follies, they have created a genre that is a perfect frame for their bubbling multiplicity of talents, without demanding a dominating Bernhardt or a Caruso to do it justice. They claim to be nothing more than the Greatest Show on Earth on its eternal provincial tour, yet they give more than one could hope for from any provincial touring company. It is the perfect compromise.
A strikingly well-made play

**GOING HOME**

**BOB ELLIS**


Jim, Chris Haywood; Zoe, Catherine Wilkin; Mike, Gary Day; Molly, Nancye Hayes; Tom, James Elliott.

Although in some ways like *Down Under*, a like-minded play by Anne Brooksbank and me about expatriate melancholics dragging their feet once more back home to the "technicolor side of the world" (where, we may be certain, their yellowing vision of a clean, well-lighted place in which to be a true artist will elude them once again) Alma de Groen's play, *Going Home*, also in three longish acts, is in some ways a much better one — sparer in its theme, crisper in its characterisation and more saddening in its delineation of the understanding female who watches, time after time, her bull-headed, overweening husband blowing it.

The husband, Jim, (Chris Haywood) a sombre navel-searcher with strict ideas of territorial pride, but for his acquiescence demands from her such humiliating terms (like immediate sexual congress, now, upstairs, in a stranger's house) that she rejects him again, but only for a time. Though full of varied guilt, Zoe decides, too late, to run away with Mike, when Mike, as is his wont, has breezily changed his mind. So the painful status quo reasserts itself, and slowly and grimly, with no real hope of greener fields, the wanderers come home. They will, at least, appreciate it now.

It's a strikingly well-made play, with a focus, exactness and structural polish that put me in mind of Simon Gray. The wit is ample and mellow and though intermittently uproarious never plays a character false for the sake of a laugh. In all its aspects except perhaps that of vulgar energy I find it superior to *A Handful of Friends*, many of whose preoccupations it shares. In particular in its delineation of the choices open to an artist — crude, flashy careerism, painful, monastic self-delusion and sour pedagogical withdrawal from the only race in the world worth running — it shows a mind of considerable multidirectional compassion. And its delineation of the choices open to a woman is masterly. You can be either, she seems to be saying, a flabby bathmat at home or a plaintive wandering shrew, but there is no middle way. At least not yet there isn't.

The production, by Richard Wherrett, was shapely and tender and made of a second act that could have been merely amusing a small masterpiece of drunken conviviality, and the set, by Ian Robinson, bulky, wooden and surrounding, a pleasure to live in. From the always excellent performances I would, in one mood, pick James Elliott's love-drained academic Yorkshireman for the gravity and pain of his crinkled deadpan and Nancye Hayes's chubby emotional derelict for the smoothness with which she slid round bug-eyed whingeing farce; in another mood Gary Day for the relish and malice of his moustached world-conquering snarl and Catherine Wilkin for her deep, calm-eyed remorse. Chris Haywood, though one of my favourite actors, and in this case a bouncy and pensive rough-hewn of laughs, was hoist on his Cockney accent and could never quite wriggle off its unlikelihood.

Clearly a classic evening of sorts, at least as good as *Down Under* (I hereby sourly acknowledge) and one well worth a revisit.

**FANSHEN**

**JOHN McCALLUM**

*Fanshen* by David Hare. Nimrod Theatre, Downstairs, Sydney, NSW. Opened 27 August 1977. Director, Richard Wherrett; designer, Eamon D'Arcy; costumes, Marea Fowler.

The play studies the political plan they are given to do this and the problems they face as they discover that politics is complex. It is not so much a political play as a play about politics itself — the relationship between the leaders and the led and the human effects of radical political change.

The directives that are given the villagers by the Communist Party, and their landlords and turn them into good communists, working for themselves and controlling the distribution of resources in their own area.

Wouldn't it be nice if more plays were broadening, uplifting, informative or mind-expanding experiences? If you could go to the theatre knowing that here the leading ideas of the time were to be enacted, and that you were about to learn something about people in the world and be imaginatively involved in something outside your experience? If we, as audiences, were prepared actively and with open minds to respond to the situation of such a play and ensure that through our participation we leave the theatre wiser and enriched?

*Fanshen* is potentially such a play. It deals with a human problem and a political process of which we have no experience in the West. The villagers of Long Bow, several hundred miles southwest of Peking, depend for their very survival on how quickly and efficiently they can come to terms with the political change which is reorganizing their lives.

It is not so much a political play as a play about politics itself — the relationship between the leaders and the led and the human effects of radical political change.

In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, and in the middle of the Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communists, the villagers have to organize for themselves the "fanshen", or revolutionary upheaval, which will take them out of their feudal dependence on their landlords and turn them into good communists, working for themselves and controlling the distribution of resources in their own area.

The play studies the political plan they are given to do this and the problems they face as they discover that politics is complex.

This is not a heavy play and could be entertaining.
which challenge all their former ideas of how to go about things, require for them a major effort of rethinking. A similar effort, at least of imaginative involvement, is required of a company that performs the play, and of an audience that hopes to get something out of it.

David Hare claims, in a note quoted in the programme, that the West, with its current political problems (of distrust between the people and their bureaucracy) has a lot to learn from the study of the political situation set forth in the play. If this is so then the cast and audience need to work hard to involve themselves without prejudice in its totally different world.

The shape of the play helps. In a Brechtian fashion it presents issues in set scenes, each illustrating a particular development and leading to a complex picture of the change in the village. Good Chinese Communists, the characters stop what they are doing for self-criticism and reevaluation. It may seem that I am complaining about precisely those things that might make an otherwise heavy play entertaining. However this is not a heavy play, and could be entertaining. This production, lacking a clear driving purpose, does get boring. In the programme Richard Wherrett writes of how the rehearsals involved Asking Basic Questions and Self-Criticism, two aspects of the political plan in Long Bow in the play. Useful though this undoubtedly is, it is a pity it didn’t also produce the commitment and personal concern that might have given this otherwise excellent production the intellectual power it needs.

There is ample evidence of his craft (a lately dismissed but ever valuable and necessary strength) in Side by Side by Sondheim. The trouble is that the show, being a pot-pourri, rips the songs from their context, expects them to stand on their own ability as self-contained testimonials, and some of them cannot stand up to the scrutiny.

Sondheim also mentioned at the Forum the value of collective effort; a successful show is built on everyone connected with it starting from the beginning and working in close co-operation. He mentioned the song “A Weekend in the Country” as a case in point. That song was written a week before the show opened, it needed the composer/lyricist to see the characters and the set (Boris Aronson’s masterpiece of waltzing sylvan glades) before he could invent that motorized set piece of a song that illustrated whole layers of troubled relationships, jealousies, intrigues and personal fears. The result was a breathtaking triumph of deft wit, concise psychology and slick stagecraft.

Well, it took long enough to get here, but the skilful pastiche evening of the best songs of Stephen Sondheim has arrived in Sydney at last and will travel on to Melbourne and Adelaide later. I must admit a powerful fascination and delight in Sondheim’s lyrics. Over five years ago I pestered my close friends silly with the cast album (newly arrived) of Sondheim’s Pacific Overtures, an evening of the best songs of Stephen Sondheim has arrived in Sydney at last and will travel on to Melbourne and Adelaide later. I must admit a powerful fascination and delight in Sondheim’s lyrics. Over five years ago I pestered my close friends silly with the cast album (newly arrived) of Sondheim’s Pacific and Gypsy, The Mad Show, and Company, and Night Music as well as a few show-stoppers from the above-mentioned and others such as Night Music and Gypsy, The Mad Show, and Pacific Overtures.

Others have said elsewhere and I’m afraid it’s true, that the present show suffers from the lack of an orchestra so that we cannot savour the songs couched in Jonathon Tunick’s exact, quicksilver orchestrations that add so much in the way of timbre, tone and emotional colour.

But Sondheim songs reasonably well sung with duo piano accompaniment is better than no Sondheim songs at all and one can only be thankful that the pro-

The star is Sondheim

SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM

WILLIAM SHOBRIDGE


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ducers have the courage to bring to Aus­tralia the work of a man whom most audiences have never heard of and who have never experienced his work at first hand. (A Little Night Music was mounted by J C Williamson’s a few years back, but that’s another story.)

Only one song of Sondheim’s has impinged on the general consciousness here in Australia and that of course is “Send in the Clowns” from Night Music. A haunting melody now fated to being mangled by almost every aspiring club chanteuse in the country.

So what’s the big drawcard here in Australia. Well, there’s Jill Perryman, a familiar and much loved stalwart of the Williamsons of yore, there’s the above song and, for Sydney, there’s... John Laws.

Laws’ heavy handed commentary peppered with stale jokes and flabby attempts at topical satire threatens at times to knacker the evening entirely. Ned Sherrin, the narrator for the London cast is a natural unaffected wit; Laws is not, let’s leave it at that. Noel Ferrier is taking over the narration for the matinees incidentally, but that still isn’t much of an improvement.

But what of the singers I hear you mumbling in exasperation. Jill Perryman is a good singer, and a considerable comedienne, but here and there she goes in for some unforgivable mugging, enough to make Jerry Lewis look like a master of understatement. In fact a degree of raged Leagues-clubbishness seems to seep into the show a little too often for my taste. Things like that are a world away from what Sondheim’s songs are about.

Sondheim is erudite and eloquent, his characters are voluble, neurotic and edgy (or at least they have been to date, God knows what they’ll be in musicals to come). The Australian cast, too jitty with first night nerviness, didn’t seem to have that persona, that patina that made the songs spring to life and remain believable.

Both Perryman and her female co-star Geraldine Morrow are good at presenting the physical, acting side of a song, but in voice they were stilted, the tone colour underlining character (or rather attitude changes within a song) did not come to the surface.

Unfortunately for Jack in the play his Virgil is Oscar Wilde and his Beatrice a plastic bag filled with warm water — not enough to bring him through to salvation. He never rises from the cell at Grafton. Jack falls into two separate halves. The first act is a straight-forward and naturalistic series of scenes between Jack and his cellmate Tom. It looks backwards from prison to the real world, as Jack explains to Tom that without someone to love, you are less human, and without the gentle civilizing influence of women, men are incomplete — animals.

The act is slow, sometimes awkward and almost embarrassingly personal. Jack is not satisfied with the companionship of his mate Tom, and makes a surrogate friend — the plastic bag — who represents his black-haired woman outside and to whom, or to which, he talks.

The act closes as Tom, who has killed the plastic bag to show Jack that it’s not real, gets frightened of his violent reaction and calls a warder.

The second act is a complete break from all this. Jack is now in the Observation Section at Long Bay Gaol and the real world is left far behind. The impersonal, functional warder of the first half becomes a frightening sadist, directly addressing the audience, beating up Jack and uniting with the Doctor (he with his baton, she with her drugs) to force Jack further on his road to destruction.

With the sort of awed reverence with which Hochhuth brings Auschwitz on stage in the final act of The Representative the naturalism of the first half is dropped.

Where human interaction is not allowed the realistic dramatic interplay of character is unsuitable. From the entrance of the warder at the beginning this act looks forward to Jack’s inevitable de­struction.

The duplex structure of this play, it has been claimed, interferes with conventional notions of dramatic unity. At interval the expectation is that the play will continue in the same vein to explore the relationship between Jack and Tom.

Tom’s total disappearance in the second half, however, and his replacement by the warder and the doctor, forcefully highlights Jack’s loneliness. It is precisely by going against the expectations of the audience for the second half that Jack achieves its galvanic power.

The play, at least in this production, seems if anything too timid in pushing this progression to its conclusion. Ken Horler appears to have hacked away from the second half, so that some of its excesses come across merely as naïve and emder.

One person who worked so hard and was largely ignored by the daily press was the sole tenor of the evening, Bartholomew John. Giving continual support, concerned only with elucidating the words and music of Sondheim, he was, as far as I was concerned the solid, secure base for the whole show.

His only drawback was a lack of definition, a certain loss of differentiation that made him seem oddly monochromatic in both voice and character, one example being his rendition of the title song from the ill-fated Anyone can Whistle. This song is a self contained laying bare of personal shortcomings, a confession, yet one that implores help. John didn’t catch those subtle gradations within the lyric and the song fell flat accordingly.

It was due, as I have said, to the fact of the songs being torn from their context, of the seamless fabric of a Prince/Sondheim show being unpicked. It was also due to the direction.

The stage was filled with business, little of it to any point. The inner logic and growth of nearly every song went for broke. If only Sondheim could have made it over as was hoped, he could have coached the the team through the rapids, guided them into a deeper awareness of each situation and character, he might have even been able to make the narrator and his narration more supportive than it was or wasn’t.

And yet, and yet, I wouldn’t have missed it for the world and I came out happy and delighted despite my misgivings. It was not an evening of total unalloyed joy as you can see, but perhaps if one looks beyond the process of this current cast towards the product of Sondheim’s impressive ability, one will be consistently delighted, amazed, and appreciative of one of the most in­novative, audacious and experimental talents in the theatre today.

‘Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing’

JACK

JOHN MCCALLUM


Director, Ken Horler; designer, Larry Eastwood; music composed by Robert Murphy.

Tom, John Clayton; Jack, Martin Harris; warder, Malcolm Keith; doctor, Barbara Dennis.

Jim McNeil has spent more than half his adult life in prison, been bashed by warders and felt the dehumanizing effects of prison life. Jack is his first play written outside, and it is bitter and passionate about the destructiveness of the prison system.

