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Nimrod Theatre
500 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
(02) 699 5003

Nimrod Upstairs
from Wednesday
31 January

Makassar Reef

Alex Buzo
director Ken Horler
designer Wendy Dickson
Jeanie Drynan, Davy Frincis, Julie Hudspeth, Bill Hunter,
Sandra Lee Patterson, Monroe Reimers, Sean Scully,
George Shevtsov

Octagon Theatre
Perth
from Thursday
22 February

Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare
director John Bell
designer Kristian Fredrikson
composer Nicolas Lyon
Craig Ashley, Simon Burke, Peter Collingwood, Gerry Duggan,
Drew Forsythe, Mel Gibson, Peter Kowitz, Keith Lee,
John McTernan, Angela Punch, Matthew O'Sullivan,
Michael Smith, Sonja Tallis, Anna Volska, Kerry Walker

Nimrod Downstairs
from Saturday
10 February

Hancock's Last Half Hour

Heathcote Williams
director Graeme Blundell
designer Peter Corrigan
Bruce Myles in a Hoopla Production from Melbourne

Opening February
Broadway New York

Gordon Chater
The Elocution
of Benjamin Franklin

Steve J. Spears
director Richard Wherrett
designer Larry Eastwood
'Best show in years — absolutely devastating... one of the most vital theatrical experiences to come our way in a very long time'
— San Francisco Examiner

Over 600 Performances
Gaden — a triumph of consistency

John Gaden has just been honoured with almost the only theatrical award to be made in 1979. His great triumph has been the part of the myopic, intellectual laocoonian, Professor Moore in Jumpers, only slightly eclipsing the versatile singer, raconteur entertainer of Kold Komfort Kaffe.

Gaden this year was also seen, or rather heard (having been under a huge mask) as Creon in Oedipus for the, then, SATC's offering for the Adelaide Festival and back in Sydney in both plays of the ill-fated but greatly significant Paris Theatre Company.

There it was perhaps more a committed defiance than the full extent of his talent that Gaden revealed, when some of the most illustrious names banded into a guerrilla group against the status quo. They might quickly have run out of ammunition and seemed to have lost the battle, but in the end perhaps they won the war. A somewhat artificially resuscitated Paris, it should be noted, is the only company to have been allocated two productions as part of the World Theatre Season at the Opera House.

The venture marked, as the Critics' award recognises, 1979 as the year of the actor, a point made by many reviewers in their retrospectives. In the nominations four and a half were actors (if Doreen Warburton is partially included under that heading), the runners-up being Ralph Cotterill, Barry Humphries, and Frank Wilson. The only outsider was Peter Williams who almost single-handedly (with some backing from the Elizabethan Theatre Trust) has restored the fortunes of commercial theatre in NSW when its future was beginning to look rather bleak.

Awards dwindle

But if 1978 was the year of the actor, 1979 is starting off as the year when awards themselves are dwindling. The Sydney Critics' Circle recognition of Gaden is all that remains of what was a national set-up. The national body, which had award-giving committees in each state, ended with the Australia Council's decision to withdraw a relatively minor amount of funding, which incidentally, also once or twice a year ended with the Australia Council's decision to have earned him the highest regard. Theatre Australia adds its salutations and best wishes to the most benevolent of critics.

In this dwindling of awards it is sad to see that the Playwrights' Conference has suspended the National Professional Theatre Awards which, in their two short years of existence made a considerable impact in the press and theatre advertising. TA has backed the awards in the past, printing both nominations and results and mourns their suspended animational state. It is not time yet for an obituary.

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80 Elizabeth Street, Mayfield NSW 2304.
TOWARDS AN AUSTRALIAN BALLET

MARILYN JONES, Artistic Director,
Australian Ballet

"I actually take up my appointment on 30th January, and the contract is for twelve months. Of course I'm hoping that all will go well and it will be a longer term job. I think the most important thing is that an Australian has been chosen, and I would have been happy, too, if it had been another Australian than myself. The repertoire is already set for this year; although I had no say in it, I think it is quite a good one. My main role will be working with the dancers and working out a repertoire for 1980.

One plan I have is to set up a choreographic workshop between the Company and the Australian Ballet School. There have been complaints that we don't do enough experimental work, but it is hard for dancers to fit it in with performing. My idea is for one or two dancers at a time, who want to do choreographic work, to use 3rd year ballet students for their experiments — and the 3rd years will probably be the dancers who will come into the company.

I also want to use Australian guest teachers, not just rely on the overseas people. In the rehearsal period this year Janina Curnova will be teaching, and Lucette Aldous later on. And I want to train some dancers to principal standards so we don't always have to look overseas.

For myself I want to explore scenarios for ballets, and go overseas for the Company; other things are tentative at the moment. In general I hope to follow the lines the Company has taken. I do think it is primarily a classical company, but doing some contemporary works also. I think we must find more Australian choreographers, and do good Australian works to keep in the repertoire — partly so that when we do tour overseas we have something of our own to show, and not just second hand work."

HOOPLA'S 1979 SHOW

GRAEME BLUNDELL

Few would have believed it last year; indeed few would have believed it a few months ago, but it's true. Hoopla somersaults into yet another year of artistic, popular, avant garde, splendid, magical, sensational, personal, literary, spacious Australian, American, British, Continental, all singing, all dancing, musical, comical, pastoral, tragic, logical, lateral, theatrical activity.

We have gazed on the past months of frenetic activity and decided that we should remix the ingredients lightly. 1979 will be the mixture not quite as before.


First up we welcome the Fukien Puppet Theatre from the People's Republic of China for 8 performances only (Jan. 16-20). An extraordinary blending of the traditional Chinese art of glove puppetry with brilliant theatrical realism. The Company is bringing over 100 puppets on a tour arranged by Hoopla in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs as part of the official programme of cultural activities with the People's Republic of China.

Then we have English Folk Singer and Satirist (Wait A Minun) Jeremy Taylor Live (Jan. 26-Feb.3). Jeremy Taylor has released records, written stage musicals, performed and toured with Spike Milligan, worked in cabaret and developed his own show for ITV. Jeremy Taylor is being presented in association with the Victorian Arts Centre.

Hoopla, in conjunction with the Moomba Festival plans to present the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre in special daytime performances for children.

In the balmy Moomba evenings the popular Australian recording artists Margaret Roadknight and Bob Hudson will appear in a show 'hot' from the Festival of Perth, The High And The Mighty: Gentlemen Only by Eve Marriam opens Downtstairs March 16. Directed by Graeme Blundell, the cast of this recent New York hit includes Geraldine Turner, Julie McGregor, Betty Bobbitt, Aurora Muratti, Anne Phelan and Liddy Clark and is choreographed by Nancye Hayes. Set in a turn-of-the-century gentlemen's club, this vibrant entertainment deals in a most engaging way with sexism and elitism through songs and jokes of the period. There is a fundamental surprise — all the men are played by women. The show won a raft of Obes in New York.

No Man's Land, the important Pinter play set between reality and imagination, amazingly has not been produced before in Melbourne. It was first produced by Peter Hall for the National Theatre in London with Ralph Richardson and John Gielgud for whom it was extraordinarily successful.

The Ripper Show (and How They Wrote It) by Frank Hatherly — The best (the only?) Australian musical of recent years, sly, witty, funny and literary/historical meat as well — is about a travelling theatre troupe in 1889, presenting capsule Shakespeare at agricultural shows and country towns, who devise a new musical show based loosely on the murderous career of London's Jack the Ripper.

And Measure For Measure by William Shakspeare.
THEATRE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1979

Q & Q

Shakespeare — a new black comic musical version by Murray Copland. With a programme UPSTAIRS of: Miss Hewett's Shenanigans by Dorothy Hewett; Trickeys by Barry Oakley; Miss Julie by August Strindberg and The Immortalists by Heathcote Williams.

Don't forget the interstate tour of Graeme Blundell's production of Heathcote Williams' Hancock's Last Half Hour with Bruce Myles as Tony Hancock, opens at the Nimrod Theatre from Saturday 10th February. Negotiations are also in train for an interstate tour in the first half of 1979 of Hoopla's BULLSH (or MORE BULLSH, or EVEN MORE BULLSH...

79 ORANGE FESTIVAL

LOU ROCHELLI, Drama Co-ordinator

"The 1979 Orange Festival of Arts will take place from March 23rd to April 8th. This will be the eighth Biennial Festival to take place in this region, revolving around the magnificent Orange Civic Centre Theatre Complex. The Orange Festival is the largest provincial festival in Australia and while maintaining the character of previous festivals, we have introduced many new facets of the festival for 1979 in an attempt to bring every form of culture to the whole community. Major emphasis in the 1979 festival has been placed on getting the community involved in the planning of the festival — our motto being "with and from the people", not "to" and for the people". The eighth Orange Festival of Arts promises to be a momentous event in the visual and performing arts, an exciting and stimulating two weeks involving the whole Central Western region.

John Tasker has been appointed to direct the major drama production for 1979. His production will be staged by the Orange Theatre Company and is to be the bawdy farce Lysistrata by the Greek classicist Aristophanes.

Lunch hour theatre will involve the whole region with the appointment of a Regional Director who will travel extensively preparing the 10 groups for the lunch hour productions. Pub theatre, outdoor theatre will also play a major role in the festival activities.

The new Orange Civic Centre, built at a cost of close to $5,000,000, includes a new "live" theatre. The theatre has already been acclaimed as being the best outside the capital cities, and is fully equipped with the very latest acoustic, lighting and staging equipment."

POMFEST IN PERTH

Variety Club of Australia Spokesman:

The Western Australia chapter of the Variety Club of Australia invites all Poms in WA — and that includes the Jock's, Taffies, Paddie's, Geordie's and cousin Jack's, as well as all their Sandgroper, Croweater, Banana Bender's, Apple eater and Kiwi relative's and friend's from anywhere in the world — to the first Annual POMFEST to be held at the Claremont Showgrounds on Saturday June 9th, 1979, from 6 pm to 1 am.

The Variety Club's POMFEST welcomes everyone to this massive birthday party that will celebrate the British origins of the settlement that became Western Australia.

POMFEST will be a combination of all that is British, whether it be a British Legion night, Holiday Camp, Blackpool pier or cockney pub rolled into one great happy event. There'll be some of the famous English Beers there, as well as some of the fine Australian Beers to help wash down the great food we all remember: Bangers and Mash, Roast Beef & Yorkshire pudding, Black Pudding, Faggots and Peas, Real Cornish Pasties, Real English Fish & Chips, Haggis, Cockles and Mussels, Ploughman's Lunch and Winkles to name just a few, and the entertainment includes non-stop dancing to old favourites. There are floorshows, spot prizes and wonderful door prizes — even a holiday in the UK for some lucky person. There are also dozens of novelties, Southernd and Blackpool rock and souvenirs which will bring back happy memories of the UK.

The Variety Club of Australia (WA), dedicated to helping underprivileged and handicapped children in Australia, will benefit from POMFEST and the organisation is in the capable hands of experienced organisers with many years of public entertainment behind them in both WA and the UK, so you'll be in very good hands. SEE YOU THERE.

Enquiries to: POMFEST, C/- Variety Club (WA), Box 415, West Perth, WA 6005.

LEARNING IN BED

BARRY OTTO

"I only have a small part in The Bed Before Yesterday, but I'm very flattered to have been cast. I've been a fan of Lindsay Anderson through his films for some time — never having seen any of his stage work before — and loved If, Oh Lucky Man! and This Sporting Life. Now I'm sitting in on as many rehearsals as I can, because it's fascinating to be around while he's working. He's such a cool man; he gives actors a lot of space and freedom in which to work, so you can let go and see what you've got. And in spite of this he's got a very definite view of what he wants, which he will doubtless push together by the end.

It's very much a learning production for me. I'm also understudying the James Condon role so I have that to think about too. Anderson works very solidly in rehearsals, with a lot of discipline and no funny business. All very concentrated. I hope he will be asked back to do something other than light comedy later: a Chekhov or something would be terrific. He really knows how to handle people, actors, with intelligence and a tact in seeking you out that is very rare.

Rachel Roberts is also very good to work with because she's just so normal. She has a big work load, but doesn't play 'star' at all, is very friendly and easily fits in."

THE CURRENCY PRESS

A High Court action for defamation brought against Dr Philip Parsons, Chairman of Currency Press Ltd, Sydney, by Mr Lloyd Davies, barrister, of Perth, former husband of the author Dorothy Hewett, has been withdrawn.

Dr Parsons and Mr Davies have agreed that the plays The Chapel Perilous and The Tatty Hollow Story by Dorothy Hewett, may henceforth be distributed anywhere throughout the world without legal objection by Mr Davies except in the State of Western Australia; and that no further legal action will be taken against Currency Press with regard to the alleged defamation. No admissions have been made by either side and each party will bear his own legal costs.

The case has been followed with wide interest and concern by authors, publishers, librarians, teachers and booksellers because of its implications for education and the book industry.

Dr Parsons said yesterday he had decided to settle on the present terms because of the uncertain state of the law on literary defamation and financial hardship as a result of the Davies action which had forced withdrawal of the books from Currency Press's distributors, Cambridge University Press, while the action remained sub judice.

The writ was issued in April 1977. The Chapel Perilous was published in 1972 and by then was in its third edition. The Tatty Hollow Story had been published in August 1976 in a volume with the play Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly.

A literary defence fund was initiated in Victoria by Professor Ian Turner, Professor of History at Monash University and the playwright David Williamson to assist in bringing a test case to court to clarify the position of the creative writer and biographer under the present laws of defamation. Dr Parsons said he much regretted that the case could not have been determined by bringing it to trial and he was deeply grateful for the support he had received from the literary community.

His legal advice, had been, finally that such a case would not be argued on terms which could make it a test case.

"The practical reason why publishers do not fight cases like this is that the return on very few books could begin to meet the cost of a legal action and such action diverted funds which should be invested in new books. In the case of any but the largest publishing houses the cost of winning is uneconomic and the cost of losing ruinous. As a result of this situation the mere threat of legal action is sufficient to inflict commercial damage on an author and publisher even if the merits of the case are very slight."

Dr Parsons gave evidence to this effect before the recent Law Reform Commission Inquiry into the law of defamation. He pointed out to (Continued on page 52)
BOOKINGS MITCHELLS BASS

ROBYN NEVIN as the amazing Miss Docker

JOHN BELL director of the Venetian Twins

KATE FITZPATRICK as Marguerite Gautier
FORECOURT FALLS SHORT

New Year's Eve at the Opera House in Sydney attracted approximately 200,000 guests to join in the festivities of the beginning of the New Year. However 200,000 people do not fit comfortably on the forecourt of the Opera House which sits on five and one half hectares of land. You would think that Mr Jorn Utzon designer of the $104 million complex would have had the fore thought to cater for such events. It seems that promoters are supporting the Opera House at last but they are booking all their concerts for outside. Maybe if the Australian Opera were to stage The Merry Widow on the steps of the now popular forecourt we may have our internationally acclaimed landmark paid for by the turn of the century.

NO WORRIES ALF

Mr Warren Mitchell, international star and former cover person for this publication recently discussed his short temper with a national television newsmagazine saying "the unfortunate thing about my temper is that it gets results". Mr Mitchell was complaining about the lack of efficiency by Australians working in the theatre ... "whenever anyone says to me 'no worries mate, she'll be right' I shudder with fear that nothing wil be done." I am sure that this is not always the case. Just because Australians use phrases that may not be used in the U.K. does not mean we are any different any'v 'I reck' n we do a bonza job.

STC SCHOLARSHIP

The STC need $30,000 and donations to date amount to nowhere near this relatively small total. The scholarship means that the successful applicant will train as an actor for three years with the company and then be granted a one year contract. Donations to this scheme are tax deductable through the AETT so why not offer them some support.

A CHEERY FRIEND

Mr Brian Thomson designer of such great shows as Superstar and The Rocky Horror Show for Australian Theatre and the West End will join Australia's first lady of Theatre, Dame Edna Everidge later this year in New York. Mr Thomson turned down Dame Edna's offer to design their current smash hit now running in the West End. Why? Because he, Patrick White and Jim Sharman will join together once again to produce one of Mr White's plays. This time it is A Cheery Soul for the Sydney Theatre Company; last time it was Big Toys for the old, Old Tote which by the way was the late theatre company's most successful show. The combination of White, Sharman and Thomson with A Cheery Soul opened last month at the Opera House Drama Theatre (inside). By the time you read this I will have seen the show; sorry I can't report on how it went — then again why not offer them some support.

CIGARETTES IN THEATRE

What's this I hear about the Benson and Hedges Company joining with Western Australian, Mr Michael Edgely to promote theatrical productions around Australia? Benson and Hedges pulled out of the film industry some years ago, maybe they see a brighter future in theatre — I do. Mind you I also hear that some directors of W & D H O Wills (makers of Benson and Hedges) are considering investing privately into films? so our film industry couldn't be all that bad either.
Ray Stanley’s

WHISPERS
RUMOURS
& FACTS

Wonder if the key to the live performing arts in the eighties lies in that action of Michael Edgley’s in selling fifty per cent of his company, Michael Edgley International Pty Ltd, to Benson and Hedges for two million dollars. The astute M E still retains all direction and decisions, with B&H only sleeping partners. Can we now expect big multi-nationals getting in the act with commercial and/or subsidised management?

Incredible that someone with Jill Perryman’s talent has had to wait so long to be awarded the MBE — yet a singer like Olivia Newton-John, who resides overseas, was a flop on her last Australian concert tour, but appears in a one-woman show entitled Lace, Knickers and Old Arse. Scheduled, and despite the fact actors approached to appear in them talk quite freely. Officially the MTC maintains it cannot release details until all its would-be subscribers have received details. But surely many subscribers wait until reading more about the plays in the Press before making up their minds?...See the Australian Opera is claiming its production of Nabucco in Melbourne last year made ‘use of the Palais Theatre for the first time in the history of the Australian Opera’ which probably goes to prove with so many changes in management over the years there is nobody now in the organisation with the company when it was known as the Elizabethan Opera and played several seasons at the Palais.

For once bosses and workers will be getting together amicably to discuss problems within their industry when in May the Musicians’ Union, the Theatrical and Amusement Employees’ Association and the Theatre Proprietors’ and Entrepreneurs’ Association all get together. Chairman Mr Justice Robinson describes it as a ‘free wheeling forum designed to encourage a frank exchange of views’. Let’s have more of it...$300,000 seems a large sum to spend on such a small renovated theatre as the 199-seater Civic Playhouse for the Hunter Valley Theatre’s new venue...Hope the APG do not muck about too much with its proposed production of Ibsen’s Rosmersholm. It’s such a great rarity for Australia, would be a pity to see it done less than justice to.

Melbourne reviews for The Kingfisher were quotable for the performances but not the play, so several ads featured the following: “The Kingfisher brings charm and elegance back to the theatre. Three great stars, perfectly matched and perfectly entertaining, make it a champagne night that is just right to celebrate this festive time of the year when everyone wants to relax and enjoy themselves...” — John Michael Howson, Bert Newton Show — 3UZ, Truth, Mike Walsh Show. What the ads did not convey is fact the play is being jointly presented by Mike Walsh’s company and Malcolm Cooke; latter is John Michael’s manager, and the two have adjacent offices in the same building! And in the press bar on the opening night, John Michael was telling other members of the press that the Broadway production (with Claudette Colbert, Rex Harrison and George Rose) had received excellent notices, despite the fact it had not then opened; and when it did, the reviews were not good.

Why do Australian companies seem so keen on only staging Shaw’s early plays and not his later (and frequently better) ones? Arms And The Man is being presented by both the SATC and the MTC (who did it 20 years ago). Then the Q Theatre is staging The Devil’s Disciple as its Sydney Theatre Company offering, and the QTC You Never Can Tell. What about The Millionaires? (recently revived in London with Penelope Keith) or Too True To Be Good?... Is it true that the Ella Fitzgerald concerts last November, although a big artistic success for her, put the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in the red for a very substantial five figure amount?

The death in December, at the age of 84, of that distinguished actress Fay Compton, will remind playgoers with long memories that she toured Australia and New Zealand 1937-8 in Victor Regina, Tonight at 8.30 and George and Margaret. Also in the company was a very young Michael Wilding...Note next October/November Frank Thring is to play Sheridan Whiteside in The Man Who Came To Dinner, a role he has taken on at least two previous occasions. This time it will be with the Queensland Theatre Company...Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, now on another tour of the country, hold a special affection for Australia. It is where it all started for Cleo becoming an international star, and she (and Australia for that matter) should be grateful to Cliff Hocking for persuading her to come here in the first place.

Nimrod could be taking up that New Zealand play by Roger Hall, Gildetide. Apparently everyone turned it down until the Canberra Theatre Trust presented it under the title of Flextime, directed by John Tasker. Not for the first time John managed to turn a play, given the thumbs down elsewhere, into a success (Remember Ralph Peterson’s The Night Of The Ding Dong?). Hope Nimrod engage him to direct, otherwise it may flop...And it looks as if Hoopla could be a winning streak with its 1979 scheduled line up, which includes Pinter’s No Man’s Land, a special new black comic musical version of Measure For Measure by Murray Copland and Strindberg’s Miss Julie...The Paris Company’s production of Patrick White’s A Cheery Soul reminds me that when it had its world premiere by the MTC in 1963, the review from Howard Palmer in The Sun in its entirety read: “A Cheery Soul is a sad play”. A world record?

So Zoe Caldwell apparently has given away acting to become a director (as well as wife and mother), making her debut in the former field with Richard II...And to think we nearly saw Superman Christopher Reeve on stage in Australia! At least we would have, if plans to bring Katharine Hepburn and her full company to Australia in A Matter of Gravity had eventuated. As Hepburn’s grandson in the play, he played juvenile lead...The recent MTC production of Arsenic And Old Lace recalled for me a story, current when it was playing in London in the early ’40s, that Noel Coward contemplated writing a sequel (but didn’t dare) entitled Lace Knocks And Old Arse.

So far no one seems to have been able to come up with an exception to my theory (December issue) that every American play or musical that flops in London does the same here. Several people though have instanced, in reverse, West Side Story, a big success in London but in 1960-61 a failure here. Obviously it was before its time for Australia and one wonders how it would fare today.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1979
Dear Sir,

The August issue of Theatre Australia included a letter from W P Ryan of the Canberra Repertory Society requesting information on Maud Jeffries and Julius Knight. They were prominent in Australian theatre at the turn of the century, performing, under Williamson management, with their own Knight-Jeffries company and Beerbohm Tree’s Company. We have sent biographical notes to Mr Ryan together with a list of sources in our library.

