Kenn Brodziak on Theatre
Jan Friedl actress & singer
New Theatre Pt I
Film Awards
Reviews.
NIMROD

Nimrod Upstairs
Until Sunday 8 October

METAMORPHOSIS

Franz Kafka
adapted for the stage and directed by
Steven Berkoff
costumes Silvia Jansons
Paul Bertram Margaret Cameron
Richard Collins Ralph Cotterill Janice Finn
Nicholas Lyon George Shevtsov

‘Expertly directed and executed’ — National Times
‘Real theatre of nightmare’ — Sydney Morning Herald
‘Ralph Cotterill, a truly remarkable performance’ — The Sun

Nimrod in the USA
Alcazar Theatre San Francisco
Gordon Chater

The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin

Steve J. Spears
director Richard Wherrett
designer Larry Eastwood
‘Brilliant’ — London Evening News
‘Spellbinding’ — London Observer
‘Hilarious’ — London Evening Standard
Now over 500 performances

Nimrod in New Zealand
Until Monday 28 September
Peter Carroll

THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

Ron Blair
directed by John Bell
designed by Larry Eastwood
Centrepoint Theatre Palmerston North
Court Theatre Christchurch, Downstage Theatre Wellington, Fortune Theatre, Dunedin
Now over 250 performances

Nimrod Downstairs
until Saturday 7 October

THERE WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS

Steve J. Spears

THE JOB

Lloyd Suttor
director Ken Horler
designer Anthony Babicci
David Argue Basia Bonkowski John Clayton

Robyn Archer John Gaden
Sharon Raschke Jerry Wesley
director Ken Horler
designer Martin Sharp
‘Could run for ever’ — Daily Telegraph
‘Very polished, savage and powerful’ — The Bulletin

Nimrod Downstairs Return Season
from Wednesday 11 October
## Theatre

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Long Live the State Theatre

The Old Tote is now dead, but the corpse goes on as the 78 season is run out under the aegis of the State. The once bustling headquarters in O'Riordan Street is now like a mausoleum, the only hum of activity coming from the workshops: the shows must go on.

One or two of the now retrenched managerial staff still haunt the place, their eyes glazed over with the blank stare of incredulousness. The shadows of the skeleton staff, kept on to provide essential services, flit hither and thither.

In the board room at an immense table sits the only real power left in the company's affairs; the liquidator. The cleared office of the erstwhile headquarters, but of course with an entirely new board. The establishment of that board is in his view the first priority and from there the appointment of an artistic director. He "hopes" an Australian will be chosen, believing there to be several who could do the job, but he will not restrict the net just to nationals.

In the gap between the end of 78 and the new venture the Drama Theatre is to be thrown open to showcase productions — which should keep the Government rent collectors happy and take a little of the urgency out of the present situation.

The Tote is dead. Long live the state company.

Au Revoir Paris

With the closing of Visions the Paris Company has been put in abeyance and may never rise again unless they get the nod as that second company.

Despite the general critical opinion that the company has been a non-starter, we believe the very boldness and scale which, because of low audiences, caused its failure, should be applauded. This over reaching should be seen as of major significance for the future. That it didn't succeed has much to do with the critical policy he is fairly tight lipped. There is a state election looming, and though, he says, this issue "is unlikely to gain more than six votes", it is for the Premier to make any announcements (probably before this edition is published). Clearly, though, the next step is a state company with a statutory basis like those of South Australia and Queensland.

There are fears that companies are never properly created out of the blue but need to grow organically from small beginnings. And even with a lead time that doesn't envisage any productions until mid 79, that still looks like hurried work to set up such a major enterprise.

The Australia Council believes there is enough money around (a possible $1.2 million) for more than one company, though the second could well involve the expansion of one already existing.

Williams does believe there will be some continuity with the Tote, in picking up the assets and personnel, even, perhaps, the old headquarters, but of course with an entirely new board. The establishment of that board is in his view the first priority and from there the appointment of an artistic director. He "hopes" an Australian will be chosen, believing there to be several who could do the job, but he will not restrict the net just to nationals.

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The Tote is dead. Long live the state company.
OPTING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

WARREN MITCHELL

"It was just one of those mad things I decided to try and it seems to have come off.

Of all the interests that I've developed in my life — and there are many — acting is the one that still appeals most of all, and next to acting is acting good words. That's why I stayed with life — and there are many — acting is the one standing on my head and I didn't want to do Shakespeare, who else?

There seemed to be omens. I saw Buzz Goodbody's version — the one we've done — at the National and liked it very much. It is a truncated version, and I think streamlined and to the point. I also read Patrick White who implies in one of his books that the role of Lear is unplayable. I was originally asked by the QTC to play the part of Shylock; well I could do that — and wherever Marietta got hers from about 150-175 a night. If they had been playing at the current venues for new work, Nimrod Downstairs or Jane Street, they would have been triumphs, packed out and with extended seasons.

I hope that the Paris has shown that a closer relationship between artists and administration can be made; it's a two way thing, not just for the artists to put their point of view, but also to realise the administrative problems. And also that we will see a continuing concern with new work, even if it does have to be heavily subsidised.

There have been talks between myself, Rex and the NIDA/Jane Street people which may emerge into a season next year that incorporates the best of Jane Street and Paris; and it won't be in either of those previous venues. I will be going to rehearse Superstar now, and then take a break, but I hope to be involved in theatre here again towards the middle of next year.

Finally, we've placed in the Opera House archives the press book of the Paris Theatre. It should be made compulsory reading to those who think of performing new work or starting new companies."

WHAT WENT RIGHT ABOUT PARIS

JIM SHARMAN

"Everyone who wants to write about it wants to know what went wrong with the Paris. We produced two major new works and we're pretty pleased with the results. The only question was overestimating the audience who would support the high risk policy of only new works; after the response to Sarsaparilla and Big Toys there seemed to be an audience waiting. Clearly anyone producing new work in the future should do it couched among more standard productions. Of the two shows one was well received critically, and one badly; but the audience figures were very much the same for both — about 150-175 a night. If they had been playing at the current venues for new work, Nimrod Downstairs or Jane Street, they would have been triumphs, packed out and with extended seasons.

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THE OPERA HOUSE AFFAIR

CHARLES BUTTROSE

"This year the Australia Council is dividing its annual report into two parts; a review of this year's work and the official report about grants etc. Anything that's been in the papers so far has been speculation as it's not being released till 19th September. The Editor of The Australian said his information fell off the back of a truck — and wherever Marietta got hers from about the Council's view it was as usual totally wrong. There is a review of the Opera House and the Council does not think any of the theatres in it are ideal. What The Australian said was that the size of the Opera Theatre made the economics of running an opera company there more than usually difficult. It only holds 1,500 people, and several hundred of the seats have bad sightlines. No one has ever said, however, that it should be destroyed."

MOMMA'S SMASH HIT

DENNIS FEIL, Tasmanian Puppet Theatre.

"We're very happy with our latest touring season in Adelaide and Melbourne. We did all our children's shows during the day at the Space in the Festival Centre. They were sold out and had a very good reception. In the evening we played our adult show Momma's Little Horror Show, and the reviews to that have been fantastic too. Someone from the INSEA Congress suggested we take it to Singapore as they would never have seen anything like it, so perhaps moves might be made in that direction.

We haven't played in the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant situation before, but it looks as if it's going to suit us very well. Our designer, Jenny Davidson has been down there measuring up and we should fit in perfectly. Following that season we go on a three week tour with the Victorian Arts Council; two weeks around the schools of outer Melbourne, and a week in Gippsland, with The Golden Nugget Show.

After that we have a lot of preparations to make for the International Puppet Festival which is being held in Hobart between the 1st and 7th of January next year, we are acting as hosts. We are also working on a new show for adults, following the success of Momma. It's going to be a cabaret evening."

WHO NEEDS WHIPBIRDS?

JOHN SPICER, Lieder Southern Regional Theatre.

"When the Lieder Theatre approached me in 1971 it was going through a bad stage; the upshot was that I found myself not only giving advice, but ending up as president and helping to produce plays. I started off as an actor in England at Stratford and my wife Mary used to act all over England, especially London, and on Broadway. We gave it all up when we came out here to live on the land. In 1975, there were consultations with the Community Arts Officer at Bowral, and it was agreed that there was room for a regional theatre to tour the area using Goulburn as a base. It was around then I (Continued on page 56)"
Dear Sir,

My indignation grows steadily less Christian. Brigette Kilmartin’s letter in your August 1978 issue turns me towards older and more decidedly fractious deities. Actually, this should stand me in a good stead should Ms Kilmartin’s projected ideal for Australian theatre ever come to pass. "...active heated dissent, genuine argument and conflict..."

When you think about it, it’s not a bad definition of the second world war. Are we going to have body counts too?

The NIDA auditioning procedures as described in the June 1978 edition of this magazine are what we feel at the moment to be the best procedures open to us. It could of course, change next year or the year after that. After all, it is an assessment procedure and should be kept as flexible as possible.

I am unaware of any institute, be it of educational or vocational orientation, that has yet devised a process of assessment perfectly satisfactory to all concerned. This does not prevent us from being aware of the problem. Certainly we have not yet commissioned a sign reading PAINLESS AUDITIONS HELD HERE despite the implications of your correspondent.

Ms Kilmartin wants NIDA to scorch the pages of Theatre Australia with discussion. Well, that’s OK. Just put up a reasonable argument and we’ll have a bash at it. But for Baal’s sake, stop trying to defend Bea Star’s article as though it contained more than a modicum of integrity.

Yours faithfully,
(but only just)
Peter Carmody
NIDA

Dear Sir,

Further to W P Ryan’s enquiry in your August edition on behalf of the Canberra Repertory Society, I hope the following information will be of interest:

Julius Knight, a handsome, widely-respected and extremely popular actor of the "old school", was born at Dumfries, Scotland, in 1863. His first stage appearance was at Llandudno, Wales, in 1884. Seven years later he made his London debut in Theodora at the New Olympic Theatre. He worked for three years in Sir Henry Irving’s company, and made his first visit to Australia in 1897, appearing in The Sign of the Cross, A Royal Divorce, The Prisoner of Zenda, The Lady of Lyons, etc. Back in England he appeared with Mrs Langtry in Mademoiselle Mers, then he returned to Australia in 1904 with Maud Jeffries as his leading lady. Maud Jeffries was born in Mississippi in 1869. She made her first appearance at Daly’s Theatre, New York, in 1889, but it was her work in London, where she played in Wilson Barrett’s company for many years, that brought her stardom. She first came to Australia, with Barrett, in 1897. During their 1904-6 visit, she and Julius Knight starred in such dramas as Resurrection, The Darling of the Gods, The Eternal City, If I Were King, Comedy and Tragedy, His Majesty’s Servant, David Garrick, Pygmalion and Galatea, etc. In 1904, Maud Jeffries married a wealthy Australian pastoralist, James Nott Osbourne, and eventually retired from the stage to settle at Gundaroo, New South Wales. She died on 27th September, 1946, aged 76.

Knight visited Australia again in 1910, playing in The Third Degree, Henry of Navarre, The Sign of the Cross, etc. He was back in 1914-5, starring in Bella Donna, Milestones, The Silver King, Monsieur Beaurepaire, The Lifeguardsman, Diplomacy, etc, and presenting dramatic recitations at the Tivoli. His last visit to Australia was in 1923, when he again appeared at the Tivoli, with scenes from the great dramas in which he had once starred. Julius Knight died on 21st February, 1941, at the age of 78.

Yours faithfully,
Frank Van Straten
South Yarra, Victoria.

International Puppet Festival
1-7 January 1979. Hobart

The theme for the Festival is PUPPETS: MIME, MASK, MOVEMENT AND SOUND.
The programme will provide for the exploration of these concepts through performances, workshops, seminars, improvisation, discussion and exhibitions.

International companies and guests include:
THE TANGSHAN SHADOW PUPPET THEATRE from the Peoples’ Republic of China.
THE PUK PUPPET THEATRE from Japan.
JOHN BLUNDALL from the U.K.
SERGEI OBRAZTSOV from the U.S.S.R.

The Festival is organised by the Australian Society for Education through the Arts, with the support of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board and Myer.

For information and registration contact:
THE ADMINISTRATOR, INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL 81 SALAMANCA PLACE, HOBART, TASMANIA, 7000.
Jan Friedl —
a passion for work with others.

Bruce Williams

Jan Friedl is one of those who emerged from the education mill in the sixties to find themselves part of the new, new Australian drama. Now that the talk of renaissance has died down, and limitless horizons have been replaced by a few, increasingly familiar views, actors once more are searching for direction. There is a strong, consistent line of development in Jan Friedl's career. Her interests haven't wavered, but it's become harder for her, as for others, to see just where those interests might best find a home.

After Melbourne University, where she wrote a thesis about Gorki, Lenin and the role of the political artist, she taught for a while at the State College of Victoria. From there, the line leads straight to the show about Brecht which she and Martin Friedl, the composer, together with Mick Rodger are currently devising with the aid of a grant from the Australia Council. Nowadays, however, Jan has a few reservations about the academic outlook. She was enthusiastic about John Willett's recent Melbourne lectures in Berlin in the twenties, not only because they were timely for research she's doing for the Brecht show, but because of the man's love for the theatre and his abundance of information informed by that love. A welcome contrast, she thought, to academics who have nothing but theory to offer. When we talked about new University courses in drama (Deakin has begun; La Trobe is moving towards them) she raised at least one eyebrow. Where are the actors coming from, she wanted to know?

As with academia, so with politics. She finds she isn't attracted to women's theatre. This is consistent with her earlier preference for Rosa Luxemburg over Clara Zeikin, a preference for the high road of change rather than the detours that so often turn out to be dead ends. She's sceptical, too, about the view that a political theatre begins with the liberation of the actor. "Who wants to pay to watch improvisations?" Here again, she is conscious of a change from the expansive mood she shared in a few years ago. Her preference is for a playwrights' theatre.

She worries that managements have begun to need to turn the theatre from a home of illusions to a home of experiences. Jan Friedl, at least, has no illusions about how hard a task that is.

The Brecht show arose from a number of directions; among them, Jan's admiration for Eisler and Dessau, who succeeded Kurt Weill, have had less than their due. The piece will focus on the playwright's last years, after his return to East Germany. "He was less a dramatist, then, than an introspective poet with a lot on his mind." The show will work back into his earlier years, to take in, amongst other things, Brecht's attitudes to women. Interestingly, Jan thinks Brecht has more in common with Galy Gay the reconstructed hero of Mann ist Mann than most accounts of him suggest. In a way, she thinks, the show will challenge Brecht's own view of himself: dialectics applied to the diarist. Mick Rodger will direct a cast of two; the show opens at the Arena Theatre, Melbourne, in November, and goes on tour to Adelaide, probably to The Space.

From Just Between Ourselves, Jan went into the new Victorian Opera season, Adventures in Opera, playing multiple roles in Sin: An Immoral Fable in Seven Deadly Acts and Entr'actes by Martin Friedl and Jack Hibberd. I didn't envy her having to appear as the suffering mother (dowdy coat and scarf) whose son is wrested away by the warmongers. On the whole, that night, I felt, watching her resourceful performance (she's a good singer, as well) that a theatre she could believe in wholly was still a long way away. The shortcomings of "straight" and "alternative" theatre can't be overcome with goodwill missions, like this at the Victorian Opera. Brecht talked of the effort needed to turn the theatre from a home of illusions to a home of experiences. Jan Friedl, at least, has no illusions about how hard a task that is.

Max Richards and Bob Evans.

So Jan Friedl finds herself in a profession where the options are far less clear than when she began. She hasn't opted either for the committed theatre, despite some years with the APG, nor settled for a safe professional berth. It might look as though she has. After all, she's now established (though she winces at the word) in the Melbourne Theatre Company, playing substantial roles. She gets her share of TV work as well. When we talked, she was appearing in her second Ayckbourn play for the MTC, Just Between Ourselves, having already played the would-be suicidal lady in Absurd Person Singular. "Why do I get to play the freaks?" But the MTC, for her, is still a challenge, rather than a refuge. Working with groups like the APG, she says, there's a feeling that your integrity is somehow guaranteed. At the MTC you have to work much harder to feel that — the easy-going audience is the main reason. I had a strong impression, though, that to look at acting in this way, as something entirely personal, was alien to her. "I want to do something that comes from me", she said, but in the least assuming of tones. As in our conversation she was most at ease talking about others, she wants a theatre she can wholly believe in and contribute towards, not only as an actress, but as a full collaborator. One of the things she likes most about Brecht is his passion for work with others.

The Brecht show arose from a number of directions; among them, Jan's admiration for him, and Martin's feeling that composers like Eisler and Dessau, who succeeded Kurt Weill,
The INSEA Congress — Arts in Cultural Diversity

Solrun Hoaas

The 23rd World Congress of The International Society for Education Through Art (INSEA), held in Adelaide 12-19 August, on the theme of 'Arts in Cultural Diversity', was like a mammoth marketplace with far too many events competing for attention. One is left with a sad sense of waste: rather than opt for a showcase program, it might have more profitably channelled efforts into a smaller-scale situation with more potential for interaction between artists, educators and theoreticians.

On the surface of it the congress was superbly organised with keynote addresses in the Festival Centre in the morning, followed by twenty to thirty special-interest papers to choose between and as great a variety of symposia or workshops in the afternoon. To sample the diversity of the latter: Wayang puppet theatre, Classical Indian dance, Post Modern Dance with The Dance Exchange, Bruce Petty on 'Humorous Art and the Serious Knowledge Gaps', John Flaus on 'Cultural Diversity in the Australian Film', Frances Colyer with The Cockpit Arts Workshop, several sessions on puppetry, drama in education and community arts etc. In addition there were continuing children's activities each day: Role Play Workshop by Blue Folk Community Arts Association, performances by Salamanca Theatre Company, State Opera, Toe Truck Company, Tasmanian Puppet Theatre and numerous others.

For some, the congress undoubtedly provided a framework in which to explore their own work further under pressure. Peter Oyston's 'Communication Skills Workshop', for instance, had students from the Victorian College of the Arts utilising improvisation and group dynamics to write a play throughout the week. For others in community arts the verbatising by educators of their own ideals was a useful guide to how to apply for funding.

Yet for many practitioners of the arts a gap was felt between their own concerns and those of the educators, between their own form of expression and the theory formulating language of the keynote addresses. The immediate impact and simplicity of Bruce Petty's pulleys or brick-walls struck me as a far better argument for valuing the arts on par with the sciences in educational curricula than the philosophical argument for objectivity in art evaluation. Sadly, however, the latter may well be the most effective weapon against the decision-makers who throw the arts, foreign languages and home economics into one big bag of less-important subjects scheduled during the sleepy hours that conflict with school excursions.

As a focal-point towards unity within the sprawling congress the keynote addresses had an unfortunate male, anglo-saxon, and English-speaking bias for an international UNESCO-sponsored congress, even given its location in Australia. All fourteen speakers were from American, British, Australian or New Zealand institutions. This coloured the frame-of-reference for the conference, the definition of 'our own culture', which a note of caution, offered at the end of the week, said we must know before 'celebrating cultural diversity' and evaluating 'other' cultures. Rather than this 'we' — 'they' approach I should have preferred one of greater emphasis on releasing the imagination to equip children to create their own cultures.

The educator's instinct to preserve order and to pull back if anyone goes too far out on a limb of experimentation did not go unnoticed in several conference sessions. After a superb presentation by John Fox (Artistic Director, Galactic Smallholdings) of 'naming ceremonies' in which the Welfare State artists create a space, drawing on various archetypal symbols and ritual sources, to provide a new sense of identity when parents give children names, one lady said she saw it as an 'anathema'. Despite its considerable British Arts Council funding, the group, however, does not appear afraid of excommunication from theatrical or other orthodoxies. Drawing on the ritual of medieval Europe and other cultures, they create their own symbols and 'construct objects for people to hang their imagination on', often staging events with festival excitement in depressed city areas. Attempting to break down boundaries between art forms, the work of this 'Fine Arts Circus' is very physical and pragmatic and based on a relatedness between various forms of expression.

He sees his role essentially, says John Fox, as drawing on various archetypal symbols and reference for the conference, the definition of ritual sources, to provide a new sense of identity, to equip children to create their own cultures.

In arguing the case for the arts in education by placing 'art in mind'. Robert W Witkin (The Intelligence of Feeling) suggested that 'events in themselves are not boxed in forms', but rather they are 'dynamic and fluid'. Memory boxes them in order to conserve and adds to them in order to interpret. Therefore, and because one person could not even experience five per cent of the INSEA event, I hesitate to speak of the congress that was or was not. It still has tentacles.

To see the world as it is, suggests Witkin, is to see 'a dynamic web of relatedness. To have creative vision is to surrender picturing and memory in order to touch this web of relatedness with the mind.'

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The Continuing Saga of Twelfth Night

Veronica Kelly

which houses it, and as a potential artistic disaster. And a financial one, judging by In Praise of Love which achieved 35% houses. Who needs it? And in view of the deserved fate of the Tote, will we really be getting it?

It looks like it’s up to you, Artistic Director. An appropriate appointment (this time around with no heavy stuff?) now seems the crux of the Theatre’s future. The Twelfth Night Board has fought with Tartaric energy to nurse the Theatre through this year’s economic convulsions, including a four week period when the State Government requested a suspension of operations. It would be sickening if this gritty determination to save Twelfth Night financially were to be wasted amid a general forgetfulness of what, ultimately, it is to be saved for.

Meanwhile, professional theatre in Brisbane is not dead this year; it’s just moved to new addresses. David Clendinning’s Brisbane Actors’ Theatre ran a sell-out season of Chekhov and Ionesco at Kelvin Grove CAE, followed by schools tours. Currently the BAC is playing Ayckbourn’s uncompromising Just Between Ourselves in — wait for it — Twelfth Night Theatre. One of the many ironies is that the Twelfth Night Company can barely afford to play in its own house, while the Building Trust rents the theatre to outsiders at half price — hard to tell whether they’re being sardonic or just pragmatic.

Ron Finney put on a season of that old boulevard toe tapper, Sartre’s In Camera, in a freezing church hall in the Valley — packed out both with unsolicited school audiences and the aforementioned oiks. Both Clendinning and Finney were rejected as candidates for the Twelfth Night Artistic Directorship last December. The grass certainly isn’t growing under the feet of the professional directors and actors here.

The space vacated by Twelfth Night is well and truly being occupied, which doubtless has not escaped the attention of subsidising bodies both of the State and the Australia Council. Let’s hope Twelfth Night is also getting the message — the talent is here, the audiences are here, and one needn’t entice them along with patronising trivalities. Queensland doesn’t need a commercial theatre paid for by subsidy, it needs a second professional company with a coherent artistic policy. The question arises; will that company be the Twelfth Night Theatre Company? or should it be allowed to die quickly to make room for more vigorous growth?
Adelaide Commentary

by Tony Baker

Changes in name and personnel in official theatre in Adelaide seem just that, merely changes in name and personnel. They also provide an interesting example of a cultural establishment at work.

The most obvious change is that of name from the South Australian Theatre Company to that of State Theatre Company. This will make life easier for those who had previously confused it with the South Australian Trotting Club in planning their entertainment. It will also bring the company’s style into line with that of State Opera.