In it we are led progressively down through a series of prison cells to the hell of the maximum security section at Grafton, N.S.W. (A ripple through the audience when Grafton was first mentioned on the night I was there testifies either to the publicity the place has had recently, or to McNeil’s ability to set up his hell.)

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The play, at least in this production, seems if anything too timid in pushing this progression to its conclusion. Ken Horler appears to have hacked away from the second half, so that some of its excesses come across merely as naïve and em-
barrassing, passionate outbursts suitable for the soapbox rather than the theatre. Also the character of the female doctor, who is half sympathetic and half oppressive, confuses the earlier argument about the sexes needing each other to be complete humans. In her sinister alliance with the warden she makes Jack's otherwise merely sad relationship with his plastic bag look pathetically misguided, by taking away any justification within the play for his hopes of women.

Without daring to suggest that Jim McNeil rewrite his play I suspect the effect would be cleaner if this misogynist element were removed. An all male cast would intensify the mood of the whole play.

This play shows more clearly than any number of pieces of investigative journalism what it's like to live in prison and feel your personality being taken away. I was going to write that the rather clumsy attempt to confront the audience with its own responsibility was unnecessary, and certainly some members felt alienated and resentful of being abused.

I'm now not so sure.

There is a feeling of indulgence in the attitudes of trendy theatregoers towards playwrights who are black, or female, or ex-prisoners. I don't know how Jim McNeil feels about having his suffering and his personal commitment exploited by them, but I can sympathize with his trying to ensure that some political good will come out of it.

Certainly the cast do not lack sympathy and commitment. John Clayton and Martin Harris, old hands at this sort of thing, act with great sensitivity. Malcolm Keith captures the manic energy of the second half; and an incident at one of the previews suggests his portrait of a sadistic warden is if anything too frightening. I have said that I find the doctor out of place, but that is hardly Barbara Dennis' fault.

Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing after some other things on in Sydney at the moment, and I don't much care if Jim McNeil never polishes up his style. I just hope theatres don't try to polish it up for him. I eagerly await from Nimrod, for next year perhaps, the production of a play by a whale.

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**Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero**

**AWAY MATCH**

**REX CRAMPHORN**

*Away Match* by Peter Yeldham and Martin Worth. Marian Street Theatre, Killara NSW. Opened 1 September 1977. Director, Alistair Duncan; designer, Brian Nickless; stage manager, Frances Taylor. Tony Piper, Tom Oliver, Erica Piper, Sue Walker, Lucy Durrant, Lynn Rainbow, Michael Durrant, Vincent Ball.

*Away Match* is a mildly-diverting, commercially-intended piece whose principal themes, as reflected in the title, are marital infidelity viewed as an indoor sport and an attempt to give up smoking. The central character has been dominated by his wife throughout twelve years of marriage (it is generally agreed among the characters that she is a 'spoilt bitch') and during the action of the play he manages to give up smoking and liberate himself from her by making love to the wife of his best friend.

Despite the fact that his own wife now realizes that she loves and needs him, the central character maintains his independence at the end and it looks as if they're going to part. Actually, at curtain, (no curtain fell but one felt for one), it turns out that they're not going to part but that she's going to let him wear the pants. (She has, I think, worn pants throughout the play.)

My interest is held by the question of whether the central character will stop being a gently incompetent mouse and become a masterful new man. And, as I say, he does. A marginal question is whether the wife of the best friend will reject the 'arrangement' she has with her 'swinging' husband and throw in her lot with our hero. She doesn't. So, finally, the integrity of the two marriages is maintained — our hero's being regenerated and his best friend's continuing in its comfortably unregenerate state.

I'm at a bit of a loss for criteria in this sort of play. I guess it could be said to be successful if one accepts the characters as being in some way 'real' or well observed, or if one can somehow identify with their problems. If this is the case I must admit that I don't know anyone like Tony, Erica, Lucy and Michael.

That, of course, is not to say that there may not be just such couples in weekenders dotted all over the Isle of Sheppey (where the play is set) and elsewhere. I'm at a bit of a loss for criteria in this sort of play. I guess it could be said to be successful if one accepts the characters as being in some way 'real' or well observed, or if one can somehow identify with their problems. If this is the case I must admit that I don't know anyone like Tony, Erica, Lucy and Michael.

The comedy, in short, gave me the impression of having been added to the character material as a conventional adjunct designed to render it palatable and familiar.

I thought Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero — the boyish cuteness, the self-conscious incompetence and defensive weakness looking not a little pathetic in the mature man and shading nicely into the euphoria of new-found self-confidence. Sue Walker played his wife and didn't seem to be very comfortable in the pants (literally I didn't think they suited her), and it's a pretty unattractive character.

Lynn Rainbow played the best friend's wife to good purpose, making one quite hope she would leave her awful husband. Vincent Ball played her awful husband in a very civilised, West End sort of way. Writing about the characters and the performances as if they were somehow inextricable makes me aware that I am looking at them in rather the way people look at favourites in a soap opera.

All in all, it's the sort of play which might once have dragged its audience all the way into town to see it presented by Williamson's — Marian St sensibly brings it much closer to home.
Are wit, style and pace too much to ask for?

THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE

DOROTHY HEWETT

The Time Is Not Yet Ripe by Louis Esson. Old Tote Theatre Company, Drama Theatre, Sydney NSW. Opened 7 September 1977. Director, Peter Collingwood; designer, Anne Fraser. Doris, Helen Morse; Sydney Barratt, Neil Fitzpatrick, Miss Perkins, Joan Bruce; Sir Joseph Quiverton, Ric Hutton; Sir Henry Pillsbury, Peter Collingwood; John K Hill, Al Thomas; Lady Pillsbury, Margaret Ford; Bertie Wainwright, Robin Bowering; butler, Redmond Phillips; Otto, Roger Carroll; Harry Hopkins, Kevin Leslie, Peter Jensen, Rod Williams; Arthur Gray, Richard Collins; Violet Faulkner, Janice Finn; a fat man, Tom Farley; a cheeky youth, Greg Bepper; a working woman, Maggie Kirkpatrick, an old man, Des Rolfe.

Louis Esson's The Time Is Not Yet Ripe at the Opera House, a farce about politics in Edwardian Melbourne, should fizz and sparkle, be airily elegant and popular. How come then that the Old Tote production lay as heavily on the imagination as suet pudding?

A pity! It would have been delightful to praise this early Esson play, because the text deserves praise, and it has been wasted. Even the old man, Des Rolfe, as the witty and endearing social butterfly, Doris Quiverton, who stands for Parliament on a "Festival of Light" platform, looked enchanting, was dressed to kill, and seemed to know what style was about. But Neil Fitzpatrick as Esson's eccentric mouthpiece, Sydney Barrett, a socialist Rhodes scholar and wealthy pastoralist, just back from Oxford, seemed lost, dashing about the stage in an irritable frenzy. Fitzpatrick can do marvellous things, but this was not one of them. Perth actress, Margaret Ford, OBE, a brilliant lady, did an eighteen century comedy of manners on Lady Pillsbury, which was pretty close to the mark; Janice Finn, an actress to watch, was an incisive Violet Falkner BA, LLB, a bluestocking "new woman" with shades of Major Barbara; Joan Bruce, buried for too long in the suburban slush of Cretin Women, did a workmanlike Miss Perkins of the Anti-Socialist League, and one of my favourite Sydney actors, Robin Waring has an unerring instinct that told him he was playing a mixture of Wilde and Shaw.

Dr Phillip Parsons in his introduction to the Currency National Theatre publication of The Time Is Not Yet Ripe in 1973, describes the play as Wilde inside and Shaw outside. In the elegant Prime Minister's drawing room it is all Wilde, in the socialist club, the nicely matched Miss Quiverton's committee rooms, and the street corner political rally, it is all pure Shaw.

The political rally was the most successful scene at the Opera House due partly to its own theatrical ingenuity, (vintage car on stage, heckling crowd, Edwardian street scene,) but also to the delightful set and the nicely authentic "crowd".

What was lacking was that sense of an overall style and pace in the direction, so that every actor would fit into the quite intricate plan of the piece, every actor would know where he or she was, and what role they were playing. There was a sense that everyone was making it up as they went along, sometimes hitting the moment, but more often than not playing just off-centre.

The pace changed gear alarmingly, slowing down to a dead march, speeding up to manic proportions. It was as if the actors themselves, aware that something was wrong, were trying to push the piece along. It should need no pushing. Apart from anything else it is still chillingly topical. The Liberal PM (for Australian Liberal, as always, read Tory) makes speeches extraordinarily like Mr Fraser on the box dodging questions, although Esson's PM is more literate, the American businessman, John K Hill, who wants to Americanize Australia by canning beche-de-mer and making Chinese coffins from our cypress pine forests, because there is an unlimited market and the Liberals falling over themselves to sell him the country are all still with us.

Doris Quiverton's "We are all keenly interested in politics. It's the latest thing" is a prefiguring of Patrick White's trendy Mag in Big Toys, going off to her uranium rally for the Labor Party.

One would imagine that a play which was, in Dr Parsons' words, "quite clearly written for the well-heeled folk of Toorak village" and using an already "established range of formal and stylistic conventions" would still be relevant for the well-heeled folk of the city of Sydney, particularly an Opera House audience, and that the elegant and expensive professionalism which the play always needed, would be possible on an Old Tote subsidy.

There seemed to be no true understanding in the production of the Barrett character and philosophy. It's true that this is quite complex; Esson is not presenting us with a "real" left-wing politician, but with a true, Shavian amanuoso-socialist. An intellectual who demands that everyone live their lives to the fullest stretch of their imaginations; a sub-thumper, a disturber of the peace, an over-reacher who is absurd and touching and human and fallible, and therefore can never make a politician.

Like all Utopians who love the masses in theory, he can't stand them in practice, but he is not just a political lampoon. He is as real as the new Jim Cairns, but then nobody in Australia seems to understand Jim Cairns' motivations either.

This is the third production of The Time Is Not Yet Ripe. The first time was by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre in 1912, (in the presence of the Prime Minister Andrew Fisher,) but although the play was critically acclaimed and "hugely successful" it did not move into the commercial theatre. The second production was at the Union Theatre, Melbourne in 1972, with Esson's grand-daughter Kathie Esson, playing Doris. The production was mounted by the Trinity College and Janet Clarke Hall Dramatic Clubs.

Wit, style, and pace, some glimmering of historical sense, surely these are not too much to ask from one of the two major professional companies in Australia, but we seldom get them. Is it a failure of nerve, a failure of theatrical intelligence, or just the dreariness of an oversubsidised monolith, not visionary at all?

As Doris says, with her admirable candour, as the crowd cheers on the other side of the PM's plushy drawing room, "the band is out of tune."
Theatre/Victoria

Robin Ramsay as Henry Lawson in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of The Bastard from the Bush and other Heroes.
Photo: David Parker.

Henry Lawson is alive and well in Melbourne — twice

HENRY LAWSON

JOHN LARKIN

Director, Leonard Teale; design, Ian McPherson; lighting, Tony Watts.
Lawson, Leonard Teale.

Director, Rodney Fisher; design, Tony Tripp; lighting, Jamie Lewis.
Lawson, Robin Ramsay.

This is the year of Henry Lawson ... again ... at last ... at least, anyway, in Melbourne, where we have been blessed by two almost simultaneous presentations of the man.

First in was Leonard Teale, with his While The Billy Boils, which he has staged at the Grant Street Theatre in South Melbourne. He was only a few weeks before a season at the Russell Street Theatre for the Melbourne Theatre Company by Robin Ramsay of The Bastard From The Bush And Other Heroes.

But there has been little obvious sense of competition between the two productions, for all the apparent co-incidence of their timing.

If anything, they have probably complemented each other, first by all of a sudden drawing all this attention to one of ... each operates in quite different dimensions, so that attending both was necessary to know as much as we can about-him.

Nor was there any of that awful business of each production claiming to have the real Lawson, and, indeed, doing that might have been a problem because if one thing is clear from his confused life, it is that he was many people.

The only other reason to hold the two shows up side by side is to say the Ramsay night was much more refined, not in the sense of being gentle for Lawson was never that, but in the way of being a better distillation of the legend, holding out more depth and breadth of both information about his work and the Lawson interior.

Both men perform solo and both, quite distinctively, bear different types of resemblance to Lawson.

Teale's magnificent voice rises and falls amongst the potted palms as a guide to the many moods of the man, as well as his great sense of feeling for the land around him, his being such an involved witness when much of Australia's attention was still being diverted away from itself.

Lawson would suffer from this trend. While he longed to be taken seriously intellectually, his country was still busy being impressed by the minds of Europe.
Lawson became popular for the wrong reasons, for the repetitive stuff he turned out for his beer money. This, along with his alcohol problems, his hearing problems, his money problems, his women problems and his personality problems, frustrated him.

Teale uses much of his time to spin us the yarns, but in between, there are glimpses of Lawson himself lurking. Teale, has an edge of anxiety about the evening, which makes us wonder whether Lawson has a secret, resenting having to perform thus like a dog for his dinner, is halfway to getting drunk, again, or is it just plain shy, or is it just a kind of casual

Aided by such devices as staring very hard at individual members of the audience, and, on occasion, making exchanges with them, Teale has our attention all the way through, even when he threw away the end of the night by having Law­son break down when talking about love, and have to be helped off stage by an usherette. It was a mistake, but not bad enough to take away the taste of the billy tea brew of campfire tales.