I welcome the opportunity to bring the Dennis Wolanski Library and Archives of the Performing Arts at the Sydney Opera House to the attention of your readers and urge them to avail themselves of our reference service by phone or letter or by visiting between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday to Friday. The collection now includes over 4500 volumes and 450 serials on the performing arts, including music.

Our archives contain a diversity of materials including photographs, posters, programmes, sound recordings, costume and set designs, set companies for donations of materials. We are most grateful to the theatre companies and, under the sponsorship of Philips Industries Holdings Ltd, we have begun the performing arts archives depend on the generosity of private collectors and theatre companies for donations of materials. We are looking forward to the opportunity to bring the Australian theatre and drama, and, under the sponsorship of the Australian Film and Television School Library is freely available to people in the entertainment industry, to researchers and those with a more casual interest in the subject.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Bentley
Librarian
Sydney Opera House

Dear Sir,

I do have to sympathise with your critic about his review of my play, Flextime. The poor man, having to sit there hating it, while everyone around him was laughing. However, his caustic review came as no surprise; before the season opened in Canberra three different people at three separate occasions warned me that the theatre audience would “hate the play”. It makes me wonder, then, what sort of critic it is whose prejudices are so widely known and which can be so accurately predicted.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Hall
University of Otago,
Dunedin, NZ.

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[02] 233 1658

THE MILL COMMUNITY THEA TRE PROJECT
(A community activity of Deakin University)
ACTOR/COMPANY MANAGER
Ref: 78/0/63

The University plans to conduct a program of Community Theatre in 1979 and applications are invited for the position of Actor/Company Manager with the Mill Community Theatre Project located in Pakington Street, Chilwell, Geelong.

The position is a full time position within a professional company of four, working in community theatre in Geelong.

The successful applicant will be expected to divide his/her time between managing the company and acting. Salary: $176.50 per week.

Commencement date: 19 February 1979 for an initial period of four months.

The University reserves the right not to make an appointment if funding is not available. Applications close on 19 January 1979 and should be made on the form available from the Staff Officer, Deakin University, Victoria. 3217 from whom additional information concerning this post is available.

Telephone enquiries to 052-435700. The University will be closed from 22 December 1978 to 3 January 1979.

A L PRITCHARD
University Secretary

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357-1057
Ray Stanley pays tribute to a beloved actress
honoured by the Queen in the New Year List.

"Jill, this is going to make a star out of you", said a well known theatre figure, who should have known better, on the first night in Melbourne of Annie.

The reference was to Jill Perryman's performance as Miss Hannigan, the villainous matron.

Constantly being discovered and singled out as 'star' material, is something Jill has had to cope with over the years. It certainly has not made her big-headed in any way, and probably has gone in one ear and out of the other.

There can be no doubt that Jill is our leading musical comedy star, a true professional to the fingertips, dedicated to her work and always conscientious. Beloved by all who work with her, there never is the slightest sign of temperament or ego. Neither is there anything theatrical about her: none of that bitchiness one so frequently associates with the theatre world, where security is but a day-to-day existence. If Jill happens to be critical of any fellow artist, it is always said in the kindest of terms, never wishing to hurt, and only said to those she knows will not divulge her confidence.

A very cheery, matey person to meet, with quite a humorous quirk in her make-up and talking a lot of good sound commonsense, one immediately realises just how unambitious she really is, that at the back of everything, as well as hard work, luck, and not ambition, has got her where she is today. She admits to having very few theatre people amongst her closest friends, at the same time saying that really she and husband Kevan Johnston entertain little.

Yet Jill comes from a theatrical family. Her father was Bill Perryman, a baritone with J C Williamson's; and her mother, whose stage name was Dot Duval (and whom Jill stresses was 'very, very pretty') understudied Gladys Moncrieff.

If that cliche 'born in a trunk' can apply to anyone, it certainly does to Jill. Her parents were both in a touring production of White Horse Inn, and she had traversed some 10,000 miles around Australia by the time she was two'. The production visited some very obscure places. It was attached to Wirth's Circus, which would perform so many days, and then be followed by performances of the musical.

Jill has been told by her mother that once, at the age of two, she tottered on stage from the wings to join her parents, and stopped the show (something she has been doing ever since). Her appearance so delighted the audience it became a regular occurrence and a miniature Tyrolean costume was made for her; Jill still possesses it.

When the tour of White Horse Inn ended, Bill Perryman joined the Tivoli Circuit, but Mrs Perryman's time was now taken up with the children. Jill's older sister is the highly acclaimed actress Diana Perryman, of whom Jill is very proud; there is also a younger brother. They are a close family. Bill Perryman eventually became a radio announcer with 2KY.

Jill retired then from the stage at the age of three and cannot recall, as a child, wanting a theatrical career. Her ambition was to be a lady butcher or work in a dry cleaning shop!

Eventually of course Jill did change her mind about the stage. JCWs were always calling for people to audition. According to Jill one had to fill up an application form at the stage door for an audition — and JCWs never seemed in a hurry. Jill filled up several of those forms, but it took a year before she was auditioned — for South Pacific.

After South Pacific she worked in several JCW musicals, like Paint Your Wagon, The Pyjama Game, Can Can and Call Me Madam. She would sometimes play small roles and understudy the leading lady — in Call Me Madam it was Evie Hayes, for whom she went on at one performance.

In The Pyjama Game director Fred Hebert, recognising a hidden talent in Jill, against the advice of others, cast her as the plump 50-year old secretary. Jill scored an immense hit in the role and in many ways likens her current part of Miss Hannigan to that: just as the shoes and padding she wore for Mable helped her create the character so, she declares, the shoes for Miss Hannigan give her the 'feel' for the role.

Between musicals she appeared in a number of the famous Phillip Street Theatre revues, which was good all-round training as she had to snap in and out of several different characters, and was given opportunities to sing and display her humour.

When Jill played Rosie in Carnival (which Kaye Ballard created on Broadway) she virtually stole the show and audiences and critics loved her in the part, although the musical itself was a big flop.

Jill plays tribute to Kenn Brodziak for first seeing her potential and having faith in her
Spotlight

abilities by offering her the female lead in Stop The World, I Want To Get Off. Regrettably she had to decline as at the time she was carrying her second child.

Next Jill portrayed Mrs Molloy in Hello Dolly, again understudying the leading lady, and playing for her a great many times in Sydney.

Then came perhaps Jill’s biggest success — the Streisand role of Fanny Brice in Funny Girl. It was a very starry part and in Australia Jill became an overnight star in it. People who saw Streisand overseas and then Jill, frequently declared Jill was better. She came within a hair’s breath of taking over from Streisand in the London production. Had she done so there can be little doubt she would now be an international star, and strangely enough New Zealand is still the furthest she has travelled. She has no regrets about not playing in London. “It was not meant to be”, she simply says.

Following Funny Girl there came the Mary Martin part in the musical for two, I Do, I Do — in which she nightly stopped the show singing “Flaming Agnes”. In an Australian written musical version of Priestley’s When We Are Married, staged not very successfully by Phillip Productions, amidst an all-star cast, Jill shone in the built-up role of the actress Lottie Grady.

Again she stole the show in No. No. Nanette as Lucille, which toured the JCW circuit for two years. There was Sondheim's A Little Night Music, in which Jill seemed rather miscast as Charlotte, but her sheer professionalism got her by.

More recently she has been in the Music Loft Theatre Restaurant’s revue Leading Lady (which also played at St Martin’s in Melbourne), in which she was able to display so many aspects of her talent. This was followed with more show-stopping on Jill’s part in the marvellous Side By Side By Sondheim.

And now she is playing Miss Hannigan in Annie, which looks like keeping her occupied for some time to come.

Jill has been called upon to play in American musicals here and base her performances upon the original creations, which in itself has entailed much versatility. One wonders if any of the overseas stars could have played so many different parts, and still come out on top. Who for instance could be more different to Streisand than Mary Martin? Yet Jill managed to make each star’s role seem tailor-made.

Is it not time someone wrote a big musical specially for Jill to create the leading role?

A gift subscription to Theatre Australia is a present that keeps on coming!
Marilyn Richardson: Our Most Glamorous Opera Singer

By Pamela Ruskin

Marilyn Richardson was once asked to sing Brunhilde for a German recording company. "My voice isn't big enough but they kept on at me for so long that I did a tape just to convince them I couldn't sing the role. It just isn't me. They said they loved it but fortunately the whole thing fell through". I couldn't help thinking that if her voice wasn't big enough, neither was she herself. Brunhildes are usually very massive ladies indeed, not slender, green-eyed, auburn-haired beauties of infinite grace like Marilyn. She is certainly one of the most, if not the most, glamorous and seductive singers working in opera in Australia at the present time.

A Sydney girl, a graduate of the Conservatorium, she is also a typical Australian outdoor girl who loves swimming, tennis and bush holidays though she doesn't have much time for relaxation these days. She made her start singing with Young Opera in Sydney, enjoyed considerable success in Melbourne with what is now the Victoria State Opera and is today singing many major roles with the Australian Opera.

If personal considerations had not prevented her from taking long-term engagements overseas, she would be a good deal better known internationally than she is, although she still sings regularly in Switzerland in brief engagements. She has, in modern parlance, got the lot. She is lovely to look at and lovely to listen to, with a beautifully modulated voice which she herself describes as "warm and round but not big". She is also extremely hard working, a great perfectionist, has a flair for languages and her diction is excellent. As a dramatic actress, she is outstanding. This is why her Poppea in the Vic Opera's Coronation of Poppea was sensational and why she was chosen to sing Aida and Salome for the Australian Opera.

What has kept her in Australia for most of her career is that she married, first at eighteen and was widowed early. She has three sons, Michael 23, Christopher 19 and Nicholas 17 whom she found it wonderfully stimulating to sing Alcina at the Dallas Brooks Hall, with Lauris Elms and Beverley Bergen among others, conducted by Richard Divall. The concert was brilliantly sung and the critics were rapturous. In a general 'thank you' to the soloists, John Sinclair of the Melbourne Herald wrote of Marilyn that "she sang so beautifully that I can do no more than apologise for the inadequacy of my words. She did everything the part required ... more completely than any singer I have heard during the last thirty years ... it was a question, not only of her ravishing beauty of tone, her impeccable sense of style or her infinite subtlety of expression." Other critics were almost equally lyrical, and those of us in the audience delighted in her performance and in that of Lauris Elms in particular.

After Alcina, Marilyn had time for a rest and a family Christmas before plunging into work again. She is to sing Fidelio in Sydney with Don Smith, a strange bit of casting brought about by the loss of Aida, which meant the whole Verdi cast was transferred to Beethoven, a decision that is causing much comment in opera circles. Also in this season at the Sydney Opera House, she will sing in Tchaikowsky's The Queen of Spades mid-year, and again in The Mastersingers in Sydney in February and later also in Melbourne. "Every production gets four weeks rehearsal which is better than with the South Australian Opera where there are eight weeks. That's far too long and one loses both one's voice and also the spontaneity of one's performance."

Commenting generally on the work of the opera singer, Marilyn Richardson emphasizes the importance of the role of the conductor. "It is a terribly important role, not just musically but from a personality point of view. Some are very co-operative and some are not." She prefers to sing in the language in which an opera is written "English is not a good language to sing except when written by an artist like Britten. On the other hand, I like to communicate with an audience and if they don't understand what is being sung that is a problem." (Continued on page 31)
The John and Sue Fox Tour

Fiona Batchelor
(National AYPAA)


An accurate description of John Fox? His national Australian tour would suggest that indeed it is. Welfare State was founded in Yorkshire in 1968 by John, and it is one of the most influential alternative theatre companies in Britain.

Over the past nine years through a vast body of work at home and abroad and financial assistance from many public bodies, including the Arts Council of Great Britain, Welfare State has gained an international reputation for pioneering new forms of celebratory theatre, in particular social contexts.

At present, after ten years of directing, John and Sue Fox are taking a year's sabbatical, leaving a vigorous company still functioning in England. They are spending the year travelling widely as a family, with their children Daniel, 9 and Hannah, 7.

After intensive research in their own work on Ceremonial Theatre, they propose later in the year to visit Bali and India to see at first hand their processes and funeral ceremonies, in particular to experience music, Dance and sculpture in everyday life in the community not particular to experience music, Dance and sculpture in everyday life in the community not as a specialist art activity in a rarefied theatre or gallery situation.

They were invited to the INSEA (International Society for Education through Art) World Congress in August '78 in Adelaide where John's papers and illustrated talks attracted considerable attention. It was here that The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association approached John and Sue with regard to doing a national tour as a stimulus for everyone involved.

Before beginning their tour for AYPAA, they were approached by Mobil Oil Australia and commissioned to create a project suitable for mass printing and mass circulation. The Fox family moved to the Port district in Adelaide where Mobil's terminal is situated, and John made a series of Icons reflecting his response to the area, its people, their dreams, fears and superstitions. They also spent two months working as Consultants in Celebratory Theatre for Maggie Theatre-in-Education at the Festival Centre, Adelaide.

The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association approached John and Sue to offer assistance to people from many country areas who are interested in working with John and Sue, this assistance is in the form of travel expenses. The tour has been an exciting catalyst for projects to celebrate International Year of the Child.
If the mammoth timber rafters supporting the century-old sandstone warehouse in Salamanca Place, Hobart, had collapsed at midnight on the 6th of January, the future of Australian puppetry would have been dim indeed.

The impressive old buildings that line Salamanca Place near the Hobart dockyards have become home to a number of arts-oriented organisations in recent years — among them, the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre. For the week ending on that Saturday night, number 68 had also been the heart of the 1979 International Puppet Festival. The Festival was organised by the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Society for Education through the Arts, with the assistance of the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre and the theatre's director, Peter Wilson. The week-long series of workshops and performances were attended by delegates from all over Australia, including representatives from almost every puppet group in the country. Taking part too were British puppet master, John Blundall, the PUK Puppet Theatre of Japan and the Fukien Puppet Troupe from the Peoples Republic of China.

On the Saturday night in question, following the closing ceremonies held in Hobart's Playhouse, most of the 310 delegates to the Festival had returned to the Festival Club to watch a midnight Punch and Judy show, Bailed Out by South Australian puppeteer, Greg Temple. Temple's high-spirited performance was probably the emotional climax to an exhausting week in which each day saw an average of six different shows at any of four Festival venues, in addition to dozens of two-hour workshop choices daily. But Bailed Out wasn't the artistic climax.

That distinction indisputably went to the Fukien Puppet Troupe from China. Fighting tigers and mandarins with swords and daggers, twirling plates on sticks, juggling, dancing, smoking, laughing, performing one incredible feat after another with the precision and timing of acrobats, the small exquisitely made Chinese hand puppets brought gasps and wild applause from the audiences which packed the Playhouse for their three performances. The Chinese troupe at the Festival served as a catalyst and focal point becoming something of a thorn in the side of Australian puppetry — albeit a welcome and inspiring one — when self-analysis of the where-are-we-going variety gathered momentum throughout the week.

The Chinese were masters of the skills and techniques required to mount a technically perfect production. They presented four playlets — three traditional and one modern — with flawless precision and split-second timing. One had to admire their striving for and achievement of excellence in a field which is, for them, steeped in tradition. Yet for the Australian contingent, Fukien probably offered little that was directly relevant to Australian companies or likely to help solve the problems which face puppet people in Australia now.

What those problems are became increasingly apparent and the overwhelming one must be the need for training for Australian puppeteers. Festival participants seemed to prefer a loosely organised structure that might serve as an Illich-type skills resource centre: putting people who need training in certain skills into contact with the individual or company which can provide it. Indeed, visiting Festival lecturer Blundall, who is acknowledged to be one of the world's leading puppet masters, was invited to meet in Sydney with Australian puppetry people in subsequent weeks to discuss forming such an organisation.

The shortcoming of such a method, of course, is that you need to know what it is you need to know before you'll know enough to go looking for it. Moreover, you need to know what you aspire to.

The Festival pointed out very clearly that there are hundreds of people in this country interested in creating a vibrant, multi-faceted Australian puppet theatre. Their enthusiasm is contagious; their dedication and good will are inspiring, but their overall achievement — however varied and ambitious — falls far short of the excellence represented by Fukien. So it was Fukien's greatest contribution that as well as their own charming puppet tiger, they brought to Australia a more terrible tiger indeed — a standard of performance excellence which Australian puppet theatre had not even imagined.

Nevertheless, Australian companies and individuals at the Festival gave us some exciting theatre. Little Patch Theatre from Adelaide presented an 'educational' show, Everything Depends on the Sun, which combined shadow puppetry, black theatre, singing and simple scientific experiments in a 50-minute program that was highly entertaining, amusing and simply but beautifully designed. Not surprisingly, Little Patch was chosen to host the next Australian Festival in January 1983.

Then too, the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre repeated their landmark production of Momma's Little Horror Show, designed by Jennifer Davidson and directed by Nigel Triffitt. This multi-media cornucopia had the anticipated stunning effect which earned the regional company kudos in Melbourne and Adelaide recently — though the show met with only lukewarm reception during its short Sydney season.

The best individual performance was that of Richard Bradshaw and his now legendary shadow puppets. Richard's masterly one-man show, with its simple, appealing silhouette puppets in a series of short, witty vignettes and sketches, was perhaps the most polished offering from the Australian contingent.

The enthusiastic reception he received made all the more poignant the general disappointment of Festival participants in the Marionette Theatre of Australia's The Mysterious Potamus, for Richard is Artistic Director of the MTA. Potamus premiered at Hobart's Theatre Royal on the 1st of January, following the official opening of the Festival by the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Stanley Burbury. The puppets are technically complex and, close-up, quite appealing. But the production doesn't work — except perhaps for a pre-school audience.

The best puppet plays will appeal to adults as much as to children, though perhaps for different reasons, and the mistake MTA makes, is to slow things down for the supposed sake of making things clear to kids. Moreover, the obvious physical strain on puppeteers manipulating the complex rod puppets used in Potamus destroyed

(Continued on page 38)
New Year for the TV networks begins in February when the first ratings survey, TV's barometer of programme popularity, gets under way. There are eight such surveys a year. While the ABC likes to see itself as apart from the commercial scramble for points, it too, consciously or otherwise, brings on its new season's products round about this time. In these columns we've listed the continuing and new Australian-made shows which contain at least some element of dramatic content. In other words, for the purpose of this listing we've ignored sporting, current affairs, documentary and game-show type programmes.

Local Productions for 1979

ABC-TV

ABC-TV's drama department, headed by Geoff Daniels (see separate story), launches into the new year with three locally-made series. At the time of writing the light entertainment section had only scheduled the comedy sketch series Jokes, made last year, for screening in February.

Drama's offerings include Golden Soak, The Oracle and Patrol Boat. Golden Soak was completed during 1978 and most episodes of the other two were made during '78 also.

Golden Soak, based on the book of the same name by Hammond Innes, revolves round mining man Alec Hamilton (Ray Barrett) who has fled England — under dubious circumstances — for Australia. He gets involved in the mystery of the Golden Soak, an abandoned gold mine, and the owner's daughter Janet (Elizabeth Alexander).

Patrol Boat, says the ABC, is one of its largest projects, which probably has something to do with outside filming on a RAN patrol boat and the building of a replica of HMAS Ambush in the studio. The thirteen 50-minute episodes constitute an action series starring Andrew McFarlane (straight out of The Sullivans) and Robert Coleby (out of Chopper Squad) as the officers. Cast includes: Danny Adcock, Tim Burns, Ron McKinnon and Rob Baxter. Executive producer: Ray Alchin. Directors: Frank Arnold, Rob Stewart and Brian McDuffie.

The Oracle is Steve Black (John Gregg), a Sydney talkback radio announcer. To his listeners, he is the expert on all matters — from incest to income tax. The self-contained episodes (13 x 50 minutes) follow his professional and personal life as well as the lives of those who call him up on air. Julie Hamilton plays Tommy, his secretary girl Friday, and Pamela Gibbons his second wife, Suzanne. Don Pascoe is the station manager, Bob.

It's odds on that drama's three one-off plays, Banana Bender (John Hargreaves, Maurie Fields and Lyndal Rowe), Mismatch (Jane Harders, Stephen O'Rourke and John Bluthal), and Rockpool (Lyn James and Bunney Brooke) will be screened under the Stuart Wagstaff's World Playhouse series title.

Two series, which began production in 1978 and which will be completed early this year, are Twenty Good Years and A Place In The World. Twenty Good Years, being made in Melbourne, devotes a 50-minute episode to each year from 1956 to 1976. It follows the lives of a married couple Anne (Anne Pendlebury) and Ron Fielding (Harold Hopkins) during the period. It also stars Anne Phelan and John Diedrich.

A Place In The World is set to win all the honours if we believe what they're saying in the drama department. Everyone's been raving about Michael Cove's scripts. He envisaged a six-parter, but the ABC initially would only come good for a trilogy. Eventually they agreed to do the six. Each of the first five episodes centres on a different individual and his "place in the world". They all come together at a school reunion in the final episode. Series cast includes John Gregg, Paul Mason, John Gaden, Nick Tate, and Kerry Francis.

New productions for this year include: Ride On, Stranger; Time Lapse; Lawson's Mates; and Twin Towers.

Ride On, Stranger has been adapted by Peter Yeldham, from the novel by Kylie Tennant, into four 60-minute episodes. Production begins March April.
**Channel Seven**

Just as 1978 was drawing to a close the Seven network were openly talking about their new, continuing series, *Skyways* (see separate story), to be made this year.

At the time of writing production dates weren't available, but *Skyways* should get off the ground soon, if it hasn't already.

In their '79 promotional kit Seven describe the upcoming series as "following the lives and loves of people working in the airport and the travellers passing through." They say they're going to try and capture "some of the feeling" of the movie *V I P's*. The series will be made in Melbourne by Crawfords.

**A scene from One Day, Miller.**

One of them, *One Day, Miller*, has been made into a series (six half-hours) with Penne Hackforth Jones and Tony Llewelyn Jones.