But it’s a case of what’s in a name, indeed. The company is a statutory body and, since the Act regulating it has not been amended, it technically remains the SATC still also known as, and registered as, the State Theatre Company.

Of more moment is the departure of the aging doyen of South Australian theatre, Colin Ballantyne as chairman at the age of 70 and with half a century of contribution to the performing arts in South Australia behind him. The new chairman is Mr Malcolm Gray, a senior assistant crown solicitor, and member of the board for the past three years. Mr Gray, 36, is not a public figure in Adelaide but to those who have met him he is highly regarded as an intelligent, able administrator and keen amateur enthusiast of the theatre. His appointment was formally approved by Premier Don Dunstan as Minister responsible for arts development in the State. But the prime mover was undoubtedly Mr Len Amadio who operates unobtrusively from the position of Director, Arts Development in the Premier’s Department as a kind of cultural czar.

Mr Gray’s appointment was an excellent example of the strengths and limitation of an entrenched establishment. It promotes the appointment to senior, influential position of others from the same milieu who share the same values, often the same acquaintances and who can be relied on not to rock the boat unduly, indeed to work actively to keep it on an even keel. Mr Gray reinforced this view when he told me shortly after his appointment that he sees his position primarily as chairman of a board rather than as chairman of this particular theatre board.

It is an appointment beyond reproach; it must also be said that it is a cosy arrangement and a tribute to Mr Amadio’s adroit behind the scenes manoeuvres. Mr Gray seems just the man to ensure efficient administration and financial restraint and to see that the board maintains good liaison between the two real centres of power, the official patrons and the Company’s artistic director and staff.

I single out the artistic director because, regardless of other management and formal player participation in the running of the company, the artistic director is very plainly dominant and, in the person of Colin George, has become even more so in recent times.

The other change in the STC’s personnel may have less evident implications and effects and could prove of considerable longer term interest. David Allan, one of the founders of the Troupe alternate and innovative group and a drama lecturer, has joined the governors. Troupe have provided many of the more talked about talking points in Adelaide theatre in the past couple of years.

On the STC board Mr Allan could bring established and alternate theatre closer together, or, if that seems too fanciful, could at least be an additional force on the side of those with a taste for the radical.

Don’t forget Tassie

Karl Hubert

Tasmanians are quite used to see their island left off maps and it is understandable that they should be surprised when their existence is remembered suddenly by the mighty and powerful decision makers on the North Island.

Take opera. The last performance by the Australian Opera — some locals think it should be called the Sydney Opera — took place at Hobart’s Theatre Royal in 1971. Now, there is to be a season by the AO at the Royal and the Princess Theatre in Launceston later this year (October-November).

Two years ago, the writer saw a production by the Melbourne Theatre Company at St Martin’s, when a huge map of Australia formed the backdrop. It was found that once again it had happened. Australia finished at Cape Otway and there was no trace of Tasmania.

Later, a number of actors shifted places and it was found that Tasmania was positioned on the stage floor. The explanation was that the map-backdrop had been too big for St Martin’s stage and rather than cut off Darwin, Tasmania was deleted.

Since 1971, many Tasmanians have become accustomed to the idea that apparently they are not worthy of grand opera. Initially, there were objections; it was stated that Tasmanians too were paying taxes, and as the AO received subsidies from the public purse, it had a moral obligation to appear in the State, particularly if it was a national company.

The AO argued that the Theatre Royal was too small for grand opera, conveniently overlooking the fact that the late Stefan Beinl had done it. The second argument was equally unconvincing, namely that the company would lose money. Of course, it would lose money, but did it not lose money elsewhere too? In fact, how many opera companies in the world make money?

So the announcement that the company would bring Donizetti’s Don Pasquale to Tasmania was a genuine surprise and people are asking themselves, why this sudden concern for Tasmanian Opera lovers? The answer may be that funds have become available from the Australia Council for such tours and that there is serious competition for the AO.

In fact, long before it decided on its Tasmanian tour, the State Opera of South Australia announced it would come to Tasmania early next year, and the Victoria Opera too is strongly interested in appearing in the State.

However, this is only part of an answer. The Don will be one of the major attractions of the first Italian Festival in Tasmania, of which Claude Alcorso is the president, the same Claude Alcorso who was chairman of the AO for a number of years.

It may be assumed that he pulled a few strings. In any case, Tasmanians have reason to be grateful to him. There is no doubt that The Don will have an excellent season here — and that he will lose money. However, that is as it should be; culture is not cheap, but essential to the well-being of a nation.
WHISPERS
RUMOURS
& FACTS

Ray Stanley's

People in the film industry are saying John Waters has made a mistake at a crucial point in his film career by accepting a stage role. He was being sought for several roles in upcoming films, but is contracted for a year in being sought for several roles in upcoming films, his film career by accepting a stage role. He was told me Malcolm Robertson has written a screenplay which integrates those prison plays of Jim McNeil — directed by Bruce Beresford. Blundell will play the role in Hoopla at the Playbox in Melbourne.

As a matter of fact, a little while ago I had the opportunity of talking to Brown and Hargreaves on the set of The Odd Angry Shot in Queensland, and both made it clear that, although they would like to do occasional stage work, they have no intention of doing so for any lengthy periods...I shouldn't be surprised to see Hargreaves, who tells me he's likely to do another TV series of Young Ramsay, follow in the steps of Bill Hunter and appear in a play for Hoopla at the Playbox in Melbourne.

Graeme Blundell (also on the set of TOAS) told me Malcolm Robertson has written a screenplay which integrates those prison plays of Jim McNeil — The Chocolate Frog, The Odd Familiar Juice — and How Does Your Garden Grow, — with probable title the latter play. Hoopla will be involved with Stable Productions in making the picture, which is likely to be directed by Bruce Beresford. Blundell will play the role in How Does Your Garden Grow he did for the MTC, and it's likely both John Hargreaves and Bryan Brown will also be in the film.

My information last month about actor Hamilton Deane being guest of honour at the Dracula Society's dinner on November 11 was incorrect: for the simple reason he died a couple of years ago! Guest of honour in fact is author Ivan Butler, who played Lord Godalming in Dracula back in 1925. As Deane portrayed the vampire for so many years on the stage, however, an empty chair is being reserved for him at the dinner, in his memory...See Robin Ramsay has been doing his one-man Henry Lawson show at London's Riverside Studios for a few isolated 5 pm performances.

Hear Peter Yeldham's play Away Match, written in collaboration with Martin Worth, and which had a season at Marian Street last year, has been playing to packed houses since last January at the Komodie Theatre in Berlin. Seems the Germans love Yeldham's style of comedy, as it's his third hit play at that theatre, the others being Birds on the Wing and She Won't Lie Down. He is of course settled back in Sydney now, writing TV and film scripts.

Wonder if we shall get that Italian modern parable musical comedy based on Noah's Ark. It ran for three years in Rome and also has had smash hit runs in Austria and Germany, and currently is playing in Madrid and Mexico with eight other world capitals lined up to follow. An English adaption, with lyrics by Leslie Bricusse, opens in London in November, with film rights already purchased for nearly a million pounds. The English translation of the Italian title is Set Another Place at the Table, and the producers are offering a case of Italian table wines to the person who provides a better name in English.

Those Perth AFI Awards: After his over-enthusiasm surely in 1977 that quaint little fellow who popped up everywhere will be known as John Michael 'Hollywood Eat Your Heart Out' Howson. I was seated immediately in front of the American visitors, who were splitting themselves with laughter, and from one came a very audible "Shit!..." Were Frank Thring and Noel Ferrier really auditioning their song and dance act for Robert Helpmann? If so, I've got news for them...The phrase these last few dying days of the Fraser Government in his acceptance speech for best screenplay award, caused Bob Ellis to be good-humouredly dubbed 'text day by Newsfront colleagues as "Australia's Vanessa Redgrave"'.

The smash hit of Crown Matrimonial does not surprise me at all. The old J C Williamson Theatres Ltd. at one time toyed with the idea of staging it, but did not believe it was a going proposition, despite the fact the Australian public always flock to see and read about Royalty far more than they do in Britain. Some people suggest its success is due to the names of June Salter and John Hamblin — but there has been little evidence previously of Australian TV stars attracting people to the theatre.

Following in the wake of Lawler's The Doll Trilogy and Kenna's The Cassidy Album, comes The Spalding Family Album. It stems from Colin Ryan's Esther which started out at Melbourne University's Guild Theatre in May and transferred to La Mama. Now the play gets a second season at La Mama's from October 19 to November 10, played alternately with companion play For Get Me Nots. Joining the cast of Esther will be Jo-Anne Moore from TV's Cop Shop.

Although holding no brief for the Old Tote Theatre Company, was surprised to find a rival organisation like the Hoopla Theatre Foundation publically applauding the Australia Council's decision to cut off funds to the Tote, and intimating because it had staged sixteen Australian plays (howbeit some so poorly attended they had to be withdrawn!) Hoopla was therefore doing a better job than Nimrod (who provided the two blockbusters for Hoopla)!

When I suggested Helpmann, in trying to get Hepburn to the Old Tote (a move Hoopla deplores) would be getting bums on seats and thus providing work for Australians and bring in money for other productions, the implication from Hoopla was that this was the area of commercial theatre, and that subsidised theatres do not need to get bums on seats!

John Diedrich has been playing the lead in Carousel for an amateur society in Shepparton, for which he was of course paid. Seems a good idea for there to be more of this sort of thing. Apart from the employment aspect, actors get to play roles which they might otherwise not have the opportunity to do, and the company in question has the chance to work with a professional. And so everyone gains.

Recently had a telephone call from Peter Adams, who had spent a week-end in Sydney seeing Dracula and Father's Day, and who told me all about them. We charted for some fifteen minutes, during which time I was distinctly under the impression I was talking to actor Peter Adams. It was not until he asked if I could provide the telephone number of a certain film director and I queried if he was going into said director's next picture, that the penny dropped. It was Peter Adams of 3UZ!...And what about that amazing discovery made by Australia's Master Magician, Ian Buckland: kangaroos have limp wrists!

Those people wishing to have up-to-the-minute news of films and film people throughout the world, really should subscribe to the weekly Screen International, edited by Peter Noble. A free specimen copy can be obtained by writing to Christine Fairbairn, Screen International, Film House, 142 Wardour Street, London, W1V 4BR, and mentioning Theatre Australia.
In the business, the people who put money into commercial theatre are called angels — for the most part they are the ones who rush in where fools fear to tread. In London they often get their fingers burnt, in New York the situation is even worse, yet in Australia though the country is not able to sustain the long runs which give the big returns, they come off well. That is if they put their money on Kenn Brodziak.

The Current Package

His success rate is uncannily high and not just for picking shows, but talent spotting too. The girl now cast as Little Orphan Annie was early on scented out by the famous Brodziak nose; the director saw little in her but she remained on the list because the maestro had indicated his view. When finally the number of girls was whittled down to three it was obvious to everyone that she stood head and shoulders above the five hundred others they had auditioned.

His package for the next twelve months is already fixed and rolling with Dracula as the first big attraction. His reasons for picking the various shows have an almost pedestrian simplicity, but the feeling that tells him they will succeed is part of an indefinable sixth sense. “Dracula was the most commercial play I’d seen since Godspell; I found it appealed to all ages, it was fun, it was exciting, it was very theatrical. You had stars in the form of actors and stars in the form of scenery and costumes (by Edward Gorey).”

Annie which opens on October 25th at Her Majesty’s, Melbourne, he chose on the single fact that it is “the most successful musical in the world” — and the sell out seasons in New York, London, Washington, Florida and San Francisco prove his point. Australia, he believes, wants a good, old-fashioned musical with singalong tunes, dance routines and spectacular costumes, and can’t fail to follow suit. It will be the most expensive production he has ever mounted with half a million dollars at risk.

Liv Ullman’s visit in Cocteau’s The Human Voice and Chekhov’s The Bear is almost an accident. While an agent went through his lists — musing about Henry Fonda not being fit to travel, Burton being tied up and Taylor too unreliable (“you’d have to advertise the show as starting at approximately 8.30 and then you’d never know when she’d turn up”) — he said “I don’t suppose you’d be interested in…?” “I certainly would” said Brodziak. The deal was fixed in twenty four hours and Liv Ullman is due to open at the Comedy, Melbourne, on November 1st.

The Festival Centre, Adelaide, called Brodziak to ask whether he had anything to go into the Playhouse in January; a telegram was sent to Derek Nimmo asking if he could fit it in and complete his tour of Australian cities with Why Not Stay For Breakfast? there, Canberra, Hobart and Launceston. “Derek said yes — and that gave us our fourth package; he loves Australia”.

The fifth, Death Trap, was another Brodziak find. It didn’t get rave reviews the first time round: “My report when I saw it was that it would be a big hit in New York and within two weeks it was playing to capacity houses and will go for years and years”. It is a comedy thriller like Sleuth, though, “Full of gimmicks, but less so than Sleuth and has a little bit more logic”. He shares the worries about the final scene but believes the whole play works well enough to carry it.

The Brodziak Connection

of the 1978/79 season for JC Williamson’s Productions is mounted in association with Michael Edgely International, a managerial relationship which has been a continuingly successful one since Brodziak’s Aztec services entered the JCW debacle and emerged with their illustrious name for his production company — and without the crippling liability of the theatre buildings. In 1971 Edgely had merged his company with the old Firm in a thirteen month bid to save its declining fortunes. The young head, then 27, made record profits for the concern but it was too much for too little. Now Edgely is a director of the new JCW Productions with Brodziak as chairman and managing director.

The relationship, though, is a loose one, each going his own way but investing in each other’s presentations. The link that holds them together is the high regard in which they hold each other. “I think he is the best showman in Australia”, says Kenn with an obviously strong loyalty underlying the remark, “and he thinks I am the best negotiator and administrator”.

Though Edgely is majorly known for circuses, stars from Russia, and ballet productions — in various permutations and combinations — and Brodziak for theatre, there are no actual lines of demarcation. They buy shows separately, then ask if the other is interested and quite often come together for a joint venture as with A Chorus Line and Annie. One major difference between them is that where Edgely was once wont to risk all on a show, Brodziak has always hedged his bets. When a venture is underway it usually happens that the Brodziak end takes care of production and administration while Edgely’s handle the promotion. “Michael has convinced me to spend the big money on advertising; $40,000 went on publicity for Dracula before it opened, $80,000 on Annie and $130,000 for A Chorus Line”. But Brodziak still enjoys the lucky breaks that sometimes come for free — as with A Chorus Line, when Michael Bennett’s sacking of the girl in England got big press here, and when the difficulty of finding a child actress brought the headline “Little Orphan Annie — Where Are You” — it instantly broke the public’s confusion of the musical with Annie Get Your Gun.

Brodziak as chairman, managing director of the new JCW Productions with Edgely as major investor, is a new step in the relationship which has been a loose one. The link that underlies the remark, “and he thinks I am the best showman in Australia”, says Kenn with an obvious strong loyalty underlying the remark, “and he thinks I am the best negotiator and administrator”. Though Edgely is majorly known for circuses, stars from Russia, and ballet productions — in various permutations and combinations — and Brodziak for theatre, there are no actual lines of demarcation. They buy shows separately, then ask if the other is interested and quite often come together for a joint venture as with A Chorus Line and Annie. One major difference between them is that where Edgely was once wont to risk all on a show, Brodziak has always hedged his bets. When a venture is underway it usually happens that the Brodziak end takes care of production and administration while Edgely’s handle the promotion. “Michael has convinced me to spend the big money on advertising; $40,000 went on publicity for Dracula before it opened, $80,000 on Annie and $130,000 for A Chorus Line”. But Brodziak still enjoys the lucky breaks that sometimes come for free — as with A Chorus Line, when Michael Bennett’s sacking of the girl in England got big press here, and when the difficulty of finding a child actress brought the headline “Little Orphan Annie — Where Are You” — it instantly broke the public’s confusion of the musical with Annie Get Your Gun.

But even if he is convinced by Edgely, Kenn Brodziak is still rueful about Australian audiences; publicity may tell them a show is on but the claims of awards and record breaking seasons overseas leave them unmoved. What is to my mind a healthy open-mindedness does not secure them unmoved. What is to my mind a healthy open-mindedness does not secure them unmoved. What is to my mind a healthy open-mindedness does not secure them unmoved. What is to my mind a healthy open-mindedness does not secure them unmoved. What is to my mind a healthy open-mindedness does not secure them unmoved.
they will be entertained.

When Brodziak knows now largely what is to happen on Broadway and in the West End for years to come, and even knows within moments of their conception the ideas that are developing in writer’s heads in the UK and the US, decisions can be considered over a long period, Kenn reeled off a list to make the point; Michael Bennett’s new show Queen of the Starlit Ballroom; King of Hearts; to open on Broadway in October; Okay which has just had a shaky premiere in Toronto and which Brodziak has been watching for three years; Sweeney Todd with Angela Lansbury already cast. These and a dozen more are possibles for late 1979 and beyond, but first have to prove themselves with audiences.

The Edgley — Williamson Productions tie up, then, is largely conservative; there might be dauntingly large amounts of money involved but the risks, when tried and tested overseas products are the staple fare, are not as great as the once-in-a-lifetime imaginative. But such caution in handling mainly the proven is understandable when the first production of Brodziak’s under the new JCW banner, More Canterbury Tales, despite being a sequel to a successful import, premiered here and was a flop. But even pessimist, he says it was simply because “it wasn’t a good show — it didn’t deserve to succeed”.

Brodziak and Australian Drama

That, The 20’s and All That and Big Toys are the only shows he’s tried in a long time that have originated here. Success and the fortunes required to fill theatres like the Melbourne and Sydney Her Majesty’s have largely put him in a league that can no longer consider productions such as Rusty Bugles, and Dark of the Moon both of which he picked up from Mel and Fit in his Independent’s early days. The latter was a particular love of his on which he was prepared to lose money; now he flatly admits that he is never likely to indulge such enthusiasms again.

Negotiations were entered into with the MTC to take over The Club, for which he would willingly have arranged a transfer, “but they kept on extending”. With Benjamin Franklin he wanted to take up Paul Iles’ offer but there were just no dates for it at the Comedy and so it went to the Playbox under Hoopla.

For some time, he has been looking for an Australian musical one of the few ambitions he has left. One idea was a Power Without Glory type plot, but the book hasn’t so far adapted to the stage. He joined a consortium to pay Ron Blair for the outline of a musical comedy on the sacking of Whirlam, but that also went awry, “it was more a review sketch, though a good one, but not a play”.

David Williamson has earned his respect, though more for his achievements than for his plays, which I don’t know enough about. But when I do want something of his, every time I ask where he is, he’s overseas. Brodziak would have gone to Dorothy Hewett’s Pandora’s Cross despite the bad crits, as it is about a period he knew personally, but, he says, he was actively prevented by some of the cast and various agents.

His own view of Australian drama notwithstanding, and which some might think a self-fulfilling one given that huge sums are just not risked on local product, he does believe that there could be a healthy export of shows overseas. London and Broadway producers are constantly in touch with him about premières here "because, believe it or not, they are short of product".

Subsidy

Brodziak is unrepentant in the view that subsidy is a bad thing and that theatre should be self-supporting. The mainstays of the “homes of theatre”, New York and London, are not he asserts those with Government aid — thereby discounting the Royal Court, the RSC, the National and the fact of Hair (minus the nude scene) and A Chorus Line began in subsidised theatres.

To the argument that internationally most of the modern playwrights of any stature have emerged in subsidised theatres, Brodziak answers that before subsidy the Independent, the Ensemble and the New Theatre were producing the most important playwrights out here on membership subscriptions alone for capital. In so far as subsidy developed the likes of Buzo, Helen Reddy, A Chorus Line and Nowra — the whole local new wave — Brodziak admits that it has been good, but says flatly “I’m not trying to develop a native culture”.

Though a great believer in the star system by which he means people as he knows, John Gaden, Geraldine Turner, Kate Fitzpatrick, Bruce Myles and Robyn Nevin coterie. This subject marks for him one of the major divergences between the two forms: “I can’t be converted otherwise than that the public want to see stars”.

Mainly the division exists with personalities; “with a few exceptions, subsidised theatres cultivate a brand of director, actor and management which is alien to what I believe in — they will not accept the fact that exist because of commercial theatre”. Bold words. He blames the press, and particularly Theatre Australia, for allowing this lack of humility and disregard of commercial theatre to be given undue publicity.

Achievements, Ambitions and Retirement

Kenn Brodziak is pleased with his success, it has given him everything he wants. All that worries him is that the money that once could mean disaster has now become only figures. To the observer, still with a touch of romanticism in his view of theatre, Brodziak appears now to treat it merely as merchandise to be marketed. He admits to having lost many of his old enthusiasms and owns that for the most part his “is a job like any other”. Being the head of one of the few companies to have consistently paid a dividend to its shareholders, he considers to be one of his finest achievements. With such a track record, finding the angels to put up money “has been the easiest part of it”.

Trying to draw him on standards proved impossible. The only plays he would not do on principle are the ones he has seen in the US where the blacks knock the whites mercilessly, but when I asked why he hadn’t mounted any of the “sex shows” he answered that “finally it would have to be because I wouldn’t think they’d make money”. Not because they’re vacuous. “No — what could be more vacuous than some of the other shows”. For some time, he has been looking for an Australian musical one of the few ambitions he has left. One idea was a Power Without Glory type plot, but the book hasn’t so far adapted to the stage. He joined a consortium to pay Ron Blair for the outline of a musical comedy on the sacking of Whirlam, but that also went awry, “it was more a review sketch, though a good one, but not a play”. It was this detachment which made the biggest bombshell of the interview believable. Kenn Brodziak announced that he is to retire “in the foreseeable future” and that he will spend his time between Melbourne and New York. There is as yet no sign of an heir apparent nor is he a self-fatalist (not pessimist — “I don’t know the meaning of the word”) doesn’t plan these things, he lets them happen. Whoever replaces him has the unenviable task of following the man who has brought here everything from The Beatles (“I just liked the sound of their names!”) to A Chorus Line, and above all, needs that sixth sense that can unfailingly pick out successes.

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by William Shakespeare

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Performing September 14 to October 14 in the Greenroom

Keep on Truckin', Francesca

Devised by Christine Randall and featuring Pat Skevington and Denise Kirby.

From the well-meant sexist jokes that husbands tell, to rock-song lyrics and the pink or blue blanket they put on your baby in the hospital nursery, sexism is still a fact of life for half the people of the world—women. Keep on Truckin' Francesca is not just another women's show with hard-line speeches and cries of 'no more men.' It is a celebration of the gains made by the women's liberation movement and a plea for the revolution to continue.

Performing December 2 to December 23 at the Playhouse

The Cocky of Bungaree

by Richard Tulloch

Cocky Bourke's hard luck never seemed to end. He was the only bloke to have his woolshed burned down in the Flash Floods of '56 and, in the Epidemic of '69, even his budgie came down with foot and mouth disease. But when the trouble began between the Pastoralists and the Shearers, a lesser man than Cocky Bourke would have been all for throwing himself in the sheep dip and ending it all. The hilarious events at Bungaree at the end of last century are recorded in a riotous musical play, using the traditional songs and folklore of one of the most colourful periods of our past. Note: Your subscriber ticket may be converted to TWO seats for children at no cost.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: Stephen Barry; ADMINISTRATOR: Tony Youlken.