On the other hand, the Ramsay night is an experience more for the mind. It might have been, then, more to Lawson’s liking, taking time and space to look for the lesser known outer limits of his work and inner limits of himself.

Ramsay spent much time in the Mitchell Library in Sydney researching the Lawson writings, then he devised his script, which he and Rodney Fisher then compiled and adapted together.

It should not be assumed that because Ramsay gets inside Lawson his night will be some sort of manic depressive excursion in which memory lane becomes a minefield.

We are made much aware of Lawson’s awful isolation, both real and imagined, from his country and its people, his eternal search for somewhere to lie his head, but finding it not in the city, not in the bush, not overseas, and not even within himself.

Yet, apart from his always being up against it — or perhaps, partly because of it — Lawson, through Ramsay, a most sensitive medium and imaginative enough to move more than cope with Lawson’s moods, never forgets his sense of fun, or ours.

Indeed, much of the evening is funny, a droll, ‘down-at-the-mouth-but-up-in-the-eyes, look at life back o’ Beyond, and all the way back to the city of Sydney and the oversize, according to him, offerings of London.

Robin Ramsay’s great talent for being many characters meets the needs of all the people in the Lawson stories and even improves on them, so we are constantly aware of a stage brimming and bubbling and boiling with the intensity of the Lawson perceptions.

Most of all, though, we sense Lawson’s loneliness, his trying to come to terms with being himself. In both these aspects, he was a fair and fine reflection of Australia itself. Through Ramsay, this has been re­born.

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My Fair Lady without the songs

PYGMALION

RAYMOND STANLEY

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw. Melbourne Theatre Company presentation at Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne, Victoria. Opened 15 September 1977. Director, Ray Lawler, designer, Hugh Colman. Clara Eynsford-Hill, Sally Caball; Mrs Eynsford-Hill, Jacqueline Kelleher; Freddie Eynsford-Hill, Gary Down, Eliza Doolittle, Sandy Gore; Colonel Pickering, Simon Chilvers; Henry Higgins, Frederick Parslow; Chief bystander, Roy Baldwin; Mrs Pearce, Beverley Phillips; Alfred Doolittle, Edward Hepple; Mrs Higgins, Mary Ward; Mrs Higgins’ butler, Peter Curtin; Karpathy, Robert Hewett; A Female Royalty, Beverley Phillips; Prince, Roy Baldwin; Lady-in-Waiting, Sally Caball; Hostess, Moira Claux; Other bystanders in Scene I: Peter Curtin, Robert Hewett, Moira Claux.

George Bernard Shaw wrote Pygmalion in 1912 especially for actress Mrs Patrick Campbell who, after many tribulations, played the role of Eliza Doolittle at the age of 49 in the first English production in 1914, and was still performing the role in other productions up until 1920. Only Shaw’s refusal prevented her reviving the play later. When the film was made in 1938 Mrs Campbell was approached to play Mrs Higgins, but declined, which, for history’s sake, seems a great pity.

Pygmalion was the first play by Shaw to really make money, and has continued to do so ever since. It is much more of a ‘potboiler’ than any of his others. Incidentally or not, its plot is very similar to an incident in Smollett’s novel Peregrine Pickle, which Shaw admitted having read as a youth.

Apart from the well publicised rehearsals rows between Mrs Pat, her leading man actor-manager 60-year-old Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Shaw who directed the public in 1914 were alerted before hand by press reports that Mrs Pat, during the course of the play, would speak a forbidden word which could not possibly be printed.

If not too much “funny” business is introduced into the proceedings, Shaw will remain, always partial to his main character, at that level, and with Pygmalion the roles are pretty well actor-proof. When JCW’s presented My Fair Lady John McCallum used to insist anyone could play Eliza, and proved it again and again with unknown 16-year olds from the chorus substituting for ailing leading ladies.

So quite naturally the MTC do a competent job most of the time. Sandy Gore and Frederick Parslow are fine and experienced performers, and capably fill out the parts of Eliza and Higgins. The Pickering of Simon Chilvers though is far too youthful, and indeed seems younger than Higgins, when it should be the reverse. As always with both the straight and musical versions though, it is finally Doolittle (this time Edward Hepple) who walks off with the evening’s honours.

I felt personally that, for a company of the MTC’s stature, the small part playing could have been better accomplished. Mrs Pearce was fairly woeful and Mrs Higgins appeared to be playing — on first night at least — in a different style from the rest of the cast. Her performance was straight out of a tea­cup matinee play.

Maybe actress Mary Ward was right in this approach, and the others wrong in approaching the play as a classic. For Pygmalion is Shaw’s most commercial play. So, why should the MTC be staging it when one of the company’s declared aims is “to provide for the production, representation and performance of theatrical entertainments which are not generally offered to the public by commercial management”?

There are so many other Shaw plays Australia — and Melbourne — still has never seen.

Ray Lawler, directing the play for the Melbourne Theatre Company, has used much of Shaw’s printed script for the 1938 screen version, which is quite a good idea. It brings in new characters and scenes and fills out the action, made possible by use of a revolve stage. Has this version been used before for the stage, I wonder? Certainly the recording of the play which the Redgraves made incorporates it.

And what about that word itself — bloody? That first audience greeted it with uncontrollable laughter, timed by somebody present as 75 seconds! And it caused much comment later amongst the clergy and other august bodies. Lerner and Lowe updated it to “move yer bloomin’ arse”, which was somewhat daring in the ’50s. Only a derivative four-letter word would suffice today — and even then the impact would hardly equal 1914’s ‘bloody’.

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Where the hell is Camberley?

**THE BRASS HAT**

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM


Director, Robin Lovejoy; designer, James Ridewood; stage manager, David Gratton; lighting designer, Ric Mackay-Scollay.

Lt. Col Guy Holden, Alan Edwards; Clarissa, Marcella Burgoyne; Major George Bradley, Russell Newman; Private John Brown, Douglas Hedge; Major General Charles Anderson-Green, Ron Haddrick.

The QTC, having offered us four English plays out of five at the SGIO this year (Knucklemen was the lone Aussie) is now striding to the end of the year with four more — Muschamp's Brass Hat, Gray's Otherwise Engaged, Ayckbourn's Confusions, and a country tour of the diabolical Why Not Stay for Breakfast.

How a state company can justify those last two (or The Sound of Music or Annie Get Your Gun) beats me; and though the present strong acting company will probably ensure good productions of all four, I'm also beginning to grow weary of the English, their tiresome preoccupation with their declining self-image, and the irritating assumption that the behavior of people on a small island with very different historical and cultural traditions from ours is a satisfactory image of how we think and behave.

Robin Lovejoy's director's note in the programme for The Brass Hat offered the usual fatuous rubbish about how the play's background — the hushing up of a massacre of a pro-communist village by the British Army in Malaya — is 'incidental' to its theme of social violence.

If an American wrote "The Home Life of Lieut. William Calley", would the My Lai massacre really be incidental to that play? And if Calley had driven one of his murdering soldiers to suicide in an attempt to hush up the massacre, would we really describe that as 'a human tragedy' (the words the author uses to describe the similar plot of The Brass Hat)?

And could our imaginary American author really get through two hours of dialogue without even querying whether the Americans should have been in South East Asia at all, as the Brass Hat author manages to do for the British?

There's a world of difference, to use another analogy, between showing the terrible problems of the Auschwitz Commandant who has been told to kill 100,000 Jews and only has gas for 50,000; and showing that the same nice
commandant is really a bastard at heart who's even capable of cold-bloodedly killing his assistant murderer. The Brass Hat, in short, is a limp apology for imperialistic arrogance and mass-murder, and whatever its self-pricking (one couldn't say lacerating) value for the British, it has no place on an Australian stage.

On a more trivial level the Note on the Scene — "The Living Room of the Holden's married quarters in the Camberley area... in the present time" — is a classic example of the atavistic survival in our state companies of the idea that England is the centre of the world.

Where the hell is Camberley? (I now glean from an atlas that it's the area around Sandhurst Military Academy south-west of London). In the present time?? Events in Malaysia have undergone many major changes since the post world war two events which lie behind the play.

Somebody should run an elementary course on recent Australian history for the benefit of our theatre companies and play selectors. The Chifley government supported (half heartedly I'd admit) the nationalist movements in Indonesia and South East Asia, and even during the Malaysian/Indonesian confrontation when English and Australian troops were both stationed in Malaysia, the conservative Menzies Government through Sir Garfield Barwick made it clear to the British that English and Australian intentions in South East Asia were very different.

The assumptions of Australians are not those which lie behind The Brass Hat, and those who would like our theatres to be little corners of a foreign field that are forever England need to be confronted with a few hard facts.

It's a pity I suppose to have to be so critical of a good production well acted. Ron Haddrick's presence gave an extra boost to the play, and Douglas Hedge (who showed us in St Joan that he was capable of vocal tones other than the timid nasality which is his stock in trade) displayed an emotional range and maturity which made this his best performance to date; but there's not much use admiring the shine on a rotten apple.

I cut my professional teeth as a pantomime stage manager, and the old director (whose theatrical ancestors stretched back into the nineteenth century London stage) instilled in me this maxim: theatre is the art of making the cheap look expensive. Ah happy days! The things I could do with a yard of taffeta. And the programmes! Maxim number two: You can always make money on the programmes.

So my first impressions of the production of Patrick White's The Season at Sarsaparilla at Twelfth Night Theatre were of such maxims ignored. The programme was a roneoed sheet, and the set looked as if the total budget was nothing, which it probably was. The costumes were a broad stab at 1955-1965, with about six or seven dress lengths and heel heights. That fine actress Kate Wilson was dressed as a grazier's daughter who married beneath her, and only a well sustained performance saved her from the cheap spoof genre.

The extensive use of mime (a perfect cheap and looks good device) was dreadfully executed, with gates opening different... frequently not opened at all. All in all you could have easily mistaken this production for one by a company that wasn't professional, was making no attempt to do things well, and wasn't interested in making money.

Which was a pity, for there were some good acting performances, and the play saved all. Eight years after regular professional theatre came to Brisbane, we finally get a production of a play by arguably our greatest playwright, and The Season at Sarsaparilla is arguably his greatest play. It should have been the glittering peak of our theatrical year. It's also the last production by Joan Whalley as artistic director of Twelfth Night Theatre after at least twenty years of consistent achievements there. We should have been packed in the aisles and cheering.

Instead there was perhaps a third of a house thinly scattered. The lady on my left had never been to a play before, but she'd come because she'd met the people in the next unit at Hamilton at the Peter Allen concert in the Gardens on Monday night, and since they were Twelfth Night subscribers and evidently had similar tastes, she'd tagged along to this as well. She got very restless during the second half.

Since Twelfth Night has consciously set out to create a popular and profitable musical comedy house style, salvaging their artistic sensibilities with Patrick White done on the cheap (except for 16 actor salaries) is bound to be creatively disappointing and financially disastrous.

And yet in spite of everything for me at least it was great just to see the play. So much recent Australian theatre consists of lousy scripts propped up by fine actors and imaginative directors, and here was a masterly script with some strong central acting performances. The musical rhythm of the dialogue was sheer pleasure, and the pungent dialogue often surges into the unforgettable.

This production is correctly set in 1961, the year it was penned, and it's exciting to see that time has aged but not decayed it. Australia seems to have escaped its age of Victorian prudery just as the British were escaping from it, and we've only just followed them into some semblance of honesty.

In 1961 the male hand on the female breast was automatically scissored from films, and was unheard of on stages. Patrick White's hard, direct, and relentless parade of sexuality and of human responses to it — the barren philandering pungent dialogue often surges into the unforgettable.

The wigs looked as if they'd been thrown in the street and mistaken for poodle bitches by the Sarsaparilla dog pack, and the lighting — particularly the dawn and dusk cyclorama wash — was basic crude.

The extensive use of mime (a perfect cheap and looks good device) was dreadfully executed, with gates opening different ways in different places and doors frequently not opened at all. All in all you could have easily mistaken this production for one by a company that wasn't

The production was saved by the play

THE SEASON AT SARSAPARILLA

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

The Season at Sarsaparilla by Patrick White. Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 23 September 1977. Director, Joan Whalley; designer, Jennifer Carseldine; stage manager, Paul Collings. Joylenc Pogson (Pippy), Michele Gale/Jane Hamilton; Girle Pogson, Kate Wilson; Deedrec, Sally Wilson; Harry Knott, Les Evans; Nola Boyle, Rosaline Mair Smith; Lucie Pogson, David Clendinning; Mavis Knott, Rowena Kean; Judy Pogson, Liz Burch; Roy Child, Peter Kovitz; Ron Saddwards, Geoffrey Williams; Julia Sheen, Di Eden; Ernie Boyle, Mark Orbiston; Mr Erbage, Reg Cameron; Rowley Masson, Tim Hughes; 1st ambulance man, Richard Christiansen; 2nd ambulance man, Eddie Constable.

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Playscript:

JACK

Jim McNeil
Two men in a cell, each with his own thoughts, the wall radio playing a love song. Tom gets up and switches it off. Jack looks at him.