Another, *Neutral Ground*, will get similar treatment this year. As with the original, it will feature Peter Sumner and Cornelia Frances in the leads. A second series of *Tickled Pink* is also on the cards.

**Noni Hazlehurst as a policewoman in the sketch comedy series Jokes.**

*Jokes*, a sketch comedy series of four half-hour programs, was made last year and has been in the can for some time. It features Terry Bader, Chris Haywood, Robyn Moase and Noni Hazlehurst.

More recently the department made *TV Follies*, four one-hour variety programs, and again this year their schedule includes six more lavish *Marcia Hines* specials.

But for all that, no one is saying much about the screening dates for these products. No doubt it's got something to do with a new programming format which must come into operation now that *This Day Tonight* has bitten the dust. Early evening prime time slots look as though they'll be taken over by drama in the main.

Geoffrey Davies were imported for 13 half-hours. They're backed up by locals Frank Wilson, who plays the irascible professor, John Derum and Joan Bruce. The series was completed late '78 and with *Father* will be screened during '79.

*Love They Neighbour* makes up a trio of "in Australia" series. The star of the British version, Jack Smethurst, who plays Eddie Booth ("snowflake"), is coming here for a series of seven half-hours to go into production this month, or next. Smethurst, according to Seven, is the only import and at the time of writing no local actors had been cast.

**Norman Gunston (alias Gary McDonald) harmonises. Photo: Channel 7.**

*Norman Gunston* will be back on screen again this year. Seven have signed him up for four, one-hour specials, plus a repeat of the best of the four.

*Julie Anthony* made another one hour special during October/November — largely shot at the Gold Coast — and will be shown this year. No decision yet on the making of a follow up.

*Heidi* (26 x 30 minutes) is a co-production between Swiss, German and Australian (Seven) networks. It has been filmed in the Swiss Alps and Frankfurt, setting of the original story of Johanna Spyri. Our only representative in the series is Ros Speirs, who plays Dete.

Seven will again screen the *Sammy Awards* and making a one-hour block on Sunday nights with *This Is Your Life*, is a new 30-minute show *This Fabulous Century*. The programme looks at Australia's past in pictures and original film clips.
The Sullivans celebrated its second birthday on TV at the end of 1978, having screened 394 half-hour episodes. It was launched as a five-nights-a-week, half-hour show, but was later switched to two one-hour shows a week. It reverted to the "strip" format in April last year slotting in at 7pm to replace the axed A Current Affair.

After fighting their way through North Africa, Crete and Papua New Guinea, the Sullivan boys this year will face the horrors of the Japanese POW camps. Kitty, played by Susan Hannaford, has the big love of her life and mum, Grace Sullivan (Lorraine Bayly), has her fair share of traumas.

We’re told that while all this is going on a number of characters, who have “slid quietly out” of the serial over the past two years, will be re-appearing. Assuming The Sullivans stays at 7pm, and no one at the time of writing has suggested otherwise, it will be up against the U.S. comedy M.A.S.H.

The formidable opposition has been one to the time of writing has suggested that Channel 0-TEN may move into that slot five nights a week by the 0-10 network. According to Nine programming executive Lynton Taylor, the network won’t “rush” into production this year (not for the first six months at least) with “so much successful drama on air at the moment.”

The Young Doctors

This time last year Nine included five Australian made “telefeatures” on their new programs listing. They haven’t been screened and they’ll appear in the list again this year, with the addition of one more teleplay.

Three of them, Say You Want Me (Belinda Giblin, Serge Lazareff and Hugh Keays-Byrne), A Good Thing Going (John Hargreaves, Chris Haywood, Sandra Lee Paterson and Veronica Langi) and Cass (John Waters, Michelle Fawdon, Judy Morris, Melissa Jaffer and Stephen O’Rourke) were co-produced with Film Australia.

The other three, Harvest Of Hate (Chris McQuade, Dennis Grosvener and John Orsik), Sound Of Love (Celia de Burgh, John Harratt, John Beynham and George Ogilvie) and the latest addition, The Plumber (Judy Morris, Ivar Kants and Robert Coley), were co-produced with the South Australian Film Corporation.

Lynton Taylor says all six, which look at the changing nature of marriage and women’s attitudes to it, will be shown sometime this year. They’ll be screened one a week and possibly under an umbrella title, in similar style to Stuart Wagstaff’s Playhouse technique.

Don Lane (nights) and Mike Walsh (mid-day) will carry on chatting through ‘79 and Paul Hogan returns with six one-hour specials plus, as is traditional, repeats of “two of the best” from the six.

Network O-TEN

Set for launching this month is the 0-10 network’s Prisoner (see separate story), a series of 16 one-hour dramas about Australian women in an Australian prison.

Following a year of preparation, about five episodes had been made by the end of 1978. Grundy’s are producing at the Melbourne studios of Channel 0 and even as early as late December it was being tipped that the network would commit themselves to a further series.

For Grundy’s it’s somewhat of a departure from the true soap opera style (The Young Doctors and The Restless Years) to stark realism with some strong acting from the ladies concerned. They include: Peita Toppiano, Carol Burns, Kerry Armstrong, Val Lehman, all of whom play inmates. Elspeth Ballantyne plays a

prison officer and the only two men in the piece are Richard Moir, as an electrician, and Barry Quin as the prison doctor.

The series title has been changed a few times since the first scripts were written, by Grundy’s executive producer Reg Watson. Originally The Prisoner, then Women Behind Bars, and now we’re assured it’s simply, Prisoner.

If Prisoner gets a similar response to The Restless Years when it was launched about fourteen months ago, no one at 0-10 will be complaining. From the short preview we saw, it augurs well.
Grundy's Prisoner

Michael Hohensee

Reg Grundy's chief drama man, Reg Watson, is softly spoken, so he leans forward to explain that women in prison do have love affairs — and he wasn't referring to those of a homosexual nature.

While preparing Grundy's new TV drama series, Prisoner, Watson had written a storyline which had a woman inmate romantically involved with an electrician. Was this possible within such confines? Looking over his previous study and research he found his plot stood the test.

"One former convict was quite blase about it," Watson said. "Apparently, what the women used to do when she was in, was to stuff toilet rolls down the lavatory jamming it up. So, the plumbers really knew what they were going to the prison for."

Ingenuity is no doubt an important part of prison life, but Prisoner, especially about women in prison, also tells of the fears, hardships, hates and humiliation associated with it. Watson and his research team have gathered some powerful, and sordid, stories to use as background for the 16 one hour programmes to be shown on the 0-10 Network beginning this month. (In some states dates may vary according to individual station programming.)

Dramatic Realism

Watson has been with Prisoner, nurturing it along, for the past twelve months. It's far removed from the game show department upon which the Grundy organisation was founded. From a cursory look at the first episode, it contains more dramatic realism than stablemates The Young Doctors and The Restless Years, both of which were also guided to the screens by Watson.

Reg Grundy isn't synonymous with high-class drama, but there's a hint of an upgrading with the new series, which Watson describes as "gutsy." Whether we like them or not, TYD and TRY crack along successfully in commercially oriented ratings terms and, as Watson would have it, they're entertaining. That's his prerequisite. Prisoner, too, above all, must be entertaining. If you get too close to home, and shock too much, the public will shy away from the programme.

But, according to Watson, he hasn't pulled any punches. "There's no point in glamourising prisons. I don't think anyone's going to want to go into prison after seeing this." They've certainly packed it in in the first episode, which sees Peita Toppano, as Karen, sent down for murdering her husband after catching him in bed with someone else. It's a bit more involved than that, but it's not policy to give storylines away.

No Glamour Girls

There are overtones of lesbianism, a cell suicide, stand-over tactics and the inevitable brushes with the prison officers. It's abrasive, potent stuff. Grundy's didn't go for glamour girls to act out this material. Each actress, says Watson, has to play a very distinctive character. "They're all excellent, a lot of experienced ladies who are not well known on TV. Many of them have concentrated mainly on theatre." There was no reason behind that, he adds, "just an opportunity to get "very gutsy actresses."

There's Carol Burns, she plays Franky Doyle, a tough individual who, when crossed, appears quite capable of bending prison bars. Franky is based on an actual person, and when she snaps, everybody around her runs.

When people are grouped together there emerges a top dog, in this case Queen Bea, played by Val Lehman. Other cast members include Kerry Armstrong, Colette Mann, Elspeth Ballantyne, Fiona Spence, Mary Ward and Margaret Laurence. The only two regular actors in the series are Barry Quin as the prison doctor and Richard Moir as the electrician.

Situations Analysed

As the series progresses each woman's situation is analysed and the backdrop isn't restricted to prison walls. If inmates go beyond the walls, the camera can go with them. Alternatively, a storyline may begin with the crime and we follow the culprit into prison.

"When you start off talking about a concept like this," Watson says, "they're all tough old lags. That isn't true at all. If you go over the court cases of the past few years there are some very sophisticated ladies in prison. "We learnt from the research that once a woman gets in there's quite prepared to tell the whole background of the crime, but won't necessarily do that at the trial."

For researchers, Watson recorded on sound tape 30-40 hours of interviews with a woman who had been in prison for thirteen years. "Before I met the woman I had pre-conceived ideas: she was going to be a real tough bitch, chain-smoking, the lot. In fact, she is the most charming woman, doesn't smoke, doesn't drink and doesn't swear. And fortunately for us, she had total recall. And what struck me most, she wasn't bitter."

Watson, who wrote the initial scripts, rewrote the first episode five times. The first drafting was so "stark and cruel" no one would have watched a follow-up. As it is, the first episode, he says, will shock a lot of people.

Researchers, producers, directors and cast have all had a trip to prison and while content accuracy has been checked as far as Victoria and NSW are concerned, Grundy's are not stating in which state the prison is located. The series is being shot in the Melbourne studios of Channel 0, which are surrounded by allotments normally seen within prison walls!

Bars and Grills

For dramatic emphasis the producers have used more bars and grills — all of which are steel — normally associated with a prison, as well as introducing longer corridors. Even the outside of the studio has been made to look like a prison exterior.

Before joining Grundy's Watson was a producer and writer with British serials Emergency Ward 10 and Crossroads. Is the "realism" of the prison drama a step up from Grundy's two soap operas?

Simply, they're just three different concepts, he says. "With The Young Doctors we're not trying to tell the medical profession how they should look after their patients. The doctors are efficient, but they have lousy private lives.

"While a lot of young people in The Restless Years weren't experienced in TV they had had a lot of theatre. Talented people from the Ensemble (Sydney). All we did was explain the technique of TV and got them to adapt to it. They're often called amateurs, they're not."

"While those so-called experienced actors, who do two or three TV dramas in five years ... they're not necessarily good TV actors. In serial form there's no indulging yourself — it's a first night every episode. It's treated as such."

"With Prisoner we're going more for realism. All the situations are things that have happened, or could have happened. "Young Doctors, you go for a happy ending when you can. Restless Years, hopes for the future, big things going to happen for them. Prisoner: they're not interested in saving someone's life, they're only interested in fighting for their own. Tomorrow is a long way off, for some in prison, it's never going to come."

Great Humour

But, adds Watson, he doesn't want to give the impression that everything is all grim in prison. "It isn't, there's great humour. One woman says: 'The mistake we made was getting caught.'"

"I'd like every housewife to look at this and say: 'That could be me in there.' Because it could be. The only thing different about them is that those inside went through with a crime a lot of other women have contemplated. There's great compassion from them. They're just members of the public, inside."

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Acting: TV v Theatre

Michael Hohensee

"It's like playing tennis. When you're on stage you get different shots played back to you and you adapt rightly. On TV it's like playing against a brick wall, you get your own, same shots played back at you."

That was Stuart Wagstaff's analogy. He was, as you've obviously guessed, expounding on the subject of performing in the theatre or on the little screen. It was in response to questions we put to a number of actors and actresses — a few of whom we rarely see on TV — on their approach to the two mediums. Did they have a preference? And why? What were their likes or dislikes of both? Was one more demanding than the other? etc...etc...

There's no mistaking Wagstaff's feelings on the subject: "The disciplines are greater in the theatre than they are with TV. Once the curtain goes up you're on your own and have total responsibility. On TV there's a director there all the time."

He believes it's easier to make the transition from theatre to any other medium than the other way round — "You're cutting down on a larger performance. It's difficult for someone experienced in TV and film to go over to the stage. Not so long ago I saw someone, who had no stage experience, go over to theatre from TV — the voice was very thin with little projection."

The actor hears himself in the theatre and adjusts "the mistakes" in his voice accordingly. With TV you just turn the volume up or down.

Wagstaff said: "Yes, there's more kudos attached to TV. I'm the living example. After years in the theatre I could walk down the street and no one would know you. Make a few TV commercials and you get the recognition which, quite frankly, I could do without. I get the greatest satisfaction from theatre. It's literally being creative."

Robyn Nevin had a theory once that she'd played so many differing character roles — she's currently playing "a fat, potato-shaped 60-year-old" in Patrick White's A Cheery Soul — that the TV and film people had difficulty slotting her in to anything. "I've never," she said, "tried to project, or work towards a particular image."

Robyn is interested in text. She has a preference for the theatre because actors are given more time to find out about "the literature" in question. "On TV it's almost thrown at you and you have to rehearse out of sequence. I like to see the piece as a whole."

"I think I'm at an interesting age regarding roles for the theatre, but somehow with TV, the parts seem to be for the young or the old."

"There are different physical requirements. On stage you have more control over what you do, the whole of you is visible. On screen, the director chooses what part of you, if at all, will be seen."

She last did television for an episode of ABC-TV's upcoming series The Oracle, which features John Gregg in the lead. "I did that because I knew the director, Julian Pringle... it makes a difference. I don't do Crawford's stuff. I mean the cops shows and things like that. But I'd do The Sullivans, it's the best of the serial stuff."

Robyn gave up the theatre as a disillusioned 22-year-old and for four years became a TV announcer for the ABC in Tasmania — "I won a couple of TV Logies for best female thing... hated being famous for just being on TV and not really contributing anything. So, I suppose I've had the experience of being public property. That's an aspect of soap operas I'd hate. I went back to the theatre in '71, where I'm meant to be. I like the material better."

Ron Haddrick, who did most of his TV work in the early to mid 60's, said ideally he'd like to split his time equally between theatre and TV. For some years now he's concentrated on theatre with the odd TV episodes here and there. "I prefer theatre because there's more time for rehearsal and to work with your fellow artists... plus the development of the character. On TV, the first performance is the last, all at the same time."

As a stage production progresses the actor discovers tiny facets of his character, and with the relationship build-up with other cast members all this adds up to an improved, richer performance.

"That," says Haddrick, "gives me a lot of satisfaction. In theatre, of course, there is the audience feedback. On TV one doesn't have to project as much. In the early days of TV they would tell you — 'Don't act'. It was easy to fall into the trap of not doing anything. As long as you're internalising, the camera will work for you."

As a younger man with a family, Haddrick admits he was conscious of security and was only too pleased to land a theatre contract and/or season. He recently turned down a New Zealand TV offer which would have kept him away from home (Feb) until May. Now that he's not going to tour with Bedroom Farce, this month he joins the Neutral Bay Music Hall cast — as the villain.

June Salter, renowned for her role as Miss McKenzie in the 0-10 Network's The Restless Years, had not performed in a straight theatre play for thirteen years when she took on Queen Mary in Crown Matrimonial.

"I was concerned when I first started in Crown Matrimonial. Had I forgotten to project? As it happened I didn't find it too difficult to adjust. I think the character helped."

"The physical differences were interesting. With the part I have to sit with a very straight back and walk very upright with my feet splayed. I don't wear a corset and my shoulders, I felt, were taking a lot of the pressure."

"During a few days break from the play I was uncomfortable and I thought I'd cracked a rib. My chiropractor said I'd put my rib cage out of kilter, because during that break I'd relaxed and hadn't been sitting rigidly!"

For all that, June believes actors are not so restricted on stage in their movements — "having to move here or there to keep in, or out, of shot." With Crown Matrimonial at Sydney's Seymour Centre, there was great freedom with its thrust stage. When it moved to the Mayfair, and a proscenium, it was like "being back on TV", with its restrictions.

Catwalk was June's first straight role on TV, but it took her until the end of Certain Women before she fully relaxed in front of the TV camera — "I'm not nervous of it now. The electronics of it are so impersonal." You can, she says, get into a routine with TV and once you've got the rhythm it becomes quite easy. Queen Mary has been a demanding role which she's found strenuous.

But it's difficult doing both. While in Newcastle doing the play she was driven south to Sydney to do some work on The Restless Years. The TV scenes took longer than anticipated and she had to be flown by the network's helicopter back to Newcastle. She arrived there for 7.15 pm and had to be on stage for 8.15 pm.

Ron Falk says the place to learn is in the theatre. With the advantage of repeat performances one can correct and improve. The trap with many TV performances is that they are often "too big", he says. And that's acceptable as long as the emotions can match it.

He had been frightened of TV before he did the ABC-TV four-parter Loss Of Innocence where he played the father to John Fitzgerald. Before rehearsals for each episode he brought in a student friend to help him make sure he had his lines off pat. "I did that so I could completely forget about lines while in front of the cameras."

Falk has tended to get signed up by theatre companies for six months at a time. This year, it's one play at a time, so we may see more of him on TV. He finds moves over to TV something of a "refresher course" and says TV is more lucrative — in the theatre $230 to $250 a week, on TV $350 to $450. "Theatre and TV complement each other in many ways, but one is, perhaps, more accurate in one's truthfulness on TV."
Barbara Stephens prefers to work in the theatre. And she says that after working solidly in TV for the past eighteen months, she's currently appearing in The Bed Before Yesterday alongside Rachel Roberts with Lindsay Anderson directing. It was Anderson who, after rehearsals, said to Barbara: "Have you been doing a lot of TV." When she replied in the affirmative, he said: "We've caught you just in time."

"He didn't expound on that," Barbara said. "Theatre is slightly forced, but it makes more demands on you and you have to make it work every night. Cameras can be emotive for you.

"People think it's fantastic to be seen on TV. I was recognised for the ABC TV series Run From The Morning, which was a nice change from being known as the British Airways girl."

Paul Mason, who's been working in theatre for about 18 months and has returned to TV to ABC's A Place In The World, believes an audience tells the actor so much about a performance. While he moves "purposely" on stage, the TV camera can underline changes.

"One is more quickly recognised for work on TV and I think the purists — theatre actors and students — tend to spurn it."

His first TV encounter was in an episode of Silent Number. "I didn't know what hit me. I knew my lines and I arrived at the bush location for seven in the morning. And the first thing the script editor said to me was: 'Have you got your script changes?"

"Here was I ... driving a car along a cliff road with people perched on the bonnet ... and having to deliver new lines. It was a nightmare. In that sense TV is a harder medium."

While theatre may be more physical, TV is more in the head. Never turn a part down, says Mason. It's all experience. "I did a couple of lines in the ABC's One Day, Miller recently and it was the hardest thing I've had to do. The character was far removed from anything I'd done and I enjoyed it. What's that saying ... There are no small parts, just small actors."

Ivar Kant's maintains the stage will always be his basis. "Because I don't think there are really any resident companies in Sydney any more, we're all freelance. I've just down a stretch in Channel Seven's Doctors Down Under — a sort of feed for Robin Nedwell and Geoffrey Davies. You either do some bits and pieces or you don't. I have a wife and two kids and I do the odd TV ads and parts which I normally wouldn't want to do. But that's the reality of it all."

TV, he believes, is only worthwhile for the actor if he has a part in a long-running series or a major role in a teleplay. In September he made The Plumber, a co-production between the Nine Network and the South Australia Film Corporation. The telemovie also featured Judy Morris and it was directed and written by Peter Weir.

"It's a psycho thriller with an exciting script. It was the first time I've had an opportunity to give a real performance in front of a camera."

Barbara Stephens

Crawford's — A Place in TV History

Raymond Stanley

Without doubt, one of the outstanding names in Australian television is Hector Crawford, whose Melbourne-based company, Crawford Productions, has continuously churned out one television series after another, ranging from the downright awful and amateur Consider Your Verdict of the '50s to the high quality and very professional The Sullivans of today.

In his time Hector Crawford has been 'knocked' and he and wife Glenda Raymond the constant butt of good-humoured jokes, all of which he has taken in the spirit in which they have been presented. His semi-hobby of being an orchestral conductor also has come in for much ribbing.

What has to be remembered is that Crawford Productions have been the longest stayers of the course in television production, determinedly continuing in the face of adversity that would have knocked out many others completely. Over the years Crawford's have provided much professional work for actors (even if the pay sometimes has seemed peanuts, the scripts mediocre, rehearsal time almost nil and working conditions not always the best).

Few Australian actors worth their salt have not at some time or other worked for Crawford's. Maybe some day the company will compile a few nostalgic programmes with selected scenes showing 'names' at work in bygone days, when many were complete unknowns. It has also —purposely or not — been able to turn编织 into household names people like Leonard Teale, Gerard Kennedy, George Mallaby, Lorraine Bayly, Paul Cronin and many, many others.

If one takes an in-depth look at the current film industry, one discovers many of today's top writers, directors, producers, cameramen and other technicians received their ground training at Crawford's. Many have told me they didn't particularly enjoy the experience, that it was hard work for little money, but at the same time they are grateful for what they learned in Crawford's employment.

Originally Hector Crawford seemed to have been bent on a musical career; he attended the Melba Conservatorium and began public conducting at sixteen. In 1937 he inaugurated the first of his famous Music for the People open air concerts — beginning in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens and working ultimately up to the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

In 1941, however, Crawford decided to go into radio and, as manager of the Broadcast Exchange Company, turned out shows like Magic Of Music, Hymns for the People and Spotlight on Music. His sister, Dorothy, had been a drama producer with ABC radio and eventually the two formed their own company, Hector Crawford Productions; he concentrating on musical shows, she on drama.

Over a seventeen-year period, the Crawfords produced a wide variety of radio programmes for distribution in Australia and abroad (Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Hong Kong, Bahamas, Jamaica and some dozen other places). One of the most popular series, which broke new ground both for Australian and overseas radio, was Melba, a drama with music which, written by John Ormiston Reid, traced the life of Australia's "Queen of Song". Patricia Kennedy enacted Dame Nellie Melba, Glenda Raymond provided the singing voice, backed by a symphony orchestra — conducted by Hector Crawford, of course. Another was a 104 episode series Opera For The People, which introduced many young Australian singers who since have made international names for themselves.