3 Pier Street, Perth 6000. Phone 325 3344
Theatre's foundation — an event that had its birthday message in 1953, commemorating the 21st anniversary of Sydney New Theatre’s foundation — an event that had taken place in 1932.

Forty six years old in 1978, New Theatre is now Sydney's longest-running theatre. Much publicised once, and with an often flamboyant history, why is it that a surprisingly large percentage of the theatre-going public is unaware today of its existence? The reasons are complex, but some answers might be found in the nature of the times that gave rise to the theatre's formation, and the varied political climate in which it spent its first twenty five years.

In Australia as in America, the late nineteen twenties and much of the thirties were years of acute financial depression. Long dole queues were common as were evictions of families unable to pay the rent of even sub-standard houses. Hope, for the majority of would-be wage earners was at a minimum. It was against this background that the New Theatre movement was born in America. Its earliest productions were chiefly "agit prop" (agitational propaganda) sketches. Then came Clifford Odets' famous one-acter Waiting for Lefty. Written to raise funds for a New York taxi drivers' strike fund, it soon became a Broadway hit, eventually to be played from coast to coast in twenty cities by twenty different companies.

Following the American trend, amateur Workers' Theatre groups sprang up in various Australian capitals — the Workers' Art Club in Sydney, the Workers' Theatre Groups in Melbourne and Perth, the Student Workers' Theatre in Brisbane. As in America, their first plays were short, locally written agit prop numbers (1930's versions of today's Street Theatre) presented at factory gates, at street corners and at Labor Party and Communist Party branch meetings.

Crude as many of the sketches might have been from the dramatic standpoint, their topicality and sardonic humour had an instant appeal for audiences only too happy to see somebody poking fun at the bosses, the politicians, and the economic system depicted as responsible for the capitalist recession. Another important role of these groups at the time was their opposition to the rise of fascism and the danger of world war.

The Sydney and Melbourne groups, in 1932 and 1936 respectively, (adopting the name New Theatre League, later to be shortened to New Theatre) were the first to establish themselves as serious theatres, with Waiting for Lefty the first play to put each of them on the map. When Sydney New Theatre won the 1936 City of Sydney Eisteddfod One Act Play Competition with this American play as their entry there were a few criticisms of "improper passages" (that helped to give the play a long run) but the Fairfax magazine The Home said: "... its dialogue is alive and afire with passion, its emotional impact terrific. Here is provocative drama at its strongest".

But by 1936 New Theatre in their Pitt Street premises had already produced a number of more generally acceptable plays by writers like Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair and Muriel Box — productions that were to set the pattern of future New Theatre programming: socially meaningful contemporary works and classics interspersed from time to time with overtly political plays, musicals and revues, some with more than a touch of "agit prop", some cleverly satirical.

During its forty-six years history, Sydney New Theatre has mounted some 280 productions, of which no more than eighteen can be said to have been narrowly political in that they have criticised the "sacred cows" of successive periods in much the same way that other groups do today with impunity. Yet it has been these comparatively few productions that have given New Theatre its reputation in some quarters as purely and simply a "theatre of the Left", despite the fact that the majority of its offerings have been works by universally accepted writers like Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Molière, Chekhov, Sean O'Casey, Clifford Odet, J B Priestley, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Brendan Behan, William Saroyan, Thornton Wilder, Albert Maltz, Tennessee Williams, Jules Feiffer, Ted Willis, John Whiting, Kurt Vonnegut, David Storey, Tom Stoppard and Bertolt Brecht — the last-mentioned admired today as trendy, but first produced by New Theatre in 1939.

Often unrecognised too is New Theatre's long-held policy of presenting (mostly new) Australian plays, of which there have been seventy eight to date by writers including Louis Esson, Leslie Rees, Betty Roland, Katharine Prichard, George Landen Dann, Oriel Gray, George Farwell, Dick Diamond, David Martin, Ralph Peterson, Alan Seymour, Dymphna Cusack, Frank Hardy, Kevin McGrath, Barry Oakley,
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John Romeril, Kevin Morgan and myself. But criticism of the Establishment has sometimes touched a too sensitive nerve, and New Theatre has more than once been the subject of censorship attempts. The most notorious of these took place in 1936 around Clifford Odets' short anti-Nazi play *Till the Day I Die*, performances of which encountered various manifestations of hostility in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

Of Sydney New Theatre's first performance of this play directed by Jerold Wells at the Savoy, the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote (2nd July 1936): "... taut, concentrated dramatic energy in the writing, as well as noise and terror... here and there the attack on the Nazis becomes cheap, but mostly it grips the unbiased observer". Before the second performance on 22nd July, Hitler's Consul General in Australia asked the audience, "Do you want to see this play?" A unanimous "Yes!"... Exeunt police... on with the show. The next day the papers were full of stories and pictures about the night's more than usually dramatic performance.

Deciding to test this ban in the court of public opinion, the show opened to a packed audience with a revival of *Waiting for Lefty* as the first half of the programme. At interval Arnold informed the tense audience that the second half of the programme would consist of "an un-named play". This turned out to be *Till the Day I Die*. At the end of the first scene, with the Gestapo due to knock on a door and burst in, the audience was treated to the exciting spectacle of the Sydney police charging through instead, shouting "The play must cease!"... Victor Arnold, playing the lead, asked the audience, "Do you want to see this play?" A unanimous thunder of "Yes!"... Exeunt police... on with the show. The next day the papers were full of stories and pictures about the night's more than usually dramatic performance.

Meanwhile in Perth a gallery of local Nazi sympathisers protested about the play's attack on Hitler; and in Melbourne the Workers' Theatre Group found that every city and suburban theatre and hall had been notified that the play must not be shown on their premises. Using a technicality, a friendly mayor was able to have the Collingwood Town Hall made available, but when he arrived for the performance he found four hundred police surrounding a hall padlocked against cast and audience. Undefeated, and to the cheers of the multitude, His Worship let himself in by climbing through a window on with to find that his Beemans had removed all the chairs. A stormy protest meeting replaced the play. *Till the Day I Die* was not performed publicly in Melbourne until February 1938.

Despite official attitudes these heady days in the theatre received mostly sympathetic press coverage — a situation that was to change in the late forties and fifties.

But much was to happen in the meantime. In South Australia a group that was later to call itself Adelaide New Theatre staged two plays including *Waiting for Lefty*. Then in Brisbane the Student Workers' Theatre Group made available later adopted the name Unity established itself with *Till the Day I Die*.

War broke out, and the departure of members to the various Services forced the suspension of all New Theatre groups except Sydney and Melbourne who carried on with reduced numbers. By 1942 when Sydney New Theatre had moved to premises in Castlereagh Street the involvement of the USSR in the war had created an atmosphere of unusual official tolerance, and newspaper critics seemed free to pay due respect to the high standard of production, writing and acting often presented at the New, Sydney people appearing in Castle- reagh Street who later became professionals included Jerold Wells, John Gray, Oriel Gray, John Hepworth, Pat and Cedric Flower, Ken Warren, Jean Blue, Jack Fagin and John Armstrong, while at 92 Flinders Street in Melbourne the New Theatre there provided actors like John Bluthal, Martin Vaughan and John Ewart (playing a child in *Tomorrow the World*) with early stage experience.

After the war New Theatre companies were re-formed in Adelaide and Perth, and Brisbane's Unity got together again in 1947. George Petersen, Labor member for Illawarra in today's NSW Parliament was the theatre's secretary from 1949 to 1956 and recalls that the first play was George Farwell's *Son's of the South*. His work was mainly administrative, but he says, "I did perform and must have been one of the worst actors to tread the boards... it seems to me in retrospect that we had the worst of both worlds. We had neither an amateur cast that was professional enough, nor were our plays and theatre performances adequate for the political tasks of a left-wing theatre". Not all former members of the group might agree with him, but the Brisbane branch of the New Theatre movement, like those in Adelaide and Perth, ceased operation some years ago, so perhaps this is a correct assessment.

Sydney New Theatre was riding a wave of comparative prosperity in 1948 when Sean O'Casey's play *The Star Turns Red* was performed in an old church hall. On March 8 the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic said that the production was "... so good that it deserved discriminating and critical patronage by all serious students of drama and life. Although passionate and an­ guished, the play is magnificent theatre, with guffaws of inspired laughter to relieve its tears".

This was the last review of a New Theatre production to appear in *The Herald* for many years. Was the critic too enthusiastic about this very controversial play? In retrospect, this withdrawal of *Herald* coverage seems to have been the first icy blast of the cold war that was to breathe on the Australian New Theatre movement for the next twelve years, bringing with it a dearth of reviews, a partial advertising boycott, and experiences like the refusal of a suburban Town Hall for a performance of the popular Australian folk musical, *Reedy River*.

Next month:

*The Cold War and After.*

Cedric Flower and Margaret Olley painting set of *Tartuffe* for 1945 production. 

Sons of the South (1947) Jerome Levy as William Lane
To design a major theatrical production is never easy. To redesign one that is already solidly established in the public's mind is extremely difficult. That was the formidable task confronting Kristian Fredrikson when I discussed his work with him. He was working on a completely new production of *Coppelia* for the Australian Ballet with producer George Ogilvie. This was George's first ballet but Kris has designed many. In fact, he was invited to Australia from his native New Zealand way back in 1963 by Dame Peggy van Praagh to do the costume designs for the company's *Aurora's Wedding*.

The Fredrikson/Ogilvie partnership is an old and tried one that dates back to a number of plays they did together at the Melbourne Theatre Company and has continued through to *II Seraglio* and *Don Giovanni* (costumes only) for the Australian Opera. "I've worked with George on so many productions that a rapport has developed between us. So working out the designs for *Coppelia* is really an exchange of ideas between us to see what works and what doesn't".

How then does he go about creating new designs for a classic and well-known ballet? Kris Fredrikson of the dark, high-cheek-boned serious visage suddenly smiles. "Well! It's not as difficult as being asked to design a new *Giselle*. That's a nightmare. What I'm trying to do is to put back the fairy-tale aspect of *Coppelia* — restore some of the magic and enchantment and emphasise the romantic element. Delibes was an innovator in ballet. He influenced Tchaikowsky. Today it has become little more than a series of national dances. George is hardening the story-line — building up the characters of Swanilda and Frantz. Dr Coppelius is really rejecting life — trying to make automotans, whereas Frantz and Swanilda's story is a celebration of life".

*Coppelia* is, of course, based on one of the stories of *The Tales of Hoffman*. It was first produced at the Paris Opera just before the Franco-Prussian War. It was described as a "ballet-pantomime" when it had its premiere in 1870 with choreography by Saint-Leon. Kris says he has been a ballet fanatic since way back and long ago wrote to Paris for this score so when he was asked to design the ballet, he already had the score. "Then George and I had discussions with Dame Peggy who has done additional choreography for this production. She sat there and with her hands, recreated the whole ballet for us. It was a fabulous performance. I decided after talking with her, to wipe out the Middle-European look and go right back to the Paris original. I looked to see what Delibes and his designers had meant for it. It has lost a lot of its detail today. The score tells you what Delibes is saying, if you listen carefully. All designers, you know, are inherent producers. We work so closely with them that we go through each production, dramatically, as they do. I'm really dancing Coppelia in my mind as I sketch."

Kris paints a lot of sketches which must be approved by both the producer, and in the case of a ballet, the choreographer. He then goes to wardrobe and consults with them. He likes to choose all the fabrics himself. "I am", he says, "A finicky designer. I drive the wardrobe people insane. I have a great admiration for those who actually do the making. They can make or break a production. It's a great problem working with fifty or sixty people and it can be disastrous. Personally, I like to stay with a production and supervise everything from start to finish".

I ask him how long he has been given to produce the costume sketches and set models for *Coppelia*. He sighs and says resignedly, "Only a month. I'm working till 4 am every night. It's absurd. Would you believe I was given only a month to do
that enormously elaborate Australian Opera production of The Merry Widow — 130 costumes and the most complex sets". I look suitably appalled and he says, "Don't ask me why! It nearly always happens but not to overseas designers. They are given months."

Which brings Kristian Fredrikson, one of the few really successful Australian designers whose work is in constant demand, to a subject about which he feels strongly. He has worked in Australia since 1963 and he has seen here an enormous amount of design talent that is never given a chance. "Yet the big companies are importing designers from overseas while our own just can't get work in the theatre. We are turning out graduates from NIDA at the taxpayers expense and they are not being used. It's a bad state of affairs. It's like training bus drivers and then bringing out West Indian bus drivers."

I say that I've been told by some of the big company people that a director must be able to choose his own designer and so an overseas one will therefore choose an overseas designer whose work is known to him. "Not so!", says Kris sharply. "It costs much less to send one Australian designer to consult with the producer in England or wherever he is, and then send on sketches and models, than it does to bring an overseas designer out here two or three times per productions and that's what is happening now. I'm not saying we should use only Australian designers but we should consider them. When Colin George took over the South Australian Theatre Company, he brought out his own designer with him from England and the three Australian designers had to resign. Then the English designer went back home".

There are rumours now that exactly the same thing is to happen in other theatre company shake-ups in the near future. Last June, Kris Fredrikson was appointed as Designer-in-Residence to the National Playwright's Conference in Canberra. This was the first time such an appointment was made. There he read all the scripts, sat in on rehearsals and made himself available to producers, playwrights and actors. "Many playwrights today", he explains, "know nothing of stagecraft. I could tell them what is possible and what is not — what will work and what will not and show them why and how. I worked a twelve hour day for two weeks which was exhausting but stimulating. It was strange to be designing in my head without putting anything down on paper, but it was worthwhile. For years designers have been regarded as a necessary evil. Now we are getting recognized."

It isn't easy to go from a really big budget opera or ballet production to a small one but it's something that most designers have to do from time to time. While those of us who haven't the job of grappling with such problems, say knowingly, "Ah! But it must be such a challenge?", designers like Kris Fredrikson find that a shoestring budget is terribly frustrating says Kris — "A sensible one is all right but when one needs, for example, a chair and the right kind of chair at that and the budget doesn't run to it, the result just isn't very good".

During the intervals on the first night of the Australian Opera's Don Giovanni in Melbourne, everyone was talking about the really magnificent costumes designed by Kris. His costumes and sets for The Merry Widow were received with rapture. As a designer, he has both taste and restraint and unfailing elegance. If anyone has the ability to restore the "magic and enchantment" to Coppelia it is Kristian Fredrikson. When the curtain goes up on the world premiere of the new Dame Peggy van Praagh/George Ogilvie production of Coppelia at Melbourne's Palais Theatre, on February 22nd, it should prove to be yet another Fredrikson triumph.
Bogdan Gierczynski visits France and sends this report.

The visitor in Paris with theatregoing inclinations will find the present season far above average. The current Parisian stage fare, though not exactly a regal aesthetic feast, provides at least a very fair and appetizingly varied repast. Should an overcrowded calendar leave but a single evening for the theatre, the selection can be easily made.

**Jarry and Brook**

Peter Brook’s production of *Ubu* at Les Bouffes du Nord is a commendable and, on the whole, a successful experiment, a fresh staging of the theatrical nonsuch that introduced the Drama of the Absurd more than seventy years ago.

This strange play by Alfred Jarry, written in the 1890s for marionettes, was first performed by players of flesh and blood at the Théâtre de L’Œuvre under the aegis of Lugne-Poe, the most enterprising impresario and discoverer of playwrights of his generation. Firmin Gemier was the first Pere Ubu and Louise Gemier was the first Mere Ubu, that loathsome pair who, in Jarry’s opinion, symbolized blind and ferocious philistinism.

“I call bourgeois all that is base”, declared Flaubert, and this declaration has cleverly adopted some of them. “As for the action, that takes place direction to Lugne-Poe, and Brook has cleverly adopted some of them. As for the action, that takes place in Poland, that is to say, nowhere”, he wrote the director. This is a political jibe in Poland, that is to say, nowhere”, he wrote the director. This is a political jibe for even the name of Poland had been erased from the map in 1896. Brooke appropriately lets the action roam over the performing space of the theatre.

Jarry and Brook wrote. “It is neither strictly humor nor strictly parody. I should put it first among excessive caricatures, ranking it with most original and powerful burlesques of all time, with the colour, highlights and wit that caricature may contain”.

It opens with a thunderclap that characterizes it when Ubu shouts at his wife: “Mere Ubu, why are you so ugly tonight? Is it because people are coming to dinner?” The guests arrive and what they say and what they eat and drink and what they do — with Ubu as a “natural” leader of the army of destructive stupidity on the march — compose the nightmare incidents of Jarry’s eerie fantasy.

Jarry outlined his notions for the direction to Lugne-Poe, and Brook has cleverly adopted some of them. “As for the action, that takes place in Poland, that is to say, nowhere”, he wrote the director. This is a political jibe for even the name of Poland had been erased from the map in 1896. Brooke appropriately lets the action roam over the performing space of the theatre.

**Andreas Katsulas and Jean-Claude Perrin in Peter Brook’s Ubu, Theatre des Bouffes du Nord.**

There is an ironic conclusion, with the knights who have slain him rationalising their murder, while the women of Canterbury moan their lamentations.

It is often claimed that Eliot restored the poetic drama to the modern theatre. Actually, the 20th century had many poetic playwrights before him. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood* while deprecating Gilbert Murray’s translations of the Greek dramatists, wrote of his regard for Rostand’s facile matching of words and action. And what of Claudel, of D’Annuzio, of...
As usual, Grigorovich has sought to make dance the principal vehicle of communication. Mime and other storytelling devices have been amputated to the vanishing point. There is no Benvolio, no Duke of Verona, and Juliet’s nurse is hardly more than a walk-on. Grigorovich assumes that the audience knows its Shakespeare or perhaps he does not care, and in eighteen fast-moving scenes — in two acts of about an hour each — he concentrates on the primary emotions of love and hate.

The production is not specific about time or place. Simon Virsaladze’s set consists of an array of black curtains hanging from the flies and moved around (noisily) to assume different shapes and create changing scenic spaces. Now and then a specific object — a balcony, a bed — is hinted at. The choreographer has imagined the drama taking place at Carnival time, and the revellers and musicians are kind of continuously mobile backdrop and their costumes supply most of the colour in an otherwise neutral space. Grigorovich’s version is more impressive in its sense of structure, with its contrast between intimate scenes and mass movement, and its stagecraft, than for the choreography as such.

Dominique Khalfouni was the Juliet, with her long, slender lines giving a sense of the slightly awkward grace of a teenager. She and Denard had no less than four full-scale pas de deux to dance, and while these were unfailingly attractive, Grigorovich did not endow them with choreographic inventiveness or originality to keep a progressive departure from Shakespeare was to have Romeo dying, but still alive, when Juliet awoke, ending the ballet with Juliet lifeless across Romeo’s body.

AND...

Les Dernieres Clientes (at the Studio des Champs-Elysees) is a “gay” play. The scene is a sauna parlor frequented exclusively by male homosexuals, yet, despite its setting and subject, it trades neither in the sensational nor in the salacious. It is not a sniggering farce, but a serious, honest consideration of types from a world long excluded from society and, until lately, from frank, intelligent discussion.

The bath’s habituals are drawn from various classes. There are a bank teller whose effeminacy is permitted full range in the parlor’s confines; a Canadian who stalks about in a peignoir; a handsome Tunisian; the muscular proprietor; a paterfamilias, already a grandfather, who simply likes the relaxing atmosphere of the place.

A collection of minor dramas compose the action. An abandoned man comes to face his ex-lover and is again spurned, and the elderly client collapses in the steam room. At one point there is a revealing symposium on the theme that preoccupies the assembled.

The author, Yves Navarre, has devised it in a single, lengthy act, and it is sufficiently varied to hold attention throughout. It is constantly provocative and interesting, a rare feat. It is not what is known as an “intellectual” play, but rather a sort of documentary recording, illustrating a phase of human experience. Its conclusion — by inference rather than by emphasis — is that the homosexual is a man with an extra problem.

Louis Thierry’s staging is acceptable, but perhaps more brilliant direction would have provided the script sharper focus.

Handke and Regy

Peter Handke’s Les Gens Deraisonnables Sont en Vole de Disparition requires more than three hours to perform. It begins at 8.30 and runs — with a slight pause but no intermission — until nearly midnight. It seems longer.

Claude Regy, often an inventive director, is intent on selling Handke in France. Not long ago he mounted an all-star, stylish production of the Austrian writer’s incomprehensible script The Ride Across Lake Constance at the Espace Cardin. Neither big names — Jeanne Moreau, Delphine Seyrig, Gerard Depardieu and Michel Lonsdale were the cast — nor snob appeal could draw audiences.

Now he mistakenly believes that La Maison de la Culture de Nanterre is the place for Handke, and he has persuaded Depardieu, established as a leading man in films, to join him in the enterprise, all to no avail. The interminable evening is colorless, uninspired and oppressive.

Handke has left out the policeman, judge and hangman, thus depriving his script of varied action. And he has sought to “humanise” the stencils, but he fails at characterisation as he fails at generalisation. There is no more dramatic technique discernible in the manoeuvring than there is in the Anatomy of Melancholy.

One waits for a flash of originality, the glint of a fresh idea, but Handke has nothing now to say despite his compulsive determination to say it. Sick society, disorder, the crumbling of traditions are the stale materials which he sets before the audience in a nonstop wrangle. Wit, irony, humour are conspicuous by their absence. Of eloquence, there is nothing.

The result is tiresome talk masquerading as thought.

Juliet and Romeo

The Paris Opera ballet had no production of Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet in its current repertory. Yuri Grigorovich has been wanting to do one, but his own Bolshoi company already has Leonid Lavrovsky’s celebrated version as a cornerstone of its repertory.

It was a clear case of demand meeting supply, and the new Grigorovich production unveiled last night gives the Opera a version unlike anyone else’s of one of the 20th century’s major ballets, and a splendid showcase for its young principal dancers. It is a radical departure from Lavrovsky’s realistic, story-ballot approach, and a different conception, too, from Nureyev’s vast Italianate fresco staged last year in London and recently repeated here.

Handke’s Les Gens Deraisonnables . . . . Photo: Alain Fonteray
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Cast size should be limited to five or six. Preference will be given to full-length scripts (about 90 minutes).

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The judges are drawn from people active in children's theatre - Helmut Bakaitis, Artistic Director, St. Martin's Centre; Peter Tulloch, Artistic Director, Children's Arena Theatre; and Don Mackay, Director, Victorian Arts Council.

The competition is jointly funded by the Goethe Institute and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, and is being administered by the Victorian Arts Council.

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UNDER MILK WOOD

RAYMOND STANLEY

Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas; Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened 7 September, 1978. Director, Mick Rodger; Designer, Anne Fraser; Lighting designer, Jamie Lewis.


Really, I am in two minds about the MTC's production of Under Milk Wood. On the one hand there is the undoubted brilliance of poet Dylan Thomas, and on the other the most-of-the-time brilliance of director Mick Rodger. But the two do not necessarily blend. As we know, Thomas wrote of 24 hours in a small Welsh town as a play for voices. Apart from an early reading by Thomas himself with a small group, it was first aired by the BBC in January 1954, only 2½ months after the author's death.

I can recall when, in September 1956, it was staged in the West End. Nobody thought it could work on stage. But it did and chalked up 250 performances, and one was saddened at the thought of what Thomas might have accomplished in the theatre had he lived. The characters seemed real, although not all of the performances of that first stage production were flawless. As Tynan wrote at the time: "Some caricature their roles, revue-fashion, thereby bringing out the worst in Thomas' words."