Tom: Didn't want that, did you?
Jack: No. Thought you did.
Tom: Didn't want that, did you?
Jack: No. All that love shit.
Tom: None of it here . . .
Jack: I don't wanna get it, I wanna let it out . . . before I go fuckin' mad.
Tom: Don't look at me.

(Scene; Tom's raised eyebrows)

Jack: Not that . . . affection, y'know? (Pause; Tom's raised eyebrows) Well y'know to give some fuckin' affection to somebody! To touch, ruffle someone's hair, smile at 'em, let something go from me to them . . . y'know?

Tom: No. I hate the cunts. The lot, screws and crims both. Only affection I'd give 'em d be with a flame-thrower.
Jack: Well that's how r' startin' to feel, too! And I don' wanna!
Tom: Can't avoid it.
Jack: I wanna kill it not avoid it.
Tom: There's a few hundred swine in this joint . . . you'll have some killin' to do.
Jack: I didn't mean that . . .
Tom: Y'dunno what you mean.
Jack: No . . . no I s'pose not.
Pause; Jack is downcast.
Tom: Ah, look Jack, I been through that shit . . . wishin' things weren't like they are . . . things and people and me with 'em; but give it a few years 'n y'know it's all shit, y'can't go touchin' or rufflin' just because you feel like it, 'cause it's inside you . . . it's not inside them, they'd punch y'gob in if y'tried any a that.
Jack: Oh, yeah I know . . . but . . .
Tom: Look, Jacko, we're inside the boob — no affection for sale.
Jack: Well I'll make me own!
Tom: (grins): Whatever y'reckon, mate . . . but just don't go sneak-kissin' me.
Jack: Ha-ha. Well I'll find something . . .
Tom: Sure, why not? Go ahead mate.
Jack: You wouldn' mind . . . ?
Tom: What?
Jack: If I did?
Tom: Go f yer life.
Pause.
Jack: Cards . . . ?
Tom nods, they pick up cards and settle at the table to play. Tom deals, they play . . .

ACT ONE
Tom: How many?
Jack: Three.
He discards. Tom deals them three.
Lights down

Lights up.
The Same Setting
The cell door slamming behind Tom & Jack. They sit down wearily. Tom lighting a butt.
Tom: Ahhh! Well that’s another day up their arse . . .
Jack: Yeah, it’s good to get back in the Peter. Jesus Christ, I couldn’t hardly stand it in the yard . . . bunch’ve stone-faced morons, they shit me.
Tom: Don’t let it get y’ya.
Jack: Ah! Ah, Tom’ve y’ever really had a good look at ‘em in that yard? Ever stopped still and really looked and thought about it?
Tom: Wouldn’ want a bunka.
Jack: I mean have you ever taken in what’s goin’ on? Christ! I just stood there against the wall today, watchin’, seein’ ‘em all walkin’ along their own invisible little lines, not one of ‘em ever touchin’ another one, like a lot of numbered islands floatin’ to nowhere on a sea’ve shit! — shit! All with their eyes on the ground, all with shitpot looks on their faces, tryin’ t’look tough or somethin’, convincin’ each other what bad men they all are — balls!
Tom: Yeah, I know, you don’ have t’tell me, I know.
Jack: Y’know . . . y’walk into that yard . . . and it’s dark, dark inside their heads . . . who was that poet that wrote . . . blown at once, ‘n the yard’s dark just because they’re in it — shit. Why can’t we look at each other — why not smile at each other now’n again? Why’re we all frightened even t’brush against each other in a fuckin’ yard!

Tom has poured hot water into the bag. He puts down the jug and waits.
Tom: . . . right, now you just twist ‘er round the top of ‘er . . . yeah, ta! Jack stands happily with bag secured. Tom stands staring uncertainly.
Jack: Ah. Yeah I thought so. Been watchin’ you . . . haven’t turned a page for a long time.
Tom: No.
Jack: I do it a lot. The same thing.

Lights up. Tom is reading a book. Jack is abed cuddling his ‘woman’ against his face. He sighs and smiles, eyeing Tom.
Jack: How’s the book, mate?
Tom: Ah, it’s not bad.
Jack: What about . . .
Tom: I dunno. I’m sort’ve . . . my mind’s off somewhere else.
Jack: Ah! Yeah I thought so. Been watchin’ you . . .

Tom: (pausing): Who is?
Jack: I mean about my woman . . . it’s gonna be this . . .

Jack: No . . . ah, well . . . I dunno.
Pause (both in their own thoughts).
Jack: Hey, Tom . . . I decided already, about what I’m gonna do.
Tom: Oh y’ve got something? What . . .?
Jack: I mean about my woman . . . it’s gonna be this.
He produces an empty plastic bag.
Tom: What’s the fuckin’ joke?
Jack: Y’said last night you wouldn’t mind.
Mind what? What a y’talkin’ about?
Jack: This. It’s what I want.
Tom: For what?
Jack: I’ve told ya — for my woman.
Tom: That’s her . . .?
Jack: Yeah. (Tom starts laughing) No, look, waitin’ see . . . (Jack pulls out a tin jug of hot water from blankets under the table) . . . see, now you just hang on to the jug a minute . . . it’s hot though . . . ta, right now just pour it in gentle . . . right. Tom has poured hot water into the bag. He puts down the jug and waits.
Jack pulls out a twist fastener for Tom to hold.
Tom: . . . right, now you just twist ‘er round the top of ‘er . . . yeah, ta! Jack stands happily with bag secured. Tom stands staring uncertainly.
Tom: What’s with that . . .?
Jack: See . . . (He puts the bag in his bed, against pillow, tucking it with blankets.)
Next morning.
The bell is ringing. Tom is up and dressing.
Jack is in bed.

Tom: You'd better move . . .
Jack: I'm staying in.

Tom: So . . .
Jack: Bit of a headache . . .

Tom: I'm going to . . . from now on I'm making a sincere effort.

Jack: Thanks, mate . . . hot, is it?

Tom: I don't know I can't . . .

Jack: I oughtn't to tell you, make you sad, it made me sad . . .

Tom: You want your porridge . . .

Jack: No, no doctors. It's nothin' a day in bed won't fix.

Tom: Ah, well they'll lock you in . . .

Jack: I'm shavin' aren't I . . .

Tom: Whereabouts . . .

Jack: I oughtn't to tell you, make you sad, it made me sad . . . the bastard, he just marched up to that wire, y'know, and there's his lovely soft gentle wife waitin' there with the baby and the little girl — she was about, oh, about four years old, and she had a drawing on paper in her hand . . . that she'd done for him — the pig bastard of a thing — and it was a fuckin' windy day . . . you know how the wind whips across the front there? Well it does . . . anyway he went straight up to the wire — to his wife and kids — and never even said hello; he just started abusing her, straight away, not even hello, or waitin' for her to say it, and he started swearin' and glarin' at this woman, and she was tryin' to say somethin' but he wouldn't let her, and this little girl unrolled the drawing she'd done for the cunt and she kept wavin' it and holdin' it up and sayin' "Daddy, see my drawing, see my drawing I did for you . . . " — but he never even saw her much less heard her, all he wanted to do was be a fuckin' pig . . .

Jack: That's bonzer, Jack.

Tom: Thanks, mate . . . hot, is it?

Jack: Yeah, it matters . . . because what? Jack: Because . . . because you wouldn't understand.

Tom: Ya think so?

Jack: Yeah, ya think so . . .

Tom: Well, I'd better wake me up . . .

Jack: You just stay there . . . too cold to come out . . .

Tom: (sighs, pausing). . .

Jack: I s'pose I'd better shave . . .

Tom: You're just stayin' . . .

Jack: Well, I'd rather bein' down here . . .

Tom: You're just stayin' . . .

Jack: I'm shavin' aren't I . . .

Tom: (Pausing) . . .

Jack: Yeah, it matters . . . because what? Jack: Because . . . because you wouldn't understand.
Jack: Heeyah... Time will thread it silver through the dark falls of your hair, tracing in fine filigree the years we could not share... But for me our love is locked, and I still see you there... laughing free and loving me with Midnight in Your Hair... (Pause... he stands self-consciously.)... I mean, shit, I'm not so good at don't it, but that's how I've been feelin'... anyway, I wrote it for you, hope you like it a little bit...
He gets back into bed, nurses the bag, smiling.
There is a rattling of keys at the door.
Jack jumps up from the bed, goes towards the door, stands apprehensively. The sound of the heavy bolt being thrown, the creak of hinges... door opening:
A Voice: Get y'self dressed, feller, you're wanted at the hospital in fifteen minutes.
Jack: I'm all right.
Voice: Get dressed!
Jack: That fuckin' Tom... couldn't have told 'em properly. I'm sorry, love, but it won't take long... (He starts to dress)... just have to tell 'em I'm not dyin'... be back in a flash.
He keeps dressing. Lights down.
I was made... I was so black by the time I saw you again... except it wouldn't change so long as I never did see it, so long as I only had to see you always like you were... Midnight... anyway, see if you like it...
He gets out of bed, rummages in a box. He stands with paper in hand, recites.
Jack: Tom: Try me... because what? Why not?
Jack: Well... because you haven't got a woman. Tom, no gentling influence to make you decent... you're an animal like the rest... sorry.
Tom stares — Jack goes on combing his hair.
Tom: How'd you like a whack in the gob?
Jack: (smiling wise): See what I mean...?
Tom sighs, sits unhappily at the table.
Lights down and up again to Jack alone in the cell. The door locked. Noises outside, of screws calling masters — numbers, the roll-call, the bell ringing, the feet trampling, etc.
Jack is in bed, shaven, his hair done, etc.
He is nestling the bag to his neck, under his chin, talking to it...
Jack: I love you... y'know that? (He strokes the bag, smiling.) Just you 'n' me... (He nuzzles the bag.) Like old times... (He shakes his head, slowly, wonderingly.) Never thought we'd... Jesus. Sorry... but y'know what I mean... wasn't for you, y'know, I would've... well, I was gone mad, really mad... right off me head... like an animal. Not now, I'm all right now... thanks t'you... beautiful thing, you are... soft... at the door... you dunno what you've done for me... (He nuzzles the bag again, smiling gratefully.)
Tom: How'd you like a whack in the gob? Jack
He keeps dressing. Lights down.
We don't get it... anyway, see if you like it...
Tom: Try me... because what? Why not?
Jack: Well... because you haven't got a woman. Tom, no gentling influence to make you decent... you're an animal like the rest... sorry.
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He is nestling the bag to his neck, under his chin, talking to it...
Jack: I love you... y'know that? (He strokes the bag, smiling.) Just you 'n' me... (He nuzzles the bag.) Like old times... (He shakes his head, slowly, wonderingly.) Never thought we'd... Jesus. Sorry... but y'know what I mean... wasn't for you, y'know, I would've... well, I was gone mad, really mad... right off me head... like an animal. Not now, I'm all right now... thanks t'you... beautiful thing, you are... soft... at the door... you dunno what you've done for me... (He nuzzles the bag again, smiling gratefully.)
Tom: How'd you like a whack in the gob? Jack
He keeps dressing. Lights down.
Lights up.
The Cell. Night.
Tom stands holding the cards. Jack lies on his bed whistling softly. Tom is uneasy but.
Tom: Gonna play, mate?...?
Jack: Fuckin' amazin'...?
Tom: Eh...?
Jack: Today.
Tom: Yeah...?
Jack: Yeah.
Tom: What, yer mean good... or...?
Jack: Aww... well, educational.
Tom:... that's about the guts of what I mean... fair-dinkum.
Pause.
Tom: Ah. Well, we playin?  
Jack: Yeah... y'know, a man never thinks of what that means — fair-dinkum. It means bein' true, 'n' loyal, none of y'fuckin' about with mates or that... just goin' straight down the middle, and no shit or bein' two-faced with a mate... fair-dinkum... 
Jack, of course, is 'having-a-go' at Tom, because he is fully aware that only Tom could have caused the screw to take him to the hospital that morning... 
Pause.
Tom: Aww, well we all know that... (He shuffles the cards some more.) we gonna play now...?
Jack: See, it's in the Bible, Tom...?
Tom: Eh...?
Jack: The swine who isn't with me is against me...
Tom: Yeah... well you read that stuff... 
Jack: Stuff.
Tom: Well, y'know, I mean... 
Jack: Yeah, I read that stuff... 
Tom: I didn't mean... well, Jack, I — 
Jack: Y'said stuff. Y'meant stuff... 
Tom: Yeah, but no offence... 
Jack: That's what he said... 
Tom: Eh...?
Jack: The doctor, the quack... psychiatrist... when he got me this mornin'... he said, what's all this stuff about a bag... 
Jack: Stares hard at Tom... who can't handle it...
Tom: I'm not with it... 
Jack: Aren't ya? Oh, well, that's right, I forgot I haven't told ya... I had to front the psycho this mornin', they come and got me, made me get dressed and go to the hospital... thought it was just them bein' nuts because I was stayin' in, but no, it was to see the psycho... 
Pause. Tom avoids Jack's eyes.
Tom: Uhnn... funny.
Jack: It is, eh? The psycho, makes a man wonder what for. Don't y'reckon?
Tom: Did'nt he tell ya...?
Jack: Told me nothin'. Just asked me things... asked me was I feelin' all right, any worries, did I want to talk to somebody... y'know.
Tom: Ah... funny.
Jack: Funny all right.
Tom: Yeah.
Jack: Funny how they picked on me out've all the gaol to ask how I was... it was almost as if someone told 'em I was up to something... some dog who was jealous of me or somethin'... some swine of an informer or somethin'... 
Tom: Oh, it wouldn't be that... 
Jack: Oh yeah it must a been... I mean, how else does a man get called to the psycho? Someone's told 'em some bullshit about me, sure.
Tom: Oh... 
Jack (smiling): Anyway that's what I said to the psycho. I said — lookin' him right in the eye, I was... y'know, sincere as hell — I said, look, doctor, I'm not namin' names, but I know who's been tellin' y'things to waste your time... friend of mine, really, but can't help himself from thinkin' that somethin's wrong with everyone else... (He grins at Tom)... and I went on like that at 'im, y'know, as if I knew who'd told 'em tales but I was really worried about the bloke, tho I wouldn't say who he was in case they didn't know... sincere as you like, I was... (he chuckles).
Tom: Ah, well, that's good. Gonna have a game now?
Jack: Wonder who the bastard is... 
Tom: Oh, mightn't be anybody. Y'never find out anyway. Not worth worryin' about I don't think... what'll we play? 
Tom sits with the cards, looking at Jack.
Jack: Anyway, he done no good. I was much too fuckin' smart. Whoever he is, they're likely to call him in for a talk ... then I'd know who he was ...