There was The Blue Danube, comprising 52 musical dramatic episodes containing better—
Crawford's — A Place in TV History (continued)

class music, The Amazing Oscar Hammerstein, Glenda featuring Glenda Raymond and, away from music, You And Your World, a documentary series produced in collaboration with the CSIRO and Australian universities. The World's Best Books was selected and dramatized from classes prescribed by education departments. A half hour programme, Problem People, dealing with social problems and combining drama with a panel discussion, was under the chairmanship of Zelman Cowan!

There was also D.24, a half hour drama series originally created and sponsored by the Victorian Police Department.

In 1955 the Crawford company produced the country's first closed circuit TV production, a ballet, and in the first week of transmission a married couples' quiz, Wedding Day, which ran to 39 episodes. There was Raising a Husband, Peter's Club a children's series, Take That, Don't Argue, Huston's Family Quiz, a one hour musical programme The Crucifixion and the play Seagulls Over Sorrento. But it was with Consider Your Verdict which, shown nationally and overseas and going to 168 episodes, really made the Crawford name known in television.

One police drama after another came from the Crawford stables — Homicide (Crawford's reputedly lost $37,000 on the first 26 episodes), Division 4, Hunter, Mailbox Police, Ryan, Bluey ... To do justice to Hector Crawford, he tried hard to interest the commercial stations into taking series other than the constant car chasing crime sagas; but the commercial TV know-alls resolutely insisted on the well tried and true shows. The Wind Divides, Blue Murder, Me And Mr Thorne, all had their problems but eventually managed to 'sell' this excellent series.

It was with Bluey that the company made its first real break, not only into a new country, but also showed that the public could appreciate a well produced series other than the car chasing crime sagas. By 1962, after several years of trying, the company had finally obtained the licence for Melbourne's third commercial channel. This is where it all started. But the licence was not to last long. It was revoked because of financial difficulties and the company was forced to sell out to the Melbourne division of the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

For the first time the Crawford company could be faulted for lack of imagination and a tendency to stick to tried and tested formulae. With the one exception of the recently completed series Me And Mr Thorne (I managed to view the pilot) which inexplicably was turned down by all the commercial stations. It starred Gordon Chater as a middle aged bookkeeper believing he was a reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes, solving mysteries with the help of his young assistant (Johnny Farnham) and getting into all kinds of disguises (including drag). The pilot to me appeared excellent material, very very funny and possessing much potential. To my knowledge that pilot has not even been seen on TV.

There was for instance a proposed comedy series Me And Mr Thorne that Crawford's biggest disappointment came in 1962 — missing out in obtaining the licence for Melbourne's third commercial channel. Instead it went to Reg Ansett, experienced in the world of television. Early in 1972 Crawford's moved into the 'live theatre' field with formation of Crawford Theatre Productions. They presented in concerts around the country Liberase, Glen Campbell, Henry Mancini and his orchestra and Dr Murray Banks, plus the first highly successful tour of Robin Nedwell and Geoffrey Davies in Doctor In The House. This was going to be followed with tours of other shows (such as Danny Kaye in Two By Two) which never eventuated. A little after three years from their first stage attraction, Crawford's theatrical activities were "put in recess", despite their obvious profitability.

In my opinion, for many years Crawford's were sitting on a potential goldmine which they were not even aware of, or if so refused to do anything about. Most actors hate being in a long running TV series except for the financial security it offers and long to return to the stage. In the days when Homicide and Division 4 were high rating series, Crawford could have taken a theatre — like say the St Martin's in Melbourne and run their own repertory company, presenting some of their best scripts adapted for the stage (and even 'trying out' others), with their TV regulars and 'guest stars' appearing. Could it have failed? Imagine what a huge success a specially written play about The Sullivans would have if half a dozen of the current leads were in it. Maybe some enterprising entrepreneur will yet pip Crawford's to the post with such an idea.

It is not only in the area of 'live' theatre that Crawford's seem to have lacked initiative. Except for The Hands of Cormac Joyce (for which they brought out Stephen Boyd, Colleen Dewhurst, Cyril Cusack and Dominic Guardi), they have made no telemovies, despite one-time plans to do so. There was much talk about a film version of Homicide, but it never eventuated. Crawford's did make a movie version of The Box, but that is their sole film.

One wonders whether perhaps today the management of Crawford's needs new blood. Incredibly they possess no publicity department, and to obtain information from the organisation is literally like getting blood from a stone. One writes to Hector Crawford or general manager Nigel Dick, and receives no reply. One attempts to ring them, to be told they are out or 'in conference'; one leaves a message for a ring back, which never comes. The nearest to a publicity person is Nick McMahon, who seems to be connected with marketing. My own dealings with McMahon result in him promising to put in the post information about Crawford's current activities, plus photographs — and nothing more is heard. Maybe the experiences of other journalists have been different, and I have been plain unlucky. But it seems to me that today Crawford's are not interested in publicity, and have no interest in their product being written about overseas.

Small wonder then that Crawford's are being overtaken in all directions by the go-ahead Reg Grundy Organisation. Grundy's — right on the ball all the time — have a very efficiently run publicity department which will always provide up-to-the-minute information and photographs, constantly suggesting stories themselves. Ultimately the results must pay off internationally. It is no secret that Grundy's now employ many ex-Crawford key men, people who had worked long, hard and well for Crawfords — and whom Crawfords made no attempt to retain on their books.

Some five years ago — when Crawford's did possess a publicity officer the incomparable Bill Gordoni — I was taken around their Abbotsford headquarters and at the time was greatly impressed with all the immense administrative organisation involved. All crammed under one roof were the behind-the-scenes activities of TV makers: film editors, dubbers, sound synchronisers, background music selectors and other occupations of which the general public is largely unaware. There were rehearsal rooms, workshops for making furniture and other props, a wardrobe department, make up rooms and, not least, sections put aside for producers and script writers. A simple index system covered thousands of Australian actors, incorporating their photographs, age groups, types of roles specialised in, as well as reports on behaviour on the set and independent assessments on performances in previous Crawford productions. I imagine it is very little different today.

In fact the latest information I have is that Crawford's now possess three sound stages with lighting for both film and television production (much of the film Patrick was in fact shot at Crawford's), cameras and grip equipment for 16mm and 35mm film, casting services, wardrobe department, set design and construction departments. Post production facilities include 16mm editing rooms with Moviolas, neg matching department, sound and projection facilities (16 and 35mm), dubbing theatre with mixing facilities, re-recording studio and music editing facilities.

Currently the company is enjoying a huge success with Cop Shop. Might one suggest that — taking a leaf out of British TV — there is a comedy spin-off series centred around 'J' and Valerie (Peter Adams and Joanna Lockwood)? But this might prove too venturesome for the present management.

Hector Crawford is now in his mid-60s. Presumably the heir apparent is Dorothy's son, Ian Crawford. Certainly it is an appropriate time to re-assess just where the company is now going.

To keep in step with today's television trends, Crawford's surely must enter into the telemovie field, if not indeed feature pictures. Perhaps they will be prodded in these directions by the Victorian Film Corporation, which is now investing in the projects of Crawford Productions ($91,000 for example in a second series of Young Ramsay).

Whichever directions the company take in the future, one fact remains: Hector Crawford and Crawford's will always have a niche in the history of Australian television.
Exclusive ABC TV's Drama Package

Michael Hohensee

Exclusive ABC TV's Drama Package

This first week of February ABC TV's head of drama, Geoff Daniels, fronted up to the newly constituted Commission to outline his plans for production during 1979-80.

He needs their seal of approval. Amid a climate of run-downs, cuts backs and a strike, Daniels is budgeting for the same number of TV drama production hours as was made last year. He's obviously working on the premise that his hours on Auntie won't be further reduced.

Eighty Hours Only

Like last year, he's aiming for 72-80 hours, which means drama's five production strands — three in Sydney and two in Melbourne — will constitute Commission to outline his plans for production during 1979-80.

“we are unable to look at more than 80 hours at the moment. We're not considering an increase because of the writer situation.”

Daniels was appointed to his present position in March last year at a time when the drama budget was drastically reduced — “We lost about $300,000 in one day, just like that. Each year production has been less — from 156 hours in 1975 to 72 this year”.

Levels to be Maintained

Nevertheless, he's optimistic that levels will be retained for the coming production year. Daniels, enthusiastic and effusive, almost to the point of overtaking a tape recorder, quickly mentions that the 1975 production figure then included Certain Women and Bellbird.

And we won't be seeing similar productions from the ABC in the future, it simply can't afford it, says Daniels. Maintaining the cast situation is too expensive. They're leaving "the soaps" to the commercial networks.

Outlined for production is a 10 one-hour adaptation of the classic. For The Term Of His Natural Life. According to Daniels, a co-production deal with Dorian Films in the U.S. is under negotiation now. "It's one of the most expensive TV series to be made in Australia, but it won't cost the ABC anything because we're putting our resources in. It's been written by an Australian girl, Patricia Payne, and the Australian Film Commission are involved with script development, plus local finance.”

Radio talkback announcer, Steve Black, was at work on ABC's "Ombudsman" title.

Directors needed

We're looking internally, within the ABC, to see if we can flush out some budding directors. The aim is to try and develop new directional talent. The idea is not new, the ABC have tried it.” During the 1979 screening year (March to November) the ABC will have to provide about eight hours of first-run drama a week for 49 weeks, that's including overseas and local programs.

Daniels believes local production should represent "Australian writers, the Australian scene and the Australian social milieu. The ABC must know what's going on overseas — for example it's no good us pushing into Shakespeare when 37 plays are being done by the BBC and they're coming out here at six a year.” And they won't push "the police stuff" either, the commercials do all that very well.

The on-air pickings for this year include The Club, Golden Soak, The Oracle, A Place In The World, Twenty Good Years, Lawson's Mates, Ride On Stranger and Twin Towers. (A brief description of these shows are listed in the new programmes article.)

Less action-dramas

“We were heavily criticised last year, and rightly so I think, for putting more action drama into ABC-TV. The traditional ABC audience doesn't look for action drama in our programmes. “People who never watch ABC, the total commercial viewer, prefer action drama to inter-personal drama. So, what we did, by putting on the Trackies for example, alienated to some extent our own audience. It was interesting that we doubled the male audience — between the ages 20 to 35 — but it wasn't sufficient to compensate for the fall off and criticism we copped.”

Last year the ABC got itself involved in a co-production deal and made six, six-hour length telemovies with an American concern. It wouldn't be an understatement to say the arrangement didn't work too well.

Daniels was unequivocal about the venture. "Wouldn't go through it again, Christ no. But it did have some benefit. It gave us a mass of experience in a short time. Tell me what production company can put out six such movies in a year?”

“We did get some reputation overseas for them — they're being sold all over the place — and technically you can't fault them. A mass exercise, off six.”

There will be no more 90-minute one-off dramas. To a certain extent this has been dictated by the new programming policy, designed, it seems, to give the commercials a run for their money.

Prime-time dramas

With This Day Tonight being axed at the end of '78, situation comedy is destined to replace it at 7.30 p.m. Drama, says Daniels, will come in at 8.30 p.m. giving way to the new current affairs programme Nationwide, scheduled for Monday through Thursday, at 9.30 p.m.

More or less there will be drama on every night of the week at 8.30 p.m., except for Saturday when Stuart Wagstaff's World Playhouse, moved from Thursdays, will follow Four Corners. "In the past,” said Daniels, “audiences had an hour and a half of information programme. For first time we're in at 7.30 p.m. ... no doubt the commercials will be worried.”
Following the withdrawal of a High Court action against Currency Press, these major works by Dorothy Hewett are now freely available for sale overseas and throughout Australia with the exception of the State of Western Australia.

THE CHAPEL PERILOUS

DOROTHY HEWETT

THE TATTY HOLLOW STORY

Distributed by Cambridge University Press
Only oblique sense of futility

ROMA

MARGARET McLUSKY


Roma, Maggie Millar.

(Professional)

Barry Humphries does it. Reg Livermore does it. Even the Victorian College of the Arts and Hoopla do it. If it comes to mind that what all these people and parties have in common is a Mum who does hers in a Whirlpool, that's not so far off the mark: what these four share is a passion for women in the suburbs, Hoopla, giving us Roma upstairs at the Playbox. And if the title suggests a Fellini-esque phantasmagoria, that's not off the planet either. Roma of Roma could dream up a few scenes as wonderful and out-fantastic Fellini. Unfortunately, she has two problems: she's a women, and she lives in the suburbs.

Roma was written by eight women - four from V.C.A. and four Essendon "houswives" - and was first performed at Essendon Y.M.C.A., in 1977, "designed to explore the potential of theatre professionals working side by side with people who can contribute real content for theatre from their actual life experiences."

From its beginning V.C.A. has espoused the phantom of community theatre: from the first week of its drama course when initiates go and live with the aborigines and sleep under the stars, participants are encouraged to view theatre not as the elitist prerogative of the middle classes, nor plays as somethings to be performed on a proscenium to a hushed, well-heeled audience, Theatre is about, for and by ordinary people, people like you and me.

While this seems an innocent enough aim, and even a laudable one, it appears that there is no one to tell the band of enthusiasts what theatrical conventions are worth keeping. There has been a plethora of ill-conceived and poorly executed plays over the last few years which might well have succeeded, had they not thrown out the baby with the bath water: babies like the importance of direction, good acting, or at least audible acting, all based on a well-structured and developed script.

Let me hasten to say that the direction of Roma is able and Maggie Millar is superb in this one women show. But neither Gantner nor Millar can hide the limitations of the script.

The dialogue - or rather monologue - is rarely clumsy, and is written with real flair. It shows surprisingly little evidence of eight desperate pairs of hands. But it seems to be concerned with a rather narrow concept: Roma's agoraphobia.

The play is rather embarrassingly staged as a visit — from the audience — to Roma in her neat little flat. She confronts her visitors/audience with her memories. She is nervous. She is pathetically surprised and gratified at anyone's interest in poor little her. After all, she's only a middle-aged suburban Mum isn't she?

Her biography is sketchy and without surprises. She was a country girl, brought to the city by her husband. She reminisces, damp-eyed about her wedding. She has a 'glory box', of sorts. Half empty, it contains old love letters, postcards, bits of gift wrapping, ribbon, a baby's bonnet, a bride's satin horse shoe. She displays her treasures at intervals.

She wrings her hands. She is funny about answering the phone and going downstairs to collect the mail (agoraphobia). She makes tea and swallows a couple of pills to still the twangings of her menopause. She gossips about a neighbour who hasn't been seen for months. But Roma knows she's there. She's heard her screaming.

The loneliness and fear of this woman are finely portrayed by Maggie Millar. But only obliquely are we given the sense of the futility of a woman's place in the home. After all, when Roma talks about the woman in the next flat — a nice touch infuriatingly undeveloped — she is talking about herself. Without being grandiose, this is a play about dead dreams, unfulfilled fantasies, a life without the dignity of purpose. These are undoubtedly potent in Roma's agoraphobia, but the audience is left to make up its own mind — if it cares — about the cause of this malaise.

Having sat through too many long plays, this is one that I wanted to go on, to develop. Roma is the story of too many women. It is incumbent upon its eight authors to develop Roma to the point where no one can walk away and say 'so what'.
If the unemployed are dole bludgers, then what the hell are the idle rich?

THE YOUNG AND THE JOBLESS

GAIL RAYMOND

These words were part of a graffiti backdrop for the unemployment show, The Young and the Jobless at the Pram Factory, Carlton, Melbourne. Before its season at the Pram, the show toured high schools for six weeks. Six young unemployed people performed scenes that had grown out of their own individual experience of being unemployed.

The show was a direct reaction to rising unemployment. The danger of this type of theatre, which the actors and directors were aware of, is that a theatrical piece can transform ‘... political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation ...’ (Walter Benjamin).

Most unemployed people are primarily concerned that the rest of the community understand the situation they are in and treat them like human beings.

One of the two directors, Alison Richards, says: ‘‘the show was a general introduction to the problems of unemployment. We set out to put the personal problems in a wider context because I don’t think you can take any coherent political position until you personally understand your situation and others. For instance, at the beginning the actors found they had a lot of society’s attitudes such as it really is the worker’s fault that there’s unemployment and inflation, that there are such people as dole bludgers. We saw about ninety people in the workshop sessions and at the end of every session we asked them what they would like to see, what were the most important things for them in a play about unemployment. The groups we ended up with was representative, if not typical. There were five women because we found women tended to want to put themselves on the line as far as public statements go, more than men of that age. We got a lot of our facts from articles in the National Times about youth unemployment schemes. People told their own stories from leaving school and work. We got a lot of our facts that had to be looked at. We tried to introduce the idea of Profit and what we ended up with was that it wasn’t the individual person’s fault, that the economic causes have to do with the balance of the economy ... who gets what. The money-hat game tried to show this idea.

“One of the things we had difficulty with was the section on depression and isolation. The results of this were shown in the scene which was a stylisation of people smashing a telephone box.”

The main thing that came up was the undermining effect of the bureaucracy as found at the CES office. The second most important thing was family and peer group reaction. Part of the problem of being unemployed is a loss of heart, but the actors found that by the end of the run their self-confidence had developed enormously. After each performance the actors all made a personal statement on unemployment, and one thing that came out of their statements was the idea that with the advent of new technology work is fast becoming a privilege and not a right.

The part of the show which showed kids in boring jobs under a youth training scheme being sacked after four months, when the Government subsidy of $45 a week towards their wages cut out, was criticised as overstatement, but this information had come out of actual experiences. Shows for CYSS groups (Commonwealth Youth Support Scheme) brought a very different reaction as these kids actually knew what it was like to be unemployed. The groups who are most affected are (a) the working class in general and (b) migrants, due to parental expectations. The pattern in schools was for the kids to react against the actors as ‘‘dole bludgers’’ as at first they were obviously threatened by the issues raised. But by the end of the show, the sorts of questions they asked showed that they really had identified with the problem.

‘‘Open Channel’’ in Fitzroy have a videotape of the show which will be accessible to anyone who has contact with the unemployed and hopefully will be distributed through the Education Department and be used as a discussion starter, as the show has been. The actors themselves are concerned that the expertise they have acquired whilst doing the show is made available to other groups.

All in six part harmony

L F SLOANE’S THREE BLACK AND WHITE JUBILEE MINSTRELS

V. I. RICHARDS

John Pinder at the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant is proving to be the most adventurous and successful entrepreneur in Melbourne. From a secure base among the indiscriminate drinkers, who doubtless would enjoy anything dished up at the Last Laugh he has convinced not a few of the theatrical wits and gourmets, that the Last Laugh is artistically kosher most of the time. Indeed, the unsuccessful entrepreneurs around town, looking at their miniscule dividends and their tied up capital must be wondering why they were late? So blind a few years ago, and why they weren’t going to Flying Trapeze. My uneducated guess would be that the Last Laugh has made more dough for less investment than anything since the Melbourne Theatre Company.

This is not to say that Pinder hasn’t spawned a hummer or two. One recalls with some anguish an undistinguished but raucous thing of Louis Nowra’s, and more recently a dreary trio of semi-tuneful songbrushes in a forgettable sub Copacabana hoof. However we do remember the Busby Berkeley’s, the circus and the last show, Mama’s Little Horror. Triumphs, mostly against the odds.

What’s good about the Last Laugh, whether you win or lose, is that the food is improving all the time, the grog’s not too expensive and you know you’re not going to get any of the pseudo vaudeville, spurious music hall junk that seem mostly to be the hallmark of the theatre restaurant. And at the Last Laugh you’ll even get a bit of aggro from time to time, and there are dark (moisy) places to hide with your friend.

So upon hearing that L F Sloan’s Three Black and Three White Jubilee Minstrels were being imported from the underground circuit, I was stung into action, went along and sort of enjoyed myself.

What the show is, is a sort of Theatre-In-Education account of the history of Minstrelsy, which I found interesting but a bit disconcerting. Being educated whilst drinking. Once I recovered from that and cottoned on to some of the bewildering number of names dropped and dates mentioned, I could enjoy the excellent singing and dancing. The cakewalk, the origin of the word ‘coon’, the racist nature of the entertainment industry, all in six part harmony.

I suppose the main problem with the show is that the allegedly (and actually) racist attitudes we whites have and had towards minstrelsy (the horrible Black & White Minstrel Show) and their funny way of walking, talking and ain’t that so Mr Bones is evident even in a critical show like this one. The singing and dancing are so good that we want more of that and less of the facts. So whilst being objectively critical, the show is subjectively enjoyable which is the tension that makes it work, I guess.

In its fairly simple way, the Minstrel Show is more interesting than most others on around town. But not that interesting that I would have brought it thousand of miles. Maybe getting someone to write one about Sharman Tier. Shows here might have been just as entertaining and instructive.

A gift subscription to Theatre Australia is a present that keeps on coming!
Apart from the performances of its players, it is difficult to see what appeal an English play like William Douglas Home's *The Kingfisher* can possibly have for Australian audiences in the late 1970s. It is a play completely out of its time, which is probably the 1920s when, even then, it probably would have been looked upon as a mediocre vehicle.

Take its incredible plot. For 30 years Sir Cecil, a successful novelist, has been holding a torch for Lady Evelyn, whom he made love to under a beech tree in his garden and, because he failed to propose marriage, she flew next morning to the bed of another admirer who, in apparent terror at her action, proposed to and subsequently married her. Cecil and Evelyn have not met since.

On reading in *The Times* of her husband's death, Cecil writes to Evelyn inviting her to his country home. SHE accepts and arrives for tea on the way home from her husband's funeral. Apart from a black coat and hat, there is very little reminder of her previous engagement that day and, even allowing for the fact she did not love her husband, one would have expected the circumstances to have created some emotion.

Cecil is intent on carrying on from where they left off 30 years before and persuades Evelyn to stay to dinner and then the night. Fortunately she has taken with her to the funeral an evening dress, along presumably with night attire, and a change of clothing for the following day. Obviously Lady Evelyn is prepared for all emergencies!

Cecil writes a letter of love and regret to his master over the years. After Hawkins has left off 30 years before and persuades Evelyn to stay to dinner and then the night. Fortunately she has taken with her to the funeral an evening dress, along presumably with night attire, and a change of clothing for the following day. Obviously Lady Evelyn is prepared for all emergencies!