Rodger, with his usual inventive mind, has not been content to allow Thomas to speak for himself and so, aided by grotesque masks designed by Anne Fraser, presents a series of caricature cartoon-like characters. Very funny indeed at each appearance. The director also introduces much clever rib-tickling business. All this though, I maintain, has nothing to do with Thomas. First and foremost he was a poet, and to listen to the Argo recording of the original BBC broadcast is near authentic.

The programme does not list the many roles played by each member of the cast, nor does the MTC have preferred an interval rather than the relentless one and a half hours. However, the pathos of the play is muted right down taking the roles of schoolboys. However, I do think Michael Edgar's Captain Cat (sans mask) is quite powerful. Before long though both — as do many in the cast — lose any semblance of Welsh accents.

A little better, and more Welsh sounding, is Malcolm Keith as Second Narrator. He takes the opening speech painfully slowly and somehow the words Thomas wrote do not strike out and hit one.

A little better, and more Welsh sounding, is Malcolm Keith as Second Narrator. Before long though both — as do many in the cast — lose any semblance of Welsh accents.

I recall when Under Milk Wood was first staged at London's New Theatre there was only one Narrator — Donald Houston — and most effective he was. There really seems no reason for using two, except that Thomas did write for a duo. In the present production, except at the commencement and end of the play, both sit in boxes either side of the stage.

Under Milk Wood — with most performers taking several roles — calls for ensemble playing of the highest order if it is to be successful. Here it only works intermittently. Some are good for most of the time, but occasionally fall off in one particular characterisation. The women are consistently better than the men, although I do think Michael Edgar's Captain Cat (sans mask) is quite powerful.

Head and shoulders over everyone else is Beverley Dunn: always with the right accent, spot on with a slightly different voice or characterisation. Ms Dunn is one of those Melbourne actresses the MTC, for no fathomable reason, has consistently failed to employ. This is her first appearance in a MTC production since she appeared in The Party way back in 1959!

Ms Dunn heroically has managed to do without the MTC, doing much respected radio work, playing Mary Emerson in Belbird and touring the country in highly acclaimed one-woman shows of her own creation. It seems a crime that she probably is better known on stage in Hobart and Perth than in her native Melbourne. Hopefully the MTC will now realise her potential and use her more in the future.

Some of the brilliance of director Rodger includes the chorus of women clucking like hens, and four of the women as schoolgirls with Mr Waldo and others taking the roles of schoolboys. However, the pathos of the play is muted right down as to be negligible and, with the endless backouts, any suggestion of time of day by lighting effects is nullified. It is a pity too that the talented Rodger has made no attempt to match the verbal poetry with some visual stage poetry.

The programme does not list the many roles played by each member of the cast, which is a pity. And, personally, I would have preferred an interval rather than the 100 minutes non-stop action.

Earlier I mentioned being in two minds about this production. Did I enjoy it then? As a matter of fact I did. But not for the reason I ought to have: relishing the poetry of Dylan Thomas. It was because of the constant amusing and surprising tricks being brought out of the hat by Mick Rodger.
One resounding success

ADVENTURES IN OPERA

DAVID GYGER

It was billed as Adventures in Opera, and consisted of the world premieres of three pieces of music theatre by living Australian composers; and it contained one resounding success and two shrugs of the shoulders.

It was, of course, the Victoria State Opera season at the Union Theatre, Melbourne University, early in September. The resounding success was Barry Conyngham and Murray Copland's The Apology of Bony Anderson (being a music-oriented critic, I list the composer before the librettist). Martin Friedl and Jack Hibberd's Sin: An Immoral Fable in Seven Deadly Acts and Entr'actes was a partial success in the undergraduate university revue genre; and Peter Sculthorpe and Barbara Blackman's Eliza Fraser Sings was a virtually unembellished musical monologue with no more than the odd token guffenectomy in the general direction of theatre.

The evening overall, of course, added up to a thoroughly mixed bag first, with Eliza Fraser, the pure music; then, with Bony Anderson, the only specimen of true music theatre; then, with Sin, a series of loosely connected skits with music that struck me as wholly incidental to the meaning of the piece.

Two-thirds of the programme was directed by Jan Stripling, whose dance background clearly manifested itself at every turn: indeed, it would almost be fair to say that his direction was so choreographic as to subvert the eye by distracting the ear. But it would be churlish to make too much of that; for of course music theatre is and ought to be the contemporaneous, all-in, composite art form, embracing all of the arts in the same way its creative parent, grand opera, was supposed to do (though traditional opera doesn't go in for too much of the blurring of the lines of demarcation between them).

That Stripling was less successful in bringing Eliza Fraser to life than Bony Anderson can be sheeted home directly to the deficiencies of the piece itself. It is a monologue; and it is well nigh impossible to build much true drama into a monologue of such modest proportions, accompanied only by piano and alto flute. Margot Cory was a fine Eliza who made a good deal of the material she had to work with; but one was still left wondering at the end just exactly what had been added, or indeed could have been added, by producing the piece as music theatre rather than as a straight concert item.

In a way, Bony Anderson is almost a monologue too, but not quite; "not quite" consisting, in this context, of the addition of two other singing voices to the vocal mix — a mezzo-soprano and a tenor — and the choreographic presentation of the unfolding story of Bony's personal sense of appreciation of the stagecraft involved is being stimulated for the first time always to sidestep triteness and cliche.

What makes Bony such an extraordinary experience, transcending either of those just mentioned, is the addition of those two other singers — remarkably characterised on this occasion by Pauline Ashleigh and Gerald English — and the four dancers (Julie Coward, Amanda Smith, Christopher Cole, Peter Mathews) brilliantly choreographed by Stripling to produce some of the most grotesque, surreal, beautiful — but always memorable — physical vignettes I have ever seen on stage.

Instrumentally and vocally too, Bony Anderson breaks new ground for the composer (at least as I know Conyngham's work). It is a remarkable refinement and advance on his Edward John Eyre of 1971 or thereabouts, using many of the same techniques but using them more sure-footedly and varying them more in accordance with the unfolding story of Bony's personal destruction.

The Apology of Bony Anderson must mark Conyngham as a significant composer for the musical theatre: it and Larry Sitsky's Lenz are the only two contemporary Australian pieces of musical drama I would go very far out of my way to see again.

Sin is good fun, much of the time, and occasionally it is even brilliant; but finally it provokes an intellectual shrug of the shoulders even while one's funnybone is being tickled expertly and often and one's sense of appreciation of the stagecraft involved is being stimulated for the dozenth time.

Much of the trouble is built into the very concept (and the title) of the work: the idea of saying anything very much about the seven deadly sins in a third of an evening's entertainment is more than a little presumptuous. Hence the inevitable need to capsulise, and probably the inevitable failure to capsulise brilliantly enough time after time always to sidestep triteness and cliche.

Some moments are brilliantly conceived and executed theatre, occasionally there is a flash of philosophical insight. More, sadly, are not original in the slightest. The music is nice but unmemorable. Pruning out some of the dead wood will help to make this a better piece of music theatre, but I doubt that it could ever evolve into more than what it is now — an intrinsically nice, but thoroughly undergraduate, series of cabaret skits.

Ian Cousins, Jan Friedl, Graeme Wall and Evelyn Krape in the Victorian State Opera's Sin

Dozens of APG/ Poor Theatre Tricks

THE FOOLS' SHOE HOTEL

V. RICHARDS


Gordon W. Footstone, Dick May; Jack Black, Captain Crumble, Bill Garner; Pop Gun, Roy Baldwin; Maud, Gladiss Beaumont, Faye Mokotow, Bum, Frankfurt, Dog, Tony Taylor; Maurer, The Crocodile, Jonathon Hardy.

Barry Dickens' Fools Shoe Hotel is a naturalistic cum absurdist Goon Shoe of a show which pretty much holds together under the force of some quite appropriate overacting. Amusing but pointless.

It's set in a seedy, possibly overgrown Manly private hotel populated by actors and a collection of bizarre dreams. There's a Frankfurt to deliver the prologue and epilogue, there's a crocodile that emerges from the fridge from time to time, on one memorable occasion to play analyst to
Jack Black, a sour gherkin of a failed performer. And there's Gordon Teetee, Ham of the first water, performer of edible trapeze tricks, perpetrator of all that was bad in the style of Gustavus Vaughan Brooke. The list would not be complete without the sad tale of Maude Bum, teadady to the stars, (a tale too pessimistic to relate here). Nor should we forget Pop Gun the proprietor and cook of such delicacies as roast thong, and Captain Crumble a Salvationist suffering gladly the slings of hellfire and masturbation.

Threaded through this crazy quilt are a pair of longhaired Marx brothers, Boris and Maurice who, with a great deal of boom boom and hows your father, purvey a shaggy dog story or two in a lunatic way.

So there you have it, a collage of verbal nonsense made to work hard by some straight ahead, over the top, single minded performances. I especially liked Jonathon Hardy's Crocodile, a most dexterous stunt, and he and Tony Taylor's Boris/Maurice routines where they effortfully conveyed the fun they were obviously having themselves. Fay Mokotow's tea lady soliloquy was most touching, Dick May's ham acting appropriate; Roy Baldwin's Pop Gun morose, and Bill Garner acerbic.

Barry Dickens has been well enough served by this production: director and cast have pulled dozens of APG/Poor Theatre tricks out of the bag to flesh out a collage of fairly facile verbal tricks. By keeping the acting area very small, the oppressive atmosphere of the hotel is created fairly easily and the dreamy rituals and bizarre visitations happen naturally. But underneath the production the writing is fairly thin, not funny enough to sustain itself, and not crazy enough to make any point about the characters. Bad puns, and circumlocutions and Goonishness do not establish a first rate comic imagination. Comedy is more serious than that. What it needs, or what Barry Dickens needs, I think, is to let himself go more completely, to escape from the confining world of theatrical in jokes (theatre about theatre is pretty boring) and find an environment where his sort of language is not imposed on a "naturalistic" world.

A kind of puritan's fanatic denunciation

FREAKS

JACK HIBBERD

Freaks by Gordon Graham. Hoopla Theatre Foundation. Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened 18 August, 1978. Directed by Mike Morris; Design by Peter Corrigan; Music by John Woody; Stage Manager: Tessie Hill; Stage Manager: Grant, Roger Oakley; Lighting: Judith Woodroffe; Nell: Paul Young; Royce: Malcolm Robertson; Penny: Liddy Clark; Maggot: Kim Gysalari.

(Finalist)

Something decidedly wierd is at large in Australian playmongery at the moment, something difficult to put the complete finger on. Within the span of a week I have witnessed occasions as wildly disparate as Barry Dickens's Foolshoe Hotel, Gordon Graham's Freaks, and Louis Nowra's Visions, a solid test indeed for the earnest seeker after some homogeneity or pattern in a heterogeneous world. In a phrase, three of our newer playwrights seem to be all over the place: Nowra is currently in Paraguay after a stint in Mother Russia, Graham inhabits some Australian cess­pool of his own invention, while Dickens is utterly off the planet.

At a level of carpentry and craft, Nowra displays the surest knack, Graham is on the troglodyte side of Jugglers Three, for Dickens the words are ludicrous. At a level of imagination and modern sensibility, only Dickens exhibits a real flair, in a highly generous, theatrical and lunatic response to the everyday scheme of things. All he needs is an intrinsic architecture. That is about all Nowra has, with his fleshless intimations of Marquez and Brecht. Graham seems only to have heard of the word in the context of erecting human outhouses.

Nowra, with his non-antipodean set­tings, looks to be reaching for an unparochial reaction, and finds it in that epicentre of the cosmopolitan and international, Sydney. Dickens warmly takes the parochial and attempts to transform Australia into a sad petty boarding house of idiot conventions, mad aspirations and failed dreams. Graham merely cudgels us with the Lorenz-like club of the sub­parochial. The Dickens is easily the finest achievement, and furthermore, he is (when in top form) blessedly comic, reverberating with echoes, fresh echoes, of Sterne, Dada and the Goons.

The expected common factor in these three would of course be Australia. Nowra, as is by now obvious, ignores it, not in order to create a Half-World and No­Where as in Beckett, but simply to unencumber himself in another clime, something immediately riveting to our universal-addicts and cultural cringers. Dickens disappears up into the clouds above Australia, his own comic exhalations. Graham thrusts Australia's potentially foetid underbelly and groin unrelentingly into our faces.

At the risk of being procrustean, one possible common factor is a desire to take leave of Australia dramatically (also discernible in the expatriate orientations of Going Home, A Handful of Friends, and Makassar Reef), to gain some more expansive and objective distance from the sub-culture, a drift in sharp contrast (not necessarily superior) to the close-up concerns of the late sixties and early seventies. Nowra achieves this by walking across the waters, Dickens by joyously taking leave of his senses, Graham by erecting another Australia, an island of predatory apes and cringing marmosets. Here is Graham on Freaks: 'What matters to me most about Freaks is its
political context; and in that respect *Freaks* is no distortion at all. The direct political equivalents of the action of the play are with us already, and there are more to come. Watch for Spider at the next elections.

It is inconceivable that *Freaks* is some form of neat allegory for the contemporary political situation in Australia without this statement. It is pretty inconceivable even with it. A massive sideways wrench of the wits is required to see the soft counter-cultural middle-class house of the play's action as Parliament or the Polis, and Spider, a fascistic working-class biker-bully, as a metaphor for our present top incumbent. If the play had irony, humour, and a few comprehensible parallels amongst its class confusions, such a construction might remotely be feasible. For all that one might applaud the wish, the wish is not realized in text or on stage.

*Freaks* is actually one of those quasi-anthropological and crypto-ethological plays that takes, from some kind of pulpit, a grubby view of human nature, a view frequently but not always endorsed by history. In a stolidly manichaean fashion, it examines the theme of the animal versus the human, the barbaric versus the civilized, the potent versus the effete, the aggressive versus the timorous, and in doing so *Freaks* oversimplifies and compartmentalises beyond average credulity.

The victory of the Attila-like Spider over the spineless sensitive of the house is in the end purely didactic and reeks of an inverted moralism: see what barbaric forces stalk our land, how sychophantic we are to authority regardless of its nature, how we finally worship and indulge such brutality despite our residual conscience, why don't we, a clutch of weak over-civilized bastards, do something? why don't we conquer and become like the magnificent Spider?

In the end it is rather like having an axe buried between the eyeballs or vulva and being screamed at for not doing something about the axeman. The axeman cometh says Graham and we naturally knell and touch the subfusc hem of his raiment, a set of smelly jeans.

*Freaks* is morally vulgar, a kind of puritan's fanatic denunciation, with all the puritan's ambiguous feelings for the putrid and corrupt. It presents a world entirely without redress, the only possible redress coming from the audience, some of whom booed at the end of the opening night performance.

I don't wish to say much about the production except that the director and cast were posed a near impossible task. Once again it gets down to poor choice of play, something that seems to dog *Hoopla* a little. Perhaps, given the broad demand, the Australian dramatic conserve is being spread too thinly. A grim sentiment, but it is my observation that with increasing acceptance of Australian plays over the last few years there has not been a proportionate increase in dramaturgical accomplishment, particularly among the newer writers, who should be applying a lot of ginger to the rumps of their ageing cohorts.

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**Theatre/NSW**

Plays to its sophisticated style

**DRACULA**

*Dracula* dramatised by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston from Bram Stoker’s novel. J C Williamson Productions Ltd and Michael Edgely International Pty Ltd at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Sydney, NSW. Opened 18 August 1978. Director, Robert Helpmann; Designer, Edward Gorey. Lucy Seward, Leigh Rowlas; Miss Wells, Amanda Irving; Jonathan Harker, Tony Sheldon; Dr Seward, David Ravenwood; Abraham Van Helsing, Max Bruch; R M Renfield, George Spartela; Buttersworth, Gavin Hamilton; Count Dracula, John Waters. (Professional)

Vampires have been used to mirror the unconscious fears of generations, to write large morbidity that at times afflicts the mass consciousness, and to unleash in a thrilling metaphor the male dominance of the female. They are quintessentially Victorian; an intoxicatingly sinister brute male sapping the blood of his sexual slaves. It needs no Freud to see the punctured neck and blood-letting as coital symbols.

But our age is not so much one of repressed sexuality, eschatology and bleak satanic mills so much as one of boredom born out of economic doldrums. The late seventies will not go down as an era when issues were raised, fights fought and people took their causes to the streets, but one of apathy and marking time. The escapism is not of the spine chilling thriller or deep passions pulsating just below the
A tolerably funny evening

THE REMOVALISTS

GREG CURRAN


Stu Simmonds, John Bowens; Constable Neville Ross, David Kavanagh; Uncle Kerkin, Kerrie Adams; Kenny Carter, Ray Anderson; Rob, Stephen Baker.

"I have never made an arrest in all my three years in the force, Ross" declares Sergeant Simmonds to his rocky Constable. Difficult to credit, you might think, in any circumstances, and especially when you know the man. First we are introduced to Dan. First complaint received in The Removalists is merely a domestic scuffle, which police normally don't touch. But the Sarge is telling the unwilling wife "We could take him in for questioning".

Simmonds also tells his junior "If you ever get into a situation that you can't handle without making an arrest, then you may as well get out, too". But when Simmonds and Ross pay a call on the wife, Fiona (to help her "remove" some furniture from her husband's control), and find Kenny, the slap happy spouse, and two separate charges of assault. A bit of the punching that's already gone on, is suddenly loses control and beats Kenny to berserk" and beats Kenny about the face bravely. We in the audience might only add — Amen).

Simmonds is almost totally implausible in the role of character. He only exists in the essays on violence in the printed text, not on the stage (except may be as a comic type) He's an idea, not a dramatic creation, because he simply doesn't add up. Nor does Ross, a slightly dim witted naive, vaguely idealistic plot who tells Simmonds "I think we have to be prepared for change in this day and age. I think our minds should be receptive to new ideas and new ways of doing things .. ." Ross, it appears, is ambitious mainly about money. He wants to go to a dance with his girl friend but is roped for the invasion of Fiona's home, and then suddenly loses control and beats Kenny to death. Unbelievable! (Not to mention than Simmonds, who stresses that he was too late to stop a previous assistant striking some Albert alderation in a manner which is puffylooty compared to what Ross does, does not intervene.

Kate the semi-upper-middle-class dentist's wife, sister of Fiona, is a reasonable enough catalyst to trigger off Fiona's complaint to the cops and a lot of sexual tension all round. At the Actors Company Julie Kirby makes this character less satisfactory perhaps than thanable than it has been in the past (at least in my experience, ie the Harry Miller production and the movie) Kerrie Adams plays Fiona, better (I think) than Jackie Weaver did, suggesting a certain background, a fairly comfortable one, that she shares in common with her sister. And her comic timing is excellent. (Fiona's "She isn't" responding to Kate's "Anyone would think I was a nymphomaniac" is the funniest line of the evening).

Fiona is sometimes presented as sym pathetic and not quite sweet but so something prepares us for the scene in which she sees Kenny continually beaten up and does nothing about it. True, she demurs vaguely at first and when Kenny asks her to tell Simmonds to let him go she points out to the cops she's not intending to press charges. But when Kenny tells her "He's going to beat shit out of me, Fiona" she allows herself to be lead astray by her sister, whose own response to this, after all the punching that's already gone on, is "Don't be so ridiculous!" Nothing quite prepares us for this exit, this callousness. I think we're probably expected to despise Fiona and her socialite sister as much as Ross's girl friend offstage, down at the other end of the social scale" ... we're on the same table as the general manager. . . . Marilyn my girlfriend's getting her hair set and the paid a deposit on the tickets". The removalist himself is just as unfelt as Kate and Fiona, he's totally disinterested in Kenny's plight. His obsession is his occupation, his signature tune the truck waiting outside (I've got ten thousand dollars worth of machinery tickin' over out there ...) When his job's done he won't
help the hapless victim and he walks out. At the Actors Co Stephen Baker, ravenously chewing gum, is laconic, ocker and quite funny.

Apart from the "flesh and blood" characters, there's another, non human participant in this play — the police station where it all starts ... Simmonds tells us that it's not one of the "right places" — "no pay-offs here boy, a few perks but no pay-offs". If that's so, and we must presumably take what he says at face value, how come Simmonds can arrange female company for Kenny as a pay off for being beaten up (Kenny: What? You turn a blind eye and get paid off in kind. Simmonds: The girls are grateful to me because I realise their value to the community). What sort of a police station is of such a size that it's too small to handle anything — big or small (the latter is said to be hardly worth the effort). At what police station do the police do nothing but bash people up, watch the midday movie and visit prostitutes?

The Removalists is a good instance in Australian drama of the critics and public taking the will for the deed. It's a play you can see the score around. Franks and Kerry Mitle in their Piece in The Currency edition interestingly refer to assaults covered up. But that's not what this play becomes finally about, quite the contrary. Theories don't displace the necessity of writing a good play and creating some characters. For a playwright the mere indication of themes (and a flair for dialogue) is inadequate; good intentions are not enough.

Ian Turner (in another article) points out that Australian culture is fundamentally anti-woman and that (presumably having regard to Simmonds's designs on the ladies and his puritanical tirade against Kate on rejection) "the deep repressions and frustrations expressed by Sergeant Dan Simmonds in his outburst against Kate and Fiona are endemic in this culture". There's little doubt — it's a part of the play — but, surrounded as it is by inconsistencies and implausibilities in other areas, this good dramatic notion hardly makes the effort it should.

The Actors Co performance apparently took a while to settle in, but by the time I got there, it was operating, rather surprisingly, as a comedy. Perhaps because the violence is not as efficient as previously (in John Bell's production it was horrendous and loath to do it as I did, that must be taken as a compliment), perhaps because David Ken求's Ross more likeable than usual (Ray Anderson is good as Kenny, but no Martin Harris). But mainly it's because of John Barnes as Simmonds. Mr Barnes ferries his irresistible stare and deadpan comic timing almost to the end of the play, including the Sergeant's incredulity at Ross's suggestion that they make the death look like a suicide. "Do you think I'd commit suicide by beating myself to death? Gets all depressed and starts swinging uppercuts at himself? Whatever the reason the pill on this occasion is sugared, the play is softened. It means tolerable fun for an evening because we don't have to believe in it and because David Williamson is a master not only at reproducing the banality of officialbllese but of native comic dialogue in general. Has anyone ever had any illusions that "Yes, if your father's a carpenter, he'd be pretty stahle"?"

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**Multitude of strong after images**

**LAMB OF GOD**

**ANTHONY BARCLAY**

*Lamb of God* by John Summons. *Ensemble Theatre, Sydney* NSW. Opened August 10 1978. Director, John Summons; Designer, Brian Tucker; Lighting Design, Kim Haque-Smith; Sound Design, Rod Dyson. Mick, Nick Harris; Jim, Michael Smith; Ruth, Patricia Jones; Jack, Martin Vaughan. (Professional)

The ensemble's *Lamb of God* reaps considerable laurels for writer John Summons, the very talented actor Michael Smith and director Hayes Gordon. This almost judicious blending of youth (Summons, Smith) and maturity (Gordon) offers to Sydneyiders one of the best locally played and directed pieces of theatre for 1978.