Tom: ... What'll we play?

Jack: Oh, no cards for me, mate., not tonight. Gonna lie down a while ...

Jack lies down on the bed, smiling at the ceiling. Tom puts the cards down, sits unhappily.

Tom: Well you'mana make up your mind.

Jack: What's that, Tom?

Tom: What you said ... you said he asked what the stuff was about a bag, 'n' then you said he never told ya why he was seein' ya ... Pauser.

Jack: Did I say that ... ?

Tom: Y'know ya did. (Tom picks up the cards again, starts playing himself.)

Jack: Did I? Ah, well I get confused. No need for you to worry anyway, mate ... you're me mate ... (Jack reaches for the bag, holds it, talking) isn't that right, love? Tom's our mate, isn't he? Hey? 'Course he is, good old Tom ...

Jack: Anyway, how you been today? Lemme look at you ... yeah, you're just as pretty as you were this mornin'. Look at her hair, Tom: isn't that the blackest hair you've ever saw?

Jack turns his head. Jack holds the bag for him to see ... smiling, asking Tom to admire her.

Tom: Yes, Jack ... it's awfully white.

Jack: Yeah ... and it's mine, Tom.

Tom: Yeah. She's yours.

Tom throws down the cards and begins to make his bed. Jack suddenly gets up with the bag, goes and puts it on the chair by the table. Smiling & gesturing.

Jack: C'mon, love, sit there where we can see you properly! Look at her, Tom, isn't that somethin' to have in the cell?

Tom: Beautiful.

Jack: Only small, isn't she? Always was. But look at those little tits, Tom, ya givin' right off the planet ... they're drivin' you mad ... you've gotta go back and see that psycho ... please ...

The lights start to dim ... to black.

Jack: But what for, Tom ... ?

Tom (in darkness): Because you're seein' things that aren't fuckin' there ... is why.

Jack: What's not there ... ?

Tom: She's not there.

Look, Tom. I'll just get her to sit at the table again ... tell me you can't see her tell me I'm mad ... come on, love ... over here ...

Jack gets up, puts the bag on the chair. He arranges it, smiling, talking to it.

Jack: I'm sorry, love, but Tom here needs glasses ... I mean, who could miss ye ... ? Behind him Tom has taken the plastic knife in hand.

Jack: There y'are, Tom ... now look. He turns smiling an invitation to Tom. Tom shakes his head.

Tom: Nothin' there, Jacko ... Jack: You're havin' me on, Tom ... come on, why're you pretendin', hurtin' her like this?

Tom: You're havin' me on, Jacko ... I have seen her. See that hand-broom, see that psycho. Please. Tom: I can't fight so good as you ... Tom: I'm sorry, Jacko! I'm sorry, Jack...

Jack: I'm sorry, love, but Tom here needs glasses ... I mean, who could miss ye ... ?

Tom: You're mad, you bastard.

Jack: You hit me, knocked me down ... Tom: I didn't want to, Jacko ... I had —

Jack: I can't fight so good as you ... Tom: Yes you —

Jack: No I can't. No ... but I can wait longer than you ... nobody can fight so good in their sleep ...

Tom: Jacko ... mate, I'm sorry, I —

Jack: And you have to go to sleep sometime, you insane cunt — don'tcher? Tom: I had to do it, Jacko!

Jack: I'm gonna sit here, till the lights go out, and I'm not gonna sleep. Not tonight or any night. I'll be awake, awake when you go to sleep ... and then I'll sleep, because you'll never be awake again ... either.

Jack smiles, Tom stares silently, shakes his head, goes to sit on his bed, starts taking off his shoes ...

Lights down.

Lights up.

Jack sits at the table watching Tom. Tom is in bed, his back turned.

Jack: You still awake ... ?

Tom: You move or answer. Jack chuckles.

Jack: You're mad, you bastard.

Tom: Jacko! Jacko! — I'm gonna sit here, till the lights go out, and I'm not gonna sleep. Not tonight or any night. I'll be awake, awake when you go to sleep ... and then I'll sleep, because you'll never be awake again ... either.

Jack smiles, Tom stares silently, shakes his head, goes to sit on his bed, starts taking off his shoes ...

Lights down.

The prison clock strikes ten ...

Jack: I'm sorry. ... That's the last time. I'm sorry. ... I'll get you another one, I'll replace your bag in the morning.

Jack: You're mad, you bastard.

Jack: No I can't. No ... but I can wait longer than you ... nobody can fight so good in their sleep ...

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Jack smiles, Tom stares silently, shakes his head, goes to sit on his bed, starts taking off his shoes ...

Lights down.
It is no accident that Henry Lawson and his work should be going through a 
rebirth of interest. His life and work hold significance for the present 
generation of Australians.

He was, then, a champion of youth and the true workers of this country. He 
was a nationalist without any of the jingoism that sometimes occurs.

He fought his own poverty, lack of 
education and partial deafness and 
wrote himself to the top of the literary 
pole. He is one of the greats of 
Australian Literature. His determination 
is an inspiration to the youth of today.

'I hate the wrongs I read about
I hate the wrongs I see,'

Lawson writings will inspire those 
who are apathetic about the problems 
Facing this nation of ours because he 
pleads for all Australians rather than 
any particular sectional interest. His is a 
voice that should be heard once more. 
The magazine that first published his 
visionary words was The Bulletin; it was 
through its pages that he reached his 
fellow Australian. It is right that with his 
rebirth he should again reach his 
audience through a paper that still 
champions the people.

Lawson's truths still hold despite the 
changes within our society because 
Lawson was a creative visionary. He 
saw the possibilities for our country 
and our society and his words hold 
even more significance for us because 
we are Lawson's Future Vision.

'I have this to say to my people: win 
back my respect if you can!' 

His words still challenge the apathetic. 
'We'll win in the end, despite all the 
cant and hypocrisy that pervades the 
land.'

It is time for The Bulletin to reassess 
this great Australian writer and 
visionary.
'I waited two years for the right script.'

Jann quit 'live' theatre and concentrated on film work. He was not prepared to involve himself in theatre until he could put his principles regarding professionalism in theatre into practice. 'I waited two years for the right conditions.' The right conditions were a good script and a theatre whose management believed in professionalism in the theatre. The script was Marcus Cooney's 'Between The Lines'; the theatre was John Howitt's new 680 Playhouse. John had already confounded 'the knockers' by making a success of the 680 coffee theatre at Killara.

Being in the right time at the right place is the most enduring of theatrical devices and that set of coincidences played its part in Jann's return to theatre. 'I live down at Coaster's Retreat on the Pittwater; where I share a house with the actor John Jarratt and his wife Rosa. I used to see this bearded bear of a man on the ferry. I thought he was one of the local fishermen. John arrived back one Saturday with Bill Hunter, the actor, and the bearded bear. John was interested in getting Marcus to help him write the scenario for a film called 'No Heroes' which we hope will go into production next year.'

One thing led to another and Jann read a script that Marcus was finishing at that time. The script was 'Between The Lines'. Jann at that time was actively looking for possible venues. One possibility was the Wayside Chapel Theatre but they were in the throes of refurbishing the theatre and it wouldn't be ready for January 1978, at the earliest.

The search for a venue had Jann rising with the kookaburras that roost in the trees around his house and returning long after the last kookaburra had bedded down for the night. The search was successfully concluded when Jann rang Amy MacGrath whose Australia Theatre is well known to Sydney readers. Amy suggested that Jann get in touch with John Howitt Jann rang only hours after John had signed the papers to take over the Independent Theatre. John read the play and agreed to allow Jann's production to be the first play at the new Six Eighty Playhouse.

The first production in the new 680 Playhouse at 269 Miller Street is called 'Between The Lines', a play written by Marcus Cooney and starring Alexander Hay. The play is produced by Jann Harris Productions.

Jann (Yarn) Harris was one of the first graduates of the Design course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. He has worked with the Queensland Theatre Company, the Q Theatre and the Ensemble Theatre. Two years ago Jann found himself involuntarily subsidising a production he was involved with. 'I became disenchanted because of the gamesmanship played by certain people whose attitudes I believed were incompatible with professionalism within the industry.
Marcus Cooney describes himself as 'an expatriate Tasmaniac' and Tasmania as 'a great place to be from'. 'Between The Lines' is his fourth stage play to be produced. He had spent two years researching the life of Henry Lawson for a screenplay. 'I wrote the first draft of the screenplay for a bloke but he had no money to develop it so it never got off the ground'.

When the screenplay project folded Marcus decided to write something on Lawson for the stage — 'to get some return on my investment of time and mental energy'. It was easier said than done; he felt he had an obligation to the man not to misrepresent him. The obvious starting point as far as Marcus was concerned was 'how Lawson described and saw himself. There was sufficient extant correspondence to make that possible. The problem then resolved to how the material could be presented.

'I remembered how much admiration Lawson had for Dickens and that supplied my answers. Lawson was perennially broke so why shouldn't he hold a personal reading of his work to raise money.' It is out of this situation that the tensions and truths emerge in the play. Marcus admits that much of the material was written by Lawson; 'The supreme compliment for me will be if nobody can recognise where Lawson ends and Cooney begins. There was no other way to tackle the problem if I wanted to stay true to the man.'

Marcus is a retiring type and it took some persuasion to get him to talk to me. 'I don't go in much for that bullshit. I think it is valid for performers to make some comments about the characters they play. Writers are a different matter.'

He may be a retiring type but from my enquiries amongst the people who know him he is not so much Jann Harris' 'Big Bear of a man' as a wild Tasmaniac whose occasional forays from his lair on the Pittwater are always awaited with some trepidation. Perhaps there is more than the writing which makes Marcus see some parallels between his and Lawson's life.
The man chosen to play the role of Henry Lawson in 'Between The Lines', is Sydney actor Alexander Hay. Although his career began with classical training, Alex points out that 'that was only one facet. I have had many roles in the theatre — dancer, acrobat, stagehand, and scene painter as well as the familiar actor, and director. I was prepared to work at anything that advanced the knowledge at my craft.'

Alexander was a tutor at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, although he admits that he doesn't know what acting is, and whatever it is, he is perfectly certain it can't be taught; 'you can watch the rose as it grows and occasionally add a little manure'.

Alexander has always been interested in new playwriting. Robin Lovejoy and he, shares the responsibility for the first season of the 'Jane St. Theatre' in Sydney. The Jane St. Theatre was specifically founded as a venue for new Australian plays. In keeping with his interest in new plays, Alex is on the committee of the Australian National Playwrights conference and was Director at the conference in 1975.

Alex himself produced new plays by writers — Tom Keneally, Dorothy Hewett, and James Searle, at the Jane Street venue.
Eleven years ago a starry-eyed young man quit his job with B.P. Australia and launched himself in the entertainment industry. After an impressive twenty-one productions over the last eleven years, all of which were devised, produced, directed and performed in by this same young man, his future seems assured. His latest show opens in October and the Arts Council of N.S.W. want to tour the show next year. Negotiations are in progress for a National T.V. show based on the unique concept of entertainment. Not a bad success record for a man who started his own theatre because no one would give him a break.

That man is John Howitt, Producer-Proprietor of the Killara 680 Coffee Theatre in Sydney. He will celebrate the theatre's 11th birthday on Thursday October 27 with his new show 'Around the World in 80 Minutes + 10'.

John has decided to expand in other directions as well and in late 1976 he offered to purchase the Independent School of Dramatic Art from Miss Doris Fitton. The sale did not go through and after the resignation of Miss Gillian Owen, the former Principal of the School, John decided with Miss Owen to create a new school to provide a growing need for training not only for professional theatre but films and television as well.

The 680 Drama School provides a three year diploma course so only those students with potential are accepted with admission by audition only. The forty two week study year is divided into three terms with classes held in the evenings so part-time students can undertake the course while still undertaking employment outside the entertainment industry. Subjects cover voice and speech, movement with Mr. Keith Bain, well known for his movement classes, dialects, styles, make-up, modern acting and playreading.