Caught up in the romantic garden setting, lying together on a rug under the old tree, Cecil proposes and this time she accepts — much to the chagrin of Cecil's butler Hawkins, who promptly gives in his notice.

Next day Evelyn has second thoughts: she doesn't want to disrupt Cecil's domestic arrangements, particularly after talking to Hawkins who reveals he has been in love with his master over the years. After Hawkins has withdrawn his notice the play finally ends on an in the air note, with the possibility Evelyn and Cecil will spend the rest of their lives together.

As if the plot is not enough some of the twee lines have to be heard to be believed. There are moments which out-do anything Barrie ever wrote. One feels embarrassed for John McCallum as Cecil who, walking an invisible tightrope, has to deliver most of them; it says much for his abilities that he never falls although once or twice comes perilously close to

It is in fact the joyous performances of Googie Withers and John McCallum which almost make the evening worthwhile. With immense polish and sparkle they show what great acting really is all about and make it all look so easy. I suggest Liv Ullmann could with profit have taken acting lessons from Miss Withers, particularly in the art of playing comedy.

The performance of the remaining member of the trio — Frank Thring as the manservant — does not impress me nearly as much as it apparently has most other people. In my opinion he is grossly miscast and it is difficult to think of any actor less likely for the part. With grey hair and hunched shoulders he shuffles around, presenting several of the well known Thring vocal mannerisms, obviously sending it all up. At one point, with raincoat and an undersized bowler, he manages to look like Charles Laughton's Ruggles. The mere fact that he is playing the role creates unintentional laughs, which frequently play against the lines. It is not Thring's fault; he is just not equipped for such a part. There is one line McCallum has to deliver about Thring being an Adonis 30 years before when the two went swimming together in the nude!

Unfortunately the whole point of the play has been destroyed by the substitution of the original '50 years' lapse of time to '30 years'. The theme of the play is surely about the infirmities of old age, that the red hot blood of youth grows cooler as one grows older, and one just becomes ridiculous trying to do the same sort of things.

When it was presented in London the elderly Ralph Richardson and Celia Johnson must have made it appear almost plausible. But Googie Withers and John McCallum are a living lie to the text: both look so youthful, healthy and agile, it makes nonsense of many of the lines and situations.

As nearly always with George Ogilvie's direction, the pace is far too slow. Although, with less than two hours from start to finish — including a long interval — he could hardly have done otherwise.

Then one has seen better sets at the Comedy. The action all takes place in Cecil's garden, where a great deal of very obvious green carpeting is unsuccessfully trying to masquerade as grass.

Again, this is a play for either the undiscriminating members of the general public, or simply those who appreciate fine acting and nothing more. One cannot blame the McCallums for appearing in it; but even they must wish it was more substantial.
Cast strong in the goal-to-goal line

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

JACK HIBBERD

Arsenic and Old Lace by Joseph Kesselring. Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaem Theatre, Melbourne Vic. Opened 14 December 1978. Director, Simon Chilvers; Designer, Maree Menzel; Mr Witherspoon, Roy Baldwin; Mr Gibbs, Don Bridges; Lt Rooney, Sydney Conabere; Dr Harper, Lloyd Cunnington; Elaine Harper, Lynette Curran; Mrineer Brewer, David Downer; Teddy Brewer, Anthony Hawkins; Dr Einstein, Edward Hepple; Abby Brewer, Irene Inescott; Officer Klein, Malcolm Keith; Martha Brewer, Patricia Kennedy; Officer O'Hara, Gerald Maguire; Jonathan Brewer, John Stanton; Officer Brophy, Ian Suddardes. (Professional)

It is the season when Commerce celebrates the advent of the Galilean, when the toilers put up their plates of meat, when fearless and demanding theatre-goers allow their cerebral hemispheres a well-earned respite. It is the time when the MTC, after the year's exactions, after the incessant exercisings of artistic and social conscience, bends its talents to the deck-chair comic.

So, for a Yuletide divertissement and bum's-on-seats success, the MTC have this year chosen Arsenic and Old Lace, that favourite of the amateur theatre and those in quest of a light night out. Within the terms of such a strategy, the MTC have done reasonably well.

Though the first act flagged and sagged, the rest of the proceedings gradually gained in pace and verve. Admittedly the opening act is highly conventional, even laborious, in the way it dramatically sets things up. Nevertheless, the cast seemed on the night slow to heat up, and the production did not purposively contrive to counter this early sluggishness. Indeed by the first interval, the prospects looked both luke and slack.

Yet amidst the second act, the play, the cast, the production, found one another and clicked — indeed there was lump laughter in the house, not that I was ever beside myself with lunatic mirth. In compensation, it was an undiluted delight to observe all those paragons of the middle and upper classes, their faces creased with the cares of the nation, progressively relax and light up as if in another more carefree world.

One major virtue of this presentation of Arsenic and Old Lace was the assembling of a cast strong in the goal-to-goal line. Irene Inescott and Pat Kennedy were formidable and sweet as the two elderly murderesses; they imbued the parts with all the naivety and single-mindedness of little philanthropists. In their hands the play's incipient satire of piety and Christian humanism came through with a degree of impact — it is hardly ever apparent. As Elaine Harper, the platinum twit next door, Lyn Curran more than maintained the excellence of her performance in Just Between Ourselves, bringing some intelligence and shape to a traditionally stupid and shapeless part.

Of the men, John Stanton and David Downer featured, especially in their attempts at physical freedom and expression, nicely contrasting the freakish with the square. Edward Hepple, whose Dogsborough I found dead in Arturo Ui, lifts his game completely here and gives a rendition with animation about it. The rest, with the exception of Roy Baldwin and Sydney Conabere, ranged from the able to the hack.

Simon Chilvers, the director, showed once and for all, forever maybe, that he is at his best in the province of farce. His production contained many agreeable twists, moments of unexpected and droll physical detail. My criticisms would focus on the handling of the first act and an overall interpretative reticence — a reluctance to push more to the surface some of the plays hard and unsavoury currents. With its reputation and strength as a formula comedy, I imagine it is too much to ask that it show more arsenic than lace.

The design (Maree Menzel) was ineffably literal and functional, lacking an expressive statement or a humorous slant on existence. Given that the house is charnal and stands beside a cemetery, given that it is the abode of two seemingly innocent biddies, there surely could have been some ironic nuance or insanity in the set, less use of shit-can tan woodwork and High St (Armadale) furniture.

Melbourne theatre is stagnant (doubtless distinguishing it from that of the rest of the continent) at the moment. There is much that is standard and entertaining, little that is original and entertaining, little that irresistibly strikes a fresh stance. One hopes that after its holiday with Arsenic and Old Lace, The MTC (along with Hoopla and the APG), steps more boldly into the face of things.
A general wrap on entertainment in the Newcastle and Hunter area, this will include, shows, theatre, restaurants, nightclubs, discos, art shows....and also books and music.
Striking authenticity

TREASURE ISLAND

ROBERT PAGE

Treasure Island from the book by Robert Louis Stevenson. Nimrod Theatre, Festival of Sydney, on dark Island, Sydney NSW. Director, Peter Barclay; Designer, Larry Eastwood; Stage Manager, Margie Wright. Jim Hawkins, Justin Byrne; Black Dog, Israel Hands, Bill Charlton; Billy Bones, Tom Morgan, Benjamin Frankling; Blind Pew, Ben Gunn, Ralph Cotterill; Harry Anderson, Nicholas Lyon; George Merry, Alan Bacher; Squire Trelawney, Terence Clarke; Doctor Livesey, Paul Bertram; Tom Rednuth, Frank Lloyd; Long John Silver, Hugh Keays-Byrne; Captain Smollett, Martin Harris; Dan Dick, David Bracks; O'Brien, Jock McLachlan.

Treasure Island, as mounted by Nimrod, is more an event than a piece of theatre. It begins not with the first muffled shanty drifting across the quay of Clark Island, but with the embarkation onto a characterfully ancient ferry at the Man O’War steps, Bennelong Point.

This year’s premiere was not only one of the first happenings of the Sydney Festival — the fire hoses were still playing on the steps of the Opera House, washing away the effluvia of the previous night’s New Year’s Eve opening party — but also the very first event to mark the International Year of the Child. The trip was a free one for the city’s less fortunate children, with the nocturnal critics and Nimrod MAGI looking distinctly incongruous in the outing atmosphere of a blazing sunny day.

Talking of firsts, this is associate director Peter Barclay’s first autonomous flexing of directional muscles for the company, though he has previously assisted with Henry IV, Metamorphosis and Jumpers. Regrettably, it being my introduction to the play too, I cannot compare it with Ken Horler’s previous two ventures, though from all reports the action has been beefed up.

Certainly it took only the upping of an anchor, the clash of cutlasses or the report of a musket to have the kids agog with excitement. What was striking, though, was the authenticity of many of the feats demanded; the climbing of the rigging, the fall of Israel Hands (Bill Charlton) some fifty feet into the briny Harbour, and the scramble of Long John Silver (Hugh Keays-Byrne) up a sheer rock face for which, I gather he requested danger money!

Barclay’s vision, amidst all the swashbuckling, did not overlook the more surrealistic aspects of the story — though he must have been aided by the bizarre brilliance of Ralph Cotterill who played both weird figures — Blind Pew the black-cloaked angel of death with huge, sightless eyes, and Ben Gunn, the Poor Tom of the Island, fantastically got up in pigments, feathers and rushes, and prancing to a wild cackle all over the rocks.

Whilst the actors were well drilled over the multiple stages and obstacle courses of Larry Eastwood’s impressive, but perhaps over literal, setting, Barclay’s hand seemed less firm in two essential matters, viz evocation and maintaining the illusion. Had the pirate sailors rolled and pitched a little, much more feeling of voyage would have been given to that ineluctably landlocked ship; and had all the actors copied the thorough commitment of Justin Byrne as Jim Hawkins, or Cotterill, attention might not have wandered as many times as it did. As is almost proverbial, kids are a most demanding audience; yet they will allow almost anything so long as it is consistent within itself.

And a final quibble: after all the talk of treasure, the narrated end, both in its abruptness and failure to show even the meanest sample of piratical swag, left the audience dumbfoundedly in the air.

Treasure Island is overall a splendid excursion, with much of its success resulting from following Tyrone Guthrie’s dictum that “open air performance is only suitable for the kind of entertainment which can be absorbed with one ear, half an eye and almost no exertion of the intellectual faculties.”
Excellent and serious attempt

THEY ARE DYING OUT

JOHN MCCALLUM

They Are Dying Out by Peter Handke. Rocks Players, Sydney, NSW. Opened 10 December 1978. Director, Anthony Barclay; Dramaturg, Joanna Warren; Stage Manager, Denise Lake; Music and sound, Ross Brewer, Peter Pitcher. Quitt, Benjamin Franklin; Von Wullnow, Bruce Wilson; Koehler, Kim; Peter Pitcher; Lut, Brett Nevill; Paula Tax, Debra May; Quitt’s wife, Alyssa Hittman.

One of Peter Handke’s preoccupations, which people who know his play Offending the Audience often dislike, is the paradox of theatrical illusion. He is fascinated by the fact that such an immediate and real experience as sitting in a theatre watching a performance should rely so heavily, for its subject matter, on reference to things outside itself. An actor on stage has a nearly perfect opportunity to assert the immediate reality of his presence. He or she is there, and the audience is there, and it is only in theatre that this fundamental interpersonal artistic relationship exists. Yet in the traditional theatre the playwright and actor continually deny this relationship. The state represents some place other than a stage, and the actor pretends to be some other person.

There is an old psychiatrist joke which sums up Handke’s concern with theatre, and talk in life, referring to other things. Two psychiatrists meet in a corridor, and one psychiatrist says to the other psychiatrist, “Hello”, and the other psychiatrist walks on, mumbling to himself, “I wonder what he meant by that.” Handke makes similar points himself. One character says, in The Ride Across Lake Constance, “Someone is banging on the table — to get his way?” and the other replies, “Couldn’t he simply be banging on the table?” In They Are Dying Out the principal character, Quitt, says, “I once dreamt I was losing my hair, whereupon someone told me that I was afraid of becoming impotent. But perhaps it only meant I was afraid of losing my hair.” It is our demand that every utterance and every experience means something or refer to something else which alone enables us to make sense of life, but which paradoxically interferes with our experience of the life we are trying to make sense of. The observer alters what is observed by being there, observing. The experimenter becomes part of the experiment.

In They Are Dying Out there is a profound distinction between the action which represents the outside world, and the action which simply occurs — between “theatrical” events and “real” events on stage. The characters talk about business and money and advertising, but gradually the act of talking becomes the object of attention, not what is being talked about. Correspondingly there are events taking place on stage which have no meaning other than their own reality, their happening. A large block of ice melts slowly on stage throughout the second half. A tub of bread dough rises as the yeast works. A bag of air slowly deflates. The audience is discouraged from looking beyond what is happening on stage, from inferring meanings or interpreting what is, once some writhing snakes and a load of apples have been added, a pretty odd collection of images.

The production by the Rocks Players is an excellent and serious attempt to cope with some rather intractable material, but it has some infelicities. A gross theatricalisation of one of the “real” events, the bread dough rising, is misguided, and betrays a misunderstanding of one of the most important points of the play. The whole point of the dough, the ice, and the bag of air is that these are real events, not theatrical illusions. In this production they are in danger of becoming precisely what Handke is attacking — obscure images.

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JUMPERS

TONY BARCLAY

*Jumpers* by Tom Stoppard. Nimrod Upright, Sydney, NSW. Opened December, 1978. Director, Ken Horler; Set and Lighting Design, Larry Eastwood, Professor George Moore, John Gaden; Dotty, Moore, Geraldine Turner; Sir Archibald Jumper, George Whaley; Inspector Bones, Barry Lovett; Secretary, Mary Haire; Archbishop of Canterbury, Martin Phelan; Crouch, Walter Pym; The Jumper, Allan Chappelle, Lewis Fitzgerald, Glenn Mason, Tom Nichols, Martin Phelan, Shane Withington. (Professional)

Clive James wrote of Stoppard that one gets into difficulties with his plays if one seeks a static viewpoint. He elaborated that with Stoppard there is no observer, no safe point around which everything takes its proper place, that one sees things 'flat' and thereby how they relate to each other. To this reviewer the explicit analogies to Einsteinian (Stoppard) and Copernican (earlier, other dramatists) universes is quite valid. It is, though, a contentious and difficult point and many critics still find Stoppard variously 'pretentious', 'incoherent' or more insultingly 'test-book stuff'. That's their loss. Stoppard is a dramatist of sheer intellectual exuberance, of encyclopaedic reference, of stunning wit and, above all, of immense theatricality. Beckett comes to mind as an 'ancestor' but if Stoppard is difficult, like Beckett, it is because he is very contemporary (unlike Beckett now) — and simply his drama works.

Now Nimrod have crowned what must surely be their finest year in Sydney theatre with a polished and well-honed production of *Jumpers*. Not that *Jumpers* is exactly Christmas fare but then its party mood covering a bleak and deeply unsettled humanity does strike a chord as we lurch in festive spirit towards '79 not a little hungover from '78. To quote Ken Horler's apt programme not of Stoppard's "Since we cannot relate to each other. To this reviewer the explicit relaxation of the Radical Liberal party newly elected at the General Elections. All of this set against the background of the first manned British moon-landing (who else: Cpt. Scott and Oates) — the astronauts wrestling on the lunar surface.

It is the figure of George that compels our attention as he maintains with increasing frustration a stubbornly deistic stance in a world where ethics and theology have become 'two subjects without an object'. George's quest is at once hilarious and oddly moving and to give it scope Stoppard moves across analytical and philosophical and religious boundaries. For example, Stoppard allows George to suggest, contra Zeno, that St Sebastian did not die by the arrow, contra the dynamic school, by the flight of the arrow, but rather by 'fright'! It's a cheeky but masterful point and Stoppard links this to George's unwitting slaying of his pet hare, Thumper, when demonstrating his thesis and later upon discovering the arrowed Thumper he inferred that St Sebastian did not die by the arrow, that 'fright' is the real cause. Stoppard, to be fair, is playing some mighty games with relativistic stance and the seriousness of his stance is that the games philosophers play are often inexcusably governed by rules that miss out on life. The best, it still seems, lack all conviction. Hence George is almost oblivious to Dotty's neurotic anguish; she vice-versa. Further, in his search for God he ends up with more of a two-headed ambiguous monster than any beneficient deity. But it is Sir Archibald Jumper who is awarded an almost perfect score with his gymnastic speech at the end of the play: a jumbled, pun-ridden piece of verbal chaos that runs a witty gamut from Descartes to Einstein. But Sir Archibald is inside the speech, Stoppard outside. Indeed, the deeper implication that philosophers, let alone society, have not come to terms with the relativistic universe is not left untouched. For Stoppard, though, 'things are so interrelated'. It is difficult in a review of this length to spell out the richness of the play in detail so I'll conclude by justly returning to the production.

It is undeniably John Gaden's show when we come to the acting. Gaden, looking perhaps a little too young and unmarked for George, gives a dazzling performance. High energy, intelligent but perhaps not quite moving enough. Geraldine Turner seemed a little uneasy as Dotty though I'm sure she will settle down as the season progresses. Perhaps here we can detect a small weakness in the production: I did not find the George-Dotty relationship moving enough, though, one suspects the sheer force of the play's comedy submerged this aspect.

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Richly resonant piece of writing

MR HEROD'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

DON BATCHelor

Mr Herod's Christmas Pageant by John O'Toole, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Director, Jennifer Blochside; designer, Luigi Forlini; Musical Director, Sean Meek. (Amateur)

Mr. Herod's Christmas Pageant is a richly resonant piece of writing whose implications serve us well by challenging our preconceptions, even quite sacred ones.

There are flaws in the show; it needs an infusion of vitality mid-way through part one and interopolated apologies by members of the cast about boring the audience are not the most efficacious way of achieving alienation. While one of the good features was that it was written for a given group of performers (al least in part), the particular Middle Stagers and some of the less experienced adults as well left a lot of the potential unrealised in this first version. I hope the thing gets to publication in some form.

Scenes with the four shepherds energetically performed by Stephen Billett, Simon Denver, Keith Avent and Greg Silverman at his scurrilous best, and certain flashes by the Herod figure (Joe Woodward) and his mindless stooges (Craig Cronin, Robbie Warwick, Robert Gore), were examples of workable theatre material seized with exuberance by actors with the right instincts. Jennifer Blochside, comprehending the bare style of the show, had pared down design and presentation to simple means and instincts. Jennifer Blochside, comprehending the bare style of the show, had pared down design and presentation to simple means and relied on performers to achieve a general air of ebullient fun. Clearly the cast had no reservations about their material, and one sensed a purposeful unity and enthusiasm for their task.

The show's approach is to oppose versions of events surrounding the Christmas story. It moves from the traditional one as portrayed in the Wakefield Cycle, to a version which represents the whole thing as a plot by Zealots to synthesise a Messiah out of Old Testament prophecies, as a rallying point for first century Jewish liberation fighters. The third version is a rock opera being prepared by a bunch of school kids, and presents a Jesus figure as a sort of 2001 super-nipper. In the clash between these versions, O'Toole sheds sparks of socio-political truth, not only about the events themselves, but about the same forces persisting in our time. Throughout the anchorman, master of ceremonies and commentator is the Herod character, and his paring words about the Herods always coming out on top may be taken as the central cry of the play.

Employing Herod as MC makes it hard to identify the voice of the author himself. Does O'Toole really mean to debunk the traditional Herods always coming out on top may be taken as the central cry of the play.

For their part, the director, designer and performers did a wonderful job. By the time I saw the show it had been on a successful State tour and was running easily in top gear.

The set was a triumph of atmosphere, capturing the muted and stuffy formality of a rural manor house, full of deadly good taste. The workwork was particularly effective and set-dressings were carefully considered. (Somehow the hookey and darts boards seemed too cheap for a games connoisseur of Wyke's pretensions.)

Diary entry one week... "Saw Catch Me If You Can at twelfth Night Theatre - whodunnit — laughed a lot — good night out". Diary entry one week later... "Saw Sleuth today — another whodunnit, but so much more to it than the other one — the difference between a pot boiler and a play".

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SLEUTH

DON BATCHelor

Sleuth by Anthony Shaffer. Queensland Theatre Company, SGI Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. opened 6 December 1978. Director, Terence Clarke; designer, Stephen Gow, Andrew Wyke; Costume, Brian Blain; Lighting, Robert Alexander. (Professional)

With this reservation, let me acknowledge with enthusiasm the ingenuity of the writing. As each sequence in the plot is apparently resolved it opens up unexpected new dimensions in the story, so that one is being constantly disarmed. Spectacular twists are engineered even in the last few electric moments of action. And all the while diverting little side games are being played — like the verbal fun Shaffer has with the name Doppler, relating it to the German word for double, and seeing it as a near anagram for the name of Wyke's doltish fictional Inspector Plodder. The more you look at it the more the whole thing resembles one of those fiendish Chinese puzzles. It's a tour de force, and loads of fun.

But for all my carping, Terence Clarke and his company did a highly creditable and thoroughly entertaining job.

Spotlight

(Continued from page 11)

It is not one with an easy solution."

Marilyn is not a member of the Australian Opera. She insists on remaining free to work where she chooses, based on Adelaide. Her appearances are those of a Guest Artist. For instance in 1980 she and her husband will take off for six months overseas; she will sing in Geneva and go to the mid-West again to sing with the company her husband started just over ten years ago. This will be the longest time she has spent overseas and she is looking forward to travelling with her husband and working with him.
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SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL

GUTHRIE WORBY

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler, State Theatre Company of SA, Playhouse, Adelaide, SA. Opened 2 December 1978. Director, Ron Blair; Desper, Richard Roberts; Lighting, Nigel Leavings. Bubba Ryan, Christline Mahoney; Pearl Cunningham, Audine Leith; Olive Leech, Carole Skinner; Emma Leech, Myra Noblet; Barney Rhoe, Rob Steele; Ron Wedder, Paul Sonkilla; Johnnie Dowd, Colin Friel.

When The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll was first produced in the mid-1950's it was pointed out that Ray Lawler had achieved the rare distinction of breathing life into an all but outdated form and at the same time had managed to say something provocative about Australia and Australians in transition. The inevitable chemistry of new vintage in old bottles threatened (but unfortunately only threatened) to burst the traditional form/content habits of local drama for ever.