Attention turns first to twenty-five year old dramatist John Summons. Summons' *Lamb of God* is his most serious work to date and it earmarks his very considerable potential as a future writer for theatre. *Lamb of God*, a more fullsome exploration of the world of Sydney suburban Catholicism, rooted within the cloistered web of family and the late 'sixties, develops on his 1977 success *Coroner's Report*, one of three plays in Richard Wherrett's excellent Nimrod Downstairs programme *Going Bananas*. Both works tread a cautious path between liberating self-awareness and maudlin self-indulgence with inevitable twinges of melodrama. Summons manages in both plays to triumph with an almost sculptural rendering of powerful emotions neither understood nor articulated by his protagonists (mainly family) and his own self-redemptive wit, a singular foil against the blind thrusts of family, friends and religion. If the stuff of his plays begins in immensely personal worlds it ends in a reasonably familiar milieu of suburban malaise.

At this stage of his development Summons has a rare quality; he leaves the spectator with a multitude of strong images, particularly in *Lamb of God* with its episodic form and lengthy blackouts between scenes. But closer inspection reveals flaws beneath these images. There is a fundamental weakness in his grasp of language, a lack of dexterity that sometimes loses the clarity of the issues being exposed and explored. That was especially true of the relationship between parents Ruth and Jack (Patricia Jones and Martin Vaughan) and son (Michael Smith). Jack, the father, who has 'always thought Summons captured the Jim-Mick relationship well and many of the play's better moments were shared by Michael Smith and Nick Hedstrom. This relationship highlighted Jim's sensitive awareness, his suppressed tactile physicality which eventually labels him a 'poofler' for which he is bashed and lip-sticked by classmates while Mick looks on.

Another world, off-stage, is that of dead Uncle Bill who seems to represent 'freedom', a world of fantasy that border more on fantasy than substance, and who lives in the second act: he unobtusely points the suburban wilderness. These scenes highlight Hayes Gordon's masterly direction of the second act: he unobtusely points the major issues. Martin Vaughan and Jones had an equal share in the play. Jones seemed awkward at moments and Vaughan rambled for a time before he hit home — but this suggests to me that Summons had not fully fleshed the parents than any inherent flaws in the acting.

The focus on only four characters gave the play an economy yet it is a tribute to Summons that he managed to create a whole world of characters outside of the gloomy house well evoked by Brian Tucker's sparse and aptly depressing set. The authoritarianism and monumental ignorance of Catholicism (Bro. Thomas) juxtaposed to the pathetically doomed humane teacher (Bro. John) whose homosexual leanings towards Jim cannot be disguised by his specious mouthings of existential theology and Rogerian psychology, the basic point of Jim's attraction to him. This sadly highlights the alienation of the sensitive in a world of entrenched dogma and we are not surprised to learn of Bro. John's 'nervous breakdown'.

On stage the milieu of peer-group is represented in the figure of Mick (Nick Hedstrom the colourless, good friend who is suspicious of Jim and reacts with a blunted hostility to Jim's frequent jibes that he is a 'moron'. Jim leans on Mick's crude masculinity — even to the point of getting him to set a rat-trap, a task he inevitably despised Mick because the latter has no access to the worlds Jim seeks.

I thought Summons captured the Jim-Mick relationship well and many of the play's better moments were shared by Michael Smith and Nick Hedstrom. This relationship highlighted Jim's sensitive awareness, his suppressed tactile physicality which eventually labels him a 'poofler' for which he is bashed and lip-sticked by classmates while Mick looks on.

Another world, off-stage, is that of dead Uncle Bill who seems to represent 'freedom', and still does to Jim's father, Jack.
But we find that Bill was an alcoholic and we are confident that Jim will not pursue this vainglorious path (though Summons gets an excellent connection when Jim develops a 'bad back', a throwback to his Uncle, Bill's bad back, Bill's excuse for evading most responsibilities in life). Equally, we are confident that Jim will not pursue this path (though Summons was terrifying. But rather than hold them, while the object of horror, the son, is invading the living space, the actors usually moved back in naturalistic gesture. This, I felt, weakened the sculptural power of some tableau and, once again, gave the particular gestures a literal quality. The amalgamated mime of the entire family coming together to embody an insect was excellent, reminiscent of the nightmare scene unleased Michael Smith's tremendous range as an actor as Jim acts out his alienation in the fantasy of the fallen angel, Captain Cosmos, alien from another galaxy. The scene struck me as an uneasy mixture of rich comedy, deft redemptive irony and the self-indulgence of precocious adolescence. But it lacked restraint, its humour resided more in cliche than in informing self-awareness and this was similarly reflected in the overdone lighting and sound effects. The Lamb lays down any allegiance to the insensitivity of his environment but he has yet to find new worlds. It was obviously necessary for John Summons to reject the medieval closed world of suburban Catholicism, but one wonders where a young playwright of such shape and substance will find new directions for his next work.

The horror builds gradually in the piece. This is because the director has created a vacuum sparesness on stage to emphasise, very clearly, a few themic points in the drama. He has also concentrated work on the physical relationships between family members, especially between father and son. The insect-son may be crawling toward his mother for affection. Mother is horrified. If father had lived in Vienna instead of Prague, Freud would have had a field day.

The major theme of the play is the bourgeois family itself. But Berkoff is not dissecting it in the same way he did in East where the family was not bourgeois however. In the family scenes in East, the characters were hyper-realistic, zany types. Here, in Metamorphosis, there is no doubt but that the autocratic family system, with disgusting daddy at its helm, is being presented.

George Shevtsov as the father and Ralph Cotterill as the insect-son embody this relationship. Shevtsov can look mighty and overgrown on stage. (His bearish physciality was diminished upstairs at the

physical contrast at the heart

METAMORPHOSIS

ROGER PULVERS

Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka, adapted by Steven Berkoff. Nimrod: Theatre Uptown, Sydney, NSW. Opened 19 August 1978. Director, Designer, Steven Berkoff; Music, Nicholas Lyon; Costume, Silvia Janssen; Stage Manager, Penny Roberts; Lighting, Annie Marshall. Gregor, Ralph Cotterill; Mr Samsa, George Shevtsov; Mrs Samsa, Janice Pilling; Grete, Margaret Cameron; Chief Clerk, Paul Betram; Lodger, Richard Collins.

The horror builds gradually in the piece. This is because the director has created a vacuum sparesness on stage to emphasise, very clearly, a few themic points in the drama. He has also concentrated work on the physical relationships between family members, especially between father and son. The insect-son may be crawling toward his mother for affection. Mother is horrified. If father had lived in Vienna instead of Prague, Freud would have had a field day.

The major theme of the play is the bourgeois family itself. But Berkoff is not dissecting it in the same way he did in East where the family was not bourgeois however. In the family scenes in East, the characters were hyper-realistic, zany types. Here, in Metamorphosis, there is no doubt but that the autocratic family system, with disgusting daddy at its helm, is being presented.

George Shevtsov as the father and Ralph Cotterill as the insect-son embody this relationship. Shevtsov can look mighty and overgrown on stage. (His bearish physciality was diminished upstairs at the
kind of grave prescience, against which the lunatic antics of Magenta, Columbia, Eddie and Riff Raff became if not the focal point at least a valuable ingredient in, let’s face it, such a remarkably thin script.

This decision of O’Connell’s to soften personality was courageous and generally successful. Certainly his Frank N Furter was overtly alive to fleshly pursuits, but the character’s brooding defence of the ‘if it feels good do it’ philosophy was finely managed.

Where the immediacy of the show succeeds — and this despite its pace, visual effects and elegant articulation of the Narrator — was in dialogue sections where audio levels were humdrum following the clarity and verve of the musical numbers. The music in fact, performed with sparkling authority on a mixture of acoustic and electric hardware, fanned the stage performers into a blaze of physical action celebrating the joys of rock rhythm.

As the young couple who seek refuge at Furter’s mansion, Toby Prentice as Brad and Lynne Erskine as Janet well conveyed dewy middle-class innocence, Myles O’Connor as the gangling marionette facility as Riff Raff and Ken Moffat put a surge of vitality into Eddie, doubling sturdily later as the wheelchair-bound Dr Scott.

Janette Crowe’s Magenta was easily the pick of the ladies, as much for her wickedly sinking presence as for her range of fluent gestures. By comparison, Elaine Mangan’s Columbia seemed less certain: she was almost too nice.

Rocky himself, in the person of Les Winspear, glowed like a Greek athlete and projected everybody’s notion of extra-terrestrial strength and excellence. Bob Baines brought verbal relish to his narration; this was overtly alive to fleshly pursuits, but the well made play seems slight. Geoff Usher managed to give full credit to Geoff Usher. It feels good do it’ philosophy was finely managed.

Directive: Peter Collingwood; Design: James Ridewood. Tom: Geoff Kelso; Colin: Robert Hughes; Tolen: Grant Dodwell; Nancy: Celia De Burgh.

Whereas in the early sixties it was still quite shocking to have a play with no real plot, a different sense of structure has developed, and in spite of the “free-wheeling” dialogue, the action appears very contrived. The subject of the dialogue, between three young men sharing a birthday as a justification — it is the first play the theatre ever put on — but the Tote had no such alibi. In both revivals it was discerned to be perhaps too soon, perhaps impossible, to revitalise even as nostalgia, the innovations of a decade and a half ago.

The Hole in the Wall, and in Sydney by the Five-Sided Theatre, Kensington NSW. Opened 9 August, 1978.

THE KNACK

LUCY WAGNER


The Five-Sided Theatre, another of the new theatre groups in Sydney, is temporarily residing at the inhospitable Kirk Gallery. The group, lead by young Sydney actor Stephan Hargreave, is a mixture of professionals, amateurs and those just plain-interested in theatre. The group’s first offering is Brian Friel’s Lovers, two one-act plays entitled respectively Winners and Losers; a neat coupling of Irish lyricism and strong beefy humour, at once cheeky and tinged with that pathos that only the Irish can celebrate with ease. The plays themselves make for good theatre but I was somewhat puzzled by the group’s choice of Friel for openers. These are relaxed sketches more suited to say drama festivals (Winners played at the Canberra festival a couple of years ago) then to an extended season.

Winners is a sensitively written, lyric-poetic piece, dealing with young love thwarted by the cruel thrust of fate. It features two narrators who deliver the factual details surrounding the accidental deaths of Maggie and Joe while, on stage, two actors live through the events of the afternoon preceding the lovers’ fatal drowning. Young actress Andrea Kelland, though not entirely at ease with her role as Maggie, captured well some of the play’s lyrical power — her idyllic love of Joe complemented with her adolescent confusion of forthcoming motherhood and adult responsibility. Yet the play failed because the necessary tension between narration and stage action, a tension designed to create a sad, dark mood as the lovers leave the stage, was entirely lacking. Indeed, the exit was nothing short of casual on a most unattractive stage; no attempt was made to use lighting to create mood. The whole weight of the play was entirely verbal and, while one is prepared to give consideration to lack of resources, this proved to be a mistake. Geoff O’Connor managed to give both verbal awareness and accurately modulated tones to his narration; this combined with Andrea Kelland’s expressive work made the play bearable.

Losers, by contrast, is strong Irish stuff, encompassing humour and pathos as it deals with middle age trapped by marriage and religion. I’m sad to say there was little to remark on with this performance — except to give full credit to Geoff O’Connor. It amazed me that Usher managed a vivacity and strength in his treatment of Andy, eliciting the necessary blend of comedy and sadness, when he was working with one of the worst trio of actresses I have yet to behold. Lines fluffed, accents dropped almost at will, stage movement as clumsy as an end of year school production.

I am not inclined to truculent criticism of new groups but there are a number of groups around Sydney whose ranks are primarily non-professional and they are worth viewing. I hope the Five Sided Theatre will continue but I trust they will give thought to their choice of material, the quality of their acting, and the accuracy of their direction.

Lightweight diversion for the middle brow
— that remains the most potent image for today of the early sixties. The first moments of the play reveal him painting abstract swirls over the Victorian wallpaper of his rented room. The new and fresh seeking to impose itself over the old and tired, in a way that makes its own rules — white where the light falls, black in the shadows — emphasising what is natural. James Ridewood's set was happily evocative of the dingy rooms that students take delight in so transforming, and of the staid outside world of the street that Tolen is constantly bursting out into, to introduce the new-found freedom of the private set-up into the public.

But whatever the constant similarities between new generations of youth, the play's value is already that of a period piece. But it was written as a drama of freedom; it was meant as a slap in the face to those who take themselves and the world too seriously, "theatre as pure play" as Michael Kustow enthused in his original review. The games should be childlike, not childish as Colin points out to Tolen, Tolen who makes his knock ridiculous by his humourless concern with it, and ends up the loser. Sad, then, it is that this play should have been put on amidst the Tote's commercial season, where it has been seriously treated as a lightweight diversion for the middle brow. That the costumes should be so non-descript as to appear equally of either the sixties or today implies an inability to see the changes that such a play has wrought. The success of it and its liberating innovations has at least temporarily rendered it impotent.

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**One of the best new Australian pieces written**

**VISIONS**

ROGER PULVERS

*Visions* by Louis Nowra, Paris Theatre, Sydney, NSW. Opened 17 August 1978. Director, Rex Cramphorn; Designer, Luciana Arrighi, Jono Enemark, Melody Cooper; Music, Sarah de Jong; Choreography, Keith Bain; Lighting, Bill Walkar.

President Lopez, John Gaden; Madame Lynch, Kate Fitzpatrick; Adelaide, Claire Growther; Conna, Mary-Lou Stewart; Juana, Jennifer Clarke; Valera, Tim Hughes; American Ambassador, John Paramor; Lopez' Father, Peter Corbett; Aide, Geoffrey Clendon; Marie, Judy Davis; Doctors, Soldiers, Peasants, John Paramor; Peter Corbett, Geoffrey Clendon; Guitarist, George Sims; Percussionist, Peter Kelly.

I don't know the fate of the Paris Theatre by the time this review appears. But I also don't understand the motivations of critics who opposed the theatre's choices. There has been a definite change going on in Australian theatre in the last three years. The writing of Steve Spears, Louis Nowra, and David Allen, to name three, is not like that of earlier playwrights here. Now, when a new theatre starts up and recognises, with production, one of those writers, as well as other earlier non-naturalistic writers like Dorothy Hewett and Patrick White, it is attacked for not doing the 'right plays'.

Well, a new theatre should do new plays; and the Paris's two choices so far have been unquestionably good.

*VISIONS*, I feel, has the sense of an epic, a story re-told in clearly defined time blocks. The characters are not only acting out the story, they are also commenting on it and trying to outwit it, as if it were history itself.

John Gaden's portrayal of President Lopez was very fine. Rather than juice himself up for a bit of buffoonery, he allowed his wife, played by Kate Fitzpatrick, to exhibit the strength. Wasn't she to be — as he announces — the symbol of his Presidency? And in her portrayal, Kate Fitzpatrick was brilliant as the insipid bigote. The part engenders hatred.

I felt that the director, Rex Cramphorn, brought out the essential structure of the piece with great precision. Each part was spaced and visually sharply. I heard one person complain about the longish scene changes; but this sort of thing can add to the strength of a play, as it does in the Noh theatre for instance. It was in the visual elements that the direction showed its greatest power. The old president lying half-dead, and all we see is his feet and a raised fist in the air. One gesture like this can suggest so much: does the old father see what is going to happen to his country?

The Henri Rousseauian backdrop was, in a word, exquisite, suggesting in a fauvist way the opulence and danger of the native environment. It is a backdrop that engulfs the lovely clumsy dresses of the wife and sister. This is no place for the salon. In fact, the whole play's message, of the pathetic consequence of transplanting foreign culture, comes home here. The French wife puts on a masked ball in a country of rich festivals. The native cock-fight, using men instead of animals, is an amusement, as is the war they watch from their picnic site. It isn't until the end that the characters realise that these seemingly amusing confrontations involve them.

Lopez scorches the earth under Asuncion before abandoning it. He, his wife, his sisters, and aides spend months trapped in the swamp. This was where the staging failed to live up to the total effect. The swamp was not sufficiently evoked. Water might have been used, as it was earlier in the play; or just more mud. The president has to be degraded more before being shot. And when he is shot, it is done in the 'take this!' and 'this' fashion. Much to melodramatical, and out of step with the ironical style of the rest.

The play itself is one of the best New Australian pieces written. It has a good deal of humour and always reminds us that we in Australia have paralleled the cultural development of its object country, Paraguay. Someone remarked to me after the play, 'Ha, Paraguay, who knows anything about the culture of Paraguay!' But who knows anything about us either. Some of the reasons might be similar.

Finally, I would like to point out two young actors in *Visions*, Geoffrey Clendon and Judy Davis. They gave superb small performances, acting tragic little people who are called to serve hateful masters. This too is a theme of the play: that people of power cause the destruction of others without realising that they are bound to fall victim themselves.

Kate Fitzpatrick as Madame Lopez in Paris Theatre's *Visions*. Photo: Branco Gaica
Success lies in its lyrical quality

TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS

JEREMY RIDGMAN

Tales From The Vienna Woods by Odon von Horvath. La Boite Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened 18 August 1978. Director, Rod Wissler; Set design, Luigi Forzini; Alfred’s Mother, Gillian Tye; Alfred, Ken Parker; Ferdinand, Alex Duncan; Alfred’s Grandmother, Barbara Bacon; Valvert, Kaye Stevenson; Oskar, Craige Cronin; Hlavatetsch, Rose Dobinson; Captain, Bruce McCormack; Lady, Karin Kunj; Marianne, Peta Gottschalk; Zauberkonig, Roger Rosser; In Aunt, Heine; Jacqui Conn; 2nd Aunt, Barret; Penny Wissler; Erich, Garry Cook; Emma, Girl, Jacki Maffean; Sepp, Oskar’s Father, American; Chris Burns; Compare, Peter Galli, Girl, Christine Affleck, Madame.

As the country’s economic fortunes tremble and Queensland unflinchingly submits to the instigation of a branch of the National Front, it seems not inappropriately that La Boite should choose to mount von Horvath’s until recently little known study of 1930’s Austria, a society slowly crumbling under inflation and burgeoning fascism.

One might want to quibble with von Horvath’s fatalistic attitude to the misfortunes of his heroine and his homeland, but the implicit political criticism was obvious enough for his plays to be banned under the Third Reich.

The production has evidently puzzled a few Brisbanites who came expecting an evening of cheery chintz and got an eyeful under the Third Reich.

Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane Qld. Opened 17 August 1978. Director, Designer, David Clendinning; Lighting, Kenneth Rayner; Stage Manager, Gregg McMichan; Dennis, David Clendinning; Vera, Margaret Hickay; Neil, Bruce Parr; Marjorie, Iolanthe Slater; Pam, Bronwen Doherty.

The morning before Alan Ayckbourn came to talk to our drama course group in London in 1975, he had walked into the West End Theatre where his Absurd Person Singular was performing, and sacked all but one of the cast. The reason, he told us, was that most actors they had been unable to resist the temptation to ham up the obvious farcical elements in his play, and had turned a sharp satire on middle class life into a ridiculous comedy.

The Brisbane Actor’s Company, if the author could see their production of Just Between Ourselves, would I fear suffer the same fate. It has a remarkably veracious set, accomplished performances, and is one of the most stylish (in a general sense) productions of the year. But in its failure to accurately follow the acting style Ayckbourn intends, it becomes an improbable and often unpleasant farce.

The Lucky Ones

CLOWNEROONIES!

VERONICA KELLY

Clowneroonies/QTC, at Uniting Church Hall, The Valley, Qld. Opened 22 August, 1978. Director, Geoffrey Rush; Stage Manager, Robert Gregor; The Great Wizard, Geoff Cartwright; Skeeter, Gillian Hyde; Bob the uncanny, Russell Newman; Moggy, Pat Thomson; Roy the wonderbox, Geoffrey Rush. (Professional)

How often do you see a show which is not only exhilarating, funny and polished, but leaves you gibbering with the delightful certainty that a high point in Australian theatre has happened before your eyes? In Clowneroonies! the QTC has just such a rarity, and it’s class stuff. This full-length programme of comedic and mimetic skills was assembled in a six-weeks workshop period by members of the QTC under the tutelage and direction of Geoff Rush, and a funny and professional crew of clowns they are. Given the work they get to do in the Company’s mainstream productions, this may surprise some. The Clowneroonies have got what our theatre so desperately needs and which our actors are indeed capable of supplying: inventive ensemble work, accomplishment in physical skills, intelligent and witty use of the popular European theatrical tradition and of local imagery connecting immediately with the audience. The brilliant “Ekka” sequence, especially the tin ducks in the lethal shooting gallery, will haunt me a long time. The show plays a fortnight only in a scruffy tropical-gothic church hall using materials raided from the QTC stores, the result is the authentic magic of living theatre.

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Both Absurd Person Singular and this later play combine unlikely plot elements. Ayckbourn deliberately uses contrived situations worthy of Feydeau, and places in the midst of this comic madness a person in genuine despair. And Ayckbourn dwells on the reasons for this despair sufficiently to make clear that here is a serious character, and not just another eccentric facet of the comic melange.

Consider this example from Just Between Ourselves. Our home handyman Dennis is in the garage making a present
for his mother, for it's her birthday. His wife Vera is in the third stage of a carefully charted decline into a total schizophrenic withdrawal from the world. In the final scenes of the action Dennis is engaged in a very contrived sexual wrestle with a friend's wife, the mother is trying to prevent Vera finding out, Vera is screaming in hysterics and struggling at the stuck garage door, and the friend arrives dead on cue carrying a huge and dazzling birthday cake, and switches on the fairy lights.

All good comic stuff you might say, but the problem is that Ayckbourn goes to some length to make it clear that Vera's mental collapse is a product of Dennis's neglect and callous condescension, combined with the mother's snide presence in the household. And the central image of the play — Vera's clapped out car in the garage — is very clearly for Vera the symbol of just the kind of freedom and independence which she needs to recover. This, in short, for a more serious and satirical study of homo suburbanus.

Ayckbourn's intentions both as writer and director (as I recall from his talk) are to focus on this second level, and to restrain the farce sufficiently to allow his discrimination to come through. And it is on this point precisely that the Actor's Company cannot contain its desire for commercial success, nor compensate for the fact that the director and leading actor David Clim dusting is one of Australia's most inventive and outrageous comic actors. He has distanced the comedy to perfection, and made his central character Dennis an appealing laugh a minute master of ceremonies.

So one is left with two choices: either refuse to take the play seriously, or get the rather unpleasant sensation that one is laughing at a loonie who just happens to be a desperate human being who's stumbled into the wrong play.

Off-handedness rescues play from overkill

BIG TOYS

DON BATECHLOR

Big Toys by Patrick White, Queensland Theatre Company, 50 Jutheatre, Brisbane, Queensland. Opened 16 August, 1978. Director, Jack Marriott; Designer, James Henson; Stage Manager, David Deighton; Lighting Design, Mag, Kate Shell; Terry Legge, Douglas Hedge; Richie Bouanquet, John Krummel.

We live in lunatic times, some of us feebly protesting participants in a voracious system, many of us committed to the point of being ineffectual in our disapproval. Drastic times require drastic measures.

There is need for voices of great power, becomes, for the duration of the play, a little boy lost in the sick wilderness. We live in lunatic times, some of us feebly protesting participants in a voracious system, many of us committed to the point of being ineffectual in our disapproval. Drastic times require drastic measures.