Video and radio training for senior students is included and has become a valuable part of the course particularly with the renewed interest in the Australian film industry. It is interesting to note that the tutorial staff have a background of training at such in-
stitions as R.A.D.A., The Old Vic and the Royal Academy of Music and Drama. The school is located at Mosman, Sydney and any readers interested in making further enquiries can ring Sydney 960 3680 or write to the school at Box 371, Spit Junction, 2088.

Since the establishment of the school John has not been resting on his laurels. When the Independent Theatre at North Sydney closed after almost forty years John acquired the lease on the premises and the new 680 Playhouse officially opens its doors about the same time that John's Coffee Theatre celebrates eleven years of first class entertainment. Included in the new complex is Boo Boo's French Cafe, specialising in French pastries and an old recipe of John's grandmother, Grand-mamma's meat balls! For John the basic aim is to encourage new Australian plays and players. "But at all times we must remember to be entertaining", is the way John qualified the underlying rationale for the Playhouse.

Commercial productions will use the venue six days a week; on Sundays there will be productions from the students of the Drama School and plans are under way for lunchtime theatre. There will be space available to workshop new Australian plays and musicals; this should give added impetus to Australian writers. Every person involved in the entertainment industry must wish John Howitt the 'best of Australian'. Every venue staying open in Sydney offers that many more employment opportunities for the future.

The theatre is being redesigned to offer the greatest flexibility in mounting productions. This is good news to those of us who have suffered from tunnel vision at the Independent Theatre in the past and although no firm policy has been established John is committed to keeping the theatre alive with entertainment of the highest calibre only, whether it be drama, musicals, revue etc.
It is not often that a regional company and the Australian Opera open productions of the same opera on consecutive nights; and it is even rarer, when such a confluence does occur, that the national company comes out second best. But such a strange situation did in fact occur on 15 and 16 July last, with productions in Brisbane and Sydney of Leoncavallo's masterpiece of a little two-acter, *Pagliacci*.

Despite severe limitations imposed by a basically inhospitable venue, the Brisbane *Pagliacci* was a memorable piece of music theatre; despite all the advantages conferred by a fully professional company and a much more conducive venue, the Sydney *Pagliacci* was one of the least satisfying opera experiences it has ever been my misfortune to be confronted with. Its failure was both monumental and inexcusable on several grounds; for it arose through an almost wilful combination, seemingly, of terrible casting, poor production and unsympathetic conducting. It was doubly unfortunate because it was one half of a double bill whose other half was excellent; and because it so easily could have been a triumph instead of a disaster.

The major fault in this *Pagliacci* was Sergei Baigildin's Canio: neither vocally nor dramatically was he convincing or effective for a moment, and this part is so vital to an effective realisation of *Pagliacci* on stage that the piece simply cannot succeed without a strong Canio. Baigildin has a pleasant enough voice and stage presence; could for all I know be thoroughly acceptable in any number of other roles; but it is absurd that he was apparently chosen in preference to two other tenors either of whom would have been stunning in the part. And this is no matter of mere conjecture; for Donald Smith, who has just returned to the AO as a guest artist, is a superb Canio — one might quite justifiably go so far out on a limb as to say it is his best role, dramatically; and an unknown, locally, Sydney resident by the name of Yusef Kayrooz could also have been engaged to sing the role. In the event, Kayrooz got the Canio guernsey in Brisbane and Smith made his rapprochement with the national company as Don Jose in *Carmen*, a role he sings — as always — magnificently but acts barely adequately in the aftermath of as dynamic a singing actor as Ron Stevens.

The Brisbane coupling of *Pagliacci* with its traditional twin, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, was an unequivocal production triumph for John Thompson and his Queensland Opera Company despite the quirky acoustics of the Brisbane City Hall with its circular dome that alternately confers on singers the false impression they are being amplified artificially and that they have all but lost their voices completely merely by moving a few feet one way or the other.

Though there were flaws of detail — a surfeit of breast-beating and excessive strutting about that came perilously close to transforming drama into melodrama, and some very strange lighting effects — the overall concept of this *Cav/Pag* was a brilliant stroke of theatre that never faltered for a moment. The set (designed by James Ridewood of the Queensland Theatre Company) consisted of a huge church facade that both virtually obliterates the feeling of the naked hall and at the same time provided an ideal visual atmosphere for *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The disembodied portions of the hall's permanently resident pipe organ that peeped out from behind only served to enhance the feeling of the piece.

The orchestra, of course, had to be
stationed on the flat floor between the stage and the audience; surrounded, in the excessively wide body of the hall for its depth, by acres of open floor space which were sometimes invaded by performers — as during the religious procession in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which moved across between the audience and the orchestra before remounting the stage proper from the opposite side.

But the most striking innovation of the evening came after interval, when the itinerant troupe of players in *Pagliacci* arrived through a side door complete with a cart bearing the bits and pieces of the flimsy temporary stage that was to provide the venue for the pantomime within the opera that leads to the final denouement. On opening night, when I saw this *Cav/Pag*, Kayrooz nearly demolished the canvas-and-wood framework; on the following night, while I was enduring the Sydney *Pag*, he apparently actually did.

In the Queensland *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Valerie Hanlon was an excellent Santuzza and Robert Harrington a very good Turiddu, though they did not strike quite so many dramatic sparks off each other as is implicit in the characters; and Denis White was a thoroughly delightful romp of a night out despite the usual artistic failings of Sydney’s suburban Rockdale company and the acoustic eccentricities inevitably arising from any attempt to stage opera in the round. The idea of building a mock-desert island in the middle of Rockdale Town Hall was fine, but the actual island was somewhat precarious and cramped for the performers and it was well nigh impossible to catch all the words from any seat in the hall since on average you would only be sung at directly one-quarter of the time.

But there were many compensations in the unceasing inventiveness of Hatherley’s direction — from Crusoe’s first appearance at the desert island, borne shoulder high on a raft with choristers in the guise of sea nymphs all round, to the cascades of confetti which descended through the ceiling to mark the final wedding tableau.

And Fleance (admirably played by Hugh Monro) curls up and goes to sleep during Banquo’s pre-murder aria, waking up at the dying warning of his father and confounding the assassins by hurling a cloak at them — thus lending some credence to his escape from 20-odd well-armed thugs. The difficult twin appearances of Banquo’s ghost are effectively handled. Elsewhere the production is mostly logical and straightforward rather than spectacularly innovative; though some magical witches rather too grotesque of appearance and too heavily masked to be able to do full justice to their vocal stints.

*Connell’s Lady Macbeth was a trifle understated on opening night, but had already gained a great deal in dramatic power a couple of days later, likewise Shaw’s Macbeth. Before the season is ended, they will no doubt have consummated an audiences’ ‘Frenzy’ of high expectations.*

The following night, at the Sydney Opera House, things started off well enough when John Shaw sang a very strong Prologue, though it lacked a measure of the dramatic conviction Robert Allman has given to the part in the past. But from that point on things deteriorated alarmingly. I have already said enough about Baglidin; but his Nedda, Beryl Furlan, failed to make much of an impression either vocally or dramatically and John Pringle never came to life as her lover Silvio. Graeme Ewer’s Beppe was the best performance of the night, but the role is not important enough to salvage an otherwise unsatisfactory staging of the piece. Moffatt Oxenbould’s rethik of Stephen Hall’s original production eliminated many of its original good points without introducing any new virtues of its own. And Richard Bonyne seemed ill at ease with *Pagliacci*.

Though not, at least nearly to the same extent, with Puccini’s *Suor Angelica*, with Joan Sutherland in the title role, which completed the Sydney double bill. Indeed, this was just about as good a realisation of *Angelica* as one is ever likely to see. Sutherland was blessed with a positive bevy of female AO talent in the supporting roles (Elizabeth Fretwell, Lesley Stender, Cynthia Boulton, Heather Begg, Isobel Buchanan, Rosina Raisbeck); and sang ravishingly and acted very convincingly herself — pottering about appropriately in the background with watering can and trowel in the early stages, establishing her character before the singing took over. *Suor Angelica*, though, can probably only be seen to its best advantage when it is placed as Puccini intended, at the centre of the *Triplet*, between the fierce melodrama of *II Tabarro* and the very black comedy of Gianni Schicchi.

Robert Hatherley’s production of Offenbach’s madcap travesty of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* was a thoroughly delightful romp of a night out despite the usual artistic failings of Sydney’s suburban Rockdale company and the acoustic eccentricities inevitably arising from any attempt to stage opera in the round. The idea of building a mock-desert island in the middle of Rockdale Town Hall was fine, but the actual island was somewhat precarious and cramped for the performers and it was well nigh impossible to catch all the words from any seat in the hall since on average you would only be sung at directly one-quarter of the time.

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But far and away the greatest achievement of the operatic month was the Australian Opera’s realisation of Verdi’s ‘*Macbeth*’ production by John Copley which opened on 4 August, conducted by John Pritchard and starring John Shaw in the title role and Elizabeth Connell as Lady Macbeth. Though there were some sizeable problems at opening, there was no doubt even then that this would be one of the AO’s better efforts once it had a chance to settle down.

Much of the strength, and a little of the weakness, of this *Macbeth* must be attributed to Stefanos Lazaridis’ designs; for visually stunning as the sets are, they require intricate and cumbersome scene changes which simply cannot be accomplished with great speed — and thus inevitably underscore the episodic nature of this opera, which contains no less than 10 scenes in its four acts. This problem is most serious where it intrudes into the action the most — during the closing stages; for Verdi’s Act IV has four scenes, most of them quite short.

But there is no doubting the brilliance of the Lazaridis designs: the massive walls of open grillwork suspended ominously, the grotesquely distorted throne and cruelly evocative instruments of war; the weighty costumes with scarcely a trace of color anywhere except the flecks of red that affict the Macbeths — symbolic, no doubt, of the blood they spill or cause to be spilt till it proves their final undoing.

The lighting (attributed jointly to Copley and Roger Barratt) is equally brilliant, clothing the ominous sets with silver edges as if they are dripping-damp and clammy-cold; nearly always everything is silhouetted against a dense black background. But never is there the slightest difficulty in seeing what the audience needs to see: strategic pools of light reveal faces and action with crystal clarity.

The production copes masterfully with some of the inbuilt nuttiness of the opera. Lady Macbeth’s miraculous and illogical appearance at the end of the second witches scene, for instance, is sidestepped by a sudden scene change back to the castle in full view of the audience as Macbeth swoons (why couldn’t more of the scene changes have been handled in this expeditious and effective way?)

And Fleance (admiringly played by Hugh Monro) curls up and goes to sleep during Banquo’s pre-murder aria, waking up at the dying warning of his father and confounding the assassins by hurling a cloak at them — thus lending some credence to his escape from 20-odd well-armed thugs. The difficult twin appearances of Banquo’s ghost are effectively handled. Elsewhere the production is mostly logical and straightforward rather than spectacularly innovative; though some magical witches rather too grotesque of appearance and too heavily masked to be able to do full justice to their vocal stints.

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Overall, this was a fine realisation of an opera of considerable merit; a pleasant and tuneful piece, if at times inappropriately so; far from a masterpiece, when compared to Verdi’s last two Shakespearean operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but a very strong and effective night at the opera for all that.
World premiere season of new production by Anne Woolliams.
MELBOURNE: October '77 — SYDNEY: December '77
and for BRISBANE, CANBERRA, ADELAIDE and PERTH during the 1978 season.
Thorne, *Theatre in Australia*  
Hagen, *Respect for Acting*  

This is more than a supplement to the earlier book and it is of more than scholarly interest. What theatres they were! Barnet Levy's Theatre Royal in Sydney, opened in 1833, must have been impossibly crowded by our standards: small stuffy and uncomfortable. Built in the Georgian style of the famous restored theatre in Richmond, Yorkshire, it had different types of seating in a variety unknown in modern theatres. The different feeling in sitting in the pit, or in a box next to the proscenium, or in the upper gallery, would have been immense. Or the little ChilTERN Theatre, in Victoria built because of the slightly delayed impact of the gold rushes, in 1867.

The photographs show a dilapidated brick shed stuck on the back of what was originally a pub, but the list of entertainments that took place there makes it look almost romantic. It is fascinating to speculate on what happened in these tatty places of mass entertainment. We must be grateful to Professor Thorne for capturing this sense of our theatrical past.

The book also touches on some of the dreadful country arts centres that have been built since the second world war. Designed as all-purpose venues for plays, concerts and dances, they end up being suitable for none, where a number of smaller specialized areas might not only cater for different needs more effectively, but be cheaper to build.

In a book such as this the illustrations are obviously very important, for better than the text they can give us an idea of what these theatres were like and how it felt to be part of an audience, or a performer, in them. Unfortunately the quality of many of the pictures is very poor. The ground plans and cross-sections of theatres are straightforward and understandable, but to the layman many of the photographs are unclear and uninformative. Particularly, some of the exterior pictures are unrevealing to the untrained eye, of the interior features which the captions suggest are the point of including them. In other cases they are too dark, or simply give no idea of what the theatre feels like to be in, as in the pictures of the New Fortune Theatre in Perth and Walter Burley Griffin's Open-Air Theatre in Castlecrag, Sydney. Some of the pictures are good. If you want to find out exactly what's in a name, have a look at the photo of the Theatre Royal, Charters Towers, Queensland.