Any meaningful production of the play needs to find a way of recreating this special ferment. The original yeast was a strain of sentiment, not sentimentality, which caught people happily off-guard, in an attempt to face the pace Rob Steele (Barney) produced sufficient energy for two, but upset the balance of his own characterisation in the process. The other characters, Pearl, Dowd and Bubba, seemed even more peripheral in this production than they are in the script. I suspect that Audine Keith's Dorrit-Evans-like approach accounted for the fact in the case of Pearl — definitely one of God's concierges. Furthermore in an Olive-biased production the Bubba-Dowd subplot has less weight because of the "first serious mental struggle he has ever had in his life". He appeared throughout, to be committed to the classic error of playing the end not the process. As a result there was an air of inevitability about emotional transactions between performers which led to an overemphasis of Barney's bull and Emma's contrariness. In this atmosphere Ms Skinner was hard put to build to her third act catharsis.

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As well done as it could be

CALIFORNIA SUITE

COLLIN O'BRIEN

California Suite by Neil Simon. Hole in the Wall Theatre, Perth, WA. Opened 29 November 1978. Director: Stephen Barry; Designer: Stage Manager: Stephen Amos; Actors: Merrin Canning, Sydney Nicholls, Stu Franklin, Robert Van Mackelenberg, Dana Nicholls, Hannah Warren, Beth Hollender; Alan Cassell; Bunny; Merrin Canning; Stephen Barry. Designer, Stage Manager, Executive Lady, ALAN CASSELL; Bunny; Merrin Canning; Stephen Barry's direction was adequate to the task — which is not to denigrate him, as the form and content of the playlets. COLLIN O'BRIEN

Provoked by the jibe of a supposed friend that I use too much cricket imagery in my reviews, let me begin by saying that Neil Simon is the Derek Randall of contemporary American theatre. Randall has a phenomenally good eye, but he lacks the sound technique, grace and stature which Greg Chappell commands (or rather did command, I have not seen him since he turned professional). Also Randall is too jokey about the game: Sid Barnes could be irreverent too, but he always knew that the cricket pitch is Nature's Cathedral. Similarly Simon is capable of sharp one liners and can think up situations in which his characters can credibly swap smart-arse comments which will give the audience a laugh, although they won't remember what the hell it was all about next morning. It is the way, self aware shrug of affluent America, summed up in the comment once made about the archetypal Simon actor, Jack Lemmon: the rictus under the aftershave.

Personally I like cross-reference between the arts and sport and so on. Among the more memorable is the remark that a certain Pot Black contestant is 'the Erik Satie of the billiard cue'. I also saw a sound, gentlemanly innings by Colin Cowdrey (shades of Ralph Richardson, perhaps?) praised on the grounds that he performed 'as though his bat had been steeped in vintage port'. My favourite remains Kenneth Tynan's description of bullfighter Antonio Ordonez' chest pass — the one where the bull leaps high through the muleta — as recalling to him Olivier's delivery of 'Once more unto the breech....

But to return (as you can guess somewhat reluctantly) to Neil Simon. Its not just that his theatre is escapist. There is a legitimate place for unashamedly escapist work — indeed, with their special flair for musicals Americans are master of it, and no-one looks for deep insights in Oklahoma! But there is a sick rot at the core of American commercial theatre, a cop out for sentimentality, stereotype and not getting at anybody which spills over into their television. One has only to look at American rewrites of English TV comedies, even such bland ones as Man About the House. And just look at what they did to the vicious undertones of Stepfve and Son when it was vampirised into Sanford and Son.

I think that the reason Simon so irritates me is that he always looks as though he might say something which his characters can credibly swap smart-arse comments which will give the audience a laugh, although they won't remember what the hell it was all about next morning. It is the way, self aware shrug of affluent America, summed up in the comment once made about the archetypal Simon actor, Jack Lemmon: the rictus under the aftershave.

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When I first knew Helmut, ten years or more ago, he was an actor who was beginning to be interested in writing. When we first worked together he played Pericles in a production of the play that I was doing for Jane St, and the Duke in a Measure for Measure that I was doing for the SATC. And Helmut wrote a Gothic play called Shadows of Blood that we presented at old Nimrod and again, later, at Jane St. My first question, then, was how and when did Helmut begin the involvement with youth arts and community arts that has led to his present appointment as Artistic Director of St Martin's Youth Arts Centre.

HB: When I was working at the MTC as an actor in the late 60's I wrote my first plays for children (Pageant of the Love Tree and The Little Lady Steps Out) and the MTC produced them. But the major involvement began in Adelaide with my work as director of youth activities with the SATC under George Ogilvie's artistic direction — I set up, directed and worked in various collective ways with the Saturday Company, I was instrumental in setting up the Carclew Arts Centre. I was a member of the committee responsible for the youth component of the Adelaide Festival — in fact I was on a number of boards with only one thing in common: they were all related to extending public awareness of youth arts.

RC: But why youth?
HB: It's not that I see myself as champion of the rising generation or anything like that — it's just that I found, quite early in my career, that I get a good response from them. I like the fact that there is no hierarchical system of values — Bugs Bunny and Joan Sutherland are equally acceptable aspects of culture to them. I suppose I followed a natural line of development in the sense that the wide range of things I'm interested in can all find expression in youth and community arts — like film and video, or the relationship between educational systems and politics, or the possibilities of participation orientated rather than product-orientated arts. And in the specifically theatrical part of the work I get a chance not only to write and act but also to design, direct, choreograph, and write music.

RC: What happened after Adelaide?
HB: I was given a grant by the Australia Council to study with Dorothy Heathcote in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, her postgraduate (after BA Dip Ed) Drama in Education course (Newcastle University having agreed to recognise my experience as equivalent to the degree). I got on very well with Dorothy Heathcote but found the course rather frustrating — it was designed for trainee teachers without theatrical background. After two terms my basic aim — to learn teacher terminology and point of view from the inside — had been satisfied so I went down to London. Along with a number of jobs like book-selling, teaching and modelling, I was invited to make proposals for a Community and Youth Theatre downstairs at the Roundhouse (a change in management then put the youth programme low in priority); I worked at a community centre called Jackson's Lane in Highgate on the Youth, Community Theatre, and Film committees; and then, just as Trevor Nunn was becoming interested in proposals for a Youth Activities section of the RSC and I was being offered a full-time position as administrator at Jackson's Lane, the offer came for the St Martin's job in Melbourne.

RC: And what is the job at St Martin's?
HB: I am employed to assist the interim committee of the St Martin's Youth Performing Arts Centre in developing the philosophy, the programme, the building and the staffing of the Centre from the ground up. This is the opportunity I've been looking for to test theories and ideas I've been developing over some years — for the first time I'll know that if anything goes wrong it will be on the basis of my own decisions. We are working from a 1953 proscenium theatre with a number of associated small buildings situated in a well-off middle class suburb. We plan, first of all, to turn it into a state centre for public arts processes with a bias towards young people. Secondly, we plan to develop a policy of theatre hire and use which will break down traditional prejudices about children's theatre.

Thirdly, we plan to set up a community/youth resource group with a staff of twelve (filling posts like theatre manager, front-of-house manager, catering manager etc with apprentices from unemployed youth programmes who can, for example, take a six-month job on-front-of-house at St Martin's), who will assist groups and individuals with performing arts projects which they find difficult to implement by themselves. Suppose four kids wanted to form a rock band and needed an amplifier — we could investigate costs, write applications, lend rehearsal space and generally provide expert back-up and assistance. And finally, we propose to establish it as a community centre for the local residents. Despite the socio-economic level of the area we feel that there's a real need for not only services but also activities. Although South Yarra has some transient and trendy population, at least two-thirds of the community is made up of old people.
RC: Having worked there myself, I have some vivid memories of the old theatre. What are you going to do to it stylistically?

HB: The front wall on St Martin's Lane will provide space for a large community mural and access will be from the side of the building. On the ground floor will be a coffee shop and a large open area of performance for gallery space. There will be steps up to the main auditorium where the fixed seating will be reduced from 404 to 220 and the stage space will be doubled. Additional movable seating will be available anywhere in the auditorium to give as many stage—audience relationships as possible. We plan to extend and convert the church hall into two self-contained workshop spaces; the old factory will be made into one big space with a video room, an open administration area and a "wet" area for craft activities. Actually, we are trying to keep all the structural planning as open and flexible as possible—this is not a situation where planners and bureaucrats are bringing in architects to design something that will look nice in a blue­print vacuum. We will revise and re­evaluate the planning at every stage of development before leaving the re­development of the car-park space, for example, until we have a response to the other areas of re-development.

RC: What about the ideology of the Centre?

HB: I would like the aim of the centre to be the identification, the examination, the fostering of current youth mythologies.

RC: What's a current myth?

HB: John Travolta, punk . . . ideas and trends that form part of the youth sub-culture and have no place in the cultural mainstream. I'm using myth in the Barthian sense: the translation of popular ideas concerning natural or historical phenomena into narrative or ideographic form.

RC: Why do you feel a need to identify and examine these semiological processes?

HB: The usual, mainstream attitude to these myths is critical, academic, and from an outsider's point of view. I would like to study their growth in a friendly, supportive environment. I am particularly interested in the political implications of these myths.

RC: How does politics get into it?

HB: Politics is implicit, but often unsuspected and unrecognized. All these myths make political assumptions—look how the Greek myths supported the religious political and social structures of the period. And, incidentally, look what a vital role the Greek drama played in questioning the myths of the ancient world.

RC: Are you confident that you can merely identify and examine and that you will stop short of influencing?

HB: I don't want to influence. I want to help articulate already existing tendencies. But we don't have the kind of environment in which myths can develop which are alternative to those which support the present political climate. It is becoming harder and harder for myths to develop in reaction to the status quo. The political influence on the media, on education, on every aspect of daily life makes an environment that is increasingly hostile to alternative myth.

RC: Aren't you afraid that the people who fund this activity might regard these aims as subversive?

HB: Liberal ideology is supposed to embrace all shades of political opinion. If that sounds a little naive, I can only repeat that the aim is to provide a centre for the study and fostering of all the tendencies that exist in the society in which we are placed and that we are not rejecting the society in which we are placed (like nuns and drop-outs) — we are trying to clarify its processes in an analytical way and to find solutions within it. The result, for young people, would simply be an awareness of politics and the political implications of their myths. At a time when the status quo would like to protect its own interests by "depoliticising" the media, the ABC, and Canberra, I am simply saying that what we need is not to know less about politics, but more.

RC: How long-term is the project?

HB: It will be re-examined annually. Each year we will base our plans on the backwash of the previous year's experience. At first I propose that staff time be appropriated as follows: 50% on administration, 30% on creative work, 10%—20% on methodology.

RC: Do you now see yourself as an administrator rather than a creative person?

HB: No. All the staff will be people with arts backgrounds, people who have had to become aware of administrative techniques to protect their own talent. No one will be employed for administrative abilities alone. I feel that the split between the arts and administration must be broken down, that artists who are artists, impractical destroyed. Committed artists have to be practical to survive.

RC: What sort of practical, non­administrative work will you be doing?

HB: I'm working on our first youth theatre project. Eighty teenagers from all over Melbourne will be doing a door­knock survey of memories of life in South Yarra — we're documenting a social history of the people who have been living here for fifty years. That is taking place over Christmas and into the new year. The next step will be to jointly transform the material collected into a large­scale circus cabaret. That will be ready by April and we'll have to find a venue for it. The building work on the theatre will not be completed till June and the first project in relation to it will be the mural on the front wall.

The final financial approval for the project had come through just before I talked to Helmut and he was feeling elated and optimistic. The only aspect of his creative ability that seemed to be doomed to partial eclipse was one he had always particularly admired — his work as an actor. Helmut is the kind of actor who is interested in the whole concept of a production, who can clearly see his role in relation to the cast, who is passionate about the material. I always particularly admired his playing of the much-loved character of Leontes.

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The Politics of Children’s Marketing

4 The cultural identity of young people in our society is determined by the vocabulary of these symbols. These symbols are both explicit and hidden. When the symbols are manipulated by entrepreneurs, such as the Stigwood Organisation, for financial rather than cultural reasons, we begin to condone a massive exploitation of an already economically dependent stratum of society — YOUTH. Stigwood et al are daily providing models for behaviour which are then marketed with a no-holds-barred attitude, unless the models actually over-step the Nineteenth Century Christian dictates of the more powerful classes.

Parents will readily object to an advertisement for their offspring which uses overt Sex or realistic Violence but the same parents have little or no concern for the Cultural or Political implications of the mass-produced Star Wars dolls, for example. Every commodity marketed to kids (Art is a luxury commodity as well) contains implicit behaviour models that have clear political and social attitudes. If we are to AFFIRM society rather than promote the quasi revolutionary drop-out mentality then we must all be concerned with the development of discriminatory processes in the society of the future.

5 If this structural/analytical experience can be a collective one then the process is even more potent. One of the most obvious places for these shared experiences is obviously the theatre.

6 However, not only does most theatre for young people completely ignore this aspect but it is actually based on a totally false assumption: CHILDREN'S THEATRE SHOULD NEVER DEAL WITH SOCIAL OR POLITICAL ISSUES. Even the most perfunctory analysis of a Brian Way theatre piece for young people reveals the most right wing, regressive assumptions that make Enid Blyton appear Maoist. Before we continue to give tax-payers' support to the bat talions of well-meant and well-heeled marketers of kiddie images, let us stop to analyse them structurally.

7 The massive problem to be faced is that objective analysis presumes an understanding of the basics of Political Process. However, in Australia, education relegates the political processes to the same position that the Catholic church gives to the mystery of the Trinity. ("You’re too young to understand, it’s a Mystery of Faith.") The first tool of perception that young people must be given is the tool of political awareness. Only then can we radically improve the cultural character of future society.

Carlota and Maximilian. A spectacle devised and directed by Helmut Bakaitis in Adelaide for the Come Out Festival 1975. A cast of 200 recreated a school environment in Vienna in 1912. The audience moved from acting area to acting area, participating in the students' Marxist analysis of the collapse of the Hapsburg empire.

The vast majority of Drama teachers in Australia are concerned with outmoded quasi gestalt conservative concepts. A few labelled radical by their peers are more interested in the structural analysis of contemporary mythologies. Drama students at Preston Technical College in conjunction with their teacher, Michael Mitchener, used Sophocles' Antigone as a starting point for the examination of the escapist Saturday Night Fever syndrome.
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Spotlight

(Continued from page 13)

the intimacy between puppeteer and puppet and results in an aloof quality which is curiously two dimensional.

The PUK Puppet Theatre from Japan, on the other hand, minimise distance between puppet and puppeteer by cutting out strings altogether and, sometimes, even rods. Using traditional techniques in new ways, PUK puppeteers are costumed and masked in black, appearing as hauntingly intimate though not distracting shadows behind their puppets. Energy flows from puppeteer to puppet in an amazingly fluid way. Some of their puppets are almost human-sized, and for these the puppeteers’ own feet slide into black slippers at the base of the puppets’ feet, to that the puppet appears almost human as it moves around the stage. As far as exchanging skills, PUK seems to offer more easily adaptable methods to interested Australian puppeteers than the more formalised, tradition-rooted Chinese puppetry techniques could.

In the case of Fukien and PUK, we saw evidence of what is to western thinking an alien concept — namely, that if you do something well you should be able and encouraged to keep doing it, with variety certainly, but without the dire need to get ever bigger, to go from strength to strength, or to pursue novelty and innovation for their own sake.

The International Puppet Festival in Hobart was not exactly a large-scale meeting of East and West or the epitome of a confrontation in aesthetics, but it gave Australian puppetry a lot to think about. By the time of the 1983 Adelaide Puppet Festival, can we hope to reap a few results? (Postscript: One thing we can hope for is that by 1983, some of the major newspapers will see fit to arrange coverage of what is a significant event in the performing arts spectrum.)
I will centre my argument this evening on the type of theatre which I believe should be the outcome of a government subsidy; a theatre which can justify the outlay of money derived by taxing everyone and which, past the pleasure it gives, can bring something worthwhile back to the entire community.

Earlier this year in a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald I asked for a subsidised theatre which should not only have a high standard, but which should also enrich the quality of our lives and affect the behaviour of our society by suggesting to us in a variety of ways what we might become.

This is not a new concept for a theatre. It has been the true purpose of theatre since its birth. It continues to thrive in this manner in most of the countries of the world. But here, as we slough off the skin of an inherited culture and respond to the thrust of forces which have been growing within us since our own birth, we seem confused as to the purpose of the Arts which, unless they sprint from and connect back with their audience, survive only as culture for its own sake; that euphoric pasttime to which people bring their sensibilities, bruised by the pressures of living, to bathe in the calm waters of contentment. It is there to succour not to content them. It must never disturb.

This is not in itself a bad purpose. It is only bad when great works of art are defused of their passions to feed it; when the millions killed by it need no one to apologise for them any more. They have succeeded too many times and in locations outside Australia. But presenting poor local work simply because it is Australian serves no useful purpose. A failure to entertain turns people away from the theatre and this is foolish no matter how worthy in principle the offering is.

In any case, the personality of the Australian Theatre is not wholly dependent on Australian plays or even Australian actors. Even though we cannot hope to establish a national drama without utilising both. The personality of the Australian Theatre is dependent on an Australian Emphasis. An Australian Style.

The other major thing I do not want is yet another attempt to establish a facsimile English Rep Company on these shores. No I admire the English Theatre more than I can say. I lived in London for eight years and saw a great deal of it. If we could have what they have, but in our own terms, I would be delighted.

In an editorial last month, the Sydney Morning Herald asked for a NSW State Theatre which was "eclectic and pursued a policy of offering that Sir Laurence Olivier, speaking of the English National Theatre called 'the best of everything'."

On the evidence of The Herald's previously stated editorial opinion I took this to mean, among other things, overseas directors and actors coming out here to show us how things are done. But on the evidence of English National Theatre programming what this boils down to, for them, is English actors speaking in their own accents presenting on stage English plays peopled with characters whose real-life counterparts are walking around in the streets outside the theatre; whose foreign plays have, for the most part, been translated by living English writers who have edged them towards an English understanding; and where everybody concerned in artistic matters, particularly choice of plays, is being constantly informed by the social and moral mores of the society about them.

The English National Theatre is a theatre which is fuelled daily by life. But take this organism and put it down here 13,000 miles away from its source, by and large their choice of plays, an attempt to copy their style of production and acting and straight away the transplant starts to run out of blood. Much of what we see is irrelevant to us. We cannot properly relate to their complex class structure or express in performance the manners which define it. Their behaviour is affected by a history which in terms of standing monuments and influences from the past is some tens of centuries older than ours. There is a minus here, there is a minus there. There are no additions. It would be unfortunate but tolerable had we not the means to create a theatre of our own which can be as relevant to us as theirs is to them. The existence of the Nimrod Theatre and other groups is proof of this. And yet, for some extraordinary reason, these theatres are generally referred to as "alternative theatres." "Alternative" to what? Only to irrelevance!

While I was in London during the 1960's I remember the sensation caused by Joan Littlewood's production of Oh, What a Lovely War. For the first time, to a large audience, someone was saying that the first world war was a meaningless charade, that the millions killed by it need not have died but for the wickedness of a
handful of politicians and generals. And it said this to the very people who had taken part in the war or lost loved ones because of it. At its performances people wept openly. Some shouted angrily at the actors and left the theatre. Other cheered their agreement with what was being said. Some merely had a good time tapping their feet to the music.

A presentation with impact is by no means rare in the English theatre. On the opening night of Joe Orton’s What The Butler Saw the stalls were on their feet shouting at a jeering gallery to go home if they didn’t like the play.

How many English plays presented here have drawn forth such a response? A response to equal the audience reaction to David Williamson’s The Club or Ray Lawler’s Summer of the 17th Doll for instance.

And there was another occasion in our national drama which illustrated to me perfectly the force carried by a play’s direct communication with its audience.

In the 1950’s The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust presented Richard Beynon’s play The Shifting Heart. In it Neva Carr Glyn, playing an Australian, used “Jesus” as an expletive. It was the biggest laugh in the show but it so offended some people that finally a church body threatened to invoke a blasphemy clause in the law and have the play taken off. The “Jesus” was removed. It was the only one in the play.

A couple of seasons later The Trust presented Eugene O’Neill’s Journey Into Night. In it Sydney’s “Jesus” was a “Mark Antony” or a “Jesus Christ” on every page of its lengthy script. No one challenged it, not a single person. When I wrote a letter to The Herald asking what the difference was, nobody replied.

Of course I knew what the difference was. “Jesus” with an American accent wasn’t the same “Jesus” we were worshipping with an Australian one. The name did not confront people in the same way. This is an indication of the power which is generated by people speaking to each other in their own accents, communicating with each other in terms and ideas which are immediately recognisable.

For this reason I believe that the brief injection of overseas directors and stars into local theatre companies (I do not refer to people from other countries who communicate with each other in their own accents, communicating with each other in terms and ideas which are immediately recognisable) in the hope that they will elevate our powers of expression, is a hope misplaced. They may well improve our technical skills, which is very worthwhile, but they also run the risk of leaving us in a state of artistic confusion.

On balance I don’t think there is much of permanent use to be gained by, for instance, a Rumanian director coming here to produce a Russian play and in the process training Australian actors to behave like Rumanians playing Russians. In the brief time he had with us Liviu Ciulei could not be expected to discover in which ways we are different from Rumanians or Russians. He is a fine director and did an excellent job. So did the actors. The Lower Depths was a splendid evening in the theatre. But it was only that. The people and ideas in the play as they might relate to us in particular were left almost totally unexplored.

Please don’t think I am against the best actors in the world produced by the best directors coming here to entertain us. I hope that with the advent of cheaper air fares the commercial management and organisations such as The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust will be able to persuade entire companies to visit us. Bound together by the unity of their own inherited styles they will have much more to offer us than isolated personalities.

But to be particular about the type of subsidised theatre I would like to see in operation as far as our approach to world drama is concerned, I would hope we could shake off the habit of simply mirroring what is revived in other countries and search for plays which, regardless of their origin or period, can be related in some way to our national character or to situations arising here. Should they be foreign language plays I believe they would best be translated by our own writers to further underscore their topicality.