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What is, in the end, so disappointing about the South Australian State Theatre Company's A Manual of Trench Warfare is not that it is a bad play, though it is a bad play, but that it is so derivative. It is as if D-class Synge or O'Casey had been applied to Oh! What A Lovely War; a feeling that is reinforced by the style of the production and the leading protagonist's Dave Allen agent.

Clem Gorman's play, staged for the first time in this production, is set in the trenches of Gallipoli on the eve of the evacuation. A young and distinctly gormless private from the bush called Barry Moon is joined by an Irishman Brendan Barra who, it turns out, is not only a warrior bold but who also fancies Private Moon. Camp life, indeed.

The other principal character is a Lance-Corporal Byron who regards Barra, not unreasonably in the circumstances and the times, as a deviate and troublemaker. There ensues much battle-type action, shot and shell (why does rifle fire never sound realistic in a theatre?) because Barra ritualistically makes his big play — still, though, retaining trousers and puttees.

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arrested by the corporal, summarily flogged and escaped back to the trench of Moon. After the abortive seduction he is shot in a fight by the vengeful NCO and dies.

If that all sounds very melodramatic, I can plead only that it is all very melodramatic.

It is only fair to record in this professional journal of record that local critic Alan Roberts found it the finest Australian play he had seen in years or felt likely to see for a long time and that he regarded Colin George’s production as showing “mastery of the claustrophobic.” To my mind it was mawkish and boring, I fidgetted throughout a rough but reliable guide.

There are flashes of humour, there is a good vignette from Patrick Frost as Bairs-father-type soldier, and Mr Gorman does say something about the nobility of man and the futility of war.

But by now this is familiar territory and what is said is not enough to retrieve the rest. I must also take exception to the way Barra and Moon (Neil Fitzpatrick and Colin Friel) keep clutching each other. Even making all allowances for the ritual and symbolic element, people simply do not behave that way.

A generation ago a play linking the Great Australian Legend of Gallipoli and homosexuality would have been guaranteed to outrage at least the RSL. These days the reaction is just a resigned shrug.

Old jokes are the best

DICK WHITTINGTON AND HIS CAT

CLIFF GILLAM

Dick Whittington by Kenny Cantor. Interstar and Channel 9, Regal Theatre, Perth WA. Opened August 17 1978. Directors, Kenny Cantor; Tony Bay; Choreography, Marcia Hatherington; Design, Bill Dowd.

King Rat; Barry Screigh; The Fairy, Marcia Hatherington; Town Crier, Senator of Morocco, Barrie Barkla; Alderman Fitzwarten, Colin Bergonon; Alice Fitzwarten; Yvonne Troedson; Captain; Mavis Ogden; Mare, Phil Cleary; Sarah The Cook, Bernie Davis; Idle Jack, Kenny Cantor; Dick Whittington, Jackie Immelman; Tommy the Cat; Jean Chisolm; Regal Singers and Dancers, Adele Cooper, Nerelle Matthews; Catherine Matthews, Anita Rosal, Marina Del Beso, Deane Hansen, Kathy Rudrum, Suzette Rudrum, Lisa Elder; Eleanor Hales; Suzanne Elliott; Shiree; Shiralee Cook.

(Professional)

Though very much out of season, and somewhat more exotic than is usual the case, being performed in the Antipodes in August rather than at Christmas in England, Interstar’s presentation of the traditional pantomime Dick Whittington and His Cat provides fairly conclusive proof that having fun is a simple thing, and that the old jokes are still the best jokes.

It was a truly traditional pantom — the hero a girl in tights, a grand Dame in this case Sarah the Cook done in drag, crusty old gent, clownish baddies, a touch of exotic throw in in the form of the Sultan of Morocco and his harem, lots of singing and dancing, topical jokes, slapstick, audience participation routines; a veritable farrago held together by the vestiges of a plot and the inevitable puck of the proceedings, the presider over this genteel Saturnalia, Idle Jack, alias Kenny Cantor.

Mr Cantor is an English comic (among other things) of some reputation, and he devised and wrote the show, but it would go on the ease with which he controlled other things) of some reputation, and

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Deserved a more thinking performance

SMALL CHANGE

PETER MANN

Small Change by Peter Gill at the Hele in the Wall Theatre. Perth, WA. Opened 9th August. Director. John Milton; Lighting, Stephen Amos, Gerard, Gerald Hitchcock; Mrs Hans, Jenny McKae; Veteran, Bevon Lew; Mrs Driscoll: Margaret Anketell.

One leaves the theatre, after seeing this splendid piece of modern dramatic writing, presented at the Hole, absorbed with its situations. Broken conversations, taken up again after other information has been given, have left one still working out its significance. So absorbed is one by it all, that one is unconscious that the players, on their tilted-raft stage, have rarely risen from their seats, and that what ordinarily constitutes a play has not taken place.

The four people talk in ordinary words, their lives include nothing out of the ordinary, and yet their pleasures, their doubts and their aspirations are the real stuff of theatre. The two characters, Mrs Driscoll and Gerard do not communicate, and although they are present all the time, it seems that this neighbourhood died before (Continued on page 40)
Act II
The time is early evening of Easter Saturday. It is that transitional time when the sky is palely luminous, and competing with the already lighted street lamps. The Village is a hive of activity. Pan has drawn one of her panther/woman rampant on the pavement and is now painting a sign on the wall near the fountain. The sign reads “Homes are History.” Mac is sitting at his table, almost sober, typing furiously. Prim is working a flatbed at the counter, is gathering up the leaflets and folding them. The Goose is playing “Across the Western Suburbs we will wander” on the downstairs piano. The atmosphere is excited, cheerful, and both in the sense of purpose usually quite alien to the Village.

The Goose: (sings) O me name is the Goose, they’ve been playin’ fast and loose, with the little village that I call me home, so its caused me heart to grieve, for I’ll have to take my leave, and across the western suburbs I must roam.

Ethel: (sings and capers scattering leaflets) Me name is Ethel Malley and I’m callin’ this ’ere rally, before our national heritage is squandered, for they’ve started knockin’ down all the nite spots in the town, where in the old days Ern and Ethel wandered.

Prim: (sings and jumps onto the bar) O me name it is Mac Greene and I’ve got patience. She waits...and then she pounces.

Mac: O me name is Mac Greene and I’ve got a head of steam,

for the inner city is me natural home, for pyramids of glass they have given me the arse

and across the western suburbs I must wander.

Ali: Under concrete and glass Sydney’s disappearin’ fast, it’s all gone for profit and for plunder, though we really want to stay, they keep drivin’ us away, now across the western suburbs we must wander.

Ali: (to Rudi and Tink) Under concrete and glass Sydney’s disappearin’ fast, it’s all gone for profit and for plunder.

The Village pull Tink and Rudi into the dancing circle. They both come unwillingly but Tink quickly gets to the spirit of the performance, while Rudi is unwillingly charmed by Pan.

Ethel: (sings) Though we really want to stay they keep drivin’ us away

Now across the western suburbs we must wander.

The performance ends. They move back to their tasks. Only Rudi and Tink are left like shags on the pavement and the ghost of Mr Villeon still inhabits single rooms.

And the girls lean out from heaven over lightwells thumping mops, while the gent in 57 cooks his pound of mutton chops...

Grooming to God from Darlinghurst...Five Bells.

The Village clap and cheer.

Prim: But we’re goin’ to civilize the cities.

Fran: Where is Pan?

Prim: And you’ll all end up in the Darlinghurst court.

Rudi: Where the stars are lit by neon

Flats.

Fran: We're goin’ to fight back.

Prim: But we’re goin’ to civilize the cities.

Rudi: (turning away) You’re all mad as hatters.

Fran: We all live here. We come to the Cross from Kempsey. Juggin’ me grotesque suitcases when I was sweet sixteen, and I can’t be conned.

Mac: (reciting) Where the stars are lit by neon

Wander.

Mac: We’ll bar and bolt it up like a medieval castle spot. We’ll bring in coils of wire...

Tink: And you’ll all end up in the Darlinghurst lock up. Look, I think the world’s just fantastic these days as long as it don’t get out of hand. I believe in everyone doin’ their own thing..in

ERN: (calling after her) And too many lovers.

Tink: (wryly) I used to work for Smith’s Weekly.

ERN: (deliberately) Pours Mac and himself a drink, hands the glass to Mac.

Mac: (with longing) I’m on the wagon.

ERN: (softly) That won’t strain anybody’s imagination. They’ll come in their thousands to see the old Cross, still alive and kickin’. (Pause. She looks at Ern challengingly, then elaborately casually.) You goin’ to read, Ern?

ERN: They’d remember me then wouldn’t they?

Mac: They’re all waatin’ to remember you.

ERN: Ah! You’re just an old seducer Pan.

Prim: You’re a part of the Village.

ERN: I’m not a “part” of anything. Mac invented me, that’s all.

The light has faded from the sky. A blue haze falls on the Village. Mac turns on his desk lamp and continues singing. Ern crosses and places (for a whisky break) it, let’s have Mac’s drink. The Goose removes his white gloves and begins to play “Shine in my Feathers.”

Prim crosses and lies full length along the top of the piano, twirling her new fans.

ERN: (wryly) And too many lovers.

Fran: Where in charge ere?

Ali: (to Prim)  Prim is.

Prim: Watch it Rude, you know better than to

Come to the Cross from Kempsey. Juggin’ me grotesque suitcases when I was sweet sixteen, and I can’t be conned.

Mac: Whaddya think it is. It’s a fuckin’ squat mate.

Tink: You’re a man of the world Mac.

ERN: It’s a materialist society Mac.

ERN: (calling after her) That’s how I always think of you, as some fabulous Japanese princess. But Pan doesn’t answer. She disappears into her own dark sanctum. Ern places his glass on Mac’s table and moves into a follow spot. The song and dance are directed to each of the watchers in turn. Filling the stage Ern waltzes, cajoles and threatens them all like a lover.

ERN: What’s that you eat, Pan?

Prim: What’s that you eat, Pan?

ERN: What’s that you eat, Pan?

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Prim: What’s that you eat, Pan?

ERN: What’s that you eat, Pan?
Ern: Another drink from Mac's table. Mac is getting I'm just a givin' fool.

another drink. I'm the ghostly lover,

glitter in my jewels, but you'll never know...

over the bonnet, occasionally accepting a pill; I'm the sad recorder,

dropping mandies; Tink is talking to her, draped I'm the vivisector,

of the Alpha, repairing her make-up and I'm the natural showy, like the Pope.

look how much I've given you. I'm just a fuck, that's all.

I'm the sad recorder,

no one can deny. I'm just a natural showy, like the Pope.

Shine in my feathers, glitter in my jewels, I'm the sad recorder,

look how much I've given you, I'm the glad angel.

I'm just a givin' fool. I'm the glad angel.

The Village clap Ern as he crosses and pours another drink from Mac's table. Mac is getting steadily and expertly drunk. Rudi stands, glowering. Mac is swinging his gun, by the fountain; Ern is content, crosses, and steps into the Bonita, repairing her make-up and I'm the glad angel.

speechless.

shouts of lovin', 

and together in the silent, darkened Village before the Festival begins, with only Mac, drunkenly passed out at the table, and Frae, asleep in the Alpha, they dance out their love story. The Goose enters silently, like a ghost, and the piano begins to play...

I'M WRAPPED IN YOU

Ern & Ethel: (song & dance routine) It's a kind of lovin', it's a kind of game, although the squares might give it a different kind of name. It's a game for stylish players, it's a constant curtain call, it's a hard act to follow anywhere at all. It's a game for two, and I know it's true, no matter what you do, I'm wrapped in you.

Ethel: There's a shine about you, that I like to see, you're the Prince of Darkness in my fantasy.

Ern: There's a shine about you that I like to see, you're the black haired princess, you're the poetry.

Together: It's a game for two, and I know it's true, no matter what you do, I'm wrapped in you.

Ethel: Clover hoofs are catchin' sulphur fumes are fine, when you look at me dear, everything's divine.

Ern: You're the lame angel. With the rainbow strobes, when I look at you dear the universe explodes.

Together: It's a game for two, and I know it's true, No matter what you do, I'm wrapped in you.

Together: It's a kind of lovin',
Pan: she wrote one novel, she did a porno floor show in a long, passionate embrace. They do not break apart, even when Pandora appears in her red kimonos at the top of the stairs, because they are not even aware of her presence. She carries her tarot pack in her hand.

Ern: I would have kicked it down.

Pan: (excited) Pardon me for livin'! The Goose pulls out postcards, pin ups and magazines. Fran and Ethel chant their slogans rhythmically.


Ethel: Save The Whale, Stop Rolfe Harris.

Fran: Waterfall's the name. Nude slides, gay mags, rubber aids...

Pan: Standing! This is the heel of fortune, and the four creatures of Ezekiel, Angel, Eagle, Bull and Lion.

Ern: I'll strike you...you. With a sweep of her fan the naked Prim takes the applause. She turns off flirting her fan to the brazen of the Village. Rudi and Tink exit.

Ethel: (excited) Save the Village. Strippers unite.

Fran: I'm gonna striptease you, it's a kind of game, as she bares her lovely pussy in the Pink Pussy Cat.

All: Pasties and a G string in the strip tease matinee, past the lonely tables into the light of day, they're leavin' in their rabbit skins for the next matinee.

Goose: They call her Gypsy Belle. She knows he'll never send the fare, but when you see her standin' there, you know she's got a tale to tell...

Prim: Because you make me blue I'm gonna strip tease you, because of what you do I'm gonna cock tease you, that's what I'll do I'll striptease...you.

With a sweep of her fan the naked Prim takes the applause. She turns off flirting her fan to the brazen of the Village. Rudi and Tink exit.

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Ethel: (excited) Save the Village. Strippers unite.
Ern picks up a glass of whisky and throws it in his face. Ern licks it as it dribbles down his chin.

Ethereal (enthusiastically) Home's where the heart is.

Ern (in a fury) Will someone shut that stupid cow up.

Ethereal stares at Ern in horror, then, with strangled sobs, rushes upstairs and sits in her chair like a bad child, the leaflets scattering as she runs. The whirling lights fade, the fountain so that she is pretty well obscured, and a storm remains on the almost sinister, absolutely motionless figure of Pandora. Ern moves to the foot of the stairs.

Ern (drunk & heavily sarcastic) Well, where is it Pandora, the great Festival you talked about, the Ern Malley Revival, the new audience you planned? What've I ever done in the end but draw a few maulies a night, topple sideways and crack me head on a chair, get up again. I got a bruise on my heart, see. Sometimes I feel real slack.

Fran (sings, dances) I'm just a little hooker on the game, And Fwangipanni Waterfall's the name, If you'll pardon me for livin', I'm very good at givin', they tell me that I'm quite a spunky chick, so little Jackie Horner, if you c'n meet me in the corner, anytime you wanna dip your wick.

With a pocketful of mandies, and a head full of shit, I'm a refugee from Blacktown, if you're lookin' for a bit. I'm just a little hooker on the game, whatever you c'n pay for baby I've got it, And Fwangipanni Waterfall's the name.

I got a pitch here by the fountain, and I listen to it play, tell me pretty baby what's that fountain say.

Mac and Ern (join in) She's just a little hooker on the game, and Fwangipanni Waterfall's the name...

Fran: I'm on the game and Fwangipanni Waterfall's the name. Taking off her fur coat Fran goes behind the fountain so that she is pretty well obscured, puts her fur coat over her and, yawning, curls up to sleep. The Goose ceremoniously places coat, top hat and gloves on the top of the piano and exits right. Ern and Mac, very drunk now, continue to speak as the stage grows darker.

Mac: I've written and burned, burned, mark you, two novels (Mac rises, falls heavily, whispers) and three hundred sonnets.

Ern (stands) Without holy curiosity and awe, none can find the Muse. Mac stretches out his hand.

Fran: Is it enough that we once came together, what is the use of setting it to rhyme...

Ern (swaying) It is enough that we once came together, if the wind has turned against the rain...

Mac: (with a sob) It is enough that we once came together, Ern: Time has seen this and will not turn again. Ern collapses, grabbing Mac's hand and simultaneously their heads hit the table. They both pass out. Pause and two shadowy figures enter with elaborate caution. It is Rudi and Tink (still in drag). They lurk by the fountain.

Rudi: (whispering) Them two pisspots are out to it. They won't give no trouble. Where's the Goose?

Tink: (giggling) Out goosin'. (He giggles.) Rudi thumps him savagely. Fran's head comes around the fountain, but withdraws quickly.

Rudi: (snarling) Shuddup fairy. Where's the hooker?

Tink: (thurt & dignified) Probly swanned on up to the Fitzroy Gardens to pick up a bit of the trade. This place is dead as a doornail. Ooh! (He giggles again, pause.) But I don't like it Rude. I don't like it at all.

Rudi: Ah! you wouldn't know if your arse was on fire.

Tink: I don't mind a bit of the graft or the standover, but I draw the line at...

Rudi pushes him in the belly and he doubles up with pain.

Rudi: Nobody cares what you draw the line at cunt. You just shut your gob and be told (Rudi drags Tink upright, still gasping) Mr Big won't

Mac (slyly, softly) Five bells.

Ern pulls up a glass of whisky and throws it in his face. Ern licks it as it dribbles down his chin.

Ethereal (enthusiastically) Home's where the heart is.

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Ethereal stares at Ern in horror, then, with strangled sobs, rushes upstairs and sits in her chair like a bad child, the leaflets scattering as she runs. The whirling lights fade, the fountain so that she is pretty well obscured, and a storm remains on the almost sinister, absolutely motionless figure of Pandora. Ern moves to the foot of the stairs.

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Rudi: Nobody cares what you draw the line at cunt. You just shut your gob and be told (Rudi drags Tink upright, still gasping) Mr Big won't
like it Tinkerbelle if you mess up this simple little job for him.

Tink: You're spoiling me harsho Rude. He passed his crooked wig into place. Rudi laughs, placates.

Rudi: You look like a moll on a holiday.

Tink: Prim's not just any ol' worn out pro y'know. She's got a followin'.

Rudi: That's why she's gotta be stopped, see. Me and my mates, we might even do good memory, we'll lug her out front and stow 'er in the Alpha.

Tink: What if she starts in screaming?

Rudi: She won't never start in screaming, babe, never again.

(He begins daydreaming) I'll really make the big time with this little lot Tink. I'll be up there at last with The Boys. I'll be a proper hit man, and they won't never be able to put me down as jus' any ol' punk agent.

There is a muffled sneeze from behind the fountain.

Rudi: Wassat?

Rudi pulls out his gun. Tink takes his truncheon and together they creep on the fountain ambushing it and dragging out a terrified Fran.

Tink: Why look 'oo's here Rude. It's Pardon Me For Livin'.

Tink yanks Fran's head back by the hair and forces her to her knees.

Tink: Funny how listeners never hear good of themselves.

Rudi stands close, staring down at her.

Rudi: Where you been hooker?

Fran: (faintly) Playin' the pokies.

Rudi kneels her in the groin. She gasps and folds up.

Rudi: Don't lie ter me. What you hear, ay?

Fran: Nothink.

Rudi: Well, whatever you 'eard you didn't 'ear it. See?

Fran nods.

Rudi: (watching his trouser leg) Y'know me Wink. I'm no nark for the jacks.

Rudi: Yeah? You're no what?

Fran: Nothink.

Rudi shakes his leg free, turns away.

Rudi: That's right. An' remember, the turns be watching you.

Tink pulls her hair back harder. Fran tries to nod.

Rudi: Then don't forget there's a nice, deep, black harbour out there fulla Noahs Arks, failin' that the garbage disposal grinds up ev'ry tiny fingernail, an' out there on the Ansett tarmac the draught from them big jets is purrin' Frangipanni Waterfall, R I P. See.

Tink lets Fran go. She scrambles away on her hands and knees. Rudi kicking her in the rear and laughing as she crawls.

Rudi: Pissoff Hooker. Git down ter Costello or the Crest...

Tink: Or I'll put you in quick for vagrancy. Rudi and Tink exit downside left. Fran sob's quietly by the fountain, then painfully pulls herself up, trembling and terrified. She moves from side to side like a frightened rat, pops a few mandies out of her handbag, puts on her shoes, and, at last, overcomes her terror sufficiently to run fitfully across to Mac and Ern. Meanin' incoherently she pulls at Mac's arm. Mac groans, mumbles, shrugs her off in his sleep. She tries Ern, whispering and tugging madly at him.

Fran: Ern, Ern, wake up, oh! For Chrissakes Ern, wake up.

Ern half wakes, his eyes trying to focus.

Fran: Wassup? Wassa matter?
Smiling Rudi begins to move up the staircase to Pandora's attic. Mac pours himself another glass of meth.

Three streets cross at the top of William Street with their resident ghosts; Chris Brennan in Rockwell Crescent, Mary Gilmore in Darlinghurst Road, Ken Slessor in William Street, Ern and Ethel and Primivera in the Village. There's a few changes, but the Cross absorbs us, the dead and the living. We survive.

Pan: Dulcie Deamer comin' home in her leopard skin from the Artists' Ball... Rudi (grinning) Darcy Dougan at the Wayside Chapel...

Tink: Bea Miles in her tennis shorts...

Fran: Frangipani Waterfall by the fountain... The lights fade. The voices die away. Only a spot stays on The Goose. The city sounds envelop him at his piano; car horns, fire alarm, police siren, an ambulance wailing, the rumble of the demolition squads. As the sounds die away The Goose begins "The Pyjama Girl Rag" and the others exit quietly.

Goose: (sings/plays) They call her the Pyjama Girl... She does the twist, she does the twirl, she takes her clothes off one by one, gyrates her hips and grinds her bum, she does the strip for everyone... the Pyjama Girl. Before the patrons of the Cross she counts the profits and the loss, and when the lights begin to fizzle, she starts to take off everything the Pyjama Girl. The Goose rises from the piano and begins to exit.

Goose: Then with a glitter and a glow, she waves her hand, she has to go, the neon's fade, the lights go down she lays aside her gilded crown. Standing at the exit at the top of the stairs the only light on The Goose illuminates his sad clown's face. And calls a cab for out of town, the Pyjama Girl. The Goose exits. The fountain begins to play, and the last light leaves the statues of Ern and Primivera.

NOTES

Quotes used:
1. Frederico Garcia Lorca
2. Kenneth Slessor
3. Ern Malley
4. Ezra Pound

Song: "Rudi Roderiga Song" — lyrics by Merv Lilley
Song: "The Green Ban Song" — lyrics by Shamus Gill, Dennis Kevans, Merv Lilley, Dorothy Hewett.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 1978

CLIFF GILLAM

Perth’s most gifted young actresses

MARY STUART

Cliff Gillam

Mary Stuart. Mary Stuart was directed by Schiller, translated by F. J. Lamport, and was presented in the Perth Theatre/WA in August 1978. The performance was reviewed by Cliff Gillam.

It’s not often that we in Perth have the opportunity to see German drama performed. The odd bit of Brecht perhaps, and two recent works by Peter Handke as I recall, but little else, so Ken Campbell-Dobble’s production of Schiller’s Mary Stuart at the Hayman Theatre was a first in two senses — the first Schiller we’ve seen in Perth and a personal first professional production (for the WATC) since Campbell-Dobbie arrived here from Sydney earlier this year to work with the WA Opera Company, though he has found time to do Racine’s Phaedra for the University Dramatic Society on the side.