There is also what I assume to be a misprint in the caption to Illustration 2 where the date should surely be 1833, not 1883, for the Theatre Royal, Sydney. I mention this triviality because it is rather ironic. The initial confusion about that theatre arose when 1838 was misread as 1833, as Professor Thorne explains. Let us hope that researchers in 200 years will not be further confused.

Uta Hagen's book, *Respect for Acting*, respects a particular school of acting — the Method. Ms Hagen is a former pupil of Lee Strasberg and a successful professional actor and teacher in the United States. Her book is an often very personal account of the process by which actors can achieve truth in performance through finding the truth of a dramatic action in themselves. The principal device for doing this is "substitution", whereby actors use elements of their own lives and their own experience to make real for themselves the actions of the character. The example of this which I've always liked best, mainly because it's so ludicrous, is the suggestion that if you've ever wanted to kill a mosquito on a camping trip then you have the emotion-memory to play Othello. (This was given by Richard Boleslavsky, of whom Ms Hagen, through Strasberg is a grand-pupil, so to speak.)

Central to the book is a series of 10 "Object Exercises" which are intended as an equivalent to ballet exercises or music practice. Each is a way of rehearsing different sorts of behavior — in order to understand and then consolidate true, or honest action on stage.

It is difficult to say how useful this book would be for Australian actors. Certainly the conditions for actors in the United States appear very different. The commercial pressures on them seem very great and there is even less chance for ensemble work than there is here. Also I worry that these methods might lead actors even more firmly into the arms of those critics for whom the words "convincing" and "credible" are the highest praise. We need less conviction and more commitment, less credibility and more ideas.

*Respect for Acting* does demonstrate just that respect for a profession which every layman thinks he could do if he tried and of which he thinks himself a valid critic. It also shows a commendable concern for seriousness and professional self-discipline, and contains the odd refreshingly put Old Truth. If it doesn't add anything to the theory of acting, it at least gives a valuable insight into the mind and Method of an actress and teacher highly thought of in her own country.
Roger Coveil

To find another workable Mozart opera would be counted by most music lovers as one of the most agreeable kinds of present. 

Zaide, composed in 1780 when Mozart was twenty-four, is not quite that. Mozart did not finish it. Nor did he give it a title: Zaide has been extracted for general use as a title from the circumstance that it is the leading soprano's name. Furthermore, we can find better representation of the basic story idea in Zaide by turning to another German opera derived from Singspiel and other traditions in Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Harem) or The Seraglio as it is sometimes called. Mozart was six years older when he wrote Die Entführung; and it reflects his growth in musical ambition, discrimination in stagecraft and consistency of characterisation.

All the same, Zaide is evidently not to be condemned to be one of the less frequently consulted volumes in the splendid New Mozart Edition. A group of excellent solo singers (Edith Mathis, Peter Schreier, Ingvart Wixell among them) have been brought together with the Berlin State Orchestra (East Berlin, that is, where a superb tradition in the playing of Mozart is still flourishing) under the direction of Bernhard Klee to record all the music of Zaide that actually survives (Philips 6700 097; 2 discs).

It would be difficult to present this torso of Zaide in the theatre as a self-sufficient entertainment. This is where recording can rescue a substantial piece of music like this from relegation to the footnotes of musical history, and keep it permanently in circulation as living music without asking that listeners accept it as part of the standard operatic repertoire.

The remains of Zaide are quite considerable. We have fifteen numbers complete among the manuscript papers that Mozart's widow, Constanze, discovered among his effects after his death. This compares with twenty-one numbers in the complete score of Die Entführung. It would be difficult to present this torso of Zaide in the theatre as a self-sufficient entertainment. This is where recording can rescue a substantial piece of music like this from relegation to the footnotes of musical history, and keep it permanently in circulation as living music without asking that listeners accept it as part of the standard operatic repertoire.

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Ballet

Two conservative management.

It would seem to me that the Edgley organization isn't capable of thinking in the long term, specifically in terms of the effects of the its overseas ballet circuses touring Australia.

The mentality of the fast buck seems to be the driving force. Always we get these moderately good overseas ballet companies, in an overdressed, underrehearsed, badly conducted, full-length block-buster ballet. Always they are the backing to some "superstar" or other.

Since Rudolf Nureyev is a well worn name in the public mind, Edgley's always seem to think he is good for the box office health, artistic standards hardly seem to matter; not on the evidence of the material so far.

In the last few years, only two companies stand out as anything really worthwhile in presentation, in choreography or adventurousness. Those being the Nederlands Dans Theatre and the Stuttgart Ballet. Edgley's got their fingers burnt (financially speaking) with the Nederlands Dans Theatre season. But it was arguably their own fault. They over-publicised that dreary pantomime-for-the-purists ballet. Everybody flocked along to be titillated by that and ignored the other two programmes which were filled with inventive choreography of far greater worth than the tedious expanse of Mutations dragging its slow weight along.

The Edgley corporation obviously thought that Australians didn't understand modern choreography and wouldn't want it. Indeed I would even go so far as to say that Nureyev has found his influences and flung them into this hotch potch, specifically that final pas de deux in Romeo and Juliet. (Is Nureyev at last realizing that he's approaching the end of the rainbow and has decided to turn choreographer now, foisting them on some gullible company that will take them because they need his PR image for a healthy box office taking?!) Could not something of the "give'em muck, that's all they understand" mentality, in Nellie Melba's famous term apply? Do these "superstars" dance below their best level for us Down Under, treating it as a bit of a holiday?

Of course audiences will love it here in Australia, they don't go to the ballet to see good dancing, they go only for the occasion; culinary culture at its worst.

Edgley's obviously aren't going to bother to educate and inform them and thereby aid and abet the vicious circle of ignorance.

I almost didn't get to see this present version of Romeo and Juliet. Edgley's decided that Theatre Australia wasn't worthy as a publicity factor therefore no complimentary seats would be forthcoming, going instead to those scribes of towering credentials; the reviewers of the intellectual daily life's like The Sun, The Mirror and The Telegraph.

Real expanded criticism and analysis the like of which Theatre Australia is capable (and yes I think I am capable of giving it) goes for broke. It's the publicity factor that matters. Strange how Edgley's blow hot and cold with the press.

Anyway, I did get to see the ballet. I had a couple of friends in the Company and they managed to pull a swifty at the box office for me (Sol Hurok would have been proud of me).

It was just what I had expected it to be; a pompous, overblown mimsily choreographed store front window bore. Of all the R and J's, this was the worst. Indeed I would go so far as to say that Nureyev has found his influences and flung them into this hotch potch, specifically that final pas de deux on the tomb stone which bears a remarkable resemblance to Bejart's excruciating effort (set to the Berlioz music of all things).

It just wasn't good enough. To my mind, the orchestra was terrible, the set changes times with Nureyev.

I thought Nureyev's own version of Sleeping Beauty an absolute muddle. All that window dressing and itsy bitsy additions used to disguise an abysmal ignorance of what makes for choreographic structure in a full length work. The same goes for Romeo and Juliet. (Is Nureyev at last realizing that he's approaching the end of the rainbow and has decided to turn choreographer now, foisting them on some gullible company that will take them because they need his PR image for a healthy box office taking?!) Could not something of the "give'em muck, that's all they understand" mentality, in Nellie Melba's famous term apply? Do these "superstars" dance below their best level for us Down Under, treating it as a bit of a holiday?

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were interminable, the sumptuous costumes got in the way, the programmes were a rip off and of course... the over fed, over entertained audiences applauded madly in their ignorance.

Anyway, the news is that Edgley's feel that this was the last of the extravaganzas, it being too expensive to keep doing. (They say there were risks but for the life of me I can't see how.)

Look, honestly... the great draw card is Nureyev, right?

So why back him with these teeming ballet companies? Why not arrange one of those "Nureyev and Friends" parcels that always go down so well in London and New York? With the name Nureyev in the publicity blurs audiences would be assured. Yet with ballets like Pierrrot Lunaire, Apollo and the Moors Pavane, say, the overheads would be cut drastically, scenery would minimalised and Australian audiences would be given a chance to see great works by great choreographers, well danced (despite Nureyev). It would serve to educate the audiences.

In the meantime, this might be the plan for the future what with Edgley's packing Bobby Helpmann off around the world to pick up names for a choreographic jam session next year. Who knows, they might come up with something interesting next time.

Now that Anne Woolliams has resigned, what has been decided for the future of the Australian Ballet? What is Peter Bahen going to do to turn around the company after so many leave at the end of the year? Kevin Coe is going, so is Jonathan Kelly amongst others.

Are we going to get the Merry Widow until it is running out of our ears? (Let's hope that Sutherland's performance in the true and real version puts paid to it being seen in Sydney ever again).

The Board is casting around already for a replacement (John Field took one look at the contract a long time ago and by now the word must be out among the international ballet troupes). This sort of thing does nothing but engender total demoralisation amongst the dancers and apprehension amongst the audiences.

If the Board and Mr Bahen are thinking of concentrating on the full length ballets, hoping to keep their subscribers, let them remember that those subscribers are elderly, are dying off every year and the new ones are not concerned with those tawtery pantomimes.

Also they should note that the Australian Opera has had a lot of subscriptions left unreviewed by people protesting against a constant diet of things like Madame Butterfly, Carmen and Fra Diavolo.

Audience tastes change and sometimes administrations are too slow off the mark in adjusting to them.

Again it is the problem (and one that Woolliams has tried to battle) of not looking and planning far enough into the future. The Board voted recently in overwhelming confidence in Mr Bahen (who by the way is also the Secretary to the Board), and accepted with alacrity Miss Woolliams' resignation.

But underneath all the caffuffle, with charges and counter charges being laid, it would seem that trouble had been boiling within the company for a long time and Miss Woolliams was not altogether little miss-goody-two-shoes either.

For a start, when Helpmann's reign was terminated, the company looked after itself, which is absolute disaster for any company.

When Woolliams arrived with her ideas, plans and personal disciplines, quite a few toes were trodden on and some dissatisfaction was born. A group of dancers went to Bahen with a list of complaints against Woolliams, when these were brought into the open, tempers flared and so Woolliams left.

Secondly there was such an outraged reaction to Monkeys in a Cage at its Sydney premiere that the Board might have got cold feet about it all (not to stretch the analogy too far).

Personally I think Woolliams might have been at fault in dropping the Australian Ballet's oh so conservative, blue rinse audience into the deep end of modern dance so abruptly. What was needed (and is still needed) is a gradual weaning onto it so as to slowly show that there is something beyond the narrow and quickly exhausted confines of nineteenth century ballet.

Provided both money and permission were available they could have built up a storehouse of works that could take audiences on a tour of the entire lexicon of what has happened in dance since 1880.

Starting off with perhaps Coppelia (and why haven't they dusted off that one, it was always good box office?) they could continue with Fokin's Scheherazade, Carnival and Petrushka; then Massine's Le Tricorne and Parade, Nijinska's Les Noces, Kurt Joos's Green Table, Balanchine's Apollo and Four Temperaments, Ashton's Daphnis and Chloe, Macmillans Song of the Earth and, if they worked hard enough, some works by Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins' Dances at a Gathering and Prelude to the Mid afternoon of the Faun (there were plans at one stage to get that one but I believe something went wrong) and so on with Tetley, Bejart (Le Sacre), van Manen (Grosse Fuge) and ending up with say Twyla Tharp (there are plans to have her 8 Jelly Rolls next year) and of course Australian born choreographers.

All of these mentioned works are of course my taste, but I do think they are catholic enough to please a lot of people and to really develop a taste and understanding for modern dance.

Australian audiences rarely (if ever) get a chance to see these great works and the Australian Ballet of all the dance operations now functioning in this country should be doing its utmost to educating audiences. But I can't see it happening until some direly needed weeding out of the obstructive dead wood is achieved.

ARTS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

The Arts Council of South Australia is funded through State and Federal sources to encourage and maintain a varied pattern of arts provision throughout the State.

Through its network of 37 branches, whose needs and preferences are taken into account when planning touring itineraries, the Arts Council endeavours to provide even the remotest areas with a balanced programme of activities in the fields of:

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* Music
* Dance
* Crafts
* Visual Arts
* Community Arts
* Lecture Tours
* Schools Holiday Workshops
* Local and ethnic festivals

As well as supporting a regular touring schedule by the State Companies — the South Australian Theatre Company, the State Opera of South Australia, the Australian Dance Theatre (supported also by Victoria) and, when not busy in metropolitan schools, the South Australian Theatre Company's Theatre in Education team — the Arts Council also engages overseas and interstate companies to bring the best of all worlds to country audiences.

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5000
Telephone (08) 212 2644.
Two Australian films with highly contrasted theme and style were launched half way through August. Both are winners, and must inject a fortifying confidence into the local industry.

They are *The Getting of Wisdom*, produced by Phillip Adams from the novel of the same name by Henry Handel Richardson and the South Australian Film Corporation's *Storm Boy* from the book by Colin Thiele. It's interesting, though perhaps incidental that both these films came from books that are each in its own way exceptional, and were translated into film by gifted scriptwriters.

I suppose it can't be said too often that the film will be only as good as the writing. *The Getting of Wisdom* is about the impact of a tough talented little country girl on a rather snooty young ladies' academy in Melbourne, and of the academy's effect on her. The time is 1897, busts of Queen Victoria are scattered among the jars of papyrus, the too-often-cobbled heels of the student body's shoes clatter in the draughty corridors, the younger among the teachers are beginning to feel the stirrings of feminism, and the mood of the school is governed by parents and a board of governors that accepts that the rich are always right.