Having in mind our world reputation for analagous dependence I have for some time been keen to relocate Dr Knock; Jules Romain’s delightful French comedy about an entire town which is put to bed by the mere suggestion of illness. Any what theatre company in the world would turn up its nose at a Patrick White Chekhov, a Thomas Kenneally Ibsen or a David Williamson Feydeau? I do not mean that these last mentioned plays should be Australianised in any way other than that their speech patterns should be translated to become a reflection of our own way of speaking.

I would like to see these plays cast with actors who are capable of rendering Australian colour to the characters described. The Americans have been casting plays in this manner for many years. I need only mention the Hollywood version of Julius Caesar which was replayed on television recently. In it, Louis Calhern was presented as both “The First of the Romans” and a New York Business Tycoon. Marlon Brando as Mark Antony was both his revenging friend and the troubled teenager of the person with no authority.

A local example of this sort of parallel casting was achieved by Richard Wherrett in his production of Henry IV for the Nimrod; Frank Wilson brilliantly translating Falstaff into a North Shore RSL Blatherskite.

I believe that the very pace of plays and the making of climaxes in them should be a reflection of the audience’s pace, should be pitched to the degree of emotion it allows itself to reveal in real life and that the artists involved in creating and interpreting our drama should pursue their studies of human nature on our streets and in our houses and not merely follow the fashionable conventions of what is regarded as reality elsewhere. If the pursuit of ourselves for the enrichment of ourselves succeeds then surely our drama will interest more and more of the population and the prejudice felt against it as a pastime for intellectuals will eventually disappear.

I would like to say a final word on behalf of the not-good-enough or downright unsuccessful Australian Play and to beg for it two favours.

The first is that writers be given the opportunity to workshop what they have written within the structure of the subsidised companies in order to bring that work to the best production standard possible. In lieu of out of town tryouts which are, of course, unheard of in this country, and in our houses and not simply follow the fashionable conventions of what is regarded as reality elsewhere. If the pursuit of ourselves for the enrichment of ourselves succeeds then surely our drama will interest more and more of the population and the prejudice felt against it as a pastime for intellectuals will eventually disappear.

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Claudio Remondi and Riccardo Caporossi have revived the uncertain fortunes of Italian avant-garde theatre. Their starting point is Beckett—but they are not mere imitators. They have developed their own distinctive style which almost eliminates words.

Their first theatrical venture was to write the text of a Beckett play on a Roman apartment’s walls. In Sacco (1973), one was in a sack for an hour and maltreated by another. In their next play, Richiamo (Recall), they were comically overwhelmed by wheels. They recently revived these two plays plus Piece Workers.

The Piece Workers scene is a construction site with elaborate scaffolding. At the beginning, there are skirmishes between the two workers played by Remondi and Caporossi who are authors-directors of their own plays. Caporossi plays an almost pathetic figure while nuggety-built Remondi impersonates a no-nonsense, practical character.

After skirmishes along the scaffolding by these mates-enemies, they build a six-foot wall across the wide stage. Despite amusing “business”, and very occasional words such as builder’s labourers might use, the wall building becomes somewhat boring. When the wall is completed, it separates the clown-collaborators.

They come together again thanks to an extension ramp. This rests apparently, but not in fact, on the wall and then extends way beyond it. The builder’s labourers walk this rickety seesaw together. Then what looks to be a bent Eiffel Tower with a life of its own travels up the ramp. Suspended from it by a steel cord is a huge glowing aluminium globe. When the machine reaches the apex of the ramp, the cord extends until the globe rests a few inches from the ground between the first row of the spectators. End of The Piece Workers.

Similar events are evident in the pair’s latest work Pozzo which means “well”. They dug out a new theatrical space for Pozzo within the Teatro in Trastevere complex. Trastevere (across the Tiber) is Rome’s “left-bank” where poor apartment buildings which seem left over from neo-realist films, fine restaurants and chic-chi penthouses are cheek by jowl.

There is also a concentration of cinema clubs and underground theatres.

The Teatro in Trastevere complex consisted of three unpretentious theatres before Remondi and Caporossi conceived Pozzo. Now it consists of four. They dug out a circular cavern which can seat sixty.

In the middle of the white central space is the pozzo, the well.

There are no prizes for those who guess that the play is about what is in the well and what the well means. Initially it is covered by a huge umbrella. Drawing it up, Remondi finds Caporossi hooked on to it playing a concertina. There is a lot of “business” casting a stone down the well without it ever sending back an echo; dragging out strange objects, including a live jackdaw. (Live chickens pecked around the wall during its construction in Piece Workers and cheeped throughout it). A blind person is lowered (sucked) into the well while naming, after braille-reading them, all the spectators (names were requested at the entrance). There is an elaborate drawing of well water which is poured into a bucket which never fills up.

I found the business too long drawn-out. The core of the play, however, concerns a mysterious character, wearing only flesh-coloured swimming trunks, who rises from the well and, without saying a word, leaves through one of the three exits only to emerge from the well again shortly afterwards. Consternation! Remondi and Caporossi put a straw hat on his head, erect a rope at head level and the hat falls off. He is not a ghost. Eventually they snatch a huge pack from his shoulders as he rises once more from the well. A colourful parachute is attached. They are playing simple-mindedly with this above the well when a head arises under it. They have trapped him! After a strenuous struggle, they wrap the figure completely in the parachute. At that point, the swimming trunk-clad figure rises again from the well and passes between Remondi and Caporossi bent over their catch.

In the pack to which the parachute was attached, the frantic pair find an animal’s skin. They cover the well with the skin, nailing it into place as the mystery man’s butt ends and his hands emerge everywhere. Finally, one of the marvellous machines, which are so important in the pair’s repertoire, runs on a ceiling track until it lowers a rock which hangs just above the covered well.

Well, well. In my opinion, although they have strong central images, Remondi and Caporossi do not manage to weld all the elements in their plays into compelling, significant wholes. They have not eliminated words entirely and more may be needed. But they do not fall into the trap of too-obvious symbolism and they have evolved a valid, Commedia dell’arte-like acting style as well as recognisable themes. Their ingenious stage machines, which recall the inventions of the late Renaissance court theatres, have a perfection which humans do not attain in their plays.

Australian Play for Italy

An Australian play is to be staged, for the first time in Italy, in Venice in February. Neville Teede, of the University of Western Australia’s drama department, will perform Jack Hibberd’s A Stretch of the Imagination at Venice university.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Literature Board have backed this venture. Queenslander Bernard Hickey, associate professor of Commonwealth Literature at the Ca Foscari (Venice) university, has long been keen on fostering Italian interest in Australian drama but faced many problems.

One was the availability of texts. Bill and Lorna Hannan, formerly of the Australian Performing Group, who spent some time with Hickey, helped obtain some texts from the AFG and the Currency Press.

Another problem was that there is scant tradition of drama performances within Italian universities. However Professor Claudio Gorlier, who hosts a lively Australian literature course at Turin university, was enthusiastic. Teede is expected to perform Hibberd’s play in Turin as well as Venice and, in both places, students will have prior familiarity with the text.

“It’s only a beginning,” says Hickey. He points out that videotapes of Australian plays could find a ready audience in Italy.

In Rome itself there are two summer festivals which would welcome Australian plays. Language is a problem but not an insurmountable barrier. Another problem, of course, is the cost of a company. Probably performing in Italy is feasible only for a group stopping over on its way elsewhere. And, of course, one or two-men plays are favoured.

Desmond O’Grady

THEATRE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1979

V.B. Gosco FF 00191 Rome
Light opera from Sydney, Rockdale’s Manon, Macbeth from NZ

Sydney’s opera year bowed out on the decidedly light end of the spectrum, with a Yeoman of the Guard from the national company and a production of Johann Strauss’ Die Fledermaus from the newly formed Touring Company of Sydney. The only truly operatic productions I have for mention this month are a staging of Massenet’s Manon from suburban Rockdale and a concert performance of Verdi’s Macbeth from across the Tasman — in Wellington, New Zealand, to be precise, where I was able to hear it while enjoying a pre-Christmas holiday with my family. The airlines dispute in December prevented me from seeing this year’s Innisfail Festival production of Madama Buttery by Ronald Macconaghe at the reputedly superb new Townsville Civic Theatre.

Their relative standards being so wildly different, it would be impossible to nominate a best among this lot of offerings. Perversely, perhaps, the most provocatively interesting was the Seymour Centre Fledermaus because of the potential it revealed in the York Theatre for future opera productions provided some quite serious practical problems can be sorted out satisfactorily. The jutting stage area of the York, bounded on three sides by audience, makes for marvellous rapport between performers and observers; and this production coped very well indeed with the required scene changes by augmenting a flat facade with key props that were easily portable.

The big problem of this Fledermaus was the lack of rapport between pit and stage caused by the incredible depth of the York pit — deeper even than the newly deepened pit in the Opera Theatre of the Sydney Opera House. I should think on casual inspection; and with no hope of establishing electronic contact between conductor and stage performers by the indirect device of closed-circuit TV to the wings, as has proved an invaluable aid at the Opera House. If this admittedly major problem can be overcome, the York may well have a real future as an intermediate sized venue for opera.

Early in the evening, before becoming aware of the problem just described, I was inclined to attribute the uncomfortably frequent lapses in ensemble to the inexperience of the National Training Orchestra, which was manning the pit; it is clear that the venue itself, rather than any of the performers, was mostly to blame.

It would be nice to be able to say, after reporting all the above, that this was otherwise a superlative Fledermaus; sadly, this was not the case. Despite some excellent performances — in particular from Gino Zancanaro, who threw himself into the role of Alfred with just the correct measure of self-send up of the heart-on-sleeve Italian tenor syndrome, a very fine Adele from Roslyn Dunbar and a thoroughly comic Colonel Frank the jailer from Paul Maybury, assisted by a good Frosch from Rex Corrigan, the champagne effervescence that must characterise a thoroughly successful Fledermaus was largely absent. Neither Eric Thornton as Eisenstein nor Valerie Hanlon as his stage wife Rosalinda ever really convinced; and the party of Act II — admittedly a cause for ennui in all but the most highly professional of Fledermases — was an incredibly long-winded yawp despite some promising moments from Marie-Clare in the weird pants role of Prince Orlofsky.

Like the Fledermaus I have been talking about, the Australian Opera production of Yeomen of the Guard failed to meet advance expectations — if inevitably, as it must be, judged on a good deal more exalted level of professionalism. This most serious of the Savoy operettas is far more operatic than most, and as such ought to suit admirably the talents of a true opera company; but dramatic interest was sadly lacking on opening night.

Part of the trouble can no doubt be sheeted home quite firmly to the vast barn of a joint that is Sydney’s Regent Theatre — with an
awkwardly wide and shallow stage and a surfeit of Victorian squiggles to distract the eye and dissipate dramatic impact. But the problems with this Yeomen were a good deal deeper than that. Of the principals, only Russell Smith's Wilfred Shadbolt was unequivocally right all the time: when he was on stage, the ideal Yeomen was consistently at least within reach; when he was not, things jolted rather than flowed.

Because it is by and large so straight and non-comic, inherently, Yeomen requires particular strength in the pivotal roles of Shadbolt and Jack Point: the former it got, as I have just said; the latter, it did not. Dennis Olsen, who has proved himself over and over again to be an exponent without peer (in the Australian context, anyhow) of the standard G and S funny man, was not quite up to Jack Point either vocally or dramatically. This is a part which ideally requires a considerable measure of lyricism coupled, early in the piece, with a kind of happy-go-lucky philosophical off-handness which Olsen captured very well indeed. As a singing actor, however, he could not cope with the musical demands of Jack Point nearly as well as the admittedly far less severe demands of the usual G and S funny man, nor did he manage to bring off the serious, uncharacteristic denouement — at least to my satisfaction.

The rest of the principals were reliable without being memorable, which is all the piece demanded of them I suppose: the frequent patches of static ennui that descended on the proceedings were more the fault of Brian Crossley as producer than the defects of any individual pawns on his chess board. William Reid conducted competently and the Elizabethan Sydney Opera Company played likewise. All in all it was not a night out to get very excited about pro or con.

My reactions to this year's major effort of the Rockdale Municipal Opera Company, the performing arts oasis in the vast cultural wasteland of suburban Sydney, were similarly mixed. Massenet's Manon — a work of undeniable merit which ought to be high on the forthcoming repertory list of the Australian Opera — was the work being staged.

Like all Rockdale productions, this had its points of interest and its moments of unequivocal success; but its virtues were a good deal thinner on the ground than usual and its faults a good deal more glaring. Partly this was the inevitable result of the choice of Manon — hardly an easy piece to stage effectively in view of its five scenes (as played), no two of which have the same setting; but one expects technical simplification at Rockdale, and such practical demands were met adequately as always.

The main trouble in the individual performance department was that Manon is one of those operas whose overall success depends so overwhelmingly on one singer, the one who plays the title role, and Yvonne Laki, who played Manon at Rockdale, seemed barely to have penetrated the surface of the character she was portraying. She sang very well, even stunningly at times; but there was no indication at any point that she understood even one aspect of this fascinating woman who must rate among the more schizophrenic in all opera — bitch, money grubber, social climber first and finally; but possessing a character also deeply laced with manifestations of sweetly naive charm and uncomplicated romantic devotion.

The good news about the Rockdale Manon was that the romantic male lead of Des Grieux was so capably played by Howard Spicer, the promising tenor who has been touring the education wilds of Australia in recent years under the nom-de-plume of Big H the B-flat Bikie, wearing a leather jacket and riding a motorcycle into classrooms to prove (somewhat unnecessarily these days, perhaps) that opera is not really a sissy sport.

On the strength of his Rockdale stint, there is no doubt he has sufficient vocal endowment and dramatic talent to merit a niche in the mainstream of opera in this country.

The rest of the principals for the Rockdale Manon, who anyhow are far less important than Des Grieux and Manon herself, were adequate, with special mention due to Bill Toolehy's Lescaut and George Carter's Guillot de Morfontaine; as was the chorus and Brian Phillips' production, at least as to its general parameters. Musically, by which I mean specifically orchestraly, it was not up to the usual level of competence we have come to expect of Rockdale. Conductor Cedric Ashton allowed the strings, in particular, to get away with far too many lapses of ensemble, intonation and pitch. Obviously this suburban orchestra could not be expected to be made up of top-notch professionals, but it has demonstrated consistently in the past that it can do considerably better than it did on this occasion.

That wraps up the fully staged opera I saw during the period under review; but brief mention must be made of the concert performance of Macbeth presented in Wellington on Thursday, December 7 — which, in the absence of a resident professional opera company anywhere in New Zealand (though moves are afoot to re-establish the art form on at least a semi-permanent basis), was the nation's major opera event of 1978. Three key people were imported from overseas for the occasion — two from Australia and one from Europe.

Particular interest for me lay in the prospect of hearing the noted Auckland-born bass, Donald McIntyre, in the title role; and though an apologia was made on his behalf at interval, and he omitted one of Macbeth's last act arias, he sang most impressively. Particularly impressive was his dagger speech early in the piece — which was so full of dramatic intensity it was almost possible to forget momentarily that this was merely a concert performance. It was easy to hear why McIntyre has made such a name for himself in Europe in the heavy Wagnerian repertory.

The other two imports, both from Australia, were Elizabeth Fretwell and Vance Cavdarski — the former recreating the role of Lady Macbeth, which she sang earlier in 1978 in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra; the latter as conductor.

McIntyre and Fretwell were given splendid support by resident soloists, though of course the Macbeths between them monopolise the solo singing department far more than in most operas. Anthony Benfell was an outstanding Macduff, and Bruce Carson a good Banquo, though lacking a voice of sufficient dimensions to do absolute justice to the part. The Orpheus Choir of Wellington made some very pleasing choral sounds — a little too pleasing, be it said, to be credible as a gaggle of witches and a shade too refined to be convincing as a victorious army celebrating the downfall of a usurper and the accession of a new king.

Overall, though, it was about as dramatically convincing an evening as one could expect from a concert performance; though it was a pity the piece was sung in Italian, making it impossible for the vast majority of the audience to follow the proceedings in detail.

Elizabeth Fretwell as Lady Macbeth in the AO's production.

Photo: William Moseley.
The Australian Ballet's production of Ashton's La Fille mal Gardée is one of its own stalwart works, first presented when the company was in its fledgling stages and the Royal Ballet connection was about the only connection it had.

Since then things have broadened out a bit, but that essential pipeline still remains; Macmillan's Las Hermanas will be part of next year's Sydney season. There was hope at one stage that the AB would get the rights to his Song of the Earth but some obstruction arose somewhere. The Administration has apparently got its beady eyes set on Macmillan's Mayerling and it goes without saying that this last is another dressy, full-length blockbuster.

I'm afraid that I fail to see why La Fille is regarded as such a great work and why so many ballet companies clamour to have it in their repertoires. The choreography, occasionally beautiful but more often merely workmanlike, is pretty thinly stretched over two hours of viewing time. Probably Ashton's greatest gift as a choreographer is in character dance, and character dance needs a storyline in which to grow, but here I am probably well answered by the fact that arguably Ashton's greatest single work Symphonic Variations is totally plotless.

But what one remembers most about an Ashton ballet are those richly drawn individuals. The Ugly Sisters in Cinderella, Puck in The Dream, all of the cast in Enigma Variations and the lovers in Daphnis and Chloe. The greatest and most memorable characters in La Fille are the Widow Simone and the idiot son Alain. Both of them are eccentric and both have very little "pure dance" to dance, what is the essence here is a human being outlined in movement, movement that captures traits of personality and mood.

But for me at least, these fascinating little character sketches are drawn at the expense of the ballet as a whole; the central lovers become ciphers, and although lovers are notoriously boring most of the time in ballet, in La Fille they become even more pallid and anaemic than ever.

But I suspect that what captured Ashton's imagination in this particular ballet was the period and the place; that of an idyllic pastoral Provencal setting that seems to have stepped right out of the pages of Montay and Balzac; a cloud cuckoo land of bucolic innocence and noble peasantry acting as a watercolour backdrop to a tale of love's single-minded but long, troubled road.

It is the atmosphere that matters most in La Fille; there is no evil as such, just misunderstanding; no violence, just the stormy intrusion of nature. The work is saturated with the feel of the countryside. The chickens dance a sprightly rigodan to open the work, the multi-purpose peasants frolic at the drop of a worker's smock and sheaves of wheat, milk churns and horses and carts abound everywhere. It is all totally benign and harmless and slightly like The Tales of Beatrix Potter — and that is I suppose the charm of it for many audiences.

But dancers, specifically the corps de ballet, get heartily sick of it, especially if they have to dance it for three weeks solid as the members of the AB were called upon to do last year. The actual amount of dancing for the corps is small indeed, most of the time all they do is watch, walk about, or carouse mindlessly and even carouse is too strong a word here. But they have to do it, Ashton put them there for a specific purpose, to act as atmosphere.

As for the principals, I thought Ray Powell's Widow Simone had the edge for warmth of character. He's taken the part almost since the AB first performed the work and the character has grown with him. One can understand with him in control that the Widow is obstreperous and domineering only because she wants the best financial deal for her daughter Lise and that because she loves her. It is merely unfortunate that the wealthy landowner's son is such an unattractive dill. Alan Alder as Alain brought out the pathetic, bewildered aspect of the boy superbly and one could only feel deeply sympathetic when the vicious, uncaring side of those peasants came to the surface in the second act when they deride him, chase him and generally keep him apart from the objects of his affections, his red umbrella that he hoards Linus-like for protection; and the Widow's daughter Lise.

Only Marilyn Rowe of all the casts I
Gary Norman (Spartacus) and Marilyn Rowe (Flavia) with artists of The Australian Ballet in Spartaecs Act I.
scene of gladiatorial training with its protagonists tap-tapping their swords in time to the music and much Dalcrozan bend-stretch to approximate virile writhing musculature. But all is not lost.

This scene accumulates its power too as we witness the two teams of gladiators (one of which is Spartacus) forced to fight each other to the death for the pleasure and entertainment of Crassus and his effete familiars. This scene is undoubtedly one of the high points of the whole work and it was here that Dale Baker as Spartacus came into his own and drew the audience into the story. He was far better than Gary Norman who in the same role didn’t ever touch the heart strings. In fact Norman was far too distracted throughout, he danced and “acted” as if he was worried about having left the gas on at home. It was not good enough. Even though Marilyn Rowe as his wife Flavia danced her guts out trying to beef up the evening, it didn’t succeed; so much is dependent upon the dramatic skill of whoever portrays Spartacus.

Baker put so much more into it, more emphasis on the phrases of his solos, more edge to his character, more contrast to the heroic leader of an ill equipped band of revolutionaries and the loving husband of Flavia. There was more feeling of hatred, anger and frustration and it was eloquently portrayed in that gladiator scene. But he was also helped no end by his fellow fighters here, Paul de Masson and, especially, guest artist Augustus van Heerden. Van Heerden’s performance was superb; he was sensual but full of rage, the audience was riveted by it; he was worried about having left the gas on at home. It was not good enough. Even though Marilyn Rowe as his wife Flavia danced her guts out trying to beef up the evening, it didn’t succeed; so much is dependent upon the dramatic skill of whoever portrays Spartacus.

Anyway, let that pass. Kelvin Coe as Crassus was as good as can be expected and his dancing in the Court scene (despite some missed landings) was rich and rewarding. When Baker came to his solo in the next scene that too was powerful and enthralling (also despite some missed landings and a bad fall at the end), Ann Jenner as Flavia was just as powerful and effective as any of the men in this excellent cast, as was Marilyn Rowe in the opening night cast. It was a pity that the very final scene was mismanaged. After a knife-edge build up in the final pas de deux as the two lovers restate their love for each other in the face of imminent defeat, the scene just fell apart. The pas de deux music built rapturously up to its final climax before tailing off. It was far better than it could have been.

But with some of the most uninspired and insipid dancing for the female corps and a Bell Dance that was the most sub-Juliet Prowse routine I’ve ever seen, here was a fine opportunity missed. I know that probably it couldn’t have been as steamy as desired when done in Hungary (the Soviet Ministry of Culture would never stand for that) it could have been reworked with far more oomph for us decadent Westerners.