Mr Campbell-Dobbie has a penchant for European drama, both classical and romantic it seems. His Phaedra which I did not see, has been well spoken of, and I can attest to the stylishness of his Mary Stuart.

All the stylishness in the world cannot save the play itself however, which suffers badly from an excess of the “Sturm und Drang” and a prolixity seemingly occasioned by Schiller’s determination to ground his study of Mary’s last two days in a Mexico among the Tragedies. Mary’s long speeches break under the strain of having to be thoroughly expository of past matters at the same time as revelatory of the emotional power generated by the confluence of her particular strengths and weaknesses as an individual with the tide of history. It’s possible of course that in the original German of Schiller the language might prove adequate to the strains imposed upon it by his approach to his subject but the FS Lamport translation used for this production, while providing a workable dramatic text was not in itself poetic enough to fuse the romantic individualism with the historicism. I wonder whether the Stephen Spender text used by Queensland’s Arts Theatre for their April production of the play might not have been a better choice.

As it was we had to endure much pedestrian verse and considerable, if not in itself four hours of the WATC production along with the occasional lapse from the implicitly tragic to the mere weltschmerz. There were times indeed where the romantic agonies became almost comic, as for example, Leicester’s agonized heart-wrenching self-recriminations as he reports Mary’s progress from her cell to the block.

Given the stodginess of the play itself, the production was nonetheless a very good one. As Mary Stuart, Wanda Davidson performed with authority, using her voice, an instrument of great depth and richness over its full range during her many long and difficult speeches. It’s a huge role and this young and intelligent actress handled it very well enough to make believable both young Mortimer’s fanatically passionate devotion to her and Elizabeth I’s deep resentment. As Elizabeth, Julia Moody was a good foil. She played the Queen according to Schiller’s conception — as a woman used to power but nonetheless a woman, conscious of the danger of Mary in political terms but suspicious that her own envy and resentment of Mary’s beauty might be prompting her to Mary’s execution, rather than the demands of realpolitik. Mr Campbell-Dobbie chose well for his two principal characters, since Ms Davidson and Ms Moody are easily the most gifted young actresses at the Perth theatre over the past three or four years. Both need the challenge of big roles to sustain their development, and these are not easy to come by in Perth. Both rose to the challenges offered by Mary Stuart.

By contrast, Mr Campbell-Dobbie was not so fortunate with his minor actors. As Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Chris Greenacre marred his performance by a tendency to swallow his lines. In the most difficult role of the play, that of young Mortimer, Keith Robinson just failed to strike the proper note of the patholgical. The split between fanatical idealism and lust in the motivation of Mortimer (the clandestine servant and would-be liberator of Mary), the existence within himself of a confusion between Aphrodite Pandemos and Urania is adequately provided for but little else, so Ken Campbell-Dobbie all performed creditably. As Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Chris Greenacre marred his performance by a tendency to swallow his lines. In the most difficult role of the play, that of young Mortimer, Keith Robinson just failed to strike the proper note of the patholgical. The split between fanatical idealism and lust in the motivation of Mortimer (the clandestine servant and would-be liberator of Mary), the existence within himself of a confusion between Aphrodite Pandemos and Urania is adequately provided for but little else, so Ken Campbell-Dobbie all performed creditably.

Overall Mr Campbell-Dobbie’s direction proved strong enough to elicit a good level of performance from a cast which, with the exception of the two principal women, obviously lacked experience. It was possible to discern the Tragedy of Mary, but I suspect much more subtlety in the playing than Mr Robinson was able to draw from his experience. As Paulet the Jailer, Burgley the arch-manipulator and Elizabeth’s political mentor and Talbot the Just, Mike Hall, Frank Johnson, and Dennis Clements all performed creditably, with another having been long ago in Poland, the FJ Lamport translation used for this production.

Presenting this play depends on the “right” player for Gerard, but Gerald Hitchcock’s clearly-spoken performance left only the irrelevant impression that Gerard found it all rather fun — and even a sense of smugness appeared. As the anguish, which is the play, never emerged, we cared more about Mrs Driscoll than Gerard.

Such a magnificent script deserved a more “thinking” performance, and one looks forward to local players getting better at handling this sort of dramatic fare.
We're only as good as the attractions we present.....

The Townsville Civic Theatre 1978 program includes...Brian May and the Melbourne Showband*, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf", (Adelaide Festival)* Judy Bailey/Dutch Tilders*, "La Sylphide" (Qld. Ballet), "Slightly Jewish and Madly Gay", Andy Stewart (Stadiums Limited), Queensland Symphony Orchestra (ABC), "In Praise of Love" (Twelfth Night)* "The Thoughts of Chairman Alf" (QAC), "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (Rudas), Long Island Youth Orchestra*, Mike McClellan (QAC), "The Christian Brothers" (Nimrod)* Rolf Harris (ATA), Johnnie Ray*, Dick Emery (Vidette), Hans Richter Haaser (QAC)*, "Sleuth" (QTC)

*Entrepreneurial participation by Townsville City Council

We are now booking for 1979.

Note: Two capacities available. Standard 1006 seats. Divider curtain and moveable proscenium converts theatre to 382 "intimate" capacity.

For further information contact:
John L. Lamb, Director, Townsville Civic Theatre,
Box 5181, MSO Townsville 4810. Phone: (077) 72-2677.

Australian Centre International Theatre Institute

153 Dowling Street, Potts Point, N.S.W. 2011, Australia. Phone: 357-1200
President: Prof. Robert Quentin. Hon. Sec.: Dr Marlis Thiersch.
Editor: Candy Baker

INDIAN MUSIC AND DANCE THEATRE

A working session on Music and Dance Theatre in India, will be held in Bombay from November 27th - December 1st, 1978, in co-operation with the Dance Committee and the Music Theatre Committee of the ITI. The organiser is the famous Indian choreographer Mrinalini Sarabhai, who is setting up the session in order to explore the possibility of expansion within Music and Dance Theatre. Specialists are needed to take part in this session and arrangements are being examined for travel discounts and hospitality. Those interested in attending should contact this office immediately for further information.

DANCE DANCE DANCE

Preliminary plans have been made for the ITI World Congress to be held in Sofia, Bulgaria June 4th - 10th, 1979. The surprising event will be the co-operation of the Dance Committee in the organization and preparation of the International Ballet Competition to be held in Jackson, Mississippi, USA from June 11th - 23rd, 1979. The two presidents of the Dance Committee will be the co-presidents of the Jury. There is a possibility of a charter flight to begin in Sofia directly after the ITI Congress with various stops in Prague and Paris before it’s US destination so as to ensure maximum participation.

The International Ballet Competition will be followed by the 2nd International Ballet Pedagogical Seminar which will take place in Varna, Bulgaria from July 2nd - 15th, 1979. It will be conducted by Peter Gusev plus an additional teacher and two demonstrators with artistic direction by Robert Joffrey, co-president of the International Dance Section of the Netherlands.

A Dance Festival will be held in Budapest from February 18th - 27th, 1979 in conjunction with 8 dance companies.

A Jazz Dance Seminar will be held in Poland during the summer of 1979. Robert Joffrey will be organising this.

A Seminar entitled "Mythology in the Dance", will be held in Jerusalem, Israel from August 5th - 9th, 1979.

NEW LONDON ARTS CENTRE

Riverside Studios is London’s newest centre for the arts. It is housed in a converted 1930’s film studio, and can offer free performance space and publicity to international theatre and dance groups, artists and musicians. The year-round program includes master classes, workshops, performances and an independent film forum. Interested companies and artists should send detailed information including brochures, recommendations, video-tapes, reviews and programs to: David Gotthard, Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith W6 9RL, London, England, or phone (01) 741-2251.

US ITI Newsletter Aug 1978

ROUND-TABLE — UNESCO

The purposes of The Round Table are to identify the artistic and cultural needs of both Industry and the Arts and to examine the ability of each to satisfy these needs in ways that are productive and economically viable for both.

People wishing to participate or who would like to suggest leading artists and industrialists whom they feel should take part in this Round-Table should contact: Gloria Morris, The Round Table Preparatory Committee, 18 Avenue Kleber, Paris 75116 France.
The relationship of large companies to state governments

I am going to talk of a possible movement, which I suggest to certain of the larger subsidised companies, to spend time and effort in a new bid for altered relationships and improved status with their state governments. I can be accused of irrelevance; so many urgent matters of artistic importance await attention. I can be accused of false values — a worship of status-position relating to both the government and the public, would re-state their function within the community and re-allocate responsibilities and priorities internally within the organisation.

Central to all of this is that large scale drama companies throughout the world depend on financial assistance. If you would fail without subsidy, then you are vulnerable. The only answer to vulnerability of this sort is to build a very close-knit structure, a relationship that no government will wish to diminish, for in doing so it destroys, not an external body, but its own reputation — part of itself — its own cultural prestige and heritage.

State theatre responsibilities

A State Theatre. The very name conjures up visions of the Moscow Arts Theatre, the Berliner Ensemble, the worthy, monumental, immensely dignified and slightly dull state theatres of Germany. In Australia it would surely have to be a medium to large size company of experienced actors and directors, suitably and permanently housed in a good theatre; a company receiving adequate public moneys and a recognition from the state, and expected to deliver certain state services for that patronage.

Let’s see what every state has a right to expect for the security it would provide:

1. A classical programme of international quality.
2. An Australian play programme taking equal ranking with the classical productions.
3. A balance in the programme of some of the best work of moderns outside Australia.

What other things could be reasonably expected?

1. A small but valid training programme for young actors, directors and playwrights; a practical, on stage, non-CAE training.
2. An educational service — theatre in education, youth activities services — whatever you like to call it, that is under the guidance of an expert in this field. A service of education through and in the theatre by a dedicated team working in the schools both in the city and country. This team needs to create its own Australian material; to demonstrate to children that vitality, creativity and imagination are the beautiful characteristics of the human animal. The main company of the theatre must back this team by co-ordinating with it fine plays for children in the holiday periods etc.
3. Another responsibility is to tour good theatre into the country towns — arguable, difficult and sometimes unrewarding as this sometimes is, a state theatre company must play to disadvantaged areas, theatrically speaking, and must be seen to play there.

What else can the state ask for, after the provision of money and recognition and the prestige, if any, which goes with that official recognition?

It can ask that the state theatre search out and maintain close touch with large sections of the public, that is, it should educate people to recognise the function of theatre and accept it into the community cultural life. This reaching out by state theatres is done by an “available lecturers” programme, theatre exhibitions, slide and TV closed circuit shows etc. etc., a very active business.

Relevance and identification with the community — a closer, more continuous relationship from childhood onwards is what it is all about.

So we come to the crunch. Is the prestige and the security and the extra functions inherent in a state theatre company in Australia worth the added risk of political interference? The ideologies of the opposing political parties in Australia can maul the strongest body — witness the ABC — it can be an embrace of death.

Your answers will be dictated by your artistic beliefs and your political affiliations and indoctrination. Some will feel that governments should keep right out of everything but the essentials of life, others will believe that our forefathers fought quite fearlessly for state libraries, state museums, state educational systems, state orchestras, and that our generations should not be afraid to see governments regard the high level in theatre as an
invaluable cultural asset.

I might add, for those that fear the government embrace, that I also fear it. I also know that statutory authorities, like the ABC, with special clauses written into their act, were powerless against the financial pressures of a government and that every non-profit company dependent on Australia Council moneys, can be pushed around. None is exempt and there is no protection that can legally be devised — except, of course, being able to do without the money.

Do I think a state theatre company essential? No, I don’t. I think it’s just great if a company develops that way within a state — but, thank god, there are many workable patterns. In NSW and Victoria you have complex company law systems dealing with the ways of setting up a theatre company. In South Australia we have company law and a lesser breed, incorporation. It is reasonable to welcome every known variety of association of persons producing the widest range of theatre — irreverent, nationalistic, middle-of-the-road, anarchic, iconoclastic, comical-pastoral-historical, avant-garde, amateur field I have found to be impossible it is to be “avant” without a "garde"?

I believe in certain rules for theatres:
1. Representation on the board, of employees and subscriber members.
2. Governments to be allowed representation if they are subsidising the company.
3. The board chairman to be responsible for that difficult balance between artistic director and general manager, and to see too that the independence of the artistic director is never sacrificed. This doesn’t mean he’s not criticised, or not held within budgetary limits, it simply means that he selects the plays and casts them as his right and responsibility. The general manager controls expenditure according to the break-up of his budget. The board chairman who fails the specific test of balancing artistic directorship and administrative control should be quickly dealt with. I maintain that while the balance is there, all board members should bow and address their chairman as “your excellency”, a week after he fails the test he should be proclaimed “a living national treasure” and summarily beheaded on stage. The same fate only with strangulation for the board chairman who allows a monopoly position to occur with the artistic director and the general manager merged into one dictator-person.

4. I believe that management should be a committee of management of at least three working artists which meets once a week with the general manager, and that by consensus the company is governed by it in its day to day affairs.

If you look at the last ten years of the theatres in Australia I think you will see how much responsibility I put on the board chairman and that board make-up for the curious course that has been charted.

Now to the South Australian Theatre Company.

We are not a state theatre company but we have many of the virtues and some of the failings of one.
1. We are the preferred tenant in a fine modern theatre in the Adelaide Festival Centre.
2. We are a statutory body with the government accepting residual financial responsibility.
3. We do have a massive theatre-in-education project under an acknowledged expert.
4. We do tour with the Arts Council each year (sometimes twice).
5. We do manage fine classical productions (of a contentious kind, thank heaven!). We have not yet a good or even a good enough reputation for the production of Australian plays. The past in this has been marred by bad luck and bad judgement; the future, we think, is immediate and exciting.

6. We are heavily subsidised and we do not yet achieve the desired percentages of audience attendance. The most that can be said is that, in some areas, we constantly improve.

7. We admit to being guilty of having a highly talented and very good man of the theatre, Colin George, as artistic director. Let’s face it, he trained in and came from the United Kingdom. You Sydney currency lads and lasses should believe that we got him from Armidale University, after serving a portion of his sentence there and clutching his emancipation papers in his hot hand.

If the next artistic director happens to be an albino Hottentot and he is as good as this one, I wouldn’t care a rap. The highest talent knows no boundary lines and no nationality and requires no apologies. It would be as absurd as being required to apologise for producing a programme with a classical element — I’d go to the rack rather than apologise for presenting Shakespeare.

So all I have said is this: state theatres are a matter of mutual trust (and perhaps admiration) developing between governments and theatres. If the theatre is growing this way I’m not afraid of it — I welcome it, it is a protective device politically. It is no bad thing for a state to have one body able to stage large cast plays and play the role of senior provider with all its obligations; just as it is no bad thing for a state to have one full-complement symphony orchestra, able to do justice to some mighty work.

It doesn’t stop you or me slipping away to blow our own trumpet or bang our own drum in our particular way. If we are any good there are plenty of people who will want to listen, and maybe even a government who will want to later drop something in the hat.

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHT’S CONFERENCE

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ENROLMENT 1979

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Dance Company — handed to us like a dead fish

The Dance Company (NSW) has announced that its projected performances of Poppy in Melbourne have had to be cancelled.

It is unfortunate, for Melbourne, who have the chance of regularly seeing both the Australian Ballet and the Adelaide based Australian Dance Theatre, would have been able to make a more qualified comparison between the three dance companies and to measure the different quality of the Sydney based group.

For the life of me I don't know why more cities cannot be allowed to see companies from interstate, it can only improve relations, educate audiences and companies alike and promote a more dynamic level of creation. Finance is difficult to arrange I know, but private enterprise should be lobbied far more strongly to help out here, it would have the Federal Government's blessing (and that's about all it would have).

It is not sufficient for the Sydney press to enthuse about the Dance Company (NSW) when the rest of Australia has no idea of what they are. As it is when the Dance Company goes to America next year and to Europe in 1980, those audiences will have more idea of the company than audiences in Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane and even Melbourne.

From what I can gather, when the Company does go overseas it will be promoting itself on the basis of Poppy and Murphy's new full-length, non-narrative work which will be premiered next year. Not knowing the content of the new work, Poppy will certainly be indicative of the company, but hardly representative, it will not show the contribution of Graeme Watson for one or the influence of Don Asker for another.

Graeme Watson, who has been around dancing and choreographing for years has not been grabbing the headlines as much as Murphy, who being the hope of Australian dance has the public eye upon him. Watson however has been quietly working away in his own time dancing with, and choreographing for, quite a number of Australian companies, the Queensland Contemporary and Modern most recently and importantly. He will soon, it is rumoured, mount a work of the Adelaide based Australian Dance Theatre.

Watson has delved and rummaged into almost every corner of dance style there is; he was lyrical and balletic on Random Harvest (one of his best works in my opinion), whimsical and free form in Regale, bizarre and problematical in Medieval Malics and now in his latest work for the dance company White Women, struck for something between narrative and abstraction.

One thing that always upsets me about Watson's choreography is his self-conscious analysing. Analysing the limits and boundaries of dance is necessary and there isn't enough of it here in Australia, but there are ways and ways of doing it. People are often amazed when I say that George Balanchine is one of the best modern dance choreographers in the world today. His basis may be classical technique (the firmest basis of all) but his cast of mind breaks down all the components, bends them, retraces them and ultimately refashions them so we are left with more or less a whole new dance language. Balanchine will be seen by history as probably the major spearhead of dance in this century and maybe of any century (dance being the 20th century artform).

But Balanchine does it with his dancers. He goes into a studio with only a few hazy clues and feeds off his dancers. Graeme Watson on the other hand seems to make
out his plans at the drawing board and then impose them on his dancers, a system which seems to me to be dead before it is born.

It is unfair of course to cudgel Watson for not being a Balanchine but that isn't my point. Balanchine's method of choreographing seems more alive to me, that's all and I wish more young choreographers would try it instead of setting themselves problems and forcing their choreography to solve them, something which on present evidence they rarely do. Watson's latest piece for the Dance Company, *White Women* is a case in point.

Watson takes as his "theme" the power plays behind the tyranny of beauty, and in a specific sense the world of the professional beauty, the model. Fashioned loosely on Helmut Newton’s book of photos and graphics of the same name, *White Women* sets its protagonists down for the Dance Company, *Everyman's Troth* is a case in point.

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Of Ballerinas, Terpsichore and Cupid.

A profile of Ann Jenner

Ballerinas are special people, and, as Australian Ballet watchers will appreciate, a bit thin on the ground here at the moment. It is almost as if Terpsichore has witfully ignored the Company's requirements, for without her imprimatur, ballerinas do not happen. The very special quality and stamina that can make a full length ballet 'live' throughout an entire evening is given to few. It cannot be made or forced. Dame Peggy van Praagh has obviously had a few words with the Goddess of the dance, an international net has been cast and together they have come up with a beauty. Her name, Ann Jenner, from the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, surely one of the elect.

Ann is a Royal Ballet thoroughbred. She began her studies in earnest at the ideal age of nine, firstly at the Royal Ballet School at Baron's Court in London and later at the residential branch of that famous institution, White Lodge in Richmond Park. By the age of seventeen she was in the corps de ballet and it was not long before her potential was noticed and nourished.

While still a member of the corps she began to dance roles usually reserved for soloist or principal — the Bluebird pas de deux from The Sleeping Beauty, the pas de trois from Swan Lake, and most notably, the Neapolitan dance from the same ballet. The qualities she displayed in this last named variation are some of her most salient ones — an absolute joy in the performance and an eagerness for her audience to share it, incredible speed and energy and a pervasive warmth of personality. American audiences especially loved her for it and the Neapolitan became a show stopper for her.

Within a few years she was promoted to soloist and soon made an ideal Swanilda in Coppelia; a role she continues to invest with a great sense of infectious fun and charming mischief. The soubrette suits her well, but she is by no means limited to it as Sir Frederick Ashton, former Director of the Royal Ballet was quick to realise, casting her in what is widely regarded as his greatest masterpiece, Symphonic Variations. This plotless ballet for six dancers defines The Royal Ballet classical style and has never been given to any other company. To be a leading interpreter of it in the world, deeply committed to her heritage and at the height of her popularity, confirmed by a recent public poll in Dance and Dancers magazine, which placed her third in a list of over fifty ballerinas appearing in London in 1977) decide to come and dance in Australia when she has previously had the choice of many outstanding offers elsewhere and turned them all down?

Well, one could say after all that dance is an international art, and why not? One could also say that here she will get to dance more often and in a different repertoire and that is always good for a dancer. Maybe, but this does not really answer the question, for truth to tell, Terpsichore has had a little help from her kinsman, Cupid. Ann's Achilles heel turned out to be, Dale Baker, formerly a leading soloist of The Australian Ballet and latterly of The Royal Ballet and now returned with Ann to settle in Australia.

They first met over a rehearsal of the Romeo and Juliet balcony pas de deux. Any two young people involved in the sensuous art of dancing, exposed to this romantic situation and surrounded by the intensely dramatic and emotionally charged music of Prokofiev are seriously at risk! Indeed, those readers who have seen the film, The Turning Point will recall how a rehearsal of this very duet was used to show the burgeoning romance between Baryshnikov and Leslie Browne — a real case of life goes to the movies!

Ann and Dale have since danced together with great success as guest artists in many places around the world, most importantly with Dame Margot Fonteyn's selected stars in England. It is a partnership to watch.

MacMillan/Mahler Song of the Earth and Balanchine's Apollo with Nureyev; Serenade; a string of Ashton ballets: the title role in Cinderella, Titania in The Dream, both principal roles in Two Pigeons, Monotones, Tuesday's and Sunday's child in Jazz Calendar and the role of Dorabella in Enigma Variations, the beautifully evocative life of Elgar in Edwardian England; Folkline's Les Sylphides and The Firebird; Tudor's Shadowplay; Jerome Robbins' Dancers at a Gathering; the role of Bianca in Cranko's wonderfully warm and funny, Taming of the Shrew; and more recently Countess Marie Larisch in MacMillan's highly successful 3 act ballet, Mayerling.

Last year her overdue debut as Juliet brought forth enough floral tributes from her loyal public to require three capacious London cabs to be called to the stage door of Covent Garden to get her home, and the verbal bouquets from the critics were just as fragrant. In short she is a highly versatile and accomplished dancer and just the ticket for The Australian Ballet.

But perhaps her most popular and successful role in Lise in that most exhilarating and refreshing comic ballet masterpiece — Ashton's La Fille mal gardee — the role in which, appropriately, she makes her debut with The Australian Ballet. At 22, Ann was the youngest ballerina ever to dance this role at Covent Garden and is, by now, unquestionably among the leading interpreters of it in the world today. Indeed it could have been created especially for her, so happily does it suit her prettiness and sense of gentle feminine fun, and so perfectly exploit her light and quick bravura brilliance.

Last year she was the chosen ballerina for Baryshnikov's first performance in the ballet at Covent Garden. So why, you might be asking does a leading ballerina from one of the greatest companies in the world, deeply committed to her heritage and at the height of her popularity, (confirmed by a recent public poll in Dance and Dancers magazine, which placed her third in a list of over fifty ballerinas appearing in London in 1977) decide to come and dance in Australia when she has previously had the choice of many outstanding offers elsewhere and turned them all down?