The little country girl is Laura Tweedle Rambotham, whose mother runs the post office at Warrenega, a one street dusty town. The snobs are tough on her clothes and her uppishness and try to do her down. She fights back, with superior knowledge gleaned from books, lies and play-acting a love affair.

She has the occasional support of one or other of the variable girls, swayed by every social breeze, and some sympathy from the assistant head mistress. The remote headmaster, the Reverend Mr Strachey, regards her with a kind of appalled interest, as if she were aphids on his standard roses.

*The Getting of Wisdom* will inevitably be compared with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, just because it is about a girls' school. But there is absolutely no connection, and no similarity in the director's style, camera work or settings. Incidentally, overseas film people may find us an odd lot, three of our best films being about schoolgirls and schoolboys — *Picnic, The Getting of Wisdom* and *The Devil's Playground*. We will be noted as a nation of pedophiles.

*The Getting of Wisdom* is a strong, lively, confident film which always knows where it is going. Produced by Philip (Don's Party) Adams for Southern Cross Films, it is directed by Bruce Beresford and photographed by Don McAlpine. The script from the short novel by Henry Handel Richardson is by Eleanor Witcombe and it all works very well. One or two solecisms may inevitably be noted, but there is nothing to make the hair stand on end.

Southern Cross found their lead in an inexperienced Melbourne girl, Susannah Fowle, 19 years old, with a decisive profile, softening dimples, a sharp voice, hoydenish walk, all qualities that suit the role. One doesn't know what else she can do, but she can certainly do Laura.

Laura/Susannah Fowle dominates, as she is meant to. But the script ingeniously places competitors all around her — the Rev. Mr Strachey, somewhat Dickensian but minus sputter or sentimentality, played by Barry Humphries; the younger cleric, the Rev. Mr Shepherd, a bully and hypocrite (John Waters); two school mistresses, Miss Zielinski, romantic and Miss Snodgrass, cynical, played by Candy Raymond and Jan Friedl; Hilary Ryan as the head girl, Evelyn, a somewhat Angels Brazil young lady, rather too smooth and beautiful to be true; the bold, coarse Lilith with her footballer's face and her push (Kim Deacon). There is an appealing portrait of a well-intentioned teacher, Miss Chapman, from Patricia Kennedy.

It would be difficult to make a period film like this without slipping occasionally...
into caricature and stereotype. The head mistress (Sheila Helpmann) falls victim to this, and so does John Waters. Perhaps unexpectedly, Barry Humphries is perfectly in control of his Mr Strachey, at the same time rigid and uneasy. He never plays for easy laughs.

One of the real attractions of The Getting of Wisdom (and a stunning exercise in casting) is the gaggle of girls at the boarding school — foolish, frolicsome, tormenting and tormented, easily diverted from friendship to enmity, curious and jealous and overtly "colonial". They are awful, but fascinating.

The Getting of Wisdom was Henry Handel Richardson's second novel, published in 1910. Her old school, PLC, was instantly recognisable and the affronted governing body retorted by removing her name from the honor roll.

Storm Boy is an instant classic, in the category of The Red Balloon and that film about the white horses of the Camargue called, I think, Crin Blanc. I can imagine Storm Boy ensconced in everybody's memory (and still showing in a thousand cinemas around the world) after we have forgotten every Disney work with the possible exception of Pinocchio.

The things to be said at once about Storm Boy is that it is entertaining, about the most necessary quality a film can have. And the film never leans on its audience with heavy messages. I suppose Fingerbone is in there, the token black, to remind us how we misinterpret Aborigines and the environment. But because David Gulpilil is so much his own man, has what a colleague accurately called "presence", and because Henri Safran directs so sensitively, there is no effect of lecturing.

The thing to be said about Storm Boy is that it is storytelling without benefit of translation. Everybody can understand what it is like to shelter from a storm, rescue men from a sinking boat, catch a fish, love an animal, sometimes want a mother, walk on a beach and eat a plate of beans.

A few subtitles would take care of opaque spots occurring in the relationship of father and son; the fewer the better, probably.

The players in this South Australian Film Corporation's picture are Greg Rowe as Mike, or Storm Boy; Peter Cummins as Hideaway Tom, the father; Gulpilil as Fingerbone, the black man. Colin Thiele, the South Australian novelist, wrote the book and Senta Berg made a screenplay from it; Henri Safran directed, Geoff Burton handled the photography and Michael Carlos's music made an astonishing match with the images.

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As for the story, it's about a boy who doesn't go to school but rafts up and down the marsh inlets all day, thinks his father the cleverest boatman in the world, rears a pelican for companionship, meets a black man named Fingerbone, thinks he might like to go to school, loses his pelican to illegal shooters, resigns himself to having only one parent.

I can't think of anywhere in the world where Storm Boy could not be enjoyed without benefit of translation. Everybody can understand what it is like to shelter from a storm, rescue men from a sinking boat, catch a fish, love an animal, sometimes want a mother, walk on a beach and eat a plate of beans.

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A.C.T.

CANBERRA PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
The Twenties And All That Jazz with John Dechirch, Caroline Gillmer and John O’Meara. Musical Director, Michael Tyack: choreography, Jillian Fitzgerald. (To 5 Nov.).

Canberra Opera and Australian Opera Studio: Mozart After Hours (18, 19 Nov.).

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 8211)
Peter and the Wolf (for schools) (1-4 Nov.). Papalassett (26 Nov.).


HIBISCUS THEATRE RESTAURANT, Macquarie (51 3131)

JIGSAW COMPANY (47 0781)
In repertory: Prometheous (upper primary), The Empty House (pre-school and infants), Crampet and Company (Special schools). Documentary on Canberra (to end Nov.).

THEATRE THREE (47 4222)
Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare. Directed by Ross McGregor (to 12 Nov.).

Canberra Theatre: by Howard Spicer, presented by arrangement with the State Opera of South Australia (secondary schools) (1-4 Nov.).

NEW SOUTH WALES

ACTOR’S COMPANY (660 2503)
No Man’s Land, by Edmund Gould, directed by John Howitt (to 31 Dec.).

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (66 661)
The Bull n Bush Show, from Frank Strain’s Theatre Restaurant, William Street, Sydney, directed by George Carden, (touring rural New South Wales to 24 Dec.).

Thursday Island Dancers, folk singer and guitarist (touring rural New South Wales to 24 Dec.).

Two, by Malcolm Frawley, Rick Maier and Peter Stephens; directed by Colin Croft; (continuing on tour of central west, north west, north coast and Hunter districts to 27 Nov.).

AUSTRALIAN OPERA (26 2976)
Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House: The Mikado (Gilbert and Sullivan): 1, 2, 3, 4 Nov., 5 Nov. (mat. and eve.), 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Nov., 12 Nov. (mat. and eve.). Conductor, William Reid or Geoffrey Arnold; producer, Brian Crossley; designer, Quentin Hole; choreographer, Keith Bain.

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE, Newtown (51 3841)

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (699 9322)
Crumpet and Company or Obsessive Behavior in Small Spaces, devised and directed by John Howitt, (to 31 Dec.).

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (909 8222)
Last for Power, or Perils at Parramatta, written and directed by Michael Boddy, (continuing).

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE RESTAURANT (977 6585)

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
Captain of Kopenhagen, by Carl Zuckmey, adapted by John Mortimer, directed by Jock Levy, designed by Roderick Shaw (continuing).

NO 86 THEATRE RESTAURANT, St. Leonards (439 8533)
Al Capone’s Birthday Party, by Pat Garvey, directed and produced by Pat Garvey, choreography by Keith Little, sets by Doug Anderson, costumes by Ray Wilson, (continuing).

OLD TOTE (663 6122)
Drama Theatre, Opera House: The Lower Depths, by Maxim Gorky, directed by Liviu Cieule, designed by Helmut Sturmer (from 2 Nov.).

Parade Theatre: Mothers and Fathers, by Joseph Musaphia, directed by Bill Redmond; designed by Mike Bridges, (to Nov. 8).

Oscars Hollywood Palace THEATRE RESTAURANT, Sans Souci (529 4455)
The Glitter Sisters, devised and written by Gary Down and Jon Finlayson, directed and staged by Jon Finlayson, musical director Garey Campbell, designed by Mike Robertson, costumes by Bill Goodwin. (continuing).

Q THEATRE, Penrith (047 21 5735)
The Murder of Maria Erin, revised by Gary Down and Jon Finlayson, ( continuing).

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY, Wagga ((069) 25 2052)
Jesu Christ Superstar, by Andrew Lloyd
WEBER and Tim Rice. Directed by Terry O’Connell. (11-25 Nov.)

ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL OPERA COMPANY (587 4813)

La Traviata (Verdi) in English: 18, 19, 25, 26 Nov. Conductor: Cedric Ashton; producer and designer, Brian Phillips.

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)

presented by the Touring Theatre Company of Sydney, directed by Leonard Lee, with June Bronhill, Yusef Kayrooz (7 to 19 Nov.).

WEBER and Tim Rice. Directed by Terry O’Connell. (11-25 Nov.)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

Side by Side, La Traviata

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

by Diedrich, Gillmer, O’May; musical direction, Michael Tyack; choreography, Jillian Fitzgerald; design, Trina Parker. With John Diedrich, Caroline Gillmer, John O’ May (from 23 Nov.).

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

by Louis Nowra. Directed by David Bell (To 12 Nov.).

CAMERATA (366 561)

A special project by the Early Childhood Drama Project:

Children’s matinees:

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)

Night Must Fall by Emlyn Williams. Directed by Jennifer Debenham. (To 12 Nov.).

The Man Who Came To Dinner by Kaufmann and Hart. Directed by Jason Sarella. (Children’s matinees: The Emperor’s Nightingale written and directed by Alan Francois.

Mr. Nobody written and directed by Eugene Hickey. (Opens 12 Nov.)

LA BOITE (36 1932)

Inner Voices by Louis Nowra. Directed by David Bell. (To 12 Nov.).

Timor a co-operative programme devised by Richard Fotheringham, John O’Toole, Rick Billinghurst, Hugh Lunn and others. (Opens 18 Nov.)

Late Night Show: Everest Hotel by Snoo Wilson. Directed by Sean Mee. (Opens 3 Nov.).

Man Of Steel, A Middle Stagers production (Opens 26 Nov.).

A special project by the Early Childhood Drama Project: Dog (Opens 28 Nov.).

CAMERATA (366 561)

Avalon Theatre

The Royal Pardon by John Arden and Marguerite D’Arcy. Directed by Coralie Hartley. (Opens 17 Nov.)

HER MAJESTY’S (221 2777)

The Pleasure of His Company by Samuel Taylor and Cornelia Otis Skinner. Directed by Mick Rodger (10-19 Nov.).

Queensland Company: A Revue, directed by Mick Rodger (10-19 Nov.).

Queensland Ballet Company; Romeo and Juliet (23-26 Nov.).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CIVIC THEATRE RESTAURANT (72 1595)

The Five Past Nine Show with Max Kay, Alice Dale, Peter Dean.

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)


THE PLAYHOUSE (25 3500)

The Brass Hat by Thomas Muschamp. Directed by Aarne Neeme. (20 Oct.-12 Nov.).


THE REGAL (81 1557)


W.A. OPERA COMPANY

At the Perth Concert Hall (28 3545)

Cavalleria Rusticana by Mascagni. With Suzanne Steele. Pagliacci by Leon Cavallo with Raymond McDonald.

VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7153)

The Soup Box Circus Christmas Extravaganza, Smakinhalks by Bob Daly, Carol Porter and Richard Murphey. Music by Matchbox.

COMEDY THEATRE (663 3211)

Big Toys by Patrick White, directed by Jim Sherman. J.C. Williamson Production presentation in association with Old Tote Theatre Co. (to 5 Nov.)

The Pleasure of His Company with Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Carol Raye, Charles Tingwell and Robert Coote. (7-19 Nov.)

THE HOOPLE THEATRE FOUNDATION

Playbox Theatre (63 4888)


Hancock’s Last Half Hour by Heathcote Williams. Featuring Bruce Myles. Directed by Graeme Bundell. (3-26 Nov. Fri. Thurs. & Sat. at 11 p.m.)

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6226)

Back to Bourke Street (continuing)

LA MAMA (347 6085)

The Bastard from the Bush (And Other Heroes) by Henry Lawson. Performed by Robin Ramsay, Rodney Fisher. Directed by Rodney Fisher, (to 19 Nov.)

with Max Kay, Alice Dale, Peter Dean.

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 2911)

Laugh After Death by Lloyd Jones (11-27 Nov.)

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 1100)

Desire Under the Elms by Eugene O’Neill. Directed by Ray Lawler; designed by Tony Tipp (from 3 Nov.)

Russell Street:

The Bastard from the Bush (And Other Heroes) by Henry Lawson. Performed by Robin Ramsay. Directed by Rodney Fisher. (to 19 Nov.).

Cop Out! by Cliff Green. Directed by Paul Karo; designed by Steve Nolan (from 24 Nov.)

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 2911)


with Dennis Olsen, June Bronhill, Thomas Edmunds and David Ravenswood. Directed by Brian Crossley. Musical Director, Terry Vaughan. (from 25 Nov.)

THEATRE AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER 1977 63
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G.P.O. Box 21,
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