Unfortunately the unbelievably tame and flimsy “orgy” scene in the Roman court nearly destroyed the whole thing. It should have been far more erotic and repulsive, fairly reeking with a metaphorical half-tosis. I know the time was 74 BC and the Empire wasn’t as decadent then as it was in Petronius’ time, but the audience should have been filled with more contempt than it was. It should have a court worthy to be swept away by the revolutionaries that invaded and turned it out.

It will be interesting to see how they tackle the demands of Coppelia this year (an old favourite given a new coat of paint) and Prokofsky’s Anna Karenina later on.

What we need now is something excellent to show off the expertise of the female corps de ballet; I make Markarova’s version of La Bayadere, Act 4 a suggestion.

It will also be instructive to see how the company manages Jerome Robbins’ The Concert too; this hilarious work has to be done very carefully. It is for me the only exciting work to be mounted by the Company next year and I fervently cross my fingers that if Robbins is pleased with their acquittal, he may allow them to do the sublime Dances at a Gathering one day. All of this dependent on course on whether the accountants and paper shufflers in the Administration think they should do yet another dressy blockbuster or not.

One hopes that the new Artistic Director, Marilyn Jones has some say in the matter. (See Q&Q for Marilyn Jones’ quote.)
George Dreyfus: The composer as cabaret

Roger Covell

George Dreyfus may have invented a new type of music theatre. As some readers of Theatre Australia will know, he has been presenting recently little entertainments in which he reveals a comic or satirical view of music and, in particular, of his own music. With the assistance of another musician who plays electric piano and synthesizer and makes any other appropriate noises that are required in the course of the programme, Dreyfus plays themes from his film music, his operas, song titles and one or two special pieces which he may compose specially for this kind of programme.

Dreyfus' own musical instrument is the bassoon. Many friends and admirers of this composer would agree that the bassoon is a particularly suitable instrument for him to play. It has a rich variety of timbres; it can chuckle like Falstaff or sing in a noble and plaintive style in a register which might reasonably be described as resembling a rather careful and elderly tenor; and, as everybody knows, the cork-popping abruptness of its lower notes and its ability to jump around rapidly from one register to another have made it a favourite vehicle of composers who wish to proclaim that they are making a joke. Bassoonists as a race do not seem to exhibit much sense of comedy in themselves. In this respect, Dreyfus is an exception; and yet his clowning rarely extends to his actual playing of the bassoon. It may seem very odd at times that some of the music he plays in these two-man cabaret sessions should be heard arranged for bassoon and keyboard at all; but Dreyfus plays them so seriously that when it comes to the point you can hear him in action with Paul Grabowski at the keyboard playing just such a programme on a disc entitled George Dreyfus — Live! produced under a label whimsically labelled Three Feet Records (TF-002).

The address of Three Feet Records is 3 Grace Street, Camberwell, Victoria, 3124; which is not a hundred miles from the composer's own address. I am told that only five hundred copies of this record have been pressed and that there is not likely to be a second edition even if the demand is considerable. In other words, this is a disc which seems certain to become a collector's piece, quite apart from its considerable merits as a souvenir of the irresistible entertainment in which Dreyfus takes as his subject matter his own life and music and manages to make the disagreements, false alarms and manifestos of contemporary music engrossing and exhilarating even to a listener who has no particular interest in the subject.

I must make it clear that none of George Dreyfus' inimitable talking is on this disc. The material is restricted to the music he uses to illustrate his very personal kind of chat. This may seem a pity at first, since it is much easier to reconstruct one of Dreyfus' pieces of music than it is to capture the precise flavour of his mind and wooden conceptions. On the other hand, it would hardly be fair to the fluid nature of his comedy to tether it to any one version. But there is a deeper reason why the omission is not accidental. Beneath the clowning, as anyone who knows Dreyfus reasonably well soon discovers, there is a quite serious purpose; and that purpose is revealed by what remains of the George Dreyfus Show on this disc. The purpose is simply to further an understanding of his work on the part of the listeners to whom he can speak at first hand. It is a kind of travelling mission in which Dreyfus demonstrates that he is not content simply to accept the unpopularity and relative obscurity of a great number of contemporary composers but is prepared to make his own creative personality and his own creative acts into a performance.

Listeners who admire Dreyfus' professionalism as a composer for theatre and television may well prefer to acquire another very recent disc on which the composer conducts the Queensland Symphony Orchestra in music for six films and TV series. The scores represented are those he wrote for Rush, Let the Balloon Go, Power Without Glory, Marion and A Steam Train Passes. This disc has been issued by the World Record Club (R 05225), its title is The Film Music of George Dreyfus. This is a bright recording of high-spirited playing which condones some slight imperfections in detail. The record is indispensable listening for anyone who wants to study the professionalism of one of our busiest composers of music for the screen. It is also likely to yield a good deal of pleasure. Some of the pieces lack only the promotion of a wider market for them to achieve international renown.

One of the hardest things to do with any group devoted to the playing of medieval or renaissance music is to keep it going. This is something that Winsome Evans has done with conspicuous success, as witnessed by the continuing career of her Renaissance Players in Sydney some twelve years after the group's founding. Anyone who has been involved in the performance of music of this period knows that the scoring and realisation of pieces is a matter calling for some boldness and decision in relation to the surviving form of the music in score. Winsome Evans has arranged, often very ingeniously and effectively, a large number of the pieces performed by her ensemble; and this arranging alter ego is usually identified in her programmes as Snave Pluckpayres. If you find the first part of this name strange, try reading it backwards. Winsome Evans, Snave Pluckpayres and the Renaissance Players have combined their talents on a Cherry Pie disc of Christmas music entitled Adam's Apple (CPF 1033, also available on cassette CPC 1033). There are some medieval and renaissance pieces and one or two carols that every listener will know. The male alto Graham Pushsee and the baritone Lyndon Terracini are partnered by a menagerie of medieval and renaissance instruments played by members of the group; and the instruments have some pieces entirely to themselves or greatly extend the scope of the purely vocal part of the performance.

Listeners to this record will soon realise that, although Winsome Evans is quite capable of restricting her choices to what is known of performance practice in a period appropriate to this or that piece of music, she feels quite free to range freely across the centuries for the style in which she arranges and performs music which is less firmly tied to any one century. Some of her arrangements on this disc are amusing, irreverent and delightful. I shall be surprised if anyone finds them an argument against enjoying the disc and descends repeatedly. No one knows how Christmas records tend to have a very limited playing life and how they more or less go numb for the remainder of the year. I do not think that this need happen or ought to happen to this engaging record in which the emphasis is not on the Christmassy qualities of the pieces but on their purely musical possibilities.
The immortal, the ephemeral and the bardolatrous

The immortal, the ephemeral and the bardolatrous

biographical books about the theatre, which, as is often said, is getting far removed from the act of theatre. My Drama School, edited by Margaret McCall seems rather contrived — being a collection of reminiscences by people like Flora Robson, Lilli Palmer, Dulcie Gray, Patrick Macnee, Mai Zetterling, Ann Jellocle and others about their early training. It ends up vaguely interesting, but its chief delight is a piece by Robert Morley, who can make a list of names no-one has ever heard of witty and amusing. The book also has the splendid line, delivered apparently completely seriously, "If RADA taught me anything it was how to get rid of my American accent." Now we know.

New Zealand, like Australia, is suffering from an upsurge of theatrical activity at the moment, and keeps sending books across the Tasman. The latest is A Dramatic Appearance, by Peter Harcourt, an account of New Zealand theatre and drama from 1920 — 1970. Its chief interest for Australian readers is the startling parallels with our own development. A self-conscious nationalism, a pride in egalitarian colonial society, constant reference to overseas authority the importance of the amateur theatre movement between the wars, the non-existence of farm life, the influence of radio, the rise of subsidised theatres — the story is very close. Companies like the New Zealand Players have their equivalent in our Trust Players and New Zealand has their monolithic QEII Arts Council. In the seventies an aggressive new nationalism at last began to overcome complaints that the lack of conflict in New Zealand society precluded serious drama.

Also unfortunately familiar is the chatty unhistorical style of the book. Too much of it is narrated in long uncrirical quotes from oral sources, and too often plays are treated simply by quoting from the critics — which gets a bit like the quotes in newspaper advertisements. This is history which will make much more sense to people already familiar with the subject for overseas readers it is at times rather incoherent.


"There are people alive now who are never going to die." So ends Heathcote Williams' hit-and-run attack on death, The Immortalist. If the human life-expectancy, like everything else at the moment, is subject to exponential growth, then we've reached the point where it will be approaching infinity within the next 70 years. "If you're in your twenties now, you expect to die around 2026. Add the thirty years bonus to that and you expect to die around 2056. And how many years will science be able to give you by them?" Etc. These and other stimulating complaints that the lack of conflict in New Zealand society precluded serious drama.

Even more precise and 'scientific' is the classification system devised by Simon Trussler for British Theatrelog, published by the British Centre of the L.T.I. All events connected with the theatre are classified by numbers. Thus 01-148-002 refers to the Joint Stock Theatre Company's announcement of temporary disbandment in February 1978, 01-301-067 refers to the opening of Steve J Spears' Benjamin Franklin at the Mayfair, etc. It is hard to say at this stage exactly what use can be made of this system, but no doubt as it develops people will think of things to do with it. (At least now you have a number to quote to prove that something really happened. Useful for arguments in the pub.)

Another volume of theatre documentation is CERT Nos. 14, 15, 16, published by the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Théâtrales of the University of Bordeaux. This is a sort of scrapbook of newspaper cuttings, journal articles and other documents of the cultural and theatrical life and politics of France. This triple volume covers March-October, 1977. A period which the editor says, "n'est guère rose pour l'action culturelle en général et pour l'activité théâtrale en particulier. Even for readers with French it's a lot of material to wade through.

John Willett has done more to make Brecht accessible to the general reader than most other writers. His anthology of Brecht's writings, Brecht on Theatre, is now available in paperback. This magnificent selection will reveal to doubters the startling range of Brecht's thought, and hopefully eliminate forever the prejudice still often expressed that all Brecht wanted to do was force bitter didactic pills down the necks of an alienated audience.

Less useful for the general reader is Michael Morley's Bertolt Brecht, which is depressingly academic. Although the publishers claim that the book is intended particularly for students and senior pupils in schools, it attempts to mix elementary explanation, literary description and analysis with scholarly argument and point-scoring — presumably for the sake of an academic publication. It has the advantage that its emphasis is firmly on the work, rather than the theory and it is comprehensive about the individual plays in a way which may be useful to people studying the text in educational institutions.

One of the best new theatre books of the past year, and one which has already received praise from John Bell and others, is Clive Barker's Theatre Games. This describes his work as an actor, director and drama teacher over the last 20 years, and the approach to drama training he has developed, based on the use of children's games. It depends on his view of the mind as

John McCallum
comprised of two parts — the "backbrain" which is responsible for the control of subconscious or instinctual thought and the "frontbrain" which is the centre of rational, conscious or deliberative thought. The kinaesthetic "sixth" sense, the muscular sense by which we subconsciously direct our bodies in spontaneous performance of an action — like a typist who stops to think where the keys are and fumbles.

Barker invites people to take his book as a challenging set of ideas, rather than a "system", and to start out by trying to prove them wrong. There will be people who will regret his complete rejection of the conscious mind as a reference point. Barker argues that actors are ideally suited as investigators of human interaction, social behaviour and communication. The work of many sociologists, such as Goffman, draws on the theatre; and the work of many encounter groups, role-playing exercises and so on is seen by Barker as simply bad directors working with bad actors on bad scripts. Actors are trained and experienced observers and creators of human behaviour.

Yet another area in which Theatre Games has application and will be of use to those involved, is in teaching of drama at universities and schools. The skills of the stage are life-skills, and the insights of the actor of interest to everyone.

New editions and reprints include the Robert Pagnarelli translation of the Oresteia of Aeschylus in a new Penguin edition with a very long introduction, notes and bibliography. There is also Six Yuan Plays, translated by Liu Jung-en, which are the texts of the music-dramas of 13th and 14th century China. In the New Mermaid series are Dryden's All For Love, edited by N. J. Andrew and Congreve's Love For Love, edited by M. M. Kelsall.

Finally there is The Masks of Macbeth, by Marvin Rosenberg, which is a very daunting book for someone who has had to do more than 10 books in one review. This is one of a series by Rosenberg (the others being The Masks of Othello and The Masks of King Lear) and it tells you everything you could ever want to know about what everyone you've ever heard of has said, thought or done with Macbeth. In its 800 pages it covers all matters critical, historical and theatrical as it ploughs slowly through the play, analysing every line and explaining what every major production ever has done with it. (Talk about close reading of a text!) For those who can stand it, it seems a magnificent work, an outstanding piece of scholarship, as theatrical as it is critical. An interesting feature is Rosenberg's arrangement for three productions (two in the US one in England) for "naive" audiences — people who did not know the play at all — to test the power Shakespeare sans Bardolatry might have in the modern world.
BUNRATTY CASTLE (51 2111)
Irish Theatre Restaurant
Wednesday to Saturday.

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
The Black and White Minstrel Show
7-8 February.

Crown Macaroni
Elizabethan Theatre Trust/Peter Williams Productions. Director, Peter Williams. 20-24 February.

CANBERRA THEATRE FOYER (49 7600)
Fortune Theatre Lunchtime Season begins mid-February.

CHILDERS STREET HALL
Australian Theatre Workshop
Breath Double Bill; Cities and Sharks and Acting Exercises by Bertolt Brecht, adapted by Ralph Wilson. Director, Ralph Wilson. Till second week in February.

PLAYHOUSE (49 7600)
Canberra Philharmonic Society
The Sound of Music by Rogers and Hammerstein Return Season. Opens 28 February.

REID HOUSE (47 0781)
Canberra Youth Theatre
Drama Workshops for 8-25 year-olds. Recomence 7 February.

THEATRE 3 (47 4222)
Canberra Repertory

For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 49 3192.

NEW SOUTH WALES

ACTOR'S COMPANY
(Note new phone no. 692 0689)
Cabinet by Masteroff. To 3 Feb.

Othello Phone theatre for details.

Late nights Paradise: Depression Style by Tim Gooding; Director, Jean Pierre Mignon; Performers, The Astounding Optimissimos.

Friday, Saturday 11.15 pm, Sunday 5.15 pm to 16 Feb.

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
School Tours: Bob Fillman: Ventriloquist and Puppeter (North Coast)
Alex Hood Australian Bunsongos (Central West)
Wonderful World of Music by The Bandsel (Metropolitan Area)

The Dance Concert Ltd Ethnic Folkdances (Hunter Valley and Nth-West)

Blinky Bill (South Coast)

Songs of Guitar

Seymour Centre: Gooding; Director, Jean-Pierre Mignon;
AUSTRALIA OPERA (2 0588)

Mr. Maguire (49 7600)

Merry Widow
by Benjamin Britten. 3 Feb.

Albert Herring

Concert Hall

Songs of Guitar

Seymour Centre: Gooding; Director, Jean-Pierre Mignon;
AUSTRALIA OPERA (2 0588)

Alex Hood

Gloved Puppets

Blinky Bill

Performers, The Astounding Optimissimos.

(Hunter Valley and Nth-West)

Puppeteer

School Tours:

Othello

Wednesday to Saturday till 24 February.

Shakespeare. Director, Michael Lanchbery;

Wonderful World of Music

The Bandels

Drama Workshops for 8-25 year-olds.

Canberra Philharmonic Society

The Sound of Music by Rogers and Hammerstein Return Season. Opens 28 February.

Canberra Youth Theatre

Drama Workshops for 8-25 year-olds. Recomence 7 February.

Canberra Repertory


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**SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA**

**AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE** (212 2084)

Q THEATRE (223 8610)

*What Every Woman Knows* by J M Barrie; director, Trevor Johnson. Wed to Sat 17 Feb - 17 March.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51-5151)

Hamlet by William Shakespeare; director, Colin George; designer, Hugh Coleman; with Michael Siberry as Hamlet. 4½ hr uncut version starting 6.30 24 Feb - 3 March; cut version 7.30 start, 6 - 24 March.

STATE OPERA (51 6161)

Appearing at the Perth Festival with *Marriage of Figaro*.

**TASMANIA**

**SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY** (23-5259)

Theatre Project by Ken Kelso; director, Al Butavicius. For upper primary and lower secondary schools. Rehearsals all through Feb., starts first school term.

**TASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE** (23-7996)

Touring metropolitan and country schools. Rehearsals all through Feb., 12-24 Feb.

**CREATIVE ARTS THEATRE** (870 7642)

Community based theatre working in schools, libraries and shopping centres. TIE team.

**FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE** (41 3727)

Shiraz Cabaret with Alan Pentland, Steve Vizard and Ruth Schoenheimer.

**FOIBLES THEATRE RESTAURANT** (347 2397)

Festival of all Nations. Comedy Revue with Rod Quanton, Mary Kenneally, Geoff Brooks, Stephen Blackburn and Neville Sterne.

**HOOPLA THEATRE FOUNDATION** (63 7643)


**LAST LAUGH Theatre Restaurant** (419 6226)


**LA MAMA** (350 4593/347 6085)

Two plays: The Castaways by Denis Oram, Karios and Chronos by Daniel Kahns. The Bridal Suite by Barry Dickens 22 Feb - 11 March.

**MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY** (654 4000)


**MIXED COMPANY** (24 9667)

New professional acting company based in South Yarra. Please phone for details of February production.

**OLD MILL, Geelong** (052 21 1444)

Drama Centre of Deakin University. Thursday evening productions.

**PALAIS THEATRE** (94 0655)

Australian Opera Company.

**PILGRIM PUPPET THEATRE** (818 6650)

Peter Pan written and directed by Gneone Bent. 10.15am and 2.00pm Tues to Fri; 2.00pm Sat.

**POLYGLOT PUPPETS** (818 1512)

Multi cultural puppet theatre with Mogg the cat and friends. Touring schools and community centres.

**PRINCESS THEATRE** (662 2911)

*Sleeping Beauty On Ice*. To Feb 3. Director, Robin Lovejoy; designer, John Truscott. Victorian State Opera: *The Pearl Fishers* 21,23,26 Feb; 1,3,6,8,10 March.

**TENTS SHOW**

Batman Avenue (663 4993)

*Filmon's on Parade*. To 8 Feb.

**TIKKI AND JOHN'S Theatre Lounge** (663 1754)

With Tikki and John Newman, Myrtle Roberts, Vic Gordon and guest artists.

**VICTORIAN STATE OPERA** (41 5061)

See Princess Theatre.

**Major Amateur Theatre Companies**

- **BASIN THEATRE GROUP** (762 1082)
- **CASTLE THEATRE COMPANY** (878 1702)
- **Heidelberg Repertory** (49 2252)
- **Malvern Theatre Company** (211 0020)
- **Pumpkin Theatre**, Richmond (42 8237)
- **Williams Little Theatre** (397 6705)
- **1812 Theatre**, Ferntree Gully (796 86 24)

For entries contact Lex Cartwright on 781 1777.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**CIVIC THEATRE RESTAURANT** (272 1595)

Five past '79. Playing until March

**PERTH FESTIVAL** (386 7977)

Dolphin Theatre: Swede and Banana. Between Us Something is Happening. 12 - 17 Feb.

Nola Rae: Mme and Clown/Some Great Fools of History. 19 Feb - 10 March.

**HAYMAN THEATRE, WAIT**


**HOLE IN THE WALL** (381 2403)

*Makassar Reef* by Alex Buzo. 10 Feb - 10 March. *After Magritte* by Tom Stoppard. Late show 15 Feb - 3 March.

**NATIONAL THEATRE** (352 3500)

Playhouse: *Night and Day* by Tom Stoppard; director, Stephen Barry. 13 Feb - 3 March.

**NEW FORTUNE THEATRE**


**OCTAGON THEATRE**

Nimrod Theatre: *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare; director, John Bell; with Angela Punch and Mel Gibson. 22 Feb - 10 March.

**REGAL THEATRE** (381-1557)

Prospect Theatre: *The Luminic the Lover and the Poet*. 14, 16, 21, 22 Feb.

Smith of Smiths. 15, 19, 20, 23 Feb. The Grand Tour, 17, 24 Feb; with Derek Jacobi, Timothly West, Isla Blair, Julian Glover.

**SUNKEN GARDEN**

Dramatic Society: *Sophocles' Trilogy*. director Peter Mann. To 7 Feb.

**CATS WATER WRITES** (14 24 Feb)

Steve Hansen Punch and Judy: *The Frog Prints*. 26 Feb - 10 March.

*For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639.*

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**THEATRE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1979**

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Q & Q
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the Commission that while publishers were already severely disadvantaged by the present law, the proposed introduction of a law of privacy under which action could be threatened by any person claiming to be recognisable and his right to privacy violated in a work of fiction would greatly compound the problems of the creative writer and his publisher. Such a situation raised issues of irresponsible censorship which demanded serious consideration.

"While the creative writer can claim no divine right to damage the livelihood and reputation of others, the fact remains that writers can only draw on their own experience. The limits within which he may do so freely must be defined as widely rather than as narrowly as possible."

As a result of the present action educational authorities in Western Australia including the University of Western Australia and the Public Library Board will not include The Chapel Perilous or The Tatty Hollow Story in any Australian Literature program or lend either book to students, despite the fact that neither work has been found defamatory in a court of law or is held to be defamatory by its author or her publishers, Dorothy Hewett's plays, especially The Chapel Perilous, are widely studied in educational establishments elsewhere in Australia.

Dr Parsons said he wished to emphasise that in raising these issues he did not question the integrity or sincerity of Mr Davies in bringing his action. He simply wished to point out that the present financial and practical difficulties in bringing the case to trial made Mr Davies effectively plaintiff and judge in his own case.

"I know, for instance, that instructions have been issued to the University Library and the Department of English by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia that The Chapel Perilous and The Tatty Hollow Story should not be used "for academic instruction or distribution from a library" for fear of legal action of Mr Davies. I know of similar instructions at the Claremont Teacher's College.

"I question the professional integrity of any educational authority prepared to compromise the free availability of literature in the face of an untested allegation. The plain fact is that teachers have been told by their administrators not to teach these plays. That instruction has nothing to do with educational principle and everything to do with financial expediency.

The principle of literary freedom ought to be fought not by publishers but by users who want access to books. That is why I regard it as the responsibility of universities and libraries to continue this issue."

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