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David Gyger

Imported Wagner, a vocal virtuoso and a little known Puccini

Both of the new Australian Opera productions to be unveiled in Sydney during August were considerable achievements for the company, maintaining the consistent quality of a season that has as yet produced no musical disappointments and only one eminently forgettable production — that of Bellini’s Norma, which was rescued only by the superb singing of Joan Sutherland and her two outstanding mezzo offiders, Margreta Elkins and Heather Begg.

The first of the August premieres was the impressively authentic realisation of Wagner’s The Mastersingers of Nuremberg on loan for two years from Scottish National Opera. Also imported for the occasion were the two leading men of the piece, Norman Bailey (Hans Sachs) and Allen Cathcart (von Stolzing) as well as the conductor, Mark Elder, and the producer, David Pountney; but important as the contributions of all these imports the event was nevertheless a major achievement for the Australian Opera the extent of which became more and more apparent as its brief season of eight performances rolled on.

The orchestra proved it had the staying power and (at least mostly) the expertise to cope with Wagner’s immense, often very complex, score. And special praise must go to the Australian Opera chorus for the way it rose to what must be regarded as its greatest professional challenge to date. Right from the opening chorale it sang with clarity and beauty. Equally important, the choristers acted convincingly, and the organised disorder of the riot at the end of Act II was as effective in its own way as the organised restraint of the great public ceremonial that is the final scene.

All that said, one must still record that The Mastersingers is one of that handful of late 19th-century operas on a grand scale which cause you to regret anew the decision to exclude truly staged large-scale opera from the major hall of the Sydney Opera House. Even in its enlarged reincarnation, the opera theatre pit is too small for such works; and staged spectacle must be carefully choreographed on a miniature scale.

Which leads directly to what can only be commendation of the decision to borrow this particular physical production lock, stock and barrel from Scottish Opera for the miniature stage of whose home in Glasgow it was originally designed. The appearance of medieval craftsmanship in the church of Act I, and the facades of Act II and the interior of Act III Scene I was phenomenal — to the extent it was faked, so much greater is the credit due to the designer, Maria Bjorson. The costumes too were marvellous, not to mention the prop; only the rickety, makeshift grandstands and the stylised mock-tree centre stage in the final scene were disappointing in a scene which ideally ought to give the impression of spaciousness and open air and instead turned out rather claustrophobic and cramped — cut off altogether, almost, from the open air.

Bailey’s Sachs lacked both vocal power and dramatic involvement on opening night, and Cathcart’s Walther was worryingly sung at the start of the premiere. But both had come good unequivocally by the time I revisited the piece toward the end of its run. Bailey in particular was putting an infinite wealth of further dramatic detail into his Sachs, as for instance in the lovely Act II confrontation with Beckmesser while he is trying to serenade Eva.

Raymond Myers, whose appearance as Beckmesser was aptly described by one metropolitan critic (Roger Covell) as a cross between Napoleon and a funnel web spider, was indeed excessively bizarre of appearance for a part that is innately so hammed up it needs no hamming up at all. His was a good all-round performance that would profit from even further restraint than he exercised in the performances I saw.

Donald Shanks was a marvellously sonorous Pogner, Marilyn Richardson a pleasing Eva though I missed her beautiful red hair and am not convinced it was necessary to superimpose a wig with long blonde pigtais, traditionally teutonic though they may be. The role of Kothner the baker suited Pieter van der Stolk (filling in for John Shaw) admirably, and Gregory Dempsey made an excellent David — almost compensating through visual, bouncy exuberance and vocal eagerness for the fact that he (like just about anyone else possessed of the vocal maturity to cope with the role) is not easily credible as an apprentice.

The rest of the mastersingers were a picturesque and vocally adept lot of caricatures come to life from a vintage painting.

John Copley’s new Traviata, to glitteringly impressive designs by Henry Bardon and Michael Stennett, was also a major success if inevitably of less monumental stature than that of The Mastersingers due to the relative demands of the two pieces. Many opera lovers will not deem this Traviata to be an ideal one, for it chooses to emphasise the work’s social whirl and glitter somewhat to the detriment of the deeper relationships between Alfredo and Violetta and the intriguing third party of the piece, Alfredo’s father. But it certainly works within its own context, and it was an ideal vehicle for Kiri Te Kanawa and will no doubt be equally ideal as a vehicle for Joan Sutherland in Melbourne next year.

I had seen Te Kanawa in three opera productions before this Traviata — as the Countess in Figaro (Glendebourne 1973), Amelia in Simon Boccanegra and Mimi in La Boheme (both Sydney 1977); and had each time found her as dramatically unconvincing as she was vocally spectacular. Her Violetta in this Traviata is possibly even more impressive vocally than any of her previous performances I have seen, and it is also dramatically much more impressive. Perhaps the reason for this is partly that Violetta the character is more akin to Te Kanawa the person than these other heroines; or maybe her acting talents are expanding in scope as her career progresses. At any rate, she is a stunning Violetta of bigger-than-life-size proportions — particularly in the vocal
Indeed, Violetta is just about an ideal vehicle to display the full range of Te Kanawa's virtuoso vocal talents from the lyric to the dramatic, the heartfelt and straight-forward to the highly vocal talents from the lyric to the dramatic, the vocal department.

If there was a valid complaint about this particular Violetta, it was that it was marginally too big in scale for the hall and her male co-performers — both of whom seemed at times to be forcing themselves beyond their vocal limits in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department. This was a pity, for both Anson Austin and Robert Allman were her in the volume department. This was a pity, in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department. This was a pity, in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department. This was a pity, in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department. This was a pity, in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department. This was a pity, in a vain attempt to outsing her, or at least equal her in the volume department.

The big personal success of the evening was, indeed, Austin's Alfredo even if he did over-extend himself now and then. Always a more than credible romantic male lead visually, his acting in the past has tended to be rather unconvincing: on this occasion it was never less than adequate and quite often it was quite moving. Vocally too he set a new personal standard for himself: his voice seemed to be larger in size, and at the same time more pleasing in quality, than I have ever heard it before.

Allman, always an effective singer and actor, was also very successful in the role of the senior Germont even if just now and then he seemed provoked by Te Kanawa to over-reach marginally his vocal resources.

This was not a revelatory \textit{Traviata}, but it was a solidly pleasing one that will no doubt prove a durable addition to the AO's reserve supply of stock productions of standard repertory favorites.

I finally caught up with the Australian Opera production of Scarlatti's \textit{The Triumph of Honor}, which was premiered at the last Adelaide Festival, in Brisbane early in August. Full of visual comedy and eminently listenable and sparkling, if admittedly unmemorable music, \textit{The Triumph of Honor} is short and accessible, good for the kids and the plebs; and it is well received by the daily critics at its premiere. I saw its last performance, which may of course have differed quite considerably from the one commented on by the other reviewers, and thought it one of the more successful efforts of the company.

Apart altogether from the individual performances, the production looked and worked a good deal better than some of the other recent efforts of the resident Adelaide team of director Adrian Slack and designer John Cervenka. Cervenka's set designs made excellent use of the rather small performing area in Adelaide's Opera Theatre; and Slack coped very well with the difficult dramatic demands of the piece, in particular the scenes where two things are going on at once which must be co-ordinated visually — Ruggiero's entrance in Act I, where he converses with Rambaldo while Magda and others are involved in a fortune-telling session; the comings and goings of the cafe scene.

Yet there are problems with \textit{La Rondine} that perhaps no designer or director can solve. It is a mood piece, the mood being nostalgia and dreaminess and philosophical contemplation; the characters philosophise and reminisce rather than getting on with life. The moral, if there be one, seems to be that people should go on being what they are rather than trying to become something else: the liaison between Magda the courtesan and Ruggiero her young romantic aristocratic lover is doomed from the outset, just as are the aspirations of her maid Lisetta to take Magda back loses credibility.

Juno Bronhill, always an engaging stage personality, had some vocal difficulty at the top of her range the night I saw \textit{La Rondine}, but captured and conveyed extremely well the character of Magda, the aging courtesan clutching at what will probably be her last chance to experience real romantic love, and deserting her keeper Rambaldo in the process: quite aware of what she is doing, probably knowing all along her liaison with Ruggiero is doomed yet clinging to him anyhow.

Robin Donald, who also was having some trouble at the top of his range on the night, was a suitably ardent Ruggiero but perhaps a little too impetuous and worldly wise and roughly physical to suit the part. I tend to think of Ruggiero as rather more of an innocent, as much bowed over by Magda's obvious experience and sophistication in the ways of love and society as she is by his youth and budding masculinity.

The orchestra played adequately for Myer Fredman, though far from impeccably — in particular, it lacked the soaring, full-throated string sound that this Puccini, like all other Puccini, demands from time to time.
Mouth to Mouth, which won the jury prize at the Australian Film Awards staged in Perth in August, is a model of a quality film made with a very small amount of money. John Duigan had $129,000, the sort of cash most people would use to make a documentary of the mating habits of the spangled drongo shrike. He took four people with no, or limited, acting experience, a tightly-plotted story, locations that spoke for themselves, and a brilliant cameraman (Tom Cowan) and held the direction firmly in hand. Perhaps his most commendable decision was to keep the talk as spare as possible. The young, working class or any other class, are not articulate, which does not mean that some of them do not talk a lot. Without wishing to make wounding comparisons one could pose the "conversations" of the people in FJ Holden and Third Person Plural against those in Mouth to Mouth and realise that the latter is an object lesson in how to do it. Duigan was his own writer, but he resisted whatever temptations there were to decorate the dialogue.

The film tells part of the story of Carrie and Jeanie, Tim and Sergio — two girls on the run, two boys on the dole. The fringe characters are a loutish "head" who pays perfunctory attention to Carrie and somehow catches her romantic imagination, and a derelict who could have been a banality if Duigan had not kept such a grip on the character. He was played by Walter Pym, once a matinee idol of the Sydney stage. In his case, too, words were kept to a minimum. The occasional screeched cliches of the alcoholic were about all he was allowed, but the flashes of revealed personality, still pulsing away under the saturated carcasse, came through truthfully.

The boys and girls meet in a greasy-spoon cafe where Carrie and Jeanie have acquired a bit of temporary work and the boys come in for pies with plenty of sauce. They rendezvous that night in a pub to spend Tim's last $24. Jeanie drinks beer with her hosts, Carrie asks for brandy crustas. She adopts a sullen manner, meant to be femme fatale. They spend the night in Sergio's old bomb of a car — driven from Wonthaggi, where there is no work either — and in borrowed beds in the flat of an unsympathetic relative, and finally in the makeshift living quarters which the girls have assembled on a high floor of an abandoned tenement building. On the floor below the "dero" camps with his paper-bag-wrapped bottles of liquor and his fire.

The association, tenuous at first, becomes stronger, more real, more emotionally grounded. Out of work, the girls cannot get the dole because they escaped from a corrective institution (the kind known as a "home") and have no credentials. Application for the dole would simply mean a return to the "home". So they shoplift food and clothes. The boys spend the time applying for jobs they never get. Acceptable-looking Tim is as unsuccessful as long-haired, cheeky Sergio. The girls then go on "escort" service, the euphemism for nights out with visiting firemen.

The resolution of this story is very moving, as indeed is the film. In any group of four there are those who will go under and those who will survive. The audience will reach its own conclusion.

The performances are quite extraordinary, of such liveliness and candor that despite the downbeat theme I never felt dispirited. Carrie is played by Kim Krejus a former NIDA student, and Jeanie played by Sonia Peat, a nurse who has never before acted. A young New Zealander named Ian Gilmore, whose background I don't know, is Tim, and Serge Frazetto, a truck driver by occupation, makes a strong exciting impact as Sergio.

Cowan's photography is a great plus; his shop-lifting scenes, the dank interiors into which he has somehow infused warmth and the film's only concession to youth at play, a day out on a wild winter beach, are quite memorable.

The film is being distributed by Roadshow/Village, and in the matter of promotion they are up against it. But I hope the word will get around and make Mouth to Mouth the success it deserves to be.

John Duigan's new film is Dimboola, from the play by Jack Hibberd, which he is making for $350,000.
1978 Australian Film Awards

At a time when the Australian film industry is producing films and film-makers worthy of international acclaim, it's depressing to see that industry celebrate its achievements with an event heavily reminiscent of 1950s television talent shows.

The Australian Film Institute's 1978 Australian Film Awards were presented late August in Perth's 7,500-seat Entertainment Centre, a daunting cavernous auditorium which only Gough Whitlam himself at the height of his charismatic powers has managed to fill with excitement.

The Awards presentation, telecast nationally and costing the hosts, TVW7, a reputed $200,000, was seasoned from ordinary to downright embarrassing. The lineup of ageing showbiz personalities, imported and local, made one wonder whether the organisers had ever come across that often quoted trade fact that the 18 to 23 year olds are the solid core of film-goers in Australia's and overseas' industry.

Look at just some of the films to be honoured this year — the hot favourite Newsfront, which bagged eight awards; The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, with three prizes; John Duigan's low-budget Mouth To Mouth, awarded the top prize; Tony Haydon's The Last Tasmanian, the prize-winning Documentary; and Steve Jodrell's The Buck's Party, the Short Fiction prize winner. They offer in varying degrees energy, passion, intensity, commitment to the craft of storytelling, immaculate production values, and, after all, international standards. And certainly they and their makers deserve a celebratory event which in its style and mood matches the importance and quality of the best in Australian cinema today.

The Australian Film Commission met in Perth just before the Awards, and there were good news and bad news rumour floating around after the meeting.

The good news rumour suggests that the Commission will be putting a lot more money into script development. No film entrepreneur from Sam Goldwyn onwards has ever demonstrated infallibility in identifying the script that delivers the goods. The Commission, assisted by consultants and assessors, has made its fair share of mistakes in backing underwritten and just plain bad scripts, and money spent at the drafting and redrafting stage could mean money saved in the end.

However, more money for script development certainly means less money for production budgets in these Federal belt-tightening days. The Commission presumably sees the new Tax Assessment Act (offering tax deductions to private investors in film) as introducing a very considerable change in the funding of the Australian industry, offering producers a viable alternative to dependence on large-scale Commission backing. This may explain the bad news rumour of an automatic ceiling applying to all feature budgets submitted for Commission funding, irrespective of the scope or merit of the film.

Australian films have contributed a great deal in the last few years to the definition of the Australian identity at home and overseas, and the Australian Film Commission's role in this process has been an important one. With Canberra calling the financial tune, the Commission, like the other statutory bodies underpinning the performing arts in Australia, is going to have to be tough-minded and quickwitted in its dealings with claimants and Federal patron alike. And it's clearly time for the Commission to look hard at itself and its self-proclaimed role as 'merchant banker to the Australian film industry'.

The Award-winning Mouth To Mouth and The Last Tasmanian were two of the features screened at the Western Australian International Film Festival early September in Perth. The programme, drawn largely from offerings at this year's Sydney Film Festival, played to packed houses. Small matching grants from the Australian Film Commission and the Western Australian Arts Council made the very successful event possible.

Macbeth On Video

The 1977 SATC production of Macbeth has been videotaped in a major studio production by the SA Film Corporation who are making it available for educational purposes. This very competently filmed version is edited down to three twenty minute segments. The three tapes are each introduced by Colin George, the director, who also provides the story links which allow such a drastic reduction in running time. But without a fair knowledge of the play to begin with relating the plot like this is hardly adequate for students even to follow the story.

Coupled with this, and exacerbating it, is the idiosyncratic nature of George's version of the play. He has given full rein to the remark he makes that "Shakespeare's imagination can roam the world" and dressed out his production accordingly. The martial figures owe their genesis to Kurosawa's film and beyond that the samurai tradition; the kings resemble Tartars, the servants appear at times in Moorish full black robes and at others in Indian dress, the weird sisters have masks which are from the South Seas and the clanging atonal music devalues, if memory serves me correctly, directly from the soundtrack of the Lord Jim film. All of which, for no apparent reason beyond underlining a cosmopolitan view of the Bard, serves to make nonsense of such lines as "From thence to Inverness". Don't directors realize that the universal arises out of the particular?

Again, the doubling presents difficulties: Kevin Miles peeps on a mask to change before our eyes from wounded soldier to weird sister and from thence to play servant and one of Macbeth's hired assassins. George obviously wanted to make the point that the sisters' evil influence is ubiquitous, but, given such a severe abridgement, it would appear to students merely confusing. In other ways he is too literalist, most notably in giving the dagger of Macbeth mind's eye an all too tangible reality. Being a studio production there is of course no account taken of staging nor of the potency of the actor audience relationship in the theatre.

It is not that one wants Shakespeare "straight" but this is so far out on a limb that in the classroom its main use would be (as George admits) in sparking discussion about its deviance — which is either boldly challenging or irratiocnaly de-pending on one's point of view.

Reservations about the production itself should not be seen as criticisms of the idea of extending audio visual aids to the study of drama in performance, for which the SA Film Corporation deserves full praise. The package of three ¼" video cassettes (which fit a Sony U-matic) is available at a very reasonable $300, approx. Master copies, with a licence for unlimited copying are also obtainable for just the price of the tape.

All enquiries to the Documentary Marketing Department South Australian Film Corporation, PO Box 263, SA 5067.
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Roland Topor Leonardo Was Right (Calder Playscript 83)
Alan Brown Skoolplay (Calder Playscript 84)
Howard Barker Fair Slaughter (Calder Playscript 82)

The subject of Roland Topor's Leonardo Was Right is shit. And as one of David Hare's characters says, that's not a metaphor, that's a fact. The play has, according to the publishers, "the disconcerting but highly enjoyable feel of a Feydeau farce re-written by Ken Russell and Luis Bunuel." In the grand tradition of French farce six characters are gathered for a weekend in a country house — on the dining table, under the sofa, etc.

Another good play is Fair Slaughter, by Howard Barker. It is the epic story of Gocher, a veteran communist and "England's oldest living murderer". The violently energetic narrative interweaves scenes from his early life (fighting with the "Capitalist Army" in Russia after the Revolution, working in Music Halls during the 30s, meeting his old commanding officer in a burning whisky warehouse during the Blitz) with scenes of Old Gocher lying in hospital with a bottle of brandy and bolts himself into his room, fantasising about the beautiful girl in a white dress, named Flower — a hackneyed figure but here handled with some delicacy and humour. Her only dialogue, spoken "with a beautiful voice", is Eliot's famous quatrain about the world ending with a whimper, read from a slip of paper pulled out of a sodden Christmas cracker. At his request she shows the old man (with the rat) "a beautiful breast" then enigmatically departs. The play is full of strong images surprisingly juxtaposed.

As well as an exercise in classic French farce the play becomes a closed room detective story as the characters try to determine who could have left twenty two turds lying around in as many hours. The resolution of this problem is occasion for a surreal synthesis of unpleasant, degraded characters and gentle, warm behaviour. Into a household where an old man sits with a dead rat on his head quoting Eliot, a couple argue viciously with each other and a violent young man paddocks and bolts himself into his room, come various fleeting intimations of love and beauty and a yearning for richness. Specifically there comes a strangely silent beautiful girl in a white dress, named Flower — a hackneyed figure but here handled with some delicacy and humour. Her only dialogue, spoken "with a beautiful voice", is Eliot's famous quatrain about the world ending with a whimper, read from a slip of paper pulled out of a sodden Christmas cracker. At his request she shows the old man (with the rat) "a beautiful breast" then enigmatically departs. The play is full of strong images surprisingly juxtaposed.

All these plays are Calder Playscripts (numbers 83, 84 and 82 respectively) and all are small, cheaply produced volumes, at the same price ($3.50) as Currency Press' much more handsome publications. It's just that the plays themselves are so much better. Concerning the academics, even Tom Stoppard's characterisation of their work as charmingly like chess-playing is not enough to justify them, after the longeurs with Karpov and Korchnoi in the Philippines.

Less specialist and of more general interest is the British journal Theatre Quarterly which gets a mention here, after thirty issues, because it and its associated publications (playscripts, checklists on writers etc.) are now being distributed in this country by Currency Press. At the opposite extreme is Australian Film Posters 1906-1960 by Judith Adamson. This is a large format paperback with full colour reproductions of posters, which tantalize, and a chart which covers all manner of subjects rather than a description of the films themselves. The book is attractive but there is not enough detail to give the ignorant any coherent history of Australian filmmaking, and too much for those who don't care but would like to know what the films were about. Nostalgia, as they say, isn't what it used to be.

Finally, and most usefully, especially for schools and inexperienced amateur companies, is Stage Crafts, by Chris Hoggett (Adam and Charles Black). This is an admirably clear 'how-to' book covering most aspects of conventional stage craft. It will not be of much use to the adventurous. It seems to assume that all sets will be made of timber and canvas and most props of paper mache. It also assumes an overwhelming demand for faked realistic historical props and costumes (it has over thirty pages on arms and armour through the ages). Nevertheless people wanting a clear pictorial guide to the techniques and tricks of the trade in the theatre should find it useful.

Books

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BY THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO
by Edgar Allan Poe. Written and directed by Andrew Stott; Designer, William Klein. To 24 Oct.

COURT THEATRE (98-9111)
Robert Nesbitt in the title role, with Helen Bruce, John Gough, Hughan Forbes, and Margaret Cameron. To 7 Oct.

THEATRE ROYAL (231-6111)

THE ARTS THEATRE RESTAURANT (47-0277)
by Sophocles. Director, Don Mee. To 14 Oct.

Byrons TALE OF A TUBE

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221-5177)
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov. Director, Joe McColm; Designer, Peter Cooke; with Monica Maughan, Pat Bishop, John Krummel. To Oct 7.

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resigned as president of the theatre and was appointed artistic director; to date I have produced thirty six plays.

We had an Australian play festival this year, starting with No Man's Land then Summer of the Seventeenth Doll. For the third play we advertised nationwide for a play not yet performed in Australia. We received twenty six entries from most states, and finally settled on Who The Hell Needs Whipbirds? by Queensland's Jill Shearer. It is being produced at the end of October. The Theatre uses amateur actors, but it is attracting good and appreciative audiences who have come to expect the high standard of production they are getting.

NATIONAL MOVES

JOAN AMBROSE

"In line with his policy of encouraging Australian writers, Stephen Barry, at the opening of his second season announced plans that will see considerable encouragement for new work in the near future, in Western Australia. For 1979 Stephen Barry has commissioned plays by Dorothy Hewett and Alan Seymour, as part of the extensive plans here to celebrate the State's 150th year.

Following on from that Stephen Barry expects to be arranging seminars and playreading groups to develop local talent in WA. Already the Playhouse, under his direction has taken a considerable interest in new work. Assistant Director Mike Morris has been working with a writing/acting ensemble group that had had two successful productions this year, Fanshen and Join the Boys.

And in the Green Room Stephen Barry has directed Christine Randall's new play, Keep on Truckin', Francesca — a play whose theme is, as the programme notes say, a celebration of the gains made by women's liberation movement and a plea for the revolution to continue. And plans are well in hand for a new children's play by Richard Tulloch, The Cocky of Bungaree — a play whose theme is, as the programme notes say, a celebration of the gains made by women's liberation movement and a plea for the revolution to continue. And plans are well in hand for a new children's play by Richard Tulloch, The Cocky of Bungaree — a play whose theme is, as the programme notes say, a celebration of the gains made by women's liberation movement and a plea for the revolution to continue.

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